UNDER A CHARM.

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A Novel.

FROM THE GERMAN OF E. WERNER,

By CHRISTINA TYRRELL.

\_IN THREE VOLUMES\_.

VOL. I.

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PART THE FIRST.

UNDER A CHARM.

CHAPTER I.

The hot summer day was drawing to its close. The sun had already set;

but the rosy flush of evening still lingered on the horizon, casting a

radiant glow over the sea, which lay calm, scarce moved by a ripple,

reflecting the last splendour of the departing day.

Close to the shore on the outskirts of C----, the fashionable

watering-place, but at some little distance from the promenade, which

at this hour was thronged by a brilliant, many-coloured crowd of

visitors, stood a plain country house. Unpretending in appearance,

compared with the other, for the most part, far larger and grander

houses and villas of the place, it was remarkable for nothing save only

for the beauty of its situation, its windows commanding a limitless

view over the sea. Otherwise it stood there secluded, almost solitary,

and could certainly only be preferred by such guests as wished rather

to avoid, than to court, the noisy, busy life of C---- during the

bathing season.

At the open glass-door, which led out on to the balcony, stood a lady

dressed in deep mourning. She was tall and imposing of stature, and

might still pass for beautiful, although she had more than reached

life's meridian. That face, with its clear regular lines, had, it is

true, never possessed the charms of grace and loveliness; but, for that

very reason, years had taken nothing from the cold severe beauty it

still triumphantly retained. The black attire, the crape veil shading

her brow, seemed to point to some heavy, and probably recent, loss; but

one looked in vain for the trace of past tears in those eyes, for a

touch of softness in those features so indicative of energy. If sorrow

had really drawn nigh this woman, she had either not felt it very

deeply, or had already overcome its pangs.

At her side stood a gentleman, like herself, of distinguished and noble

carriage. He might, in reality, be only a few years older than his fair

neighbour; but he looked as though more than a decade lay between them,

for time had not passed by him with so light a hand. His grave face,

very full of character, with its sharp, deeply marked features, had

plainly weathered many a storm in life's journey; his thick dark hair

was here and there streaked with grey; line upon line furrowed his

brow, and there was a sombre melancholy in his eyes which communicated

itself to the man's whole countenance.

"Still nothing to be seen! They will hardly return before sunset."

"You should have sent us word of your arrival," said the lady. "We only

expected you in a few days. Besides, the boat does not come in sight

until it has rounded that wooded promontory yonder, and then in a very

few minutes it is here."

She stepped back into the room, and turned to a servant who was in the

act of carrying some travelling wraps into one of the adjoining rooms.

"Go down to the shore, Pawlick," said she, "and directly the boat comes

to land, tell my son and my niece that Count Morynski has arrived."

The servant withdrew in compliance with the order received. Count

Morynski left his post on the balcony, and came into the room, seating

himself by the lady's side.

"Forgive my impatience," he said. "The meeting with my sister ought to

suffice me for the present; but it is a whole year since I last saw my

child."

The lady smiled. "You will not see much more of the 'child.' A year

makes a great change at her age, and Wanda gives promise of beauty."

"And her mental development? In your letters you have ever expressed

yourself satisfied on that head."

"Certainly; she always outstrips her tasks. I have rather to restrain

than to stimulate her ardour. In that respect I have nothing to wish

for; but there is one point on which much is to be desired. Wanda has a

strong, a most decided will of her own, and she is disposed to assert

it passionately. I have sometimes been obliged to enforce the obedience

she was greatly inclined to refuse me."

A fleeting smile brightened the father's face, as he replied, "A

singular reproach from your lips! To have a will and to assert it under

all circumstances is a prominent trait of your character--a family

trait with us, indeed, I may say."

"Which, however, is not to be tolerated in a girl of sixteen, for there

it only shows itself as defiance and caprice," his sister interrupted

him. "I tell you beforehand, you yourself will have frequent occasion

to combat it."

It seemed as though the turn taken by the conversation were not

specially agreeable to the Count.

"I know that I could not give my child into better hands than yours,"

he said, evading the subject; "and for that reason I am doubly glad

that, though I am about to claim Wanda for myself, she will not have to

do without you altogether. I did not think you would make up your mind

to return so soon after your husband's death. I expected you would stay

in Paris, at all events until Leo had completed his studies."

The lady shook her head. "I never felt at home in Paris, in spite of

the years we spent there. The emigrant's fate is no enviable one--you

know it by experience. Prince Baratowski, indeed, could not again set

foot in his own country; but no one can prevent his widow and son from

returning, so I resolved to come without delay. Leo must be allowed to

breathe his native air once more, so that he may feel himself truly a

son of the soil. On him now rest all the hopes of our race. He is still

very young, no doubt; but he must learn to outrun his years, and to

make himself acquainted with those duties and tasks which have now

devolved on him through his father's death."

"And where do you think of taking up your abode?" asked Count Morynski.

"You know that my house is at all times ..."

"I know it," the Princess interrupted him; "but no, thanks. For me the

all-important point now is to assure Leo's future, and to give him the

means of maintaining his name and position before the world. This has

been hard enough for us of late, and now it has become a perfect

impossibility. You know our circumstances, and are aware what

sacrifices our banishment has imposed on us. Something must be done.

For my son's sake I have decided upon a step which, for myself alone, I

never would have taken. Do you guess why I chose C---- for our place of

sojourn this summer?"

"No; but I was surprised at it. Witold's estate lies within five or six

miles of this, and I thought you would rather have avoided the

neighbourhood. But perhaps you are in communication with Waldemar

again?"

"No," said the Princess, coldly. "I have not seen him since we left for

France, and since then have hardly had a line from him. During all

these years he has had no thought for his mother."

"Nor his mother for him," observed the Count, parenthetically.

"Was I to expose myself to a rebuff, to a humiliation?" asked the

Princess with some warmth. "This Witold has always been hostile to me;

he has exercised his unlimited authority as guardian in the most

offensive manner, setting me completely at nought. I am powerless as

opposed to him."

"He would hardly have ventured to cut off all intercourse between you

and Waldemar. A mother's rights are too sacred to be thus put aside,

had you but insisted on them with your usual resolution. That, however,

was never the case, to my knowledge, for--be candid, Hedwiga--you never

had any love for your eldest son."

Hedwiga made no reply to this reproach. She rested her head on her hand

in silence.

"I can understand that he does not take the first place in your heart,"

went on the Count. "He is the son of a husband whom you did not love,

who was forced upon you--the living reminder of a marriage you cannot

yet think of without bitterness. Leo is the child of your heart, of

your affections ..."

"His father never gave me cause for a word of complaint," the Princess

added, emphatically.

The Count shrugged his shoulders slightly. "You ruled Baratowski

completely; but that is not the question now. You have a plan; do you

intend to renew former, half-forgotten relations with Witold and his

ward?"

"I intend, at last, to assert those rights of which I was robbed by

Nordeck's will--that unjust will, every line of which was dictated by

hatred of me, which deprived alike the widow and the mother of her due.

Hitherto it has remained in full force; but its provisions fixed

Waldemar's majority at the age of one and twenty. He attained that age

on his last birthday, and he is now his own master. I wish to see

whether he will suffer things to go so far that his mother must seek an

asylum with her relations, while he reckons among the richest

landowners of the country, and it would cost him but a word to assure

me and his brother a suitable position and means of existence on one of

the estates."

Morynski shook his head doubtfully.

"You count upon finding natural filial affection in this son of yours.

I am afraid you are deceiving yourself. He has been severed from you

since his earliest childhood, and love for his mother will hardly have

been inculcated on him as a duty. I never saw him but as a child, when,

I own, he made the most unfavourable impression upon me. One thing I

know for certain, he was the reverse of tractable."

"I know it too," returned the Princess with equanimity. "He is his

father's son, and, like him, rough, unmanageable, and incapable of all

higher culture. Even as a boy he resembled him, trait for trait; and,

with such a guardian as Witold, education will have given the finishing

touches to Nature's work. I do not deceive myself as to Waldemar's

character; but, nevertheless, there will be a way of leading him. Minds

of an inferior order always yield in the end to intellectual

superiority. Everything depends upon making it properly felt."

"Were you able to lead his father?" asked her brother, gravely.

"You forget, Bronislaus, that I was then but a girl of seventeen,

without experience, altogether unversed in the ways of the world. I

should now be able to compass even such a character as his, and should

certainly gain an ascendancy over him. Besides this, with Waldemar, I

shall have on my side the weight of my authority as his mother. He will

bend to it."

The Count looked very incredulous at these words, spoken in a tone of

great decision. He had no time to reply, for a light, rapid step was

now heard in the anteroom. The door was flung open with impetuous

haste, and a young girl, rushing in, threw herself into the arms of

Morynski, who sprang up and clasped his daughter to his breast with

passionate tenderness.

The Princess had risen also. She did not seem quite to approve of so

stormy a greeting on the part of the young lady; she said nothing,

however, but turned to her son, who came in at that moment.

"You stayed out a long time, Leo. We have been expecting you for the

last hour."

"Forgive us, mamma. The sunset on the sea was so beautiful, we could

not bear to lose a minute of it."

With these words, Leo Baratowski went up to his mother. He was, indeed,

very young, perhaps seventeen or eighteen years of age. One look in his

face was sufficient to show that his features were modelled on those of

the Princess. The resemblance was striking, as it only can be between

mother and son; and yet the latter's fine youthful head, with its dark,

curly hair, bore quite another stamp from hers. The cold, severe

expression was wanting. Here all was fire and life; all the passion of

a glowing, and as yet unbridled, temperament blazed in the dark eyes,

and his whole appearance was such an impersonation of adolescent

strength and beauty, it was not difficult to understand the pride with

which the Princess took her son's hand to lead him to his uncle.

"Leo has no father now," she said, gravely. "I shall look to you for

help, Bronislaus, when the counsel and guidance of a man become

necessary to him in his career."

The Count embraced his nephew with heartfelt warmth, but in a far

quieter fashion than that in which he had received his daughter. The

sight of her seemed for the present to drive all else into the

background. His looks continually wandered back to the young girl, who,

in this last year during which he had been separated from her, had

almost grown to maiden's estate.

Wanda was not in the least like her father. If the likeness between Leo

and his mother were striking in the extreme, here, between father and

daughter, such resemblance was altogether wanting. The young Countess

Morynska was, indeed, like no one but herself. Her slender, graceful

figure was as yet unformed, and she had evidently not attained to her

full height. The face, too, was childlike, though her features already

justified the Princess's claim on their behalf. A rather pale face it

was, the cheeks being tinged only by faintest pink; but there was

nothing sickly in this paleness, and it in no way diminished the

impression of fresh and healthful vigour. Her luxuriant, raven-black

hair set the whiteness of her complexion in still stronger relief, and

dark dewy eyes were hid beneath the long black lashes. Wanda did indeed

give promise of beauty. As yet she had it not; but, on the other hand,

she possessed that peculiar charm which belongs to many a girlish

figure, standing on the boundary line between child and maiden hood.

There was about her a pretty blending of the child's petulance and

artlessness with the graver demeanour of the young lady, who, at every

turn, calls to mind her sixteen years; while the bloom of early youth,

of the blossom budding forth, invested her whole person with a special

grace of its own, and made her doubly charming.

When the first emotion of the meeting was over, the conversation flowed

in calmer channels. Count Morynski had drawn his daughter down on to a

seat near him, and was jestingly reproaching her for her late return.

"I knew nothing of your arrival, papa," Wanda said in self-defence;

"and, besides, I had an adventure in the forest."

"In the forest?" interrupted her aunt. "Were you not on the water, with

Leo?"

"Only coming back, aunt. We intended to sail back to the Beech Holm, as

had been agreed; but Leo declared, and persisted in it, that the way by

sea was far nearer than by the footpath through the wood. I maintained

the contrary. We argued about it for some time, and at last decided

upon each proving we were right. Leo sailed alone, and I set off

through the forest."

"And reached the Beech Holm quite safely a good half-hour after me,"

said Leo, triumphantly.

"I had lost my way," asserted the young lady, warmly; "and I should

very likely be in the forest still if I had not been put right."

"And who put you right?" asked the Count.

Wanda laughed mischievously. "A wood-demon, one of the old giants who

are said to wander about here at times. But don't ask me any more now,

papa. Leo is burning with curiosity to know all about it. He has been

teasing me with questions the whole way back, and therefore he shall

not hear a syllable."

"It is all an invention," cried Leo, laughing, "a pretext to explain

your late arrival. You would rather make up a long story than

acknowledge I was right for once."

Wanda was about to retort in the same tone, when the Princess

interfered.

"Pretext or not," said she, sharply, "this solitary walk, taken without

consulting any one, was to the last degree improper. I had given you

permission to go for a short sail in Leo's company, and I cannot

understand how he could leave you in the woods for hours, by yourself."

"But Wanda would go," said Leo, by way of excuse. "She wanted to have

our dispute about the distance settled."

"Yes, dear aunt, I \_would\_ go" (the young lady laid greater stress on

the word than she would have ventured to do, had her father not been

protectingly at hand), "and Leo knew very well it was useless to try

and hold me back."

Here was a fresh instance of the girl's wilfulness, requiring to be

severely dealt with.

The Princess was about to deliver a serious reprimand, when her brother

quickly interposed.

"You will allow me to take Wanda with me?" said he. "I feel rather

tired from the journey, and should like to go to my room. Good-bye for

the present." With this he rose, took his daughter's arm, and left the

room with her.

"My uncle seems in raptures at the sight of Wanda," remarked Leo, as

the two disappeared.

The Princess looked after them in silence. "He will overlook it," she

said at last, under her breath; "he will worship her with blind

adoration, such as he lavished formerly on her mother, and Wanda will

soon know her power and learn to use it. This was what I feared from a

return to her father. The very first hour shows that I was right. What

is this story about an adventure in the forest, Leo?"

Leo shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. Probably one of Wanda's

teasing jokes. She made me curious at first with all sorts of hints,

and then obstinately refused to tell me more, taking great delight in

my vexation. You know her way."

"Yes, I know her way." There was a slight frown on the Princess's brow.

"Wanda likes to play with every one and everything, to let all who come

near her feel her arbitrary humour. You should not make it so easy to

her, Leo, at least so far as you yourself are concerned."

The young Prince crimsoned to the temples. "I, mamma? Why, I am always

quarrelling with Wanda!"

"And always submitting in the end to be led by her caprices. Do not

tell me, my son--I know who invariably triumphs when a contest arises

between you two; but, for the present, this is all childishness. I

wanted to speak to you of something serious. Shut the balcony door, and

come here to me."

Leo obeyed. His face showed that he was offended, less, perhaps, by the

reproof administered to him, than by the expression 'childishness.'

The Princess, however, took not the slightest notice of his mood.

"You know," she began, "that I had been married before I bestowed my

hand on your father, and that a son of that first marriage still lives.

You know, too, that he has been reared and educated in Germany; but up

to this time you have never seen him. A meeting between you will now

take place. You are to make his acquaintance."

Leo sprang up, his eyes sparkling with eagerness and liveliest

surprise.

"My brother Waldemar?"

"Waldemar Nordeck, yes." The emphasis laid on the latter name conveyed

a perhaps unintentional, but most decided, protest against this

relationship between a Nordeck and a Baratowski. "He lives in this

neighbourhood on his guardian's estate. I have sent him word of our

presence here, and I expect he will come over one of these days."

Leo's previous ill-humour had vanished. The subject was evidently one

of the greatest interest to him. "Mamma," said he, hesitatingly, "may I

not hear something more of these sad family affairs? All I know is that

your marriage was an unhappy one, that you are at variance with

Waldemar's relations, and with his guardian. Even this I have only

learned from my uncle's allusions, and from hints dropped by old

servants of our house. I have never ventured to ask a question, either

of you or of my father. I saw that it would hurt him, and make you

angry. You both seemed anxious to banish the remembrance from your

mind."

A singularly hard expression came over the Princess's features, and the

tone of her voice was hard too, as she replied, "Certainly, old

mortifications and humiliations are best hidden from view and

forgotten, and that unhappy union was fertile in both. Do not ask me

about it now, Leo. You know the events that happened. Let that suffice

you. I neither can nor will take you, step by step, through a family

drama, of which I cannot think even now without a feeling of hatred for

the dead rising up within me. I thought to efface those three years

altogether from my life, and little dreamed that I should one day be

compelled myself to call up the memory of them."

"And what compels you?" asked Leo, quickly. "Not our return? We are

going to my uncle's, at Rakowicz, are we not?"

"No, my son, we are going to Wilicza."

"To Wilicza!" repeated Leo, in surprise. "Why, that is ... that is

Waldemar's place!"

"It would have been my dower-house, but for the will which ejected me,"

said the Princess, in a cutting tone; "now it is the property of my

son. Room will certainly be found there for his mother."

Leo started back with an impetuous gesture. "What does it mean?" he

asked, hotly. "Are you going to lower yourself before this Waldemar, to

ask a favour of him? I know that we are poor; but I would bear

anything, do without anything, rather than consent that, for my sake,

you ..."

The Princess rose suddenly. Her look and attitude were so commanding

that the boy stopped short in the midst of his passionate protest.

"Do you suppose that your mother is capable of lowering herself? Have

you so little knowledge of her? Leave to me the care of upholding my

dignity--and yours. It really is not needful that you should point out

to me the limits to which I may go. It is for me alone to judge of

them."

Leo was silent, and looked down. His mother went up to him, and took

his hand.

"Will this hot head of yours never learn to reason quietly?" said she,

more gently. "Yet calm reflection will be so necessary to it in life?

My plans with regard to Waldemar I shall carry out myself, alone. If

there be bitterness attaching to them, you, my Leo, shall feel nothing

of it. You must keep your sight unclouded, your spirit fresh and

valiant for the future which is in store for you. That is your task.

Mine is to assure you that future at any cost. Trust your mother."

With a dumb prayer for forgiveness, her son raised her hand to his

lips. She drew him to her; and, as she bent down to kiss the handsome,

animated face, it became manifest that this cold, austere woman had a

mother's heart, and that, in spite of the severity with which she

treated him, Leo was that heart's idol.

CHAPTER II.

"Do oblige me by leaving off those everlasting lamentations of yours,

Doctor. I tell you, there is no changing the boy. I have tried often

enough, and I have had six tutors, one after the other, to help me. We

could none of us do anything with him; you can't do anything either, so

just let him go his own way."

This speech, delivered in the most vigorous tones, was addressed by

Herr Witold, Squire of Altenhof, to the gentleman intrusted with his

ward's education. The room in which the two were seated was situated at

the end of the house of which it formed a corner. Its windows were

thrown open on account of the heat, and its whole appearance seemed to

indicate that the dwellers therein held such things as elegance and

comfort to be quite superfluous, if not absolutely harmful,

indulgences. The plain and, for the most part, antiquated furniture was

scattered here and there, without the least regard for tasteful, or

even for commodious, arrangement--pushed right and left to serve the

convenience of the moment. On the walls hung guns, sporting tackle, and

antlers in indiscriminate confusion. Wherever room for a nail had been

found, there that nail had been driven in, and the article on hand at

the time hung thereon, without the smallest consideration for the

figure it made in the place allotted to it. The bureau was loaded with

piles of house and farm accounts, together with tobacco pipes, spurs,

and half a dozen riding-whips. The newspaper lay on the carpet; for

carpet there was, in name at least, though its absence would have

proved a better ornament to the room, since it bore but too evident

traces of serving the great setter as his daily couch. Not a thing was

in the place to which it rightly belonged; but rather there where it

had last been made use of, and where it remained ready for any future

occasion. One single object in the room testified, and that in a truly

appalling manner, to the owner's artistic tastes, namely, a brilliant

hunting-piece of most intense and vivid colouring, which hung in the

place of honour over the sofa.

The Squire sat in his armchair by the window, lost in the dense clouds

of smoke which issued from his meerschaum. A man of about sixty years,

he looked relatively young, in spite of his white hair, and was

evidently in the full enjoyment of health and strength. He was of an

important presence, his height and bulk being alike considerable. There

was, perhaps, not overmuch intelligence in the ruddy face; but, on the

other hand, it wore an unmistakable air of good humour. His dress, made

up partly of indoor raiment and partly of hunting gear, was decidedly

negligent; and his whole massive person, with its powerful, deep-toned

voice, formed the strongest contrast to the lank figure of the tutor,

now standing before him.

The Doctor might be thirty or thereabouts. He was of middle height, but

his stooping attitude made him appear short of stature. His face was

not exactly unhandsome, but it wore too evident a look of sickliness,

and of the depression bred of a painful position in life, to prove

attractive. His complexion was pale and unhealthy, his brow deeply

lined, and his eyes had that abstracted, uncertain expression peculiar

to those who seldom, if ever, bring their thoughts altogether to bear

on the realities around them. His black attire was ordered with

scrupulous care; and there was an air of anxious timidity about the

man's whole being, betraying itself in his voice, as he replied in a

low tone--

"You know, Herr Witold, that I never apply to you, save in an extreme

case. This time I must call upon you to use your authority. I am at my

wits' end."

"What has Waldemar been doing now?" asked the master of the house,

impatiently. "I know he is unmanageable as well as you do, but I can't

help you in the matter. The boy got far beyond my control long ago. He

will obey no one now, not even me. He runs away from your books, and

prefers to be off with his gun, does he? Tut! I was no better at his

age. They could never ram all their learned stuff into my head. He has

no manners, has not he? Well, he does not want them. We live here among

ourselves, and when we do have a neighbourly meeting now and again, we

don't make much ceremony about it. You know that well enough, Doctor.

You always take to your heels, and escape from our shooting parties and

drinking bouts."

"But, only think," objected the tutor, "if Waldemar with his rough wild

ways were, later in life, to be thrown into another sphere; if he were

to marry ..."

"Marry!" exclaimed Witold, absolutely hurt by such a supposition. "He

will never do such a thing. What should he marry for? I have remained a

bachelor all my life, and find myself uncommonly comfortable; and poor

Nordeck would have done better to keep single. No, thank God, there is

no fear of our Waldemar! Why, he runs off at the sight of a petticoat,

and he is right."

So saying, Waldemar's guardian leaned back in his chair with an air of

much contentment. The Doctor drew a step nearer.

"But to return to the point from which we set out," said he,

hesitatingly. "You yourself admit that my pupil will no longer be

guided by me. It must therefore be high time to send him to the

University."

Herr Witold sprang up from his seat so suddenly that the tutor beat a

hasty retreat.

"Did not I think something of the sort was coming! I have, heard

nothing else from you for the last month. What should Waldemar go to

the University for? To have his head stuffed with learning by the

professors? I should think you have taken good care to do that for him

by this time. All that an honest country gentleman needs to know, he

knows. He is as great an authority about the land and the farm business

as my inspector. He keeps the people in their place far more

effectually than I can, and there is not a better man in the saddle or

in the field. He is a splendid young fellow!"

The tutor did not appear to share this enthusiastic view of his pupil's

merits. He hardly ventured to express so much in words, but summoned up

all his evidently slender stock of courage for the timid reply.

"But, sir, the heir of Wilicza requires, after all, something more than

the qualifications which go to make a good inspector or land-steward.

Some higher culture, some academical study, appear to me extremely

desirable."

"They don't appear desirable to me at all," retorted Herr Witold.

"Isn't it enough that, by-and-by, I shall have to let the boy, who is

the very apple of my eye, go from me, just because his property lies in

that cursed land of Polacks? Must I part from him now to send him to

the University against his will? I'll do nothing of the sort, I tell

you, nothing of the sort. He shall stay here until he goes to Wilicza."

With this, he puffed so savagely at his pipe that for several minutes

his face disappeared behind the clouds of smoke. The tutor sighed, and

was silent. His quiet resignation touched the tyrannical Squire.

"Don't trouble your mind any more about the University, Doctor," said

he, in quite a changed tone; "you will never persuade Waldemar to

consent to the plan as long as you live. And for yourself, too, it is

better that you should stay at Altenhof. Here you are just in the midst

of your tumuli and your Runic stones, or whatever you call the rubbish

you are after all day long. I can't understand, for my own part, what

you can see so remarkable in the old heathen lumber; but the heart of

man must take delight in something, and I am right glad you can find

any pleasure to satisfy you, for you have often a hard time of it with

Waldemar--and with me into the bargain."

The Doctor, much confused, made a deprecatory gesture. "Oh, Herr

Witold!"

"Don't put yourself out," said the other, good-naturedly. "I know that

in your secret soul you look upon our life here as a godless business,

and that you would have run away from us long ago, if it had not been

for the heathen rubbish you have grown so fond of, and which you can't

bring yourself to part from. Well, I am not such a bad fellow after

all, you know, though I do fly out in a passion occasionally; and as

you are always pottering about among the pagans, you must be just in

your element here with us. I have heard say that people in those days

had no manners at all. They used to fight and murder each other out of

pure friendship."

The historical information displayed by Herr Witold appeared to the

Doctor to have a dangerous tendency. Possibly he feared some practical

illustration of it on his own person, for he backed by almost

imperceptible degrees behind the sofa.

"Excuse me, the old Teutons ..."

"Were not cut out after your pattern, Doctor," cried the Squire with a

shout of laughter, for the man[oe]uvre had not escaped him. "I know

that much, at all events. I think, of us all, Waldemar comes the

nearest to them, so I can't make out what fault you can find with him."

"But, Herr Witold, in the nineteenth century ..." The Doctor got no

further in his dissertation, for at that moment the crack of a shot was

heard--of a shot fired close to the open window. A bullet whistled

through the room, and the great stag's antlers, which hung over the

bureau, fell down with a crash.

The Squire jumped up from his seat. "Waldemar! What does this mean? Is

the boy taking to shoot into the very rooms? Wait a moment; I'll put a

stop to that work!"

He would have hurried out, but was stopped at the entrance by a young

man, who pushed, or rather flung, open the door, letting it fall to on

its hinges again with a bang. He wore a shooting suit, and carried in

his hand the gun which had caused the late report, while at his side

stalked a great pointer. Without any sort of greeting, or of excuse for

this violent mode of making his appearance, he went up to Witold,

placed himself right before him, and asked triumphantly--

"Now, which of us was right, you or I?"

The Squire was really angry. "Is that the way to behave, shooting over

people's heads?" he cried, testily. "One is not sure of one's life with

you now. Do you want to put the Doctor and me out of the world?"

Waldemar shrugged his shoulders. "Where was the harm? I wanted to win

my wager. You declared yesterday I should not hit that nail, where the

twelve-year-old hung, from outside. There's my ball, up there."

He pointed to the wall. Witold followed the direction.

"It really is!" said he, full of admiration, and altogether appeased.

"Doctor, just look--but what is the matter with you?"

"Doctor Fabian has got another of his nervous attacks, no doubt," said

Waldemar ironically, laying aside his gun, but making no attempt to

succour his teacher, who had sunk back on the sofa, half fainting with

the fright, and was still trembling from head to foot. The good-natured

Witold raised him up, and encouraged him to the best of his ability.

"Come, come, who would think of fainting because a little powder went

off! Why, it is not worth speaking of. We had laid the wager, that is

quite true; but how was I to know the young madcap would set to work in

such a senseless fashion? Instead of calling us out, that we might look

on quietly, he makes no more ado, but takes his aim straight over our

heads. Are you better now? Ah, that's right, thank God!"

Doctor Fabian had risen, and was striving to master his emotion; but as

yet he could not quite succeed.

"You might have shot us, Waldemar," said he, with pale and trembling

lips.

"No, Doctor, I might not," answered Waldemar, in a tone the reverse of

reverential. "You and my uncle were standing to the right, and I aimed

over there to the left, at least five paces off. You know I never

miss."

"No matter, you will let it alone in future," declared Witold, with an

attempt at asserting his authority as guardian. "The deuce himself may

be playing tricks with the balls, and then there will be an accident.

Once for all, I forbid you to shoot anywhere near the house."

The young man crossed his arms defiantly. "You can forbid me, uncle, as

much as you like, but I shan't obey. I shall shoot if I choose."

He stood confronting his guardian, the very incarnation of rebellious

wilfulness. Waldemar Nordeck's whole appearance was of the true

Germanic type; no single feature of his bore evidence to the fact that

his mother had come of another race. His tall, almost gigantic, figure

towered several inches above even Witold's portly form; but his frame

lacked symmetry, every line in it was sharp and angular. His light hair

seemed in its overabundance to be quite a troublesome load on his head,

for it fell low down over his brow, whence it was tossed back every now

and then with an impatient gesture. His blue eyes had a sombre and, in

moments of excitement like the present, almost a fierce expression. His

face was decidedly plain. Here, too, the lines were sharp and unformed;

all the boy's softer contours had vanished, and were not as yet

replaced by the set features of the man. In the case of this young man,

the transition stage was so marked as to be almost repulsive; and the

uncouthness of his manners, his complete disdain of all polite forms,

did not tend to diminish the unfavourable impression created by his

appearance.

Herr Witold was evidently one of those men whose person and bearing

seem to argue an energy of which, in reality, they possess not a

particle. Instead of meeting his ward's defiant rudeness with steady

resolution, the guardian thought proper to give way.

"I told you so, Doctor; the boy won't mind me any longer," said he,

with an equanimity which showed that this was the usual outcome of such

differences, and that, whenever it should please the young gentleman to

be in earnest, the uncle would be found powerless as the tutor.

Waldemar took no further notice of either of them. He threw himself at

full length on the sofa, without the least regard to the fact that his

boots, completely soaked by a journey through the marshes, were coming

in contact with the cushions; while the pointer, who had also been in

the water, followed his master's example, and, with equal recklessness,

settled himself down comfortably on the carpet.

A rather awkward pause ensued. The Squire, grumbling to himself, tried

to light his pipe, which had gone out in the interval. Dr. Fabian had

taken refuge by the window, and, gazing out, cast a look towards heaven

which said more plainly than any words that, truly, he did consider the

way of life here to be 'a godless sort of business.'

The Squire had meanwhile been hunting for his tobacco pouch, which

was at last happily discovered on the bureau, under the spurs and

riding-whips. As he drew it out, an unopened envelope fell close by his

hand. He took it up.

"I had nearly forgotten that. Waldemar, there is a letter for you."

"For me?" asked Waldemar, indifferently, and yet with that touch of

surprise called up by an event of rare occurrence.

"Yes. There's a coronet on the seal, and a coat of arms with all sorts

of heraldic beasts. From the Princess Baratowska, I presume. It is a

long time since we have been honoured with her Highness's gracious

autograph."

Young Nordeck broke open the letter, and glanced through it. It seemed

to contain but a few lines; nevertheless, a heavy cloud gathered on the

reader's brow.

"Well, what is it?" asked Witold. "Are the conspirators still hatching

their plots in Paris? I did not look at the postmark."

"The Princess and her son are out yonder at C----," reported Waldemar.

He seemed purposely to avoid the names of mother and brother. "She

wishes to see me. I shall ride over to-morrow morning."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said the Squire. "Your princely

relatives have not troubled themselves about you for years, and they

need not begin now. We want nothing of them. Stay where you are."

"Uncle, I have had enough of being ordered about and forbidden to do

this and that!" Waldemar broke out, with such sudden vehemence that the

Squire stared at him open-mouthed. "Am I a schoolboy that I need ask

your leave at every step? Have not I the right, at one and twenty,

to decide whether I will see my mother or not? I \_have\_ decided, and

to-morrow morning I shall ride over to C----."

"Well, don't put yourself in a passion, and be so bearish," said

Witold, more astonished than angry at this outburst of fury, which was

quite inexplicable to him. "Go where you like, so far as I am

concerned; but I'll have nothing to do with the Polish lot--that I tell

you."

Waldemar wrapped himself in sullen silence. He took his gun, whistled

to his dog, and left the room. His guardian looked after him, and shook

his head. All at once a thought seemed to strike him. He took up the

letter, which Waldemar had carelessly left lying on the table, and read

it through. Now it was Herr Witold's turn to knit his brow and frown

more and more ominously, until at last the storm broke.

"I thought so!" he cried, thumping with his fist on the table. "It is

just like my fine madam. In six lines she stirs the boy up to rebel

against me. That is the reason he turned so cantankerous all in a

minute. Listen to this delightful letter, Doctor: 'My son,--Years have

passed, during which you have given no sign of life.'--As if she had

given us any!--'I only know through strangers that you are living at

Altenhof with your guardian. I am staying at C---- just now, and

should rejoice to see you here, and to have an opportunity of

introducing your brother to you. I know not, indeed,'--listen, Doctor,

this is where she pricks him,--'I know not, indeed, whether you will be

free to pay me this visit. I hear that, notwithstanding you have

attained your majority, you are still quite subject to your guardian's

will.'--Doctor, you are witness of how the boy tramples on us both day

after day!--'Of your readiness to come I make no doubt; but I do not

feel so sure that Herr Witold will grant his permission. I have

therefore preferred to address myself directly to you, that I may see

whether you possess sufficient strength of character to comply with

this, the first wish your mother has ever expressed to you, or whether

you \_dare\_ not accede even to this request of hers.'--The '\_dare\_' is

underlined. --'If I am right in the former supposition, I shall expect

to see you shortly. Your brother joins me in love.--Your mother.'"

Herr Witold was so exasperated that he dashed the letter to the ground.

"There's a thing for a man to read! Cleverly managed of the lady

mother, that! She knows as well as I do what a pig-headed fellow

Waldemar is, and if she had studied him for years she could not have

hit on his weak side better. The mere thought of restraint being placed

on him makes him mad. I may move heaven and earth now to keep him; he

will go just to show me he can have his own way. What do you say to the

business?"

Doctor Fabian seemed sufficiently initiated in the family affairs to

look upon the approaching meeting with alarm equal to the Squire's,

though proceeding from a far different cause.

"Dear me! dear me!" he said, anxiously. "If Waldemar goes over to

C---- and behaves in his usual rough, unmannerly fashion, if the

Princess sees him so, what will she think of him?"

"Think he has taken after his father, and not after her," was the

Squire's emphatic reply. "That is just how she ought to see Waldemar;

then it will be made evident to her that he will be no docile

instrument to serve her intrigues--for that there are intrigues on foot

again, I'd wager my head. Either the princely purse is empty--I fancy

it never was too full--or there is some neat little State conspiracy

concocting again, and Wilicza lies handy for it, being so close to the

frontier."

"But, Herr Witold," remonstrated the Doctor, "why try to widen the

unhappy breach in the family, now that the mother gives proof of a

conciliatory spirit? Would it not be better to make peace at last?"

"You don't understand, Doctor," said Witold, with a bitterness quite

unusual to him. "There is no peace to be made with that woman, unless

one surrenders one's own will, and consents to be ruled entirely by

her; it was because poor Nordeck would not do so that she led him the

life of hell at home. Now, I won't exonerate him altogether. He had

some nasty faults, and could make things hard for a woman; but all the

troubles came of his taking this Morynska for a wife. Another girl

might have led him, might perhaps have changed some things in him; but,

for such a task, a little heart would have been needed, and of that

article Madam Hedwiga never had much to show. Well, the 'degradation,'

as they call it, of her first marriage has been made good by the

second. It was only a pity that the Princess Baratowska, with her son

and spouse, could not take up her residence at Wilicza. She could never

get over that; but luckily the will drew the bolt there, and we have

taken care to bring up Waldemar in such a way that he is not likely to

undo its work by any act of folly."

"We!" exclaimed the Doctor, much shocked. "Herr Witold, I have given my

lessons conscientiously, according to my instructions. I have

unfortunately never been able to influence my pupil's mind and

character, or ..." he hesitated.

"Or he would have been different from what he is," added Witold,

laughing. "The youngster suits me as he is, in spite of his wild ways.

If you like it better, \_I\_ have brought him up. If the result does not

fit in with the Baratowskis' plots and plans, I shall be right glad;

and if my education and their Parisian breeding get fairly by the ears

to-morrow, I shall be still better pleased. Then we shall be quits, at

least, for that spiteful letter yonder."

With these words the Squire left the room. The Doctor stooped to pick

up the letter, which still lay on the floor. He took it up, folded it

carefully together, and said, with a profound sigh--

"And one day people will say, 'It was a Dr. Fabian who brought up the

young heir.' Oh, just Heaven!"

CHAPTER III.

The domain of Wilicza, to which Waldemar Nordeck was heir, was situated

in one of the eastern provinces of the country, and consisted of a vast

agglomeration of estates, whereof the central point was the old castle

Wilicza, with the lands of the same name. To tell how the late Herr

Nordeck obtained possession of this domain, and subsequently won for

himself the hand of a Countess Morynska, would be to add a fresh

chapter to that tale, so oft repeated in our days, of the fall of

ancient families, once rich and influential, and the rise of a

middle-class element which, with the wealth, acquires the power that

was formerly claimed by the nobility as their exclusive privilege.

Count Morynski and his sister were early left orphans, and lived under

the guardianship of their relations. Hedwiga was educated in a convent;

on leaving it, she found that her hand was already disposed of. This

was assuredly nothing unusual in the noble circles to which she

belonged, and the young Countess would have acquiesced unconditionally,

had her destined husband been of equal birth with herself--had he been

one of her own people; but she had been chosen as the instrument to

work out the family plans, which, at all costs, must be carried into

execution.

Some few years ago, in the neighbourhood where lay the property of most

of the Morynski family, a certain Nordeck had arisen--a German, of low

birth, but who had attained to great wealth, and had settled in that

part of the country. The condition of the province at that time made it

easy for a foreign element to graft itself on the soil, whereas, under

ordinary circumstances, every hindrance would have been opposed to it.

The after-throes of the last rebellion, which, though it had actually

broken out beyond the frontier, had awakened a fellow-feeling

throughout the German provinces, made themselves everywhere felt. Half

the nobility had fled, or were impoverished by the sacrifices they had

been eager to make in the cause of their fatherland; it was, therefore,

not difficult for Nordeck to buy up the debt-laden estates at a tithe

of their value, and, by degrees, to obtain possession of a domain which

insured him a position among the first landed proprietors of the

country.

The intruder was, it is true, wanting in breeding, and of most

unprepossessing appearance; moreover, it soon became evident that he

had neither mind nor character to recommend him. Yet his immense

property gave him a weight in the land which was but too speedily

recognised, especially as, with determined hostility to all connected

with the Polish faction, his influence was invariably thrown into the

opposite scale. This may possibly have been his revenge for the fact

that the exclusively aristocratic and Slavonic neighbourhood held him

at a distance, and treated him with unconcealed, nay, very openly

manifested contempt. Whether imprudencies had been committed on the

side of the disaffected, or whether the cunning stranger had played the

spy on his own account, suffice it to say that he gained an insight

into certain party machinations. This made him a most formidable

adversary. To secure his goodwill became a necessity of the situation.

The man must be won over at any cost, and it had long been known that

such winning over was possible. As a millionaire, he was naturally

inaccessible to bribery; his vulnerable point, therefore, was his

vanity, which made him look on an alliance with one of the old noble

Polish families with a favourable eye. Perhaps the circumstance that,

half a century before, Wilicza had been in the possession of the

Morynskis directed the choice to the granddaughter of the last

proprietor; perhaps no other house was ready to offer up a daughter or

a sister, to exact from them the obedience now demanded of the poor

dependent orphan. It flattered the rough \_parvenu\_ to think that the

hand of a Countess Morynska was within his grasp. A dowry was no object

to him, so he entered into the plan with great zest; and thus, at her

first entrance into the world, Hedwiga found herself face to face with

a destiny against which her whole being revolted.

Her first step was decidedly to refuse compliance; but what availed the

'no' of a girl of seventeen when opposed to a family resolve dictated

by urgent necessity? Commands and threats proving of no effect,

recourse was had to persuasion. The young relation was shown the

brilliant \_rôle\_ she would have to play as mistress of Wilicza, the

unlimited ascendancy she would assuredly exercise over a man to whose

level she stooped so low. Much was said of the satisfaction a Morynska

would feel on once more obtaining control over property torn from her

ancestors; much, too, of the pressing need existing of converting the

dreaded adversary into a ductile tool for the furtherance of their own

plans. It was required of her that she should hold Wilicza, and the

enormous revenues at the disposal of its master, in the interests of

her party--and where compulsion had failed, argument succeeded. The

\_rôle\_ of a poor relation was by no means to the young Countess's

taste. She was glowing with ambition. The heart's needs and affections

were unknown to her; and when, at sight of her, Nordeck betrayed some

fleeting spark of passion, she too believed that her dominion over him

would be unbounded. So she yielded, and the marriage took place.

But the plans, the selfish calculations of both parties were alike to

be brought to nought. His neighbours had been mistaken in their

estimate of this man. Instead of bowing to his young wife's will, he

now showed himself as lord and master, impervious to all influence,

regardless of her superior rank; his passing fancy for his bride being

soon transformed into hatred when he discovered that she only desired

to make use of him and of his fortune to serve her own ends and those

of her family. The birth of a son made no change in their relations to

each other; if anything, the gulf between husband and wife seemed to be

only widened by it. Nordeck's character was not one to inspire a woman

with esteem; and this woman displayed the contempt she felt for him in

a way that would have stung any man to fury. Fearful scenes ensued;

after one of which the young mistress of Wilicza left the castle, and

fled to her brother for protection.

Little Waldemar, then barely a year old, was left with his father.

Nordeck, enraged at his wife's flight, imperiously demanded her return.

Bronislaus did what he could to protect his sister; and the quarrel

between him and his brother-in-law might have been productive of the

worst consequences, had not death unexpectedly stepped in and loosed

the bonds of this short-lived, but most unhappy, union. Nordeck, who

was a keen and reckless sportsman, met with an accident while out

hunting. His horse fell with its rider, and the latter sustained

injuries to which he shortly after succumbed; but on his deathbed he

had strength enough, both of mind and body, to dictate a will excluding

his wife from all share alike in his fortune and in the education of

his child. Her flight from his house gave him the right so to exclude

her, and he used it unsparingly. Waldemar was entrusted to the

guardianship of an old school friend and distant connection, and the

latter was endowed with unbounded authority. The widow tried, indeed,

to resist; but the new guardian proved his friendship to the dead man

by carrying out the provisions of the will with utter disregard to her

feelings, and rejected all her claims. Already owner of Altenhof,

Witold had no intention of remaining at Wilicza, or of leaving his ward

behind him there. He took the boy with him to his own home. Nordeck's

latest instructions had been to the effect that his son was to be

entirely removed from his mother's influence and family; and these

instructions were so strictly observed that, during the years of his

minority, the young heir only paid a few flying visits to his estates,

always in the company of his guardian. All his youth was spent at

Altenhof.

As for the enormous revenues of Wilicza, of which at present no use

could be made, they were suffered to accumulate, and went to swell the

capital; so that Waldemar Nordeck, on coming of age, found himself in

possession of wealth such as but few indeed could boast.

The future lord of Wilicza's mother lived on at first in the house of

her brother, who meanwhile had also married; but she did not long

remain there. One of the Count's most intimate friends, Prince

Baratowski, fell passionately in love with the young, clever, and

beautiful widow, who, so soon as the year of her mourning was out,

bestowed her hand upon him. This second marriage was in all respects a

happy one. People said, indeed, that the Prince, though a gallant

gentleman, was not of a very energetic temperament, and that he bowed

submissively to his wife's sceptre. However this may have been, he

loved both her and the son she bore him, tenderly and devotedly.

But the happiness of this union was not long to remain untroubled. This

time, however, the storms came from without. Leo was still a child when

that revolutionary epoch arrived which set half Europe in a blaze. The

rebellion, so often quelled, broke out with renewed violence in the

Polish provinces. Morynski and Baratowski were true sons of their

fatherland. They threw themselves with ardent enthusiasm into the

struggle from which they hoped the salvation of their country and the

restoration of its greatness. The insurrection ended, as so many of its

predecessors had ended, in hopeless defeat. It was forcibly suppressed,

and on this occasion much severity was displayed towards the rebel

districts. Prince Baratowski and his brother-in-law fled to Paris,

whither their wives and children followed them. Countess Morynska, a

delicate, fragile woman, did not long endure the sojourn in a foreign

land. She died in the following year, and Bronislaus then gave his

child into his sister's charge. He himself could no longer bear to stay

in Paris, where everything reminded him of the wife he had loved so

ardently, and lost. He lived a restless, wandering life, roving from

place to place, returning every now and then to see his daughter. At

last, an amnesty being proclaimed, he was free to go back to his native

country, where, through the death of a relation, he had lately

succeeded to the estate of Rakowicz. He now settled down on his new

property. Matters stood far otherwise with Prince Baratowski, who was

excluded from the amnesty. He had been one of the leaders of the

rebellion, and had taken a prominent part in the movement. Return was

not to be thought of for him, and his wife and son shared his exile,

until his death removed all barriers, and they too became free to make

their future home where they would.

CHAPTER IV.

It was early in the forenoon, and the morning room of the villa in

C----, occupied by the Baratowski family, was, for the time being,

tenanted by the Princess alone. She was absorbed in the study of a

letter which she had received an hour before, and which contained an

announcement from Waldemar that he intended coming over that day, and

should follow quickly on his messenger's steps. The mother gazed as

fixedly at the missive as though from the short cold words, or from the

handwriting, she were trying to discern the character of the son who

had grown so complete a stranger to her. Since her second marriage she

had seen him but at rare intervals; and during the latter years she had

spent in France, communication between them had almost entirely ceased.

The picture she still bore fresh in mind of the boy at the age of ten

was unprepossessing enough, and the accounts she heard of the youth

coincided but too well with it. Nevertheless, it was necessary, at any

cost, to secure an influence over him; and the Princess, though she in

no way attempted to disguise from herself the difficulties in her path,

was not the woman to recoil from the task she had undertaken. She had

risen and was pacing up and down the room, musing deeply, when a quick

loud step was heard without. It halted in the anteroom. Next minute

Pawlick opened the door, and announced "Herr Waldemar Nordeck." The

visitor entered, the door closed behind him, and mother and son stood

face to face.

Waldemar came forward a few steps, and then suddenly stopped. The

Princess, in the act of going to meet him, paused in her turn. In the

very moment of their meeting a bridgeless chasm seemed to yawn open

between them; all the estrangement and enmity of former years rose up

again mighty as ever. That pause, that silence of a second, spoke more

plainly than words. It showed that the voice of natural affection was

mute in the mother's heart, as in the son's. The Princess was the first

to dissimulate that instinctive movement of reserve.

"I thank you for coming, my son," said she, and held out her hand to

him.

Waldemar drew near slowly. He just touched the offered hand, and then

let it drop. No attempt at an embrace was made on either side. The

Princess's figure, notwithstanding her dusky mourning robes, was very

beautiful and imposing as she stood there in the bright sunlight; but

it appeared to make no impression on the young man, albeit he kept his

eyes steadily fixed on her.

The mother's gaze was riveted on his face; but she sought in vain there

for any reflection of her own features, for any trace which should

recall herself. Nothing met her view but a speaking likeness to the man

she hated even in death. The father stood before her portrayed in his

son, trait for trait.

"I counted upon your visit," went on the Princess, as she sat down and,

with a slight wave of her hand, assigned to him a place at her side.

Waldemar did not move.

"Will you not be seated?" The question was put quietly, but it admitted

of no refusal, and reminded young Nordeck that he could not

conveniently remain standing during the whole of his visit. He took no

notice of her repeated gesture, however; but drew forward a chair, and

sat down opposite his mother, leaving the place at her side empty.

The demonstration was unmistakable. For one moment the Princess's lips

tightened, but otherwise her face remained unmoved. Waldemar, too, now

sat in the full daylight. He again wore his shooting clothes, which,

though on this occasion they certainly bore no marks of recent sport,

yet betrayed no special care, and were worlds apart from anything

approaching a correct equestrian costume. In his left hand, ungloved

like its fellow, he held his round hat and whip. His boots were covered

with the dust of a two hours' ride, the rider not having thought fit to

shake it off; and his very manner of sitting down showed him to be

altogether unused to drawing-room etiquette. His mother saw all this at

a glance; but she also saw the inflexible defiance with which her son

had armed himself. Her task was no easy one, she felt.

"We have grown strangers to one another, Waldemar," she began; "and on

this our first meeting, I can hardly expect to receive from you a son's

affectionate greeting. From your early childhood I have been forced to

give you into other hands. I have never been allowed to exercise a

mother's rights, to fulfil a mother's duties towards you."

"I have wanted for nothing at my uncle Witold's," replied Waldemar,

curtly; "and I have certainly been more at home there than I should

have been in Prince Baratowski's house."

He laid a bitter emphasis on the name which did not escape the

Princess.

"Prince Baratowski is dead," said she, gravely. "You are in the

presence of his widow."

Waldemar looked up, and appeared now for the first time to notice her

mourning garb. "I am sorry for it--for your sake," he answered, coldly.

His mother put the subject from her with a wave of the hand. "Let us

say no more. You never knew the Prince, and I cannot expect you to feel

any kindliness towards the man who was my husband. I do not disguise

from myself that the loss I have sustained, cruel though it has been,

has done away with the barrier which stood between, and held us apart.

You have always looked on me exclusively as the Princess Baratowska.

Perhaps now you will recall to mind that I am also your mother, and

your father's widow."

At these last words Waldemar started up so hastily that his chair was

thrown to the ground. "I think we had better not touch on that. I have

come in order to show you that I am under no restraint, that I do just

what I choose. You wished to speak to me--here I am. What is it you

want with me?"

All the young man's rough recklessness, his utter disregard of the

feelings of others, spoke in these words. The allusion to his father

had evidently stung him; but the Princess had now risen in her turn,

and was standing opposite him.

"What I want with you? I want to break through that charmed circle

which an influence hostile to me has drawn around you. I want to remind

you that it is now time for you to see things with your own eyes, to

let your own judgment have free play, instead of blindly adopting the

views which other people have forced upon you. You have been taught to

hate your mother. I have long known it. Try first whether she deserves

your hatred, and then decide for yourself. That is what I want with

you, my son, since you compel me to answer such a question."

This was said with so much quiet energy, such loftiness of look and

tone, that it could not fail to have its effect upon Waldemar. He felt

he had insulted his mother; but he felt also that the insult glanced

off from her, powerless to wound, and that appeal to his independence

had not fallen on deaf ears.

"I bear you no hatred, mother," said he. It was the first time he had

pronounced that name.

"But you have no confidence in me," she answered; "yet that is the

first thing I must ask of you. It will not be easy to you to put faith

in me, I know. From your earliest childhood the seeds of distrust have

been sown in your soul. Your guardian has done all in his power to

alienate you from me, and to bind you solely to himself. I only fear

that he, of all men, was least fitted to bring up the heir of Wilicza!"

Her eyes took a rapid survey of the young man as she spoke, and the

look completed her meaning; unfortunately Waldemar understood both look

and words, and was roused by them to a pitch of extreme irritation.

"I will not have a word said against my uncle," he exclaimed, in a

sudden outburst of anger. "He has been a second father to me; and if I

was only sent for here to listen to attacks against him, I had better

go back again at once. We shall never understand each other."

The Princess saw the mistake she had made in giving the reins to her

animosity against that detested guardian, but the thing was done. To

yield now was to compromise her whole authority. She felt that on no

account must she recede; yet everything depended on Waldemar's staying.

Suddenly help came to her from a quarter whence she least expected it.

At this critical moment a side door was opened, and Wanda, who had just

returned from a walk with her father, and had no idea that a visitor

had arrived in her absence, came into the room.

Waldemar, who had turned to leave it, stopped all at once, as though

rooted to the ground. A flame of fire seemed to shoot up into his face,

so rapid, so deep was the crimson that dyed it. The anger and defiance

which an instant before had shone in his eyes, vanished as by

enchantment; and, for a moment, he remained transfixed, with his eyes

riveted on the young Countess. The latter was about to retire, on

seeing a stranger in her aunt's company; but when the stranger turned

his face towards her, a half-uttered exclamation of surprise escaped

her also. She, however, preserved all her presence of mind; and, far

from being overtaken by any confusion, was apparently seized by a

violent temptation to laugh which it cost her much trouble to subdue.

It was too late to go back now, so she shut the door and went up to her

aunt.

"My son, Waldemar Nordeck; my niece, Countess Morynska," said the

Princess, looking first at Waldemar with considerable astonishment, and

then casting a questioning glance at the young girl.

Wanda had quickly overcome the childish impulse to merriment,

remembering that she was now a grown-up lady. Her graceful courtesy was

so correct that the severest mistress of deportment could have found no

fault with it; but there came a traitorous little twitch about the

youthful lips again as Waldemar returned her salutation by a movement

which he no doubt intended for a bow, but which certainly had a very

strange effect. Once again his mother scanned his face, as though she

would read his most secret thoughts. "It seems you know your cousin

already?" she said, with a peculiar emphasis. Her allusion to the

relationship between himself and the new-comer only increased the young

man's discomfiture.

"I don't know," he replied, in extreme embarrassment. "I did ...

certainly ... some days ago ..."

"Herr Nordeck was so good as to act as my guide when I lost my way in

the forest," interposed Wanda. "It was the day before yesterday, when

we made our excursion to the Beech Holm."

At the time the Princess had described this walk as a rebellious and

highly improper freak; but now she had not a word of blame for it. Her

tone was almost sweet as she replied--

"Indeed! a singular meeting. But why behave to each other as though you

were strangers? Between relations etiquette need not be so strictly

observed. You may certainly offer your cousin your hand, Wanda."

Wanda obeyed, holding out her hand in a frank, unembarrassed way.

Cousin Leo was already gallant enough to kiss it when she gave it him

in token of reconciliation after a quarrel; his elder brother,

unfortunately, appeared to possess none of this chivalry. He took the

delicate little fingers, shyly and hesitatingly at first, as though he

hardly dared to touch them, then all at once pressed them so tightly

between his own that the girl almost cried out with the pain. Of this

new cousin she knew as little as Leo, nay, still less; she had

therefore looked forward to his announced visit with proportionable

curiosity. Her disenchantment knew no bounds.

The Princess had stood by, a silent though keen observer. Her eye never

quitted Waldemar's face.

"So you met each other in the forest?" said she again. "Was no name

mentioned on either side to enlighten you?"

"Well, I unluckily took Herr Nordeck for a wood demon," burst out

Wanda, paying no heed to her aunt's grave, reproving glance, "and he

did his best to strengthen me in the belief. You can't imagine, aunt,

what an interesting interview we had. During the half hour we were

together, he never let me find out whether he really belonged to the

present race of men, or to the old fabulous ages. Under these

circumstances, a formal introduction was out of the question, of

course."

This little speech was made in a tone of impertinent, half-mocking

jest; but, strangely enough, Waldemar, who had recently shown himself

so irritable, did not appear in the least offended by it. His eyes were

still fixed on the young girl, and he hardly seemed to hear her

stinging little pleasantries.

The Princess, however, thought it time to put a stop to Wanda's

pertness. She turned to her son with calm as perfect as though the

previous scene between them had never taken place.

"You have not yet seen your brother, Waldemar, nor your uncle either; I

will take you to them. You will spend the day with us?" She spoke the

last words in an airy, assured tone, as though his staying were a thing

of course.

"If you wish it." This was said irresolutely, hesitatingly, but with

none of the fierce defiance of his former answers. Evidently Waldemar

no longer thought of going.

"Certainly I wish it. You would not leave us so abruptly on the

occasion of your first visit. Come, dear Wanda."

Young Nordeck wavered yet a moment; but as Wanda obeyed the summons,

his decision was taken. He laid the hat and riding-whip, to which he

had hitherto persistently clung, down on the chair he had a little

while before upset in his sudden blaze of anger, and meekly followed

the ladies as they led the way. A scarcely perceptible smile of triumph

played about the Princess's lips. She was too clever an observer not to

know that she had the game in her own hands. It is true that accident

had befriended her.

CHAPTER V.

Count Morynski and Leo were together in the drawing-room. They had

already heard from Pawlick of Waldemar's arrival, but had not wished to

disturb the first meeting between mother and son. The Count looked a

little surprised, as Wanda, whom he believed to be in her room, came in

with them; but he did not put the question which was on his lips. For

the moment young Nordeck engaged his whole attention. The Princess took

her younger son by the hand, and led him to the elder. "You do not know

each other yet," she said, significantly; "but to-day, at last, the

satisfaction of bringing you together is granted me. Leo is ready to

meet you with a brother's love, Waldemar. Let me hope that he may find

the same in you."

Waldemar, with a rapid glance, took the measure of the new-found

brother standing before him. There was no hostility in his manner now.

The young Prince's handsome face took him captive on the spot, so much

was evident; perhaps, too, he had been won over to a milder mood by

that which had passed, for when Leo, still with some shy reserve, held

out his hand to him, he grasped it warmly.

Count Morynski now drew near to address some words of courtesy to his

sister's son. The latter answered chiefly in monosyllables, and the

conversation, which, on Waldemar's account, was carried on exclusively

in German, would have been forced and languid, had not the Princess

guided it with truly masterly tact. She steered clear of every rock

ahead, she avoided every painful allusion, and skilfully contrived that

her brother, her sons, and Wanda should by turns be drawn into the

general talk, so as, for half an hour, really to conjure up an illusion

of the most perfect harmony reigning among the different members of the

family.

Leo stood close to Waldemar's chair, and the contrast between the

brothers was thus brought into strongest relief. The young Prince

himself had hardly emerged from boyhood; he no more than his neighbour

had yet ripened to man's estate. But how different was the transition

here! Waldemar had never appeared to greater disadvantage than by the

side of this slender, supple form, where there was symmetry in every

line--by this youthful aristocrat, with his easy, assured bearing, his

graceful gestures and ideally beautiful head. Young Nordeck's sharp,

angular figure, his irregular features and sombre eyes, looking out

from under a tangle of light hair, justified but too fully the mother's

feelings, as her gaze rested on them both--on her darling, her handsome

boy, so full of life and animation, and on that other, who was also her

son, but to whom she was linked by no single outward trait, by no

impulse of the heart. There was something in Waldemar's manner to-day

which showed him in a more than usually unfavourable light. The short,

imperious tone that was habitual to him, though unattractive enough,

was yet consistent with his general appearance, and lent to it a

character of its own. This tone he had maintained throughout the

interview with his mother; but, from the moment of the young Countess

Morynska's entrance, it had deserted him. For the first time in his

life he appeared shy and under restraint; for the first time he seemed

to feel the influence of society in every way superior to himself, and

the novelty of his position robbed him, not only of his defiance, but

visibly of his self-confidence also. He had come prepared to face a

hostile camp, and his resolution had armed him with a certain rugged

dignity. Now he had given up the fight, and his dignity had vanished.

He was awkward, abstracted, and Morynski's surprised look seemed now

and then to ask whether this really could be the Waldemar as to whom

such alarming reports had been made. When they had sat and talked for

about half an hour, Pawlick came in and announced that dinner was

ready.

"Leo, you must resign your office to your brother, and let him take

Wanda in to-day," said the Princess, as she rose and, passing her hand

through her brother's arm, went on first with him to the dining-room.

"Well," asked the Count in a low voice, and in Polish, "how do matters

stand? What was the result of the interview?"

The Princess only smiled. She gave one rapid glance back at Waldemar,

who was just going up to Wanda, and then answered, also in Polish,

"Make your mind easy. He will comply. I will answer for it."

It was nearly evening when young Nordeck set out on his homeward

journey. Leo went with his brother to the gate of the villa, and then

returned to the drawing-room. The Princess and Count Morynski were no

longer there, but Wanda still stood on the balcony, watching the

departing horseman.

"Good gracious, what a monster that Waldemar is!" cried Wanda to her

cousin as he came in. "However did you manage to keep serious all the

time, Leo? Look here, I have nearly bitten my handkerchief to pieces,

trying to hide that I was laughing; but I can't keep it down any

longer, or I shall suffocate!" and, falling on to one of the balcony

chairs, Wanda broke into a violent burst of merriment, which plainly

showed what severe restraint she must hitherto have placed on herself.

"We were prepared to find Waldemar odd," said Leo, half apologetically.

"After all we had heard of him, I, to tell the truth, expected he would

be much rougher and more disagreeable than he is."

"Oh, you only saw him in company dress to-day," jested Wanda; "but when

one has had the good fortune to admire him, as I did, in all his

primeval grandeur, it is hard to recover from the overpowering effect

of the savage's first appearance. I yet think with awe of our meeting

in the forest."

"Yes, you owe me an account of that meeting still," put in Leo. "So it

was Waldemar who showed you the way to the Beech Holm the day before

yesterday? I have gathered this much from your discourse, but I really

do not understand why you make such a mystery of the matter."

"I only did that to torment you," replied the young lady with great

candour. "You grew so angry when I told you of my interesting adventure

with a stranger. You naturally believed some fascinating cavalier had

escorted me, and I left you in that belief. Now, Leo"--here her gaiety

got the better of her again--"now you see it was not a very dangerous

affair."

"Well, yes, I see that," assented the young Prince, laughing; "but

Waldemar must have had some knightly instinct, or he would not have

condescended to act as your guide."

"Possibly; but I shall remember his escort as long as I live. Just

fancy, Leo; all in a minute I lost the path I had so often taken, and

which I thought I knew so well. At every attempt to find it I got

deeper and deeper into the forest, until at last I strayed into regions

quite unknown to me. I could not even tell in which direction the Beech

Holm or the sea lay, for there was not a breath of wind, and not a

murmur of the waves reached me. I stood still, not knowing what to do,

and was just on the point of turning back, when something broke through

the bushes as violently as though the woods were being beaten for a

battue. Suddenly the figure of a man stood before me, whom I really

could take for none other than the wood-demon in person. He was up to

his knees in mud. A freshly killed doe was thrown over his shoulder,

quite regardless of the fact that blood was dripping from the animal

down on to his clothes and staining them. The enormous yellow mane,

which serves him for hair, had been roughly used by the bushes, and was

hanging down over his face. He stood there with a gun in his hand, and

a growling, snarling dog at his side, who showed his teeth as he looked

at me. I ask you if it was possible to take this monster of the woods

for a human being bent on sport."

"You were in a tremendous fright, I suppose," said Leo, banteringly.

Wanda tossed her head. "In a fright? I? You ought to know by this time

that I am not timid. Another girl would have probably fled

precipitately, but I kept my ground, and asked the way to the Beech

Holm. Though I repeated the question twice, I got no answer. Instead of

replying, the spectre stood as though rooted to the ground, and stared

at me with its great wild eyes without uttering a sound. Then I did

begin to feel uncomfortable, and turned to go, when in a moment, with

two strides, he was at my side, pointing to the right, and showing an

unmistakable intention of acting as my guide."

"But not by pantomime alone?" interposed Leo. "Waldemar spoke to you,

surely."

"Oh yes, he spoke; he honoured me in all with six or seven words,

certainly not more. On joining company with him, I heard something like

'We must take to the right;' and on parting, 'Yonder lies the Beech

Holm.' During the half-hour's interval, there reigned an impressive

silence which I did not venture to break. And what a way it was we

took! First we went straight into the very midst of the thicket, my

amiable guide walking on ahead of me, trampling and crushing down the

bushes like a bear. I believe he destroyed half the forest to make some

sort of a passage for me. Then we came to a clearing, then to a bog. I

expected we should plunge right into it; but, marvellous to say, we

stopped on the brink. All this time not a word passed between us; but

my singular companion stuck close to my side, and whenever I looked up

I met his eyes, which seemed to grow more and more uncanny every

minute. I now inclined decidedly to the opinion that he had risen from

one of the ancient tumuli, and was prowling about in search of some

human being whom he would straightway drag off to one of the old

heathen altars, and there immolate. Just as I was preparing for my

approaching end, I saw the blue sea glistening through the branches,

and at once recognised the neighbourhood of the Beech Holm. My

wonderful cavalier came to a halt, fixed his great eyes on me once

more, as though he would eat me up on the spot, and seemed hardly to

hear that I was thanking him. Next minute I was on the shore, where I

caught sight of your boat. Think of my astonishment when I came in

to-day and found my wood-demon--my giant of primeval times, whom I

thought long since buried in some deep cavern of the earth--in my

aunt's reception room, and when the said ghostly vision was introduced

to me as 'Cousin Waldemar.' It is true, he conducted himself in the

most approved style; he even took me in to dinner. But, goodness me!

how funnily he set about it! I believe it was the first time in his

life he ever offered a lady his arm. Did you see how he bowed, how he

behaved at table? Don't be offended, Leo; but this new brother of yours

belongs rightly to the wilderness, and to the furthest depths of it,

too! There he has at least something awe-inspiring about him; but when

he comes out among civilised men, he simply convulses one with

laughter. And to think that he should be the future lord of Wilicza!"

At heart, Leo shared this opinion; but he thought it incumbent on him

to take his brother's part. He felt how infinitely superior to young

Nordeck he himself was, both in appearance and bearing, and this made

it easy to be generous.

"But it is not Waldemar's fault that his education has been so entirely

neglected," said he; "mamma thinks that his guardian has let him run

wild systematically."

"Well, all I can say is, he is a monster," decided the young lady. "I

herewith solemnly declare that if I have to go in to dinner with him

again, I will impose a voluntary fast on myself, and not appear at

table."

During their talk, Wanda's handkerchief, with which she had been

fanning herself, had slipped down, and now lay at some distance below

them in the ivy which crept round the balcony. Leo noticed this, and

gallantly bent to reach it. He was obliged almost to go down on his

knees. In this position, he picked up the handkerchief, and restored it

to his cousin. Instead of thanking him, she burst out into a peal of

laughter. The young Prince sprang to his feet.

"You are laughing?"

"Oh, not at you, Leo. It only struck me how unutterably comic your

brother would have looked in such a situation."

"Waldemar? Yes, indeed; but you will hardly have that satisfaction. He

will never bend the knee before a lady, certainly not before you."

"Certainly not before me!" repeated Wanda, in a tone of pique. "Oh, you

think I am still such a child, it is not worth while kneeling to me. I

have a great mind to prove to you the contrary."

"How?" asked Leo, laughing. "By bringing Waldemar to your feet,

perhaps?"

The girl pouted. "And suppose I undertook to do it?"

"Well, try your power on my brother, if you like," said he, touchily.

"Perhaps that will give you a better notion of what you can do, and

what you can't."

Wanda sprang up with the eagerness of a child who sees a new toy before

it.

"I agree. What shall we wager?"

"But it must be done in earnest, Wanda. It must not be a mere act of

politeness, like mine just now."

"Of course not," assented the young Countess. "You laugh; you think

such a thing is quite beyond the range of possibility. Well, we shall

see who wins. You shall behold Waldemar on his knees before we leave. I

only make one condition; you must give him no hint of it. I think it

would rouse all the bear in him if he were to hear we had presumed to

make his lordship the object of a wager."

"I won't say a word," declared Leo, carried away by her mischievous

eagerness, and joining in the frolic. "We shan't escape an outburst of

his Berserker wrath, though, when you laugh out at him at last, and

tell him the truth. But perhaps you mean to say yes?"

Both the children--for children they still were with their respective

sixteen and seventeen years--joked and made merry over their conceit,

as such thoughtless young creatures will. Accustomed constantly to

tease and torment each other, they had no misgivings about including a

third person in their sport. They never reflected how little Waldemar's

stern, unbending character was suited to such trifling, or to what

bitter earnest he might turn the play imagined by them in the foolish

gaiety of their hearts.

CHAPTER VI.

Some weeks had passed. The summer was drawing to an end, and all hands

at Altenhof were busy with the harvest. The Squire, who had spent his

whole morning in the fields, looking after the men and directing the

work, had come home weary and exhausted, and was settling himself down

for his well-earned after-dinner nap. Whilst making his preparations

for it, he looked round every now and then, half angrily, half

admiringly, at his adopted son, who was standing by the window dressed

in his usual riding gear, waiting for his horse to be brought round.

"So you are really going over to C---- in the heat of the day?" asked

Herr Witold. "I wish you joy of your two hours' ride. There is not a

bit of shade all the way. You will be getting a sunstroke--but you

don't seem able to live now without paying your respects to your mother

at least three or four times a week."

The young man frowned. "I can't refuse to go if my mother wishes to see

me. Now that we are so near each other she has a right to require that

I should pay her some visits."

"Well, she makes a famous use of the right," said Witold; "but I should

like to know how she has contrived to turn you into an obedient son. I

have tried in vain for nearly twenty years. She managed it in a single

day; she certainly always had the knack of governing people."

"You ought to know that I do not allow myself to be governed, uncle,"

replied Waldemar, in a tone of irritation. "My mother met me in a

conciliatory spirit, and I neither can nor will repulse her advances

roughly, as you did whilst I was under your guardianship."

"They tell you often enough that you are under it no longer, I'll be

bound," interrupted his uncle. "You have laid great stress on that for

the last few weeks; but it is quite unnecessary, my boy. You have, I am

sorry to say, never done anything but just what pleased you, and often

acted in opposition to my will. Your coming of age is a mere form, for

me, at least, though not for the Baratowskis. They best know what use

they mean to make of it, and why they are continually reminding you of

your freedom."

"What is the good of these perpetual suspicions?" cried Waldemar, in a

passion. "Am I to give up all intercourse with my relations for no

other reason but because you dislike them?"

"I wish you could put your dear relations' tenderness to the test,"

said Witold, ironically. "They would not trouble themselves so much

about you, if you did not happen to be master of Wilicza. Now, now,

don't fly out again. We have had quarrels enough about it of late, I am

not going to spoil my nap to-day. This confounded bathing season will

be over soon, and then we shall be quit of them all."

A short pause followed, Waldemar pacing impatiently up and down the

room.

"I can't think what they are about in the stables. I ordered Norman to

be saddled--the men seem to have gone to sleep over it."

"You are in a terrible hurry to get away, are not you?" asked the

Squire, drily. "I really believe they have given you some philtre over

in C----, which will not allow you to rest anywhere else. You can

hardly bear to wait until it is time for you to be in the saddle."

Waldemar made no reply. He began to whistle and to crack his whip in

the air.

"The Princess is going back to Paris, I presume?" asked Witold all at

once.

"I don't know. It is not decided yet where Leo is to finish his

studies. His mother will no doubt be guided by that in the choice of

her future home."

"I wish he would go and study in Constantinople, and that his lady

mother would be guided by that, and take herself off with him to the

land of the Turks; then, at all events, they could not be back for some

time," said Herr Witold, spitefully. "That young Baratowski must be a

perfect prodigy of learning. You are always talking of his studies."

"Leo has learned a great deal more than I, yet he is four years

younger," said Waldemar, in a grumbling voice.

"His mother has kept him to his books, no doubt. That boy has kept the

same tutor all the while, you may be sure; while six have decamped from

here, and the seventh only stays on with you because he can't very well

help himself."

"And why was not I kept to my books?" asked young Nordeck, suddenly,

crossing his arms defiantly and going up close to his guardian. The

latter stared at him in astonishment.

"I do believe the boy is going to reproach me with giving him his own

way in everything," he cried, in wrathful indignation.

"No," replied Waldemar, briefly. "You meant well, uncle; but you don't

know how I feel when I see that Leo is before me in everything, and

hear constantly of the necessity of further advantages for him, while I

stand by and ... But there shall be an end of it. I'll go to the

University, too."

Herr Witold, in his fright, nearly let fall the sofa cushion he was

comfortably adjusting.

"To the University?" he repeated.

"Yes, certainly. Dr. Fabian has been talking of it for months."

"And for months you have refused to go.

"That was before ... I have changed my mind now. Leo is to go to the

University next year, and if he is ready for it at eighteen, it must be

high time for me to be there. I am not going to be outdone always by my

younger brother. I shall talk to Dr. Fabian about it to-morrow. And now

I'll go round to the stables myself, and see whether Norman is saddled

at last. My patience is pretty well worn out."

With these words he took up his hat from the table, and hurried out of

the room, full of eagerness to be gone. Herr Witold sat still on the

sofa, holding the cushion. He did not think of laying it straight now.

It was all over with his noonday rest.

"What has come to the boy, Doctor? What have you been doing to the

boy?" he cried, angrily, as that inoffensive individual came into the

room.

"I?" asked the Doctor, in alarm. "Nothing! Why, he has but just left

you.

"Well, well, I don't mean you exactly," said the Squire, peevishly. "I

mean the Baratowski people. There has been no managing him since they

got him into their hands. Just fancy, he says now he wants to go to the

University."

"No? Really?" cried the Doctor, in delight.

This reply roused Herr Witold to still greater ire.

"Yes, it will be a matter of rejoicing to you," he grumbled. "You will

be enchanted to get away from here, and to leave me at Altenhof without

a soul to keep me company."

"You know that I have always advocated his going to the University. I

have unfortunately never found a hearing; and, if it really be the

Princess who has prevailed upon Waldemar to take this step, I can only

regard her influence as most beneficial."

"Deuce take her beneficial influence!" stormed the Squire, flinging the

unhappy sofa cushion into the middle of the room. "We shall soon see

what it all means. Something has happened to the boy. He wanders about

as if he were dreaming in broad daylight, takes no interest in

anything, and when one asks him a question he answers at cross

purposes. When he goes out shooting, he comes back with an empty

bag--he, who never used to miss a shot; and now he has all at once

taken to study, and there is no getting him from his books. I must find

out what has brought about this change in him, and you will have to

help me, Doctor. You must go over to C---- one of these days."

"No, for Heaven's sake, no!" protested Dr. Fabian. "What should I do

there?"

"See how the land lies," said the Squire, emphatically, "and bring me

back word. Something is going on there, of that I am certain. I can't

go over myself, for I am, so to speak, on a war-footing with the

Princess, and when we two come together there is sure to be a row. I

can't tolerate her spiteful ways, and she can't put up with my plain

speaking; but you, Doctor, stand as a neutral in the business. You are

the right man."

The Doctor with all his might resisted the requirement made of him.

"But I understand nothing of such matters," he complained. "You know,

too, how absent and ill at ease I am in my intercourse with strangers.

I should be especially so with the Princess. Besides, Waldemar would

never consent to my going with him."

"It is all of no use," interrupted Witold, dictatorially. "Go over

to C---- you must. You are the only creature in whom I have confidence,

Doctor. You won't desert me now?" With this he broke into such a flood

of argument, reproaches, and entreaties, that the poor Doctor, half

stunned by so much eloquence, surrendered at last, and promised all

that was asked of him.

The sound of hoofs was heard outside, and Waldemar, already mounted,

trotted past the window, then gave his horse the rein, and galloped

away without once looking back.

"Off he goes," said Witold, half grumbling, and yet brimming over anew

with admiration for his adopted son. "Just see how the boy sits his

horse. They might be cast in bronze! and it is no trifle to keep the

Norman well in hand."

"Waldemar has a singular mania for riding young horses which are only

half broken in," said the Doctor, anxiously. "I cannot understand why

he has selected Norman for his favourite. He is the most unmanageable,

the most restive, animal in the stables."

"That is the very reason," returned the Squire, laughing. "You know he

must have something to curb and master, or he finds no pleasure in the

game. But now, come here, Doctor; we must consider about this mission

of yours. You must set to work diplomatically, you know."

So saying, he grasped the Doctor's arm and dragged him off to the sofa.

Poor Fabian went docilely enough. He had resigned himself to his fate,

and only murmured occasionally, in doleful accents, "I a diplomatist,

Herr Witold? Mercy on me! la diplomatist!"

The Baratowski family had never taken much part in the gay doings of

the C---- season, and latterly they had withdrawn from them more and

more. Waldemar, who now paid them such frequent visits, always found

the family party alone. Count Morynski alone was wanting to it. He had

left a few days before the scene above described. It had been his

intention to take his daughter away with him; but the Princess

discovered that a longer stay at the seaside was essential to Wanda's

health, and prevailed on her brother to consent to a prolonged

separation. He yielded to his sister's wish, and set out on his

solitary way towards Rakowicz, where business matters required his

presence.

In spite of the noonday heat, young Nordeck had ridden over from

Altenhof at full speed. On his arrival he entered the Princess's room,

where he found her sitting at her writing-table. Had Leo come to her

thus, glowing and overheated, she would certainly have met him with

some word of remonstrance, of motherly solicitude; but Waldemar's

appearance, though possibly not unnoticed by her, excited no remark.

It was a singular fact that, although mother and son now saw each other

so frequently, no intimacy had taken root between them. The Princess

always treated Waldemar with the utmost consideration, and he strove to

tone down the harshness of his demeanour towards her; but in this

mutual endeavour to preserve a good understanding, there was not a

spark of warm, genuine feeling. They \_could\_ not cross the invisible

gulf which lay between them, though, for the time being, an extraneous

power had bridged it over. The greeting on either side was just as cool

as on the occasion of their first meeting; but Waldemar's eyes now

roved round the parlour with an uneasy, questioning glance.

"You are looking for Leo and Wanda?" said the Princess. "They have gone

down to the shore, and will wait for you there. You have planned a

boating excursion together, I think?"

"Yes. I will go and look for the others at once." Waldemar made a hasty

movement towards the door, but his mother laid her hand on his arm.

"I must claim your attention for a few minutes first. I have something

important to discuss with you."

"Won't it do later?" asked Waldemar, impatiently. "I should like

before ..."

"I particularly wish to speak to you alone," the Princess interrupted

him. "You will still be in time for the sail. You can all very well put

it off for a quarter of an hour."

Young Nordeck looked annoyed at being thus detained, and obeyed with

evident reluctance when invited to sit down. There seemed little

prospect of his attention being given to the matter in hand, for his

eyes wandered off continually to the window near him which opened on to

the shore.

"Our stay in C---- is drawing to an end," said the Princess; "we must

soon begin to think of our departure."

Waldemar gave a start almost of dismay.

"So soon? September promises to be fine, why not spend it here?"

"I cannot, on Wanda's account. I can hardly expect my brother to do

without his darling any longer. It was very unwillingly, and only by my

especial wish, that he consented to leave her behind. I promised him in

return that I would myself take her to Rakowicz."

"Rakowicz is not far from Wilicza, is it?" asked Waldemar, quickly.

"Only two or three miles; about half as far as Altenhof from this."

The young man was silent. He looked anxiously through the window again:

the shore seemed to have an unusual interest for him to-day.

"Speaking of Wilicza," said the Princess, negligently, "you will be

taking possession of your property soon, I suppose, now that you are of

age. When do you think of going there?"

"It was fixed for next spring," said Waldemar, absently, still absorbed

by his outdoor observations. "I wanted to stay on with my uncle through

the winter; but all that will be changed now, for I mean to go to the

University."

His mother bent her head approvingly.

"I can but applaud such a resolution. I have never disguised from you

that the essentially practical education you have received at your

guardian's has been, in my opinion, too one-sided. For such a position

as yours, some higher culture is indispensable."

"I should rather like to see Wilicza first, though." Waldemar made a

dash at his object. "I have not been there since my childhood, and ...

You will make a long stay at Rakowicz, will you not?"

"I do not know," replied the Princess. "For the present I shall

certainly accept the refuge offered by my brother to me and to my son.

Time will show whether we must make a permanent claim on his

generosity."

Young Nordeck looked up. "Refuge? Generosity? What do you mean,

mother?"

The Princess's lips twitched nervously, the only sign she gave that the

step she was about to take was one painful to her. With this exception

her face remained unmoved as she answered--

"Hitherto I have concealed the state of our circumstances from the

world, and I intend still to do so. To you, I neither can nor will make

a secret of our position. Yes, I am compelled to seek a refuge with my

brother. You know something of the events which happened during the

term of my second marriage. I stood at my husband's side when the storm

of revolution swept him down. I followed him into banishment, and for

ten long years I shared his exile. Our fortune was sacrificed to the

cause; for some time there has been a hopeless discrepancy between the

claims of our position and the means at our command. A cursory

inspection of our affairs, made since the Prince's death, has convinced

me that I must give up the struggle. We are at the end of our

resources."

Waldemar would have spoken. His mother raised her hand to silence him.

"You can understand what it costs me to make these disclosures to you,

and that I never should have entered on the subject if I myself had

been alone in question; but as a mother, I must look to my son's

interests. Every other consideration must give way to that. Leo stands

on the threshold of life, of his career. I do not fear for him the

privations of poverty, but its humiliations, for I know that he will

not be able to bear them. Fate has willed it that you should be rich;

henceforth, your wealth will be at your unlimited disposal. I confide

your brother's future to your generosity, and to your sense of honour."

Any other woman would have felt, and shown she felt, it keenly

mortifying thus to sue for help from the son of the man she had fled

from in scorn and hatred; but this woman so carried herself that the

painful step she had to take was in no degree lowering to her, and

wrought no prejudice to her dignity. Her bearing, as she stood before

her son, was not that of a supplicant. She made appeal neither to his

filial feeling, nor to an affection which, as she well knew, did not

exist. The mother with her rights stepped, for the time being, into the

background. She did not take her stand on them; but she demanded from

the elder brother's sense of justice that he should befriend the

younger--and it soon appeared that she had not erred in her judgment of

Waldemar. He sprang up quickly.

"And you only tell me this now, today? Why did I not hear of it

sooner?"

The Princess's eyes met his gravely and steadily.

"What answer would you have made me if, on our first meeting after our

long separation, I had made this communication to you?"

Waldemar looked down; he very well remembered the insulting manner in

which he had asked his mother what it was she wanted with him.

"You are mistaken in me," he replied, hastily. "I should never have

consented to your seeking help from any one but me. What! I am to be

master of Wilicza and allow my mother and brother to live in a state of

dependence! You are mistaken in me, mother; I have not deserved such

distrust!"

"I was not distrustful of you, my son, but only of that influence which

has guided you so far, and may perhaps be your guide even now. I do not

even know whether your friends will permit you to offer us an asylum."

Again she pricked him with a goad which never failed in its effect, and

which the mother was always ready to apply at the right moment. As

usual, it stung the young man's pride into arms.

"I think I have shown you that I can assert my own independence," he

replied, shortly. "Now tell me, what am I to do? I am ready for

anything."

The Princess felt she was about to hazard a bold stroke, but she went

on steadily, straight to her aim.

"We can only accept your help in one form, so that it shall not be made

a humiliation to us," said she. "You are master of Wilicza--would it

not seem natural that your mother and brother should be your guests in

your own house?"

Waldemar started. At the mention of Wilicza, the old suspicion and

distrust reared their heads anew. All the warnings he had heard from

his guardian against his mother's plans recurred to his memory. The

Princess saw this, and parried the danger with masterly skill.

"I only care for the place on account of its being near Rakowicz," she

said, indifferently. "From thence I could keep up a constant

intercourse with Wanda."

Near Rakowicz! constant intercourse with its inhabitants! That decided

the question. The young man's cheeks flushed crimson as he replied--

"Arrange it just as you like. I shall agree to everything. I am not

going to stay permanently at Wilicza just at present; but I will take

you there, at any rate--and there are long holidays at the University

every year."

The Princess held out her hand to him.

"I thank you, Waldemar, in my own name, and in Leo's."

Her thanks were sincerely meant, but there was no warmth or heartiness

in them, and Waldemar's reply was equally cool.

"Pray don't, mother; you make me feel ashamed. The thing is

settled--and now I can go to the shore at last, I suppose."

He seemed most desirous of escaping, and his mother detained him no

longer. She knew too well to whom she owed her victory. Standing at the

window, she watched the young man as he strode hastily along the garden

walk towards the shore; then, turning to her desk again, she sat down

to finish a letter she had been writing to her brother.

The letter was just completed, and the Princess was in the act of

sealing it, when Leo made his appearance. He looked almost as heated as

his brother had been previously; but, in his case, it was evidently

some inner disturbance which sent the blood to his temples. With a

frowning brow and lips tightly set, he drew near his mother, who looked

up in surprise.

"What is the matter, Leo? Why do you come alone? Did Waldemar not find

you and Wanda?"

"Oh, to be sure. He came to us a quarter of an hour ago," said Leo, in

an agitated tone.

"And where is he now?"

"He has gone out for a sail with Wanda."

"Alone?"

"Yes, all alone."

"You know very well I do not approve of such doings," said the

Princess, much annoyed. "If, now and then, I trust Wanda to you, that

is quite a different thing. You have been brought up together, and are

therefore entitled to treat each other as brother and sister. Waldemar

stands in quite a different relation to her, and moreover--I do not

choose that they should thus be left alone together. The boating

excursion was planned by you all in common. Why did you not remain with

the others?"

"Because I will not always stay where I am not wanted!" exclaimed Leo.

"Because it is no pleasure to me to see Waldemar following Wanda about

with his eyes, and behaving as if she were the only creature in

existence."

The Princess pressed the seal on her letter.

"I have told you before what I think of these foolish fits of jealousy,

Leo. Are you beginning with them again already?"

"Mamma!" The young Prince came up to the writing table with flashing

eyes. "Do you not see, or \_will\_ you not see, that Waldemar is in love

with your niece--that he worships her?"

"Well, and what do you do?" asked his mother, leaning back in her chair

composedly. "Precisely the same, or at least you fancy so. You cannot

expect me to take this boyish enthusiasm into serious account? You and

Waldemar are just at the age to need an ideal, and Wanda is the only

young girl with whom you have been thrown in contact so far.

Fortunately, she is still child enough to look on it all as a sort of

game, and it is for that reason alone I allow it to go on. If she were

to begin to take a more serious view of the matter, I should be obliged

to interfere and restrict your intercourse to narrower limits. But, if

I know anything of Wanda, the case will not arise. She plays with you

both, and laughs at you both. So indulge yet awhile in your romance,

young people! It will do your brother no harm to practise a little

gallantry. He needs it much, I am sorry to say!"

The smile which accompanied these words was truly insulting to a

youthful passion--it said so plainly, 'mere child's play.' Leo

restrained his indignation with much difficulty.

"I wish you would talk to Waldemar in that tone of his 'boyish

enthusiasm,'" he replied, with suppressed vehemence. "He would not take

it so quietly."

"I should not disguise from him, any more than from you, that I look

upon the matter as a piece of youthful folly. If, five or six years

hence, you speak to me of your love to Wanda, or if Waldemar tells me

of his, I shall attach some importance to your feelings. For the

present, you can safely play the part of your cousin's faithful

knights--always on condition that no disputes arise between you on the

subject."

"They have arisen already," declared Leo. "I have just had some very

sharp words with Waldemar. That was why I gave up the sail. I won't

bear it. He claims Wanda's company and conversation altogether for

himself, and I won't stand his imperious, dictatorial ways any longer

either. I shall take every opportunity now of letting him see it."

"You will not do that," interrupted his mother. "I am more desirous now

than ever that there should be a good understanding between you, for we

are going with Waldemar to Wilicza."

"To Wilicza!" cried Leo, in a fury; "and I am to be his guest there--to

be under him, perhaps! No, that I will never consent to; I will owe

Waldemar nothing. If it costs me my whole future, I'll accept nothing

from him!"

The Princess preserved her superior calm, but her brow grew dark as she

answered--

"If you are willing to set your whole future at stake for a mere whim,

I am still here to watch over your interests. Besides, it is not merely

a question of you or of me. There are other and higher considerations

which make a sojourn at Wilicza desirable for me, and I have no

intention of allowing my plans to be disturbed by your childish

jealousy. You know I should never ask of you anything that could

compromise your dignity; and you know, too, that I am accustomed to see

my will obeyed. I tell you, we are going to Wilicza, and you will treat

your brother with the regard and courtesy I show him myself. I require

obedience from you, Leo."

The young Prince knew that tone full well. He knew that when his mother

assumed it she meant to have her way at any cost; but on this occasion

a mighty spur urged him to resistance. If he ventured no reply in

words, his face betrayed that he was inclined to rebel in deeds, and

that he would hardly condescend so far as to show his brother the

required courtesy.

"I will take care that no provocation to these disputes shall arise in

future," went on the Princess. "We shall leave this in a week, and when

Wanda goes back to her father you will necessarily see less of her. As

to this sail, \_tête-à-tête\_ with Waldemar, of which I altogether

disapprove, it shall most decidedly be the last."

So saying, she rang, and, on Pawlick's appearing, gave him the letter

to take to the post. It conveyed news to Count Morynski of their

intended departure from C----, and informed him that his sister would

not at present make a claim on his hospitality, but that the former

mistress of Wilicza was about to return to, and take up her residence

in, her old home.

CHAPTER VII.

The boat containing Waldemar and the young Countess Morynska sailed

merrily before the breeze. The sea was rather rough on that day, and

the waves broke foaming against the keel of the little vessel as she

shot through them, dashing their spray overboard every now and then, a

fact which in no way disturbed the two occupants. Waldemar sat at the

helm, with the calm of an experienced steersman; and Wanda, who had

placed herself opposite him under the shadow of the sail, seemed to

find great enjoyment in the quick, bounding motion of the little craft,

and in their rapid onward progress.

"Leo will go and complain of us to my aunt," said she, looking back

towards the coast, which they had already left at some distance behind

them. "He went away in a great rage, and you \_were\_ very unkind to him,

Waldemar."

"I don't like any one else to take the rudder when I am in the boat,"

he answered, in a curt, authoritative tone.

"And suppose I wanted to have it?" asked Wanda, mischievously.

He made no reply, but stood up at once, and silently offered her his

place.

The young Countess laughed.

"Oh no. It was only to see what you would say. There is no pleasure for

me in the sail when I have to think of steering all the while."

Without a word, Waldemar again grasped the rudder which had been the

nominal subject of dispute between him and Leo, though the real cause

of their quarrel lay elsewhere.

"Where are we going?" Wanda began again, after a short pause.

"To the Beech Holm, I think. That was what we had settled."

"Won't it be rather far for to-day?" asked the girl, a little

anxiously.

"With the wind in our favour we shall be there in half an hour, and if

I work the oars well it will not take us much longer to get back. You

wanted to see the sunset from the Beech Holm, you know."

Wanda resisted no further, though a vague feeling of uneasiness came

over her. Heretofore Leo had been the constant companion of the young

people in their excursions by sea and land; this was the first time

they had been out alone together. Young as Wanda was, she would have

been no woman not to discover, before Waldemar's second visit was over,

what had made him so shy and confused on the first. He was incapable of

dissimulation, and his eyes spoke a language all too plain, though he

had as yet betrayed himself by no word. He was still more reserved and

monosyllabic with Wanda than with the others; but, notwithstanding

this, she knew her power over him well enough--knew how to use, and

occasionally to misuse it; for to her the whole thing was a sport, and

nothing more. It pleased her that she could rule this obstinate,

masterful nature with a word, nay, even with a look; it flattered her

to feel herself the object of a certainly somewhat mute and eccentric,

but yet passionate homage; above all, it delighted her to see how angry

Leo grew over the matter. Really to give the preference to his elder

brother never once entered her mind. Waldemar's person and manners were

to the last degree distasteful to her. She thought his appearance

'horrid;' his lack of courtesy shocked, and his conversation wearied

her. Love had not made young Nordeck more amiable. He showed her none

of those chivalrous attentions in which Leo, in spite of his youth, was

already an adept. He seemed, on the contrary, to yield with reluctance

to a charm from which he was unable to escape; yet everything in him

bore witness to the irresistible power which this first passion had

gained over him.

The Beech Holm must probably one day have been a little islet, as its

name would indicate; now it was only a thickly wooded hill, joined to

the shore by a narrow strip of land, or rather by a little chain of

sandy downs, whereby access could be had to it on foot. Notwithstanding

its beauty, the place was but little frequented. It was too secluded

and too distant for the brilliant, gaiety-loving visitors of C----,

whose excursions were generally made to some of the neighbouring

villages along the coast. To-day, as usual, there was no one on the

Holm when the boat came to land. Waldemar jumped out, whilst his

companion, without waiting for help, sprang lightly on to the white

sand, and ran off up the hill.

The Beech Holm well deserved its name. The whole wood, which lined the

shore for nearly a mile, showed nowhere so many or such fine trees of

this species as were gathered together on this spot of earth. Here

mighty old beeches stood, spreading their giant branches far over the

green turf, and over the grey, weather-beaten fragments of stone which

lay scattered here and there, the relics of heathen times--tradition

said of some ancient place of sacrifice. At the landing-place the trees

stood back on either side, and the broad, beautiful sea lay as in a

frame, its deep-blue plain stretching away far as the eye could reach.

No shore, no island obstructed the view, no sail rose on the horizon,

nothing but the sea in all its grandeur, and the Beech Holm, lying

there so solitary and world-forgotten, it might really have been a

little islet lost in mid-ocean.

Wanda had taken off her straw hat with its plain black ribbon, and sat

down on one of the moss-grown stones. She still wore half-mourning for

the late Prince Baratowski. Her white dress was only relieved by a

black knot here and there, and a little black scarf was thrown round

her shoulders. This sombre hue on her white garments gave to the girl's

appearance a subdued and softened tinge which was not habitual to it.

She looked infinitely charming as she sat thus with folded hands,

gazing meditatively out over the sea.

Waldemar, who had taken a seat by her side on the enormous root of an

old beech, seemed to be of this opinion, for he entertained himself

exclusively with looking at her. For him the scenery around existed

not. He started as from a dream when Wanda, pointing to her stone seat,

said jestingly--"I suppose this is one of your old Runic stones?"

Waldemar shrugged his shoulders. "You must ask my tutor, Dr. Fabian,

about that. He is more at home in the first century of our era than in

the present. He would give you a learned and lengthy dissertation on

Runic stones, dolmens, tumuli, and the like. It would afford him the

greatest pleasure."

"Oh no; for goodness' sake!" laughed Wanda; "but, if Dr. Fabian has

such an enthusiastic love for antiquity, I wonder he has not instilled

a taste for it into you. It seems to me you are quite indifferent on

the subject."

The young man's face took a most disdainful expression. "What do I care

for all their antiquarian nonsense? The woods and fields interest me

for the sport they can give me."

"How prosaic!" cried Wanda, indignantly. "So all your thoughts run on

your sport! I dare say here on the Beech Holm you are thinking of the

bucks and hares which may be hidden in the coverts."

"No," said Waldemar, slowly. "I am not."

"It would be unpardonable with such a prospect before you. Just look at

the evening glow out yonder! The waves seem literally to beam with

light."

Waldemar followed the direction of her hand with indifferent eyes.

"Yes; that is where they say Vineta went down."

"What went down?"

"Have not you heard? It is an old sea legend. I thought you knew it."

"No; tell me."

"I am a poor story-teller," said Waldemar, deprecatingly. "Ask our

fisher-folk about it. That old boatman yonder would give you a far

better and more complete account of it than I can."

"But I want to hear it from you," persisted Wanda. "I \_will\_; so go

on."

A frown gathered on Waldemar's brow. The command had been too

imperative.

"You will?" he repeated, rather sharply.

Wanda saw very well that he was offended; but she relied on her power

over him, a power she had often tested during the last few weeks.

"Yes, I will!" she declared, as decidedly as before.

The frown deepened on the young man's face. It was one of those moments

when he rose up in rebellion against the charm which held him captive;

but suddenly he met the dark eyes, and their look seemed to change the

order into an entreaty. It was all over now with his anger and

resistance. His brow cleared. He smiled.

"Well, then, I will give it you in my short, prosaic way," said he,

with an emphasis on the last words. "Vineta[1] was, so the story goes,

an old fortified place by the sea, and the capital of an ancient

nation. Her dominion extended over all the neighbouring coasts and over

the waves, where she ruled supreme. Unparalleled in splendour and

greatness, countless treasures flowed in to her from other lands; but

pride, presumption, and the sins of her inhabitants brought down the

chastisement of Heaven upon her, and she sank, swallowed up by the

waves. Our sailors still affirm and vow that yonder, where the coast

shelves back so far, the fortress of Vineta lies uninjured at the

bottom of the sea. They say that, deep down below in the water, they

catch a glimpse at times of towers and cupolas, hear the bells ring,

and occasionally, at enchanted hours, the whole fairy city rises out of

the depths, and shows itself to some specially favoured beholders.

There are plenty of strange mirage effects at sea, and here in the

north we have a sort of 'Fata Morgana,' though it comes but seldom ..."

"Oh, spare me all these tame explanations!" interrupted Wanda,

impatiently. "Who cares for them, when the legend is pretty--and

wonderfully pretty this one is, don't you think so?"

"I don't know," replied Waldemar, a little embarrassed. "I never

thought about it."

"Have you no feeling for poetry whatever?" cried the young Countess, in

despair. "Why, it is perfectly dreadful!"

He looked at her in surprise and some confusion.

"Do you think it so dreadful?"

"Of course I do!"

"No one has ever taught me to understand poetry," said the young man,

almost in a tone of apology. "In my uncle's house nobody knows anything

about it, and my tutors have never done more than give me dry, formal

lessons. I am only just beginning to see that there is such a thing in

the world."

The last words were spoken with a certain dreaminess of expression very

new to Waldemar. He tossed back the hair which, as usual, had fallen

low over his forehead, and leaned his head against the trunk of a

beech. Wanda suddenly discovered that the brow so constantly hidden

beneath those unkempt light locks was high and remarkably well-shaped.

Now that it was free and exposed to view, it seemed really to lend

nobility to the plain, irregular face. On the left temple a peculiarly

distinct blue vein stood out, marked and salient even in a moment of

repose. The young Countess had never noticed it before, hidden, as it

generally was, beneath the enormous lion's mane which was always an

object of derision to her.

"Do you know, I have just found out something, Waldemar," said she,

mischievously.

"Well?" he asked, without changing his position.

"That strange blue vein on your forehead. My aunt has one, too, on the

temple, just in the same place and exactly similar, only less strongly

marked."

"Really? Well, it is the only thing I have of my mother about me."

"Yes, it is true; you are not in the least like her," said Wanda,

candidly, "and Leo is her very image!"

"Leo!" repeated Waldemar, with a singular intonation. "Leo, indeed!

That is a very different matter."

Wanda laughed. "Why? Has the younger brother any advantage over the

elder in this respect?"

"Why not? He has the advantage of his mother's love. I should think

that was enough."

"Waldemar, how can you say so!" put in the young Countess.

"Is the idea new to you?" he said, looking up with a frown. "I should

have thought any third person must see how I stand with my mother. She

forces herself to be friendly to me--oh yes!--and it must cost her

trouble enough at times; but she can't overcome her secret dislike any

more than I can mine--so we have nothing to reproach one another with."

Wanda was silent, embarrassed, and greatly surprised at the turn the

conversation had taken. Waldemar did not appear to notice this; he went

on in a hard voice--

"The Princess Baratowska is, and always will be, a stranger to me. I do

not belong to her or to her son. I feel that every time we meet. You

have no idea, Wanda, what it costs me to cross that threshold

continually, to be constantly with them. It is a positive torture I

impose on myself, and I should never have thought I could bear it so

patiently."

"But what do you do it for?" asked Wanda, imprudently. "Nobody forces

you to come."

He looked at her, and the answer lay in his eyes--shone in them so

distinctly that the young girl blushed to her very forehead. That

ardent, reproachful gaze spoke all too plainly.

"You do my aunt injustice," she said, speaking quickly, as if to hide

her embarrassment. "She must, and does, love her own son."

"Oh, no doubt!" Waldemar's bitterness had now grown quite beyond his

control. "I am persuaded that she loves Leo very much, though she is so

severe with him; but why should she love me, or I her? I was hardly a

year old when I lost father and mother at one stroke. I was torn from

my home to be brought up among strangers. When, later on, I came to

reflect, to ask questions, I learned that my parents' marriage had been

an unhappy one--a misfortune for both of them--and that they had

separated in bitter hatred; and I learned, too, how this hatred had

survived the grave, and how it exerted an influence on my own life.

They told me that my mother had been to blame for all; and yet I heard

many an allusion to my father, many an expression used with regard to

him, which disturbed my judgment of him also. Where other children are

taught to love and respect, suspicion and distrust were instilled into

me--and now I cannot get free from them. My uncle has been good to me;

he is fond of me in his way, but he could not offer me anything beyond

the life he leads himself. You know pretty well what that is--I think

every one in my mother's house is well posted up on that subject--and

yet, Wanda, you expect me to have some feeling for the poetical!"

He spoke almost resentfully, and yet there was a sort of low, regretful

sadness in his words. Wanda looked up at her companion with great

astonished eyes. She could hardly recognise him to-day. It was the

first time she had ever had any serious conversation with him, the

first time he had departed from his shy monosyllabic reserve. The

peculiarly cold relations between the mother and son had not escaped

her; but she had not believed the latter to be in any way affected by

the existing estrangement. He had never alluded to the situation by a

word; and now, all at once, he showed himself to be most keenly alive

to, and deeply wounded by it. Now, in this hour, there dawned on the

girl's mind some dim notion of what Waldemar's youth had been--how

empty, lonely, and desolate, and how friendless and neglected the young

heir whose riches she had so often heard extolled.

"You wanted to see the sunset," said Waldemar, suddenly changing the

subject and speaking in quite a different tone, as he rose and came to

her side. "I think we are having a rare one to-day."

And truly the clouds which bordered the horizon were suffused with a

crimson glow, and the sun, still radiantly clear, was sinking lower and

lower towards the sea, which flashed into a sudden glory at its

farewell greeting. A flood of light streamed over its surface,

spreading ever wider and wider--only over the spot where Vineta lay

deep down at the bottom of the sea, the waves kept their sombre purple,

while in their furrows gleamed bright streaks as of liquid gold, and

above them thousands of glittering sparks danced and floated.

It must be owned that in the old legends there is a something which

lifts them out of the domain of superstition, and even to a denizen of

the modern world an hour may come when the old enchanting glamour makes

itself felt, quickening the phantasies of the past into actual living

realities. Truly, these legends sprang from the hearts of men; and

their eternal problems, like their eternal truths, still preserve a

strong hold on the human breast. Not to every one, indeed, does the

fairy world open its gates, so closely guarded in these our days; but

the two now seated on the Beech Holm must have belonged to the elect

few, for they distinctly felt the charm which drew them gently but

irresistibly within the magic circle, and neither of them had the

courage, or the will, forcibly to break the spell.

Over their heads the wind rustled in the branches, louder still ran the

murmur and plash of the sea at their feet. Wave upon wave came rolling

up, rearing their white foam-crests aloft for an instant, then crashing

over on to the shore. It was the old mighty ocean melody, the song of

breeze and billow combined, which in its everlasting freshness enthrals

every listener's heart. It sings now of dreamy, sunshiny calm, anon of

raging storms with their terror and desolation, of restless, endless,

surging life--each succeeding wave bringing a new tone of its own, each

breath of wind echoing a responsive chord.

Waldemar and his young companion must have well understood this

language, for they listened to it in breathless silence; and as they so

sat and hearkened, another sound stole on their ears. Up from the very

depths of the ocean came the faint chiming of bells, and about their

hearts a feeling gathered as of pain and longing, mingled with a dim

far-off perception of infinite bliss. From the purple waves yonder rose

a shining vision. It floated on the waters, away into the golden glory,

and there stood bright and definite, a world of countless, unknown

treasures, a picture framed in a magic halo--the old fairy city of

Vineta!

The burning edge of the great glowing disc now touched, as it were, the

sea beneath it, and sinking ever deeper and deeper, disappeared at last

below the horizon. One more flaming, fiery blaze--then the light went

out, and the deep red hue still staining the water paled and gradually

died away.

Wanda drew a long breath, and passed her hand across her brow.

"The sun is down," she said in a low voice; "we must be thinking of

going back."

"Of going back?" repeated Waldemar, as in a dream. "Already?"

The girl rose quickly, as though to escape from some weight of

uneasiness. "The daylight will soon be gone now, and we must get back

to C---- before it grows dusk, or my aunt will never forgive me for

coming without her leave."

"\_I\_ will set that right with my mother," said Waldemar, and he too

seemed to speak the indifferent words with an effort; "but if you wish

to start ..."

"I do wish it, please."

The young man turned to go towards the boat, but all at once he

stopped.

"You will be going away soon now, Wanda. In a few days, will you not?"

The question was put in a strangely agitated tone, and the young

Countess's voice too had lost its natural ring, as she answered--

"I must go to my father now; he has done without me so long."

"My mother and Leo are going to Wilicza." Waldemar hesitated between

the words, as though something caught his breath. "There is some talk

of my joining them. May I?"

"Why do you ask me?" said Wanda, with an embarrassment very unusual to

her. "It depends entirely upon yourself whether you visit your own

property or not."

The young man did not heed the remark. He bent lower over her. His

voice faltered, as it seemed, with deep passionate anxiety.

"But I do ask you, Wanda--you alone! May I come to Wilicza?"

"Yes," fell almost involuntarily from Wanda's lips; but in the same

moment she started back, frightened at what she had done, for Waldemar

seized her hand impetuously, and held it fast, as though it were his

for ever and ever. The young Countess felt how he interpreted her

'yes,' and grew confused and troubled. A thrill of sudden alarm shot

through her. Waldemar noticed that she drew back.

"Have I been too rough again?" he asked, in a low voice. "You must not

be angry with me, Wanda--not to-day. It was only the idea of your going

away that I could not bear. Now I know that I may see you again--now I

will wait patiently till we are at Wilicza."

She made no reply, and they both went silently down to the boat.

Waldemar put up the sail, and settled himself to the oars. With a few

powerful strokes he sent the little craft far out to sea. A faint, rosy

glimmer still lingered on the waves as the boat glided through them.

Neither of the young people spoke during the journey. There was no

sound, save the monotonous ripple of the water; the last transient glow

died out of the sky, and the early shades of twilight fell over the

Beech Holm, as it receded farther and farther into the distance. The

sunset dream was over; but that old legend, which had woven its

threads, tells us that he who has once looked on the lost Vineta, has

once heard the sound of her bells, is pursued all his life by a longing

which leaves him no rest until the enchanted city rises before him once

more--or draws him down below into the depths.

CHAPTER VIII.

In Herr Witold's opinion, the diplomatic mission for which he had

selected Dr. Fabian would be comparatively easy of performance; the

chief difficulty lay in preparing the way for it. In order to gain

accurate information as to 'what was really going on in C----,' the

Doctor must, naturally, have access to the Princess Baratowska's house,

and this could only be obtained through Waldemar. Witold racked his

brains to think how he could put the matter before his adopted son, so

as not to be met at the outset by a decided refusal. Chance

unexpectedly befriended him. On Waldemar's last visit, the Princess had

expressed a wish to make the acquaintance of her son's tutor. The young

man spoke of it on his return, and the Squire caught eagerly at the

welcome opportunity. For once in his life he was able to approve of a

wish of the Princess Hedwiga's as rational. He held the Doctor

inexorably to his word, and the latter, who had all along hoped that

the scheme would fall through, frustrated by his pupil's obstinacy, was

obliged, two days later, to set out for C---- in Waldemar's company, in

order to undergo the desired presentation.

Waldemar was in the saddle as usual. He was passionately fond of

riding, and detested a drive along the sandy or stony roads, over which

he could gallop so swiftly. It did not occur to him to take a seat in

the carriage to-day out of courtesy to his tutor. Dr. Fabian was

accustomed to such marks of disrespect, and, shy and yielding by

nature, he had not the courage to make a firm stand against his pupil's

cavalier treatment of him, or, on its account, to resign his post. He

was without pecuniary resources of his own; a situation meant for him

the means of earning a livelihood. The life at Altenhof suited him but

ill; still, on the whole, he contrived to take little part in it. He

only appeared at table, and again for an hour in the evening, to keep

the Squire company. His pupil made but small claim on his time.

Waldemar was always glad when the hours for study were over, and his

master was still more so. All the rest of the day was at the latter's

own disposal, and he could pursue his hobby, his old Germanic

researches, undisturbed. To these beloved studies Herr Witold owed it

that the present preceptor of his adopted son did not follow the

example of his six predecessors, and decamp from the place; for the

Doctor said to himself with justice that, in another situation where

the boys under his charge would require constant supervision, it would

be all over with his archaeology. It needed, indeed, a patient

character like Fabian's to hold out under such trying circumstances.

To-day again he gave proof of his forbearance, bearing Waldemar's

desertion in silence, when that young gentleman, giving spurs to his

horse, actually rode on before, and only pulled rein to wait for him at

the entrance to C----, which they reached about noon.

On their arrival they found only Countess Wanda in the drawing-room,

and Dr. Fabian went through the first ordeal of introduction with much

embarrassment, it is true, but still with a tolerable presence.

Unfortunately, his visible and somewhat comic uneasiness at once

incited the young Countess to bring her talent for mischief to bear on

him.

"So, Doctor, you are my Cousin Waldemar's tutor?" she began. "I offer

you my sincere condolences, and pity you with all my heart."

Fabian looked up startled, and then glanced with alarm at his pupil,

who, however, seemed not to have heard the remark--his face did not

betray a trace of anger or indignation.

"Why so, Countess?" stammered the Doctor.

"I mean, it must be a difficult office to educate Herr Waldemar

Nordeck," continued Wanda, quite undisturbed, and with intense

enjoyment of the confusion her words produced.

Again Dr. Fabian glanced across at Waldemar with an expression of real

anguish. He knew how sensitive the young man was, how ill he could

brook a jest. Often enough had a far more inoffensive observation from

Herr Witold called forth a perfect storm; but, curiously enough, there

was no sign of one to-day. Waldemar was leaning quietly on Countess

Morynska's chair. A smile even hovered about his lips, as, bending down

to her, he asked--

"Do you think me such a bad fellow, then?"

"Yes, I do. Had not I the pleasure of seeing you in a regular passion

the day before yesterday, at the time of the quarrel about the rudder?"

"But I was not in a passion with \_you\_." said Waldemar, reproachfully.

The Doctor let fall the hat he had hitherto grasped with both hands.

What mild, gentle tones were those he had heard from his rough pupil's

mouth, and what meant the look which accompanied it? The conversation

went on as it had begun, Wanda teasing the young man in her usual

merry, high-handed way, and Waldemar lending himself to the sport with

infinite patience. Nothing seemed to irritate or offend him here. He

had a smile for her every joke, and was, indeed, completely

metamorphosed since he had come into the young Countess's presence.

"Dr. Fabian is listening to us quite devoutly," she laughed. "It

rejoices you to see us in such good spirits, Doctor?"

Poor Doctor! He was not thinking of rejoicing. Everything was going

round him in a whirl. Slight as was his experience of love matters, the

truth began gradually to dawn upon him. He could now form some idea of

how 'the land lay.' This, then, was the reason Waldemar had so amiably

consented to the reconciliation; this was why he so assiduously rode

over to C---- in storm and sunshine; here was the explanation of the

change in his whole behaviour. Herr Witold would certainly have a fit

when he heard of it--Herr Witold, who had such a deeply rooted aversion

to the entire 'Polish lot!' The diplomatic mission was indeed crowned

with success in the very first half-hour; but its result filled the

ambassador with such alarm that he entirely forgot the dissimulation

which had been enjoined on him, and would probably have betrayed his

trepidation, had not the Princess just then come in.

The lady had more than one reason for wishing to make the personal

acquaintance of her son's tutor, who would accompany his pupil to the

University. Now that the reconciliation had been achieved, that a

lasting connection seemed likely to follow, Waldemar's nearest

surroundings could not be a matter of indifference to her. She

convinced herself, before ten minutes were over, that there was nothing

to fear from the harmless Fabian; that, on the contrary, he might be

made useful, possibly unknown to himself. Many things might be learned

from the constant companion which could not be extracted from the

taciturn Waldemar, and this was no unimportant consideration. The

Princess did the Doctor the honour to look upon him as a fitting

instrument for her use. She therefore treated him with much

condescending kindness, and the humility with which he received such

condescension met with her full approbation. She forgave him his

shyness and awkwardness, or rather she looked on both as very natural

in her presence, and deigned to engage him in conversation at some

length.

On his mother's entrance, Waldemar had relapsed into his usual laconic

mood. He took little part in the general talk, but after a time he said

a few words to the Princess in a low voice. She rose at once, and went

out with him on to the balcony.

"You wish to speak to me alone?" she asked.

"Only for a minute," replied Waldemar. "I only wanted to tell you that

it will not be possible for me to accompany you and Leo to Wilicza, as

we had agreed."

"Why? Are difficulties placed in your way?"

"Yes," said the young man, impatiently. "There are, it appears, certain

formalities to be gone through, relating to my coming of age, at which

I am bound to be present. My father's will gives most decided

directions on the subject. Neither my uncle Witold nor I ever thought

about it; and now, just when I want to go, the notice has come. I shall

have to stay here for the present."

"Well, in that case, we will put off our journey also," said the

Princess, "and I must send Wanda to Rakowicz alone."

"On no account," returned Waldemar, with much decision. "I have already

written to Wilicza to say that you will arrive in the course of a few

days, and that the necessary preparations are to be made at the

castle."

"And you?"

"I shall come as soon as I am at liberty. Anyway, I shall spend a few

weeks with you before I go to the University."

"One more question, Waldemar," said the Princess, gravely. "Does your

ex-guardian know of these arrangements?"

"No, I have only spoken of my visit to Wilicza, so far."

"Then you will have to tell him of our intended sojourn there."

"I mean to," replied Waldemar, shortly. "I have written to my agent

that he is to place himself at your service until I arrive. You have

only to give your orders. I have provided for their being obeyed."

The Princess would have expressed her thanks, but she could not bring

herself to articulate them. She knew so well that this generous

consideration was not shown her for her own sake, and the particularly

cold manner in which the obligation was conferred made it incumbent on

her to accept it with equal reserve, if she would not incur a

humiliation.

"So we may certainly expect you," she said. "As for Leo ..."

"Leo is sulky still, because of our quarrel the day before yesterday,"

interrupted Waldemar. "When I arrived just now, he turned off very

demonstratively towards the shore, pretending not to see me."

The Princess knitted her brows. Leo had received strict orders to meet

his brother in a friendly manner, and now he was showing this

rebellious spirit at a most inopportune moment.

"Leo is often hasty and thoughtless. I will see that he makes the first

advances towards a reconciliation."

Waldemar declined coolly. "No, no, we shall settle it better between

ourselves. You need not be uneasy."

They went back into the drawing-room, where Wanda meanwhile had been

amusing herself by sending Dr. Fabian from one stage of embarrassment

to another. The Princess now released him. She wished thoroughly to

discuss the plan of her son's studies, and he was obliged to follow her

into her private room.

"Poor Doctor!" said Wanda, looking after him. "It seems to me you have

quite reversed your \_rôles\_. You have not a particle of respect for

your teacher, but he stands in unbounded awe of you."

Waldemar did not contradict this assertion, which was but too just; he

merely remarked--

"Does it appear to you that Dr. Fabian is a person to inspire respect?"

"Not exactly; but he seems very forbearing and good-natured."

The young man looked contemptuous.

"Perhaps so; but those are qualities I do not particularly value."

"One should tyrannise well over you if one wishes to inspire respect?"

said Wanda, with an arch glance up at him.

Waldemar drew forward a chair, and sat down by her side. "It all

depends upon who plays the tyrant. I would not advise any one at

Altenhof to try it, not even Uncle Witold, and here I only stand it

from one person."

"Who knows!" cried Wanda, lightly. "I should not care to make you angry

in real earnest."

He made no reply. His thoughts had evidently wandered from the

conversation, and were following another track.

"Did not you think it was very beautiful on the Beech Holm the day

before yesterday?" he asked suddenly, with a brusque transition.

A slight blush rose to the young Countess's cheeks, but she answered in

her former sprightly tone--

"I think there is something uncanny about the place in spite of its

beauty; and, as to those sea legends of yours, I certainly shall not

listen to them again at the sunset hour. One really comes to believe in

the old fables."

"Yes, one comes to believe in them!" said Waldemar, in a low tone. "You

reproached me with not entering into the poetry of the tradition. I

have learned to understand it now in my turn."

Wanda was silent. She was struggling to keep down a certain

embarrassment which had assailed her yesterday for the first time in

her life. Before this, on young Nordeck's entrance, the feeling had

taken possession of her. She had tried to laugh it off, to jest it

away, and had succeeded in the presence of others; but directly the two

were left alone together, it returned in full force. She could not get

back the tranquil easy tone of former days. That strange evening on the

Beech Holm! It had invested with a singular earnest a matter which was,

and certainly was to remain, nothing but a joke.

Waldemar waited for an answer in vain. He seemed rather hurt that none

came.

"I was telling my mother just now that I cannot go with you all to

Wilicza," he began again. "I shall not be there for three or four

weeks."

"Well, that is not long," said Wanda.

"Not long? Why, it is an eternity!" he cried, vehemently. "You can form

no idea of what it costs me to stay behind, and let you set out alone."

"Waldemar, pray ..." Wanda interposed in visible distress. He did not

heed her, but went on with the same vehemence.

"I promised to wait until we were at Wilicza, but at that time I hoped

to travel with you. Now it may be a whole month before we see each

other again, and I cannot be silent so long. I cannot know you

constantly in Leo's company, unless I have the conviction that you

belong to me, to me alone."

The avowal came so suddenly, with such a rush, that the young Countess

had no time to ward it off; and, indeed, any attempt of hers to stay

this burst of passion would have been in vain. He had seized her hand

again, and held it fast, as he had held it that evening on the Beech

Holm.

"Do not shrink from me so, Wanda! You must long have known what brings

me to this place. I have never been able to hide it, and you have borne

with me--you have never repulsed me. I must break silence at last. I

know I am not as others are. I know there is little, perhaps nothing,

in me to please you; but I can, and will, learn to be different. It is

solely and entirely on your account that I have imposed on myself these

years at the University. What do I care for study, or for the life out

yonder? I care for them nothing at all; but I have seen that I often

shock you, that you sometimes laugh at me--and ... and you shall not do

it any more. Only give me the certainty that you are mine, that I shall

not lose you. Wanda, I have been alone ever since I was a child--sadly

alone, often. If I have seemed rough and wild to you--you know, dear, I

have had no mother, no affection. I could not grow up to be like Leo,

who has had both; but I can love, perhaps more ardently and better than

he. You are the only creature I have ever loved, and one single word

from you will make up to me for all the past. Say the word, Wanda--or

give me, at least, hope that I may one day hear it from your lips; but,

I entreat of you, do not say no, for I could not, could not bear it."

He was actually on his knees before her; but the young Countess had no

thought now of enjoying the triumph she had once desired in her

childish presumption and vanity. A dim suspicion had, now and again,

crossed her mind that the play was growing more like earnest than she

had intended, and that it would not be easy to end it by treating it as

a mere joke; but, with the heedlessness of her sixteen years, she had

put the thought from her. Now the crisis had come, and she must face

it--must reply to this passionate wooer, who would be satisfied by

nothing less than a 'yes' or a 'no.' Truly, the wooing was not an

alluring one. There was none of that tender romantic halo about it

which, to a young girl's imagination, appears all essential. Even

through this avowal of his love there ran a touch of that sternness

which was inseparable from Waldemar's character; but every word told of

stormy, long pent-up emotion--spoke of passion's ardent glow. Now for

the first time Wanda saw how earnest he was in this matter of his love;

and, with a pang of burning self-reproach, the thought flashed through

her mind--what had she done?

"Get up, Waldemar, pray--I entreat of you!" Her voice shook with

repressed alarm and anxiety.

"When I hear you say yes, not before!"

"I cannot--not now--do get up!"

He did not obey her; he was still in the same supplicating attitude,

when the door leading from the anteroom was unexpectedly opened, and

Leo entered.

For one moment the new-comer stood rooted to the spot; then a cry of

indignation escaped his lips. "So this is how it is!"

Waldemar had sprung to his feet. His eyes blazed with anger. "What do

you want here?" he demanded of his brother, imperiously.

Leo had been pale from agitation, but the tone of this question sent

the blood up to his face. With a few rapid strides he stood before

Waldemar.

"You seem to think my presence here unnecessary," said he, with

flashing eyes. "Yet I of all people can best unriddle to you the scene

which has just taken place."

"Leo, do not speak!" cried Wanda, half entreating, half commanding;

but, in his jealousy, the young Prince lost sight of every other

consideration.

"I will speak," he returned, in his exasperation. "My word only bound

me until the wager was won, and I have just seen with my own eyes in

whose favour it is decided. How often I have begged of you to make an

end of the sport. You knew it wounded me, that it drove me to

desperation. You persisted in it, nevertheless. Am I to submit quietly

while Waldemar, in his fancied triumph, shows me the door--I, who am

witness of how you undertook to bring Waldemar to his knees, come what

might? Well, you have succeeded; but at least he shall know the truth!"

At the first word 'wager,' a great shock had passed through Waldemar's

frame; now he stood motionless, grasping the back of the chair

convulsively, whilst his eyes were turned on the young Countess with a

strange expression.

"What--what does this mean?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper.

Wanda drooped her head consciously. There was a struggle in her mind

between anger against Leo and shame at her own conduct; while, sharper

than either, prevailed a feeling of keen, intense anxiety. She knew now

how cruelly the blow would tell! Leo, too, was silent--struck by the

sudden change in his brother's countenance; he began also to feel how

unjustifiably he had acted in exposing Wanda, and how needful it was

for him to stop.

"What does this mean?" repeated Waldemar, suddenly rousing himself from

his torpor, and going straight up to the young girl. "Leo speaks of

some wager, of some sport of which I have been the object. Answer me,

Wanda. I will believe you, and you only. Tell me that it is a lie!"

"So I am a liar in your eyes," broke out Leo; but his brother did not

heed him. The young Countess's silence told him enough--he needed no

further confirmation; but, with the discovery of the truth, all the

savage fierceness of his nature rose up within him, and now that the

charm to which he had so long yielded was broken, that fierceness

carried him beyond all bounds.

"I will have an answer!" he broke out in a fury. "Have I really only

been a plaything for you, an amusement for your caprices? Have you been

laughing at me, making a mock of me, while I ... You will give me an

answer, Wanda--an answer on the spot, or I ..."

He did not finish the sentence; but his look and tone were so menacing

that Leo stepped before Wanda to protect her. She, too, now drew

herself erect, however. The sight of the young man's ungovernable rage

had given her back her self-possession.

"I will not allow myself to be questioned in this manner!" she began,

and would have added words of proud defiance, when suddenly her eye met

Waldemar's, and she stopped. Though his features still worked with

passion, there was something in his look which told of the man's

unspeakable mental torture at seeing his love scorned and betrayed, the

ideal he had worshipped hopelessly and utterly destroyed. But her voice

seemed to recall him to his senses. His clenched fists relaxed, and he

pressed his lips tightly together, as though resolved that no further

word should pass them. His breast heaved convulsively in the mighty

effort he was making to restrain his rage. He staggered, and leaned

against the chair for support.

"What ails you, Waldemar?" asked Leo in alarm, as, remorse springing up

within him, he advanced towards his brother.

Waldemar raised himself, and, waving off Leo, turned to go without

uttering a word, but with a face from which every drop of blood had

receded.

At this moment the Princess made her appearance, accompanied by Dr.

Fabian. The sound of their voices, growing louder and louder, had

reached her in her room, and made it clear to her that something

unusual was going on in the drawing-room. She came in quickly, and for

an instant her entrance was unnoticed. Wanda stood vacillating between

defiance and distress; but at this crisis the latter gained the upper

hand, and, with the cry of a child confessing a fault and praying to be

forgiven, she called to the young man to come back.

"Waldemar!"

He stopped. "Have you anything else to say to me, Countess Morynska?"

The young Countess started. Never before had that tone of frigid,

cutting contempt met her ear, and the burning blush which mantled to

her face showed how keenly she felt it. But now the Princess barred her

son's passage.

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

"Away from here," he answered in a dull low tone, without looking up.

"But explain to me what ..."

"I cannot; let me go. I cannot stay!" and, thrusting his mother aside,

he rushed out.

"Well, then, I must request of you an explanation of this strange

scene," said the Princess, turning to the others. "Stay, Doctor!" she

continued, as Dr. Fabian, who up to this time had remained at the door,

an anxious spectator, now made as though he would follow his pupil.

"There is evidently some misunderstanding here, and I must beg of you

to undertake the task of clearing up any mistake existing in my son's

mind. By rushing away in that violent manner, he has made it impossible

for me to explain matters myself. What has happened? I insist on being

told."

Wanda did not respond to this authoritative demand; she threw herself

on the sofa, and burst into a passionate flood of tears. Leo, on a sign

from his mother, went up to her at the window, and related what had

passed. The Princess's mien grew more and more ominously dark at every

word he said, and it evidently cost her an effort to preserve her calm

demeanour, as she turned to the Doctor at length and said, with much

apparent composure--

"It is as I thought--a misunderstanding, nothing more! A foolish jest

between my niece and my younger son has given Waldemar cause to feel

offended. I beg of you to tell him that I regret it sincerely, but that

I expect of him that he will not attach undue importance to the folly

of two children." She laid a stress on the last word.

"It would be best for me to go now and look after my pupil," Fabian

ventured to remark.

"By all means, do so," assented the lady, desirous now of ridding

herself of this innocent but most unwelcome witness of the family

quarrel. "Good-bye for the present, Doctor. I shall quite hope to see

you back soon in Waldemar's company."

She spoke these last words very graciously, and received the tutor's

parting obeisance with a smiling face; but when the door had closed

behind him, the Princess stepped in sharply between Wanda and Leo, and

on her countenance were written signs of an approaching storm, such as

but rarely disturbed the even rule of this severe mother and aunt.

Meanwhile Dr. Fabian had learned from Pawlick that young Herr Nordeck

had thrown himself on to his horse and ridden away. There was nothing

for it now but to drive off to Altenhof after him, which the Doctor did

as speedily as possible. On arriving there, however, he heard that

Waldemar had not yet returned. The tutor could not help feeling uneasy

at this prolonged absence, which, under ordinary circumstances, he

would hardly have remarked. The conclusion of the agitated scene he had

witnessed directed his surmises pretty near the truth. The Princess,

certainly, had spoken of a misunderstanding only, of a jest which her

son had taken amiss; but Waldemar's violent exit, his cutting reply to

the young Countess's cry of entreaty--above all, the expression of his

face--showed that the matter in question was of a very different

nature. Something serious must have occurred that Waldemar, who but a

short time before had patiently, in contradiction to his whole

character, submitted to Wanda's every whim, should now turn his back on

her and hers, and leave his mother's house in a manner which seemed to

preclude all idea of return.

The whole afternoon wore away, and still Waldemar did not appear. Dr.

Fabian waited and hoped in vain. He was glad that Herr Witold had taken

advantage of his two house-mates' absence to drive over to the

neighbouring town, from whence he was not expected to return until

evening; so that, for the present at least, there was an escape from

his inevitable questions.

Hour after hour passed away. Evening came; but neither the inspector

who had been over to the forester's house, nor the men coming home from

the fields, had seen anything of the young master. The Doctor's anxiety

now drove him out of doors. He walked some distance up the road which

led to the park, and along which every new-comer must pass. At some

distance from this road ran a very broad, deep ditch, which was

generally full of water, but was now dried up by the heat of the

summer, the great unhewn stones with which the bottom was paved lying

exposed to view. From the bridge which spanned it an extensive view

could be had of the fields around. It was still quite light out here in

the open air--only the woods began to wrap themselves in shade. Dr.

Fabian stood on the bridge, not knowing what to do next, and

considering whether he should go on farther, or turn back, when at last

the figure of a horseman appeared in the distance, coming towards him

at a gallop. The Doctor drew a deep breath of relief. He himself did

not exactly know what he had feared; but, anyway, his fears had been

groundless, and, full of rejoicing at the fact, he hurried along the

side of the ditch towards the approaching figure on horseback.

"Thank God you are there, Waldemar!" cried he. "I have been so uneasy

about you."

"Why?" he asked, coldly. "Am I a child that I may not be let out of

sight?"

In spite of his enforced calm, there was a strange sound in his voice

which at once called up afresh the Doctor's hardly appeased anxiety. He

now noticed that the horse was completely exhausted. It was covered

with foam from head to foot, the white flakes fell from its nostrils,

and its chest heaved and panted. The animal had evidently been spurred

on and on without rest or respite; but the rider showed no signs of

fatigue. He sat firm in the saddle, grasped the reins with an iron

grasp, and, instead of turning off aside in the direction of the

bridge, made as though he would leap the ditch.

"For God's sake, do not attempt such a mad, rash act!" remonstrated

Fabian. "You know Norman never will take the ditch."

"He will take it to-day," declared Waldemar, driving his spurs into the

horse's flanks. It reared high in the air, but shied back from the

obstacle, feeling, perhaps, that its exhausted strength would fail it

at the critical moment.

"But listen, do listen!" entreated the Doctor, in spite of his timidity

coming close up to the rearing, plunging animal. "You are requiring

what is impossible. The leap will miscarry; and, in your fall, your

head will be dashed to pieces on the stones below."

For all reply, Waldemar drove his Norman on anew. "Get out of my way!"

he gasped. "I will go over. Out of the way, I say!"

That wild tone of torture and desperation revealed to the Doctor how

matters stood with his pupil at this moment, and how little he cared

whether he were really dashed to pieces on the stones below, or not. In

his mortal dread of the accident he saw inevitably approaching, this

man, usually so timorous, ventured to seize the reins, meaning to

continue his remonstrances. Just then, however, a fearful blow of the

whip crashed down on the rebellious animal. It reared again, and beat

the air with its forefeet, but still refused the leap. At the same

instant, a faint cry reached the rider's ears. He started, stopped, and

then, with a movement swift as lightning, reined his horse back. It was

too late. Dr. Fabian had been thrown to the ground, and Waldemar,

leaping from his saddle, saw his tutor stretched, bleeding and

unconscious, at his feet.

CHAPTER IX.

The dwellers at Altenhof had passed a week of great suspense and

anxiety. When Herr Witold returned home on the evening of the accident,

he found the whole house in commotion. Dr. Fabian lay bleeding and

still unconscious in his room; and Waldemar, with a face which

terrified his guardian even more than the sight of the sufferer, was

endeavouring to stanch the wound. Nothing could be extracted from him,

save that he had been the cause of the misfortune which had occurred;

so the Squire was obliged, in a great measure, to rely on the reports

of the servants. From them he learned that the young master had

returned at dusk, bearing in his arms the injured man, whom he must

have carried from a distance, and that he had immediately sent off

messengers to the nearest doctors. A quarter of an hour later, the

horse had come in in his turn, exhausted, and bearing all the traces of

fast and furious riding. The animal, on being abandoned by its master,

had taken the familiar road home--that was all the servants knew. The

wound on the Doctor's head, evidently caused by a blow from the hoof,

seemed of a serious nature; and the great loss of blood and weakly

constitution of the patient aroused for some time fears of the worst.

Herr Witold, thoroughly sound and healthy himself, and accustomed to a

like vigour in Waldemar, had no experience of sickness or suspense, and

swore often enough that for all the gold in the world he would not live

through that week again. To-day, for the first time, the Squire's face

wore its accustomed cheery look, as he sat by the bed in the patient's

room.

"So we have tided over the worst," said he. "And now, Doctor, you will

do me the favour to have a little rational talk with Waldemar." He

pointed to his adopted son, who stood by the window, leaning his head

against the panes, and looking out absently into the court. "I can do

nothing with him, but you can obtain what you like from him now; so try

and bring him to reason, or I shall have the boy ruined for life

through this unhappy business."

Doctor Fabian, who wore a broad white bandage across his brow, still

looked very weak and wasted; but he was sitting up, supported by

pillows, and his voice, though faint, was quite clear as he asked--

"What do you wish Waldemar to do?"

"I wish him to be reasonable," returned Witold, emphatically; "to be

reasonable, and to thank God that things have gone so well with us;

instead of which he goes about tormenting himself, as if he really had

a murder on his conscience. I was anxious enough myself for the first

two or three days, when your life hung on a thread; but now that the

doctor has declared you to be out of danger, one may breathe freely

again. There is no good in overdoing a thing, and I can't bear any

longer to see the boy wandering about with such a face, and hardly

saying a word for hours together."

"But I have told Waldemar over and over again that I alone am to blame

for the accident," said the Doctor. "His attention was quite taken up

with his horse; he could not see I was standing so near. I was

imprudent enough to seize the animal's veins, and it pulled me to the

ground."

"You caught hold of Norman's reins?" asked the Squire, petrified with

amazement. "You, who will go ten paces out of any horse's way, and have

never ventured to approach the wild beast? How did you come to do

that?"

Fabian glanced across at his pupil. "I was afraid of an accident," he

answered, gently.

"Which would unquestionably have happened," went on Witold. "Waldemar

could not have all his five senses about him that evening, to want to

leap the ditch just at that spot, at dusk too, and with a horse dead

beat! I have always told him that temper of his would get him into

trouble some day. Now he has had a lesson--but he takes it rather too

much to heart. So, Doctor, you just read him a sermon--you are allowed

to talk now, you know--and persuade him to be reasonable. He will do

what you tell him now, I am certain."

Saying which, the Squire rose and left the room.

The two who remained behind were silent awhile. At last the Doctor

began--

"Did you hear what I have been charged with, Waldemar?"

The young man, who up to this time had stood by the window, silent and

abstracted, as though the conversation in no way concerned him, turned

round at once, and went up to the bed. At first sight, Witold's anxiety

might have appeared exaggerated. Such a nature as Waldemar's does not

succumb so easily to moral influences. He only looked somewhat paler

than of yore; but any one who observed him closely would have discerned

the change.

There was a strange, new expression in his face, well calculated to

excite uneasiness--a peculiar rigidity of feature, as though all

emotion had died out within him. This, however, might only be the

vizier behind which some deeply wounded feeling hid itself from the

outer world. His voice, too, had lost its full strong ring; it sounded

weary and spiritless as he replied--

"Don't listen to my uncle. There is nothing the matter with me."

Dr. Fabian took his pupil's hand between his own, the young man

submitting unresistingly.

"I have not ventured to touch on the subject yet," went on the Doctor,

timidly. "I see it still gives you pain. Shall I be silent?"

Waldemar drew a deep, long breath.

"No," said he, after a minute. "I ought to thank you for withholding

the truth from my uncle. He would have tortured me with questions which

I should not have answered; but my madness on that evening nearly cost

you your life. I cannot--I do not wish to deny to you what you, indeed,

must know already."

"I know nothing," replied the Doctor, with a troubled look. "I can only

form a guess from the scene I witnessed. Waldemar, tell me, for

Heaven's sake, what had taken place?"

"Oh, it was nothing--a mere childish joke," said Waldemar, bitterly. "A

piece of folly, which was not worthy to be taken seriously--so my

mother wrote the day before yesterday. Unfortunately, I have taken it

seriously--so seriously that it has wrecked part of my life for me,

perhaps the best part."

"You love Countess Morynska?" asked the Doctor, in a low tone.

"I \_did\_ love her; it is over. I know now that she was miserably

trifling with me. I have done with her and her love."

Dr. Fabian shook his head, as he scanned the young man's face with deep

anxiety. "Done with her? no, not for some time to come! I can see but

too plainly what you are suffering at this moment."

Waldemar passed his hand across his brow. "That will pass. I have borne

it, and I shall conquer it; for conquer it I will, at any cost. Only

one thing I beg of you. Say no word of it to my uncle, nor--nor to me.

I shall battle down the weakness, I know; but I cannot speak of it, not

even to you. Let me settle the matter by myself--it will be all the

sooner buried."

His trembling lips betrayed how sensitive was the wound to the

slightest touch. The Doctor saw he must desist.

"I will be silent, since you wish it. You shall in future hear no word

of it from me."

"In future!" repeated Waldemar. "Why, are you thinking of staying on

with me? I took it for granted that you would leave us when you got

well. I can hardly expect you to put up with a pupil who rides you down

in return for all your care and trouble."

The Doctor took the young man's hands again soothingly between his own.

"As though I did not know that you have suffered far more than I! One

good result my illness has had. It has convinced me on a point--forgive

me--on which I was not fully convinced before. I know now that you have

a heart to feel for others."

Waldemar seemed hardly to hear the last words. His eyes had a gloomy,

absent look; but suddenly he roused himself, and said, "My uncle is

right in one thing. How did you come to take hold of Norman's reins,

you of all people?"

Fabian smiled. "You mean because my cowardice is notorious? It was

anxiety on your account which made me courageous for once. I had, it is

true, often seen you commit similar mad acts of rashness, and never

ventured to interfere; but then I always knew that you were a match for

the danger which you set yourself to overcome. On that evening you were

not bent on overcoming a danger; you were bent on bringing about that

fall, Waldemar. I saw you wished for it, saw it would be death to you,

if I did not hold you back by force, and I forgot even my fear, and

seized the bridle."

Waldemar looked at the speaker with wide, astonished eyes. "So it was

not mere imprudence, not by any unlucky accident that you were thrown

to the ground. You knew to what you were exposing yourself. Do you care

at all about my life, then? I thought nobody cared for it."

"Nobody? and your guardian?"

"Uncle Witold? Yes, he perhaps; but no one else."

"I think I have shown you that somebody else cares," said the Doctor,

with gentle reproach.

The young man bent over him.

"I know that I have deserved it least of all from you; but, believe me,

Doctor, I have had a hard lesson, so hard a one that I shall never

forget it as long as I live. From the hour I carried you home bleeding,

from the two first days when the surgeon gave you up for lost, I have

been learning what a murderer must feel. If you really are willing to

stay on with me, you may risk it now. Here, by your bed of pain, I have

for ever forsworn those violent fits of passion which blind me to

everything that comes in my way. You shall not have to complain of me

any more."

The words were spoken with a touch of the old energy; but Dr. Fabian

still gazed anxiously into his pupil's countenance, as the latter bent

over him. "I wish you could tell me that with a different face," he

replied. "Of course I shall stay with you; but I would rather have your

old impetuosity than this dull unnatural calm. There is a look in your

eye which does not please me."

Waldemar raised himself quickly, withdrawing from the too keen

observation. "Don't let us be for ever talking of me," he said. "The

doctor says you may have some fresh air now. Shall I open the window?"

The sick man sighed. He saw there was nothing to be done here;

moreover, the conversation was now interrupted by the entrance of Herr

Witold.

"Here I am again," said he, coming in. "Waldemar, you will have to go

down. Young Prince Baratowski is there."

"Leo?" asked Waldemar, in evident astonishment.

"Yes, he wants to speak to you. My presence will be superfluous, I am

very sure, so I'll stay and keep the Doctor company."

The young man left the room, and Witold sat down in his former place by

the bedside.

"The Baratowskis are exceedingly anxious to get hold of him again,"

said he, alluding to his adopted son. "Three days ago a letter came

from her Highness, our lady mamma. Waldemar has not answered it, to my

knowledge; in fact, nothing would induce him to leave you, so now the

brother is sent over in person. And I must say this, the young Polish

shoot is of a very trim growth--a perfect picture of a boy! only,

unfortunately, as like his mother as two peas, which goes strongly

against him in my eyes. And now it just occurs to me, I have never

asked you what discoveries you made at C----. In my worry about you, I

had quite forgotten the whole affair."

Dr. Fabian cast down his eyes, and plucked nervously at the

counterpane. "I am sorry I cannot give you any information, Herr

Witold," he replied. "My visit to C---- was too short, too hurried, and

I told you before that I had neither skill nor luck for a diplomatist."

"Ah, you are thinking of the crack in your skull," said the Squire;

"but that had nothing to do with the business. However, I won't bother

you with such commissions in future. So you could not find out

anything? More's the pity! And how goes it with Waldemar? Did you read

him a good lecture?"

"He has promised that he will endeavour to put all that has passed away

from his mind."

"Thank God! I tell you, you can do anything with him now; and what is

more, Doctor, we have both of us been unjust to the boy in thinking he

had no feeling. I never should have imagined he would take the thing so

much to heart."

On entering the study or 'den' before described, Waldemar found his

brother waiting for him. The young Prince, on arriving, had been

struck by the appearance of the old-fashioned, somewhat low-roofed

dwelling-house, and was now examining with wondering eyes the modest

arrangements of the room into which he had been shown. Accustomed from

his earliest childhood to a well-appointed, elegant house, he could not

understand how his brother, wealthy as he knew him to be, could

possibly endure to live on here. The \_salon\_ of the hired house at

C----, which to him and to the Princess appeared miserably shabby, was

splendid in comparison to this reception-room at Altenhof.

All these reflections vanished, however, on Waldemar's entrance. Leo

went up to him, and said hastily, as though to get over a disagreeable

but unavoidable task as speedily as possible, "You are surprised to see

me here; but you have not been near us for a whole week, and you have

not answered mamma's letter, so there was nothing left us but to come

and look after you."

It was easy to see that, in paying this visit, the young man was not

acting spontaneously. His speech and manner were decidedly constrained.

He seemed on the point of holding out his hand to his brother, but

evidently could not quite prevail on himself to offer such a mark of

amity. The little movement was not followed up.

Waldemar either did not, or would not, notice it. "You come by your

mother's, desire?" he asked.

Leo reddened. He best knew what a struggle it had cost the Princess to

extort compliance; how she had needed to employ the whole weight of her

authority before he would consent to take this journey to Altenhof.

"Yes," he replied, somewhat tardily.

"I am sorry you should have had to take a step which must appear a

humiliating one to you, Leo. I should certainly have spared it you, if

I had known anything of the matter."

Leo looked up in surprise. The tone was as new to him as the

consideration for his feelings, coming from this quarter.

"Mamma declared you had been insulted in our house," he began

again--"insulted by me, and that, therefore, I must make the first

advances towards a reconciliation. I feel myself now that she is right.

You will believe me, Waldemar"--here his voice grew agitated--"you will

believe me, that without such a feeling on my part I never should have

come, never!"

"I believe you," was the short, but decided answer.

"Well, then, don't make it so hard for me to beg your pardon!" cried

Leo, really stretching out his hand now. His brother declined it.

"I cannot accept your excuses. Neither you nor my mother are to blame

for the insult I received in your house; moreover, it is already past

and forgotten. Let us say no more about it."

Leo's astonishment grew with every minute. He could make nothing of

this quiet coolness which he had been so far from expecting. Had he not

himself witnessed Waldemar's terrible agitation, and that scarcely a

week ago?

"I did not think you could forget so quickly!" he replied, with

unfeigned wonder.

"When my contempt is aroused, certainly!"

"Waldemar, that is too severe," Leo broke out. "You do Wanda a wrong.

She herself charged me to say to you ..."

"Had you not better spare me Countess Morynska's message?" said his

brother, interrupting him. "My view of the case is, I should imagine,

the one in question now, and it differs altogether from yours--but let

us drop the subject. My mother will not, of course, expect me to bid

her good-bye in person. She will understand that, for the present, I

shall avoid her house, and that I shall not come to Wilicza this

autumn, as we had agreed. Perhaps I may see you there next year."

The young Prince drew back with a dark frown on his brow. "You do not

suppose that, after this quarrel, after the cold repulse I have met

with here, we can still be your guests?" he asked, angrily.

Waldemar crossed his arms, and leaned on the bureau. "You mistake.

There has been no quarrel between us. My mother, in her letter to me,

condemned the late incident in very decided terms. You showed a

disapproval even more marked by interfering the other day; and if I

desired any formal satisfaction, you offer it me now by coming here.

What has the whole business to do with your staying at my place? But

you always opposed the plan, I know. For what reason?"

"Because it is humiliating to me--and what was painful to me before,

has now become impossible. Mamma may determine on what she likes, but I

will not set my foot ..."

Waldemar laid his hand kindly on the boy's arm. "Do not say it out,

Leo. Later on you may feel yourself bound by a word spoken in haste.

You are in no way concerned in the matter. I offered my mother a home

at Wilicza, and she accepted it. Under existing circumstances, it was

no more than my duty. I could not consent to her staying with strangers

for any length of time--so the plan still holds good. Besides, you will

be going to the University, and at most will only run over to Wilicza

in the holidays to see my mother. If she thinks the arrangement

compatible with her pride, you may very well put up with it."

"But I know that our whole living depends on it!" cried Leo,

impulsively. "I have insulted you--I feel it now--and you cannot

require me to accept anything at your hands!"

"You have offered me no offence," said Waldemar, gravely. "On the

contrary, you are the only one who has been true to me; and if your

words stung me at first, I thank you for them now. You should only have

spoken sooner; but I could hardly expect you to play the part of

informer. I understand that nothing but the passion of the moment would

have forced the disclosure from you. Your intervention rent away a net

in which I lay captive, and you do not suppose I am so weak a creature

as to complain of that. Between us two all enmity is at an end."

Resentment and a feeling of shame were struggling together in Leo's

mind. He knew right well that he had been prompted by jealousy alone,

and felt his share in the fault the more keenly, the more he was

absolved from blame. He had counted on a violent scene with his

brother, of whose passionate temper he had had sufficient proofs; but

now he stood before him utterly disconcerted. The young Prince was not

yet experienced enough in the reading of men's hearts to see, or even

to dream of, all that lay behind Waldemar's incomprehensible calm,

or to guess by what an effort it was assumed. He accepted it as

genuine. One thing he clearly felt, and that was his brother's evident

desire that neither he nor the Princess should suffer by what had

occurred--that it should still be possible for them to accept a home

from him. Perhaps under similar circumstances Leo would not have been

capable of a like generosity; but for this very reason he felt it to

its fullest extent.

"Waldemar, I am sorry for what has happened," he said, frankly holding

out his hand. There was nothing constrained about his manner this

time--the impulse came straight from his heart--and this time his

brother grasped the offered hand unhesitatingly.

"Promise me to go with our mother to Wilicza. I ask it of you," he went

on, more gravely, as Leo was about to resist. "If you really think you

have given me ground for offence, I ask this favour of you as the price

of our reconciliation."

Leo drooped his head. He gave up all resistance now. "So you will not

say good-bye to my mother yourself?" he asked, after a pause. "That

will grieve her."

A very bitter smile played about Waldemar's lips as he replied, "She

will be able to bear it. Good-bye, Leo. I am glad at least to have seen

you again."

The young Prince looked for one instant into his brother's face, then,

with a sudden rush of feeling, he threw his arms round his neck.

Waldemar submitted to the embrace in silence; but he did not respond to

it, though it was the first demonstration of the kind between the two.

"Good-bye," said Leo, somewhat chilled, and letting his arms fall to

his sides again.

A few minutes later the carriage which had brought young Baratowski

rolled out of the courtyard again, and Waldemar returned to the room

they had just left. Any one seeing him now--seeing how his lips

twitched convulsively, how his features were drawn in a tension

of pain, how fixed and full of misery was his look--would have

discerned the real state of the case, have understood why the cold,

self-possessed tone he had maintained throughout the interview had been

adopted. His pride, which had received so mortal a wound, had roused

itself to action once more. Leo must not see that he was suffering,

must on no account take back that report to C----. But now such

self-control was no longer needed; now the wounds bled afresh. Strong

and violent, as was his whole character, had been Waldemar's love, the

first tender emotion that had sprung up in the heart of the desolate,

uncultured youth. He had loved Wanda with all the glow of passion, but

also with the reverent worship of a first pure affection; and if the

discovery that he had been trifled with and scoffed at did not

altogether ruin him, that hour in which his boyish ideal was shattered

and destroyed took from him much that makes life desirable--took from

him his youth and his trust in his fellow-men.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

Castle Wilicza, which gave its name to all the lands appertaining to

it, formed, as has already been mentioned, the central point of a great

agglomeration of estates situated near the frontier. Rarely indeed does

so extensive a property come into the hands of one man; still more

rarely does it happen that the owner shows so little interest in his

possessions as was here the case. Judicious, systematic management had

ever been wanting to the Wilicza domain. The late master, Nordeck, had

been a speculator, and had acquired his fortune by a speculator's

talents; he could play the part of a great landed proprietor neither as

regards a practical nor a social point of view, and was not long in

discovering that he was well-nigh at the mercy of his agents. He at

once rid himself of all care for the separate outlying estates by

letting them off, and they were still held by the various tenants who

had leased them. Wilicza itself, his own residence, was excepted from

the rule, and given over to the administration of a steward.

The chief wealth of the property consisted, however, in the extensive

forests, which covered nearly two-thirds of the domain, and required

for their inspection a perfect army of foresters and rangers. They

formed a distinct branch of the administration, and were the principal

source of those vast revenues which yearly flowed into the proprietor's

coffers.

At Nordeck's death, the guardian of the infant heir, stepping into his

friend's shoes, suffered all existing arrangements to remain

undisturbed, partly out of a pious regard to the dead man's wishes,

partly because such a course seemed to him advisable in the interest

of the property. Herr Witold managed the Altenhof estate extremely

well--it was on a scale small enough for him to take the entire

direction of it into his own hands; but to the grander ratio of Wilicza

affairs the Squire showed himself altogether unequal--he had neither

measure nor grasp for them. He thought he had done his duty to the

uttermost when he had gone as carefully as possible through the

accounts and vouchers submitted to him, which he was necessarily

obliged to take on trust--when he had conscientiously invested the

incoming funds with a due regard to his ward's interests; and, for the

rest, he relied on the agents, who were allowed to act in everything

according to their own good will and pleasure. This sort of management

would have ruined most landowners, but it could not make any very

formidable breach in the Nordeck fortune; for, if hundreds were lost

here and there, thousands and tens of thousands remained behind, and

the enormous revenues of the domain, of which at present the young heir

could only enjoy a very limited fraction, not only covered every chance

deficit, but went continually to swell the capital. That the estates

produced less than by skilful hands they might have been made to

produce, was incontestable; but the guardian cared little for that, and

young Nordeck even less.

The young man had gone to the University shortly after his coming of

age, and from thence he had set out on his travels. For years he had

not shown himself at Wilicza; he seemed to have no love for the place.

The Castle itself presented a striking contrast to most of the

noblemen's seats around, which, with few exceptions, hardly deserved

the name of castles, and whereof the decay and ruin were often not to

be hidden by a certain outward splendour maintained by their owners at

any cost. The exterior of Wilicza was such as became the old

seigneurial residence of many a prince and count during two centuries.

It dated from the country's brightest period, when the might of the

nobility still went hand in hand with its wealth, when its chateaux

were the scene of a luxury and magnificence hardly known in these our

days. The castle could not exactly be described as beautiful, and would

hardly have found grace in the eyes of an artist. The taste which gave

it being was undeniably of a rude order; but it was imposing by its

massive structure and by the grandeur of its design. In spite of all

the changes it had undergone in the course of years, it still retained

its old original character; and the great edifice, with its long rows

of windows, its broad expanse of lawn, and vast, finely wooded park,

stood out, somewhat sombre perhaps, but grand and majestic, from the

circle of magnificent forests which surrounded it.

After the death of the late owner, the castle had stood for many years

empty and deserted. At very rare intervals the young heir came in

company of his guardian, but he never stayed more than a few weeks at a

time. The desolate solitude of the place vanished, however, when its

former mistress, the present widowed Princess Baratowska, returned to

take up her abode at Wilicza. The apartments, which had been so long

shut up, were thrown open once more, and the costly decorations and

furniture with which Nordeck had fitted up the different suites of

rooms on the occasion of his marriage, were renewed and restored to all

their pristine splendour. The present proprietor had assigned to his

mother's use the income arising from the Castle lands--a sum

inconsiderable to him, yet sufficient to secure to the Princess and her

younger son means 'suitable to their position,' however broad an

interpretation she might choose to put on the words. She made full use

of the funds at her disposal, and her surroundings and manner of life

were ordered on the same scale as in past times, when the young

Countess Morynska came to rule as mistress in Wilicza, and her husband

still loved to parade his wealth before her and her relations.

It was the beginning of October. The autumnal wind was sharp already as

it swept over the forests, where the foliage was gradually changing its

tints, and the sun often fought its way with difficulty through the

thick mists which enveloped the landscape. To-day again the veil had

only lifted towards noon, but now the sun shone brightly into the

\_salon\_ which communicated with the Princess's study, and in which she

usually sat. It was a large apartment, lofty and somewhat gloomy, like

all the rooms in the Castle, with deep window-niches and a spacious

chimney-place, where, as a protection against the chills of autumn, a

fire was sparkling. The heavy dark-green curtains were thrown far back,

and the full daylight streaming in displayed the solid handsome

furniture, in all which the same dark-green hue predominated.

The only occupants of the room at the present moment were Count

Morynski and the Princess. The Count often came over with his daughter

from Rakowicz, and would spend days, even weeks, with his sister. On

this occasion he had arrived on a long visit. The years which had

passed over his head had left visible traces--his hair had grown

greyer, and there were more lines imprinted on his forehead--but the

expression of that grave, characteristic face remained unaltered. In

the Princess, on the other hand, there was hardly any change. The

features of this still beautiful woman were as cold and proud, her

bearing as haughty, as in the old days. Although at the expiration of

the year she had laid aside her deep widow's mourning, she yet

constantly dressed in black; and her dark, though exceedingly rich,

attire set off her tall figure to full advantage. She was now engaged

in an animated conversation with her brother.

"I do not understand why the news should surprise you," said she. "We

must both of us have been prepared for it for some time. To me, at

least, it has always been a matter for wonder that Waldemar should

remain so long and so persistently absent from his estates."

"That is just what causes my surprise," said the Count. "He has avoided

Wilicza hitherto in the most evident manner. Why should he come now so

suddenly, without any previous intimation of his plan? What can he want

here?"

"What should he want but to hunt and shoot?" replied the Princess. "You

know he has inherited from his father a passion for sport. I am

convinced that he only chose the University of J---- because it lies in

a well-wooded country; and that, instead of attending the lectures, he

roamed about all day with his gun and bag. It will have been the same,

no doubt, on his travels. It is certain that he thinks of, and cares

for, nothing but sport."

"He could not come at a worse time," said Morynski. "Just now

everything depends upon your remaining complete mistress here. Rakowicz

lies too far from the frontier. We are watched on all sides, hemmed in

by all manner of difficulties. It is absolutely necessary we should

keep Wilicza in our hands."

"I know it," said the Princess, "and I will take care so to keep it.

You are right, the visit comes at a most inopportune moment; but I

cannot prevent my son from visiting his own estates when he thinks

proper. We must be very prudent."

The Count waved his hand impatiently.

"Prudence alone will not suffice. We ought simply to give up the whole

business while Waldemar stays at the Castle, and that is impossible."

"It is not necessary either, for he will be little enough at the

Castle, or I am mistaken in the charm which our forests must exercise

over such a son of Nimrod. With Nordeck this passion for sport became

at last a perfect mania, and Waldemar is exactly like his father in

this respect. We shall not see much of him; he will be out all day in

the forests, and will, assuredly, pay no attention to what is going on

at Wilicza. The only thing here which can have any interest for him is

the great collection of guns in the armoury, and that we will willingly

leave to him."

There was a sort of half-contemptuous raillery in her words; but the

Count's voice was grave and a little doubtful as he answered--

"Four years have gone by since you saw Waldemar. You could do what you

liked with him then, it is true, though at first I greatly doubted your

power over him. It is to be hoped you will succeed as well now."

"I think it likely," returned the Princess, with calm assurance.

"Besides, he is really not so difficult to manage as you imagine. His

stubborn self-will furnishes the very best hold over him. You have only

to give way to his rough violence in the first moment, and maintain him

in the implicit belief that his will is to be respected, come what may,

and you have him altogether in your hands. If we tell him every day

that he is sole and unrestricted master of Wilicza, it will not occur

to him to wish to be so in reality. I do not credit him with sufficient

intelligence for any very deep interest in the state of affairs on his

estates. We may make our minds easy."

"I must depend altogether on your judgment in the matter," said

Morynski. "I myself have only seen him twice. When did you receive the

letter?"

"This morning, about an hour before you arrived. According to it, we

may expect Waldemar any day; he was already on his road hither. He

writes in his usual laconic way, giving no details. You know that our

correspondence has never been remarkable for prolixity. We have never

communicated to each other more details than were necessary."

The Count looked down thoughtfully. "Does he come alone?"

"With his former tutor, who is his constant companion. I thought at

first the man might prove useful, that we might gain from him some

fuller accounts of Waldemar's doings and manner of life at the

University, but I was mistaken. Of course, my son's studies served

me as a pretext for seeking information from him, and I received in

reply nothing but learned dissertations on the subject of those

studies, not a word of what I wanted to know. My questions did not

appear to be understood, so at last I broke off the fruitless

correspondence--otherwise, this Dr. Fabian is one of the most harmless

creatures in the world. We have nothing to apprehend from his presence,

and certainly nothing from his influence, for he possesses none."

"It is Waldemar who principally concerns us," said the Count. "If you

think there will be no inconvenient watchfulness in that quarter ..."

"At all events, there will be none keener than that which we have had

to endure day by day for months together," interrupted his sister. "I

should think the steward must have taught us caution by this time."

"Yes, that Frank and his household are acting as so many spies upon

us," exclaimed Morynski, hotly. "I wonder, Hedwiga, you have never been

able to rid us of that troublesome personage."

The Princess smiled in her superior wisdom.

"Compose yourself, Bronislaus. The steward will very shortly give in

his resignation. I could not proceed against him earlier. He has been

twenty years at his post, and has always acquitted himself of his

duties in an irreproachable manner. I had no grounds for requiring his

dismissal. I preferred to manage so that he should give notice himself,

which he did yesterday--only by word of mouth, so far, and to me; but

the formal announcement of it will follow ere long. I attach much

importance to its coming from \_him\_, particularly now that a visit from

Waldemar is impending."

The Count's features, which during the whole interview had evinced

unmistakable anxiety, gradually relaxed into calm.

"It was high time," said he, with evident satisfaction; "that Frank was

growing to be a real danger. Unfortunately, we must still put up with

him for a time. His contract stipulates for a notice of several

months."

"It does; but the clause will not be insisted on. The steward has long

been independent of his situation; it is even said he means to buy a

place of his own. Besides this, he is a man of high spirit; one scene

that hurt his pride, and he would go at once. I give you my word for

it! That will not be difficult to obtain, now that he has once decided

upon going. What, Leo, back from your walk already?"

The last words were addressed to the young Prince, who at that moment

entered the room and came up to them.

"Wanda would not stay in the park any longer," he answered. "I was

coming ... But perhaps I am interrupting a consultation?"

Count Morynski rose. "We have finished. I have just heard of your

brother's expected arrival, and we were discussing the consequences,

one of which will be that our present visit must be shortened. We shall

remain to-morrow for the \_fête\_, but return next day to Rakowicz before

Waldemar makes his appearance. He ought not, on coming home, to find us

here as guests of his house."

"Why not?" asked the Princess, coolly. "On account of that old childish

folly, do you mean? Pooh! who gives it a thought now? Certainly not

Wanda! And Waldemar--well, in four years he has had time to get over

the imagined insult! That his heart was not deeply involved in the

matter we know through Leo, to whom but a week afterwards he declared

that he had forgotten the whole affair. Our sojourn at Wilicza, too, is

proof enough that he no longer attaches any importance to it. I

consider it will be most judicious and show the best tact for us to

ignore the matter altogether. If Wanda meets him without any

embarrassment, in a cousinly way, he will hardly remember that he once

cherished a romantic feeling for her."

"Perhaps it would be wisest," said the Count, as he turned to go. "At

all events, I will talk it over with Wanda."

Leo, contrary to his habit, had taken no part in the conversation; and

now that his uncle had left the room, he sat down in his place without

speaking. He had looked agitated on his entrance, and there were still

signs in his face of a perturbation he strove in vain to hide. His

mother, at least, had remarked it at once.

"Your intended walk was soon over," she said, nonchalantly. "Where is

Wanda?"

"In her room--or so I suppose."

"You suppose only? There has been a quarrel between you again, I

conclude. Do not attempt to deny it, Leo. Your face tells the tale

plainly enough; and, moreover, I know you never leave Wanda's side

unless she drives you away from her."

"Yes, she often seems to find a peculiar pleasure in driving me from

her," said Leo, with unfeigned bitterness.

"And you often torment her by your unfounded jealousy of every one who

approaches her. I am convinced that has been the cause of your

disagreement today."

The young Prince was silent, thereby confirming his mother's

supposition. She went on a little satirically, "It is the old story: a

love uncrossed makes sorrows for itself. You have the rare good fortune

to be able to follow the impulse of your hearts without impediment,

with the full approval of your parents, and now you make your lives

uncomfortable in this manner. I will not attempt to exonerate Wanda

from her share of the blame. I am not blind to her advantages, which

grow more and more striking now that she has laid aside her childish

ways; but what I feared from the first day I gave her back to her

father has unfortunately come to pass. With his unbounded tenderness,

his adoration, he has prepared a hard task for you and me. Wanda knows

no will but her own. She is accustomed to have her way in everything;

and you, I regret to say, do not teach her that others can be firm as

well as she."

"I assure you, mother, I was not very yielding to Wanda to-day,"

replied Leo, in a voice still vibrating with anger.

The Princess shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps not to-day; but to-morrow

you will be on your knees before her, begging her pardon. She has

invariably brought you to it. How often must I explain to you that that

is not the way to inspire a proud and wilful girl with the respect to

which the future husband should lay claim!"

"But I am not capable of such cool calculation," cried Leo,

passionately. "When I love, when I worship a woman with all my soul, I

cannot for ever be thinking whether my conduct towards her is such as

befits the future husband."

"Do not complain then if your passion is not returned in the measure

you desire," said the Princess, coldly. "If I know anything of Wanda,

she will never love the man who bows to her authority, but rather him

who resists it. A nature such as hers should be forced into surrender,

and that you have never understood."

He turned away, muttering in his ill humour--

"After all, I have no right to Wanda's love. I have never been

permitted to make our engagement known. Our marriage is put off to some

distant, indefinite time ..."

"Because it is not now the moment to be thinking of betrothals and

weddings," interrupted his mother, with much decision and energy.

"Because there are other and graver tasks before you than that of

adoring a young wife who would banish everything else from your mind!

'Some distant, indefinite time!' when it is only a question of a year's

delay! First win your bride; the opportunity will not long be wanting,

and Wanda herself would never consent to marry you until you have

earned her favour. But this brings us to another subject, which I am

forced to touch upon. Leo, your uncle is not pleased with you."

"Has he been accusing me to you?" asked the young man, looking up with

a frown.

"He has, unfortunately, been forced to speak to me. Must I remind you

that to your superior in age, your relative and leader, you owe

unreserved obedience? Instead of obeying, however, you place new and

unnecessary difficulties in his path--put yourself at the head of a

band of young men, your own contemporaries, and offer him open

opposition. What does this mean?"

A look of stubborn defiance came into Leo's face, as he answered, "We

are no children to be led without a will of our own. If we are younger,

we have still a right to our opinion; and we are resolved not to bear

this eternal hesitation, these doubts and fears which hold us back."

"Do you suppose that my brother will allow himself to be drawn by young

Hotspurs such as you into a course he knows to be ruinous?" asked the

Princess, sharply. "You are much mistaken. It was hard work for him

before to keep all the clashing elements in check, and now he has the

vexation of seeing his own nephew set the example of disobedience."

"I only contested his decision, nothing more," said the young Prince,

defending himself. "I love and honour Morynski as your brother, still

more as Wanda's father; but it wounds me that he will not admit my

right to independence. You yourself repeat to me continually that my

name and descent entitle me to the first place, and my uncle requires

me to be satisfied with a subordinate one."

"Because he dares not confide the direction of all-important matters to

a hot head of one and twenty. You misjudge your uncle altogether. He

has been denied an heir, and, idolise Wanda as he may, those hopes

which only a son can realise are concentrated on you--you who are so

closely connected with him by ties of blood, and who will shortly be to

him indeed a son. If, for the present, he thinks it necessary to

restrain your ardour, for the future he counts upon your fresh young

strength, when his own shall begin to fail. I have his word that, when

the decisive moment arrives, Prince Leo Baratowski shall assume the

position which is his due. We both hope you will show yourself worthy

of it."

"Do you doubt it?" cried Leo, springing up with flashing eyes.

His mother laid her hand soothingly on his arm. "Most assuredly we do

not doubt your courage. What you lack is reflection, and I fear you

will never learn it, for you have your father's temperament. Baratowski

would blaze out as you do, without considering obstacles, or staying to

inquire whether things were possible, and often enough has his

impetuosity brought trouble both on himself and me. But you are my son

as well, Leo, and I fancy you must have inherited something from your

mother also. I have answered for you to my brother. It will be for you

to redeem my surety."

Earnest as were her words, they breathed of such fond, motherly pride

that Leo threw his arms round her in a burst of loving emotion. The

Princess smiled. She was but rarely accessible to soft touches of

feeling; but at this moment all a mother's tenderness was in her look

and in her tone, as, returning her son's embrace, she said, "What \_my\_

hopes for your future are, my Leo, I need not now repeat to you; I have

told you again and again. You have ever been to me my all, my only

one."

"Your only one?" the young Prince reminded her a little reproachfully.

"You forget my brother?"

"Waldemar?" The Princess drew herself up. At mention of this name all

softness vanished from her features, all tenderness from her voice. Her

countenance was grave and severe as before, and her tone icy cold as

she went on, "Yes, truly, I had forgotten Waldemar. Fate has decreed

that he should be master of Wilicza. We shall have to endure him."

CHAPTER II.

At no great distance from the Castle stood the dwelling of Herr Frank,

the land-steward. The administration of the Wilicza estates had ever

been carried on distinct from the Castle, which, whether it were

inhabited or not, stood apart in stately seclusion, while the

management of the property was left exclusively in the hands of the

agent. The latter's handsome house, with its surrounding buildings and

offices, almost all newly erected, excited much admiration; and the

order reigning throughout the farm, so different from what was to be

seen on the neighbouring estates, was marvelled at, though not

imitated, by the whole country-side. The position of the Wilicza

steward was, indeed, one which many a landed proprietor might have

envied, both as regarded income and his manner of life.

It was growing dusk. Over at the Castle the long rows of windows on the

first story were being gradually illuminated; there was a grand

reception at the Princess's. In the agent's parlour no light had

as yet been kindled, and the two gentlemen sitting there were so

absorbed by their conversation that they did not appear to notice the

ever-increasing darkness.

The elder of these was a fine man of noble presence, still in the prime

of life, and with a frank and exceedingly sunburnt face. The younger,

on the other hand, bore in his whole appearance evident marks of town

breeding. In spite of his rather diminutive stature, he might be

considered a good-looking man. His carefully curled hair, and the

fashionable cut of his clothes, gave him somewhat of the air of a

dandy; but there was no affectation of this in his manner. On the

contrary, his speech and bearing were weighted with an excess of

dignity and importance which occasionally came into rather comic

contrast with his small person. "The thing is settled, I shall go!" the

elder man was saying. "I made known to the Princess the day before

yesterday that I intended doing her the pleasure of turning my back on

Wilicza, since to that her man[oe]uvres have long been tending. I got

no further in my disclosures, for she interrupted me in her majestic

way, 'My good Frank, I sincerely regret that you are wishing to leave

us; but I will place no obstacles in your path. Be persuaded that your

long and active service at Wilicza will be forgotten neither by my son

nor myself.' She said that to me--to me, whom she has systematically

hunted out! Do you think I could make head against that look and tone?

I had intended to relieve my mind at length by telling her the whole

truth, as a parting compliment; but at this--I made my bow and went."

The younger man shook his head. "A remarkable woman, but a most

dangerous one! We Government men have proofs of it. I tell you, Herr

Frank, that Princess Baratowska is a source of danger to the whole

province."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the agent, irritably; "but she is a source

of danger to Wilicza. She has contrived now to get the whole property

under her dominion. I was the last stumbling-block in her way; and, at

last, she is ridding herself of me. You may believe me, Herr Assessor,

when I say I have held out as long as I possibly could; not for the

sake of the post--thank God, I am sufficiently before the world to

stand on my own feet any day--but I don't like to think of all I have

worked for and accomplished these last twenty years going to the dogs

now because the old Polish management is to the fore again. When I came

to the place, Herr Nordeck had been dead a few years, his son was

living with his guardian at Altenhof, and farmers, foresters, and

agents were working the concern merrily as best suited themselves. Here

at Wilicza things were worst of all. My predecessor had robbed so

openly and audaciously that it grew too strong even for Herr Witold,

who, one fine day, dismissed him summarily. The Castle, the

magnificence of which was talked of far and wide, stood shut up and

deserted. Of the state of things in the village and on the farms about,

I can give you no idea. Miserable wood and clay huts tumbling down over

one's head, dirt and disorder whichever way one turned; the lower

orders cringing, false, and full of pious national hatred to the

'German'; the fields in a condition to make a good farmer's heart sick

within him. There was need, truly, of a pair of strong fists to the

rescue. It was a good six months before I could send for my wife and

children, because, outside the Castle, there was not what to our

notions would seem a single habitable house to be found anywhere about.

How could it be otherwise? The deceased Nordeck had never done anything

but hunt and shoot, and quarrel with his wife, and Herr Witold did

nothing at all. There were a few rows regularly each time he came; but,

in general, he let himself be led by the nose, and that was pretty well

known throughout the place. If the accounts were down on paper in black

and white, and the figures added up right, then all was as it should

be; whether the expenditure were real or fictitious, he never troubled

himself to inquire. What sums I had to ask for at first to bring the

concern into anything like order! They were granted me without delay or

difficulty; and the fact that I really employed them on the estate,

instead of putting them into my own pockets like my worthy colleagues,

was a mere hazard. Mine was an exceptional case. But the old gentleman

had some glimmering of the fact that I was the only honest man of the

whole set, for at the end of the first year he raised my salary and

commission, so that I, with my honesty, fared just as well as the

others with their thieving; and if he had lived, I should never have

left Wilicza, in spite of the Princess's intrigues. She was too wise to

attack me in those days. She knew I had only to write to Altenhof and

put Heir Witold up to what was going on, and there would have been an

explosion. He had still influence enough over his adopted son to

procure me liberty of action. During his lifetime I was left in peace;

but when he died, all that was over. What good does it do me that my

contract guarantees me a free and independent position? When these

continual encroachments proceed from the Castle itself and are

authorised by the owner's mother, there is nothing for me but either to

bear them, or to go. I have borne them long enough, and now I shall

go."

"But it is a real misfortune for Wilicza!" struck in the Assessor. "You

were the only one who ventured in some degree to resist the Princess,

whose sharp eyes inspired a wholesome fear. If you go, they will have

full scope for all their secret machinations. We Government men"--he

each time laid great stress on these words--"best know what will be the

consequences if the Nordeck estates, with all their vast extent and

confounded proximity to the frontier, come under the rule of a

Baratowska."

"Yes, she has made good progress in the space of four years," said the

steward, bitterly. "She set to work on the very first day, and has

continued slowly, but surely, advancing always towards her aim with an

energy one cannot but admire. When some time ago the farm leases

expired, she contrived that they should all be taken up by men of her

own nationality. They applied for and acquired them. Herr Nordeck

probably never knew that there were any other applicants. From the

administration of the woods and forests every German element has been

gradually expelled. The whole staff is now composed of obedient

partisans of the Princess. How often I have had to interfere in the

most energetic manner, in my endeavour to keep my German inspectors and

overseers in their situations! It grew to be of no use at last. They

went of their own free will, tired out by the refractoriness of the

people; and we are pretty well aware who urged and incited the

underlings on to resist. I think I know my successor in office. He is a

drunken lout who understands as good as nothing of agricultural

economy, and who will altogether ruin Wilicza, just as the tenants and

foresters are busy ruining the other estates and the woodlands; but he

is a National of the purest water, and that is enough for the Princess.

He is sure of the post."

"If Herr Nordeck would only make up his mind to come!" said the

Assessor. "He has no suspicion, I dare say, of what is going on here on

his property."

Frank shrugged his shoulders. "The young master? As if he ever troubled

his head about Wilicza! He has never set foot in it for the last ten

years; he likes roaming about the world better. I hoped that, on

reaching his majority, he would come here for some length of time, and

there was some talk of it at first; but he stayed away, and sent us

instead his lady mother, who lost no time in assuming the reins of

government. None of the officials are in direct communication with him.

We send in all our accounts, make our payments, and address all our

statements and demands to the magistrate at L----. Besides, before I

decided to go, I tried my last resource, and wrote to Herr Nordeck

myself. I knew that my position was untenable; but I thought it my

duty, after twenty years' service, to make him acquainted with the

doings here, and to tell him frankly that, if matters went on so, not

even his fortune would be able to stand it. I sent the letter off a

month ago, and--would you believe it?--I have never had an answer. No,

from that quarter there is nothing to hope.--But with all this worry, I

am forgetting that we are sitting in the dark. I can't think why

Gretchen does not bring in the lamp as usual. She probably does not

know you are here."

"Yes, she does," said the Assessor, in a tone of pique. "Fräulein

Margaret was in the hall when I drove up; but she did not give me time

to speak to her. She ran upstairs as fast as she could, right up to the

garret."

Frank looked a little embarrassed.

"No, no, you must have been mistaken."

"Right up to the garret," repeated the little gentleman, emphatically,

raising his eyebrows and looking fixedly at the steward, as though

calling on him to join in his indignation; but Frank only laughed.

"I am sorry for it; but with the best will in the world, I can't help

you."

"You can help me very much," cried the Assessor, warmly. "A father's

authority is unbounded, and if you were to say to your daughter that it

was your will and desire ..."

"That I will never do," interrupted Frank, with quiet decision. "You

know that I place no obstacle in the way of your suit. I believe you

have a sincere affection for my daughter, and I have no objection to

make to you either personally or as regards your circumstances; but to

obtain the girl's consent is your business. I shall not meddle with

that. If she, of her own accord, thinks fit to say yes, you'll be

welcome to me as a son-in-law; but I must say there seems to me little

chance of it."

"You are wrong, Herr Frank," said the Assessor, confidently. "You are

most decidedly wrong. True, Fräulein Margaret sometimes treats me

rather strangely--inconsiderately, I may say; but that is nothing but

the usual bashfulness of young girls. They like to be sought and won,

like to hold back, so as to make the prize of greater value. I

understand them perfectly. Make your mind easy. I shall certainly

succeed."

"I shall be glad of it," replied the agent, breaking off shortly as the

object of their conversation came into the room, carrying the lamp in

her hand.

Gretchen Frank might be about twenty. She was no delicate, ideal

beauty, but a true living picture of youth and health. There was

something of her father's stately vigour about her; and, as the bright

rays from the lamp fell on her fresh rosy face, with its clear blue

eyes and fair crown of plaits, she looked so charming that it was easy

to understand how the Assessor at once forgot that flight to the

garret, and sprang to his feet in a violent hurry in order to greet the

maiden.

"Good evening, Herr Assessor," said she, returning his greeting

somewhat coolly. "So it was you who drove into the courtyard just now.

I certainly did not expect that, as you were here only last Sunday."

The Assessor thought proper not to notice the last words. "Official

business brings me here this time," he replied; "an affair of great

importance which has been entrusted to me, and will detain me in this

neighbourhood for some days. I have taken the liberty of making a claim

on your father's hospitality. We Government men are having a bad time

of it just now, Fräulein Margaret. There is a sort of dull ferment

abroad everywhere, secret machinations, revolutionary tendencies! The

whole province is one nest of conspirators."

"You hardly need tell us that," said the agent, drily. "I think we are

at the fountain head for such news here at Wilicza."

"Yes, this Wilicza is the real centre of all their plots and

intrigues," cried the Assessor, warmly. "They dare not play their game

so openly at Rakowicz. It is too near L----, and is enclosed on all

sides by German settlements. That somewhat shackles the noble Count

Morynski; here, on the other hand, he has free elbow-room."

"And the most favourable ground to work on," added Frank; "the Nordeck

domain extending to the very frontier, and all the foresters, rangers,

and inspectors at the beck and call of the Princess! You would say such

a sharp look-out is kept that not a cat could get across without its

being known; and yet every night of our lives there is passing to and

fro, and all who come from out yonder find open doors at Wilicza,

though, to be sure, for the present they are only the back doors."

"We know it all, Herr Frank," asserted the Assessor, with a look

which betokened omniscience, to say the least. "All, I tell you; but we

can do nothing, for proofs are wanting. We can discover absolutely

nothing. At the approach of one of our people the whole busy hive

vanishes--sinks, so to speak, into the earth. My present mission is

connected with these doings; and as you have the superintendence of the

police here, I shall in some measure have to rely on you for help."

"If I must, I must; but you know how unwillingly I lend my hand to such

services--though over at the Castle they insist upon it that I am a spy

and a detective, because I will not deliberately close my eyes, and

when the people turn refractory I proceed against them with all

severity."

"But you must. There are two dangerous persons wandering about this

neighbourhood under all manner of pretexts, who must be placed in safe

custody if possible. I am on their traces already. On my road hither I

met two most suspicious-looking individuals. They were on foot."

Gretchen laughed out. "Is that a reason for suspecting them? Perhaps

they had no money to pay the post."

"I beg your pardon, Fräulein. They had even money enough for a private

post-chaise, for they had passed me in one previously; but at the last

station they left the carriage, and made all sorts of the most minute

inquiries about Wilicza. They declined the proffered guide, and

continued their journey on foot, avoiding the main road, and striking

off straight across the fields. They could give no account of

themselves to the post-master. I, unfortunately, did not reach the

station until after they had left it, and as dusk was coming on apace,

all further investigations were at an end for to-day; but to-morrow I

intend to set about them in earnest. The two men must still be lurking

somewhere in the neighbourhood."

"Perhaps over there, even," said Gretchen, pointing in the direction of

the Castle, with its long rows of illuminated windows shining across

through the darkness. "There is a great meeting of conspirators this

evening at the Princess's."

The Assessor started up. "Meeting of conspirators? How? Do you know it

for a certainty? I will surprise them, I will ..."

The steward pushed him laughingly down into his seat again. "Don't let

yourself be taken in. It is only an absurd notion of the girl's own,

nothing more."

"But, papa, you yourself said not long ago that there are good and

special reasons for all the gaieties which are going on at the Castle,"

interposed Gretchen.

"I certainly am of that opinion. Much as the Princess may love show and

splendour, I am convinced that at a time like the present she can have

no real heart for such festive doings. These great hunting parties and

balls are the simplest, the most convenient pretext for calling all

Wilicza together without exciting surprise or remark. They dine and

dance, no doubt. Appearances have to be kept up--but most of the guests

remain all night at the Castle, and that which goes on when the great

chandeliers are put out is perhaps of not quite so innocent a nature."

The Assessor listened breathlessly to a discussion which for him was

fraught with the profoundest interest. Unfortunately it was interrupted

at this point, the steward's attention being called off. News was

brought him that his own very valuable riding horse had been seized by

an attack of illness which seemed likely to take a serious turn. Frank

went himself to look after the animal, leaving the two young people

alone.

Fräulein Margaret was evidently put out by this unexpected

\_tête-à-tête\_ with the Assessor, to whom, on the other hand, it

appeared highly acceptable. He twisted his moustaches, passed his white

hands through his carefully curled hair, and resolved upon making the

most of so favourable an opportunity.

"Herr Frank has been telling me that he intends to give up his post

here," he began. "The thought that he and his were about leaving

Wilicza would, under other circumstances, have been a heavy blow to

me--would have come upon me, so to speak, like a thunderclap; but as I

myself am not likely to remain very long in L---- ..."

"Are you going away?" asked the girl, in surprise.

The Assessor smiled self-consciously. "You know, Fräulein Margaret,

that to us officials promotion generally means a change of place, and I

hope soon to advance in my career."

"Really?"

"Undoubtedly. I am already Government Assessor, and in a state like

ours that is saying sufficient. It is in some sort the first rung of

the great official ladder which leads straight up to the Minister's

seat."

"Well, you have got a long way to go," said Gretchen, rather

distrustfully.

The little gentleman leaned back with an air of dignity, as though the

cane chair on which he was seated were already the before-named stool

of office.

"Such an eminence is not, it is true, attained in a day; but for the

future ... one should always keep great things in view, Fräulein,

always propose to one's self the highest aims. Ambition is the

placeman's spur. As for myself, I daily expect to be raised to the rank

of Counsellor."[2]

"But you have been expecting that a long time," said the young girl.

"Because envy and malevolence are constantly blocking the path," cried

the Assessor, with a burst of wounded feeling. "We younger officials

are kept down by our superiors as long as we possibly can be. Hitherto

I have had no opportunity of distinguishing myself, but at last they

have seen the necessity of confiding to me a mission of importance. His

Excellency the President himself gave the necessary instructions, and

charged me to make a personal report to him of the result of my

researches. If things go well, I am sure of the Counsellorship."

He looked so significantly at the young lady, as he uttered these last

words, that she could entertain no doubt as to who would be the future

Counsellor's bride-elect. Notwithstanding this, she preserved an

obstinate silence.

"In that case a change of place would necessarily follow," continued

the Assessor. "I should in all probability remove to the capital. I

have influential connections there. You do not know the capital,

Fräulein ..." And thereupon he began to describe the city life and

amusements, to vaunt the influential relatives, skilfully contriving to

group all these advantages around himself as central figure. Gretchen

listened, half curious, half thoughtful. The brilliant pictures now

unrolled before her were seductive to the eyes of a young country-bred

maiden. She leaned her blonde head on her hand, and gazed meditatively

at the table-cover. Evidently, to her thinking, the drawback lay in

that unavoidable corollary of the present Assessor and future

Counsellor. The latter saw his advantage right well, however, and made

no delay in following it up. He prepared to open a full battery on the

besieged fort.

"But, in spite of all this, I shall feel lonely and desolate there," he

said, pathetically, "for I shall leave my heart behind, Fräulein

Margaret."

Gretchen grew frightened. She saw that the Assessor, who after

pronouncing her name had made a long dramatic pause, was now rising

from his chair with the unmistakable intention of falling on his knees

before her. The solemnity and ceremony with which he went through these

preliminaries to a love scene were, however, destined to prove fatal to

him. They gave the girl time for reflection. She sprang up in her turn.

"Excuse me one minute. I think--I think the house door has fallen to.

Papa won't be able to get in when he comes back. I must go and open

it!" and she rushed out of the room.

The Assessor stood with his dramatic pause, and knees half bent to do

her homage, the picture of consternation. It was the second time to-day

his chosen one had fled from him, and such bashfulness began to be

inconvenient. But it never occurred to him to think of a serious

resistance. She was acting from caprice, coquetry, perhaps even--the

suitor smiled--fear of his irresistible ascendancy. Evidently she dared

not say him nay, so took flight in charming confusion, postponing the

decisive moment. There was something exceedingly consoling to the

Assessor in this thought, and though he regretted having once more

failed to attain his object, he never doubted of his final victory. He

so thoroughly understood what he was about!

The pretext used by the young girl was not altogether a vain one. The

hall door, pushed by some careless hand, had really closed with a bang.

It is true that, at his return, the steward would only have had to call

from outside to one of the maids to have it opened; but his daughter

did not seem to think of this. She rushed through the adjoining room

out into the hall.

An exclamation of pain and one of alarm resounded in the same instant.

As Gretchen violently thrust open the door, a stranger, who at that

very moment had grasped the handle from outside, struck by the sudden

rebound, staggered back several paces and would have fallen, if some

one who was with him had not caught and supported him.

"Good gracious, what is it?" cried the girl.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times," said a timid voice in a tone of

great courtesy.

Gretchen looked up in surprise at the man who excused himself so

politely for having nearly been knocked down, while yet in the act of

raising himself to an upright posture. Before she had time for an

answer, the other stranger drew near and addressed himself to her.

"We wish to see Herr Frank. He is at home, we hear."

"Papa is not here just at this moment, but he will be back directly,"

replied Gretchen, to whom this late and unexpected visit came as a

great relief, offering her the means of escape from her difficulty.

Without it, she must either have committed the rudeness of leaving the

Assessor alone during her father's absence, or have been compelled to

stay with him to keep him company. Instead, therefore, of showing the

new-comers into the agent's study, as was customary, she led them

straightway into the sitting-room.

"Two gentlemen who wish to speak to papa," said she, by way of

explanation, to the astonished Assessor, who looked up and rose as the

strangers entered and bowed to him, while the girl, kindly offering to

let her father know, went out again for that purpose.

She had just sent off one of the maids, and was about to return to the

room, when, to her amazement, the Assessor appeared in the dimly

lighted hall, and inquired hastily whether Herr Frank had been sent

for. Gretchen answered in the affirmative.

The Assessor came up to her, and said in a whisper--

"Fräulein Margaret, those are the men."

"What men?" asked she, in surprise.

"The two suspicious characters. I have them. They are in the trap."

"But they are not Poles, not a bit of it," objected the girl.

"They are the two individuals who passed me in the post-chaise," he

replied, obstinately. "The same who, later on, behaved in a way

calculated to arouse suspicion. At all events, I shall take my

measures. I shall interrogate, and if necessary arrest them."

"But need it all be done in our house?" asked Gretchen, in a very

ungracious tone.

"The duty of my office requires it!" said the Assessor, with dignity.

"First of all, the entrance must be secured, to prevent any possible

attempt at flight. I shall lock the hall door." So saying, he turned

the key in the lock and drew it out.

"What are you thinking of?" protested Gretchen. "Papa won't be able to

get in when he comes back."

"We shall post the maid at the door, and give her the key," whispered

the little gentleman, who by this time was in a fever of official zeal.

"She will open when Herr Frank comes, and at the same time call in the

men to guard the door. Who knows whether the delinquents will surrender

easily?"

"But how do you know they are delinquents at all? Suppose you were to

make a mistake?"

"Fräulein Margaret, you have not the eye of a detective," declared the

Assessor, with conscious superiority. "I am a good physiognomist, and I

tell you I never yet saw two faces on which 'conspirator' was stamped

more legibly, more unmistakably. I am not to be deceived, however pure

their German may be. For the present, I will merely subject them to an

interrogation, until Herr Frank arrives. It is dangerous, no doubt, to

let such men get an inkling that they are found out--extremely

dangerous, particularly when one is alone with them; but duty demands

it!"

"I will go with you," said Gretchen, valiantly.

"Thank you," said the Assessor, as solemnly as though the girl had

resolved on going to the scaffold with him. "Thank you. Now let us

act."

He called the maid, gave her the required instructions, and then

returned to the parlour, Gretchen following him. She was naturally

courageous, and felt quite as much curiosity as uneasiness about the

issue. The two strangers had evidently not the smallest notion of the

storm about to burst over their heads. They imagined themselves in

perfect security. The younger of the two, who was a remarkably tall

man, towering more than a head above his companion, was pacing the room

with folded arms, while the elder, a person of slight build, with pale

but agreeable features, had obediently taken the place offered him, and

was sitting harmlessly enough in the armchair.

The Assessor assumed an air of authority. Convinced of the importance

of the moment, and conscious that the eyes of his beloved were upon

him, he rose to the measure of his task. He looked the judicial mind

personified, as he stepped up to the two 'individuals.'

"I have not yet introduced myself to you, gentlemen," he began,

courteous as yet. "Government Assessor Hubert, of L----."

The persons addressed could have been no novices in the art of

conspiracy, for they did not even change colour at the mention of his

official quality. The elder man rose, bowed in silence, but with much

politeness, and then sat down again. The younger merely inclined his

head slightly, and said in a careless tone, "Very happy, I'm sure.

"Might I in my turn inquire the names of these gentlemen?" continued

Hubert.

"What makes you ask?" said the younger stranger, indifferently.

"I wish to know them."

"I am sorry for that. We don't wish to tell."

The Assessor nodded as much as to say: "So I thought." "I am connected

with the police department of L----," he said, significantly.

"Very agreeable position," said the stranger, his eyes just glancing at

the official with an indifference positively offensive, and then

wandering off and fixing themselves on the young girl, who had

retreated to the window.

For a moment Hubert was disconcerted. They must indeed be case-hardened

conspirators! Even the mention of the L---- police could extract from

them no sign of alarm, though by this time some inkling of their fate

must have dawned upon them. But there were means of overcoming their

obduracy. The interrogation proceeded.

"About two hours ago you passed me in a post-chaise?"

This time the younger man made no answer. He seemed to have had enough

of the conversation; but the elder replied civilly, "Certainly, we

noticed you in your carriage."

"At the last station you left the post-chaise and continued your

journey on foot. You were, according to your own statement, bound for

Wilicza--you avoided the high-road, and took a side-path across the

fields." The Assessor was sternly judicial now again, as he hurled out

these accusations one after the other, in a manner which ought to have

been crushing, and which did indeed produce some effect. The elder of

the two conspirators showed signs of uneasiness, and the younger, on

whom the lynx eye of the official had at once fixed as the more

dangerous of the pair, went up quickly to his companion, and laid his

hand protectingly as it were on the back of his chair.

"We put on our coats, too, when it began to get cool, and left a pair

of gloves at the post-house by mistake," said the latter, with

unconcealed irony. "Perhaps you would like to add these two facts to

your interesting notes on our conduct and deportment."

"Sir, that is not a tone in which to address a representative of the

Government," exclaimed Hubert, angrily.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders and turned to the window.

"You leave us quite to ourselves, Fräulein. Will you not come out and

deliver us by your presence from this gentleman's unrefreshing

discourse?"

The Assessor was seized with a just wrath; such boldness was more than

he could bear. The steward might come in at any moment now, he knew, so

he threw to the winds his previous caution, and replied in a lofty

tone--

"I fear there is much before you that you will find unrefreshing. In

the first place you will give me your names, deliver up your papers. I

require it, I insist upon it. In a word, you are suspicious

characters."

That blow told. The pale gentleman started up with every appearance of

trepidation. "Good Heavens, what do you say!"

"Ah, so the consciousness of guilt makes itself felt at last, does it?"

said Hubert, triumphantly. "You winced yourself," he asserted, turning

to the other, and looking up at him with an authoritative air. "Do not

attempt to deny it. I saw your face twitch."

The young man's face had twitched, no doubt, in the most singular

manner at mention of the words "suspicious characters;" and now, as he

bent down to his companion, the corners of his mouth worked quite

perceptibly.

"Why do you not clear up the matter?" asked his friend, in a low

beseeching tone.

"Because it amuses me," was the reply, returned in a voice as low.

"No whispering here," interrupted the Assessor. "No fresh conspiring in

my very presence--that I forbid. Once again, your name! Will you give

me an answer?"

"Yes, we will," said the younger stranger, drawing himself up. "So you

look upon us as conspirators?"

"And traitors to the State," added Hubert, emphatically.

"And traitors to the State. Of course--that is the usual complement."

The Assessor stood petrified at such audacity.

"I call upon you for the last time to give me your names and deliver up

your papers," he cried. "You refuse to do either?"

The stranger sat down unconcernedly on the arm of the chair, and

crossed his arms.

"Quite correct. The whole conspiracy lies in a nutshell."

"Sir, I believe that you are inclined to jest with me," shouted the

Assessor, scarlet with rage. "Are you aware that that will tell very

much against your case? The police department of L---- ..."

"Must be in a bad way if it has you for a representative," observed the

young man, with imperturbable calm.

This was too much. The insulted official sprang up like one possessed.

"Unheard-of insolence! What, have things gone so far that the

authorities are now to be openly scoffed at and treated with contempt?

But you shall pay dearly for it! You have insulted and attacked the

Government in my person. I arrest you. I will have you handcuffed and

conveyed to L----."

He rushed at his adversary, who quietly let him come on, and then with

a single movement of his powerful arm sent him back, bounding like a

ball on to the sofa near at hand, which happily received him.

"Violence!" he screamed, "violence! an attack upon my person. Fräulein

Margaret, fetch your father."

"Fetch a glass of water, Fräulein, and dash it over the gentleman's

head," said the stranger. "He needs it."

The girl had no time to obey either of these very different

injunctions, for hasty steps were heard in the adjoining room, and the

steward, who had seen with extreme surprise the precautionary measures

adopted in his hall, and had heard the loud voices, came quickly in.

The Assessor still lay on the sofa, wriggling and kicking in his

struggle to get on his legs again, which, in consequence of the

shortness of those members and the height whereon he was perched, was a

feat difficult to accomplish.

"Herr Frank," he cried, "guard the entrance, call in the men. You have

the direction of the Wilicza police--you must support me. I arrest

these two persons in the name of ..."

Here his voice deserted him; he fought desperately in the air, and at

last, by a violent jerk, managed to get himself into a sitting posture.

The younger stranger had risen and gone up to the steward. "Herr Frank,

you hold the direction of the Wilicza police as proxy for me, and you

will, I trust, reflect before delivering up your own principal."

"Who?" cried the steward, starting back.

The stranger drew a paper from his breast-pocket and held it out to

him. "I come quite unexpectedly, and after ten years you can hardly be

expected to recognise me, so this letter may serve for my credentials.

You addressed it to me a few weeks since."

Frank cast a rapid glance at the page, and another as rapid at the

features of the man before him. "Herr Nordeck?"

That gentleman assented. "Waldemar Nordeck, who in the very hour of his

return to his own estates has come near being arrested as a suspicious

vagrant. A most agreeable welcome, certainly."

He looked across at the sofa. There sat the Assessor, stiff and

motionless as a statue, with mouth wide open, arms pendant, staring at

the young landowner as though he were out of his mind.

"What a painful misunderstanding!" said the steward, in great

confusion. "I am very sorry it should have happened in my house, Herr

Nordeck. The Assessor will regret his mistake exceedingly ..."

The poor Assessor! He was so crushed, he had not even strength to

apologise. The master of Wilicza, the man of many millions, of whom

the President had lately spoken, saying that, should he come to

Wilicza, he was to be treated with special consideration--and he, the

subordinate, had threatened to have this personage conveyed handcuffed

to L----! Fortunately Waldemar took no notice of him. He now presented

his companion to the steward and the steward's daughter.

"Dr. Fabian, my friend and teacher. We saw that the Castle was lighted

up, and heard that a great festivity was going on there. I am quite a

stranger to my mother's guests, and as my sudden arrival might very

naturally have caused some disturbance, we preferred to make a call on

your hospitality--at all events, until the visitors take their

departure. Besides this, there are some matters I wish to talk over

with you, Herr Frank--matters referred to in your letter, which I only

received a few days ago. I was travelling, and it was sent on after me

from place to place. Could we have half an hour's talk in private?"

Frank opened the door of his study. "May I ask you to step in here?"

Waldemar turned to his friend before going. "Pray wait for me here,

Doctor. I trust you are in no danger now of being treated as a

conspirator, and I shall soon be back." He bowed slightly to the young

girl, and left the room with the steward, having apparently lost sight

of the fact of the Assessor's existence.

"Herr Assessor," said Gretchen, going up to that unfortunate

representative of the L---- police, "I congratulate you on your

promotion."

"Oh, Fräulein!" groaned the unlucky man.

"You will have to acquaint his Excellency the President with the result

of your researches, you know, to make a personal report."

"Fräulein Margaret!"

"I have not the eye of a detective, have I?" continued the girl,

mercilessly. "Who would have thought that the young heir would have

'conspirator' so legibly, so unmistakably stamped on his countenance?"

It had cost the Assessor a great effort to hold his ground so far.

Mockery from those lips was more than he could bear. He rose, stammered

an excuse to the Doctor, the principal person concerned being no longer

present, and pleaded a feeling of indisposition as a pretext for

withdrawing as quickly as possible.

"Fräulein," said Dr. Fabian, rather timidly, but in a compassionate

tone, "that gentleman appears to be somewhat eccentric. Is he

perhaps ...?" and he touched his forehead with a significant gesture.

Gretchen laughed. "No, sir; but he is burning to advance in his career,

and he fancies that a couple of conspirators would help him forward

immensely. He thought he had found them in you and Herr Nordeck."

The Doctor shook his head sorrowfully. "Poor man! There is certainly

something morbid about him. I am afraid his career will hardly be so

brilliant as he hopes."

"I don't think it will," said Gretchen, very decidedly. "Our Government

is a great deal too sensible for that!"

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 1: It is said that the city of Vineta really existed, and

that traces of it may yet be seen near Leddin, a village in the island

of Usedom, in the Baltic.]

[Footnote 2: Regierungsrath.]

UNDER A CHARM.

A Novel.

FROM THE GERMAN OF E. WERNER,

By CHRISTINA TYRRELL.

\_IN THREE VOLUMES\_.

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PART THE SECOND.

(\_Continued\_.)

UNDER A CHARM.

CHAPTER III.

At an early hour on the following morning the Castle guests, most of

whom had spent the night beneath its roof, took their departure; only

Count Morynski and his daughter remained at Wilicza. As the young

proprietor's arrival had surprised them there, courtesy required that

they should address to him some words of greeting before leaving his

house; the Count, however, considered that, in the utter absence of all

intimacy between himself and his nephew, he would be acting with

propriety in leaving the latter exclusively to his mother for the first

few hours succeeding their meeting, and Wanda was even less eager to

assert the claims of relationship.

The Princess was alone with her two sons. She sat in her accustomed

place in the green drawing-room, with Waldemar opposite her, and Leo

standing by his brother's chair--to all appearances a peaceful, united

family group.

"No, Waldemar, I really cannot forgive you for this," said the lady, in

reproachful tones. "To stop at the steward's! As though your castle

were not at your command at any instant of the day! as though it would

not have been a pleasure to me to introduce you to my guests! I am

almost tempted to look on what you term a mark of consideration for me

as something quite the contrary. I really cannot let your fear of

causing a disturbance serve you as a pretext."

"Well, let my disinclination to come into a crowd of strangers the

moment I arrived serve me as such, then," replied Waldemar. "I really

was not in the humour for it."

"Have you still the old antipathy to everything like society? In that

case we shall have to narrow our connections here at Wilicza."

"Not on my account, I hope. I beg of you not to think of me in the

matter--only you must excuse me if I do not put in a very frequent

appearance in your \_salon\_. I have, it is true, learned to submit to

the exigencies of society when there is no avoiding them, but they are

still troublesome to me."

The Princess smiled. This tendency, of which she had so long been

aware, accorded exactly with her wishes. Indeed, everything in this

first meeting went to show that she had not erred in her judgment of

Waldemar, that his nature had remained fundamentally the same. There

was no marked change even in his personal appearance. His great height

was more noticeable now than formerly, because he carried himself more

erect, towering far above his tall and slender brother; and the

unripeness, the undeveloped lines of youth had given place to a perfect

manliness of form and bearing which, however, failed to make him more

genial or interesting than of yore. Those plain irregular features

could never be attractive, although the passion and vehemence, which in

the old days so often disfigured them, had yielded to an expression of

cold gravity. One decided advantage Waldemar possessed; his light hair,

'the enormous yellow mane,' as Wanda used satirically to call it, had

been cultivated and restrained in its luxuriant wild abundance. Its

thick masses were brushed back close to his head, leaving the forehead

and temples free; and a fine powerful brow it indisputably was, arched

over the sombre eyes, the one beauty Nature had vouchsafed to the young

man. The rough abruptness of his manner had been in a great measure

toned down. It was evident that he was now familiar with the usages of

society, and able to comply with them without visible constraint; but

there the list of his acquisitions during these years of University

life and of travel ended. An ornament to a drawing-room Waldemar

Nordeck would never be. There was a stand-off, repellant air about him,

a lack of affability; his whole being bore too distinctly the stamp of

a close and sombre reserve for any one ever to feel instinctively drawn

to him.

The contrast between the brothers was even more striking than in former

days. Leo, too, had left far behind him the boy of seventeen; but if,

even at that early age, his appearance had extracted from old Witold

the admission that his enemy's son was 'a picture of a boy,' he now

displayed all the beauty of his people--a beauty which, where it exists

at all, frequently attains to a rare perfection. Somewhat shorter, but

far more slender than Waldemar, he possessed in fullest measure all

those advantages which his elder brother lacked: the nobility of

feature, bringing into strongest relief his speaking likeness to his

mother; the splendid dark eyes, which flashed fire with every passing

emotion; the dark wavy hair, lying in soft and shining curls about his

brow. There was a touch of the romantic about the young Prince's whole

person, happily married to the distinction and refinement of a modern

gentleman. Leo Baratowski was a perfect type of beauty and of chivalry.

"So you have actually brought your old tutor with you?" said he, gaily.

"Well, I wonder at your taste, Waldemar. I was glad when my worthy

preceptor had nothing more to do with me, and should never have dreamed

of taking him as my companion to the University, still less as my

fellow-traveller."

The frigid constraint which always characterised young Nordeck's manner

when conversing with his mother, relaxed to a great extent now, as he

turned to the last speaker.

"You must not look on Dr. Fabian merely in the light of a tutor, Leo.

He has long ago given up teaching, and now devotes himself solely to

his historical studies. It was only his want of means which made him

take to his old profession. He has always been a scholar at heart; but

has never known how to turn his learning to practical account, so there

was nothing left him but to turn 'bear-leader.'"

"His vocation was evident enough. He had all the pedantry and

dry-as-dust manner of a \_savant\_," said the Princess.

"Were you not satisfied with his reports?" asked Waldemar, coolly.

"With what reports?"

"Those the Doctor used to send you when I first went to the

University," returned Waldemar. "He was in some doubt as to what you

really wanted to know, so I advised him to keep you thoroughly informed

on the subject of my studies. He was explicit enough, I think."

The Princess was startled. "You seem to be acquainted with all the

details of our correspondence, and even to have--superintended it to

some degree."

"Dr. Fabian has no secrets from me, and I thought it natural you would

like to hear about my studies," replied Waldemar, so equably that a

sudden suspicion of his having possibly seen through certain plans of

hers in former days vanished again from his mother's mind. She fancied

she had detected irony in his first remarks, but a glance at that

imperturbable face reassured her. Impossible! Neither he nor his whilom

tutor had the wit to penetrate so deeply below the surface.

"Leo is delighted at the idea of acting as your guide in your shooting

expeditions in and about Wilicza," said she, changing the subject. "I

must make up my mind to see very little of either of you for the next

few weeks."

Waldemar looked up at his brother, who was still leaning against his

chair.

"I am only afraid, Leo, that your idea of sport will prove to be very

different to mine. Even as a sportsman, you will be anxious to preserve

a gentlemanly appearance, so as to be ready in case of need to go

straight from the woods into a drawing-room, whereas, with me, you

would have to go through the bushes, and often enough through the bogs

and fens, after the game. Who knows how that would suit you!"

The young Prince laughed. "I think you will find that sport here in the

woods of Poland is rather a more serious thing than on your peaceful

old hunting-grounds at Altenhof. You will soon be able to judge whether

one finds one's self always in such irreproachable feather after, say,

a chance encounter with the wolves. I have had many an adventure, and

as Wanda is also passionately fond of hunting ... You know she is here,

at Wilicza?"

The question came suddenly, unexpectedly; it was put with a sort of

eager anxiety. Waldemar's tone, on the other hand, was calm and

tranquil as he replied--

"Countess Morynska? Yes. I heard so."

"Countess Morynska!" repeated the Princess, reproachfully. "She is your

cousin, and will soon stand to you in a closer relationship. Leo, you

will tell your brother that which is still a secret as regards the rest

of the world?"

"Certainly," answered the young Prince, quickly; "you must be told, of

course, Waldemar, that--that Wanda is engaged to me."

His eyes scanned his brother's face closely as he said the last words,

and for one second the Princess's keen look rested on it also; but not

the slightest trace of agitation was to be seen there. Waldemar's

features remained absolutely immovable. His manner, too, was unruffled;

he did not even alter his easy, half-negligent attitude.

"Engaged to you? Really?"

"It does not appear to surprise you," said Leo, rather disconcerted at

this equanimity.

"No," replied Waldemar, coldly. "I know you were always attached to

your cousin, and can imagine that neither my mother nor Count Morynski

would place obstacles in the way. I wish you all happiness, Leo."

The young Prince took the offered hand with real and hearty warmth. It

had been rather painful to him to touch upon this topic. He felt he had

done his brother a wrong, that he and Wanda had trifled with his

feelings most thoughtlessly and unkindly; and the calm with which

Waldemar received the news afforded him considerable relief. The

Princess, who herself attached no importance to these bygone matters,

but perceived that the subject should not be treated at any length,

hastened to introduce another.

"You will see Wanda and her father no later than to-day," said she,

carelessly. "We have, of course, a good deal of communication with

Rakowicz. But, in the first place, what do you think of your Wilicza?

You did not keep your word with us. When we were at C---- you promised

to pay us a visit in the following spring, and full four years have

elapsed before you have really made up your mind to come."

"I have always meant to perform my promise, and never succeeded in

doing it."

He got up and walked to the great centre window. "But you are right,

Wilicza has grown pretty nearly strange to me. I must go over the whole

place in the course of the next few days, so as to get to feel at home

here."

The Princess grew attentive. "The whole place? I do not think you will

find much to interest you, except the forests, which will have a

special charm for so ardent a sportsman as yourself. With regard to

Wilicza itself, the steward will give you all the information you

require. He has probably told you that he intends giving up his post?"

The question was put incidentally; there was no sign of the suspense

with which the answer to it was awaited.

"Yes," said Waldemar, looking through the window absently. "He is going

in the spring."

"I am sorry for it for your sake, all the more that I am the indirect

cause of your losing a clever and capable \_employé\_. Frank will, in

many respects, be hard to replace. His management, for instance, is

generally considered quite a model for imitation. Unfortunately, his

activity requires the permanent absenteeism of his principal, for he

can suffer no other authority where he is. His people complain bitterly

of his want of consideration, and I myself have had proofs of it. I was

forced, at last, seriously to remind him that neither the Castle nor

the Princess Baratowska was under his sway, and it was one of these

scenes which brought about his resignation. Now all depends upon which

side you take, Waldemar. I think the steward would not be disinclined

to stay on, if you were to accord him permission to play the master as

heretofore. I shall, of course, abide by your decision."

Young Nordeck waived the subject. "I only arrived yesterday evening,

and cannot possibly understand all the bearings of the case as yet," he

replied, with a significant gesture. "If Frank wishes to go, I shall

not keep him here; and if differences between himself and the Castle

are the cause of his departure, you do not imagine, I hope, that I

shall put my mother in a false position by taking part against her and

siding with the steward."

The Princess breathed freely. She had not been without uneasiness with

regard to Frank. Her son was only to have entered into relations with

him when he had learned to see with her eyes, and had become thoroughly

prejudiced against his agent. With the latter's straightforward

plain-speaking, and the young proprietor's violent temper, which could

not brook the slightest contradiction, a collision would then have been

inevitable; but now this unlooked-for and most unbecoming visit to the

manor-farm had marred the whole plan. Waldemar's manner conveyed,

however, that, during the short time he had been there, he had entered

into no discussion. He appeared to attach little importance to the

steward's going or staying, and possessed, as it seemed, sufficient

sense of decorum to range himself at the outset, and without any

preliminary examination, on his mother's side.

"I knew I could count upon you," she declared, well satisfied with this

first meeting. Everything was fitting in to meet her wishes. "But we

have fallen at once on this disagreeable business topic, as if we had

nothing better to occupy us. I wished ... Oh, you are there,

Bronislaus!" She turned to her brother, who at this moment entered the

room with his daughter on his arm.

At the last words Waldemar had also turned. For an instant he seemed

confounded, so strange to him was the tall proud figure now standing

before him. He had only known the maiden of sixteen, with her fresh,

youthful graces; the present vision may well have appeared altogether

new to him. 'She gives promise of beauty,' the Princess Baratowska had

said of her niece; but that lady herself could hardly have foreseen how

fully her prophecy would be justified. Beauty, in this case, did not,

it is true, consist in the regularity of outline, for Wanda's features

were not regular. The Slavonic type was too distinctly portrayed in

them, and they differed considerably from the Greek or Roman ideal;

but, nevertheless, there was an irresistible charm in the still

somewhat pale face which none could arm himself against. Her raven

hair, dressed very simply in opposition to the reigning fashion, was by

this unstudied art displayed in all its rich abundance; but the young

Countess's mightiest seduction lay in her dewy dark eyes, which gazed

out, clear and full, from under the long eyelashes. There was more in

them now than childish petulance and childish gaiety. Whether those

deep dark eyes were veiled in dreamy stillness, or beaming radiant with

passionate ardour, enigmatic and dangerous were they ever. One glance

at them would show how they could fascinate and hold captive without

hope of rescue, and the Countess Morynska had too often tested their

power not to be thoroughly conscious of its extent.

"You have taken all Wilicza by surprise, Waldemar," said the Count,

"and you come home to find guests staying in your house. We were to

have left early this morning, but on hearing of your arrival we could

not deny ourselves the pleasure of seeing you before starting."

"That we certainly could not, Cousin Waldemar." Wanda confirmed her

father's words, holding out her hand to the new-comer as she spoke,

with an enchanting smile and the most perfect ease of manner.

Waldemar bowed to his beautiful cousin with measured formality. He

seemed not to notice the proffered hand, or to have heard the gracious,

familiar little address, for without a syllable of reply he turned to

Morynski.

"I hope I am not driving you away, Count. As, for the time being, I am

only my mother's guest, we are both in similar case."

The Count seemed agreeably impressed by this politeness, of which he

had not thought his nephew capable. He answered pleasantly, while Wanda

stood by mute, with lips tightly pressed together. She had proposed to

herself to meet her young relation with the unembarrassed demeanour of

a woman of the world, generously to spare him a painful reminiscence by

herself altogether ignoring it; and now she must endure to see her ease

of manner unremarked, her generosity repelled. That glance of icy

indifference showed her that Waldemar, though he had forgotten the old

attachment, had not forgiven the old offence, for which he was now

taking his revenge.

The conversation soon grew general, the Princess and Leo now joining in

it. Subject matter was not wanting. They spoke of Waldemar's travels,

of his unexpected advent, of Wilicza and the neighbourhood; but

animated as the talk might be, it never became intimate or familiar.

The language was that used to a stranger who chanced to be on a footing

of relationship. This offshoot of the Nordecks had nothing really in

common with the Morynski and Baratowski circle, and the fact being felt

on all sides, the whole tone of the interview was involuntarily

affected by it. The Count could not prevail on himself to adopt towards

his sister's elder son the familiar form of address which came as a

matter of course when speaking to the younger; and Waldemar, taking his

cue therefrom, continued to call his uncle "Count." He showed himself

now much as he had been of old, silent and reserved, but no longer

awkward.

The season being autumn, hunting was naturally the topic which came

uppermost. It was indeed the favourite pastime of all the country

round, even the ladies entering into it with zest. The two now present

took a lively part in the discussion. Leo at length mentioned the great

Nordeck collection of arms, and especially vaunted some rifles which

formed part of it. Count Morynski differed from his nephew, declaring

that the pieces, though certainly of great value, were chiefly to be

viewed in the light of curiosities, while Waldemar unhesitatingly sided

with his brother. The gentlemen waxed hot in the defence of their

theories, and resolved to decide the question at issue by an

adjournment to the armoury and a provisional trial of the guns. They

went off immediately to put the matter to the test.

"Still the old Waldemar!" said the Princess, looking after them. "He

warms to nothing but to these sporting details. All else is indifferent

to him. Do you think him altered, Wanda?"

"Yes," replied the young Countess, laconically. "He has grown strangely

quiet."

"Yes, thank Heaven, he seems in some measure to have laid aside his

abrupt, unmannerly ways, while he is in the drawing-room, at least. One

can introduce him now without exposing one's self to ridicule, and

without having reason to dread an \_éclat\_ in the midst of the most

ordinary conversation. Those who are brought into close contact with

him will probably still have much to endure. The first blunder made by

a groom with regard to the dogs or horses will bring out the old

Berserker in him, with all his old fierceness and violence."

Wanda made no reply to this remark. She had thrown herself into an

armchair, and was playing with its silken tassels.

"His coming in that way was a true Nordeck proceeding," went on the

Princess, in a tone of annoyance. "It was bad enough that he should

dismiss the post-chaise at the last station, and continue the journey

on foot like any adventurer, but that would naturally not suffice

Waldemar. When he saw the Castle lighted up, and heard it was a

reception night here, he turned into the steward's in all haste, for

fear he should be obliged to show himself in company. Later in the

evening he came up to the Castle with the Doctor, made himself known to

Pawlick, and had himself shown to his rooms, giving most strenuous

orders that I was not to be disturbed. I, of course, heard of his

arrival before five minutes were over. My servants are better trained

than he supposes. As he had given such strict injunctions on the

subject, I had no choice, however, but to ignore his presence, and

allow myself to be taken by surprise this morning."

"A surprise which constrained us to remain on here," put in Wanda,

impatiently. "I hope papa may come back soon, that we may start."

"Not at once? You will at least stay to dinner."

"No, dear aunt, I shall beg papa to have the horses put to immediately.

Do you think it can be agreeable to me to sit here and be ignored by

Herr Waldemar Nordeck, as he has thought fit to ignore me for the last

half-hour? He avoided with admirable consistency either answering or

addressing a word to me."

The Princess smiled. "Well, well, you can afford to grant him that

small vengeance on your first meeting. You played with him rather

unmercifully, you know, and can hardly wonder if he shows a little

rancour now and then. That will pass away when you see more of each

other. What do you think of his appearance?"

"I think it is just as disagreeable as ever," declared the young

Countess; "more so, for then the impression it created was an

involuntary one, and now I almost fancy he wishes to repel.

Nevertheless, I don't know why--unless it be that his brow is so clear

and open--but he is no longer at a disadvantage beside Leo."

The Princess was silent. The same remark had been borne in on her mind

as the two stood together. Incontestable as was the younger brother's

beauty, the elder, though unable to make the smallest pretension to

good looks, was no longer in danger of being thrust into the

background. Should his person appear to others, as to Countess

Morynska, disagreeable, nay, repulsive, there was yet a certain

something in his bearing and manner which would maintain him in his

proper place. His mother herself was forced to admit as much.

"These giants always have one great advantage," said she; "they are

imposing at first sight, but that is all. You must never look for mind

or strength of character in them."

"Never?" said Wanda, with a peculiar expression. "Are you quite sure?"

The Princess seemed to think the question a strange and superfluous

one; she looked at her niece in astonishment.

"We both know what ends Wilicza has now to serve," the latter

continued, with suppressed vehemence, "and you must acknowledge, dear

aunt, that it would be very inconvenient and dangerous should it

suddenly occur to your son to show any 'mind.' Be prudent. That quiet

manner and, above all, that brow of his are not to my liking."

"My dear," said the elder lady, with calm superiority, "will you not

allow me to be the judge of my son's character; or do you imagine that,

at twenty years of age, you possess greater powers of discernment than

any I am endowed with? Waldemar is a Nordeck--that is saying

everything."

"I know you have always summed up your judgment of him in those words.

He may be the exact image of his father in every other feature; but

that forehead, with its sharply defined blue vein, he has from you.

Does it seem to you a thing impossible that he may one day show himself

his mother's son?"

"Utterly impossible," the Princess declared in a harsh tone, as though

the notion were really insulting to her. "All of myself I have had

power to transmit, Leo alone has inherited. Do not be foolish, Wanda.

You are irritated at Waldemar's behaviour to yourself, and I admit it

was not very flattering; but you really must take his susceptibility

into some account. How you manage to discover strength of character in

this tenacious clinging to an old grudge, I cannot understand--to me it

proves just the contrary. Any one else would have felt grateful to you

for endeavouring to put aside a painful half-forgotten souvenir, and

would have met you with an ease of manner equal to your own. As his

brother's betrothed ..."

"Does Waldemar know already?" the young Countess interrupted.

"Yes, Leo told him himself."

"And how did he take the news?"

"With the most perfect indifference, although I never gave him a hint

of it in my letters. That is precisely it. He soon got over his old

romantic feeling for you--we have proof of that--but he clings to the

fancied offence with all the obstinacy of his boyhood. Do you wish me

to take that as the mark of a strong mind?"

Wanda rose in unmistakable anger. "Certainly not; but I feel no

inclination to expose myself further to his obstinacy, and you will

therefore excuse us, dear aunt, if we leave Wilicza at once. Nothing

would induce me to remain, and papa will hardly let me set out alone.

We shall start within the hour."

The Princess protested in vain. Once again she had experience of the

fact that her niece owned a will as resolute as her own, and that,

where his daughter was concerned, 'there were no limits to Count

Morynski's weakness.' In spite of his sister's wishes repeatedly

expressed, in spite of Leo's most evident vexation, the plan decided on

by Wanda was carried out, and half an hour later the carriage which was

to convey her and her father to Rakowicz drove up to the door.

CHAPTER IV.

Some weeks had passed by, and the young proprietor's arrival had

wrought no change worth mentioning at Wilicza. His presence was hardly

noticed, for, as the Princess had rightly supposed, he was seldom at

the Castle, but spent his days roaming about the forests and

surrounding neighbourhood. The old passion for sport seemed to have

taken possession of him again, and to throw everything else into the

shade. He did not even appear regularly at meal times. His wanderings

generally led him so far afield that he was forced to turn into some

ranger's house, or into some farm for refreshment. This was of very

frequent occurrence. On such occasions he would return late and tired

out, and would spend his evenings chiefly in his own rooms, in Dr.

Fabian's company, only appearing when obliged so to do in his mother's

drawing-room.

After the first few days Leo had given up going with his brother, for

it turned out, indeed, that the two differed very widely in their ideas

on the subject of sport. The young Prince was in this, as in all else,

rash, fiery, but not enduring. He shot all that came within reach of

his barrel, scouted no obstacle when in pursuit, and found a decided

pleasure in anything which added a spice of danger to the work in hand.

Waldemar, on the other hand, followed with tenacious, indefatigable

perseverance, the whole day through, if necessary, the game he had

selected at the outset, giving no thought to rest or recruitment, and

imposing on himself fatigue and hardships which only his iron frame

could have withstood. Leo soon began to find it wearisome both to body

and mind, and unpleasant to the last degree; so that, on making the

discovery that his brother greatly preferred to be alone, he was very

glad to leave him to his own society.

Thus, though the three daily saw and spoke to each other, it could

hardly be said that they lived a life in common. Waldemar's stern,

almost repellant manner had in no way changed, and his reserve grew

rather than diminished in this closer intercourse. After weeks passed

under the same roof, neither the Princess nor Leo had advanced a step

nearer intimacy with him than on the day of his arrival; but such

intimacy was not needful. They were glad that the young man's conduct

tallied so completely with the suppositions they had formed. As

regarded social relations, he even showed a docility they had not

expected. For instance, he did not refuse to make a return visit to

Rakowicz, and the communications between the two castles were more

frequent than ever. Count Morynski and his daughter often came over to

Wilicza, though they but seldom found the master of the house at home.

The only thing which occasionally caused the Princess some annoyance

was the attitude preserved towards each other by her elder son and

Wanda. This remained absolutely unchanged; it was cold, constrained,

hostile even. The mother had tried several times to step in and

mediate, but always unsuccessfully. At last she gave up the idea of

curing two 'stubborn young heads' of their obstinacy. The whole thing

was unimportant, except as it might give pretext for a rupture.

Matters, however, were not carried to such lengths. Waldemar was always

as gracious to the Count as his ungracious nature would permit; and,

for the rest, he did his relatives the pleasure, of withdrawing from

their society as much as possible, so leaving them to their own

devices.

All Wilicza was astir, it being an occasion of one of those great

hunting festivities which were wont to gather the whole neighbourhood

together at the Castle. As usual, every invitation issued had been

accepted, and the company, which consisted exclusively of the Polish

nobility from the surrounding chateaux, was more numerous than ever.

Great was the Princess's satisfaction that she had not been forced to

modify her arrangements out of regard to her son. She would naturally

have so far sacrificed herself as to regulate the invitations according

to his wishes, but no such question was ever mooted. Waldemar seemed to

take it as a thing of course that his mother's circle of acquaintance

should now be his; and, seeing the very small part he took in such

social relations, the matter may well have appeared immaterial to him.

He himself held intercourse with no one in the neighbourhood; he even

avoided those connections which the Princess had thought of not without

apprehension, and made friends neither among the higher class of

officials at L----, nor the officers of that garrison, though he had

met most of the latter in other places. In these circles young Nordeck

was looked on as belonging altogether to the Baratowski faction, and as

being completely under the influence of his mother, who would, it was

declared, permit no foreign element so much as to approach him.

The hunting party was unusually late in setting out. A solid wall of

thick fog, drawn up round the house and closing in the view a few paces

off, had in the morning threatened to interfere with the whole

expedition. A little before noon, however, it cleared sufficiently for

the programme to be put into execution, with this single exception that

the breakfast was taken at the Castle, instead of in the forest.

Part of the guests were already making ready to start. The gentlemen

and younger ladies who were to join in the hunt, were taking leave

of the Princess, as she stood with Leo in the centre of the great

drawing-room. Any one unacquainted with the real circumstances must

have supposed the young Prince to be the master of Wilicza, for he and

his mother formed the central point to which all converged. They

accepted all the polite speeches, claimed all the attentions and

interest of the company, and did the honours with a distinction and

dignity of bearing which left nothing to be desired; while Waldemar

stood at the window, apart and almost overlooked, in conversation with

Dr. Fabian, who, as a matter of course, was to remain behind at the

Castle, but who had come down to join the breakfast party.

This demeanour on the part of the head of the house struck no one as

strange, he having always voluntarily chosen this subordinate \_rôle\_.

He seemed persistently to consider himself as his mother's guest who

had nothing to do with the entertainment of visitors, and declined all

participation in it as troublesome and disagreeable to him. So the

custom had gradually grown up of paying no special regard to one who

made so little claim to consideration. Gracious words were spoken to

him on coming and going. When he condescended to take part in the

conversation, he was listened to with some show of attention, and the

sacrifice was even made of speaking German in his presence, great and

general as was the objection felt to that language; but, in spite of

this, he was only nominally master in his own home, and it was known

that his passivity in this capacity was a thing of great price. All

vain attempts to break through the obstinate reserve in which he

delighted to enwrap himself had long been abandoned; and, on the whole,

the guests assembled beneath his roof took no more notice of him than

he of them.

"Pray do not ride so wildly again, Leo," remonstrated the Princess, as

she parted from her younger son with an embrace. "You and Wanda seem to

vie with one another in attempting the most hazardous feats. I

seriously beg of you to be prudent on this occasion;" and, turning to

her elder son, who now came up to her, she held out her hand with cool

affability. "Goodbye, Waldemar; you must be quite in your element

to-day."

"That I certainly am not," was the somewhat ill-humoured answer. "These

great conventional gala meets, when the woods are full of traqueurs and

huntsmen, and the game is driven right before your barrel for you to

shoot without any trouble, are decidedly not to my taste."

"Waldemar is never happy but when he is alone with his beloved rifle,"

said Leo, laughing. "I have a strong suspicion that you dragged me

through the thickest bushes and over the deepest bogs, and exposed me

to hunger and thirst, with the settled purpose of getting rid of me as

soon as possible. I am not exactly a novice in such matters, but after

the first three days I had enough of the horrible toil you call

pleasure."

"I told you beforehand that our views on the subject would differ,"

said Waldemar, coolly, as the two left the drawing-room together and

went down the steps.

A number of the visitors had already assembled below on the great lawn

before the Castle, and among them were Count Morynski and his daughter.

The gentlemen were with one voice admiring Nordeck's beautiful horse,

which he had but lately sent for and which had only arrived the day

before. They acknowledged that, in this respect at least, the master of

Wilicza had shown consummate taste.

"A splendid creature!" said the Count, patting the animal's slender

neck, a caress received by its object with all due patience. "Waldemar,

is this really the wild Norman you used to ride at C----? Pawlick was

in great anguish of mind each time he had to hold his bridle, for the

beast was dangerous then to all who went near him. He seems to have

grown remarkably gentle."

Waldemar, who had just come out of the house with his brother, drew

near the group.

"Norman was very young and new to the saddle in those days," said he.

"He has learned to behave himself since then, just as I have learned to

give up rough riding. But as to the gentleness of the animal, ask Leo

what he thinks of it. He found out what it was worth when he tried to

mount him yesterday."

"A devil of a horse!" cried Leo, in a tone of irritation. "I think you

have trained him to go on like a mad creature directly any one but

yourself puts his foot in the stirrup; but I will get the better of him

yet."

"You had better let it alone. Norman obeys me, and no one but me. You

will never get control over him. You might have found that out

yesterday, I should have thought."

A dark flush spread over the young Prince's face. He had caught a look

of Wanda's, imperiously calling on him to contradict the assertion. He

did not comply exactly; but the look stung him and added fuel to his

anger, as he replied with some heat--

"If it gives you any pleasure to break in your horse in such a manner

that no one but yourself can mount him, that is your business. I have

certainly not taught my Vaillant any such high art"--he pointed to the

beautiful sorrel his groom was holding for him----"nevertheless, you

would not fare much better with him than I with your Norman. You have

never been willing to make the attempt. Will you try him to-day?"

"No," replied Waldemar, quietly. "Your horse is sometimes very

refractory. You allow him to play all sorts of tricks, and to show

caprices which I could not stand. I should be under the necessity of

ill-using him, and should be sorry to employ violence to your

favourite. Your heart is set on him, I know."

"Well, there would be no harm in trying, Herr Nordeck," put in

Wanda--she had dropped the familiar "Cousin Waldemar" once for all

after their first meeting. "I really think you ride \_nearly\_ as well as

Leo."

Waldemar moved not a muscle at this attack. He remained perfectly

composed.

"You are very kind to credit me with any skill in horsemanship,

Countess Morynska," he replied.

"Oh, I meant no offence," declared Wanda, in a tone which was still

more damaging than her previous word 'nearly.' "I am persuaded that the

Germans are excellent equestrians; but they cannot, of course, compare

with our gentlemen in the art of riding."

Nordeck turned to his brother without making any reply. "Will you leave

your Vaillant to me for to-day, Leo? At all risks?"

"At all risks," cried Leo, with flashing eyes.

"Do not attempt it, Waldemar," interposed the Count, who appeared not

to approve of the turn the matter had taken. "You have judged quite

correctly. The horse is refractory, and quite unaccountable in his

caprices; besides which, Leo has accustomed him to all sorts of rash

adventures and mad tricks, so that no strange rider, were he the most

skilful in the world, could be a match for him. He will throw you,

without a shadow of doubt."

"Well, Herr Nordeck may put it to the test, at least," suggested Wanda,

"supposing he cares to incur the danger."

"Do not be uneasy," said Waldemar to the Count, who darted a displeased

glance at his daughter. "I will ride the horse. You see how eager

Countess Morynska is to--see me thrown. Come, Leo."

"Wanda, I must beg you to desist," whispered Morynski to his daughter.

"A real feud is growing up between you and Waldemar. I must say you

neglect no opportunity of irritating him."

The young Countess switched her whip sharply against her velvet habit.

"You are wrong, papa. Irritate? This Nordeck never allows himself to be

irritated, certainly not by me!"

"Well, why do you always return to the charge, then?"

Wanda made no answer; but her father had spoken truly. She could let

pass no opportunity of exasperating the man who at one time had blazed

up with passionate susceptibility at a thoughtless word, and who now

met her every attack with the same imperturbable calm.

Meanwhile the attention of the others had been attracted to what was

going on. They knew Nordeck to be a skilful, if a prudent rider; but it

appeared to them a thing of course that he could not in this respect

compare with a Baratowski, and, less considerate than Count Morynski,

they heartily enjoyed the prospect of the 'foreigner's' defeat. The two

brothers were standing by the sorrel now. The slender, fiery animal

struck the ground impatiently with its hoofs, and gave the groom at his

head trouble enough to hold him. Leo took the bridle from the man's

hands, and held the horse himself while his brother mounted, intense

satisfaction beaming in his eyes as he did so--he knew his Vaillant.

Then he let him go, and stepped back.

The sorrel had hardly felt the strange hand on his reins when he began

to give proof of his peculiar temper. He reared, plunged, and made the

most violent efforts to shake off his rider; but the latter sat as

though glued to the saddle, and opposed so quiet but energetic a

resistance to the animal's impetuous violence that at last it succumbed

to its fate, and endured him.

But its docility went no further, for when Waldemar would have urged it

forward it resolutely refused to obey. Nothing could induce it to stir

from the spot. It spent itself in all manner of tricks and caprices;

but no skilful management, no show of energy on the part of its rider,

availed to make it advance a step. Gradually, however, it worked itself

into a state of excitement which was really becoming serious. So far,

Waldemar had remained tolerably quiet, but now his brow began to flush.

His patience was at an end. He raised his whip, and struck the

rebellious horse a merciless, well-directed blow.

This unwonted treatment drove the capricious, spoilt creature

distracted. It gave one bound, scattering right and left the gentlemen

standing round, and then shot like an arrow across the lawn into the

great avenue which led to the Castle. There the ride degenerated into a

wild struggle between horse and rider. The former, frenzied with rage,

fairly battled with its adversary, and visibly tried all the means in

its power to unseat him. Though Waldemar kept his seat in the saddle,

it was evident that he did so at extreme risk to his life.

"Leo, put a stop to this," said Morynski to his nephew, uneasily.

"Vaillant will soon calm down if he hears your voice. Persuade your

brother to dismount, or we shall have an accident."

Leo stood by with folded arms, watching the struggle; but he made no

attempt to interfere. "I did not hide from Waldemar that the horse is a

dangerous one for a stranger to mount," he replied, coldly. "If he

purposely goads it into a fury, he must take the consequences. He knows

well enough that Vaillant will not stand the whip."

At this moment Waldemar came back. He had retained sufficient control

over the reins to force the animal into a given direction, for instead

of careering over the lawn they swept round it in a wide circle. Beyond

this, all guidance was out of the question. The sorrel still violently

resisted the hand which held it in an iron grasp, and tried by

unexpected lightning-like darts and plunges to throw its rider; but

Nordeck's face showed that the old temper was rising within him.

Scarlet to the roots of his hair, with eyes which seemed to emit

sparks, and teeth tightly set, he used his whip and spurs in so

merciless a manner that Leo grew wild with exasperation. He had looked

on composedly at his brother's danger, but this punishment of his

favourite was more than he could bear.

"Waldemar, have done," he cried, angrily. "You will ruin the horse for

me. We have all seen now that Vaillant will carry you. Let him be."

"I shall teach him obedience first." Waldemar's voice vibrated with

passion and excitement. He was past thinking of others now, and Leo's

interference had no other effect than to bring down on the horse still

more unsparing treatment, as a second time they made the tour of the

lawn. At the third round the animal was vanquished. It no longer strove

against its rider's will, but moderated into the prescribed pace, and

at the first hint from the reins came to a halt before the Castle,

completely subdued, it is true, but ready to sink with exhaustion.

Nordeck dismounted. The gentlemen gathered round him, and there was no

lack of compliments on his admirable horsemanship, though the spirits

of the company were evidently damped. Leo alone said nothing. He stood

silent, stroking the trembling, sweating horse, on whose shining brown

coat traces of blood were to be seen--so terribly had Waldemar's spurs

ploughed his sides.

"That was a trial of strength I never saw equalled," said Count

Morynski; but his words were forced. "Vaillant will not so easily

forget the day he carried you."

Waldemar had already got the better of his passion. The flush on his

brow and the full swollen blue vein on the temple alone bore witness to

his inward excitement, as he answered--

"I had to try and deserve Countess Morynska's flattering opinion that I

could ride \_nearly\_ as well as my brother."

Wanda stood by Leo's side, looking as though she had personally

suffered a defeat which she was ready to avenge at the peril of her

life, so threatening was the blaze of those deep dark eyes.

"I am sorry that my heedless words should have brought down such harsh

usage on Vaillant. The noble creature is certainly not accustomed to

such treatment."

"Nor I to such resistance," replied Waldemar, sharply. "It is not my

fault if Vaillant would not yield to whip and spur. Yield he must,

sooner or later."

Leo put an end to the conversation by ordering his groom, in a loud

demonstrative manner, to lead the sorrel, which was 'ready to drop,'

back to the stables, and there to take all possible care of him, and at

once to saddle another horse and bring it round. Count Morynski,

fearing an outbreak, went up to his nephew and drew him aside.

"Control yourself, Leo," he said, in a low urgent tone. "Do not appear

before all these people with that frowning brow. Do you want to seek a

quarrel with your brother?"

"What if I do?" muttered the young Prince. "Has not he exposed me to

the ridicule of all the hunt by that ill-timed story of his about

Norman? Has not he almost ridden my Vaillant to death? And all for the

sake of a miserable boast!"

"Boast? Think what you are saying. It was you who proposed to him to

try the horse. He refused at first."

"He wanted to show me and all of us that he is master when a mere

display of coarse physical strength is in question. As though any one

ever disputed him that! It is the only thing he is capable of! But I

tell you, uncle, if he challenges me in this way again, my patience

will give way. It would if he were ten times lord of Wilicza."

"No imprudence!" said the Count. "You and Wanda are unfortunately

accustomed to subordinate everything to your own personal impressions.

I can never obtain from her the smallest concession where this Waldemar

is concerned."

"Wanda, at least, can show her dislike openly," grumbled Leo, "whereas

I. There he is standing beside his Norman; together they look the very

picture of composure and tranquillity, but let any one try to go near

either of them!"

The fresh horse was now brought round, and in the general departure

which ensued any little unpleasantness caused by the late incident was

dissipated. It was, however, fortunate that the proceedings of the day

kept the brothers apart, that they were at no time long in each other's

company, else, in the exasperated state of Leo's mind, a rupture would

have become inevitable. When at length the chase was reached, the love

of sport awoke, and, for some hours at least, drove all else into the

background.

Waldemar was wrong in his aversion to these 'great gala meets.' They

presented a brilliant and beautiful spectacle, especially here at

Wilicza, where such \_fêtes\_ were conducted on a right princely scale.

Each forest station was called on to furnish its contingent of men in

full gala uniform. The whole woodland district was alive, fairly

swarming with foresters and huntsmen; but the most imposing sight

of all was the \_cortége\_ of the hunt itself as it careered along.

The gentlemen, for the most part, fine noble-looking figures in

well-appointed hunting dress, mounted on slender fiery steeds--the

ladies in flowing habits riding by the side of their cavaliers, the

servants bringing up the train; then the blast of horns and the baying

of hounds. It was a scene all aglow with animation. Soon the stag came

flitting by, and shots resounded on all sides, awakening the echoes and

announcing the opening of the day's sport.

Now that the fog had lifted, the weather was all that could be wished.

It was a cool, somewhat overcast, but fine November day. The stock of

deer in the Wilicza chase was considered to be unrivalled, the

arrangements were on all points excellent, and the game was most

abundant. That every effort should be made to regain what had been lost

in the morning was a thing of course. The short autumn afternoon was

fast closing in, but no one thought of staying the sport at sight of

the first shades of twilight.

Some thousand paces distant from the forester's house, which was to-day

to serve as rendezvous, there lay a stretch of meadow, solitary and, as

it were, lost in the midst of the encircling thickets. The close

undergrowth and the mighty trees which fenced it in, made the spot

invisible to all but those who knew where to find it, or who stumbled

on it by accident. Now, indeed, that the chill of autumn had in some

degree thinned the surrounding foliage, access could be had to it more

easily. In the midst of this piece of meadow-land lay a small lake or

pond, such as is often to be found in the heart of the woods. During

the summer months, with its waving reeds and dreamy water-lilies, it

lent to the place a peculiar poetic charm of its own; but now it

brooded dark and bare, fading leaves floating on its surface, its brink

edged by a circle of brown discoloured grass, autumnally desolate like

all its surroundings.

Under one of the trees, which stretched its boughs far out over the

meadow, stood Countess Morynska, quite unattended and alone. Her

retirement must have been a voluntary one. She could not have

accidentally wandered from the hunt, for sounds of the gay party were

to be heard distinct enough, though borne over from a distance, and

close at hand stood the forester's house, where the young lady must

have left her horse. She seemed purposely to have sought, and wishful

to preserve, her present solitude. Leaning against the trunk of a tree,

she gazed fixedly at the water, and yet plainly saw neither it nor any

other feature of the landscape before her. Her thoughts were elsewhere.

Wanda's beautiful eyes could take a very sombre look, as was evident at

this moment. She appeared to be struggling with some feeling of angry

resentment; to judge, however, by the knitting of her white brow and

the defiant curl of her lips, this feeling would not allow itself to be

so easily mastered, but stood its ground firmly. Farther and farther

the hunt receded, taking, as it seemed, the direction towards the

river, and leaving this part of the chase quiet and free. Gradually the

varied, confused tones died away in the ever-increasing distance; only

the dull shots reverberated through the air--then these too ceased, and

all became still, still as death, in the forest.

Wanda must have stood so, motionless, for some length of time, when the

sound of steps and a rustling close at hand attracted her attention.

She raised herself impatiently, and was about to search for the cause

of the disturbance, when the bushes were thrust aside, and Waldemar

Nordeck stepped out from among them. He started at sight of the

Countess. The unexpected meeting seemed as little agreeable to him as

to her, but a retreat now was out of the question; they were too near

each other for that. Waldemar bowed slightly, and said, "I was not

aware that you had already left the hunt. Countess Morynska has the

reputation of being so indefatigable a sportswoman--will she be missing

at the close of the day?"

"I may retort with a like question," replied Wanda. "You, of all

people, to be absent from the last run!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I have had quite enough of it. The noise

and bustle of such a day destroy all the pleasure of the sport for me.

To my mind all the excitement of the thing is in its chances, in the

trouble one has to take. I miss all this, and, more especially, I miss

the forest stillness and forest solitude."

Quiet and solitude were precisely what Wanda herself had felt in need

of, what she had sought here; but nothing, of course, would have

induced her to admit it. She merely asked--

"You come now from the forester's house?"

"No, I sent on Norman there before me. The hunt is away down by the

river. The run will soon be over now, and they are sure to pass by here

on their return. The rendezvous is close by."

"And what are we to do in the mean time?" asked Wanda, impatiently.

"Wait," returned Waldemar, laconically, as he unslung his gun and

uncocked it.

The young Countess frowned. "Wait!" In a matter of course tone as

though he took her staying for granted! She had a great mind to return

at once to the forester's house; but no! It was for him to withdraw

after disturbing her so unceremoniously in her retreat. She resolved to

remain, even though she must spend some time longer in this Nordeck's

company.

He certainly made no sign of going. He had leaned his gun against a

tree, and now stood with folded arms surveying the landscape. Not once

to-day had the sun succeeded in breaking through the veil of clouds;

but now, at its setting, it gilded them with a bright gleam. A yellow

flame spread over the western horizon, glimmering pale and uncertain

through the trees, and the mists, those first precursors of evening,

began to rise from the meadow ground. Very autumnal did the forest look

with its half-stripped branches and carpet of dry leaves spread on the

ground. Not a trace was there of that fresh sweet life which breathes

through the woods in spring and summer, of that mighty vital force

which pulses then through Nature's veins; everywhere existence seemed

on the ebb, everywhere marks were visible of slow but unceasing decay.

The young Countess's eyes were fixed, darkly meditative, on her

companion's face, as though she must and would decipher some enigma

there. He seemed aware of her observation, though turning from her as

he stood, for he suddenly faced round, and said carelessly, in the tone

of a common remark--

"There is something desolate in the look of such an autumn landscape as

evening comes on."

"And yet it has a peculiar poetic melancholy of its own," said she. "Do

not you think so?"

"I?" he asked, sharply. "I have had very little to do with poetry--as

you know, Countess Morynska."

"Yes, I know," she answered, in the same tone; "but there are moments

when it forces itself upon one."

"It may be so with romantic natures. People of my sort have to learn to

push through life without either romance or poetry. The years must be

endured and lived through one way or another."

"How calmly you say that! Mere patient endurance was not exactly your

forte formerly. I think you are wonderfully changed in that respect."

"Oh, one does not always remain a passionate, hot-headed boy! But

perhaps you think I can never get the better of my old childish

follies."

Wanda bit her lips. He had shown her very plainly that he could get the

better of them. "I do not doubt it," she said, coldly. "I give you

credit for much that you do not see fit to show openly."

Waldemar became attentive. For one moment he looked keenly,

scrutinisingly at the young lady, and then replied quietly--

"In that case you set yourself in opposition to all Wilicza. People

here are unanimous in declaring me a most inoffensive person."

"Because you wish to pass for such. I do not believe it."

"You are very good to ascribe a most unmerited importance to me," said

Waldemar, ironically; "but it is cruel of you to deprive me of the

single advantage I possess in the eyes of my mother and brother, that

of being harmless and insignificant."

"If my aunt could hear the tone in which you say that, she would alter

her opinion," declared Wanda, irritated by his sarcasm. "For the

present, I am certainly alone in mine."

"And so you will continue," said Nordeck. "The world sees in me an

indefatigable sportsman; perhaps, after the trial of day, it may vouch

me a skilful rider--nothing more."

"Are you really bent on sport, Herr Nordeck, all these long days while

you are roaming about with your gun and game bag?" asked the young

lady, fixing a keen look on him.

"And on what else might I be bent, according to your notion?"

"I do not know, but I fancy you are inspecting your Wilicza, inspecting

it closely. There is not a forester's station, not a village, not a

farm, however distant from your property, which you have not visited.

You have even called at the farms leased out to the different tenants,

and you will no doubt soon be as much at home everywhere else as you

already are in your mother's drawing-room. You appear there but seldom,

it is true, and play the part of an indifferent bystander; yet nothing

of what is going on, no word or look, escapes you. You seem to bestow

but little notice on our visitors; yet there is not one of them who has

not had to pass muster before you and on whom you have not pronounced

your verdict."

She had gone on delivering thrust after thrust with a sureness of aim

and decision of manner well calculated to disconcert him, and, for a

moment, he actually was unable to answer her. He stood with a darkened

face and lips tightly pressed together, visibly striving to overcome

his annoyance. It was, however, no easy thing to vanquish 'this

Nordeck.' When he looked up the cloud was still on his brow, but his

voice expressed nothing save the keenest sarcasm.

"You really make me feel ashamed, Countess. You show me that from the

very day of my arrival I have been the object of your close and

exclusive observation. That is indeed more than I deserve!"

Wanda started, and flashed a look, scorching in its anger, at the man

who ventured to return her shaft.

"I certainly do not deny the observation," said she; "but you will feel

perfectly assured, Herr Nordeck, that no personal interest has any

share in it."

He smiled with unfeigned bitterness. "You are quite right. I do not

suppose that \_you\_ take any interest in my person. You are safe from

any such suspicion on my part."

Wanda would not understand the allusion, but she avoided meeting his

glance. "You will, at least, bear me witness that I have been candid,"

she continued. "It is for you now to admit or to deny the truth of that

which I have observed."

"And if I decline to answer you?"

"I shall infer that I have seen aright, and shall earnestly endeavour

to convince my aunt of the fact that her son is a more dangerous person

than she supposes."

The same sarcastic expression played about Waldemar's lips as he

answered her. "Your judgment may be of the highest order, Countess

Morynska, but you are no diplomatist, or you would choose your words

more cautiously. Dangerous! The term is a significant one."

The young lady involuntarily shrank back in evident alarm. "I repeated

your own expression, I think," said she, recovering herself quickly.

"Oh, that is different. I began to fancy that something was going on at

Wilicza, and that my presence here was looked on as a danger."

Wanda made no reply. She saw now how extremely imprudent she had been

to offer battle on this ground, where her adversary showed himself so

completely her match. He parried every blow, returned her every thrust,

and entangled her hopelessly in her own words, and he had withal the

advantage of coolness and composure on his side, while she was on the

verge of losing her self-command. She saw plainly that she could make

no head in this direction, so she took a rapid resolution, and boldly

tore away the net which her own unguarded words had woven about her.

"Lay aside your tone of scorn," said she, fixing her grave dark eyes

full upon him. "I know that it is not meant for the matter we are

discussing, but solely and altogether for me. You oblige me at last to

touch upon a point which I should certainly have left buried in the

past, were it not that you are continually recurring to it. Whether

such conduct is chivalrous, I will not stay to inquire, but you must

feel as well as I do that it has brought us into a position which is

becoming intolerable. I offended you once, and you have never forgiven

me to the present day. Well"--she paused a moment, and drew a long

breath----"I behaved ill to you then. Will that suffice you?"

It was a strange apology, made even stranger by the haughty tone in

which it was offered, the tone of a proud woman who knows right well

that it involves no humiliation to herself if she stoops to ask pardon

of a man for having made him the toy of her caprices. Countess Morynska

was, doubtless, fully conscious of this, or she would hardly have

deigned to speak the words. They produced, however, a very different

effect from that which she had expected.

Waldemar had stepped a pace or two back; his eyes seemed to look her

through and through. "Really?" he said, slowly, emphasising every word.

"I did not know that Wilicza was worth \_that\_ to your party!"

"You think ..." cried Wanda, vehemently.

"I think that once already I have had to pay dearly for being the owner

of this place," he interrupted her with a warmth which showed that he

too was roused at length; his tone told of a long pent-up, rankling

irritation. "In those days the object in view was to open Wilicza to my

mother and her interests; now this Wilicza is to be preserved to those

same interests, cost what it may. But they forget that I am no longer

an inexperienced boy. You yourself have opened my eyes, Countess, and

now I shall keep them open at the risk of having my conduct stigmatised

by you as unchivalrous."

Wanda had grown deadly pale. Her right hand, hanging by her side,

clenched itself convulsively in the velvet folds of her habit.

"Enough," she said, controlling herself with an effort. "I see that you

wish for no reconciliation, and that you have recourse to insults in

order to make any understanding between us possible. Well and good, I

accept the enmity you offer me.

"You are mistaken," replied Waldemar, more calmly. "I offer you no

enmity. That would indeed be a lack of chivalry towards ..."

"Towards whom?" cried the young Countess, with flashing eyes, as he

paused.

"Towards my brother's promised wife!"

A thrill passed through Wanda. Strange that the word should strike her

as with a sudden pang. Involuntarily her eyes sought the ground.

"I have postponed offering you my congratulations hitherto," continued

Waldemar. "Pray accept them to-day."

The Countess bowed her head in silent acknowledgment. She herself knew

not what closed her lips, but at that moment she found it impossible to

answer him. It was the first time this subject had been touched on

between them, and the simple mention of it seemed to suffice, for

Waldemar added no syllable to his congratulatory speech.

The yellow flame had long ago died out of the sky, and in its place

had come a dreary, murky grey. The evening breeze swept through the

half-stripped bushes and rustled among the crests of the tall trees,

still partly decked with their gay many-tinted foliage; drooping and

faded it hung now from the branches, leaf after leaf fluttered

noiselessly to the ground, strewing the grass and the surface of the

little lake. Through the scantily clothed boughs came a sort of

low-whispered autumnal lament for the beauty and life which had been so

blooming and verdant in the old sunshiny days, but was now fast sinking

into its grave. Gloomy and weird the forest loomed across with all its

fantastic, indistinct shadows; and here in the vaporous meadow the

moist veil rose, ever thicker and thicker, hovered hither and thither,

finally massing itself over the small piece of water. There it

remained, a white spectral vision, floating uneasily backwards and

forwards, stretching out its great humid arms to the two figures

standing on the brink, as though it would have gathered them to it,

shaping the while before their eyes a thousand forms and pictures, one

pressing back, one flowing into the other in endless variation.

Nothing was to be heard but the monotonous sough of the wind, the

rustle of the falling leaves--yet stay! what sound was that which,

through it all, came like the distant, distant roar of the sea, while

lo! out from the bosom of the seething mists a Fata Morgana rose to

view. There appeared the green branches of mighty secular beeches, all

flooded in the last golden glow of evening, the blue surging sea in its

vast immeasurable greatness. Slowly the burning sun sank into the

waters, and out from the stream of light, which at its contact spread

far over the waves, arose once more the fairy city of the legend in all

its halo of mystic fancy and enchanted splendour. The treasure kingdom

again opened its untold stores, and once again, fuller now and more

resonant than in that hour on the Beech Holm, rang out the bells of

Vineta.

The old tale had not held good in the case of the two who had lived

through that charmed hour together. Hostile and as strangers they had

parted; hostile and as strangers they had since met, and so they now

stood face to face. The youth had become a cold stern man, pursuing in

proud reserve his solitary way through life; the child had ripened into

a happy beautiful woman, but to neither of them had come again that

which yon hour had brought them. Only now, on this dreary autumnal

evening did it all quicken into life anew; and, as the remembrance was

wafted over to them, the years which lay between faded away; hatred,

strife, and bitterness, all grew dim; nothing remained but that deep

inexpressible aspiration towards an unknown happiness which had first

been called into being by the spirit bells of Vineta--nothing but the

old sunset dream.

Waldemar was the first to rouse himself. He passed his hand rapidly

across his brow, as though by an effort of will he would shake off all

these fancies and drive away the vision.

"We should do much better to return to the forester's house, and wait

there for the hunting party," said he, hastily. "The twilight is

falling, and one can hardly breathe in this sea of mist."

Wanda assented at once. She, too, had seen enough of the phantasmagoria

contained in that sea of mist, and was anxious by any means to put an

end to the interview. She raised her habit and prepared to go. Waldemar

threw his gun over his shoulder, and they were about to start when

suddenly he paused.

"I offended you with my suspicions a little while ago, and perhaps I

was unjust; but--be candid with me--was the half apology to which you

condescended really intended for Waldemar Nordeck, or not rather for

the master of Wilicza, with whom a reconciliation is sought in order

that he may abet, or at least shut his eyes to, that which is passing

on his estates."

"So you know ...?" interrupted Wanda, and then stopped in confusion.

"Enough to take from you all apprehension of having been indiscreet

just now. Did they really think me so unintelligent that I alone should

be blind to what is already subject of conversation in L----, namely,

that a party movement is going on, of which Wilicza is the seat, and my

mother the soul and centre. There could be no danger in your owning to

me what the whole neighbourhood knows. \_I\_ knew it before I came here."

Wanda was silent. She tried to read in his face how much he knew, but

Waldemar's features were undecipherable as ever.

"But that is not the question now," he began again. "I was asking for

an answer to my question. Was that act of self-conquest a voluntary

one, or--had the task been set you? Oh, do not start so indignantly. I

only ask, and you can surely forgive me for looking distrustfully on

any show of friendliness on your part, Wanda."

The young Countess would probably have taken these words as a fresh

offence, and have answered them in an angry spirit, had they not

conveyed a something which disarmed her in spite of herself. A change

had come over Waldemar since he had looked into that mist yonder. He

was hostile and frigid no longer; his voice, too, had quite another

sound--it was softer, almost subdued. A little shock passed through

Wanda as, for the first time for years, he pronounced her name.

"If my aunt at one time made me the unconscious instrument of her

plans, you should accuse her, and not me," she replied, in a low tone;

and, as she uttered them, some invisible power seemed to rob her words

of their sting. "I suspected nothing of it. I was a child following the

impulses of my caprices, but now"--she raised her head proudly--"now I

am accountable to no one for what I do and leave undone, and the words

I spoke just now were spoken on my own responsibility alone. You are

right, they were not intended for Waldemar Nordeck; since he and I met,

he has never given me cause to seek or even to wish for a

reconciliation. My object was to force the master of Wilicza into

raising for once his closed vizier. There is no need for that now. This

interview of ours has taught me what I suspected before, that we have

in you a bitter, a merciless adversary, who will use his power at the

decisive moment, even though in so doing he must trample all family,

all natural ties under foot."

"To whom should these ties bind me, pray?" asked Waldemar. "To my

mother, perhaps, you think? My mother and I know very well how matters

stand between us. She is less disposed than ever to forgive me for

inheriting the Nordeck wealth, instead of her younger son. Or perhaps

to Leo? Well, it may be that some brotherly love exists between us; but

I do not think it would hold good if our ways should chance to cross,

at all events not on his part."

"Leo would willingly have met you as a brother, if you had not made it

too hard for him," interrupted Wanda. "You were always reserved and

distant even with him; but there were times formerly when he could draw

nearer you, when the fact that you were brothers could be discerned.

But now it would be asking too much of his pride to endeavour to break

through the icy barrier you oppose to him and to all those about you.

It would be quite in vain for your mother and brother to come to you

with demonstrations of affection; they would be met by a hard

indifference which cares neither for them nor for any one in this

world."

She stopped, for Waldemar was standing close to her side, and his eyes

were riveted on her.

"You judge very correctly, very unsparingly," he said, slowly. "Have

you never asked yourself what has made me hard and austere? There was a

time when I was not so, at least not to you--when a word, a look could

guide me, when I lent myself patiently to every whim. You might have

done much with me then, Wanda--almost anything. That you were not

willing, that my handsome, chivalrous brother even in those days

carried off the palm was, after all, but natural. What could I have

been to you? But you must understand that the events of those days

formed a crisis in my life, and a man, who--like myself, for

instance--has no turn for constant melancholy, naturally grows hard and

suspicious after such an experience. Now, indeed, I look upon it

as a piece of good fortune that my boyish romance was nipped in the

bud--else my mother would infallibly have conceived the idea of

repeating in our persons the drama which was performed here twenty

years ago, when a Nordeck brought home a Morynska as his bride. You, a

girl of sixteen, would possibly have submitted to the expressed will of

your family, and I--should have shared my father's fate. From that we

have both been preserved, and now the whole thing is over and buried in

the past. I only wished to recall to your mind that \_you\_ have no right

to reproach me if I seem hard to you and yours.--Will you let me go

with you now to the forester's house?"

Wanda followed him in silence. Angry and ready for the fray as she had

been at first, the turn finally taken by the conversation had struck

the weapons from her hand. To-day again they parted as foes, but they

both felt that henceforth the nature of the struggle between them was

changed--possibly the struggle itself would not on that account be a

less arduous one.

Shrouded in its own misty breath, the meadow lay more and more closely

hedged around by the dusky evening shadows. Over the lake the white

cloud still hovered, but now it was only a formless, ever-shifting mass

of vapour. The dream-picture which had risen from it, had vanished once

more--whether it were forgotten could only be known to the two who

walked on together silently side by side. Here in the dreary autumnal

forests, in the eerie twilight hour, the old sea-legend from out of the

far north had been wafted over to them, whispering anew the prophecy,

"He who has once looked on Vineta will know no rest all his life for a

longing to see the fair city again, even though he himself should be

drawn down by it into the depths."

CHAPTER V.

The two rooms in the Castle occupied by Dr. Fabian looked out on to the

park, and were in some measure shut off from the rest of the house.

There was a special reason for this. When the Princess caused the

hitherto unused apartments of her first husband to be put in readiness

for that husband's son, some thought was naturally given to the

ex-tutor who was to accompany him, and a room was prepared in

consequence. It was rather small and very noisy, for it lay next to the

main staircase; but, according to the lady's notion, it was just suited

to the Doctor. She knew that at Altenhof very little fuss had been made

about him, especially by his former pupil. There must have been a

considerable change in this respect, however, for on his arrival

Waldemar had declared the accommodation to be quite inadequate, had

caused the visitors' rooms on the other side of the house to be opened,

and had sequestrated two of them to his friend's use. Now these rooms

had been specially fitted up for Count Morynski and his daughter, who

often spent whole weeks at Wilicza. Of this fact the young owner of the

place could not possibly be aware; but when Pawlick, who now filled the

office of major-domo at the Castle, opened his mouth to reply, Waldemar

stopped him with a brief inquiry as to whether the apartments in

question formed part of the Princess's suite, or of Prince Leo's. On

receiving an answer in the negative, he declared very decidedly, "Then

Dr. Fabian will occupy them at once." That same day the corridor which

ran close by, where the servants were constantly passing up and down,

was closed, and the order given that in future they were to go round by

the other staircase, in order not to disturb the Doctor by running to

and fro--and so the matter was settled.

The Princess said no word when informed of these occurrences. She had

laid it down as a rule never to contradict her son in trifles. Other

rooms were immediately prepared for her brother and niece. Still it was

natural that she should look upon poor Fabian, the innocent cause of

this mishap, with no very friendly eyes. She never made this apparent,

it is true, for both she herself and the whole Castle soon came to know

that Waldemar was exceedingly sensitive on the subject of his old

tutor, and that, though he claimed little attention for himself, any

failure of respect towards the Doctor would be most sharply reproved by

him. This was almost the only point on which he asserted his right to

command; but on this head he spoke so emphatically that every one, from

the Princess down to the domestics, treated Dr. Fabian with the utmost

consideration.

It was no very hard task to be polite to the quiet, retiring man, who

was always so modest and courteous, who stood in nobody's way, required

but very little attendance, and showed himself grateful for the

smallest service. He was rarely seen except at table, for he spent the

whole day over his books, and his evenings generally in the company of

his old pupil, with whom he seemed on the most intimate footing. "He is

the only being for whom Waldemar has any regard," the Princess said to

her brother, when she explained to him the change in his quarters. "We

must respect this whim, though I really do not understand what he can

see in this tiresome professor. Formerly he used altogether to ignore

the man, and now he makes quite a pet of him."

However it may have come about, the complete change in his

circumstances had exercised an unmistakable influence on Dr. Fabian.

His timidity and modesty were conspicuous as ever; they were too deeply

ingrained in his nature ever to be eradicated; but the anxious,

depressed look, which had clouded his face of old, had disappeared with

all that was painful in his position. He had grown stronger, healthier

of aspect than in former days. The years spent at the University, and

his subsequent travels, may have helped to transform the sickly, shy,

neglected tutor into a well-bred man, whose pale but winning

countenance and low sweet-toned voice impressed every one favourably,

and whose timidity alone prevented him from appearing everywhere to

advantage.

The Doctor had a visitor, a rare occurrence with him. By his side on

the sofa sat no less a person than the Government Assessor, Herr Hubert

of L----, most peacefully minded on this occasion and indulging in no

dreams of arrest. That former fatal error of his was precisely what had

led to the acquaintanceship. Dr. Fabian had shown himself the one

friend and consoler in the deluge of troubles which had poured down on

the Assessor's devoted head when once the thing became known. This

happened all too soon. Gretchen had been 'heartless enough,' as Hubert

expressed it, to relate the story in fullest detail to her friends in

L----. The tale of the master of Wilicza's intended arrest went the

round of the whole town; and, if no formal report of the affair was

laid before the President, that magnate soon got to hear of it, and the

over zealous official received a sharply worded piece of advice to be

more prudent in future, and next time he was seeking to lay hands on

secret Polish emissaries not to fix on a great German landowner, on

whose attitude so much might depend. The incident was known, too, in

Wilicza. Waldemar himself had told the Princess--the whole

neighbourhood knew of it, and wherever the unfortunate Assessor put in

an appearance, he was met by covert allusions or open taunts.

On the very day following his misadventure he had called on Herr

Nordeck to offer his apologies, but had not found that gentleman at

home. The Doctor, though himself an offended party, had behaved with

generosity on this occasion. He received the crestfallen Hubert,

consoled him to the best of his ability, and undertook to make

his excuses for him. But the Assessor's contrition was neither

of great depth nor duration. He possessed far too great a dose of

self-importance to attain to any true knowledge of his own merits; and,

like any steel spring, rebounded into his former position, so soon as

the pressure was withdrawn. The general derision annoyed and hurt him,

but his confidence in himself was in no degree shaken by it. Any one

else after such a misfortune would have kept as quiet as possible, in

order to let the remembrance of it die away, and would certainly not,

for some time to come, have eagerly undertaken similar tasks. This,

however, was precisely what Hubert did with a feverish zeal. The fixed

idea had taken possession of him that he must make good his fiasco and

show his colleagues, the President, and all L----, that,

notwithstanding what had occurred, his intelligence was, beyond all

doubt, of a superior order. It was absolutely necessary now that he

should capture a couple of conspirators, or unearth a plot, no matter

how or where; it grew to be, in some sort, a question of life or death

with him, and he was constantly in pursuit of the object he had set

himself to attain.

Wilicza still remained the focus of his observations; Wilicza, which in

L---- was well known to be dangerous ground, and yet over which no hold

could be obtained! There seemed less chance than ever of getting at the

truth, for it was evident that all hopes founded on the master's

presence must be given up. He was, although a German, entirely in the

hands of his Polish relations, and if not a consenting party, at least

indifferent to their operations. This conduct, which was very generally

condemned in L----, found its severest judge in the Assessor. In a like

position, how much more energetically would he have acted, how he at a

blow would have extinguished and defeated their secret intrigues! He

would have been a shining example of loyalty to the whole province,

would have earned the gratitude of the State and the admiration of the

world in general. However, as he was not lord of Wilicza, nor even

Counsellor as yet, no choice was left him but to set to work to

discover the conspiracy which assuredly existed. To this aim and object

all his thoughts and endeavours now tended.

There was indeed no mention of such matters in the talk between the two

gentlemen. The good-natured Dr. Fabian must not be allowed to perceive

that this visit to him was prompted by a burning desire to effect an

entrance into the Castle. The Assessor had, therefore, sought a pretext

in a subject which was certainly one of interest to him, but which he

could very well have introduced at the steward's house, where he and

Fabian occasionally met.

"I have a favour to ask of you, Doctor," he began, after a few words of

greeting and preface had been spoken, "a little claim to make on your

kindness. It is not exactly a personal matter, but one concerning the

Frank family at whose house you frequently visit. As Herr Nordeck's

former tutor, you are no doubt acquainted with French?"

"I speak it certainly," answered the Doctor; "but I have got rather out

of practice during the last few years. Herr Nordeck does not like the

language, and here at Wilicza every one pays us the attention of

speaking German to us exclusively."

"Yes, yes, practice!" interrupted the Assessor. "That is just what

Fräulein Margaret wants. She spoke French very nicely when she came

back from school a few years ago, but here in the country she has no

opportunity for it. I was going to ask if you would occasionally read,

or hold a little conversation in French with the young lady. You have

plenty of time, and you would confer a great obligation on me."

"On you, Herr Hubert?" asked Fabian, amazed. "I must confess to feeling

some surprise that such a proposition should come from you rather than

from Herr Frank, or the Fräulein herself."

"There are good reasons for it," said Hubert, with dignity. "You may

possibly have already remarked--I make no secret of it--that I cherish

certain wishes and intentions which may be realised at no very distant

date. In a word, I look on the young lady as my betrothed."

The Doctor suddenly stooped to pick up a sheet of paper which lay on

the floor, and which he now scrutinised attentively although it bore no

writing. "I congratulate you," he said, laconically.

"Oh, for the present I must decline to accept congratulations," smiled

the Assessor, with indescribable self-complacency. "There has been no

avowal of our sentiments as yet, though I think I may safely count on

her consent. To be frank, before proffering my suit, I should prefer to

obtain the Counsellorship which I am shortly expecting. Such a position

would produce a better effect, and you must know that Fräulein Frank is

a good match."

"Really?"

"An excellent match. The steward is a rich man, there can be no doubt

of that. Think of all the money he must have made here in twenty years,

what with his salary and his percentage on everything! It is a positive

fact that, on leaving his post, he means to buy and settle down on a

place of his own, and I know that he is realising capital to a

considerable amount with that intention. Fräulein Margaret and her

brother, who is now studying at the school of agriculture, are the only

children. I can count on a fair dowry and a snug little fortune to be

inherited by-and-by. Added to this, the young lady herself is a most

amiable, charming girl, whom I adore."

"Added to this!" repeated the Doctor, in a low tone, but with a

bitterness most unusual to him. His murmured exclamation escaped the

Assessor, who went on with an air of great importance.

"Frank has spared nothing in the education of his children. His

daughter was for a long time at one of the first establishments in

P----, and there acquired all that a lady need know--much to my

satisfaction, for you will easily understand, Doctor, that, looking to

my future position, it is indispensable that my wife should be a person

of cultivated mind. It will be required of us to appear in society, and

to entertain at home, and therefore I feel it a duty even now to see

that such accomplishments as pianoforte playing and French are not laid

aside and forgotten. If you would be so good, therefore, in regard to

the latter ..."

"With pleasure, if Herr Frank and his daughter wish it," said Fabian,

in a constrained tone.

"Certainly they wish it, but it was I more especially who counted on

your kind help," declared Hubert, who was evidently very proud of his

bright idea. "When Fräulein Margaret was complaining not long ago that

she had very nearly forgotten her French, her father hit on the plan of

having the master of languages out from the town occasionally. Just

imagine! a young Frenchman who would begin making love to his pupil at

the very first lesson! Frank's head is always running on his farming

and his accounts, and he does not trouble himself with such things, but

I was more prudent. I would not have that young Frenchman there so

often, playing the gallant with the girl, for anything; but a man of

more advanced age, like yourself ..."

"I am thirty-seven, sir," the Doctor interrupted him.

"Oh, never mind, that has nothing to do with it," said Hubert, smiling.

"I should be quite easy with you--but I should really have taken you to

be older! Tell me though, Doctor, what made you bring such a quantity

of books with you as you have here? What are you studying? Pedagogical

science, I suppose. May I look?"

He rose, and was going towards the writing-table, but Dr. Fabian was

quicker than he. With a rapid movement, almost betokening alarm, he

threw a newspaper over some bound volumes lying on the table, and

placed himself before them.

"Only a hobby of mine," said he, a vivid flush mounting to his cheeks.

"Historical studies."

"Oh, historical studies!" repeated the Assessor. "Well, then, I must

inquire whether you know Professor Schwarz, the great authority on such

matters. He is my uncle. But, of course, you must know him. He is on

the staff of the University of J----, where Herr Nordeck studied."

"I have that pleasure," said Fabian, rather dejectedly, with a glance

at the newspaper.

"How should you not?" cried the Assessor. "My uncle is a celebrity, an

intellect of the very first order! We have every reason to be proud of

his relationship, though our family can boast many a well-sounding

name. Now I do not consider that I disgrace it myself!"

The Doctor still stood anxiously on his guard before his writing-table,

as though to ensure himself against any attempt at robbery or violence

on the part of the Assessor, but that gentleman was now far too deeply

absorbed by the importance of his family in general, and by his uncle's

celebrity in particular, to pay any special attention to the scribbling

of an insignificant tutor. Nevertheless he felt himself called on to

say something polite.

"But it is extremely creditable for laymen to take an interest in such

studies," he remarked, condescendingly. "I only fear that you cannot

have the necessary leisure for them here. There must be a great deal of

stir in the Castle, a continual coming and going of all sorts of

people, is there not?"

"It may be so," replied Fabian, unsuspiciously, and without an inkling

of the man[oe]uvre executed by his visitor; "but Waldemar, knowing my

bent, has been so kind as to choose for me the most secluded and

quietest rooms."

"Naturally, naturally!" Hubert was standing at the window now, trying

to take a thorough survey of the place. "But I should fancy that such

an old building as this Wilicza, dating back through many centuries,

must in itself have a great interest for you, with its various

historical reminiscences. All these halls, staircases, and galleries!

and what immense cellars there must be below! Were you ever in the

cellars?"

"In the cellars?" asked the Doctor, in much astonishment. "No,

certainly not. What should I be doing there?"

"\_I\_ should go down," said the Assessor. "I have a fancy for such old

vaults, as indeed for everything that is curious. By-the-by, is the

late Herr Nordeck's collection of arms still complete? They say he had

a most extravagant mania for such things, and that he got together

hundreds of the finest rifles and other weapons."

"You must ask his son!" Dr. Fabian replied with a shrug. "I own I have

not yet been in the armoury."

"That will be on the other side of the house," observed Hubert, taking

his bearings with all the keenness of a detective. "According to

Frank's description it must be a dark, uncanny sort of place, like

everything about Wilicza indeed. Have not you heard that the house is

haunted? You have not yourself noticed anything unusual, out of the

common, at night, I suppose?"

"I sleep at night," replied the Doctor, tranquilly, but with a slight

smile at his visitor's superstition.

The Assessor cast an appealing glance towards Heaven. This man, whom

accident had placed in the very heart of the place, saw and heard

nothing of what was going on around him. He had not visited the

cellars; he had not even been in the armoury, and at night he slept! No

information could be extracted from this simple bookworm. Hubert could

see that, so after a few polite speeches he took his leave and left the

room.

He went slowly along the corridor. On his arrival a servant had

received, and led him to the Doctor's study; but now on his way back he

was alone, alone in this 'nest of conspiracy,' which now, in the broad

daylight, with its carpeted galleries and stairs, certainly appeared as

secure and dignified in its repose as the most loyal home of the most

loyal subject. But the Assessor was not to be deluded by appearances.

Right and left he scented those plots which unfortunately escaped his

grasp. There was a door which had a suspicious look, he thought. It

stood in the shade of a colossal pillar, and was strongly and deeply

encased in the wall. This door possibly led to a back staircase, or

into a secret gallery, possibly even below into the cellars which

Hubert's fancy at once peopled with troops of traitors and filled with

concealed stacks of arms. Should he press the latch? At the worst, he

could allege a mistake, could say he had lost himself in the Castle's

intricate ways ... perhaps the key to all its secrets lay here....

Suddenly the door opened, and Waldemar Nordeck stepped out. The

Assessor sprang back. Just Heaven! for the second time he had nearly

fallen foul of the master of Wilicza. One glance through the open chink

showed him that the place he had held to be such dangerous ground was

that gentleman's bedroom. Waldemar passed him with a very cool bow, and

went on to Dr. Fabian's apartments. Hubert saw that, in spite of his

apology, this 'suspicious character' had not forgiven him. The

consciousness of this and the shock of the unexpected meeting had, for

the present, robbed him of all desire for further discoveries, and a

servant just then appearing on the staircase, no alternative was left

him but at once to make his way out.

Meanwhile Waldemar had gone in to his old tutor, who was still standing

at the writing-table, busy putting in order the books and papers he had

lately screened from the Assessor's curious gaze. The young man went up

to him.

"Well, what news?" he asked. "You have had letters and newspapers from

J----. I saw them when I sent you the packet over."

The Doctor looked up. "Oh, Waldemar," he said in a grievous tone, "why

did you almost force me to bring my work and quiet studies before the

public? I resisted from the first, but you went on urging and

persuading me until the book appeared."

"Of course I did. What use was it to yourself, or to any one else while

it was lying shut up in that drawer? But what has happened? Your

'History of Teutonism' was received in learned circles with a favour

far beyond our expectations. The first recognition of its worth came

from J----, from Professor Weber, and I should think \_his\_ opinion

would be decisive on such a subject."

"I thought so too," replied Fabian, despondingly. "I was so proud and

happy at receiving praise from such a mouth, but that is just what has

roused Professor Schwarz--you know him, don't you?--to attack me and my

book in quite an unprecedented manner. Just look at this."

He held out the newspaper to him. Nordeck took it and read the

paragraph through coolly. "This is nothing but a charming specimen of

spitefulness. The end is especially neat. 'We hear that this new

celebrity just discovered by Professor Weber was for a long time tutor

to the son of one of our greatest landed proprietors, and that his

system of education was attended by no very brilliant result.

Notwithstanding this, the influence of the distinguished pupil we speak

of may have had something to do with our friend's exaggerated

appreciation of a work by which an ambitious dilettante hopes to force

his way into the ranks of scientific men!'"

Waldemar threw down the paper. "Poor Doctor! How often will you be made

to suffer for having brought up such a monster as myself! In truth,

your system of education has as little to do with my unamiable

character as my influence had with Weber's review of your book; but in

these exclusive circles they will never forgive you for having been a

private tutor, even though you should one day mount into a Professor's

chair."

"Good Heavens, who ever dreams of such a thing!" exclaimed the Doctor,

fairly frightened at so bold a notion. "Not I, certainly, and therefore

it hurts me all the more to be accused of ambition, and of intrusively

thrusting myself forward, merely because I have written a scientific

book which keeps strictly to the matter in hand, offends no one,

interferes with no one ..."

"And moreover is of remarkable merit," interrupted Waldemar. "I should

have thought you would have come round to that belief yourself when

Weber took up the cudgels for you so decidedly. You know he does not

allow himself to be influenced, and you used to think him an

indisputable authority, to whom you looked up in veneration."

"Professor Schwarz is an authority too."

"Yes, but an atrabilious one who admits no one's importance but his

own. What the deuce made you hit on this Teutonic theme? That is \_his\_

province--\_he\_ has written on that, and woe to the man who lays his

finger on it. That man's work is condemned beforehand. Don't look so

discouraged. It is not becoming in a recently discovered celebrity.

What would Uncle Witold, with his sovereign contempt for the old

'heathen rubbish,' have said to Weber's discovery? I think you would

have been treated rather more respectfully than was, I regret to say,

the case. You made a great sacrifice in remaining with me."

"Do not speak so, Waldemar," said the Doctor, with a touch of

indignation. "I well know on whose side the sacrifice is now! Who

obstinately insisted upon keeping me with him when I could be of no

further use to him, and yet refused to accept the smallest service

which was likely to take me from my books? Who gave me the means to

devote myself solely to study, so that I could gather together and set

in order the scattered knowledge I possessed? Who almost compelled me

to accompany him on his travels, because my health was shaken by

constant work? The hour in which your Norman injured me was a blessed

one for me. It has brought me all I ever hoped or wished for from

life."

"Then you wished for very little," said Waldemar, impatiently--he was

evidently anxious to turn the conversation into another channel. "But

one thing more. I met that gifted representative of the L---- police

wandering about the Castle just now. He had been here with you, and I

see him continually over yonder at the manor farm. He can have no

object in visiting us now that we have proved ourselves beyond

suspicion. What is he always hanging about Wilicza for?"

Fabian looked down in much embarrassment. "I don't know, but I imagine

that his frequent visits to the steward's house have a purely personal

motive. He called on me to-day."

"And you received him with the utmost friendliness? Doctor, you are a

living impersonation of the doctrines of Christianity. To him who

smites you on the right cheek, you will meekly turn the left. I believe

you would not hesitate a moment to render Professor Schwarz an

important service, if it were in your power. But beware of this

Assessor, with his frantic mania for arresting people. He is on the

hunt for conspirators again, you may be sure; and limited as his

intelligence may be, chance might for once play the right cards into

his hands. It would not be difficult here at Wilicza."

The last words were spoken in such a tone of angry annoyance that the

Doctor let fall the first volume of his 'History of Teutonism,' which

he had just taken up.

"You have made some unpleasant discovery?" he asked. "Worse even than

you expected. I thought so, though you have said so little about it."

Waldemar had sat down, and was leaning his head on his hand.

"You know that I am not fond of talking of worries so long as I have

not mastered them; and besides, I wanted time to look about me. What

guarantee had I that, in representing matters to me as he did, the

steward was not prompted by some interest of his own, that he was not

exaggerating and distorting facts? One can only trust to one's own

judgment in these things, and I have been exercising mine during the

last few weeks. Unfortunately, I find every word confirmed which Frank

wrote to me. So far as his supremacy extends, there is order, and hard

enough it must be for him to maintain it; but on the other estates, on

the other farms, and worst of all in the forests--well, I was prepared

to find things in a bad way, but such an utter chaos I really did not

expect!"

Fabian had pushed his books and papers to one side, and was following

Waldemar's words with anxious sympathy and attention. The gloomy look

on his old pupil's face seemed to cause him some uneasiness.

"Uncle Witold always imagined that my Polish estates could be managed

from a distance," went on Nordeck, "and unfortunately he brought me up

in that belief. I disliked Wilicza. For me the place had none but

bitter memories; it reminded me of the sad breach between my parents,

of my own joyless early childhood. I was accustomed to look on Altenhof

as my home; and later on, when I intended coming, when I ought to have

come, something else held me back---- The penalty for all this has to

be paid now. The twenty years of official mismanagement during my

guardian's time had worked mischief enough; but the worst has come to

pass in the last four years under the Baratowski régime. It is

altogether my own fault. Why have I never taken any interest in the

property? Why did I adopt that unfortunate habit of my uncle's of

putting faith in every report which stood on paper in black and white.

Now I am, as it were, sold and betrayed on my own land."

"Your majority was fixed at so early a date," said the Doctor,

soothingly; "those three years at the University were indispensable to

your mental culture and improvement, and when we determined on giving

twelve months to travelling, we had no suspicion of how matters stood

here. We set our faces homeward so soon as you received the steward's

letter, and you, with your energy, will, I am sure, find yourself equal

to any emergency."

"Who knows?" said Waldemar, gloomily. "The Princess is my mother, and

she and Leo are quite dependent on me. It is that which ties my hands.

If I once let it come to a serious rupture, they will have to leave

Wilicza. Rakowicz would be their only refuge. I will not expose them,

or at any rate my brother, to such a humiliation. And yet a stop must

be put to all this, especially to the doings in the Castle itself. You

suspect nothing? That I believe, but \_I\_ know it. I only wanted to get

a clear view of the state of affairs first. Now I shall speak to my

mother."

A long pause ensued. Fabian did not venture to reply. He knew that when

his friend's face took that expression, no trifling matters were on

hand. At last, however, he got up and went over to him.

"Waldemar," he asked in a low tone, laying his hand on the young man's

shoulder, "what happened yesterday, when you were out hunting?"

Waldemar looked up. "When I was out hunting? Nothing. What made you

think of that?"

"You seemed so thoroughly out of sorts when you came back. I heard some

allusions at dinner to a dispute between you and Prince Baratowski."

"No, no," said Nordeck, indifferently. "Leo was a little huffed,

because I had treated his favourite horse rather roughly; but the thing

was of no consequence. We have settled it already."

"It was something else, then?"

"Yes--something else."

"Waldemar, the other day the Princess called me your one confidant. I

might have replied that you had never need of a confidant. It may be

that I stand somewhat closer to you than other people, but you never

open your mind to me. Is it absolutely necessary that you should bear

all, fight through all alone?"

Waldemar smiled, but it was a cold, cheerless smile. "You must take me

as I am. But what is there now to make you anxious? With all the worry

and the annoyances which come pouring in upon me on all sides, I have

reason enough to be out of sorts."

The Doctor shook his head. "It is not that. Such things may irritate

and annoy you, but your present frame of mind is a very different one.

I have never seen you so but once, Waldemar--that time at Altenhof ..."

"Pray spare me these reminiscences, sir," Waldemar broke in so harshly

and abruptly that Fabian recoiled; then, recovering himself quickly, he

added far more mildly, "I am sorry you, too, should feel the effects of

the vexation and harass this Wilicza causes me. It was selfish of me to

bring you. You should have returned to J----, at least until I had

established some sort of order here, and until I could have offered you

a peaceful asylum."

"Nothing would have induced me to let you come alone," Fabian declared

in his gentle voice, but with a decision of manner most unusual to him.

Waldemar held out his hand to him, as if to ask pardon for his former

vehemence. "I know it, but do not torment yourself any more about me,

or I shall really regret having spoken openly to you. You have enough

to do with your own affairs. When you write to J---- again, remember me

to Professor Weber, and tell him I am about to make a practical

illustration of your book, and to impress on my Slavonic lands the

stamp of the Teuton. It is much needed here at Wilicza. Good-bye."

He went. Dr. Fabian looked after him, and sighed. "Impenetrable and

hard as a rock directly one approaches that one subject; and yet I know

that he has never got over the old trouble, and never will. I fear the

unhappy influence, to escape which we so long avoided Wilicza, is again

at work. Waldemar may deny it as he will--I saw it plainly when he came

home from hunting yesterday--he is under the old spell again."

CHAPTER VI.

That evening perfect quiet and stillness reigned in Wilicza, in

contrast to the bustle and stir of the preceding day, when the whole

place had swarmed with guests. On the return from the hunt a great

supper had been served which lasted far on into the night, and most of

the guests had slept at the Castle, leaving early in the morning. Count

Morynski and Leo had gone away, too, on a visit to a neighbouring

château. They would not return for several days; but Wanda had remained

to keep her aunt company.

The two ladies were therefore on this evening alone in the

drawing-room. It was already lighted up, and the curtains had been

closely drawn; no sign was to be seen within these walls of the fierce

November storm raging without. The Princess was seated on a sofa; but

the young Countess had risen from her chair, pushing it hastily back as

though in annoyance, and was pacing uneasily up and down the room.

"Wanda, I do beg of you to spare me these Cassandra-like warnings,"

said the elder lady. "I tell you again, your judgment is warped by your

antipathy to Waldemar. Does it necessarily follow that he is our enemy,

because you choose to remain on a war-footing with him."

Wanda stopped in her walk, and looked darkly across at the speaker.

"You will one day regret having treated my warnings with ridicule,

aunt," she replied. "I persist in my opinion. You are mistaken in your

son. He is neither so blind nor so indifferent as you and every one

else believe."

"Instead of these vague prophecies, why not say clearly and distinctly

what it is you really fear?" said the Princess. "You know that in such

a case as this I do not care for people's views and fancies. I require

proofs. What has suggested to you this suspicion to which you cling so

obstinately? Tell me what Waldemar really said to you yesterday when

you met him at the forester's station."

Wanda was silent. That meeting by the forest lake--not at the station,

as she had thought fit to state to her aunt--had furnished her with no

actual proof for her assertions, for Waldemar had admitted nothing, and

no consideration would have induced her to repeat the details of her

conversation with him. She could only allege that strange instinct

which from the first had guided her in her appreciation of his

character, had led her to see clearly where even her aunt's penetration

was at fault; but she well knew that she could not cite her instincts

and presentiments without calling up a pitying smile on her aunt's

face.

"We said very little to each other," she replied at length; "but I

heard enough to convince me that he knows more than he ought."

"Very possibly," said the Princess, with perfect composure; "we must

have been prepared for that sooner or later. I doubt that Waldemar has

drawn inferences from any observations of his own; but over at the

manor-farm they are sure to have whispered enough in his ear to put him

on the alert. He has more to do with them than I like. He knows just

what the steward knows, and what is no secret to any one in L----,

namely, that we hold with our own people; but he has no deeper insight

than the others; we have taken our precautions to prevent that.

Besides, his whole conduct up to the present time tends to show that he

is indifferent on the subject, as indeed he can afford to be, seeing

that it does not concern him personally in the very least. In any case,

this son of mine possesses a sufficient sense of decorum to withhold

him from compromising his nearest relations. I put that to the test on

the subject of Frank's resignation. It was displeasing to him, I know,

and yet he did not hesitate to range himself on my side, because I had

gone too far for him to undo my work without openly disavowing me. I

shall take care that in more serious matters he shall find himself

equally fettered, should it ever occur to him to play the master, or

the German."

"You will not listen to me," said Wanda, resignedly. "Let the future

decide which of us two is right. But I have a request to make, dear

aunt. You will not object to my leaving early to-morrow morning?"

"So soon? but it was agreed that your father should come back here to

fetch you!"

"I only remained to have a little quiet talk with you on this subject.

Nothing else would have detained me at Wilicza. It was useless, I see;

so let me go now."

The Princess shrugged her shoulders. "You know, my dear, how glad I

always am to have you with me; but I frankly confess that after our

very disagreeable dinner to-day, I shall put no obstacle in the way of

your speedy departure. You and Waldemar hardly exchanged a word. I was

forced to keep up a conversation with Dr. Fabian the whole time, in

order to break the painful \_gêne\_ of the situation. If you can exercise

no control over yourself in these inevitable meetings, it will be

really better that you should go."

In spite of the highly ungracious manner in which the permission was

granted, the young Countess drew a breath of relief, as though a load

were lifted from her.

"Well, then, I will send word to papa that he will find me at home at

Rakowicz, and that he need not make the round by Wilicza," said she,

quickly. "You will allow me to use your writing-table for a few

minutes?"

The Princess nodded assent. Truth to say, she had on this occasion no

objection to her niece's departure, for she was tired of standing

perpetually between her and Waldemar, on the watch to ward off a scene,

or a positive rupture. Wanda went into her aunt's study--which was

only separated from the drawing-room by a heavy portière, half drawn

back--and sat down at the writing-table. She had hardly written the

first words when the door of the salon was quickly opened and a firm,

steady step, audible even on the soft carpet, made her pause in her

work. Immediately afterwards Waldemar's voice was heard in the next

room.

The Countess slowly dropped her pen. Here in the study she could not

possibly be seen, and she did not feel it incumbent on her to announce

her presence, so she sat motionless, leaning her head on her hand. Not

a word of what passed in the drawing-room escaped her.

The Princess, too, had looked up in surprise at her son's entrance; it

was not his custom to visit her at this hour. Waldemar always spent the

evenings in his own rooms with Dr. Fabian. It seemed, however, that an

exception was to be made to-day, for after a few words of greeting he

took a seat by his mother's side, and began to speak of yesterday's

hunt.

For some minutes the conversation turned on indifferent topics.

Waldemar had taken up an album of water-colour sketches which lay on

the table, and was turning over the pages, while the Princess leaned

back among the sofa cushions.

"Have you heard that your steward is intending to become a landed

proprietor?" she remarked, carelessly. "He is seriously occupied now,

looking out for a place in the neighbourhood. His situation at Wilicza

must have been a lucrative one, for so far as I know Frank had no

fortune when he came here."

"He has had an excellent income for the last twenty years," observed

Waldemar, without looking up from the pages. "With his quiet way of

living he can hardly have spent the half."

"Added to which, he has no doubt taken care of his own interests in all

things, great and small. But enough of this. I wanted to ask you if you

have thought of any one to replace him?"

"No."

"Well, then, I have a proposal to make to you. The tenant at Janowo

cannot keep on his farm; he has fallen into distress through no fault

of his own, and is obliged to take a dependent situation again. I think

he would be a most suitable person for the stewardship of Wilicza."

"I think not," said Waldemar, very quietly. "The man goes about drunk

the whole day long, and has ruined the place he has leased entirely by

his own had conduct. He has not a shadow of an excuse."

The Princess bit her lips. "Who told you so? The steward, I suppose."

The young man was silent. His mother went on in a tone of some

irritation.

"I do not, of course, wish to influence you in the choice of the

persons you employ; but, in your own interest, I must warn you not to

place such implicit faith in Frank's calumnies. The farmer would be an

inconvenient successor, that is why he intrigues against him."

"Hardly that," replied Waldemar, as calmly as before, "for he is

already aware that I do not intend to give him a successor. The two

German inspectors will amply suffice to look after all the details of

the concern, and as to the management in chief, I shall take that in

hand myself."

The Princess started. His words seemed to take her breath away.

"Yourself? That is new to me!"

"It should not be so. We have always looked forward to a time when I

should take possession of my estates. That time has been deferred,

owing to my stay at the University and my absence abroad; but the plan

has never been given up. I know enough of farming and forestry--my

guardian saw to that. I shall doubtless have some trouble in getting

used to the local customs and affairs, but Frank will be at hand to

help me till the spring."

He made these remarks in a nonchalant tone, as though he were saying

the most natural things in the world, and appeared so absorbed in his

study of the water-colour sketches that he did not notice his mother's

consternation. She had raised herself from her negligent attitude, and

was looking keenly and fixedly at him, but with no better success than

her niece had met with on the preceding day--nothing was to be read in

that countenance.

"It is strange that you have never let fall a hint of this resolve of

yours," she observed. "You led us all to believe that you were only

going to pay us a short visit."

"I only intended paying a short visit at first, but I see that the hand

of the master is wanted here. More than this," he went on after a

pause, "I have something to say to you, mother."

He shut the book, and threw it down on the table. Now for the first

time it occurred to the Princess that Wanda's instinct had, perhaps,

after all, seen more clearly in this case than her own penetrating and

usually unfailing glance. She felt the storm coming, but she at once

prepared to meet it, and the resolved expression of her face showed

beyond a doubt that, in any struggle with her, her son would have a

hard fight of it.

"Say on, then," she said, coldly. "I am ready to listen."

Waldemar had risen now and fixed his eyes sternly upon her. "When, four

years ago, I offered you Wilicza as a home, I felt bound to give my

mother a well-defined position as mistress of the Castle. The estates,

however, remained my property, I suppose?"

"Has any one ever disputed it?" asked the Princess. "I imagine no one

has ever raised a doubt as to your right to your estates."

"No, but I see the consequences now of leaving them for years in

Baratowski and Morynski hands."

The Princess rose now in her turn, and faced her son with great dignity

of demeanour.

"What is the meaning of this? Do you wish to make me responsible for

the administration of your affairs not being such as you would wish?

Blame your guardian, who for a quarter of a century allowed the

officials to run riot here in the most incredible manner. The evil

effects of their neglect have not escaped my notice; but you must

settle such accounts with the persons in your employ, my son, and not

with me."

"With the persons in \_my\_ employ?" cried Waldemar, bitterly. "I think

Frank is the only one who acknowledges me as master. The others, one

and all, are in your service; and though perhaps they would hardly

venture to refuse me obedience, I know well enough that any command of

mine would be met by a host of expedients and intrigues, by a secret

but active opposition, should you think proper to put your veto on it."

"You are dreaming, Waldemar," said the Princess, with a pitying and

superior smile. "I did not think you were so completely under the

steward's influence; but really, I must beg of you to set some bounds

to your credulity in matters relating to your mother."

"And I beg of you to give up the old attempt at stinging me into

compliance," interrupted her son. "Once, it is true, you were able to

mould me as you wished by setting before me fear of a foreign influence

which might assume control over my actions; but since I have really had

a will of my own, it has become immaterial to me whether I seem to

possess one or not. I have been silent for weeks, precisely because I

did not altogether put faith in the steward's reports. I wanted to see

with my own eyes--but now I ask you: Who has delivered over the farms,

which, four years ago were all in German hands, to countrymen of yours

on absurdly disadvantageous terms, without any guarantee, any security,

against the loss they have caused, the damage they have done the land?

Who has introduced into the woods and forests a set of men who may

render eminent services to your national interests, but who have cut

down my revenues by one half? Who has made the steward's position here

so unbearable that he has no choice but to go? Fortunately, he

possessed energy enough to call me to the rescue, or I should, in all

probability, have remained away much longer, and it was high time for

me to come. You have recklessly sacrificed everything to your family

traditions; my officials, my fortune, my position even, for people

naturally suppose that it has been done with my consent. The property

was badly managed in my guardian's time; but no permanent harm was

done, for the estates possess almost inexhaustible resources in

themselves; the last four years, however, under your rule, have brought

them to the very verge of ruin. You must have known it. You are acute

enough to see whither all this must finally lead, and energetic enough

to put a stop to it, if you had really wished to do so; but such

considerations could, of course, have no weight. You had only one aim

and object in view--to prepare Wilicza for the coming revolution."

The Princess had listened in silence, benumbed, as it were, by

amazement which grew with every minute, and was roused even more by her

son's manner than by what he said. It was not the first time such words

had been spoken within those walls. The late Herr Nordeck had often

enough reproached his wife with recklessly offering up all and

everything at the shrine of her family traditions; he had indeed

crushed in their birth many such schemes as those which were now ripe

for execution, but such a scene as the present could not have taken

place without the man's nature showing itself in all its brutality. He

would rage and storm, would pour forth a stream of wild threats and

abusive epithets, endeavouring so to assert his authority, but never

evoking from his proud, fearless wife any response other than a smile

of contempt. She knew that this "parvenu" possessed neither high

intelligence nor strength of character, that his hatred and

partisanship were alike based on the lowest motives; and, if anything

could equal her disdain of him, it was the indignation she felt that

such a husband should have been forced upon her. If Waldemar had

conducted himself in the same way, she would not have been in the least

surprised--the fact that he did not so conduct himself was what

confounded her. He stood before her in a calm, self-possessed attitude,

and coldly, but with telling emphasis, flung at her word after word,

proof upon proof. Yet she saw that passion was hot within him. The vein

on his temple stood out ominously swollen, and his hand buried itself

convulsively in the cushions of the chair by which he stood,--these

were the only symptoms of his inward excitement. His look and voice

betrayed nothing of it; they were completely under his control.

Some seconds passed before the Princess answered. Her pride would not

stoop to a denial or a prevarication; and, indeed, neither would have

availed. Waldemar evidently knew too much; she could no longer reckon

on his blindness, and was therefore compelled to take up a new

position.

"You exaggerate," she replied at last. "Are you so timid that you can

see a revolution brewing in your Wilicza, merely because I have

sometimes used my influence in favour of my protégé's? I regret

it, if some among them have abused my confidence and wrought you

injury, instead of doing their duty by you; but these things happen

everywhere--you are at liberty to dismiss them. What, after all, is it

you reproach me with? When I came here, the estates were, to all

intents and purposes, without a master. You took no interest in them,

cared nothing for them; so I, as your mother, considered myself

justified in taking up the reins which had fallen from your hands. It

was certainly safer for me to hold them than to trust them with your

paid agents. I have governed in my own fashion, I admit; but you were

perfectly aware that I have always sided with my own family and my own

people. I have never made a secret of it. My whole life bears witness

to the fact, and to you, I should hope, I need offer no justification

of my conduct. You are my son, as you are your father's, and the blood

of the Morynskis runs also in your veins."

Waldemar seemed about vehemently to protest against the assertion; but

again his self-command triumphed.

"It is the first time in your life you have acknowledged my share in

that noble blood," he answered, ironically; "hitherto you have only

seen--and despised--the Nordeck in me. True, you have not declared so

much in words; but do you think I cannot interpret looks? I have seen

the expression of your eyes, as they turned from Leo and your brother

to me! You have put away from you the memory of your first marriage as

of some disgrace. Happy in your position as Prince Baratowski's wife,

satisfied with the love of your youngest-born, you never gave me a

thought; when, later on, circumstances forced you to draw nearer me, it

certainly was not I myself whom you sought. I do not reproach you with

this. My father may have sinned against you in much--in so much that

you can feel no affection for his son; but we must therefore leave

altogether out of account sentiments which, once for all, do not exist

between us. I shall shortly be obliged to prove to you that no drop of

the Morynski blood runs in my veins. You may have transmitted it to

Leo, but I am made of other stuff."

"I see it," said the Princess, in a low voice; "of other than I

thought. I have never really known you."

He took no notice of her words. "You will understand, then, how it is

that I now take the management of my affairs into my own hands," he

went on. "One more question. What is the meaning of those conferences

which were held in your apartments after supper yesterday evening, and

which lasted far on through the night?"

"Waldemar, that concerns me alone," his mother answered in frigid

self-assertion. "In my own rooms, at least, I will be mistress still."

"Absolute mistress in all that relates to your own affairs, but I will

no longer give over Wilicza to serve your party aims. You hold your

meetings here. Orders are issued from hence across the frontier, and

messages are sent from out yonder to you in return. The Castle cellars

are full of arms. You have got together a perfect arsenal below

stairs."

The Princess's face turned deadly pale at the last words, but she held

her ground, heavy as was the blow. Not a muscle of her face moved as

she replied, "And why do you come to me with all this? Why not rather

go to L----, where the account of your discoveries would be most gladly

received? You have shown such eminent talent as a spy, it could not be

so very repugnant to you to turn informer!"

"Mother!" burst from the young man's lips in accents of passionate

anger, and he struck his clenched hand violently on the back of the

chair. The old fierce temper was breaking forth again, bearing down

before it all the self-control acquired so laboriously during the last

few years. His whole frame was shaken with agitation, and he looked so

menacing in his wrath that his mother involuntarily laid her hand on

the bell to summon help. This movement of hers brought Waldemar to

himself. He turned away hastily and went up to the window.

Some minutes elapsed in painful silence. The Princess already felt that

she had allowed herself to be carried too far--she, who was coolness,

prudence itself! She saw how her son wrestled with his passion, and

what the struggle cost him; but she also saw that the man who, with

such an iron energy, could by sheer force of will subdue his natural

violence, that fatal inheritance from his father, was an adversary

worthy of her.

When Waldemar again turned towards her, the paroxysm was past. He had

crossed his arms on his breast as though, forcibly to still its

heavings. His lips still worked nervously, but he had regained full

command of his voice when he spoke.

"I did not think, when at that time at C---- you entrusted my brother's

future to my generosity and sense of honour--I did not then think that

I should be incurring contumely such as this. Spy! Because I presumed

to look into the secrets of my own Castle! I might retort with a word

which would have a still worse sound. Which of us enjoys the

hospitality of Wilicza, you or I? and which of us has abused it?"

The Princess looked down. Her face was sombre and very stern.

"We will not dispute about it. I have done what right and duty

dictated, but it would be useless to endeavour to convince you of it.

What do you intend to do?"

Waldemar was silent for a moment, then he said in a low tone, but

emphasising every word: "I shall leave this to-morrow. I have business

in P---- which will detain me for a week. In that time Wilicza will be

cleared of all the illicit stores it now contains; in that time all

existing connections will be broken off, so far as the Castle is

concerned. Transport your centre of operations to Rakowicz, or where

you will, but my land shall be free of them. Immediately on my return,

a second great hunt will take place here, at which the President and

the officers in garrison at L---- will be invited to attend. As

mistress of the house you will, no doubt, be so good as to put your

name with mine to the invitations."

"Never!" declared the Princess, energetically.

"Then I shall sign them alone. In any case the guests will be invited.

It is necessary that I should at last take up a position in this matter

which is agitating the whole province. It must be known in L---- on

which side I am to be found. You are at liberty to be ill on the day in

question, or to drive over to your brother's--but I leave you to

reflect whether it will be well to make the breach between us public,

and therefore irreparable. It is still possible for us to forget this

hour and this talk. I shall never remind you of it, when once I am

persuaded that my demands have been complied with. It is for you to

decide what you will do. I have waited until Leo should be absent,

because I know that his hot temper would ill brook such a scene, and

because I wish to spare him and Count Morynski the mortification of

hearing from my mouth that which it had become absolutely necessary for

me to say. They will take it better coming from you. It is not I who

wish for a rupture."

"And if I decline to comply with the tyrannical commands you think fit

to hurl at me," said the Princess, slowly; "if, to your recognised

right of inheritance, I oppose my right as your father's widow, whom an

unjust, unprecedented will alone banished from a place which should

have been her dower-house? I know that in a court of law I should not

be able to make good my claim; but the conviction of its justice makes

me feel that here, on this ground, I have no need to yield to you, and

yield I will not. The Princess Baratowska, after what she has just

heard from your lips, would have gone with her son, gone, never to

return; but the former mistress of Wilicza maintains her right. Beware,

Waldemar. I may one day place you in such a pass that you must either

recall the arbitrary words you have just spoken, or give up your mother

and brother to an evil fate."

"Try," said Waldemar, coldly; "but do not hold me responsible for what

may then happen."

They stood face to face, their eyes fixed on each other, and it was

strange that a resemblance which had hitherto escaped all those about

them, with one single exception, should now have stood out in strong

relief. "That brow with the singularly marked vein he has from you,"

Wanda had one day said to her aunt; and there, indeed, was the same

high arch, denoting power, the same peculiar line on the temple. In her

excitement the blue vein now showed distinctly on the Princess's

forehead; while on Waldemar's it swelled forth ominously, as though all

his blood in revolt were seeking vent that way. On both faces the same

expression was stamped, that of an unbending determination, an iron

will, prepared to carry through its purposes at any cost. Now that they

were declaring war to the death, the fact that these two were mother

and son became for the first time palpable, perhaps it now for the

first time impressed itself strongly on their minds.

Waldemar went close up to the Princess, and laid his hand firmly on her

arm.

"I have left a retreat open for my mother," he said, significantly;

"but I forbid the Princess Baratowska to pursue her party machinations

on my estates. If, notwithstanding what I have said, you still persist,

if you drive me to an extremity, I too shall resort to stronger

measures--yes, if I have to give you up, one and all ..."

Suddenly he stopped. His mother felt a thrill run through him, felt

that the hand which had held hers with such an iron grasp all at once

loosed its hold and fell powerless. In extreme surprise she followed

the direction of his eyes, which were fixed, as though spell-bound, on

the study doorway. There on the threshold stood Wanda. Unable longer to

control herself, she had stepped forward, and the hasty movement had

betrayed her presence.

A flash of triumph shot from the Princess's eyes. At last the

vulnerable spot in her son's heart was found. Although in the next

instant he recovered himself, and stood inflexible and unapproachable

as before, it was too late; that one unguarded moment had betrayed his

secret.

"Well, Waldemar?" she asked, and there was a slight sneer in her voice,

"you surely are not hurt to find that Wanda has overheard our

conversation? It, in a great measure, concerned her also. At any rate

you owe it now both to her and to me to finish your sentence. You would

give us up, one and all ..."

Waldemar had retreated a step. He now stood quite in shadow, so that

his face escaped all observation.

"As Countess Morynska has overheard our conversation, no explanation is

needed. I have nothing more to add." Then, turning to his mother, he

went on----"I shall leave to-morrow morning early. You have a week in

which to decide. So much is settled between us."

Then he bowed to the young Countess, constrainedly as usual, and went.

Wanda had stood all this while on the threshold, had not yet set foot

in the drawing-room; but now she came in and, going up to her aunt,

asked in a low, but strangely agitated voice--

"Do you believe me now?"

The Princess had sunk back on the sofa. Her eyes were still fixed on

the door through which her son had departed, dreamily, as though she

could not, would not, realise the scene which had just taken place.

"I have ever judged him by his father," said she, speaking, as it were,

to herself. "The error will be avenged on us all. He has shown me now

that he is not--not such as his father was."

"He has shown you more than that. You have always been so proud,

aunt, that Leo has your features. He has inherited little of your

character--for that you must look to his brother. It was your own

energy which faced you just now, your own inflexible will--your own

look and tone even. Waldemar is more like you than ever Leo was."

Something in the young Countess's voice aroused the Princess's

attention. "And who taught you to read this character with such

unerring sureness? Was it your animosity which made you see clearly

there where we were all at fault?"

"I do not know," replied Wanda, casting down her eyes. "It was more

instinct than observation which guided me; but from the first day I

felt that we had an enemy in him."

"No matter," declared the Princess, resolutely. "He is my son; there is

no escaping that fact. You are right. Today for the first time he has

proved that he really is akin to me; but, as his mother, I will show

myself equal to him."

"What will you do?" asked Wanda.

"Accept his challenge. Do you think I shall yield to his threats? We

shall see whether he will really proceed to extremities."

"He will, depend upon it. Do not speculate on any soft relenting in

this man. He would unsparingly offer up you, Leo, all of us, to that

which he calls right."

The Princess scanned her niece's face with a long scrutinising look.

"Leo and me, perhaps," she answered; "but I know now where his strength

will fail him. I know what he will not offer up, and it shall be my

care to bring him face to face with that at the decisive moment."

Wanda looked at her aunt without grasping her meaning. She had noticed

nothing more than Waldemar's abrupt pause, which her sudden appearance

sufficiently explained, had seen his stern repellant attitude towards

his mother and herself. She could not therefore guess to what these

words alluded, and the Princess gave her no time for meditation.

"We must take a resolution," she continued. "In the first place my

brother must be told. As Waldemar leaves us early to-morrow morning,

there is no longer any reason for hastening your return. You must stay

here, and summon your father and Leo back to Wilicza without a moment's

delay. No matter what they may have on hand, the most important

business lies here. I will have your letter sent off to-day by an

express, and to-morrow they may be with us."

The young Countess obeyed. She went back into the study, and sat down

at the writing-table, quite unsuspicious, at present, of the part she

was suddenly called on to play in her aunt's plans. The childish folly,

so long done with and forgotten, acquired an importance of its own, now

that it was discovered to be neither done with nor forgotten. The

Princess could not forgive her son for having repudiated the Morynski

blood. Well, he should find his plans wrecked through a Morynska,

though, possibly, his mother would not prove that rock on which he

should split.

CHAPTER VII.

Dr. Fabian and Fräulein Margaret Frank sat in the steward's parlour

with an open book before them. The French studies had really begun;

but, as the master showed himself earnest and conscientious, so, in

proportion, did the pupil prove volatile and unreliable. On the

occasion of the first lesson, which had been given some days

previously, she had amused herself by putting all sorts of questions to

the Doctor, questions as to his past life, his former tutorship to Herr

Nordeck, the doings at Altenhof, and other kindred subjects. Today she

insisted upon knowing what he really was studying, and drove the

unfortunate scholar, who would on no account own to his 'History of

Teutonism,' hopelessly into a corner with her persistent inquiries.

"Had we not better begin to read, Fräulein?" said he, beseechingly. "At

this rate we shall get nothing done today. You are speaking German all

the time."

"Oh, who can think of French now!" cried Gretchen, impatiently turning

over the leaves. "My head is full of other things. Life at Wilicza is

so exciting."

"Is it? I should not have thought so," said the Doctor, patiently going

back through the pages to find the place at which they left off.

The young lady scrutinised him with the gaze of an inquisitor. "No,

Doctor? Yet you are at the best source for knowing all that has been

going on at the Castle--you, Herr Nordeck's friend and confidant!

Something has happened, that is certain, for there is a perfect

whirlwind abroad now since the young master went. Messengers are flying

continually between Wilicza and Rakowicz. First, Count Morynski comes

here, then Prince Baratowski rushes over there; and when one catches a

glimpse of our sovereign lady the Princess's awe-inspiring mien, she

looks as though the world were coming to an end without further notice.

And then, what are all these doings in the park of an evening, which

the inspector has been telling me of? They are busy bringing things, or

carrying things away. Your windows look out just on that side."

She was speaking German persistently, and the Doctor was so far led

away as to answer her in that language.

"I know nothing of it, absolutely nothing," he asserted, fidgetting

uneasily on his chair.

"That is exactly what papa says when I ask him," pouted Gretchen. "I

can't understand my father at all in this business. He snubbed the

inspector when he came in with the news, and gave him explicit orders

not to concern himself with the park any further--'Herr Nordeck did not

wish it.' Papa cannot possibly be in the plot; but I must say it looks

very like it. Don't you think so?"

"But, Fräulein, the object of my coming here will not be attained, if

your thoughts are so taken up with such things as these. I have been

here half an hour, and we have only read a page. Let us go on, pray,"

entreated the Doctor.

He pushed the book before her for the sixth time at least. She took it

at last with an air of resignation.

"Well, never mind. I see I am not to be let into the secrets; but

I shall very well find them out by myself. I can keep silence

too--implicit silence, I assure you!" Thereupon she began to read a

French poem with every appearance of great vexation, and with so

purposely false an emphasis that her teacher was driven to the verge of

distraction.

Before she had got through the second strophe, a carriage rattled into

the courtyard. It was empty; but the coachman seemed to feel himself

quite at home, for he at once set about unharnessing the horses. Next

minute one of the maids came in with the announcement that Herr Hubert

would shortly do himself the pleasure of calling at the manor-farm--he

had stayed down in the village, where he had business with the mayor,

and sent on his carriage with an inquiry as to whether he might once

again trespass on Herr Frank's hospitality.

There was nothing remarkable in this. Taking advantage of the friendly

footing on which he stood with the Frank family, the Assessor was wont

to pass the night under their roof whenever his official duties brought

him into the neighbourhood of Wilicza, and he took care that this

should happen pretty often. The steward was absent, it is true. He had

driven out on a long excursion into the country, but was expected home

in the evening; so his daughter gave orders that the carriage and

coachman should be accommodated, and sent the maid to see that all was

in readiness in the spare room.

"If the Assessor comes, there's an end to our reading," said Gretchen

to the Doctor, rather petulantly; "but he shall not stay to disturb us

long. Before five minutes are over, I shall let a hint drop of the

secret goings-on in the park. He will be sure to hurry over there at

once, and go hiding behind some tree to watch--and we shall be quit of

him."

"For Heaven's sake, do no such thing!" cried Fabian, in a tone of great

alarm; "do not send him over there! On the contrary, try and keep him

away, at any cost."

Gretchen gave a start. "Oh, Doctor, I thought you knew nothing,

absolutely nothing! What puts you in such a fright all in a moment?"

The Doctor sat with downcast eyes like a detected criminal, and sought

in vain for a loophole through which to escape. At length he looked up

frankly at the young girl--

"I am a man of peace, Fräulein, and never intrude on the secrets of

others," said he. "I do not, in truth, know what is going on at the

Castle, but that something is astir there I have been forced to remark

during the last few days. Herr Nordeck has only given me some hints of

the matter; but there can be no doubt that danger is involved in it."

"Well, it involves no danger to us," remarked Gretchen, with great

equanimity. "What if the Assessor does spring a mine under their feet?

Herr Nordeck is away, so he can't seize him; besides, he will take good

care not to meddle with your friend again, after that story of the

arrest. You are beyond suspicion; and as to the Princess and Prince

Leo ..."

"They are Waldemar's mother and brother," interposed the Doctor,

greatly agitated. "Do you not see that any blow directed against them

must strike him as well? He is the master of the Castle. He will be

held responsible for all that takes place in it."

"And quite right too," cried Gretchen, growing warm. "Why does he start

off on a journey and leave the door open to all their plots and

intrigues? Why does he aid and abet his relations?"

"He does not," asseverated Fabian; "on the contrary, he opposes their

proceedings in the most decided manner. His journey has no other

object---- But pray do not force me to speak of things which I ought

not to disclose, I am afraid, even to you. This I do know, that

Waldemar is most anxious to spare his mother and brother in every way.

On leaving, he made me promise to see and hear nothing of what was

passing at the Castle, and he has given your father similar

instructions. I heard him say to Herr Frank, 'I shall hold you

responsible for the Princess's remaining unmolested in the mean time. I

take all upon myself.' But now he is away, Herr Frank is away, and an

unlucky accident brings this Assessor Hubert over just at this time--a

man who has set his heart on making discoveries, and who will make some

if he is not hindered. I really don't know what to do!"

"This comes of concealing things from \_me\_," said Gretchen, reprovingly.

"If \_I\_ had been taken into your counsels, I should have quarrelled

with the Assessor just at the right moment, and then he would not have

come over again at present. Now I must reflect."

"Yes, do please," begged the Doctor. "You have great influence with the

Assessor. Keep him away; he must not go within a certain distance of

the Castle today."

Fräulein Margaret shook her head thoughtfully. "You don't know Hubert.

No one will be able to keep him away, if once he gets scent of the

truth; and get scent of it he will if he remains at Wilicza, for he

questions the inspector regularly each time he comes. He certainly

cannot stay here---- I know a way. I will let him make me an offer--he

begins whenever he sees me; but I never let him go on--and then I will

send him about his business. He will be in such a rage that he will

rush off back to L---- as fast as his horse can take him."

"No, I cannot allow that on any account," protested the Doctor. "Come

what may, your happiness must not be sacrificed."

"Do you imagine that my happiness depends on Herr Assessor Hubert?"

asked Gretchen, with a contemptuous curl of the lip.

Fabian imagined it, certainly. He knew from Hubert's own mouth that

that gentleman 'felt sure he could count on her consent,' but a very

natural shyness withheld him from touching further on this delicate

theme.

"One should never trifle with these things," said he, reproachfully.

"The Assessor would learn the true state of the case sooner or later,

and it would wound him deeply, perhaps alienate him for ever. No, that

shall never be."

Gretchen looked rather disconcerted. She did not understand how any one

could view the matter in so serious a light, and cared nothing at all

about alienating the Assessor for ever--but the reproach stung her

conscience, nevertheless.

"Well, there is nothing for it then but to lead him away from the right

track, and set him on a false one," she declared when she had

deliberated awhile. "But, Doctor, do you know we are taking a heavy

responsibility on ourselves! Everybody is conspiring here at Wilicza,

so I don't see why we two should not conspire in our turn; but,

strictly speaking, we shall be plotting against our own Government, if

we prevent its representative from doing his duty."

"The Assessor is not commissioned to do this," cried the Doctor, who

had suddenly risen to a pitch of heroism. "He is only following out his

own ambitious designs in coming searching about this place. Fräulein, I

give you my word that all these secret intrigues have had their day. A

stop is now to be put to them once for all. I have it from Waldemar's

own lips, and he is a man who keeps his word. We shall be doing our

countrymen no wrong by trying to prevent a most useless catastrophe,

which would be brought about by the over-zealous efforts of an official

enjoying, perhaps, not too great favour even at L----."

"Very well, we will have our plot then," said Gretchen, resolutely.

"The Assessor must go, and that before a quarter of an hour is over, or

he will be off as usual, on the hunt for conspirators. There he is

coming across the courtyard. Leave all to me, only agree with

everything I say. Now we will get the book out again."

Assessor Hubert, coming in a few minutes later, overheard the third

strophe of the French poem, and was much pleased to find that Dr.

Fabian had kept his word, and that the consort-elect of the future

Counsellor was practising those higher accomplishments which would be

indispensable to her position. He greeted the pair politely, inquired

for his excellent friend the steward, and then took the seat offered

him and began to relate the latest news from L----.

"Your old pupil had prepared a great surprise for us the other day,"

said he to Fabian, affably. "Did you hear that Herr Nordeck, as he

passed through our town, drove to the President's house, and made him

what appeared to be quite an official visit?"

"Yes, I did hear it spoken of," replied the Doctor.

"His Excellency was much gratified. To be candid, all hopes of any

overtures from that quarter had been given up. Herr Nordeck made

himself very agreeable, I believe. He even solicited from the President

a promise to be present at the next hunt held at Wilicza, and alluded

to some other invitations which will excite no less surprise."

"Did the President accept?" inquired Gretchen.

"Assuredly. His Excellency is of opinion that Heir Nordeck's

proceedings on this occasion almost amounted to a demonstration, and he

felt it his duty to give him his support. Really, Doctor, you would

greatly oblige us if you would give us a key to your friend's true

position with regard to ..."

"You will learn nothing from Dr. Fabian. He is closer than the young

master himself," put in Gretchen, who felt bound to go to her

accomplice's aid, for she saw at a glance that he was ill at ease in

his new rôle. He was, indeed, almost crushed by the consciousness of

guilt--not even the pureness of his intentions could reconcile him to

the thought that the Assessor was to be cheated, and that he was

helping to cheat him. Fräulein Margaret, however, took the matter much

more lightly. She went straight to her aim.

"Shall we have your company at supper, Herr Assessor?" she asked in an

easy tone. "You have business over at Janowo, no doubt."

"Not that I know of. Why there in particular?" replied Hubert.

"Well, I only thought--we have heard so many queer things of late,

especially within the last few days--I thought you had perhaps been

appointed to investigate matters out yonder."

The Assessor became attentive. "What is it you have heard? Pray,

Fräulein, conceal nothing from me. Janowo is one of the places we have

constantly to keep an eye upon. What do you know of it?"

The Doctor gave his chair a little imperceptible push farther off. He

appeared to himself the blackest of traitors. Gretchen, on the other

hand, showed a really alarming talent for intrigue. She related

nothing, but she allowed herself to be questioned and cross-questioned,

reporting by degrees and with the most innocent face in the world all

that had been noticed during the last few days, with this difference

alone that she transferred the scene of action to Janowo, the great

neighbouring estate which lay on the confines of Wilicza. Her plan

succeeded beyond all expectation. The Assessor took the bait as eagerly

as could be wished. He fairly hung on the girl's lips, working himself

into a state of feverish excitement, and finally sprang up from his

seat.

"Excuse me if I do not wait for Herr Frank's return, Fräulein Margaret.

I must go back as far as E---- at once, without delay ..."

"But not on foot. It is quite a mile and a half there."

"Above all no \_éclat\_, I entreat you!" whispered Hubert, mysteriously.

"I will leave my carriage behind. It is better I should be supposed to

be here. Pray do not expect me to supper. Good-bye, Fräulein," and with

a short and hasty salutation, he hurried out and immediately afterwards

re-crossed the courtyard.

"Now he is off to E---- to fetch the two gendarmes stationed there,"

said Gretchen to the Doctor, triumphantly; "then he will rush straight

over to Janowo, and all three of them will go prowling about the place

until far on into the night. Wilicza is safe from them."

She was not mistaken in her suppositions. It was late at night when the

Assessor returned from his expedition, which had, as she had guessed,

been undertaken in the company of the two gendarmes, and had, naturally

enough, been productive of no result. He was much out of temper and

very depressed, to say nothing of a violent cold which he had caught by

the unaccustomed exposure to the night air. Next day he was so unwell

that even Gretchen was roused to a sense of humanity. In a fit of

repentance she made tea for him, and nursed him with such care that

Hubert forgot all the discomfort he had endured. Unfortunately this

behaviour on her part confirmed him in his conviction--unalterable from

this time forth--that he was beloved beyond all telling. Dr. Fabian,

too, came over in the course of the day to see how the patient was

progressing, and showed so much anxious sympathy, such deep regret at

his indisposition, that the Assessor was touched and completely

comforted. He little knew that he owed all this attention to the

remorse of the two confederates in league against him. So he set out at

last, burdened with his cold, but with spirits much revived, on his way

back to L----.

If on that evening the Wilicza park and its environs still remained

free from all inopportune vigilance, the dwellers at the Castle had

naturally no notion to whom their thanks for such immunity were due.

About the time that Dr. Fabian and Fräulein Margaret were engaged in

concocting their plot, a family meeting had taken place in the Princess

Baratowska's apartments. Count Morynski and Leo were equipped for

travelling; their cloaks lay in the ante-room, and the carriage, which

half an hour before had brought the Count and his daughter over, still

stood in the courtyard, ready to start again. Leo and Wanda had

withdrawn into the deep recess of the centre window, and were talking

eagerly, but in a low voice, while the Princess was also carrying on a

conversation in an undertone with her brother.

"In the present state of affairs I look upon it as fortunate that

circumstances require your hasty departure," she said. "On Leo's

account it is desirable, for he would never endure to stay on at

Wilicza, if Waldemar begins to play the master. He is not capable of

controlling himself. I saw by the way in which he received my

disclosures that I should certainly be provoking a catastrophe, if I

were to insist on his remaining longer with his brother. As it is, they

will not meet for the present, and that is best."

"And you yourself will really be able to hold out here, Hedwiga?" asked

the Count.

"I must," she answered. "It is all I can do for you now. I have yielded

to the reasoning by which you describe open war with Waldemar as

useless and full of peril. We have given up Wilicza as our centre of

operations--for the time being, that is; but for you and Leo it is

still the place where messages can be sent, and whence news can be

transmitted to you in return. So much liberty, at least, I shall be

able to maintain. At the worst the Castle will still be your refuge,

should you be obliged to re-cross the frontier. Peace will not be

disturbed on this side, at all events for some time to come. When do

you think of going over?"

"Probably to-night. We shall wait at the last forester's station to

find out how and where it will be possible to cross. This evening the

last transport of arms will be sent after us; it will be left

provisionally in the forester's charge. I consider this precaution to

be urgently necessary. Who knows whether your son may not take it into

his head to search through the whole Castle on his return the day after

to-morrow?"

"He will find it clear"--the Princess clenched her hand in repressed

rage, and her lips twitched strangely--"clear as he commanded it should

be; but I swear to you, Bronislaus, he shall pay for that command and

for his tyranny towards us. I hold the means of retaliation and a

bridle wherewith to hold him in check, should he attempt to go still

greater lengths."

"You hinted something of the sort before," said the Count; "but I

really do not understand by what means you still hope to tame such a

nature. Judging by Wanda's description of the scene between you and

Waldemar, I place no faith in the power of any bridle to restrain him."

The Princess said nothing; she evidently had no wish to answer him, and

was freed from the necessity of so doing by the two young people at

that moment leaving the window recess and coming up to them.

"It is impossible to make Wanda change her mind," said Leo to his

mother. "She decidedly refuses to come to Wilicza--she will not leave

Rakowicz."

The Princess turned to her niece with an expression of great severity.

"This is folly, Wanda. It has been arranged for months that you should

come to me when your father's long-foreseen absence should occur. You

cannot, ought not to stay at Rakowicz alone. I am your natural

protector, and you will put yourself under my charge."

"Excuse me, dear aunt, I shall do nothing of the sort," replied the

young Countess. "I will not be the guest of a house whose master

conducts himself towards us in this hostile spirit. I can bear it no

better than Leo."

"Do you think it will be easy for your aunt to hold her ground here?"

asked the Count, reproachfully. "She makes the sacrifice for us,

because she wishes to keep Wilicza open as a refuge for us in case of

need, because it must not permanently be given up, and were she to go,

it would be lost to us for ever. I may well ask for equal self-denial

from you."

"But why is my presence here so necessary, so indispensable?" cried

Wanda, hardly attempting now to control her vehemence. "The

considerations which weigh with my aunt do not exist for me. Let me

stay at home, papa."

"Give way, Wanda," entreated Leo; "stay with my mother. Wilicza lies so

much nearer the frontier, we can keep up some communication far more

easily. Perhaps I may make it possible to see you once. Certainly I

hate Waldemar as bitterly as you do, now that he has openly declared

himself our enemy; but, for my sake, put a constraint on yourself and

endure him."

He had seized her hand. Wanda drew it away almost violently. "Let me

be, Leo; if you knew \_why\_ your mother wishes to have me with her, you

would be the first to oppose it."

The Princess knitted her brow, and quickly interfering to cut short her

niece's speech, she said, turning to the Count--

"Show your authority as her father at last, Bronislaus, and command her

to remain. She must stay at Wilicza."

The young Countess started angrily at these words, which were spoken

with great harshness. Her exasperation drove her beyond bounds.

"Well, then, if you compel me to speak out, my father and Leo shall hear

my reason. I did not at the time understand the ambiguous words you

spoke to me a little while ago, but now I know their meaning. You think

I am the only person Waldemar will not offer up, the only one who can

restrain his hand. I do not think so, for I know him better than you;

but no matter which of us is right--I will not put it to the test."

"And I would never, never endure that such an experiment should be

made," blazed out Leo. "If that was the motive, Wanda shall remain at

Rakowicz, and never set foot in Wilicza. I believed that Waldemar's old

attachment had long ago died out and was forgotten. If it is not

so--and it cannot be, or the plan would never have been imagined--I

will not leave you near him for a day."

"Make your mind easy," said Wanda, her own voice, however, sounding

anything but tranquil; "I shall not again allow myself to be used as a

mere tool, as I was in the old days at C----. I have played with this

man and with his love once, but I will not do it a second time. He has

let me feel his contempt, and I know the weight of it; yet there was

nothing worse then to arouse his scorn than the caprice of a

thoughtless child. If he were to discover a scheme, a calculation, and

I were one day to read that in his eyes--I would rather die than bear

it!"

She had allowed herself to be so carried away by her vehemence that she

forgot all those around her. Erect, with glowing cheeks and flashing

eyes, she delivered this protest with such passionate intensity of

feeling that the Count gazed at her in astonishment, and the Princess

in consternation; but Leo, who had been standing by her side, drew back

from her. He had turned very pale, and in his eyes, as he fixed them on

her steadily, enquiringly, there was more than astonishment or

consternation.

"Rather die!" he repeated. "Do you set such store by Waldemar's esteem?

Do you know so well how to read in his eyes? That is strange."

A hot flush overspread Wanda's face. She must herself have been

unconscious of this, for she cast a look of unfeigned indignation at

the young Prince, and would have answered him, but her father

interfered.

"Let us have no jealous scenes now, Leo," he said gravely. "Do you wish

to disturb our parting, and to offend Wanda just when you are about to

leave her? As you now insist upon it, she shall remain at Rakowicz. My

sister will yield to you on this point, but do not again wound Wanda by

any such suspicions. Time presses, we must say farewell."

He drew his daughter to him, and now in the moment of separation all

the tenderness which this grave, melancholy man cherished in his heart

towards his only child, broke forth. He clasped her to him with

profound and painful emotion. But the Princess waited in vain for her

son to approach her. He stood with a dark frown on his overcast face,

looking down at the ground, and biting his lips until they bled.

"Well, Leo," remonstrated his mother, at last, "will you not say

good-bye to me?"

The words startled him from his brooding. "Not now, mother. I will

follow my uncle later. He will not want me at first; I shall stay here

a few days longer."

"Leo!" cried the Count angrily, while Wanda, raising herself from his

arms, looked up in indignant surprise. These marks of reprobation only

served, however, to harden the young Prince in his rebellion.

"I shall stay," he persisted. "Two or three days cannot possibly make

any difference. I will take Wanda back to Rakowicz before I leave, and

make myself sure that she will remain there; above all, I will wait for

Waldemar's return, and have the matter cleared up in the shortest way.

I will challenge him with his feelings towards my affianced wife. I

will ..."

"Prince Leo Baratowski will do what duty bids him, and nothing else,"

interrupted the Princess, her cold clear voice ringing out in sharpest

contrast to her son's wild agitated tones. "He will follow his uncle,

as has been agreed, and will never stir one minute from his side."

"I cannot," cried Leo, impetuously. "I cannot leave with this suspicion

at my heart. You have promised me Wanda's hand, and yet I have never

been able to assert my right to it. She herself has always sided coldly

and inexorably with you. She has always wished to be the prize which I

must fight for and win in the struggle we are now entering on. But now

I demand that she shall be publicly and solemnly betrothed to me

beforehand, here in Waldemar's presence, before his eyes. Then I will

go; but until this is done, I will not stir from the Castle. Waldemar

has proclaimed himself master and lawgiver here in such a surprising

manner--no one ever expected it of him--he may just as suddenly

transform himself into an ardent adorer."

"No, Leo," said Wanda, with angry disdain; "but at the beginning of a

struggle your brother would not refuse to follow where duty leads, even

though it should cost him his love and his happiness."

They were the most unfortunate words she could have spoken; they robbed

the young Prince of all self-control. He laughed out bitterly.

"Oh, \_his\_ risk would be small; but it might easily cost \_me\_ both if I

were to go away and leave you to your unbounded admiration of him and

his sense of duty. Uncle, I ask permission to put off my journey, only

for three days, and if you refuse me, I shall take it. I know that

nothing decisive will be done at the first, and I shall be there in

time enough for all the preparatory movements."

The Princess would have interposed, but the Count held her back. He

stepped up to his nephew with an air of authority.

"That is for me to decide, and not for you. Our departure has been

fixed for today. I consider it necessary, and with that all is said. If

I have to submit each of my orders to your approval, or to make them

subservient to your jealous caprices, it will be better that you should

not go with me at all. I exact from you the obedience you have sworn to

your leader. You will either follow me this very hour or, take my word

for it, I will exclude you from every post where I have power to

command. You have the choice."

"He will follow you, Bronislaus," said the Princess, with sombre

earnest. "He will follow you, or he will cease to be my son. Decide,

Leo. Your uncle will keep his word."

Leo stood battling with himself. His uncle's words, his mother's

imperious looks, would probably have remained powerless in presence of

his jealousy, now so violently aroused; but he saw that Wanda shrank

from him. He knew that by staying he should incur her contempt, and

that thought turned the scale. He rushed to her, and took her hand.

"I will go," he gasped; "but promise me that you will avoid Wilicza

during my absence, and only see my mother at Rakowicz--above all, that

you will keep at a distance from Waldemar."

"I should have done that without any promise," replied Wanda, more

gently. "You forget that it was my refusal to remain at Wilicza which

led to this outburst of most groundless jealousy on your part."

Leo drew a breath of relief at the thought. Yes, it was true. She had

refused, peremptorily refused to remain under the same roof with his

brother.

"You should have spoken more convincingly," he said, in a calmer tone.

"Perhaps I may one day apologise for having wounded you--I cannot now,

Wanda"--he pressed her hand convulsively in his. "I do not believe you

could ever be guilty of such treason to me, to us all, as to love this

Waldemar, our foe, our oppressor; but you ought not to feel any of this

esteem, this admiration for him. It is bad enough that he should love

you, and that I should know you to be within his reach."

"You will have some trouble with that hot-headed boy," said the

Princess to her brother in a low voice. "He cannot comprehend the word

'discipline.'"

"He will learn it," replied the Count with quiet firmness; "and now

good-bye, Hedwiga. We must be gone."

The leave-taking was short and less hearty than it would have been

under other circumstances. The dissonance of feeling called forth by

the foregoing scene prevailed to the last. Wanda suffered Leo to take

her in his arms in silence; but she did not return his embrace, though

she threw herself once again with passionate tenderness on her father's

breast. The same jarring note disturbed the adieux of mother and son.

The Princess whispered a remonstrance, a warning so grave and earnest

that Leo withdrew himself from her arms more hastily than was his wont.

Then the Count once more held out his hand to his sister, and went,

accompanied by his nephew. They put on their cloaks outside in the

ante-room; and going down, entered the carriage which was waiting for

them below. One more wave of the hand to the windows above, then the

horses moved on, and soon the roll of the carriage wheels was lost in

the distance.

The two ladies were left alone. Wanda had thrown herself on the sofa,

and hidden her face in her hands. The Princess still stood at the

window, and looked long after the carriage which was bearing her

darling away to the strife and to danger. When at length she turned

round and came back into the room, traces might be seen even in her

proud face of what the parting had cost her--only by an effort could

she maintain her accustomed outward calm.

"It was unpardonable of you, Wanda, to arouse Leo's jealousy at such a

moment in order to carry your point," said she, with bitter reproach.

"You ought to be sufficiently aware of this weakness of his."

The young Countess raised her head. Her cheeks were wet with recent

tears.

"You yourself compelled me to do it, aunt. I had no other resource;

besides, I could not divine that Leo would turn upon me in his jealous

anger, that he would insult me by such a suspicion."

The Princess stood before her, looking down scrutinisingly into her

face.

"Was the suspicion really an insulting one? Well, I hope so."

"What do you mean?" cried Wanda, startled.

"My dear," replied the Princess, in an icy tone, "you know that I have

never taken Leo's part when he has tormented you with his jealousy;

to-day I do feel he has cause for anxiety, though to him I would not

admit it, not wishing to excite him further. The tone in which you

delivered that 'rather would I die!' made my blood boil within me, and

your dread of Waldemar's contempt was very significant, so significant

that I now willingly give up all idea of keeping you at Wilicza. When I

conceived the plan, I thought I could be absolutely sure of you; now I

really could not be responsible for the issue to Leo, and I perfectly

agree with you that--it would not do to put it to the test."

Wanda had risen. Pale as death, mute with dismay, she stared at the

speaker, feeling as though an abyss were yawning open at her feet.

Giddy with the sudden shock, she leaned for support against the sofa.

The Princess kept her eyes steadily fixed on her niece's face. "I know

you do not suspect it yourself, and that is why I give you this hint.

Sleep-walkers should be roused before they reach a perilous height. If

the awakening comes too suddenly, a fall is inevitable. You have

ever set energy, an iron will, above all else in your estimate of a

man--that alone has constrained you to admiration. I know that, in

spite of his many brilliant advantages, this one quality Leo unhappily

does not possess, and I will no longer deny that Waldemar has it; so

beware of yourself with your--hatred of him, which might one day reveal

itself in a new light. I open your eyes now while it is yet time, and I

think you will be grateful to me for it."

"Yes," replied Wanda, in a voice which was scarcely audible. "I thank

you."

"Well, we will let the matter rest then; there can be no danger in it

yet, I hope. To-morrow I will myself take you back to Rakowicz; now I

must see that all necessary caution is observed again this evening, so

that no disaster may befall us on the last day. I will give Pawlick my

orders, and superintend all the arrangements myself."

So saying, the Princess left the room, firmly persuaded that she had

only done her duty, and had prevented a future catastrophe, in that,

energetic and unsparing as ever, she had torn away the veil which hid

from the young Countess the state of her own heart. Had she seen how,

on being left alone, Wanda sank down stunned and crushed, she would

perhaps have perceived that the perilous height had already been

reached at which a cry of warning may be fatal. It could avail neither

to admonish nor to rescue. The awakening came too late.

CHAPTER VIII.

Winter had come in all its bitter severity. Woods and fields lay

shrouded in a thick white pall of snow, the flow of the river was

stopped by a strong coating of ice, and over the frozen earth the

wintry storms howled and blustered, benumbing all with their icy

breath.

Another storm had been roused by them which raged more wildly than the

elements. Over the frontier the long-dreaded revolt had broken out. The

whole neighbouring country blazed with revolutionary fire, and each day

brought its own fearful tidings. On this side the land was quiet as

yet, and it seemed as though the quiet would be maintained; but

peaceful the temper of that border-district could hardly be, for a

thousand ties and connections bound it to the struggling province, and

hardly a Polish family lived in those parts which had not at least one

of its members in the ranks of the combatants.

Wilicza suffered most severely of all from this state of things. Its

position made it one of the most important, but also one of the most

dangerous outposts of the whole province. Not on light grounds had it

been chosen to play so conspicuous a part in the plans of the Morynski

and Baratowski faction. The Nordeck domain offered the most convenient

connecting point with the insurrection, the surest retreat in case of

contests near the frontier, while it was too densely wooded to allow of

the strict supervision which had been prescribed being kept up

throughout its whole extent, in spite of the numerous posts and

patrols. Much had been changed, certainly, since the young proprietor

had, on that memorable occasion shortly before the departure of Leo and

Morynski, ranged himself so decidedly on the side of his countrymen;

but from that hour a silent, bitter struggle had set in between him and

his mother, a struggle which had not even yet come to an end.

The Princess was true to her word. She yielded to him not an inch of

the ground to which she conceived she had a right, and Waldemar at last

began to realise all the consequences of his own negligence in leaving

his estates for years in her hands. If such negligence and indifference

were ever to be atoned for, he atoned for them now.

He had achieved this--that his castle should no longer be made the

centre of party intrigues; but he could not clear his whole domain in

like manner, for its allegiance had been systematically alienated from

him. The unbounded authority so long exercised by the Princess, the

complete expulsion of the German element from the administration, the

appointment of Polish functionaries to every post of any importance,

all this now bore its fruits. Nordeck was indeed, as he had said, sold

and betrayed on his own soil. The title of master was accorded him, but

his mother was looked on as mistress in point of fact. Though she was

careful not to appear openly in this light, her orders were transmitted

to her underlings and instantly obeyed, while all Wilicza banded itself

together in secret but determined opposition to those given by

Waldemar. All possible intrigues and expedients were busily employed to

thwart him; all that could be done to evade his orders, to counteract

his measures, was done, but invariably in a way which eluded detection

and punishment. No one refused him obedience in so many words; and yet

he knew that "war and resistance" was the order daily issued against

him. When in one place he compelled submission, rebellion raised its

hydra-head in twenty others; and if one day he carried his point, on

the next fresh obstacles stood in his path. He could not meet the

difficulty by discharging all the disaffected; he must have parted with

the whole staff of his officials. In some cases he was bound by

agreements, in others he would have found it impossible to replace the

men, and at the present time any arbitrary act might have been fraught

with disaster. So the young master of Wilicza was forced into a

position which was of all the hardest for him to bear, in that it gave

no scope to his energy, but demanded only quiet, deliberate

perseverance in a course once marked out; and this was the very basis

on which the Princess had built her plan. Waldemar should weary of the

strife. He should learn to know that his power could avail nothing in a

matter wherein all Wilicza was leagued together for her, and against

him. In his anger and vexation of spirit he should let fall the reins

which he had so forcibly withdrawn from her hands. Patience had never

been his forte. But once again she deceived herself in her estimate of

her son. He now gave proof of that tenacity of purpose, that inflexible

will which she was wont to consider as exclusively \_her\_

characteristic. Not once did he recoil before the obstacles and

annoyances she heaped up in his path; one by one he overcame them. His

eye and hand were everywhere; and if, on a rare occasion, obedience was

actually refused him, he then proclaimed himself the master in such a

way that the first attempt would also be the last. This conduct

certainly did not win for him the affection of his subordinates. If

formerly they had only hated the German in him, they now hated Waldemar

Nordeck personally; but already they had learned to fear, and gradually

they grew to obey. Under existing circumstances fear was the one

stimulus which might yet extort compliance.

The relations between mother and son became in this way more and more

hostile, the situation more untenable, though the same outward forms of

cool politeness were preserved. That first explanation between them had

been the only one. They were neither of them given to many useless

words, and both felt that there could be no question of reconciliation

or agreement where character and principles were so thoroughly opposed

as was here the case. Waldemar never attempted to call his mother to

account; he knew she would admit nothing of the man[oe]uvres which yet

incontestably proceeded from her, and she on her side proffered no

question relating to these matters. Life under the same roof was

therefore possible, and, viewed from without, even tolerable. Its

stings and mortifications were known but to the two concerned. Waldemar

wrapped himself in a still more impenetrable reserve. He saw his mother

only at table, and often not even there. The Princess, too, would

frequently absent herself, going over to Rakowicz to see her niece, and

staying away a considerable time. Wanda had kept her word. She had not

again set foot in Wilicza, whilst Waldemar in his expeditions avoided

even the part of the country in which her father's property lay.

More than three months had elapsed since Count Morynski and his nephew

had left. It was generally known that they were in the thick of the

strife, that the Count was playing an important part in the

insurrection, and that young Prince Baratowski had been appointed to a

command under his uncle. In spite of distance and difficulties, they

were both in uninterrupted communication with their friends. The

Princess, and Wanda also, received exact and detailed accounts of all

that happened beyond the frontier, and constantly despatched messages

to the scene of action themselves. The readiness with which every one

in those border-districts undertook the office of messenger, laughed

all obstacles to scorn.

It was about noon on a rather cold day when Assessor Hubert and Dr.

Fabian walked back together from the village where they had met. The

Assessor was fairly swaddled in wraps. He knew by his Janowo experience

the unpleasant consequences of catching cold. The Doctor, too, had put

up the collar of his cloak as a protection against the wintry weather.

The severe climate did not appear to suit him. He looked paler than

usual, and seemed worn and fatigued. Hubert, on the other hand, was

beaming with cheerfulness and satisfaction. The events now happening on

the frontier took him very often to Wilicza, or its neighbourhood. On

this occasion he was about to conduct an inquiry which would detain him

several days in these parts; as usual he had taken up his quarters at

the steward's house, and his radiant air of contentment showed that he

found them to his liking.

"It is splendid, sir," he was saying in his solemn official tones; "I

tell you, Herr Nordeck's present conduct is splendid. We Government men

best know how to appreciate it. The President is of opinion that this

cursed Wilicza would long ago have set the example of revolt here, if

its master had not stood like a wall and a rampart, holding it back. He

has the admiration of all L----, the more so that no one ever expected

he would one day show himself in these colours."

Dr. Fabian sighed. "I wished he deserved your admiration somewhat less.

It is precisely the energy he shows which draws down more hatred on him

day by day. I tremble each time Waldemar rides out alone, and there is

no persuading him to take even the simplest precautions."

"True," said the Assessor, gravely. "The people here at Wilicza are

capable of anything, even of lying in ambush to get a shot at their

enemy unawares. I believe the only thing which has protected Herr

Nordeck hitherto has been the fact that, in spite of everything, he is

the Princess Baratowska's son; but who knows how long, with their

national fanaticism, they will respect even such a consideration as

that! What a life it must be for you all up at the Castle! No one can

make out why the Princess remains. It is well known that she is heart

and soul with the Polish cause. There must have been some terrible

scenes between her and her son, eh?"

"Excuse me, Herr Assessor, these are family affairs," replied Fabian,

evading the question.

"I understand your discretion," said Hubert, who was burning with

curiosity to learn something that he could relate on his return to

L----, where people busied themselves now more than ever with the owner

of Wilicza and his mother; "but you have no idea what terrible stories

are going the round of the town. They say that, at that time when Herr

Nordeck declared himself so decidedly for us, he had come upon and

dispersed a meeting of conspirators, who held their conferences in the

underground vaults of his Castle under the presidency of Count Morynski

and the young Prince Baratowski. When the Princess would have

interfered, her son, they say, placed a pistol at her breast; she flung

her curse at him, and then they both ..."

"How can people in L---- believe such nonsense!" cried the Doctor,

indignantly. "I give you my word that no such outrageous scene has ever

taken place between Waldemar and his mother--it would be contrary to

their natures; no, far from that, they are on very--very polite terms."

"Really?" asked the Assessor, incredulously. He was evidently reluctant

to give up the tale of the pistol and the curse--it suited his romantic

fancy far better than this tame explanation. "But the conspiracy did

exist," he added, "and Herr Nordeck did put the traitors to flight--he

alone against two hundred! Ah, if I had only been there! I was over at

Janowo, where I unfortunately failed to make any discovery. Fräulein

Margaret is generally so clever, I cannot think how she could have been

so mistaken--for we know now that the secret stores of arms were hidden

at Wilicza, though Herr Nordeck can never be brought to admit it."

The Doctor was silent, and looked greatly embarrassed. The mention of

Janowo always flurried him. Fortunately, they had now reached the spot

where the road to the Castle branched off. Fabian took leave of his

companion, and the latter pursued his way alone to the manor-farm.

Meanwhile an interview was there being held between the steward and his

daughter, which at one time threatened to take a stormy turn. Gretchen,

at any rate, had assumed a most warlike attitude. She stood before her

father with her arms folded, her head with its fair crown of plaits

defiantly thrown back, and as she spoke, she even stamped her little

foot on the ground, in order to give more emphasis to her words.

"I tell you, papa, I don't like the Assessor, and if he chooses to come

languishing about me six months longer, and you speak up for him ever

so much, I'll not be forced into saying Yes."

"But, child, nobody wants to force you," said her father, soothingly.

"You know that you are quite free to do as you like; but the matter

must be spoken of and settled at last, one way or the other. If you

persist in saying no, you must not encourage Hubert any further."

"I do not encourage him!" cried Gretchen, almost crying with vexation.

"On the contrary, I treat him abominably; but it is all of no use. Ever

since that unlucky time when I nursed him for his cold, he has been

firmly persuaded that I return his affection. If I were to refuse him

to-day, he would smile and reply, 'You are mistaken, Fräulein; you do

love me,' and he would be at me again tomorrow."

Frank took his daughter's hand, and drew her nearer to him. "Gretchen,

be a good girl, and tell me what it is you object to in the Assessor.

He is young, tolerably good-looking, not without means, and he can

offer you a social position which has considerable advantages. I admit

that he has some absurd little eccentricities; but a sensible wife

would soon make something of him. The main point is that he is head

over ears in love with you, and you did not look on him with such

unfavourable eyes at first. What has set you so against him just of

late?"

Gretchen made no answer to this question, it seemed to embarrass her a

little; but she soon recovered herself.

"I don't love him," she declared with great decision. "I don't want

him, and I won't have him."

In face of this categorical refusal, her father had no resource but to

shrug his shoulders and turn away--which he did.

"Well, as you like," he said, a little annoyed. "Then I will tell the

Assessor the plain truth before he leaves us. I will wait until he is

going away; perhaps you will think better of it by that time."

The young lady looked most disdainful at such inconsistency being

ascribed to her. The thought that she had just destroyed all the

Assessor's chances of earthly happiness did not appear to disturb her

equanimity in the least; she sat down calmly to her work-table, took up

a book, and began to read.

The steward paced up and down the room, still with a shade of annoyance

on his face; at last he stopped before his daughter.

"What is that great thick volume which I see now constantly in your

hands? A grammar, I suppose. Are you studying French so zealously?"

"No, papa," replied Gretchen. "Grammars are a great deal too tiresome

for me to take one in hand so often. I am studying"--she laid her hand

solemnly on the book--"I am at present studying the 'History of

Teutonism.'"

"The history of what?" asked the steward, who could not believe his

ears.

"'The History of Teutonism,'" repeated his daughter, with infinite

self-complacency. "A book of rare merit, of the most profound

erudition. Would you like to read it? Here is the first volume."

"Don't bother me with your Teutonism," cried Frank. "I have enough to

do with Slavs and Slavism; but how did you get hold of this learned

stuff? Through Dr. Fabian, no doubt. This is all quite against the

agreement. He promised to give you some practice in French; instead of

that he brings you old rubbish out of his library, of which you don't

understand a single word."

"I understand it all," said the girl, much offended, "and it is no old

rubbish, but quite a new book which Dr. Fabian has written himself. It

has made a wonderful sensation in the literary world, and two of our

greatest scientific men, Professor Weber and Professor Schwarz, are at

daggers drawn about it and about the new celebrity just rising into

fame, that is, the Doctor; but you'll see, papa, he will be greater

than both of them put together."

"Schwarz?" said the steward, reflectively. "That is our Assessor's

famous uncle at the University of J----. Well, Dr. Fabian may think

himself lucky if such an authority condescends to take notice of his

book."

"Professor Schwarz knows nothing about it," declared Gretchen, to her

father's amazement, delivering her verdict with the assurance of an

academical judge. "He will get himself into a scrape with his criticism

of Dr. Fabian's book, just as the Assessor did with his attempt to

arrest Herr Nordeck. Naturally enough--they are uncle and nephew--it is

the way of the family!"

The steward began to take a more serious view of the matter in

question. He looked at his daughter attentively.

"You are as well versed as any student in these university stories. You

appear to enjoy Dr. Fabian's unlimited confidence."

"So I do," assented Gretchen; "but you have no idea what a deal of

trouble it cost me to bring him to it. He is so shy and reserved,

although he is such a remarkably clever man. I have had to worm it all

out of him, word by word. He would not hear of giving me his book at

first; but I grew angry, and I should like to see him refuse me

anything when I look cross at him!"

"I tell you what, child, the Assessor did a very stupid thing when he

brought about these French lessons," broke out Frank. "This quiet, pale

Doctor, with his soft voice and timid ways, has fairly bewitched you,

and he is the sole cause of the ill-treatment you bestow on poor

Hubert. You are not going to be foolish, I hope. The Doctor is nothing

but an ex-tutor who lives on with his former pupil, and receives a

pension from him. If he writes learned works the while, it may be an

amusement for him; but such an occupation brings in no money to speak

of, certainly not an assured income. Fortunately, he is too shy, and

too sensible, I trust, to build any hopes on your fancy for him; but I

consider it better that the French studies should be put a stop to at

once. I will try and manage it without giving offence. If you, who have

hardly patience to read through a novel, are now studying the 'History

of Teutonism,' and growing enthusiastic over it merely because Dr.

Fabian is the author, the matter looks to me serious."

His daughter tossed her head impatiently at this paternal reprimand,

and was about to put forward an emphatic protest, when the inspector

came in with a message. Frank left the room with him, and Fräulein

Margaret remained behind in a very ill-humour. Assessor Hubert could

have chosen no worse time to make his appearance; but, as usual, his

unlucky star brought him in now at the wrong moment. He was, as ever,

attention and affability itself; but the object of his wishes proved to

be in so ungracious a frame of mind that he could not refrain from

noticing it.

"You seem out of humour, Fräulein Margaret," he began after several

vain attempts to engage her in conversation. "May one know the reason?"

"It makes me wild to think that it is just the cleverest men who are

shy and have no self-confidence," exclaimed Gretchen, whose thoughts

were far away.

The Assessor's face brightened at these words. "Cleverest men--shy--no

self-confidence." True, he had paused that day when about to fall on

his knees before her, and up to the present time had not succeeded in

making the declaration which was expected from him. No doubt, the young

lady herself was chiefly to blame for the delay; yet she was evidently

vexed that he should show so little self-confidence. This must be

repaired without loss of time. No hint could have been plainer.

Gretchen had hardly spoken when she saw what she had done with her

imprudent words, which Hubert naturally applied to himself. She put her

'History of Teutonism' speedily away in safety from him, for the Doctor

had made her promise not to betray him to the nephew of his literary

foe, and resolved on repairing her hasty error by behaving as rudely as

possible.

"You need not keep looking at me with the eye of a detective, Herr

Assessor," said she. "I am not a conspirator, and conspiracies are the

only things in the world which interest you."

"Fräulein," replied the Assessor, with dignity, and also with a touch

of wounded feeling, for he was conscious that his glance had not been

keen as that of a detective, but languishing rather as a lover's, "you

reproach me with my zeal in the discharge of my duties, while I myself

am inclined to make a merit of that very quality. On us officials rests

the whole responsibility for the order and security of the State. To us

thousands owe it that they can lay down their heads in peace; without

us ..."

"Oh, if our safety depended upon you, we should all have been murdered

long ago here at Wilicza," interrupted the girl. "It is lucky we have

Herr Nordeck to look after us. He is better able to keep order than the

whole police department of L----."

"Herr Nordeck appears to enjoy an extraordinary amount of admiration

everywhere now," remarked Hubert, in a tone of pique. "You share in it

too?"

"Oh, certainly, I share in it," assented Gretchen. "I am extremely

sorry to tell you that my admiration is given to Herr Nordeck, and to

no other."

She cast a look of most pointed meaning at the Assessor, but he only

smiled.

"Ah, that other would never lay claim to so cold and distant a

sentiment as admiration," he protested. "He hopes to awaken far

different emotions in a kindred soul."

Gretchen saw that rudeness availed her nothing. Hubert was steering

steadily, perseveringly, straight ahead towards a declaration. The

girl, however, had no wish to listen to him; it was disagreeable to her

to have to say No, so she struck in with the first question which came

into her mind.

"You have not told me anything of your famous uncle in J---- for a long

time. What is he about now?"

The Assessor, who saw in this question a proof of her interest in his

family affairs, entered promptly into the subject.

"My poor uncle has had much vexation and worry of late," he replied.

"There exists at the University a party of opposition--what truly great

man has not his enemies?--at the head of which stands Professor Weber.

This gentleman lays himself out to gain popularity, and the students

entertain a blind predilection for him. Every one vaunts his amiable

character, and my uncle, who disdains such artifices and cares nothing

for public opinion, meets with enmity and ill-will on every side. Just

now the opposition party, for no other purpose than to spite him, are

crying up some obscure person who has just published his first work;

they have even the audacity to declare that this novice's book is

superior to Schwarz's writings on Teutonism."

"Impossible!" said Gretchen. "Superior to my uncle's writings,"

repeated the Assessor, with generous indignation. "I do not know the

author's name, nor the circumstances of the case--my uncle is not fond

of going into details in his letters--but the matter has vexed him to

such a degree, and his dispute with Professor Weber has assumed such

proportions, that he has thought fit to tender his resignation. It is,

of course, nothing but a menace; they would never let him go--the

University would suffer far too great a loss by his withdrawal--but he

considers it necessary to put some pressure on the personages in

question."

"I wish it Would take effect," said Gretchen, with such a wrathful

expression that Hubert drew back a step in his surprise, only to

advance two the next minute, however.

"It makes me very happy to see you take such an interest in my uncle's

welfare. He, too, is already most kindly disposed towards you. I have

often mentioned in my letters the family at whose house I find so

hospitable a welcome, and he would be delighted to hear that I was to

be connected ..."

He had got so far on the road again, when the girl jumped up in

desperation, ran to the open piano, and began to play; but she

undervalued her suitor's persistency. Next moment he was at her side,

listening to her.

"Ah, the 'Longings of the Heart' waltzes, my favourite piece. Yes,

music is the language which best renders the feelings of the soul; is

it not so, Fräulein Margaret?"

Fräulein Margaret thought that to-day everything had conspired together

against her. This was, as it happened, the only piece she knew by

heart, and she dared not get up and run to fetch her notes, for the

Assessor's looks plainly said that he was only waiting for a pause in

her performance to give vent to the feelings of his soul in words. So

the 'Longings of the Heart' waltzes raged over the piano to the time of

a galop. The noise was fearful, and a string broke; but no matter, such

a din must drown any love declaration.

"Ought this to be fortissimo, do you think?" Hubert ventured to remark.

"I always fancied the piece should be played in a soft, melting piano."

"I play it fortissimo," declared Gretchen, and banged on the notes so

violently that the second string broke.

The Assessor was growing rather nervous. "You will spoil this beautiful

instrument," said he, making himself heard with difficulty.

"What are pianos in the world for?" cried Gretchen; and, seeing that

the musical uproar was disagreeable to the Assessor, she raised it to

an almost incredible pitch, and deliberately sacrificed a third string.

At last her strategy succeeded. Hubert saw that he would not be allowed

to speak to-day, and beat a retreat, a little annoyed, but with

unshaken confidence. The young lady had nursed him with such touching

care when he was ill with his cold, and to-day she had spoken of

him as a remarkably clever man, and had reproached him with lacking

self-confidence. True, her waywardness defied all calculation; but she

loved him nevertheless.

When he had gone, Gretchen stood up and shut the piano. "Three strings

broken!" said she, dolefully, but yet with a certain satisfaction;

"never mind, I have managed once more to keep him from making his

offer. Now papa may settle the rest." With that she sat down at her

work-table once more, brought out her book, and plunged anew into the

'History of Teutonism!'

CHAPTER IX.

Some hours after the incidents recorded in the last chapter Waldemar

Nordeck was returning from L----, to which place he had ridden over in

the morning. He had now often occasion to go there, a much closer

intercourse being kept up in these days between the town and the

Castle. The fact that the border-forests were included in the Wilicza

territory, and that the population of those districts was strongly

distrusted, necessitated frequent conferences and consultations as to

the measures to be adopted, and the President knew too well what an

energetic supporter he had in the young proprietor not to receive him

at all times with the greatest favour. Waldemar had called on him

to-day, and had met at his house some of the higher officials and

officers of the L---- garrison. These gentlemen had one and all found

themselves confirmed in their opinion that young Nordeck was the

coldest, the most imperious of men. Any one else would have been

galled, oppressed by the hostile attitude in which he stood to his own

mother and brother; but he did not appear in the least affected by it.

He was as ever, grave, reserved; but determined and ready to abide to

the uttermost by the position he had once chosen.

Waldemar had, indeed, every reason to show this calm front to

strangers. He knew that his situation with regard to his mother, and

the terms they were on together, formed the staple of daily talk in

L----, and that the most marvellous reports were current on the

subject. He was resolved at all events not to furnish fresh food for

gossip. But now that he was alone and unobserved, a troubled look had

settled on his face, and his brow was as darkly clouded as it had been

serene before. Absorbed in his thoughts, he was advancing at a

foot-pace, when, at a meeting of cross-roads, he half mechanically drew

rein to let pass a sledge which was approaching at full gallop, and

which next instant shot rapidly by quite close to him. Norman suddenly

reared high in the air. His rider had jerked the bridle so violently

that the animal, taking fright, sprang with a hasty bound to one side,

alighting with its hind feet in a ditch covered with loose snow which

ran parallel to the high-road. It stumbled and nearly fell with its

master.

Waldemar soon brought the horse out of the ditch, and on to the main

road again; but this slight mischance seemed to have robbed him, the

bold, intrepid rider, of his composure. His usual self-possession quite

failed him as he neared the sledge, which had drawn up on a call from

the lady occupying it.

"I ask pardon if I have startled you, Countess Morynska. My horse shied

at the sudden approach of yours."

Wanda was generally not very susceptible to fear, and possibly it was

less alarm than surprise at the unexpected meeting--the first for three

months--which drove the colour from her cheeks. Her face was very white

as she asked in reply--

"You are not hurt, I hope?"

"No, I am not hurt; but my Norman ..."

He did not finish his sentence, but sprang quickly to the ground. The

horse had evidently injured one of his hind feet. He held it up as

though in pain, and refused to advance. Waldemar hastily examined the

part affected, and then turned to the young Countess again.

"It is nothing serious," he said, in the same cold, constrained tone he

had used hitherto. "I beg of you not to interrupt your journey on my

account." He bowed and stepped aside to let the sledge pass.

"Will you not mount again?" asked Wanda, seeing that he threw the

bridle over his arm, as though preparing to walk.

"No. Norman has sprained his foot, and limps very much. It will be

painful enough for him to get on at all, he could not possibly carry a

rider."

"But Wilicza is two good leagues from here," objected Wanda. "You

cannot go all that way on foot, and at a slow pace."

"There will be nothing else for me," replied Waldemar, quietly. "I must

at any rate get my horse on to the nearest village, where I can have it

sent for."

"But it will be dark before you reach the Castle."

"That does not matter; I know the way."

The young Countess glanced at the Wilicza road which, at a little

distance from the spot where they had met, disappeared into the forest.

She knew that it ran through the heart of the woods, emerging only in

the immediate vicinity of the Castle.

"Would it not be better to make use of my sledge?" said she in a low

voice, without looking up. "My coachman can take charge of your horse,

and lead him to the nearest village."

Waldemar looked at her in amazement. The proposal seemed to surprise

him strangely.

"Thank you; but you are, no doubt, on your way to Rakowicz."

"Rakowicz does not lie far out of your road," Wanda interrupted him,

hastily, "and from thence you can have the conveyance to yourself." The

words were spoken hurriedly, almost anxiously. Waldemar slowly let the

bridle drop. Some seconds passed before he answered.

"I should do better to go straight on to Wilicza."

"I beg of you, though, not to go on; but to come with me."

This time the anxiety in Wanda's voice was so unmistakable that the

refusal was not renewed. Waldemar gave over his horse to the coachman,

who had dismounted at a sign from his mistress, and instructed him to

lead it with all possible care to a certain village, and there to leave

word that it should be sent for. He then mounted the sledge, swinging

himself up into the driver's seat behind, and grasping the reins. The

place by the young Countess's side remained empty.

They drove on in silence. The offer had been so simple, so natural, a

decided rejection of it would have appeared singular, nay, uncourteous,

between such near relatives; but easy intercourse had long since grown

impossible to these two, and the unexpected meeting made their

embarrassment more marked and painful. Waldemar devoted his attention

exclusively to the reins, and Wanda wrapped herself more closely in her

furs, never once turning her head.

They were already in the beginning of March; but it seemed this year as

if winter never would give way. Before taking its departure, the cruel

season once more let loose all its terrors on the poor earth, lying

happily expectant of spring's first breath. A heavy snowstorm, lasting

through an entire day, had clothed it anew in the white shroud of which

it had so slowly and painfully divested itself. Again the country lay

rigid under its pall of snow and ice, and stormy wind and freezing cold

strove together for the mastery.

The storm with its thick drifting snow had subsided on that morning;

but it was as gloomy and cold a winter afternoon as though the month

had been December. The horses stepped out merrily, and the sledge

seemed to fly over the smooth earth; but its two occupants sat silent

and motionless, paralysed, as it were, by the icy breath of that chill

March day. It was the first time they had been alone together since

that hour by the forest lake. Dreary and melancholy as had been that

autumn evening, with its falling leaves and surging mist-visions, some

last lingering throbs of life had then quickened Nature's pulse; but

now even these were stilled. The silence of death lay on the broad

fields, stretching away on all sides, so white and endless. Nothing but

snow all around, far as the eye could reach! The distant horizon lay

wrapped in fog, and the sky was heavy with dense snow-laden clouds

which drifted slowly, lazily along--else all was numb and dead in these

wintry desert solitudes.

The road now left the open lands and turned into the woods which it had

hitherto skirted. Here in the sheltered forest path, the snow lay so

thick that the horses could only advance at a foot-pace. The driver

loosed the reins which up to this time he had held so tightly, and

their giddy, rapid flight was changed into a gentle, gliding onward

movement. The dark fir-trees on either side bowed under their load of

snow. One of the low-hanging branches brushed against Waldemar's head,

and a perfect cloud of white flakes was showered down on him and his

companion. She half-turned now for the first time and said, pointing to

the trees--

"The road to Wilicza lies all the way through a forest as thick as

this."

Waldemar smiled slightly.

"That is nothing new to me. I pass along it often enough."

"But not on foot and at dusk! Do you not know, or will you not own to

yourself, that there is danger for you in these journeys?"

The smile vanished from Nordeck's face, giving way to its accustomed

gravity. "If I had had any doubt of that, I should have been

enlightened by the bullet which, not long ago, as I was coming home

from the border-station, sped so close by my head that it ruffled my

hair. The marksman did not show himself. He was probably ashamed of

his--unskilfulness."

"Well, after such an experience, it is really challenging danger to

ride out so constantly quite alone," cried Wanda, who could not

altogether conceal her alarm at this news.

"I never go unarmed," replied Waldemar, "and no companion could protect

me against a shot fired in ambush. In the present state of affairs at

Wilicza, my personal ascendancy is the one influence which still

avails. If I show fear and take all sorts of precautionary measures,

there will be an end to my authority. If I continue to face all their

attacks alone, they will desist from them."

"But suppose that bullet had not missed," said Wanda, with a little

quiver in her voice. "You see how near the danger was."

The young man bent half over her seat.

"Was it a desire to avert from me some such peril as this which made

you insist on my coming with you?"

"Yes," was the hardly audible reply.

An earnest rejoinder was on his lips; but some sudden remembrance

flashing through his mind, he suddenly drew himself erect and, grasping

the reins more firmly, said with a rush of the old bitterness--

"You will find it hard to justify such a desire in the eyes of your

party, Countess Morynska."

She turned completely round to him now, and her eye met his.

"It may be so, for you have openly avowed yourself our enemy. It lay

with you to make peace; instead of that you have declared war upon us."

"I did what necessity compelled me to do. You forget that my father was

a German."

"And your mother is a Pole."

"Ah, you need not remind me of it in that reproachful tone," said

Waldemar. "The unhappy division of interests has cost me too much for

me ever to lose sight of it for an instant. It was the cause of my

parents' separation. It poisoned my childhood, embittered my youth, and

robbed me of my mother. She would perhaps have loved me as she loves

her Leo if I had been a Baratowski. That I was my father's son has been

my gravest offence in her eyes. If now we stand politically opposed to

each other, that is only a consequence of past events."

"Which you logically, inexorably, carry out to its extreme limits,"

cried Wanda, flashing into anger. "Any other man would have sought for

some means of reconciliation, some compromise, which must have been

possible between mother and son."

"Perhaps between any other mother and son, but not between the Princess

Baratowska and me. She gave me the choice of surrendering Wilicza and

myself, bound hand and foot, into her hands to serve her interests, or

to declare myself at war with her. I chose the latter alternative, and

she takes good care that there shall be no truce, not even for a day.

Were it not that the contest for dominion is still going on, she would

long since have left me. She certainly does not stay on my account."

Wanda made no reply. She knew he was right, and the conviction was now

forcing itself on her mind that this man, held on all sides to be cold

and unfeeling, was in reality most keenly and bitterly sensitive to all

that was painful in his position towards his mother. In the rare

moments when he disclosed his secret feelings, this subject always came

uppermost. The thought of his mother's indifference to himself and of

her boundless love for her younger son had stung the boy's soul years

ago; it rankled yet in the heart of the man.

They soon emerged from the forest, and the horses quickly resuming

their former swift pace, Rakowicz shortly afterwards appeared in the

distance. Waldemar would have turned into the main road which led

thither, but Wanda pointed in another direction.

"Please let me get out at the entrance to the village. I shall like the

little walk home, and you can go straight on to Wilicza."

Nordeck looked at her a moment in silence. "That means, you do not

venture to appear at Rakowicz in my company. I was forgetting that the

people about would never forgive you for it. To be sure--we are

enemies."

"We are so through your fault alone," declared Wanda. "No one compelled

you to act as our foe. Our struggle is not with your country or

countrymen, it will be fought out yonder on foreign soil."

"And supposing your party to be victorious on that soil," asked

Waldemar, slowly and pointedly, "whose turn will it be next?"

The young Countess was silent.

"Well, we will not discuss that," said Nordeck, resignedly. "It may

have been some secret necessity of Nature which drove your father and

Leo into the fight; but the same necessity urges me to resistance. My

brother's task is indeed easier than mine. One way has been marked out

for him, both by birth and family tradition, and he has gone that way

without the pain of making a choice, or of causing dissension. Neither

of these troubles has been spared me. It is not in my nature to

vacillate between two contending parties without giving in my adhesion

to one or to the other. I must declare myself friend or foe to a cause.

What the choice has cost me, none need know. No matter, I have chosen;

and where I have once taken my stand, I will remain. Leo throws himself

into the struggle full of glowing enthusiasm; his highest ideal is

before him; he is supported by the love and admiration of his friends.

I stand alone at my post, where possibly death by assassination, where

surely hatred awaits me, a hatred in which all Wilicza, my mother and

brother--and you, too, unite, Wanda. The lots have been unevenly

divided; but I have never been spoiled by over much love and affection.

I shall be able to bear it. So go on hating me, Wanda. It is perhaps

best for us both."

While speaking, he had driven forward in the prescribed direction, and

now drew up just at the entrance to the village, which lay before them

still and, as it were, lifeless. Swinging himself from his seat, he

would have helped the young Countess to alight; but she waved his hand

away, and got out of the sledge without assistance. No single word of

leave-taking passed her tightly closed lips. She merely bowed her head

in mute farewell.

Waldemar had drawn back. Once again the deep lines of pain showed

plainly on his face, and the hand which grasped the reins was clenched

convulsively. Her repulse evidently wounded him to the quick.

"I will send the sledge back to-morrow," said he in a cold and distant

tone--"with my thanks, if you will not decline them, as you decline

my slightest service."

Wanda appeared to be struggling with herself. She half turned as though

to go; but lingered yet an instant.

"Herr Nordeck."

"What is your pleasure, Countess Morynska?"

"I ... You must promise me not again wilfully to challenge danger as

you would have done to-day. You are right, the hatred of all Wilicza is

directed against you at the present time. Do not give your enemies so

good a chance--do not, I entreat of you."

A deep flush overspread Waldemar's face at these words. He cast one

look at her, one single look; but at that glance all the bitterness

went out from him.

"I will be more prudent," he answered, in a low voice.

"Good-bye, then."

She turned from him and took the path leading to the village. Nordeck

gazed after her until she disappeared behind one of the nearest

farm-buildings, then he swung himself into the sledge again, and drove

off swiftly in the direction of Wilicza, the road soon taking him back

into the forest. He had drawn his pistol from his breast-pocket and

laid it within easy reach; and, whilst he handled the reins with

unaccustomed caution, his eye kept a vigilant watch between the trees.

This defiant, inflexible man, who knew no fear, had suddenly grown

careful and prudent; he had promised to be so, and he had now learned

that there was one being who trembled for \_his\_ life also, who longed

to avert danger from him.

CHAPTER X.

Rakowicz, the residence of Count Morynski, could in no respect compare

with Wilicza. Quite apart from the fact that the latter property

covered ten times as much ground, and contained three or four separate

leased-off estates, each of an extent equal to the Morynski domain, the

magnificent forests, the Castle and noble park were all wanting here.

Rakowicz lay in an open country about three miles from L----, and

differed little or nothing from the other gentlemen's seats scattered

about the province.

Since her father's departure Wanda had lived on at home alone. Though,

under other circumstances, her removal to Wilicza would have appeared a

matter of course, it now seemed very natural that Count Morynski's

daughter should avoid the Castle, its master having assumed an attitude

of avowed hostility to her friends and their cause. Even the Princess's

continued stay at her son's house excited some wonder. As has been

said, the latter lady often came over to Rakowicz to see her niece; she

was there now on a visit of several days. No mention had as yet been

made of Wanda's accidental meeting with Waldemar, her aunt having only

arrived on the evening following her return from that expedition. Two

days later, the ladies were sitting together in the young Countess's

morning-room. They had just received news from the seat of war, and

still held the letters open in their hands; but there appeared to be

little in them of a joyful nature, for Wanda looked very grave, and the

Princess's face was overcast and full of care as she at last laid down

the missives from her brother and Leo.

"Repulsed again!" said she, with repressed emotion. "They had reached

the heart of the land, and now they are on the borders once more. Never

anything decisive, no success worth mentioning. It almost makes one

despair!"

Wanda, too, laid down the letter she had been reading. "My father

writes in a very gloomy strain," she answered; "he is almost worn out

with the perpetual efforts to hold in check all the conflicting

elements in his army. Everybody will command, no one will obey--there

is growing disunion among the leaders. How will it all end!"

"Your father allows himself to be influenced by the melancholy which

forms part of his character," said the Princess, more calmly. "After

all, it is natural to suppose that a host of volunteers, hurrying under

arms at the first call, cannot possess the order and discipline of a

well-trained army. Time and practice are necessary for that."

Wanda shook her head sadly. "The struggle has lasted three months, and

for every successful encounter we may count three defeats. Now I

understand my father's great emotion at parting from us; it was not

only the separation which moved him--he went without any real hope of

victory."

"Bronislaus has always looked on the dark side," persisted the

Princess. "I hoped more from Leo's constant companionship, and from his

influence over his uncle. He, as yet, has all the elasticity and

enthusiasm of youth; he looks on every doubt as to the ultimate triumph

of our cause as treason. I wish he could communicate some of his

unbounded confidence to the other--they both have need of it."

She drew her son's letter out, and looked through it again. "Leo is

happy, no doubt, in spite of everything. My brother has at last yielded

to his entreaties, and entrusted him with an independent command. He is

stationed with his troop only a couple of leagues from the frontier,

and his mother and affianced wife cannot see him even for an instant!"

"For Heaven's sake, do not put such thoughts into Leo's mind,"

exclaimed Wanda. "He would be capable of committing the rashest, the

maddest acts in order to bring about a meeting."

"There is no fear of that," replied the Princess, gravely. "He has

strict orders not to stir from his post; he will, therefore, remain at

it. But what does he say to you? His letter to me is very short and

written in haste. Yours appears to contain much more."

"It contains very little," declared the young Countess, with visible

impatience. "He hardly touches on that which to us, who are forced to

await the result here in inaction, is the one subject of importance.

Leo prefers to write pages about his love for me, and finds leisure in

the very midst of the war to torment me with his jealousy."

"A singular reproach from the mouth of his betrothed," remarked the

Princess, with a sneer. "Most women would be happy and proud to know

that their lover's thoughts were given to them at such a time."

"We are engaged in a life and death struggle, and I require deeds from

a man, not vows of love," said Wanda, energetically.

The Princess's brow grew dark. "He will not be wanting in deeds when

the occasion for them presents itself; but perhaps you think coldness

and taciturnity are their inseparable adjuncts."

Wanda rose and walked to the window. She knew at what those words were

aimed; but she could not, would not continually be made to render

account of herself to those penetrating eyes which rested on her face

with so inexorable a scrutiny, as though they would detect the

innermost movements of her being. The Princess observed towards her

niece the same line of conduct she had adopted towards Waldemar. She

had spoken openly once, and that was enough. Repeated warnings were, in

her opinion, useless as they were dangerous. Since the evening on which

she had judged it necessary to open the young Countess's eyes, no word

had passed between them on the subject then alluded to; but Wanda well

knew that every word, every look of hers was weighed in the balance,

and this consciousness often made her feel insecure and ill at ease in

her intercourse with her aunt.

That lady had meanwhile folded and laid together the letters from her

brother and her son.

"To all appearances, we may expect some fighting close to the frontier

in the course of a few days," she began again. "What Wilicza might have

been to us at such a time, and what it is!"

The young Countess turned round, and fixed her dark eyes on the

speaker.

"Wilicza?" she repeated. "Aunt, I understand the necessity which keeps

you there; but I should not be equal to the task! Any other sacrifice I

could make; but it would be impossible to me to live day by day with

any one on the terms existing between you and your son."

"No one else would find it so bearable as it is to us," said the

Princess, with bitter irony. "I bear you testimony, Wanda, that you

were right in your estimate of Waldemar. I expected the contest would

have proved an easier one. Instead of tiring, him out, it is I who am

almost ready to yield. He is more than a match for me."

"He is your son," said Wanda; "you always lose sight of that fact."

The Princess sat leaning her head on her hand.

"He takes care that I shall not forget it; he shows me every day of my

life what the last four years have done for him. I never should have

believed that he could have worked his way up with such wonderful

energy from the rough semi-savage condition of his younger days. He has

learned to control himself, and therefore he can control others in

spite of enmity and opposition. Already I find it more difficult to get

my orders obeyed when he sets his will against them, and yet the people

are as devoted to me as ever. He awes them with his indomitable spirit,

with his tone of command. They fear his eye more than they have ever

feared me. I wish Nordeck had left me the boy. I would have brought him

up for our cause. He would have been worth much to us, I think--not

merely as master of Wilicza. As it is, he belongs altogether to his

father's people, and he will maintain his place in the enemy's ranks,

though the highest offers should be made to him by our side. I know him

well enough to be sure of that. It has been a misfortune that I could

never be a real mother to him. We have both to pay the penalty for it

now."

There was something almost of self-accusation, of sorrowful regret, in

her words. The tone was quite a new one in the Princess's mouth when

referring to her elder son. Those tenderer impulses, which at rare

intervals would gain the mastery over her, had hitherto invariably been

stirred within her by love for her youngest-born alone, and even now

she put the passing weakness from her with a strong hand. Rising

abruptly, as though to end the discussion, she said in a stern voice--

"No matter, we are enemies, and enemies we shall remain. That must be

borne, like so much else."

They were here interrupted. A servant came in with the announcement

that the house-steward of Wilicza had just arrived, and begged to be

allowed to speak to his mistress. The Princess looked up.

"Pawlick? Then something must have happened. Send him in at once."

Hardly a minute had elapsed when Pawlick entered. He had been Prince

Baratowski's servant, had accompanied the family into exile, and now

filled the office of major-domo at the Castle. The old man seemed

excited and in haste; yet he omitted none of those marks of respect

with which he was wont to approach his liege lady.

"That will do, that will do," said the Princess, impatiently. "What

brings you here? What has happened at Wilicza?"

"Nothing at Wilicza itself," reported Pawlick; "but at the

border-station on the frontier ..."

"Well?"

"There have been some squabbles with the military again, as has often

been the case of late. The ranger and his men have placed every

possible difficulty in the way of the patrols, have even insulted them

at last--it nearly came to an open fight."

An exclamation of extreme displeasure escaped the Princess's lips.

"Must our plans always, invariably, be thwarted by the folly of our

subordinates! Just now, when everything depends upon diverting

attention from the station, they absolutely challenge observation. Did

I not expressly command Osiecki to keep quiet, and to hold his men in

check! A messenger must be sent over at once to repeat the order in the

most strenuous terms."

Wanda had drawn nearer to listen. The border-station, as it was

commonly called, because it was the last forester's post on the Nordeck

property and lay within half a league of the frontier, seemed to have a

great interest for her also.

"Unfortunately, Herr Nordeck has been beforehand with us," went on

Pawlick, hesitatingly. "He has twice warned the forester, and

threatened to punish him. On this last occasion he has sent him

instructions to clear out of the station, and to come over to that of

Wilicza. For the present, one of the steward's German inspectors is to

be sent to the frontier, until a substitute is found."

"And what has Osiecki done?" interrupted the Princess, hastily.

"He has positively refused to obey, and sent word to the master that he

has been placed at the border-station, and there he shall remain--if

any one wants to drive him from it he may come and try."

The importance of the event described must have been greater than would

appear. On the Princess's face were signs of unmistakable alarm.

"And what has my son determined to do?"

"Herr Nordeck declared that he would ride over himself this afternoon."

"Alone?" exclaimed Wanda.

Pawlick shrugged his shoulders. "The master always rides alone."

The Princess seemed hardly to have heard the last words. She roused

herself from her meditations.

"See that the horses are put to at once, Pawlick. You will accompany me

back to Wilicza. I must be on the spot if any events are preparing

there. Go."

Pawlick obeyed. He had hardly closed the door behind him when Countess

Morynska stood at her aunt's side.

"Did you hear, aunt? He is going over to the border-station."

"Well?" replied the Princess, "what of it?"

"What of it? Do you think Osiecki will comply?"

"No, he must not comply, come what may. His station is of the greatest

importance to us, doubly important in view of what the next few days

may bring forth. We must have people there we can trust. The madmen, to

risk losing us the post just at this time!"

"They have lost it us," cried Wanda, hastily. "Waldemar will compel

them to obey."

"In this particular case he will not use compulsion," replied the

Princess. "He avoids all acts of violence. I know that the President

himself has specially begged him to do so, and he has given his

promise. In L---- they fear nothing so much as a revolt on this side

the frontier. Osiecki and his men will yield to nothing short of force;

and to that, Waldemar will not resort. You hear he is going over

alone."

"But you will not allow that," interposed the young Countess, eagerly.

"You are going to Wilicza to warn him, to hold him back?"

The Princess looked at her niece with eyes of astonishment. "What are

you thinking of? A warning from my mouth would betray all to Waldemar,

and at once convince him that my orders are obeyed at the station, and

not his. He would then inexorably insist upon Osiecki's leaving, which

may perhaps yet be averted, which indeed must be averted, cost what it

may."

"And you think your son will submit to be thus openly defied? It is the

first time that such flagrant rebellion has appeared at Wilicza. Aunt,

you know this wild fellow, this Osiecki, is capable of anything, and

that his men are no better than he!"

"Waldemar knows it too," returned the Princess, with perfect calm, "and

therefore he will be careful not to irritate him. He has learned such

admirable coolness and prudence, there is no fear now of his being

carried away when he really desires to control himself; and in his

dealings with his subordinates he is invariably calm and collected."

"They hate him," said Wanda, with trembling lips. "They have already

fired at, and missed, him on the road to the border-station. The second

time they will take better aim."

The Princess started. "How do you know that?"

"One of my people brought the news from Wilicza," replied Wanda,

quickly bethinking herself.

"A mere tale," said the Princess, contemptuously. "Probably invented by

his anxious friend, Dr. Fabian. The poor man has, no doubt, heard an

innocent shot fired in the woods at some bird, and has taken it for a

murderous attempt on the life of his beloved pupil. He is constantly

trembling for his safety. Waldemar is my son--that will ensure him

against any attack."

"When their passions are once fully roused, that will no longer protect

him," cried Wanda, imprudently allowing her apprehensions to get the

better of her caution again. "You had given the forester orders to keep

quiet, and you see how he has respected them."

The Princess turned a menacing look on her niece. "Would it not be

better to reserve this exaggerated solicitude for our own friends? I

think it might be far more suitably expended. You seem quite to forget

that Leo is daily exposed to such dangers!"

"If we knew that it lay in our power to rescue him, should we lose an

instant in hastening to his side?" broke forth the young Countess,

passionately; "and wherever Leo may be, he is always at the head of his

troops. Waldemar stands alone against that wild unruly band of men whom

you yourself have stimulated into hatred of him, and who will not

hesitate to turn their arms against their own master if he provokes

them."

"Quite true--if he provokes them; but he will have sense enough

not to do that, for he knows the danger, which in times like ours is

not to be trifled with. Should he, notwithstanding this, risk the

venture--should he have recourse to some act of violence--the

consequences must be on his own bead."

Wanda shivered at the look which accompanied these words. "And you, a

mother, can speak such words!"

"They are the words of a deeply offended mother, whom her son has

driven to desperation. There can be no peace between Waldemar and

myself while we both of us tread the same soil. Where I place my foot,

I find him barring the way; when I attempt to exert my power, he is

there on the defensive. What plans of ours has he not thwarted already!

What have we not been obliged to sacrifice, to give up on his account!

He has gone so far that we now stand opposed as mortal enemies. He is

alone, is he?--let him bear alone, then, all that this enmity may bring

down on his head."

Her voice was very cold and hard. That touch of maternal feeling, of a

gentler emotion, which for a moment had softened it, had long since

vanished. It was the Princess Baratowska who now spoke, one who never

forgave an injury, and in whose eyes no injury could be so great as

that of robbing her of her supremacy. Waldemar had been guilty of this,

and he, least of all, would be forgiven the crime.

She was about to leave the room to prepare for her journey when her

look fell on Wanda.

The girl had uttered no syllable in reply. She stood motionless; but

her eye met the Princess's with such a look of stern resolution that

the latter stopped.

"I must recall one thing to your mind before I go," said she, laying

her hand firmly on her niece's arm. "If I do not warn Waldemar, no one

else must do so--it would be treason to our cause. Ah, why do you start

at the word! How would you describe it, if by letter or word of mouth,

through a third or fourth hand, information were conveyed to the master

of Wilicza which exposed our secrets to him? He would go under escort,

very probably; but go he certainly would, in order to find out the

meaning of the warning--why he was not to set foot in his own station,

not to speak to his own forester whom he is about to call to account

for a conflict with the patrols. It would cost us the border-station.

Wanda, the Morynskis have hitherto never had cause to repent making the

women of their house the confidants of their plans. There has never yet

been a traitress among them."

"Aunt!" cried Wanda, in such a tone of horror that the Princess slowly

withdrew her hand from her niece's arm.

"I only wished to make clear to you what is at stake. I suppose you

will like to be able to look your father in the face on his return. How

you will meet Leo's eye while your mind is racked by an anxiety you in

vain strive to conceal, I know not. You must settle that matter with

himself; but"--here the proud woman's terrible agitation broke through

the constrained coldness of her tone--"but, could I ever have dreamed

that such a blow would one day menace my son--that it would come upon

him through Waldemar--instead of favouring Leo's unhappy love for you,

I would have opposed it with my whole strength. Now it is too late for

him--and for you too--the present hour has taught me that."

The young Countess was spared an answer, for Pawlick now came in to say

that the horses had been put to. The Princess did not require much time

for her preparations. In ten minutes she was equipped for her journey,

and at once went down and entered the sledge which was waiting for her

below. She took leave of her niece briefly and hurriedly, in the

presence of the servants, and no further allusion was made to their

previous conversation; but Wanda understood the parting glance which

met hers. She laid her damp icy-cold hand in her aunt's, and the

Princess appeared satisfied with the dumb promise.

Countess Morynska went back to the morning-room, and shut herself in

that she might breathe freely once more; but relief is hard to find

when one has such a mountain load on one's heart. She was alone at

last! alone with her own thoughts, but also with her anxiety and that

strong presentiment of evil in which the mother would place no faith.

To call it forth, the instinct of love was needed, and no such instinct

had ever stirred in the Princess's heart towards her eldest son; it

came into play only when Leo and Leo's interests were concerned. Had

she known that Waldemar's life would indeed be imperilled by the

expedition, she would have said no word to hold him back, for might not

such a word have wrought injury to her party and her party's cause?

Wanda stood at the writing-table, on which lay the letters from her

father and Leo. One short warning, two or three lines hurriedly traced

on the paper and sent over to Wilicza, might prevent it all! Waldemar

would listen to the warning, whether he guessed from whom it was sent

or not; he had promised to be more prudent, and he was well enough

acquainted with the temper of the people. If, after all, he still went,

he would at least go accompanied, so that they would not dare to attack

him. He would not find it difficult to compel obedience, if once he

determined to call in force to his aid. That which had passed at the

border-station went very nigh open revolt. It would cost the master but

a word to have the forester arrested and the station garrisoned by the

troops--then he would be at peace.

And then! The Princess had taken a clear view of the case, and had

spoken plainly of what would follow. She had taken good care that her

niece should not get beyond that thought: 'and then!' Wanda had been so

far initiated into the plans of her party as to be aware that the

border-station now played the part which had been formerly destined to

the Castle--all the machinations, which Waldemar's severe edict had

banished from his home, were now carried on out yonder. There some

portion of the supply of arms still lay hidden; the point of juncture

was there, the centre whence messages were despatched, where news was

received; much therefore depended upon the present forester's retaining

his post. He knew this as well as his mistress, and the knowledge made

him determine to stay on and brave the worst.

Nordeck himself but seldom visited the solitary distant station. He had

too much to occupy him at Wilicza to bestow any special attention to

that outlying post. Evidently he was only going over now in order, by

his personal intervention, to quell a resistance such as he often

encountered, and to which he attached no peculiar importance; but

should he discover that at the forester's house his orders were openly

scoffed at, that here a systematic opposition was organised against

him, he would act, regardless of friend or foe, would go straight

forward to his aim, and would forcibly deprive his mother of this last

outpost, this last footing on his territory. Yet the discovery would be

inevitable so soon as the fact was betrayed to him that some danger

threatened him at that particular place.

All this stood out with inexorable distinctness before Wanda's mental

vision; but just as clearly did Waldemar's danger face her whichever

way she turned. She felt the most positive conviction that the bullet

which but a short time before had jeopardised his life, had sped from

the forester's rifle; that the man, whose hate and fanaticism urged him

on to an attempt at assassination, would not hesitate to commit an

assault on his master, if the latter stood before him alone, at his

mercy! And she was to let him go unwarned, to let him go, perhaps, to

his death!----Treason! Before that terrible word all her strength of

will gave way. She had always been her father's confidant. He counted

on his daughter's loyalty with absolute faith, and would have put from

him with indignation the thought that she would ever betray a word of

his secrets--betray it to save the life of an enemy. She herself had

menaced Leo with her contempt when, in a paroxysm of jealousy, he had

hesitated to fulfil his duty. Now this same duty, which had merely torn

him from his beloved's side, and carried him into the thick of the

fight, inflicted on her a far harder ordeal, the hardest of all, that

of waiting the gradual approach of a danger, which by one stroke of her

pen she could avert, of standing by silent and inactive, not lifting

her hand to make that stroke!

All these thoughts rushed in rapid succession through the young

Countess's mind, almost prostrating her energies. In vain she sought an

outlet, a way of escape. The terrible alternative stared her in the

face, look which way she would. If, up to this time, she had really

been unaware of the state of her feelings, the present hour would have

revealed it to her. For months past she had known Leo to be in danger,

had feared for him as for a near and dear relative, had suffered

anxiety, no doubt, but had borne that anxiety with a lofty composure, a

heroism equal to that displayed by his mother; but now it was Waldemar

who was in peril, and all Wanda's composure, all her heroism, was

scattered to the winds, vanquished by the mortal dread which thrilled

through her at the thought of his possible fate.

But there is a crisis in such moments of misery when the fiercest, the

most cruel anguish gives way to a sort of stunned insensibility, the

very faculty of suffering being exhausted, for the time being at least.

More than an hour had passed since Wanda had shut herself in, and her

drawn and agonised features bore witness to all that she had endured in

the interval; now there came to her one of those moments when she could

no longer struggle or despair, when she could not even think. Faint and

weary she threw herself on to a chair, leaned back her head, and closed

her eyes.

Then once more arose before her the old dream-picture which once long

ago had shaped itself mid the glow of sunshine and the murmur of the

waves, weaving its charm round two youthful hearts all unconscious as

yet of what it portended to them. Since that autumn evening by the

forest lake it had risen so often, so persistently--by no effort of

will could it be dispelled, or scared away. The day before yesterday it

had been with them again on their lonely journey through that wintry

land. It flew with them over the broad snow-fields; it glimmered out

from the distant mist of the horizon, hovered in the dense masses of

cloud which hung so low over the earth; no desolate gloom, no icy chill

could lay that fair phantom--now again it appeared suddenly before her,

as though evoked by some magician's wand, all radiant in its golden

glory. Yet Wanda had fought against it with all the passionate

earnestness, the energy of her character. She had placed distance

between herself and this man whom she was determined to hate, because

he was not the friend of her people, had sought her salvation in the

strife now so fiercely blazing between the two nations; but of what

avail this desperate battling with a superior force? Victory had

not been achieved despite of all her struggling. This was no mere

dream--she could no longer deceive herself. She knew now the nature of

the charm which had worked on her one summer evening long ago on the

Beech Holm, knew that in that hour by the forest lake the half broken

threads had again been taken up, and this time indissolubly united. At

length she recognised the treasures which the old enchanted city had

opened to her gaze for a few fleeting minutes, only to sink with them

once more into the depths. In one respect only the legend had spoken

truly--the memory of that vision was not to be effaced, the longing for

it not to be stilled. Through hatred and strife, through the distant

clang of war and the low murmur of rebellion came a sweet, mysterious

music as of Vineta's bells chiming from below the waters.

Wanda rose slowly. The fearful conflict in her mind, the struggle

between love and duty was over. Those last minutes had decided her. She

did not hurry to her writing-table, or lay a finger on her pen. There

was to be no message, no warning. She drew back the bolt from the door,

and next instant a sharp, clear ring summoned the servant to her.

Countess Morynska leaned on the table by which she stood. Her hand

trembled; but her face wore the calm of an unalterable resolution.

"And if it really comes to the worst, I will interfere," she said, with

lips which quivered a little. "His mother in her cold indifference will

let him go to meet the danger. It shall be my task to save him."

A Novel.

FROM THE GERMAN OF E. WERNER,

By CHRISTINA TYRRELL.

\_IN THREE VOLUMES\_.

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PART THE SECOND.

(\_Continued\_.)

UNDER A CHARM.

CHAPTER XI.

The border-station lay, as has already been mentioned, only half a

league distant from the frontier, in the midst of some of the thickest

plantations on the Wilicza land. The building, which was large and even

handsome, had been erected by the late Herr Nordeck at no

inconsiderable cost; but there was a desolate, decayed look about the

place, nothing whatever having been done towards its preservation or

repair, either by master or tenant, for the last twenty years. The

present forester owed his position solely to the Princess Baratowska's

favour, that lady having taken advantage of the vacancy caused by his

predecessor's death to advance one of her own supporters to the post.

Osiecki had now filled it for three years. His frequent encroachments

and somewhat negligent performance of his duties were altogether

overlooked by his mistress, because she knew that the forester was

devoted to her personally, and that she could count on him in any

circumstances. Hitherto, Osiecki had but rarely been brought in contact

with his master, and, on the whole, had followed with fair exactness

the instructions received from him. Waldemar himself came but very

rarely to the lonely, outlying station. It was only during the last few

weeks that the perpetual conflicts between the foresters and the

military stationed on the frontier had obliged him to interfere.

It was still to all appearances midwinter. The house and forest stood

laden with snow in the dim light which fell from a heavy overcast sky.

The ranger had assembled all his troop--five or six foresters under his

orders, and some woodmen. They were all standing with their guns thrown

over their shoulders, evidently waiting for the master's coming; but it

certainly did not look as though they were ready to obey and peaceably

to quit the station, as Waldemar had commanded. The dark defiant faces

of the men augured nothing good, and the ranger's appearance fully

justified the assertion that he was 'capable of anything.' These

people, who lived from year's end to year's end in the solitude of the

woods, were not very punctilious in their notions of duty, cared little

for either law or order; and Osiecki especially was notorious for the

liberty of action he allowed himself, following generally the

promptings of his own arbitrary will.

Nevertheless, they as yet preserved a respectful attitude, for before

them stood the young Countess Morynska. She had thrown back her mantle.

Her beautiful face betrayed nothing of the struggle and torture she had

gone through but an hour or two ago; it was only very grave now, and

coldly severe.

"You have brought us to an evil pass, Osiecki," she said. "You should

have been careful not to attract suspicion or attention to the station,

instead of which you quarrel with the patrols, and imperil everything

by your indiscreet conduct. The Princess is extremely displeased with

you. I come in her name once more emphatically to forbid any acts of

violence whatever, no matter against whom. This time you must make up

your mind to obey. Your ill-judged proceedings have done harm enough."

The reproach made an evident impression on the forester. He looked

down, and there was something almost apologetic in his voice as he

answered with mingled defiance and contrition--

"Well, it is done now. I could not hold back my men this time--nor

myself either, for that matter. If the Princess, or you, my lady, knew

what it is for us to lie here quiet day by day, while the fighting is

going on out yonder, to look on at the doings of those soldier fellows

and not to be allowed to stir a finger, though we have our loaded

rifles in our hands! It would wear out any man's patience, and ours

broke down the day before yesterday. If I did not know that we are

wanted here, we should all have been over yonder with our own people

long ago. Prince Baratowski is only a couple of hours from the

frontier; it would not be hard to find the way to him."

"You will stop here!" replied Wanda, with decision. "You know my

father's orders. The station is to be held, come what may, and for that

reason you are more necessary to us here than out yonder at the seat of

war. Prince Baratowski has men enough at his disposal. But now to the

main point. Herr Nordeck is coming here to-day."

"Yes, yes," said the ranger, with a sneer. "He means to make us obey,

he says. We are to go over to Wilicza, where he will have us constantly

under his eye, where we cannot lift a hand without having him behind

us, looking over our shoulders. Yes, he is a good one to command, is

Nordeck; but the question is whether just at this time he will find any

one to obey him. He had better bring a whole regiment of soldiers with

him, if he wants to drive us out of the station--else it is not certain

but the thing may take a bad turn."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the young Countess, slowly. "Are you

forgetting that Waldemar Nordeck is your mistress's son?"

"Prince Baratowski is her son and our master," the forester broke

forth; "and it is a shame that she and all of us should have to obey

this German, just because his father forced his way in among us twenty

years ago, and got possession of the Morynski estates and of a Countess

Morynska for his wife. It was bad enough that she should have to put up

with that man for years; but now the son gives her still more bitter

bread to eat--we know well enough what terms they are on. If she were

to lose him, she would not grieve much more than she did for his

father, and it would be the best thing that could happen to the whole

family. Then the orders from the Castle need not be given in secret;

the Princess would reign, and our young Prince would be the heir and

the master of Wilicza, as he should be of right."

Wanda turned pale. The unhappy position in which mother and son stood

to each other had already so made its baneful influence felt that their

subordinates could calculate in cold blood what advantages Waldemar's

death would bring to his nearest relatives, that they reckoned on the

Princess's forgiveness, to whatever extremity they might resort. There

was here something more to check and subdue than an outbreak of

momentary fury and irritation. Wanda saw her worst fears confirmed; but

she knew that by no word, no look must she betray her inward anxiety.

She was held in respect only as Count Morynski's daughter, as the

Princess's niece, and no doubt was felt that she spoke in the name of

the latter. If once the motive were guessed which had really brought

her hither, there would be an end to her authority, and she would lose

all chance of protecting Waldemar.

"Do not venture to lay hands on your master," she said, imperiously,

but as calmly as though she were actually fulfilling her mission.

"Happen what may, the Princess desires that her son may be spared, his

safety ensured at any cost. Let the man who dares to attack him look to

himself! You will obey, Osiecki--obey unconditionally. Once already you

have angered her with your disobedience. Do not attempt it a second

time."

The forester struck his gun impatiently on the floor, and there was an

uneasy movement among the bystanders who had hitherto listened to the

conversation in silence; yet no one ventured to offer opposition--no

one even murmured. The command had been sent to them by the Princess,

who was the one authority they recognised. Wanda would have gained her

end, if more time had been granted her in which to work on the men's

minds; but, hasten hither as she might, she had only been able to

obtain an advance of a few minutes on Waldemar. At this moment his

sledge drove up outside. All eyes were turned to the window. The young

Countess started.

"Already? Open the side door quickly for me, Osiecki. Say no syllable

to betray my presence here. I will go as soon as Herr Nordeck has

left."

The forester obeyed with all haste. He knew that Countess Morynska must

on no account be seen here by the master--else all their secrets would

be betrayed. Wanda stepped quickly into a small and dimly lighted

chamber, and the door was at once closed upon her.

It was high time. Two minutes later Waldemar appeared in the room she

had just left. He stopped on the threshold and took a steady look at

the circle of foresters who had grouped themselves around the ranger,

their rifles in their hands. The sight was not an encouraging one for

the young master, who came thus alone among them with the view of

reducing the rebels to submission; but his face was quite unmoved, and

his voice rang out firm and clear as he said, turning to the ranger--

"I did not announce my coming to you, Osiecki; but you seem to be

prepared for it."

"Yes, Herr Nordeck, we were expecting you," was the laconic reply.

"Armed? in such an attitude? What are you doing with your rifles? Lay

them down."

Countess Morynska's warning must have had some effect, for they obeyed.

The ranger was the first to put down his weapon; but he placed it well

within reach of his hand, and the others followed his example. Waldemar

now advanced into the middle of the room.

"I have come to ask for an explanation of a mistake which occurred

yesterday, Osiecki," he said. "My orders could not be misunderstood, I

sent them in writing; but the messenger who brought your reply cannot

have understood his errand. What did you really commission him to say

to me?"

This was going straight to the root of the matter. The short, precise

question was not to be evaded; it demanded an answer equally precise.

Yet the forester hesitated. He had not the courage to repeat to his

master's face that which he had yesterday charged his messenger to

declare.

"I am the border-ranger," said he, at last, "and I mean to remain so

while I am in your service, Herr Nordeck. I am responsible for my

station, therefore I must have the management of it, and no one else."

"But you have shown that you are not capable of managing it," replied

Waldemar, gravely. "You either cannot, or will not, hold your men in

check. I warned you repeatedly on two former occasions when excesses

had been committed. That affair of the day before yesterday was the

third, and it will be the last."

"I can't keep my men quiet when they fall in with the patrols at such a

time as this," declared the ranger, with a flash of defiance. "I have

no authority over them now."

"For that very reason you must be removed to Wilicza--there \_I\_ shall

be able to furnish the necessary authority, if yours falls short."

"And my station?"

"Will remain for the present under the supervision of Inspector

Fellner, until the arrival of the new ranger whom I had destined for

Wilicza. He must make up his mind to take your post for a while. You

yourself will stay at the Castle-station until there is peace again in

the land out yonder."

Osiecki laughed ironically. "It may be a long time first."

"Perhaps not so long as you think. At any rate, you will have to leave

this house to-morrow."

A somewhat significant movement was noticeable among the men as he

repeated his order in most decided tones, and the forester's passion

blazed up fiercely.

"Herr Nordeck!" he exclaimed.

"Well?"

"I declared yesterday ..."

"I hope you have taken counsel since then, and that to-day you are

ready to declare it was through a misunderstanding your messenger

brought me such an incredible answer. Take care what you are about,

Osiecki. I should think you must know me sufficiently by this time."

"Yes, indeed, you have taken good care that all Wilicza should know

you," muttered the ranger between his set teeth.

"Then you know, too, that I brook no disobedience, and that I never

take back an order once given. The forester's house at Wilicza is empty

at present. You will either move into it before noon tomorrow with all

your staff, or you may consider yourself dismissed from my service."

A threatening murmur rose among the men. They crowded more closely

together, their looks and attitude showing plainly that it was only by

an effort they still restrained themselves from any overt act of

violence. Osiecki stepped up to his employer, and stood close before

him.

"Oh, oh, the thing is not so easily settled," he cried. "I am no common

day labourer to be hired to-day and discharged to-morrow. You can give

me warning if you like; but I have a right to stay here till the

autumn, and so have the men I have engaged. My district lies among the

border-forests. I want no other, and I'll take no other, and the man

who tries to oust me will fare but badly."

"You mistake," replied Waldemar. "The station is my property, and the

ranger is bound to conform to my instructions. Do not insist on a right

which you have forfeited through your own misconduct. The act committed

by your men under your leadership the other day deserves a far severer

punishment than a mere removal to another post. You have insulted the

patrols; you have now gone so far as to attack them--there were even

shots fired. If you were not arrested on the spot, you may thank the

consideration in which I am held in L---- for it. It is well known

there that I have the will and, if need be, the power to keep the peace

on my estates, and that I do not care to have strangers coming between

me and those whom I employ; but some serious interference on my part is

now expected of me, and I shall respond to that expectation without

delay. You will at once comply with the arrangement I have determined

on, or before the day is over I shall offer the station to the officer

in command to serve as a post of observation on the frontier, and

to-morrow the house will be garrisoned."

Osiecki hastily stretched out his hand towards his rifle; but bethought

himself and stopped.

"You will not do that, Herr Nordeck," said he, in a low meaning voice.

"I shall do it, if there is any question of insubordination or

resistance. Decide--you have the choice. Shall you be at Wilicza

to-morrow or not?"

"No, a thousand times no," shouted Osiecki, roused now to violent

excitement. "I have orders not to stir from the station, and I shall

yield to nothing but actual force."

Waldemar started. "Orders? From whom?"

The forester bit his lips; but the unguarded word had escaped him, it

could not be recalled.

"From whom have you received orders which are in direct opposition to

mine?" repeated his employer. "From the Princess Baratowska, perhaps?"

"Well, suppose it were?" asked Osiecki, defiantly. "The Princess has

commanded us for years, why should she leave off all at once?"

"Because the master is on the spot himself now, and it is not good that

two should rule at one and the same time," said Waldemar, coldly. "My

mother lives at the Castle as my guest; but on all matters concerning

Wilicza and its management I alone decide. So you have instructions to

retain possession of the station at any price, even to resort to force

in order to hold it! There appears to be something more here than a

mere reckless act of aggression on the part of your men."

The ranger maintained a moody silence. His own imprudence had betrayed

him into what the Princess, in speaking to her niece, had stigmatised

as 'treason'--had wrought the very evil which Wanda had striven to

avert by hurrying to the spot herself. That one hasty word had

disclosed to Waldemar that the resistance, to which he had hitherto

attached no special importance, was one planned and executed under

orders; and he knew his mother too well not to feel sure that, if she

had given orders for the station to be held at all hazards--even for

the use of force in its defence in case of need--this must be the point

where the many threads conjoined which, spite of recent difficulties,

she had never let slip from her experienced hands.

"No matter," he began again. "We will not discuss the past. To-morrow

the border-station will be in other hands. We can settle all that

remains to be settled between us at Wilicza. Till to-morrow, then."

He moved as though to go; but Osiecki barred his way. The forester had

snatched up his rifle, and now held it in an apparently negligent

fashion which was yet significant enough.

"I think we had better settle our accounts on the spot, Herr Nordeck.

Once for all, I shall not leave my station to move to Wilicza or

anywhere else, and you yourself don't stir from this room until you

have recalled your words--not one step."

He would have signed to his confederates, but no sign was needed. As at

a word of command, each man had grasped his rifle, and in an instant

the young master was surrounded. Dark, threatening faces glowered at

him on all sides, faces which said plainly that the men who owned them

would recoil before no act of violence, and the whole man[oe]uvre was

so neatly, so promptly executed, it must necessarily have been

concerted beforehand. Perhaps at this moment Waldemar may have

regretted coming alone; but he preserved all his coolness and presence

of mind.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Am I to take this for a menace?"

"Take it for what you will," cried the forester, fiercely; "but you

will not stir from this spot without first revoking your orders. It is

for us now to say 'Take your choice.' Beware what you do. You are not

bullet proof."

"Perhaps you have already put that to the test?" Waldemar turned a

searching look on the speaker. "Who despatched that ball after me the

last time I rode home from this place?"

A glance of deadly hatred darting from Osiecki's eyes was his only

answer.

"I have another ball here in the barrel, and each of my men is provided

in like manner"--he grasped the weapon more firmly. "If you care to

make the experiment, you will find us ready. Now, short and sweet. Give

us your word that we shall remain at the station unmolested, that no

soldier shall set foot in it--your word of honour, which is generally

thought by such as you to be more binding than any written promise,

or ..."

"Or?"

"You do not leave this place alive," concluded the forester, trembling

with fury and excitement.

Promptly, almost tumultuously, the others ratified the threat. They

crowded nearer. Six barrels, ominously raised, lent weight to Osiecki's

words--but in vain. Not a muscle of Waldemar's face moved as he turned

slowly, and looked round the circle. He stood in the midst of the

rebellious band, cool and collected, as though he were holding the most

peaceful conference with his subordinates. He only knitted his brow

more closely, and folded his arms with imperturbable and superior calm.

"You are fools!" he returned, in a half-contemptuous voice. "You

altogether forget what consequences you would draw down on yourselves.

You are lost if you lay hands on me. Discovery would be inevitable."

"Supposing we waited for it," sneered the forester. "What do you think

we are so near the frontier for? In half an hour we should be over it

and out yonder in the thick of the fight, where no one would ask what

game we might have brought down here with our rifles. Any way, we are

sick of lying here on the quiet, without ever striking a blow for the

cause; so, for the last time, will you give us your word of honour?"

"No," said the young man, neither moving nor averting his eyes from the

speaker.

"Reflect, Herr Nordeck." Osiecki's voice was almost choked with rage.

"Reflect, while there is yet time."

With two rapid strides Waldemar gained the wall, where, at least, he

would be covered in the rear.

"No, I say; and since we have gone so far"--he drew a revolver from his

breast-pocket, and pointed it at his assailants--"reflect yourselves

before you show fight. A couple of you will pay for the murderous

attack with their lives. My aim is as sure as yours."

At this the long pent-up storm broke loose. A wild tumult arose;

execrations, curses, threats burst from the infuriated men. More than

one among them laid his finger on the trigger, and Osiecki had raised

his hand to give the signal for a general assault when the side door

was hastily pushed open, and next instant Wanda stood by the side of

him they already looked on as their prey.

Her unexpected appearance warded off the worst--for a short space, at

least. The foresters paused on seeing Countess Morynska by their

master's side, so near to him that any attack on their enemy must

endanger her also. Waldemar, for his part, stood for one moment utterly

perplexed and amazed. Her sudden advent was inexplicable to him; then,

in an instant, the truth flashed through his mind. Wanda's death-like

pallor, the expression of desperate energy with which she took her

place at his side, told him that she had been aware of his danger, and

that she was there for his sake.

The peril was too imminent to leave them time for any explanation, for

the exchange of a single word. Wanda had at once turned to the

aggressors and was addressing them imperiously, passionately. Waldemar,

who knew but little Polish, who was but just beginning to familiarise

himself with the language, understood only that she was issuing orders,

resorting to dire threats against his adversaries--all to no avail. She

had reached the limits of her power. Their answers came back fierce and

menacing, and the ranger stamped with his foot on the ground--he

evidently refused obedience. The short and hasty parley lasted but a

minute or two. Not an inch of ground had been given up, not a man had

lowered his weapon. The rebels, exasperated to blindest fury, were past

paying deference, or recognising authority.

"Back, Wanda," said Waldemar, in a low voice, as he tried to put her

gently from him. "There will be a fight, you cannot prevent it. Give me

room to defend myself."

Wanda did not comply. On the contrary, she stood her ground more

steadfastly than ever. She knew that he must succumb to the force of

numbers, that his one chance of safety lay in her close neighbourhood.

As yet they had not ventured to touch her--as yet no one had dared to

drag her from his side; but the moment was drawing nigh when any such

lingering scruples would give way.

"Move aside, Countess Morynska," the forester's voice, harsh and full

of evil presage, resounded through the tumult. "Aside, or I shall shoot

you too."

He raised his rifle. Wanda saw him lay his finger on the trigger, saw

the man's features distorted with rage and hatred; and, seeing this,

all hesitation, all reflection vanished from her mind. One single clear

thought remained, definite, all-absorbing, that of Waldemar's deadly

peril; and, grasping at the last resource left her, she threw herself

on his breast, shielding him with her own body.

It was too late. The report crashed through the room, and next instant

Waldemar's piece responded. With a low cry the forester fell to the

ground, where he lay motionless. Waldemar had aimed with terrible

precision. He himself stood upright and unhurt, and Wanda with him. The

rapid movement, by which she had sought to shield him, had caused him

to swerve aside from the sure direction of the deadly weapon, and had

saved both him and herself.

It had all happened with such lightning-like speed that none of the

others had had time to take part in the fray. In one and the same

moment they saw Countess Morynska throw herself between the combatants,

saw the forester stretched on the ground, and the master facing them

with uplifted revolver, ready to fire his second shot. There was a

pause of death-like stillness. For one second no one stirred.

The smoke had not cleared from his barrel before Waldemar had forced

Wanda into his own partially sheltered position, and placed himself

before her. With one glance he took in the whole situation. He was

surrounded; the way out was barred. Six loaded rifles were opposed to

his single weapon. If it came to a struggle he felt he was lost and

Wanda with him, should she again attempt to come between him and the

danger. An effectual defence was not to be thought of. Here boldness

alone could save. The boldness might prove mad, rash audacity; but no

matter, it must be tried.

He drew himself up erect, threw back with an energetic gesture the hair

which had fallen over his forehead, and, pushing up the two barrels

nearest him with his hand, stepped out into the midst of his

assailants. His stately figure towered high above them all, and his

eyes blazed down on his rebellious subjects, as though by their fire

alone he could annihilate them.

"Down with your arms!" he thundered, with all the might of his powerful

voice. "I will have no rebellion on my land. There lies the first man

who has attempted it. He who dares to imitate him will share his fate.

Down with your rifles, I say!"

The men stood as though paralysed with astonishment, and stared at

their master speechless. They hated him; they were in open revolt

against him, and he had just shot down their leader. The first, the

most natural impulse would have been to take revenge, now that

vengeance was in their hands. No doubt their intention had been to rush

upon and close with Waldemar; but when he stepped out among them,

thrusting aside their weapons with his hand, as though he did in truth

wear a charmed life--when he demanded submission with the look and tone

of an absolute and despotic ruler, the old habit of subjection made

itself felt, the old spirit of blind obedience which, without question

or demur, bows to the voice of command. With the instinctive docility

of lower natures they yielded to the force of a superior mind. They

recoiled timidly before those flashing eyes which they had long learned

to fear, before that threatening brow with its strange swollen blue

vein. And Waldemar stood before them unscathed! Osiecki's ball, which

had never before been known to miss its aim, had glanced harmlessly by

him, while the forester lay dead on the ground, shot to the heart!

There was something of superstitious awe in the movement with which

those nearest him shrank back from their enemy. Gradually the menacing

barrels were lowered; the circle round the master grew wider and wider;

the venture with which he, one man alone, had braved a sixfold danger,

had succeeded.

Waldemar turned and, grasping Wanda's arm, drew her to him. "Now clear

a path," he ordered, in the same imperious tone; "make way!"

Some of the men kept their places; but the two foremost fell back

hesitatingly and, by so doing, left free the space between them and the

door. None of the others offered opposition--in silence they let their

employer and Countess Morynska pass. Waldemar did not hasten his steps

in the least. He knew that he had only quelled the danger for a moment,

that it would return with redoubled force so soon as the insurgents had

time to reflect, to recover a consciousness of their superior strength;

but he also felt that the least sign of fear would be fatal. The power

of his eye and of his voice still held that riotous, unruly band in

check; all now depended on their getting clear of their foes before the

spell ceased to work, which might happen any moment.

He stepped out with Wanda into the open air. The sledge was waiting

outside, and the driver hurried up to them with a face blanched by

fear. The sound of shots had attracted him to the window, where he had

witnessed part of the scene which had just taken place. Waldemar

quickly lifted his companion into the sledge, and got in himself.

"Drive off," he said, briefly and hastily. "At a foot-pace as far as

the trees yonder, then give the horses the rein, and into the forest

for your life."

The coachman obeyed. He was probably not without apprehensions on his

own account. In a few minutes they had reached the friendly trees, and

now they dashed onward in mad haste. Waldemar still held his revolver

ready cocked in his right hand; but with his left he clasped Wanda's

slender fingers tightly, as though he would never again relax his hold.

Not until they had placed such a distance between the forester's

station and themselves that all fear of murderous bullets despatched in

their rear was over, did he relinquish his attitude of defence and turn

to his companion. Now for the first time he saw that the hand he held

in his was covered with blood. Some heavy drops were trickling down

from the sleeve of her dress, and the man who had faced the late danger

with a brow of adamant, grew white to the very lips.

"It is nothing," said Wanda, hastily forestalling his question.

"Osiecki's ball must have grazed my arm. I did not feel the wound until

now."

Waldemar tore out his handkerchief and helped her to bind up the

injured arm with it. He was about to speak; but the young Countess

raised her white face to him. She neither bade nor forbade him; but in

her countenance there was such an expression of mute anguish and

entreaty that Waldemar was silenced. He felt he must spare her, for the

present, at least. He only spoke her name; but that one word said more

than the most impassioned burst of eloquence. "Wanda!"

His look sought hers; but in vain. She did not raise her eyes again,

and her hand lay inert and icy cold in his.

"Hope nothing!" she said, in so low a tone that her words hardly

reached his ear. "You are the enemy of my people, and I am Leo

Baratowski's affianced wife!"

CHAPTER XII.

The event at the border-station, resulting in so serious an incident as

the ranger's death, could not long remain unknown at Wilicza, where, as

may be supposed, it caused great excitement. Nothing could have been

more unwelcome to the Princess than this open and bloody conflict.

Doctor Fabian and the steward were seized with consternation, and the

subordinates, according as they sided with the master or with the

Princess, ranged themselves in two opposite camps, and ardently took

part for and against the parties concerned. One person alone was, in

spite of its tragic termination, made happy by the startling

occurrence. Assessor Hubert, as has already been mentioned, chanced to

be staying at the steward's house at the time. He at once rose to the

height of the situation. The necessary enquiry which followed brought

him to the foreground, took him to the Castle in his official capacity,

compelled Herr Nordeck to enter into personal communication with

him--all things for which Hubert had long sighed, but for which he had

hitherto sighed in vain.

Waldemar had informed him with all brevity that, driven by the

necessity of self-defence, he had shot down the forester Osiecki, the

latter having made a murderous assault upon his person. He had at the

same time begged the official to take suitable measures for a clear

notification of these circumstances to the authorities at L----,

declaring himself ready to undergo any examination, and the

representative of the L---- police grew great in the sphere thus opened

to his activity. He rushed with overwhelming zeal into the inquiry, the

conduct of which devolved on him, and made the most wonderful

preparations for its prosecution. Unfortunately, the result of all his

efforts was small. He was naturally desirous, in the first place, to

interrogate all the foresters employed on the station. As witnesses of

the occurrence their evidence was of the greatest value; but next day

the house was found empty and deserted. The men had preferred to evade

any judicial intricacies by putting into execution a long cherished

design and escaping in the night across the frontier. Their thorough

knowledge of the country made it easy for them to effect their purpose,

in spite of the sharp watch kept up on either side. They had doubtless

joined the insurgent troops, with whose position they were well

acquainted, and were thus beyond the reach of the law which, as

personified in Assessor Hubert, stretched forth its arm so longingly

after them. Hubert was inconsolable.

"They have gone!" said he to the steward, in a lamentable voice. "They

have every one of them taken to their heels. There is not a single man

of them left."

"I could have told you that beforehand," said Frank. "Under the

circumstances, it was the best thing the fellows could do. Out yonder

they are safe from an enquiry which might possibly have shown them up

in their true light as accomplices."

"But I wanted to examine them," cried the Assessor, indignantly; "I

wanted to take them all into custody."

"It was just on that account they preferred to make themselves scarce;

and to be candid, I am glad it has happened so. It was always a danger

to us to have that wild lot out on the frontier; now we are free from

them without more disturbance. They will hardly come back again, so let

them run. Herr Nordeck does not want much fuss made about the

business."

"Herr Nordeck's wishes cannot be consulted in this case," declared

Hubert, in his most solemn official tones. "He must incline before the

majesty of the law, which demands the strictest enquiry, irrespective

of persons. There can, of course, be no doubt as to his conduct on the

occasion. He acted in self-defence, and only returned the ranger's

fire. His declaration to this effect is corroborated by the coachman's

evidence, by the foresters' flight, and by the general aspect of the

case. He will merely be subjected to an examination or two, and then be

absolved from all blame. But there are very different matters in

question here. We have to do with an insurrection, with an undoubted

conspiracy ..."

The steward sprang to his feet. "For Heaven's sake, don't begin with

that again!"

"With a conspiracy," repeated Hubert, paying no heed to the

interruption. "Yes, Herr Frank, it was such--all the circumstances of

the case tend to prove it."

"Nonsense!" cried the steward, shortly. "It was a revolt against their

employer, a personal affair, and nothing else. Deeds of violence were

the order of the day with Osiecki and his men, and the Princess closed

her eyes to all their misdoings, because she and her orders were held

in absolute respect. That rough set owned no authority but hers; and

when Herr Nordeck tried to enlighten them and show them \_he\_ was

master, they took to their rifles. Any other man in his place would

have been lost, but his energy and presence of mind saved him. He shot

down that rascal Osiecki without more ado, and his promptness had such

an effect on the others that not one of them dared move a finger. The

whole thing is as simple and clear as it can possibly be, and what

there is in it to put you on the conspiracy track again, I can't

conceive."

"And how do you account for Countess Morynska's presence there?"

demanded the Assessor, with as much triumph as though he had convicted

an accused person of some crime. "What was the Countess doing at the

forester's station, which lies six miles from Rakowicz, and belongs to

the Wilicza property? We know the part both she and the Princess have

taken in the present movement. In this confounded country the women are

the most dangerous of all. They know everything, manage everything; the

whole political network of intrigues is woven by their hands, and

Countess Morynska is her father's true daughter, her aunt's most

proficient pupil. Her presence at the station is proof enough of a

conspiracy, proof clear as day! She hates her cousin with all the

fanaticism of her people; it was she, and she alone, who planned this

murderous surprise. That was why she appeared so suddenly among them,

in the midst of the tumult, as though she had risen from the ground;

that was why she tried to tear the revolver from Herr Nordeck's hand

when he levelled it at Osiecki. She urged and stimulated the ranger and

his men on to attack their master. But this Waldemar does not do

things by halves! Not only did he subdue the mutiny, but he took the

arch-instigator into safe custody, and brought her away with him by

force to Wilicza. In spite of her struggles and resistance, he dragged

his treacherous cousin out from the midst of her partisans, lifted her

into the sledge, and drove off as for the very life. Just imagine,

during the whole journey he never once addressed her--not a syllable

did they exchange; but he never loosed his hold on her hand for an

instant. He was determined to frustrate any attempt at flight. I am

fully informed of it all. I have examined the coachman minutely on the

subject ..."

"Yes, you were examining him for three mortal hours, until the poor

fellow lost his head, and said yes to everything," interrupted the

steward. "From his post outside the window he could not make out all

the details of what was passing. He could only see an angry crowd, in

the midst of which stood his master and Countess Morynska. Then came

the two shots, and by his own confession he at once rushed off to his

horse in the greatest alarm. You put all the rest in his mouth. Herr

Nordeck's deposition is the only reliable one."

The Assessor looked greatly offended. He felt very much inclined

to assume all the dignity of his office as representative of the

L---- police, whose proceedings were thus lightly esteemed and

criticised in his; but he bethought himself in time that it was his

father-in-law elect who was taking the liberty of setting him right,

and such things must be tolerated and passed over, in consideration of

their future close relationship. It was a sad pity, though, that the

steward should not feel a more becoming respect for his son-in-law's

infallible instinct in all official matters! Hubert gulped down his

annoyance and only replied, in rather an irritated tone--

"Herr Nordeck is giving himself sovereign airs as usual. He vouchsafed

me the information in as laconic a manner as possible; he would enter

into no particulars, and refused point-blank when I expressed a wish to

put some questions to Countess Morynska, alleging as a pretext that his

cousin was unwell. Then he takes upon himself to give orders and make

arrangements, exactly as if I were not there; and behaves as though no

one but he had a word to say in the business. He would hush it up

altogether if he could. 'Herr Nordeck,' said I to him, 'you are

completely in error in regarding this occurrence merely as an explosion

of private hatred. The question lies far deeper. \_I\_ can see through

it. It was a planned and premeditated insurrection, a prematurely

developed conspiracy, directed against you, no doubt, in the first

instance, but which had far wider aims in view. It was a conspiracy

against order, against law, against the Government. We must sift this

matter thoroughly; we must take all necessary measures.' What

do you think he replied? 'Herr Assessor, you are completely in

error in attributing the importance of a State conspiracy to an

ill--conditioned fellow's violent assault on me. There is no end to be

gained by your enquiry, now that all the men concerned have taken

flight; and in the utter failure of traitors and conspirators you would

be obliged to fall back on Dr. Fabian and myself, as happened to you on

a previous occasion. It is in your own interest, therefore, that I must

beg of you to moderate your zeal. I have provided you with the

necessary material for your reports to L----. As to any disturbance of

law or order here at Wilicza, you need feel no anxiety on that score. I

imagine that I alone should be equal to any emergency which might

arise.' With that he made me a cold majestic bow, and turned on his

heel."

The steward laughed. "He has got that from his mother. I know the

style. Princess Baratowska has often nearly driven me wild with it. No

just anger, no consciousness of being in the right will avail a man

against that grand, calm way of theirs. It is a peculiar form of

superiority, which is imposing in spite of everything, and in which

Prince Leo, for instance, is altogether deficient. He allows his hasty

temper to get the better of him continually. It is only the elder son

who has inherited this trait; at such times one might fancy his mother

herself was there before one, though he is little enough like her in a

general way. But Herr Nordeck is right in this. Moderate your zeal. It

has brought you into trouble once already."

"Such is my fate," said the Assessor, resignedly. "With the noblest

aims, with unwearying devotion, and the most ardent zeal for the

welfare of the State, I earn nothing but ingratitude, misconstruction,

and neglect. I persist in my opinion. It was a conspiracy. I had

unearthed one at last, and now it slips through my fingers. Osiecki is

dead, his men have fled, no confession can be extracted from Countess

Morynska. If only I had gone over to the station yesterday! This

morning I found it empty. It is my destiny ever to arrive too late!"

The steward cleared his throat in a marked manner. He thought he would

take advantage of Hubert's elegiac humour to bring the conversation

round to the subject of his wooing, and then and there roundly to

declare to him that he must entertain no hopes of winning his

daughter's hand. Gretchen had not thought better of it, but had

persisted in her refusal; and her father was about to crush the poor

lover with this afflicting disclosure, when Waldemar's coachman--the

same who had driven his master and Countess Morynska on the preceding

day, and who since then had been a victim to the Assessor's constant

cross-examinations--entered the room with a message from Herr Nordeck.

It was all over now with Hubert's resignation, all over too with his

attention for other things. He forgot past misconstruction and neglect;

remembering only that he had several most important questions to put to

the coachman, he dragged that unfortunate witness, in spite of all

Frank's protests, up with him to his own room, there to proceed with

the examination with renewed vigour.

The steward shook his head. He himself began now to incline to the

opinion that there was something morbid about the Assessor's mind; it

dawned upon him that his daughter might, after all, not be so far wrong

in refusing this suitor whose furious official zeal was so hard to

moderate, and whose fixed ideas on the subject of general and

all-pervading conspiracies were proof against all argument.

Just at this moment, however, Gretchen happened to be following the

Assessor's example. She too was cross-questioning, and that in a very

thorough and businesslike manner, the person who was closeted with her

in the parlour, and who was no other than our old friend, Dr. Fabian.

He had been obliged to report in detail all that he had heard from Herr

Nordeck of yesterday's event. Unfortunately he had little more news to

tell than what was already current in the steward's house. Waldemar had

told the Doctor what he had told every one else; confining himself to

the bare facts of the case, and maintaining an absolute silence with

regard to much that was interesting--with regard, for instance, to the

part Countess Morynska had played in the drama. This, however, was

precisely the point which Gretchen Frank desired to have cleared up.

Hubert's assertion that the young Countess hated her cousin, that she

had even planned the surprise at the forester's house, did not quite

approve itself to her mind. With true womanly instinct, she divined

some far different and secretly existing relation between the two, and

she grew very cross on finding that no more accurate information was to

be obtained.

"You don't understand how to use your influence, Doctor," said she,

reproachfully. "If I were Herr Nordeck's friend and confidant, I should

have rather a better knowledge of his affairs. He would have to come

and confess the most trifling thing to me. I should have trained him to

it from the first."

The Doctor smiled a little. "You would hardly have succeeded in that.

It is not so easy to train a nature such as Waldemar's in any

particular course, and communicative you certainly never could have

made him. He never feels the need of speaking his thoughts, of

unburthening his mind to another person. Trouble and gladness alike he

keeps to himself. Those about him see nothing of it, and one must know

him long and intimately, as I have known him, to find out that he is

capable of any deep emotion."

"Naturally enough--he has no heart," said Gretchen, who was always very

ready with her judgments. "One can see that at a glance. He chills the

room directly he comes into it, and I begin to shiver whenever he

speaks to me. All Wilicza has learned to fear, but not a single

creature to love him; and in spite of the friendliness and the

consideration he has shown us, he is just as great a stranger even to

my father as on the day of his arrival. I am convinced he has never

loved any human being--certainly no woman. He is perfectly heartless."

"Pardon me, Fräulein,"--Fabian grew quite hot as he answered her--"you

do him great injustice there. He has heart enough, more than you fancy;

more perhaps than that fiery, passionate young Prince Baratowski. But

Waldemar does not know how, perhaps does not wish, to show it. Even as

a boy I noticed this trait in him, this close, persistent reserve; for

years I strove in vain to overcome it, until a chance occurrence, a

danger threatening me, all at once broke the ice between us. From that

hour I learned to know Waldemar as he really is."

"Well, amiable he is not, that is certain," decided Gretchen. "I can't

understand how you can be so tenderly attached to him. You were almost

distracted yesterday when you heard of the peril he had passed through,

and something must have happened up at the Castle again to-day, for you

are quite cross and excited. I saw it directly you came in. Come,

confess to me at once. Is Herr Nordeck menaced by any fresh trouble?"

"No, no," said the Doctor, hastily. "It has nothing to do with

Waldemar--this matter concerns myself alone. It has excited me a

little, certainly; but as to being cross--oh no, I certainly am not

that, Fräulein. I have had news from J---- this morning."

"Has that scientific and historic monster, Professor Schwarz, been

annoying you again?" asked the young lady, with as warlike a demeanour

as though she were ready to throw down the glove and do battle with

that celebrated man on the spot.

Fabian shook his head. "I fear it is I who am to bring annoyance on him

this time, though I may truly say, in a manner altogether independent

of my will. You know that it was my 'History of Teutonism' which was

the original ground of contest between him and Professor Weber. This

contest has grown hotter and hotter, until at last it has passed all

bounds. Schwarz, with his hasty temper, irritated too by the importance

they attached to my book, allowed himself to be so far carried away as

to stoop to personal invective and to unwarrantable rudeness towards

his colleague; and, when the whole University declared itself on

Weber's side, he threatened to send in his resignation. He only meant,

by so doing, to show them how indispensable he was--he never seriously

thought of leaving J----; but his harsh, imperious manners have made

him many enemies among the leading personages there. In short, no

attempt was made to detain him, and what he merely intended as a threat

was accepted as an accomplished fact. He had no choice but to persist

in the resolution he had so publicly avowed. It is decided now that he

is to leave the University."

"A very good tiling for the University," said Gretchen, drily; "but I

do really believe you are capable of worrying yourself with remorse

about the business. It would be just like you."

"That is not all," said Fabian, in a low, hesitating voice. "There

is some talk of--of my taking his place. Professor Weber writes

me word that they intend offering me the chair which has become

vacant--offering it to me, a simple private scholar, who can boast of

no academic usefulness, whose only merit lies in his book, the first he

has published! It is something so unusual, so astounding, that at first

I positively could not believe it. I really could not get over my

surprise, my utter amazement."

Gretchen showed no amazement; she seemed to think it the most natural

thing that could have happened. "Well, they have shown themselves very

sensible," said she. "You are a man of much higher mark than Professor

Schwarz. Your book is far superior to anything he ever wrote; and when

you are once seated in his professorial chair, he will soon find his

fame obscured."

"But, Fräulein, you don't know the Professor; you have not read his

works," put in the Doctor, timidly.

"Never mind, I know you," declared the girl, rising superior to

argument. "Of course you mean to accept the nomination?"

Fabian looked down, and some seconds passed before he answered--

"I hardly think so. Honourable as the distinction is to me, I do not

venture to avail myself of it, for I fear I should not be equal to so

important and prominent a post. The long years I have spent in

retirement, in solitude over my books, have unfitted me for public

life, and have made me quite incapable of meeting all those social

calls upon me which such a position would entail. Finally--and this is

the principal reason of all--I could not leave Waldemar, especially now

when troubles are coming in upon him on all sides. I am the only person

with whom he can be said to be on intimate terms, whose society he

would miss. It would be the height of ingratitude on my part, if for

the sake of some outward advantages ...."

"It would be the height of selfishness on Herr Nordeck's part, if he

were to accept such a sacrifice," interrupted Gretchen. "Luckily, he is

sure not to do so; he will never consent to your abandoning for his

sake a career which must seem to you to comprise every earthly

happiness."

"To me?" repeated the Doctor, sadly. "No, there you are mistaken. I

have ever sought and found all my pleasure in study, and I looked upon

it as a special favour from Providence when, in the pupil who at one

time stood so coldly aloof from me, a true and faithful friend grew up.

That which is called earthly happiness--a home, a family--I have never

known, and am not likely now to learn. At this moment, when such

undreamt-of success has come to me, it would be sheer presumption to

covet that also. I can well afford to be satisfied with that which has

fallen to my lot."

In spite of his resignation, the words sounded sorrowful enough; but

his young listener was apparently not moved to pity. Her lip curled

disdainfully.

"You are of a singular nature, Doctor. I should be in despair if I had

to take so gloomy a view of life, to renounce all its bright side."

The Doctor smiled sadly. "All, with you it is very different. One who

is young and attractive as you are, who has grown up in free and happy

circumstances, has a right to expect--to demand all good things from

life. May they be granted you in fullest measure! It is my earnest, my

heartfelt wish; but, indeed, there can be no doubt of it. Assessor

Hubert loves you."

"What has Assessor Hubert to do with my happiness?" flashed out

Gretchen. "You alluded to this once before. What do you mean by it?"

Fabian was seized with dire confusion.

"I beg you to forgive me, if I have been indiscreet," he stammered. "I

know that the circumstance is not made generally known at present; but

the deep, the sincere interest I take in you must be my excuse, if

I ..."

"If you what?" cried the girl, vehemently. "I do believe you seriously

take me to be engaged to that stupid, tiresome Hubert, who talks of

nothing the whole day long, but of conspiracies, and of his future

grand Counsellorship."

"But, Fräulein," said Fabian, in utmost perplexity, "the Assessor

himself told me last autumn that he had good grounds for his hopes, and

that he could reckon with all confidence on your consent."

Gretchen sprang up with a bound which sent her chair flying backwards.

"There, it is out at last! But it is your fault, Doctor Fabian, your

fault entirely. Don't look at me with that astonished, frightened face.

It was you who misguided me into sending the Assessor to Janowo, where

he caught his cold. For fear of his falling ill in earnest, I took

charge of the patient myself. Ever since that time the fixed idea has

rooted itself in his mind that I am in love with him, and when once he

gets a fixed idea there is no curing him of it. You can see that by the

nonsense he is always talking about plots."

She was almost crying with vexation; but the Doctor's face grew

absolutely radiant at sight of this unfeigned indignation.

"You do not love the Assessor?" he asked. "You do not intend to bestow

your hand on him?"

"I will bestow a lesson on him such as he never had before, and send

him about his business," the young lady replied energetically, and

would have launched out into strong and injurious speech against poor

Hubert, had she not just then met the Doctor's gaze. At this she turned

crimson and was dumb.

A rather long pause ensued. Fabian was evidently striving to fortify

himself in some resolution from which his timidity shrank abashed.

Several times he tried to speak, but in vain. His eyes, however, told

his tale so plainly that Gretchen could be in no doubt as to what was

impending. On this occasion it did not occur to her to beat a retreat,

or to fly to the piano and perform on it until the strings snapped, as

she had been pleased to do when the Assessor had attempted to give vent

to his feelings. She sat down again, and waited for what was coming.

After a while the Doctor drew nearer, but shyly still, and with an

anxious face.

"Fräulein," he began, "I did indeed believe--that is, I supposed--the

Assessor's strong attachment ..."

Here he came to a stop, remembering that it was highly unpractical to

talk of the Assessor's strong attachment when it was rather of his own

that he wished to speak. Gretchen saw that he was getting hopelessly

involved--that it would be necessary for her to come to his assistance,

if he were to be extricated from the labyrinth. She merely cast one

glance at her timorous suitor; but if his eyes had been explicit

previously, it was evident that hers were no less eloquent. The Doctor

took courage all at once, and went on with astounding courage.

"The mistake has made me very unhappy. Yesterday I should not have

dared to confess it to you, though the trouble has weighed cruelly on

my heart. How could I, who was altogether dependent on Waldemar's

generosity, dare to approach you with any such words? But this morning

has brought about a change. The future which is now offered for my

acceptance has in it prosperity enough to enable me, at least, to speak

of my feelings without presumption. Fräulein Margaret, you reproached

me just now with my too pliant nature, with my tendency to give up

weakly, without a struggle. If you knew how renunciation has ever been

my lot, you would take back your words. I have gone through life lonely

and uncared for. My youth was dreary and joyless. I had to impose upon

myself the greatest privations in order to continue my studies, and I

gained nothing by them but a weary dependence on other people's

caprices, or on their good feeling. Believe me, it is hard, after the

most earnest endeavours, with elevated aims and a glowing enthusiasm

for science at one's heart, to have to instruct boys day by day in the

very rudiments of learning, to descend to the level of their

intelligence; and this I had to do long, very long--until Waldemar

enabled me to live for study alone, and so opened to me the career

which now offers itself. It is true that I meant to make the sacrifice

of it. I would have concealed my nomination from him; but at that time

I looked on you as the betrothed of another man. Now"--he had taken

possession of the girl's hand; shyness and embarrassment were things of

the past; now that the floodgates were fairly opened the words came

freely enough from his lips--"the future seems to promise me much.

Whether it has happiness in store for me as well is for you alone to

decide. Say, shall I accept or refuse, Margaret?"

He had now reached the point at which the Assessor had chosen to make

his great dramatic pause, preparatory to falling on his knees, but had

missed his effect, in consequence of the object of his adoration taking

flight at the critical moment. The Doctor did not attempt to kneel; he

even skilfully avoided that fatal pause, saying what he had to say

without hesitation or difficulty, while Gretchen sat before him with

downcast eyes, listening with infinite satisfaction; so that in a very

short time the offer was made, accepted, and even ratified by an

embrace, all going smoothly as a marriage bell.

Herr Assessor Hubert came downstairs. Having brought to an end his long

and minute examination of the coachman, which had left both him and his

victim in a state of semi-exhaustion, he determined to seek relaxation

from the strain of his official duties by giving free play to the

tenderer emotions of his heart. Poor Hubert! He had said that it was

his fate always to arrive too late. As yet, however, he little dreamed

how thoroughly his words would that day be verified. His departure had

been fixed for that afternoon; but, before leaving, he had made up his

mind to come to some clear understanding on the subject of his suit. He

would not set out on his journey without obtaining a definite and

favourable answer. In the glow of this valiant resolve he opened the

door of the anteroom so energetically, and with so much noise, that the

lovers in the adjoining parlour had time to settle themselves in a

perfectly innocent and unsuspicious attitude. Gretchen was discovered

sitting quietly at the window, while the Doctor stood near her, close

to the piano, which, to the newcomer's great relief, was closed to-day.

Hubert nodded condescendingly to Fabian. There was always something

patronising in his manner towards the Doctor, who, in his eyes, was

only an old tutor possessed of no importance but such as he borrowed

from his connection with Wilicza. To-day, with this business of his

love-making on hand, the man was actually in his way, and he gave

himself no trouble to hide it.

"I am sorry to disturb you. Practising French, I suppose?"

The tone was so nonchalant, so exactly that which he would have used to

a paid teacher, that even the Doctor's good-humour was not proof

against it. He had never hitherto found courage to show displeasure at

the behaviour Hubert had thought proper to adopt towards him, but

to-day it wounded him severely in his new dignity of an accepted lover.

He drew himself up, and said with an assured bearing which aroused in

Gretchen the liveliest satisfaction--

"No, you are wrong. We were practising a very different science."

The Assessor remarked nothing unusual; he was busy thinking how he

could most speedily get rid of this troublesome person.

"Ah, historical, no doubt!" said he, maliciously. "That is your hobby,

I think. Unfortunately it is hardly one suited to the taste of young

ladies. You will weary Fräulein Margaret, Doctor Fabian."

The Doctor was about to answer, but Gretchen forestalled him. She

considered it was high time to put a damper on the Assessor, and set

herself to the task with infinite enjoyment.

"You will have to give the Doctor another title soon," said she, with

great emphasis. "He is on the point of accepting a professorship

at J----, which has been offered him on account of his extraordinary

literary and scientific merit."

"What--what?" cried the Assessor, startled, but with an expression of

extreme incredulity. He could not believe in this sudden transformation

of the neglected Fabian into a University Professor.

The latter's good humour had regained the upper hand already, and the

thought of the double mortification which he must of necessity inflict

on the nephew of his rival and the unsuccessful suitor of his

betrothed, revived anew all his conscientious scruples.

"Herr Hubert," he began, supposing that gentleman to be already

acquainted with the recent events at the University-- which was far

from being the case--"it is very painful to me to think that your uncle

should misjudge me, as would, unfortunately, appear to be the case. No

one can more sincerely appreciate and recognise his worth than I do. Be

assured that I had not the smallest share in the controversy which my

'History of Teutonism' provoked. Professor Schwarz seems to think that

I stirred up the dispute from interested motives, and purposely

envenomed it."

A light, a terrible light, began to dawn on the Assessor. He did not

know the name of that obscure individual whom the opposite party had

glorified, by attempting to place his work on a level with, nay above,

Schwarz's writings; but he knew that the book in question was a

'History of Teutonism,' and Fabian's words left no room for doubt that

the author of that book, the intriguer, the criminal aggressor, who had

disturbed the peace of the family celebrity, now stood before him in

person. He would have given vent to his astonishment, to his

indignation in words; but Gretchen, who already felt it incumbent on

her to represent the future Professor's wife, interfered again.

"Yes, Professor Schwarz might be led to fancy so, particularly as Dr.

Fabian is nominated to succeed him in his chair at the University of

J----. You know, of course, that your uncle has sent in his

resignation?"

The Assessor fairly gasped for breath. Fabian cast a supplicating look

at his betrothed, but Gretchen was merciless. She could not forget that

Hubert had boasted but a few months ago of her favour and certain

acceptance of him. She was determined to give him a lesson; so she

played her last trump, and, taking the Doctor by the hand, with solemn

formality proceeded thus--

"At the same time, Herr Assessor, allow me the pleasure of introducing

to you, in the future Professor Fabian, the successor of your

celebrated uncle, my affianced husband."

"I think the Assessor has turned crazy," said Frank, addressing the

Inspector with a look of real uneasiness, as they stood together

outside in the courtyard. "He has just rushed out of the house, like a

lunatic, nearly running over me, and without a word of excuse or

apology shouting for his carriage. He has been so excited all the

morning. I hope this conspiracy business won't turn his head. Just go

after him, will you, and see what he is about, and if he is likely to

do any mischief."

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders, and pointed to the carriage,

which at that moment was seen rolling away at full speed. "It is too

late, Herr Frank. He is off yonder."

Frank shook his head gravely, and went into the house, where he

received an explanation of the Assessor's stormy exit, which calmed his

apprehensions on the score of that gentleman's sanity. The Castle

coachman, who was also standing before the house, folded his hands, and

said with a deep sigh of relief, "He is gone, thank God; now he can't

examine me any more!"

CHAPTER XIII.

At Castle Wilicza there reigned a dull sultry atmosphere, pregnant with

storms, which made itself felt even in the servants' quarters. Since

Herr Nordeck's return from the border-station on the previous evening

in the company of Countess Morynska, the barometer had stood at stormy

point in the upper regions of the great house--of this there was but

too good evidence. The young Countess had had an interview with her

aunt on the evening of her arrival, but since then had not left her

room. The Princess herself was but rarely visible; but when she

appeared, her countenance was such that the domestics thought fit to

keep as much as possible out of her way. They knew that frowning brow

and those tightly set lips augured nothing good. Even Waldemar did not

show his accustomed cold composure, the unruffled calm which he was

wont to oppose to the outer world at the very time when the fiercest

emotions were raging within him. There was something gloomy and

irritable in his manner. Perhaps the repulse he had twice met with from

Wanda during the day might be the cause of this. He had not succeeded

in getting sight of her since the moment when he had laid her, half

fainting from agitation and loss of blood, in his mother's arms. She

refused to see him, and yet he knew that she was not seriously ill. The

Doctor had assured him over and over again that the Countess's wound

was not dangerous, and that she would be able to leave for Rakowicz on

the following day, though he had felt it his duty to oppose her wish of

returning home at once.

The young landowner had not indeed much time to devote to such matters;

demands on his attention flowed in from all quarters. The ranger's

corpse was brought over to Wilicza, and then it was that news of the

foresters' flight was had. It was necessary that the station should at

once be placed under other care, and that measures should be taken to

insure the safety of Inspector Fellner, who had been sent over \_ad

interim\_. Waldemar was forced to order and direct everything himself.

Then came Assessor Hubert, tormenting him with his interrogatories, his

protocols, and his advice, until he lost patience, and resorted to his

mother's approved expedient for shaking off importunate persons.

Hardly, however, was he quit of the Assessor and his fancied

discoveries, when fresh claims were made upon his time and thoughts.

News had been carried to L---- of the state of affairs in the

insurgents' camp, and it was known that there would, in all

probability; be fighting close to the frontier within the next few

days. Orders had been issued in consequence by the military

authorities. The forces stationed along the border were to be

considerably strengthened, so as to guard the territory on this side

from possible violation or disturbance.

A strong detachment of troops passed through Wilicza; and whilst the

men halted down in the village, the officers, who were personally

acquainted with Nordeck, rode up to the Castle. The Princess was

invisible, of course. She had always been invisible to her son's guests

since the latter had openly declared himself against her and hers; so

Waldemar was obliged to receive the new-comers himself--whether he

were, or were not, at that moment disposed to see strangers, no one

thought of inquiring. It behoved him to show them a quiet, impassible

brow, in order that they should gain no further information on the

subject of the family tragedy than that of which they were already

possessed. They knew the rôle which their host's brother and uncle were

playing in the insurrection, the position in which the son stood

towards his mother. This was all food for daily gossip in L----, and

Waldemar was keenly alive to the solicitous care they showed to avoid

in his presence all allusion to these matters, abstaining even from any

mention of the revolt, except as connected with the latest military

movements on the German side. At last, late in the afternoon, the

detachment set out on its way again, so as to reach its destination on

the frontier before dark. Finally Dr. Fabian, the happy lover and

future Professor, appeared with his double news, for which he claimed

his old pupil's interest and sympathy, obliging the latter to take part

in another's joy at the moment when he saw his own happiness hopelessly

shattered and wrecked. It required, indeed, a nature of finely tempered

steel, such as Nordeck's, to face all this with a stoical appearance of

calm composure.

Early on the second day after the event at the border-station, the

Princess sat alone in her drawing-room. Her face told plainly that

there had been little rest for her that night. The grey, misty morning

light without was too faint to penetrate into that lofty, dim

apartment, the greater part of which was still wrapped in shadow; only

the fire on the hearth sent its restless, flickering gleams on the

carpet around, and on the figure of the Princess sitting close by, lost

in gloomy thought.

Resting her head on her hand, she meditated long and sadly. The

accounts which had reached her of the late occurrences still agitated

and engrossed her mind. This woman, whose constant rule it was to take

her stand on the domain of facts, and adroitly to shape her plans in

accordance with them, found herself for once unable to meet the

difficulties before her. So all had been in vain! The unsparing rigour

with which she had torn the veil from her niece's mind, in order to arm

the girl against a growing passion; the absolute separation lasting

through long months; the late interview at Rakowicz--all had been in

vain! The sight of Waldemar in peril had sufficed in one single instant

to scatter all other considerations to the wind. Soon after her

arrival, Wanda had told her aunt all that had happened. The young

Countess was too proud, too completely under the bias of national

prejudices, not to seek at once to clear herself from any suspicion of

what the Princess called 'treason.' She declared to this stern judge

that she had sent no warning, had betrayed no trust; that only at the

last moment, when all secrets connected with the station were beyond

concealment, had she stepped forward and interfered. How she had acted,

what she had done to save Waldemar, she was equally unable to conceal;

the wound on her arm was there to bear evidence against her.

The entrance of her son roused the Princess from all the tormenting

thoughts which were racking her brain. She knew whence he came. Pawlick

had informed her that this morning, for the third time, Herr Nordeck

had attempted to gain admittance to the Countess Morynska, and that on

this occasion he had obtained what he sought. Waldemar approached

slowly, until he stood opposite his mother.

"You come from Wanda?" said she.

"Yes."

The Princess looked up in his face, which at this moment was clearly

lighted up by a blaze of the fitful fire. There were lines of pain in

it--of pain, bitter but repressed.

"So you forced an entrance in spite of her repeated denial? But what,

indeed, could \_you\_ fail to accomplish! Well, the interview must have

convinced you that it was no prohibition of mine which closed Wanda's

door, as you so positively assumed. It was her own wish not to see you,

a wish you have lightly enough regarded."

"After what Wanda risked on my behalf the day before yesterday, I had

at least the right to see and speak to her. It was necessary for me to

speak to her. Oh, do not be afraid!" he went on with rising bitterness,

as the Princess was about to interrupt him. "Your niece has fully

justified your expectations, and has done all that lay in her power to

rob me of hope. She believes, no doubt, that she is prompted by her own

will alone, while, in reality, she is blindly submitting to be led by

yours. Those were your words, your views, which I have just had

expounded to me by her mouth. If left to herself, I should perhaps have

succeeded, have gained my end by persistent effort, as I succeeded in

getting speech of her; but I lost sight of the fact that for the last

forty-eight hours she has been exclusively under your influence. You

have represented that promise which you persuaded her into giving my

brother, which you forced from her when little more than a child, as an

irrevocable vow, to break which were mortal sin. You have so baited her

with your national prejudices ..."

"Waldemar!" exclaimed his mother, indignantly.

"With the prejudice," he repeated, emphatically, "that it would be

treason to her family and to her people, if she were to consent to

listen to me, because it happens that I am a German, and that

circumstances have forced me into an attitude of hostility towards your

party. Well, you have attained your object. She would rather die now

than lift a hand to free herself, or give me leave to do it for her;

and for this I have to thank you, and you alone."

"I certainly reminded Wanda of her duty," replied the Princess, coldly.

"My words were, however, hardly needed. Reflection had brought her to

her senses, and I trust this may now be the case with you. Ever since

the day on which you openly declared yourself my enemy, I have known

that your old boyish fancy was not extinct, but that it had, on the

contrary, developed into a passion with you. In what measure this

passion was returned, I only learned yesterday. It would be useless to

reproach you with what has happened. No recrimination can undo it now,

but you must feel that you owe it both to yourself and to Leo to

consent to an absolute separation. Wanda sees this and agrees to it.

You must submit also."

"Must I?" asked Waldemar. "You know, mother, that submission is not my

forte, especially where all the happiness of my life is at stake."

The Princess looked up with an expression of surprise and alarm. "What

do you mean? Would you wish to rob your brother of his betrothed, after

robbing him of her love?"

"That Leo never possessed. Wanda did not know her own heart when she

yielded to his affection for her, to her father's wish and yours, and

to the family plans. It is I who possess her love, and now that I have

this certainty, I shall know how to defend my own."

"You take a high tone, Waldemar," said the Princess, almost scornfully.

"Have you reflected as to what answer your brother will be likely to

make to such a claim on your part?"

"If my betrothed declared to me that she had given her love to another,

I would set her free, absolutely, unconditionally, no matter what I

might suffer through it," replied the young man, steadily. "Leo, if I

know him, is not the man to do this. He will be beside himself with

rage, will distract Wanda with his jealousy, and will inflict on us a

series of violent scenes."

"Are you the one to prescribe moderation, you who have done him the

deadliest injury?" returned his mother. "True, Leo is far away,

fighting in his people's sacred cause, hourly risking his life, and

little dreaming the while that his brother, behind his back ..."

She stopped, for Waldemar's hand was laid firmly on hers. "Mother,"

he said, in a voice which acted as a warning to the Princess--she

knew that with him this low constrained tone always preceded an

outbreak--"no more of this. You do not believe in these imputations

yourself. You know better than any one how Wanda and I have struggled

against this passion--know what a moment it was which unsealed our

lips. Behind Leo's back! In my room lies the letter which I was writing

to him before I went to Wanda. My interview with her need make no

change in it. He must be told that the word 'love' has been spoken

between us. We could neither of us endure to conceal it from him. I

intended to give you the letter. You alone have positive information as

to where Leo is now to be found, and you can provide for its reaching

him in safety."

"On no account," cried the Princess, hastily. "I know my son's hot

blood too well to impose such torture on him. To remain at a distance,

possibly for months, a prey to the keenest jealousy, conscious that he

is here threatened in that which he holds most dear--such a trial is

beyond his strength. And yet he must persevere, must remain at his post

until all is decided. No, no, that is not to be thought of. I have

Wanda's word that she will be silent, and you must give me a promise

too. She returns to Rakowicz to-day, and, so soon as she has quite

recovered, will go to our relations in M----, to stay there until Leo

has come back and can defend his rights in person."

"I am aware of it; she told me so herself," replied Waldemar, gloomily.

"It seems she cannot put miles enough between us now. All that love,

that desperation could suggest, I tried with her--in vain. She met me

always with the same unalterable 'no.' Be it so, then, until Leo's

return. Perhaps you are right; it will be better that we should settle

this matter face to face. For myself, I should certainly prefer it. I

am ready to meet him at any moment; what may betide, when we do come

together, is another and a very different question!"

The Princess rose, and went up to her son. "Waldemar, give up these

senseless hopes. I tell you, Wanda would never be yours, even were she

free. The obstacles between you are too many, too insurmountable. You

are mistaken if you reckon on any change of mind in her. What you term

national prejudice is her very life's blood, the food on which she has

been nourished since her earliest youth; she cannot renounce it,

without renouncing life itself. Even though she love you, the daughter

of the Morynskis, the betrothed of Prince Baratowski, knows what duty

and honour require of her; and did she not know it, we are there to

remind her--I, her father, above all Leo himself."

A well-nigh contemptuous smile played about the young man's lips, as he

replied, "Do you really imagine that one of you could hinder me if I

had Wanda's consent? That she should refuse it me, that she should

forbid me to fight on her side, and to win her--there's the sting which

nearly overcame me just now. But, no matter! A man who, like myself,

has never in his life known what love is, and who suddenly sees such

felicity before him, does not forego and put it from him so easily. The

prize is too high for me to yield it up without a struggle. Where I

have all to win, I may stake all, and, were the obstacles between us

tenfold more formidable, Wanda should still be mine!"

There was an indomitable energy in the words. The red firelight from

the hearth shone up into Waldemar's face, which at this moment looked

as though cast in bronze. Once again the Princess was fain to recognise

the fact that it was her son who stood before her with that ominous

blue mark on his brow, with the look and bearing 'of his mother

herself.' Hitherto she had sought in vain to account for the wonderful,

the incredible circumstance that Waldemar--cold, gloomy, repellant

Waldemar--could be preferred to her Leo; that he should have triumphed

over his handsome, chivalrous brother in the matter of a woman's

love,--but now, in this moment, she understood it all.

"Have you forgotten who is your rival?" she asked, with grave emphasis.

"Brother against brother! Shall I look on at a hostile, perhaps a fatal

encounter between my sons? Do you neither of you heed a mother's

anguish?"

"Your sons!" repeated Waldemar. "If a mother's anguish, a mother's

fondness here come in question, the words can only apply to one son.

You cannot forgive me for disturbing your darling's happiness, and I

know a solution of the problem which would cost you but few tears. Make

your mind easy. What I can do to prevent a catastrophe, I will do. Take

care that Leo does not make it impossible for me to think of him as a

brother. Your influence over him is unlimited, he will listen to you. I

have learned to place a restraint on myself, as you are aware; but

there are bounds even to my self-control. Should Leo drive me beyond

these bounds, I will answer for nothing. He does not show a very nice

regard for the honour of others, when he thinks himself injured in any

way."

They were interrupted. A servant brought word to his master that a

noncommissioned officer, belonging to the detachment which had passed

through Wilicza on the previous day, was below and urgent in his

entreaty to be allowed to see Herr Nordeck at once. Waldemar went out.

During the last few days he had grown accustomed to these disturbing

calls upon him, coming always at the moment when he was least disposed

to meet them.

The sergeant announced was waiting in the anteroom. He brought a polite

message and a request from the commanding officer. The detachment had

no sooner arrived at its new post than it had been obliged to proceed

to action. There had been serious fighting during the night; it had

ended in the discomfiture of the insurgents, who had fled in the

greatest disorder, hotly pursued by the victors. Some of the fugitives

had taken refuge on this side the frontier; they had been arrested and

disarmed by a body of patrols, and were now to be sent under escort to

L----. Among them, however, were a few so seriously wounded that it was

feared they would not be able to bear the transport. The captain begged

that the sick might, for the present, be lodged at Wilicza, which lay

within easy reach. The ambulance was now waiting in the village below.

Waldemar was ready on the instant to comply with the demand upon him,

and at once ordered the necessary arrangements to be made at the

manor-farm for the reception of the wounded men. He went over himself

in company of the sergeant.

The Princess remained alone. She had not heard the news, nor taken any

notice of the message which had summoned her son away. Her mind was

busy with far other thoughts.

What would come now? This question arose ever anew before her, like a

menacing spectre which was not to be laid. The Princess knew her sons

well enough to feel what might be expected, were they to meet as

enemies--and deadly enemies they would assuredly be from the moment Leo

discovered the truth; Leo, whose jealousy had at the first vague

suspicion blazed forth so hotly that it had almost seduced him from his

duty--should he now learn that Waldemar had indeed robbed him of the

love of his betrothed--should Waldemar's merely external calm give way

and his native fierceness break out again with its old violence.... The

mother shuddered, recoiling from the abyss which seemed to open out

before her mental vision. She knew she should be powerless then, even

with her youngest-born--that in this matter her influence with him had

been exerted to the uttermost. Waldemar and Leo had each their father's

blood in their veins, and however great the contrast between Nordeck

and Prince Baratowski may have been, in one thing they resembled each

other--in their incapability of bridling their passions when once fully

aroused.

The door of the adjoining room was opened. Perhaps it was Waldemar

coming back--he had been called away in the midst of their

conversation; but the step was more rapid, less steady than his. There

came a rustle in the portières, they were hastily pulled back, and with

a cry of fear and joy the Princess started from her seat.

"Leo, you here!"

Prince Baratowski was in his mother's arms. He returned her embrace,

but he had no word of greeting for her. Silently and hastily he pressed

her to him, but his manner betrayed no gladness at the meeting.

"Whence do you come?" she asked, reflection, and with it anxiety,

quickly regaining the upper hand. "So suddenly, so unexpectedly! And

how could you be so imprudent as to venture up to the Castle in broad

daylight? You must know that you are liable to be arrested! Patrols are

out all over the country. Why did you not wait till dusk?"

Leo raised himself from her arms. "I have waited long enough. I left

yesterday evening; all night I have been on the rack--it was impossible

to pass the frontier. I had to lie in hiding. At last, at daybreak I

managed to cross and to reach the Wilicza woods, but it was hard work

to get to the Castle."

He panted this out in agitated, broken phrases. His mother noticed now

how pale and troubled he looked. She drew him down on to a seat, almost

by force.

"Rest; you are exhausted by the effort and the risk. What madness to

hazard life and freedom for the sake of just seeing us again! You must

have known that our anxiety on your account would more than

counterbalance our joy. I cannot understand how Bronislaus could let

you leave. There must be fighting going on all round you."

"No, no," said Leo, hastily. "Nothing will be done for the next four

and twenty hours. We have exact information as to the enemy's position.

The day after to-morrow--to-morrow, perhaps--may be decisive, but till

then all will be quiet. If there were fighting on hand, I should not be

here; as it was, I could not keep away from Wilicza, even though my

coming should cost me my life or my freedom."

The Princess looked at him uneasily. "Leo, your uncle has given you

leave of absence?" she asked suddenly, seized, as it were, by some

vague dread.

"Yes, yes," replied the young Prince, keeping his eyes averted from his

mother's face. "I tell you all has been foreseen and arranged. I am

posted with my detachment in the woods about A----, in an excellent

position, well covered. My adjutant has the command until I return."

"And Bronislaus?"

"My uncle has assembled the main forces at W----, quite close to the

border. I cover his rear with my troops. But now, mother, ask me no

more questions. Where is Waldemar?"

"Your brother?" said the Princess, at once surprised and alarmed, for

she began to divine the secret connection of events. "Can it be that

you come on his account?"

"I come to seek Waldemar," Leo broke out with stormy vehemence,

"Waldemar and no one else. He is not at the Castle, Pawlick says, but

Wanda is here. So he really did bring her over to Wilicza like a

captured prey, like a chattel of his own--and she allowed it to be! But

I will show him to whom she belongs. I will show him--and her too."

"For God's sake, tell me--you have heard ..."

"What happened at the border-station? Yes, I have heard it. Osiecki's

men joined me yesterday. They brought me word of what they had seen.

Perhaps you understand now why I came over to Wilicza at any risk?"

"This was what I feared!" said the Princess, under her breath.

Leo sprang up, and stood before her with flashing eyes. "And you have

suffered this, mother; you have stood by looking on while my love, my

rights, were being trampled under foot--you who can control, can

command obedience from every one! Has this Waldemar subdued you too? Is

there no one left who dares oppose him? Fool that I was to allow myself

to be talked out of calling him to account before I left, to be

dissuaded from taking Wanda away to a distance where no further meeting

between them would have been possible! But"--speaking now in a tone of

bitter sarcasm--"but my suspicion was an insult to her, and my uncle

accounted my 'blind jealousy' as a crime. Can you see now with your own

eyes? Whilst I was fighting to the death for my country's freedom and

salvation, my betrothed was risking her life for the man who openly

declares himself on the side of our oppressors, who has set his foot on

our necks here in Wilicza, just as the tyrants out yonder have tried to

crush our kindred and friends. She betrays me, forgets her country,

people, family, all, that she may shield him in a moment of peril.

Perhaps she will try to protect him from me; but she had better beware.

I care nothing now which of us perishes, whether it be he or I, or she

with us both."

The Princess seized his hands, as though imploring him to restrain his

fury. "Be calm, Leo; I entreat, I require it of you. You shall not rush

to meet your brother in this spirit of fierce hatred. Listen to me

first."

Leo tore himself free. "I have listened to too much. I have heard

enough to make me mad. Wanda threw herself into his arms when Osiecki

levelled his rifle at him, screened him with her own body, made her

breast his shield--and I am still to hesitate to speak of treachery!

Where is Waldemar? Not so hidden but he can be discovered, I suppose?"

His mother tried in vain to soothe her darling; he did not listen to

her, and while she was considering how, in what manner, it might yet be

possible to avert that fatal meeting, the worst befell, which at that

moment well could have befallen. Waldemar came back.

He entered with a rapid step, and was going up to the Princess, when he

caught sight of Leo. More than surprise, horror and alarm were

portrayed on the elder brother's face at the sight. He turned very

pale, and measured the younger man from head to foot; then his eye

flashed as though with scorn and anger, and he said slowly--

"So this is where you are to be found!"

Leo's countenance betrayed a sort of savage satisfaction on seeing the

object of his hate before him. "You did not expect to see me?" he

asked.

Waldemar made no reply. His more prudent and reflective mind at once

took in the thought of the danger to which Leo was here exposing

himself. He turned, went into the next room and closed the door, and

then came back to them.

"No," he replied, only now answering the question, "and your mother

hardly expected it either."

"I wanted to congratulate you on your heroic deed at the

border-station, for you probably look on it in the light of an

exploit," went on the young Prince, with undisguised scorn. "You shot

down the ranger, and showed a bold front to the rest of the band, I

hear. The dastards did not dare to touch you."

"They crossed the frontier the same night," said Waldemar, "to join

you, probably."

"Yes."

"I thought so. When did you leave your post?"

"Are you going to put me on my trial?" exclaimed Leo. "I am here to

call you to account. Come, we have some matters to talk over together."

"Stay," commanded the Princess. "You shall not meet alone. If an

explanation is inevitable, I will be present at it. Perhaps you will

then not altogether forget that you are brothers."

"Brother or not, he has been guilty of the most shameful treachery

towards me. He knew that Wanda was engaged to me, and he did not

hesitate to decoy her and her love from me. It was the act of a

traitor, of a co ..."

His mother tried to stop him, but in vain. The word 'coward' fell from

his lips, and Waldemar started as though a ball had struck him. The

Princess grew ashy pale. It was not the frenzied passion of her younger

son which so alarmed her, but the expression on the face of the elder

as he drew himself erect. It was Waldemar she held back, Waldemar she

feared, though he was unarmed, while Leo wore his sword at his side.

Stepping between them with all a mother's authority, she called to them

imperatively--

"Waldemar! Leo! control yourselves, I command you."

When the Princess Baratowska issued a command in such a tone and such a

manner, she never failed to obtain a hearing. Even at this crisis her

sons, almost involuntarily, obeyed her behest. Leo let fall the hand he

had already raised to his sword-hilt, and Nordeck paused. The struggle

in the strong man against his old furious violence was terrible to

behold; but his mother's words had caused him to reflect a moment, and

more was not wanting now to recall him to himself.

"Leo, there have been insults enough," he said, hoarsely. "One word,

one single word more, and there will indeed be nothing left us but an

appeal to arms. If yesterday you still had the right to accuse me, you

have forfeited that right to-day. I love Wanda more than you can dream

of; for you have not, as I have, fought for years against this

passion--have not borne aversion, separation, mortal peril, only, after

all, to attain to a conviction that love is stronger than you. But,

even for Wanda's sake, I would not have given up duty and honour, would

not have deserted my appointed post, would not secretly have abandoned

the troops entrusted to me, and broken the oath of obedience I had

sworn to my leader. All this you have done. Our mother shall decide

which of us deserves the ignominious word you have flung at me."

"What is this, Leo?" cried the Princess, startled, a great fear taking

possession of her. "You are here with your uncle's knowledge and

consent? You had express leave from him to come to Wilicza? Answer me!"

A crimson flush dyed the young Prince's face, which up to this time had

been so pale. He did not venture to meet his mother's eye, but turned

upon Waldemar with sudden and furious defiance.

"What do you know of my duty? What matter is it to you? You are on the

side of our enemies. I have stood my ground so far without flinching,

and I shall be forthcoming when I am wanted; for that very reason, this

matter between us must be quickly settled. I have not much time in

which to reckon with you. I must go back to my men to-day, in the

course of an hour or two."

"You will arrive too late," said Waldemar, coldly. "You will not find

them."

Leo evidently did not grasp the meaning of the words he heard. He

stared at his brother, as though the latter had been speaking in some

foreign tongue.

"How long have you been absent from your command?" asked Waldemar

again, this time with such terrible earnest that Leo half involuntarily

made answer--

"Since yesterday evening."

"A surprise took place during the night. Your troops are routed,

dispersed."

A cry broke from the young Prince's lips. He rushed up to the speaker.

"It is impossible--it cannot be! You lie--you wish to scare me, to

drive me away."

"No, it cannot be," said the Princess, with quivering lips. "You cannot

have news of what happened out yonder during the night, Waldemar. I

should have heard it before you. You are deceiving us; do not resort to

such means."

Waldemar looked at his mother in silence for a few seconds--at the

mother who preferred to accuse him of a lie than to believe in an error

of his brother's. Perhaps it was this which made him so icy and

pitiless, as he went on.

"An important post was confided to Prince Baratowski, with strict

orders not to stir from it. He and his troops covered his uncle's rear.

Prince Baratowski was absent from his post when the night attack was

made--successfully. The leader was absent, and those who remained

behind showed themselves unequal to their task. Taken by surprise, they

offered but a weak resistance, totally without plan or method. A

terrible slaughter followed. About twenty men took refuge on this

territory, and fell into the hands of our patrols. Three of the

fugitives lie, grievously wounded, over at the manor-farm. From their

mouths I learned what had happened. All the rest are dispersed or

destroyed."

"And my brother?" asked the Princess, calm, to all appearance, but with

an awful, unnatural calm. "And the Morynski corps? What has become of

them?"

"I do not know," replied Waldemar. "It is said that the victors

advanced on W----. No news has reached us of what has taken place

there."

He was silent. There was a pause of terrible stillness. Leo had hidden

his face in his hands; a deep groan escaped his breast. The Princess

stood erect, her eyes steadily fixed on him. She panted for breath.

"Leave us, Waldemar," said she at last.

He hesitated. His mother had always shown herself cold, often enough

hostile to him. Here, on this very spot, she had confronted him as a

bitter enemy at the time when the contest for supremacy at Wilicza had

brought about an open rupture; but he had never yet seen her as she

appeared at this moment, and he, this hard, relentless Nordeck, was

seized with a feeling akin to anxiety and compassion, as he read his

brother's doom in her face.

"Mother!" he said, in a low tone.

"Go," she repeated. "I have to talk with Prince Baratowski. No third

person can come between us. Leave us alone."

Waldemar obeyed and left the room, but his heart swelled within him as

he went. He was banished in order that the mother might talk to her

son. If she were now about to let that son feel her anger, as she had

so often testified to him her affection, he, the elder, was still a

stranger, as he had ever been. He was told to go; he could not 'come

between' his mother and brother, whether they met in love or hate. A

great bitterness took possession of Nordeck's soul, and yet he felt

that in this hour he was avenged--that his mother, who had ever denied

to him her love, was punished now in her tenderest point, punished

through her darling, the child she had idolised.

Waldemar closed the curtains behind him. He remained in the next room,

so as to guard the entrance, come what might, for he was fully sensible

of the danger to which Leo was exposed. Prince Baratowski had taken too

open and decided a part in the insurrection not to be placed under a

ban, even on this side the frontier; even here condemnation and

imprisonment awaited him. He had imprudently come up to the Castle in

broad daylight. The troop, which had escorted the wounded men, was

still in the village, and at any moment a detachment, convoying the

other fugitives to L----, might pass through Wilicza. It was necessary

to take some precautionary measures.

Waldemar stood at the window, as far from the door as possible. He

would hear nothing of the interview from which he had been shut

out--and, indeed, it was impossible for any sound to penetrate the

heavy velvet folds of the thick portières. But time pressed. More than

half an hour had elapsed, and the two were still closeted together.

Neither the Princess nor Leo seemed mindful of the fact that the

latter's danger grew with every minute. Waldemar, at length, resolved

to interrupt them. He went back into the drawing-room; but paused with

astonishment on entering, for instead of the agitating scene he had

expected to witness, he found the most absolute silence. The Princess

had disappeared, and the door of her study, which had previously stood

open, was now closed. Leo was alone in the room. He lay back in an

armchair, his head buried in the cushions, and neither stirred nor in

any way noticed his brother's appearance. He seemed utterly crushed and

broken. Waldemar went up to him, and spoke his name.

"Rouse yourself," he said, in a low, urgent tone. "Take some thought

for your safety. We are now connected with L---- in a hundred ways. I

cannot secure the Castle from visits which would be dangerous for you.

Retire to your own rooms in the first instance. They will be thought

empty and closed as heretofore, and Pawlick is trustworthy. Come."

Slowly Leo raised his head. Every drop of blood had receded from his

face; it was grey with an ashy pallor. He fixed his large, vacant eyes

on his brother, seeming not to understand him, but his ear caught the

last word mechanically.

"Come where?" he asked.

"Away, in the first place, from these reception-rooms, which are

accessible to so many. Come, I beg of you."

Leo rose in the same mechanical way. He looked round the salon with a

strange expression, as if the familiar place were unknown to him, and

he were trying to recall where he was; but as his eye fell upon the

closed door of his mother's study, he shuddered.

"Where is Wanda?" he asked at length.

"In her room. Do you wish to see her?"

The young Prince shook his head. "No. She, too, would repulse me with

horror and contempt. I don't care to go through it again."

He leaned heavily on the chair; his voice, usually so clear in its

youthful freshness, sounded faint and exhausted. It was plain that the

scene he had gone through with his mother had completely shattered him.

"Leo," said Waldemar, earnestly, "if you had not exasperated me so

terribly, I should not have told you the news in that abrupt way. You

drove me beyond bounds with that fatal word."

"Be satisfied; my mother has given it me back. It is I who am the

traitor--the coward. I had to listen and be silent."

There was something most unnatural in this rigid, dull calm,

contrasting so strongly with the young man's usual fiery impetuosity.

That one half-hour seemed to have altered his whole nature.

"Follow me," urged Waldemar. "For the present you must remain at the

Castle."

"No, I shall go over to W---- at once. I must know what has become of

my uncle and the rest."

"For God's sake, do nothing so rash," exclaimed the elder brother, in

great alarm. "What, you would be mad enough to cross the frontier now,

in broad daylight? It would be neither more nor less than suicide."

"I must," persisted Leo. "I know the place where I can cross. I found

the way this morning, and I can find it a second time."

"And I tell you, you cannot get across. The sentinels on our side

have been doubled since the morning, and over the border there is a

treble line to pass. Orders are out to shoot down any one who does not

give the watchword--and, in any case, you would arrive too late. At

W---- the fate of the day has been decided long ere this."

"No matter," broke out Leo, suddenly passing from his torpor to a state

of wildest desperation. "There will still be some fighting--one other

encounter, and I want no more. If you knew how my mother has maddened

me with her fearful words! She must feel that if my men have been lost

through fault of mine, I shall have to bear all the curse, the hell of

knowing it. She should have been merciful, instead of ... Oh, God! Yet

she is my mother, and for so long I have been all in all to her!"

Waldemar stood by, deeply moved at this outbreak of grief. "I will call

Wanda," he said at last. "She will ..."

"She will do the same. You do not know the women of our people. But,

for that very reason"--a sort of gloomy triumph gleamed through the

young Prince's despair--"for that very reason, you need hope nothing

from them. Wanda will never be yours, never, even though she could

step over my dead body to you, though she may love you, and die of

her love. You are the enemy of her people. You help in the work of

oppression--that will decide your sentence with her. No Polish woman

will be your wife--and it is well that it is so," he went on, with a

deep-drawn sigh. "I could not have died in peace with the thought of

leaving her in your arms; now I am at ease on that point. She is lost

to you as to me."

He would have hurried away, but suddenly stopped, as though a spell had

fallen on him. For a second he seemed to waver, then he went slowly,

hesitatingly, to the door which led to the Princess's study.

"Mother!"

All was still within.

"I wanted to say good-bye to you."

No answer.

"Mother!" The young Prince's voice shook in its eager, heart-rending

entreaty. "Do not let me go from you thus. If I may not see you, say at

least one word--one single word of farewell. It will be the last.

Mother, do you not hear me?"

He was kneeling before the barred door, pressing his brow against it,

as though it must open to him. In vain; the door remained close, and no

sound was heard within. The mother had no parting word for her son; the

Princess Baratowska no pardon for his error.

Leo rose from his knees. His face was rigid again now, only about his

lips there quivered an expression of wild and bitter anguish, such as

never in his young life could he have experienced before. He spoke no

word, but silently took up the cloak which he had cast aside on his

entrance, threw it round his shoulders, and went to the door. His

brother attempted to hold him back. Leo thrust him aside.

"Let me go. Tell Wanda--no, tell her nothing. She does not love me; she

has given me up for you. Good-bye."

He rushed away. Waldemar stood a few minutes in utmost perplexity,

doubtful as to what course he should adopt. At last he seemed to have

taken a resolution. He passed quickly through the adjoining room, to

the Princess's ante-chamber. There he found the house-steward, Pawlick,

with a troubled, anxious face. Directly the old man had heard of the

arrival of his sick countrymen, he had hurried to them, and had been

the first to hear the terrible news. On returning to the Castle,

debating in his own mind as to how he should communicate it to his

mistress, he suddenly beheld Prince Baratowski, standing before him at

the entrance. Leo gave the alarmed old servitor no time to unburthen

himself, but merely passed him with a hasty inquiry for his brother,

for Countess Morynska, and disappeared in his mother's apartments.

Pawlick could not tell whether his young master were informed of the

late events or not; but when, some time later, the unhappy boy rushed

past him unheedingly, one look at his face was sufficient to show him

he knew all.

"Pawlick," said Waldemar, coming in, "you must follow Prince Baratowski

immediately. He is about to commit an act of the maddest rashness,

which will cost him his life, if he really carries out his project. He

means to cross the frontier, now, in daylight."

"God forbid!" exclaimed the old man, horrified.

"I cannot keep him back," continued Nordeck, "and I dare not show

myself at his side. That would only increase his danger; yet, in his

present frame of mind, he must have some one with him. I know you have

still a good seat in the saddle, in spite of your years. The Prince is

on foot. You will be able to come up with him before he reaches the

frontier, for you know the direction he will take--the place whence the

secret communication with the insurgents is kept up. I fear it is in

the neighbourhood of the border-station."

Pawlick did not reply. He dared not answer in the affirmative, but at

this moment courage to deny the truth failed him. Waldemar understood

his silence.

"It is just about there that the most vigilant watch is kept," he

cried, hastily. "I heard it from our officers. How my brother contrived

to get through this morning, I know not. He will not succeed a second

time. Hasten after him, Pawlick. He must not attempt to cross there;

anywhere else rather than there! He must wait--conceal himself until

dusk, in the forester's station itself, if there is no other way.

Inspector Fellner is there; he is on my side, but he will never betray

Leo. Hasten!"

He had no need to speak so urgently. Mortal anxiety on his young

master's account was depicted on the old man's face.

"In ten minutes I shall be ready," said he. "I'll ride as though for my

own life."

He kept his word. Barely ten minutes later he rode out of the Castle

yard. Waldemar, who was standing watching at the window above, drew a

breath of relief.

"That was the only thing to be done. He may perhaps reach him even yet;

and so, at all events, the worst will be averted."

Four, five hours elapsed, and yet no tidings. Generally, when there was

work astir on the frontier, messages came fast and frequent. All the

couriers on their way to L----, passing through Wilicza, would halt in

the village with their news, for a few minutes, at least. To-day these

communications seemed suddenly cut off. Waldemar paced uneasily up and

down his room, trying to think of Pawlick's prolonged absence as a

favourable sign. The old man had certainly come up with Leo, and would

stay by him so long as the young Prince remained on German soil.

Perhaps they were both lying in hiding in the forester's house. At

length, late on in the afternoon, the steward appeared. He came in

hastily, without waiting to be announced.

"Herr Nordeck, I must beg of you to come over to the manor-farm," he

said. "Your presence there is urgently needed."

Waldemar looked up. "What is it? Has anything happened to one of the

wounded?"

"No, not that," said Frank, evasively; "but I must entreat you to come

yourself. We have had news from the border. There has been a decisive

engagement out at W----. A regular battle was fought this morning

against the Morynski corps."

"Well, with what issue?" asked Nordeck, in extreme suspense and

anxiety.

"The insurgents have suffered a terrible defeat. It is said there had

been treason at work, that they were taken by surprise. They defended

themselves desperately, but were forced to succumb to superior numbers

at last. The survivors are scattered to all points of the compass."

"And their leader, Count Morynski?"

The steward looked down.

"Is he dead?"

"No; but seriously wounded, and in the enemy's hands."

"So that, too, is added!" Waldemar murmured. He himself had never been

on intimate terms with his uncle; but Wanda!--he knew with what

passionate love she clung to her father. Had he fallen in the fight,

she would have borne it better than to know him exposed to such a fate,

and exposed to it through \_whom\_! Who was to blame for the defeat of

that corps, surprised by an attack from which it believed itself

protected by the cover of Prince Baratowski's advance-guard?

Waldemar summoned up all his self-command. "Who brought the news? Is it

trustworthy, or mere report?"

"It was the major domo, Pawlick, who brought it. He is over yonder ..."

"At your house? He brings you the news, though he knows that I have

been waiting hours here for his return. Why did he not come up to the

Castle?"

Frank's eyes sought the ground once more. "He dared not. Her Highness

or the young Countess might have been at the window. They must first be

prepared. Pawlick is not alone, Herr Nordeck."

"What has happened?" cried Waldemar, a cold presentiment stealing over

him.

"Prince Baratowski has fallen," said the steward, in a low voice.

"Pawlick brings the corpse."

Waldemar was silent. He laid his hand over his eyes, and stood for a

few seconds motionless; then, collecting himself with an effort, he

hurried away over to the manor-farm, Frank following him. At the

steward's house, Pawlick met him. He looked up timidly at the lord of

Wilicza, whom he, the Princess's faithful servant, had been wont to

consider as an enemy; but Nordeck's face showed him what he had already

felt that morning, that it was no foe, but his young master's own

brother who stood before him, and all the old man's composure broke

down at the sight.

"Our Princess!" he wailed; "she will never survive it, nor the young

Countess either!"

"You did not reach the Prince in time?" asked Waldemar.

"Oh yes, I came up with him in time, and delivered your warning

message. He would not listen, he was bent on crossing in spite of

everything; he thought the forest thickets would protect him. I

implored, I kneeled to him, and asked him if he would let himself be

shot down by the sentries like some hunted animal. That told at last.

He consented to wait until evening. We were just considering whether we

should venture into the forester's station, when we were met by ..."

"By whom? By a patrol?"

"No, by the farmer of Janowo. We had no treachery to fear from him, he

has always been faithful to the cause. He had been called on to provide

relays for the troops, and was just coming back from the frontier. He

had heard say that a battle was being fought near W----, which was not

yet decided; that the Morynski corps had been surprised, but was

defending itself desperately. It was all over then with reason and

reflection. Our young Prince had only one thought--how to get to

W---- and throw himself into the thick of the fight. We could not hold

him back. He would listen to nothing then. He had left us about half an

hour, when we heard shots fired; two at first, one after the other,

then half a dozen all at once; and then ..." The old man could say no

more, his voice failed him, and a torrent of hot tears burst from his

eyes.

"I have brought the body," he said, after a pause. "The cavalry

captain, who was here yesterday, obtained it for me from the set out

yonder. They could do nothing with a dead man. But I did not dare to

take it straight up to the Castle. We have laid him in there for the

present."

He pointed to a room on the other side of the passage. Waldemar signed

to him and the steward to remain behind, and went in alone. Grey and

dim the waning twilight fell on the lifeless form of the young Prince.

Silently his brother stood by, gazing down upon him. The beautiful

face, which he had seen so radiant with life and happiness, was rigid

now and cold; the flashing dark eyes were closed; and the breast, which

had swelled so high with hope and dreams of liberty, now bore the

death-wound. If the hot wild blood of youth had erred, it had also made

atonement, as it gushed forth from that shattered breast, staining the

clothing with dark, ominous patches. But a few hours before all the

passions of youth had raged in that inanimate frame. Hatred and love,

jealousy and ardent thirst for revenge, despair at the terrible

consequences of an act committed in reckless haste--all were past,

frozen into the icy stagnation of death. One trace alone remained on

the still, pale face. Stamped thereon so deeply, that it seemed

indelibly graven for ever and ever, was that look of anguish which had

quivered round the son's lips when his mother refused him a last

farewell, when she let him go from her without a word of forgiveness.

All else had faded out of sight with life itself; but this one grief

Prince Baratowski had taken with him into his death-struggle; it had

been with him in the last glimmer of consciousness. The shadow of the

grave itself could not shroud it from view.

Waldemar left the room, sombre and mute as he had entered it; but those

who waited for him without, glancing at his troubled face, could see

that he had loved his brother.

"Bring the body up to the Castle," he said. "I will go on first--to my

mother."

CHAPTER XIV.

Spring had come round again for the second time since the beginning

of the rebellion, which had blazed up so hotly at first, but which now

lay quelled and crushed. Those wintry March days of the preceding year

had not only brought woe on the Wilicza household, but had been

pregnant with disaster to the whole insurrection. By the defeat of the

Morynski corps, one of its chief supports had been lost to it. When

overtaken by that sudden attack, which found him and his so totally

unprepared--relying, as they did, upon the shelter afforded them by

Prince Baratowski and his troops--Count Morynski had defended himself

with all the energy of desperation; and even when, surrounded and

outnumbered, he saw that all was lost, he yet fought on to the last,

determined to sell his life and liberty as dearly as possible. So long

as he remained at their head, his example inspired his wavering forces,

and kept them together; but when the leader lay bleeding and

unconscious on the ground, all resistance was at an end. Those who

could not fly were hewn down, or taken prisoners by the victorious

party. It was more than a defeat, it was an annihilation; and if that

day's work did not decide the fate of the revolution, it yet marked a

turning-point in its career. From that time forth, the fortunes of the

insurgents declined, steadily and surely. The loss of Morynski, who had

been by far the most redoubtable and energetic of the rebel leaders;

the death of Leo Baratowski, on whom, in spite of his youth, the eyes

of his countrymen were turned; in whom, by virtue of his name and

family traditions their hopes and expectations centred--these were

heavy blows for a party which had long been split into factions, and

divided against itself, and which now fell still further asunder.

Occasionally, it is true, the waning star would gleam out brightly for

a moment. There were other conflicts, other battles glorious with

heroic acts and deeds of desperate valour; but the fact stood out ever

more and more plainly, that the cause for which they fought was a lost

cause. The insurrection, which at first had spread over the whole land,

was forced back into narrower and narrower limits. Post after post fell

into the hands of the enemy; one troop after another was dispersed, or

melted away, and the year, which at its opening had seen the horizon

lurid with revolutionary flames, before its close saw the fire

quenched, the last spark extinguished. Nothing but ashes and ruins

remained to testify of the death-struggle of a people over whom the

fiat of history has long since gone forth.

A weary interval elapsed before Count Morynski's fate was decided. He

first awoke to consciousness in a dungeon, and for a time his serious,

nay, as it was at first believed, mortal wounds rendered all

proceedings against him objectless. For months he lingered in the most

precarious state, and when at length he recovered, it was to find

himself on the threshold of life, confronted with his death-warrant.

For a leader of the revolution, taken armed and in actual fight, no

other fate could be reserved. Sentence of death had been passed on him,

and would most assuredly have been carried out in this, as in

numberless other cases, but for his long and dangerous illness. His

conquerors had not thought fit to inflict capital punishment on a man

supposed to be dying, and when, later on, it became practicable to

apply the law in all its rigour, the rising had been altogether

suppressed, all danger to the land averted. The victors' obdurate

severity relaxed in its turn. Count Morynski was reprieved, his

sentence commuted to exile for life; exile in its bitterest form,

indeed, for he was condemned to deportation to one of the most distant

parts of Siberia--a terrible favour to be granted a man whose whole

life had been one long dream of freedom, and who, even during the years

of his former banishment in France, had never known any restriction on

his personal liberty.

He had not seen those dear to him since the evening on which he had

taken leave of them at Wilicza. Neither his sister, nor even his

daughter, could obtain permission to see him. All their attempts to

reach him were foiled by the strict watch kept on the prisoner, by the

careful measures taken to shut him off from all possible intercourse

with the outer world. For this strict watch they had, indeed,

themselves to blame. More than once had they sought to rescue him from

his captivity. So soon as the Count was on the road to recovery, every

resource the Princess and Wanda had at their command was employed to

facilitate his flight; but all their plans for his deliverance failed,

the last experiment costing Pawlick, the faithful old servant of the

Baratowski house, his life. He had volunteered for the perilous

service, and had even so far succeeded as to put himself in

communication with Morynski. The prisoner had been apprised of what was

doing, the plan for his escape had been agreed upon, but Pawlick was

surprised while engaged in the preparations for it, and, flying from

the spot in the first impulse of his alarm, was shot down by the

sentinels. The discovery of this scheme resulted in a still closer

guard of the unhappy captive, and a keen and vigilant observation of

his friends at large. They could take no further step without arousing

suspicion, and increasing the hardships to which their brother and

father was subjected. They were fain to yield at last to the hopeless

impossibility of the case.

Immediately after the death of her younger son, the Princess had

quitted Wilicza, and taken up her residence at Rakowicz. People thought

it very natural she should not leave her orphaned niece alone. Waldemar

knew better what drove his mother away. He had silently concurred when

she told him of her resolve, making not the slightest attempt to combat

it. He knew that she could no longer bear to live on at the Castle,

that the constant sight of himself was intolerable to her; for had he

not been the cause of the catastrophe by which Leo had lost his life

and destruction had overtaken the troops committed to Leo's charge?

Perhaps it was a relief to Nordeck that the Princess should go, now

that he was obliged daily and hourly to wound her by the manner of his

rule at Wilicza. Having with iron determination once taken the reins in

hand, he held them in a like grasp of iron, stern and steady guidance

being indeed urgently called for. He had been right in saying that

chaos reigned on his estates: no other word would so aptly have

described the disorder which the twenty years of mismanagement during

his late guardian's lifetime and the four years of Baratowski régime

had bequeathed to him; but now, with incredible energy, he set himself

to the work of bringing order out of chaos. At first Waldemar had

enough to do with all his might to stem the tide of rebellion which,

raging beyond the frontier, threatened to overflow his land; but when

once he felt he had free play and liberty of action, when the

insurrection with the thousand secret links binding it to Wilicza

showed signs of dying out, a process of transformation began, quite

unparalleled in its completeness. Such of the officials as failed to

render implicit obedience were dismissed, and those who remained were

subjected to severest control. The whole service of the woods and

forests was placed in other hands; new foresters and rangers were

appointed; the leased-out farms were--in some cases at a great money

sacrifice--redeemed from the tenants in possession, and incorporated

into the main estate, of which the young proprietor himself was sole

administrator. It was a gigantic undertaking for one man single-handed

to regulate and govern so vast a concern, especially now, when old

things were overturned and the new not yet established, when there was

no cohesion, nothing worked in joint; but Waldemar showed himself equal

to the task. He had finally won the day in his contest with his

subordinates. The population about Wilicza still remained hostile; its

hatred of the German in him was abiding and consistent; but even the

outsiders had learned to feel the master's hand, and to bend to its

guiding impulse. By the Princess's departure the malcontents lost their

firmest support, and the collapse of the movement in the neighbouring

province quenched the spirit of resistance on this side the border.

There could, indeed, be no question as yet of that peaceful,

well-ordered calm to be found on similar estates in other provinces.

Neither the times nor circumstances could admit of such a state of

things; but a beginning was made, the path cleared, and the rest must

be left for the future to work out.

Herr Frank, the steward, was still at Wilicza. He had put off his

removal for a year, yielding to the express wish of his employer, who

was most desirous of keeping this clever, experienced ally at his

side for a while. Now only, when the most urgent measures for the

re-establishment of order had been successfully taken, did Frank

definitely resign his office, with a view to carrying out that

long-cherished project of his, of settling down on his own land. The

pretty and not unimportant estate which he had bought, lay in another

province, in a pleasant situation and in full enjoyment of peace and

order, strongly contrasting in this last respect with the old Polish

neighbourhood where mischief was ever brewing, where the very air was

full of plots, against which the steward had battled for twenty years,

but which his soul abhorred. Two months would elapse before the

purchaser could take possession of his new home; in the mean time he

stayed on at Wilicza in his old position.

As to Gretchen, the fact that she was her father's darling had been

amply demonstrated on the occasion of her marriage; her dowry exceeded

all the calculations which Assessor Hubert had so minutely entered into

for the benefit of another. The wedding had taken place in the

preceding autumn, and the newly married pair had gone to live in J----,

where Professor Fabian now actually filled the post which had been

offered to him, and where 'we meet with the most extraordinary

success,' said his wife, writing to her father. Fabian overcame his

timid dread of a public life more easily and quickly than he could have

believed possible, and justified all the expectations entertained with

regard to the author of the 'History of Teutonism,' who had so suddenly

sprung into fame. His amiable, modest manners, which stood out in

strong contrast to his predecessor's uncourteous and overbearing ways,

won for him the general good-will; and his young and blooming wife

contributed not a little to the advancement of his social position, so

gracefully did she preside over the charming home which her father's

generous kindness had fitted up with every elegance and comfort. The

young couple were now about to pay their first visit to the paternal

roof, and were expected to arrive at Wilicza in the course of a few

days.

Things had not gone so well with Assessor Hubert, though a quite

unexpected and rather considerable accession of fortune had lately come

to him. Unfortunately, the event which procured him the legacy,

deprived the family of its man of mark. Professor Schwarz had died some

months before; and, that celebrated scholar being unmarried, his

fortune went to his nearest of kin. Hubert's pecuniary position was

greatly improved thereby, but what did it profit him? The bride on whom

he had so surely counted had given herself to another, and as yet he

did not hold his Counsellorship. There seemed, indeed, for the present,

small prospect of his promotion, although he outdid himself in official

zeal, although he kept the police department of L---- in a twitter of

perpetual alarm with his so-called discoveries, and would have counted

no exertions too great, could he, in that year of revolution, but have

laid hands on a traitor or two, conspiring against his own State. In

this hope he was, however, still destined to be disappointed. And this

same State behaved in a manner altogether disgraceful towards its

most faithful servant; it seemed to have no fitting sense of his

self-sacrifice and general devotedness, but rather to incline to the

view taken by Frank, who declared, in his outspoken way, that the

Assessor was doing one stupid thing after another, and would get

himself turned out of the service before long. Indeed, at every fresh

promotion, Hubert was passed over in so pointed a fashion that his

colleagues began to laugh at and to taunt him with his nonsuccess. Then

a dark resolve shaped itself in the mind of this deeply injured man.

Schwarz's legacy had made him quite independent; why should he longer

endure to be so overlooked and neglected? why continue to serve this

ungrateful State, which persistently refused to recognise his brilliant

abilities, while insignificant men like Dr. Fabian were called to fill

important posts and had distinctions heaped on them?

Hubert spoke of tendering his resignation. He even mentioned the

subject in the presence of the President; but great was his

mortification when that magnate, with crushing affability, encouraged

him in the idea. His Excellency was of opinion that the Assessor, with

his private means, was in no need of an official position, and would do

well to withdraw from its fatigues. Besides, he was of rather an

'excitable' temperament, and such duties as his required, above

everything, calmness and reflection. Hubert felt something of his

celebrated relative's misanthropy arise within him, as he went home

after this conversation, and, on the spur of the moment, drew up his

letter of resignation. This letter was sent off and actually accepted!

As yet, neither the State nor the police department of L---- had been

thrown out of their accustomed grooves by the circumstance, but some

disturbance might be looked for in the ensuing month, when his

threatened retirement would assume the proportions of an accomplished

fact. The nephew had in him too much of that uncle, whose unfortunate

strategy he had lately imitated, not to live in expectation of some

impending catastrophe.

In the courtyard at Rakowicz stood the horse of the young lord of

Wilicza. It happened but rarely that Nordeck rode over to this house,

and when he came, his visits were of short duration. The breach between

him and his nearest relations was still unhealed; late events seemed,

indeed, rather to have widened it, to have sundered them still more

completely.

Countess Morynska and Waldemar were alone together in the lady's

private sitting-room. Wanda was much changed. She had always been pale,

but with a paleness which had nothing in common with the deathly hue

now overspreading her face. Visible tokens were there of all that she

had suffered of late--suffered, in knowing the father she so

passionately loved in prison, sick nigh unto death without the power of

going to him and allaying his pain even for a moment, in witnessing the

final wreck and failure of those bright dreams of liberty, for which he

had so enthusiastically staked his life, and which were not without a

powerful hold on his daughter's soul. Mortal anxiety as to the decision

of this twofold destiny, constant vacillation between hope and fear,

the agitating suspense of each fresh attempt at rescue--these all had

left most evident traces. Wanda's was one of those natures which will

face the heaviest misfortunes with desperate energy so long as a

glimmer of hope is left, but which, when once this glimmer is

extinguished, break down utterly. She seemed nearly to have reached

this despairing point. At the present moment a sort of feverish

excitement upheld her. She had evidently rallied what was but too

surely her last remaining strength.

Waldemar stood before her, unchanged, haughty and unbending as ever. In

his manner there was but little of that forbearance to which the young

Countess's appearance made so urgent an appeal. His attitude was almost

menacing, and mingled anger and pain were in his voice as he spoke to

her.

"For the last time I entreat you to give up the thought. You would only

incur death yourself, without being of any help to your father. It

would be one torment more for him to see you dying before his eyes. You

are bent on following him into that fearful desert, that murderous

climate, to which the strongest succumb; you, who from your earliest

youth have been delicately nursed, and surrounded by all life's

comforts, purpose now to expose yourself to the most cruel privations.

The tried and tempered steel of the Count's endurance may possibly hold

out under them, but you would fall a victim before many months were

over. Ask the doctor, ask your own face; they will tell you that you

would not live a year in that terrible land."

"Do you think my father will live longer?" replied Wanda, with a

trembling voice. "We have nothing more to hope or expect from life, but

we will at least die together."

"And I?" asked Waldemar, with bitter reproach.

She turned away without answering him.

"And I?" he repeated, more vehemently. "What shall I do? What is to

become of me?"

"You at least are free. You have life before you. Bear it--I have worse

to bear!"

An angry remonstrance was on Waldemar's lips; but he glanced at that

pale, troubled face, and that glance made him pause. He forced himself

to be calm.

"Wanda, when, a year ago, we came at last to understand each other, the

promise you had given my brother stood between us. I would have fought

my battle, have won you from him at any cost; but it never came to

that. His death has torn down the barrier, and no matter what may

threaten us from without, it is down, and we are free. By Leo's newly

opened grave, while the sword was still impending over your father's

head, I did not dare speak to you of love, of our union. I forced

myself to wait, to see you but seldom, and only for a few minutes at a

time. When I came over to Rakowicz, you and my mother let me feel that

you still looked on me as an enemy; but I hoped for better days, for a

happier future, and now you meet me with such a determination as this!

Can you not understand that I will combat it as long as breath is left

in me? 'We will die together!'--easily said and easily done when

bullets are flying thick and fast, when, like Leo, one may be shot to

the heart in a moment. But have you reflected what death in exile

really may be? A slow wasting away; a long protracted struggle against

privations which break the spirit before they destroy the body; far

from one's country, cut off from the world and its interests, from all

that intellectual life which to you is as necessary as the air you

breathe; to be weighed down and gradually stifled by the load of

misery! And you require of me that I shall endure to see it, that I

shall stand by, and suffer you voluntarily to dedicate yourself to such

a fate?"

A slight shudder passed through the young Countess's frame. The truth

of his description may have gone home to her; but she persisted in her

silence.

"And your father accepts this incredible sacrifice," went on Waldemar,

more and more excitedly, "and my mother gives her approval to the plan.

Their object is simply this, to drag you from my arms, to achieve which

they will even subject you to a living death. Had I fallen instead of

Leo, and the present cruel fate overtaken the Count, he would have

commanded you to stay, my mother would energetically have defended her

son's rights, and would have compelled you to give up so ill-judged a

scheme; but now, they themselves have suggested these ideas of

martyrdom, although they know that it will be your death. It does away

with all prospect of our union, even in the far distant future, and

that is enough for them!"

"Do not speak so bitterly," Wanda interrupted him. "You do my family

injustice. I give you my word that, in taking this resolution, I have

been guided by none. My father is advancing towards old age. His

wounds, his long imprisonment, more than all else, the defeat of our

cause, have broken him down morally and physically. I am all that is

left to him, the one tie which still binds him to life. I am his

altogether. The lot, which you so forcibly described just now, will be

his lot. Do you think I could have one hour's peace at your side,

knowing him to be journeying towards such a fate alone, abandoned to

his doom, feeling that I myself was bringing on him the crudest grief

of his life, by marrying you, whom he still looks on as one of

our enemies? The one mitigation of his terrible sentence I could

obtain--and that with the utmost difficulty--was a permission for

me to accompany my father. I knew that I should have a hard fight with

you--how hard it would be I am only learning now. Spare me, Waldemar, I

have not much strength left."

"No, not for me," said Waldemar, bitterly. "All the strength and love

in you are given to your father. What shall become of me, how I am to

endure the misery of separation, you do not stay to enquire. I was a

fool when I believed in that impulse which threw you into my arms in a

moment of danger. You were 'Wanda' to me but for an instant. When I saw

you next day, you spoke to me as Countess Morynska, and are so speaking

to me to-day. My mother is right. Your national prejudices are your

very heart's blood, the food on which you have been nourished since

your infancy; you cannot renounce them without renouncing life

itself--to them we are both to be offered up--to them your father is

ready to sacrifice his only child. He would never, never have consented

that you should accompany him, if the man, who loved you, had been a

Pole. I being that man, he will agree to any plan which may part you

from me. What matter, if only he can preserve you from the German, if

he stand faithfully by the national creed? Can you Poles feel nothing

but hate--hate which stretches even beyond the grave?"

"If my father were free, I might perhaps find courage to set him and

all that you call prejudice at defiance," said Wanda, in a low voice.

"As it is, I cannot, and"--here all her old energy gleamed forth

anew--"I will not, for it would be betraying my duty as his child. I

will go with him, even though it costs me my life. I will not leave him

alone in his distress."

She spoke these words with a steady decision which showed her

resolution to be unalterable. Waldemar seemed to feel it. He gave up

his resistance.

"When do you set out?" he asked, after a pause.

"Next month. I am not to see my father again until we meet at O----.

There my aunt will also be allowed one interview with him. She will go

with me so far. You see we need not say good-bye to-day; we have some

weeks before us. But promise me not to come to Rakowicz in the mean

time, not again to assail me with reproaches and arguments, as you have

this morning. I need all my courage for the hour of parting, and you

rob me of it with your despair. We shall see each other yet once

again--until then, farewell!"

"Farewell," he said, shortly, almost roughly, without looking at her,

or taking the hand she held out to him.

"Waldemar!" There was heart-stirring sorrow and reproach in her tone,

but it was powerless to lay his fierce irritation. Anger and misery at

losing his love overcame for the moment all the young man's sense of

justice.

"You may be right," he said, in his harshest tone, "but I cannot

bring myself all at once to appreciate this exalted spirit of

self-sacrifice--still less to share it. My whole nature rises up in

protest against it. As, however, you insist on carrying your plan into

execution, as you have irrevocably decreed our parting, I must see how

I can get through existence alone. I shall make no further moan, that

you know. My bitterness only offends you, it will be best that I should

be silent. Farewell, Wanda."

A conflict was going on in Wanda's mind. She knew that it only needed

one word from her to change all his harshness and austerity into soft

tenderness; but to speak that word now would be to renew the contest,

to endanger the victory so hardly won. She was silent, paused for a

second, then bowed her head slightly, and left the room.

Waldemar let her go. He stood with his face turned to the window. Many

bitter emotions were written on that face, but no trace was there of

the resignation which the woman he loved had required of him. Leaning

his brow against the panes, he remained long motionless, lost in

thought, and only looked up at last on hearing his name spoken.

It was the Princess who had come in unnoticed. How the last year with

all its cruel blows had told upon this woman! When, in the old days,

her son had met her in C---- after a separation of years, she had just

suffered a heavy loss; then as now she had been draped in deepest

mourning. But her husband's death had not bent her proud energetic

spirit; she had clearly recognised the duties devolving on her as a

widow and a mother, had designed, and steadily carried out, the new

plan of life which for a time had made her ruler and mistress of

Wilicza. She had overcome her grief, because self-control was

necessary, because there were other tasks before Baratowski's widow

than that merely of deploring his loss, and Princess Hedwiga had ever

possessed the enviable faculty of subordinating her dearest feelings to

the outward calls of necessity.

Now, however, it was otherwise. The mourner still bore herself erect,

and, at a first cursory glance, no very striking alteration might have

been remarked in her; but he who looked closer would have seen the

change which Leo Baratowski's death had wrought in his mother. There

was a rigid look on her features; not the quiescence of still

resignation, but the dead calm of one who has nothing more to hope or

to lose, for whom life and its interests have no further concern. Those

eyes, once so imperious, were dull now and shaded; the proud brow,

which but a year before had been smooth as marble, was furrowed with

deep lines, telling of anguish, and there were patches of grey in the

dark hair. The blow, which had fallen on this mother, wounding her

mortally in her pride as in her affections, had evidently attacked the

very well-springs of her being, and the defeat of her people, the fate

of the brother, whom, after Leo, she loved more than all on earth, had

done the rest--the once inflexible, indomitable spirit was broken.

"Have you really been plying Wanda with argument and remonstrances

again?" said she, and her voice too was changed; it had a dull, weary

sound. "You must know that it is all in vain."

Waldemar turned round. His face had not cleared; it was dark and

wrathful still, as he answered--

"Yes, it was all in vain."

"I told you so beforehand. Wanda is not one of those women who say No

to-day and to-morrow throw themselves into your arms. Her resolution,

once taken, was irrevocable. You ought to recognise this, instead of

distressing her by re-opening a useless strife. It is you, and you

alone, who show her no mercy."

"I?" exclaimed Waldemar fiercely. "Who was it, then, that suggested

this resolution to her?"

The Princess's eyes met his without flinching. "No one," she replied.

"I, as you know, have long since ceased to interfere between you. I

have learned by too bitter experience how powerless I am to oppose your

passion ever again to attempt to check it, but I neither can nor will

prevent Wanda from going. She is all my brother has in the world. She

will only do her duty in following him."

"To her death," added Waldemar.

The Princess was sitting now, wearily resting her head on her hand.

"Death has come near us too often of late for any one of us to fear it.

When the strokes of Fate fall thick and fast, as they have fallen upon

us, one grows familiar with the worst; and this is the case with Wanda.

We have nothing more to lose, therefore nothing to fear. This unhappy

year has blighted other hopes than yours; so many have gone to their

graves mid blood and tears! You will have to bear it, if, to all the

other ruins, the wreck of your happiness is added."

"You would hardly forgive me were I to rescue my happiness from the

ruin of your hopes," said Waldemar, bitterly. "Well, you need not be

uneasy. I have seen plainly to-day that Wanda is not to be moved."

"And you?"

"Well, I submit."

The Princess scanned his face for some seconds.

"What are you thinking of doing?" she asked suddenly.

"Nothing; you hear--I give up hope and submit to the inevitable."

His mother's eye still rested scrutinisingly upon him.

"You do \_not\_ submit, or I am much mistaken in my son. Is that

resignation which is written on your brow? You have some plan, some

mad, perilous project. Beware! Wanda's own will stands opposed to you.

She will yield to no compulsion, not even from you."

"We shall see that," replied the young man, coldly--he gave up denial,

finding the mask was seen through. "In any case, you may set your mind

perfectly at ease. My plan may be a mad one, but if it presents any

danger, that danger will be mine only--at most, my life will be at

stake."

"At most, your life?" repeated the Princess. "And you can say that to

reassure your mother!"

"Pardon me, but I think there has been small question with you of a

mother's feelings since the day you lost your Leo."

The Princess gazed fixedly on the ground.

"From that hour you have let me feel that I am childless," she said in

a low tone.

"I?" exclaimed Waldemar. "Was it for me to put obstacles in the

way of your leaving Wilicza. I knew right well that you were hurrying

away to escape from me, that the sight of me was intolerable to you.

Mother"--he drew nearer her involuntarily, and, harsh and unsparing as

were his words, they yet told of a secret rankling pain--"when all your

self-control gave way, and you sank down weeping on my brother's

corpse, I dared not say one comforting word--I dare not even now. I

have always been a stranger, an alien from your heart; I never held a

place in it. If, from time to time, I have come over here to Rakowicz,

it was because I could not live without seeing Wanda. I have never

thought of seeking you, any more than you have sought me in this time

of mourning; but truly the blame of our estrangement does not lie at my

door. Do not impute it to me as a crime that I left you alone in the

bitterest hour of your life."

The Princess had listened in silence, not attempting to interrupt him;

but as she answered, her lips moved convulsively, contracted, as it

were, by some inward spasm.

"If I have loved your brother more than you, I have lost him--how have

I lost him! I could have borne that he should fall, I myself sent him

out to fight for his country--but that he should fall in such a way!"

Her voice failed her, she struggled for breath, and there was a pause

of some seconds before she could continue. "I let my Leo go without a

word of pardon, without the last farewell for which he prayed on his

knees, and that very day they laid him at my feet shot through the

breast. All that is left to me of him--his memory--is indissolubly

connected with that fatal act of his which brought destruction on our

troops. My people's cause is lost; my brother is going to meet a doom

worse by far than death. Wanda will follow him. I stand altogether

alone. I think you may be satisfied, Waldemar, with the manner in which

Fate has avenged you."

In the utter weariness of her voice, the dull rigidity of her features,

there was something far more pathetic than in the wildest outbreak of

sorrow. Waldemar himself could but be impressed by it; he bent down

over her.

"Mother," said he, meaningly; "the Count is still in his own country,

Wanda is still here. She has to-day unconsciously pointed out to me a

way in which I may yet hope to win her. I shall take that way."

The Princess started up in alarm. Her look sought his anxiously,

enquiringly; she read her answer in his eyes.

"You mean to attempt ..."

"What you two have attempted before me. You have failed, I know.

Perhaps I shall succeed better."

A ray of hope illumined the Princess's countenance, but it died out

again immediately. She shook her head.

"No, no; do not undertake it. It is useless; and if I say so, you may

rest assured that no means have been left untried. We have made every

effort, and all in vain. Pawlick has paid for his fidelity with his

life."

"Pawlick was an old man," replied Waldemar, "and an anxious, timorous

nature to boot. He had devotion enough for any task, but he had not the

requisite prudence, not the requisite audacity at a critical moment.

Such an enterprise demands youth and a bold spirit; above all, it is

essential that the principal should act in person, trusting to no one

but himself."

"And himself incur all the terrible danger. We have learned, to our

cost, how they guard their frontiers and their prisoners out yonder.

Waldemar, am I to lose you too?"

Waldemar looked at her in amazement, as the last words burst from her

lips like a cry of pain. A bright flush overspread his face.

"Your brother's freedom depends on it," he reminded her.

"Bronislaus is beyond rescue," said the Princess, hopelessly. "Do not

risk your life now in our lost cause. It has cost victims enough! Think

of Pawlick's fate, of your brother's death!" She seized his hand, and

held it tightly. "You shall not go. I was over rash just now when I

said I had nothing more to lose; at this moment I feel there is one

thing left to me. I will not give up you too, my last, my only child.

Do not go, my son. Your mother entreats you; do not go!"

At length her heart warmed towards him with maternal love; at length

this love spoke to him in tender accents, such as Waldemar had never

before heard from her lips. Even to this proud, inexorable woman an

hour had come, when, seeing all around her tottering and falling, she

was fain to cling desperately to the one support which Fate had left

her. The spurned, neglected son resumed his rights at last. True, the

grave had opened for his brother, before any such rights were accorded

to him.

Any other mother and son might now have clasped each other in a long

embrace, striving in this rush of new-born tenderness to drown all

memory of their long, deep-rooted estrangement; these natures were too

hard, and too alike in their hardness, for any such swift and absolute

revulsion of feeling. Waldemar spoke no word, but for the first time in

his life he lifted his mother's hand to his lips, and pressed them on

it long and fervently.

"You will stay?" implored the Princess.

He drew himself up. The bright flush was still on his face, but the

last few minutes seemed to have transfigured it. All rancour and

bitterness had vanished from his features; his eyes still sparkled with

defiance, but it was the glad defiance of one confident of victory, and

ready to enter the lists and do battle with Fate.

"No," he replied, "I shall go; but I thank you for those words--they

make the venture a light one to me. You have always looked upon me as

your enemy, because I would not lend my hand to further your plans. I

could not do that--I cannot now; but nothing forbids me to rescue the

Count from the consequences of an inhuman verdict. At all events, I am

determined to make the attempt, and, if any one can accomplish it, I

shall. You know the spur which urges me on."

The Princess gave up all resistance. She could not remain quite

hopeless in face of his steady assurance.

"And Wanda?" she asked.

"She said to me to-day, 'If my father were free, I might find courage

to defy all and everything for your sake.' Tell her I may one day

remind her of those words. Now ask me nothing more, mother. You know

that I must act alone, for I alone am unsuspected. You are distrusted

and watched. Any step taken by you would betray the enterprise, any

news sent you by me would jeopardise it. Leave all in my hands; and

now, farewell. I must away, we have no more time to lose."

He touched his mother's hand with his lips once more, and hastened from

her. The Princess felt something akin to a pang at this sudden, rapid

leave-taking. She went up to the window to wave a last adieu to the

traveller as he hurried away; but she waited in vain. His eyes sought,

indeed, one of the Castle windows, as he rode slowly, lingeringly

through the courtyard; but that window was not hers. He gazed

steadfastly, persistently, up to Wanda's room, as though such a look

must have power to draw his love to him, to force from her a parting

'God speed!' It was for her sake alone he was entering on the perilous

task before him; his mother, the reconciliation so lately sealed, all

faded away and sank to nought when his Wanda came in question.

And he really obtained his wish of seeing her once more. The young

Countess must have appeared at the bay-window, for Waldemar's face

suddenly lighted up, as though a ray of sunshine had fallen athwart it.

He waved his hand to her, then gave his Norman the rein, and dashed,

quick as the wind, out of the Castle-yard.

The Princess still stood in her place, gazing after him. He had not

looked back to her--she was forgotten! At this thought, for the first

time that stab went through her heart which had so often traversed

Waldemar's at sight of her tenderness to Leo--and yet in this moment a

conviction she had hitherto refused fully to admit forced itself

irresistibly upon her--a conviction that the inheritance, all share of

which had been denied her darling, had fallen to her first-born son,

that to him his mother's strength and energy had descended, that in

mind and character he approved himself very blood of her blood.

CHAPTER XV.

In the forenoon of a cool but sunny May day, Herr Frank was returning

from L---- whither he had been to fetch his daughter and son-in-law.

Professor Fabian and his wife were seated in the carriage with him. The

former's new academical dignity seemed to agree right well with him; he

looked in better health and spirits than ever. His young wife, in

consideration of her husband's position, had assumed a certain

stateliness of demeanour which she did her very best to maintain, and

which was in comic contrast to her fresh, youthful appearance.

Fortunately, she often fell out of her rôle, and became true Gretchen

Frank once more; but at this moment, it was the Professor's wife who

sat by her father's side with much gravity of deportment, giving him an

account of their life in J----.

"Yes, papa, it will be a great relief to us to come and stay with you

for a time," said she, passing her handkerchief over her blooming face,

which certainly did not look as though it needed relief. "We University

people have so many claims upon us. We are expected to interest

ourselves in every possible subject, and our position requires so much

from us. We Germanists stand well to the front in the scientific

movement of the age."

"You certainly appear to stand very much to the front," said the

steward, who was listening with some wonder. "Tell me, child, which of

you really fills the professorial chair at J----, your husband or

yourself?"

"The wife belongs to the husband, so it comes to the same," declared

Gretchen. "Without me Emile never could have accepted the post,

distinguished scholar as he is. Professor Weber said to him the day

before yesterday in my presence, 'My worthy colleague, you are a

perfect treasure to the University, as regards science, but for all the

details of practical life you are worth absolutely nothing. In all such

matters you are quite at sea. It is a mercy your young wife is so well

able to supply your deficiencies.' He is quite right, is he not, Emile?

Without me you would be lost in a social point of view."

"Altogether," assented the Professor, full of faith, and with a look of

grateful tenderness at his wife.

"Do you hear, papa, he owns it," said she, turning to her father.

"Emile is one of the few men who know how to appreciate their wives.

Hubert never would have done that. By-the-by, how is the Assessor? Is

not he made Counsellor even yet?"

"No, not yet, and he is so wrath at it that he has given in his

resignation. At the beginning of next month he quits the service of the

State."

"What a loss for all the future ministries of our country!" laughed

Gretchen. "He had quite made up his mind he should come into office

some day, and he used to practice the ministerial bearing when he was

sitting in our parlour. Is he still tormented with the fixed idea of

discovering traitors and conspirators everywhere?"

Frank laughed in his turn. "I really don't know, for I have hardly seen

him since your engagement was announced, and never once spoken to him.

He has laid my house under a ban ever since that time. You might

certainly have told him the news in a more considerate manner. When he

comes over to Wilicza, which does not happen often, he stops down in

the village, and never comes near the manor-farm. I have no

transactions with him now that Herr Nordeck has taken the direction of

the police into his own hands--but the Assessor may pass for a rising

man nowadays: he inherited the greater part of Schwarz's fortune. The

Professor died a few months ago."

"Of bilious fever, probably," put in Mrs. Fabian.

"Gretchen!" remonstrated her husband, in a tone between entreaty and

reproof.

"Well, he was of a very bilious temperament. He went just as much into

that extreme as you do into the other with your mildness and

forbearance. Just fancy, papa, directly after his nomination to J----,

Emile wrote to the Professor, and assured him that he was quite

innocent of all the disputes which had taken place at the University.

As a matter of course, the letter was never acknowledged,

notwithstanding which, my lord and husband feels himself called upon,

now that this disagreeable but distinguished person has betaken himself

to a better world, to write a grandiloquent article on him, deploring

the loss to science, just as if the deceased had been his dearest

friend."

"I did it from conviction, my dear," said Fabian, in his gentle,

earnest way. "The Professor's ungenial temper too often acted as a

hindrance to that full recognition of his talents which was due to

them. I felt it incumbent on me to recall to the mind of the public

what a loss science has sustained in him. Whatever may have been his

defects of manner, he was a man of rare merit."

Gretchen's lip curled contemptuously.

"Well, he may have been; I'm sure I don't mind. But now to a more

important matter. So Herr Nordeck is not in Wilicza?"

"No," replied the steward, laconically. "He has gone on a journey."

"Yes, we know that. He wrote to my husband not long ago, and said he

was thinking of going over to Altenhof, and that he should probably

spend a few weeks there. Just now, when he has his hands so full of

business at Wilicza!--it seems strange!"

"Waldemar has always looked on Altenhof as his real home," said the

Professor. "For that reason, he never could make up his mind to sell

the estate which Herr Witold bequeathed to him by his will. It is

natural he should wish to revisit the place where all his youth was

passed."

Gretchen looked highly incredulous. "You ought to know your former

pupil better. He is not likely to be troubled by any sentimental

reminiscences of his youth at a time when he is engaged in the

tremendous task of Germanising his Slavonian estates. No, there is

something in the background, his attachment to Countess Morynska,

probably. Perhaps he has resolved to put all thoughts of her out of his

head--it would be the wisest thing he could do! These Polish women

sometimes get quite absurd and irrational with their national

fanaticism, and Countess Wanda is to the full as great a fanatic as any

of them. Not to give her hand to the man she loves, just because he is

a German! I would have taken my Emile, if he had been a Hottentot! and

now he is always fretting over the supposed unhappiness of his dear

Waldemar. He seriously believes that that personage has a heart like

other human beings, which I, for one, emphatically deny."

"Gretchen!" said the Professor again, this time with an attempt to look

severe, in which laudable effort he signally failed.

"Emphatically!" repeated his young wife. "When a man has a grief at his

heart, he shows it one way or another. Herr Nordeck is as busy as

possible, making such a stir here in Wilicza that all L---- is clapping

its hands to its ears, and when he acted as best man at my wedding,

there was not a trace of trouble to be seen in him."

"I have already told you that extreme reserve is one of Waldemar's

chief characteristics," declared Fabian. "This passion might sap and

utterly ruin him without his betraying anything of it to the eyes of

others."

"A man who does not show it when he is crossed in love, can't have any

very deep feelings," persisted Gretchen. "It was plain enough in you

ten paces off. The last few weeks before our engagement, when you

thought I was going to marry the Assessor, you went about with the most

woe-begone countenance. I was dreadfully sorry for you; but you were so

shy, there was no making you speak out."

The steward had abstained from all part in this conversation, being,

apparently, fully taken up by an examination of the trees by the

wayside. The road, which ran for a short distance along the bank of the

river, became rather bad just at this place. The damage caused by the

late high tides had not yet been repaired, and in the present

dilapidated state of the quay, shaken by the constant wash of the

water, some hesitation might reasonably be felt at driving over it.

Frank, it is true, maintained that there was not the slightest danger,

adding that he had passed over that very spot on his outward journey;

but Gretchen did not place absolute reliance on these assurances. She

preferred getting out, and walking the short distance to the

neighbouring bridge. The gentlemen followed her example, and all three

set out, taking a higher footpath, while the carriage proceeded at a

slow pace over the quay below.

They were not the only travellers who considered caution the better

part of valour.

From the bridge a carriage was seen approaching, the occupant of which

appeared to share Gretchen's views. He called to the coachman to stop,

and alighted in his turn, just as Frank and his companions reached the

spot, and thus suddenly found themselves face to face with Herr

Assessor Hubert.

This unexpected meeting caused some painful embarrassment on either

side. The parties had not spoken since the day when the Assessor,

furious at the engagement so recently contracted, had rushed out

of the house, and the steward, under the impression that he had

lost his reason, had sent the Inspector to look after him; but

their acquaintance was of too old standing for them now to pass as

strangers--they all felt that. Frank was the first to recover himself.

He took the best possible way out of the difficulty by going up to the

Assessor as though nothing had happened, offering him his hand in the

most friendly manner, and expressing his pleasure at seeing him again

at last.

The Assessor stood erect and stiff, clothed in black from head to foot.

He had a crape band on his hat, and another on his arm. The family

celebrity was duly mourned, but the money inherited appeared to have

dropped some balm into the heart of the sorrowing nephew, for he looked

the very reverse of disconsolate. There was a peculiar expression on

his face to-day, an exalted self-satisfaction, a tranquil grandeur. He

seemed in the humour to forgive all offences, to make peace with his

kind--so, after a moment's hesitation, he took the offered hand, and

replied by a few polite words.

The Professor and Gretchen now came forward. Hubert cast one glance of

dark reproach at the young lady--who, in her little travelling-hat and

flowing veil, certainly looked charming enough to awaken regretful

feelings in the heart of her former adorer--bowed to her, and then

turned to her husband.

"Professor Fabian," said he, "you have sympathised with the great loss

which my family, and, with it, the whole scientific world, has

experienced. The letter you wrote to my uncle long ago convinced him

that you were blameless with regard to the intrigues which had been

directed against him, that you at least could recognise his great

merits without envy or jealousy. He expressed so much to me himself,

and did you ample justice. The eulogistic notice, which you have

dedicated to his memory, does you great honour; it has been a source of

consolation to his surviving relatives. I thank you in the name of the

family."

Fabian heartily pressed the speaker's hand, which the latter had

voluntarily extended towards him. His predecessor's hostile attitude

and the Assessor's grudge against him had weighed heavily on his soul,

innocent as he knew himself to be of the mortification endured by both.

He condoled with the afflicted nephew in terms of the sincerest

sympathy.

"Yes, at the University we all deeply regret the loss of Professor

Schwarz," said Gretchen; and she was hypocritical enough to offer, in

her turn, a long string of condolences on the death of a man whom she

had thoroughly detested, and whom, even in his grave, she could not

forgive for his criticism on the 'History of Teutonism.'

"And so you have really tendered your resignation?" asked the steward,

adverting to another topic. "You are leaving the service of the State,

Herr Assessor?"

"In a week," assented Hubert. "But, with respect to the title you give

me, Herr Frank, I must permit myself a slight correction. I ..." Here

followed a dramatic pause, far longer and more impressive than that

which in bygone days was intended to prelude his love declaration,

during which pause he looked at his auditors successively, as though to

prepare them for some most weighty intelligence; then, drawing a long

breath, he concluded, "I was yesterday promoted to the rank of

Counsellor."

"Thank goodness, at last!" said Gretchen, in a loud whisper, while her

husband caught hold of her arm in alarm, to warn her against further

imprudent utterances. Fortunately, Hubert had not heard the

exclamation. He received Frank's congratulations with a dignity

befitting the occasion, and then bowed graciously in reply to the good

wishes of the young couple. His placable frame of mind was now

explained. The new Counsellor stood high above all offences committed

against the former Assessor. He forgave all his enemies--he even

forgave the State, which had shown so tardy an appreciation of his

worth.

"The promotion will make no change in my determination," he continued,

it never having occurred to him that to this very determination he owed

his advancement. "The State sometimes finds out too late the value of

its servants; but the die is cast! I still, of course, fulfil the

functions of my former position, and in this, the last week of my

official activity, an important trust has been confided to me. I am now

on my way to W----."

"Across the frontier?" said Fabian, in surprise.

"Exactly. I have to consult with the authorities there relative to the

capture and reddition of a prisoner charged with high treason."

Gretchen gave her husband a look which said plainly: "There, he is

beginning again already! Even the Counsellorship has not cured him of

it"--but Frank had grown attentive all at once; he disguised any

interest he might feel in the subject, however, and merely remarked in

a careless, indifferent way--

"I thought the insurrection was at an end."

"But there are conspiracies on foot still," cried Hubert, eagerly. "A

striking proof of this is now before us. You, probably, are not aware

as yet that Count Morynski, the leader, the soul of the whole

revolution, has escaped from prison."

Fabian started, and his wife evinced a lively surprise; but the steward

only said quietly, "Impossible!"

The new Counsellor shrugged his shoulders. "It is, unfortunately, no

longer any secret. The fact is known already all through L----, where

Wilicza and Rakowicz still form the centre of general interest. Of

course, Wilicza is beyond suspicion now, under Herr Nordeck's energetic

rule; but Rakowicz is the residence of the Princess Baratowska, and I

maintain that that woman is a source of danger to the whole province.

There will be no peace so long as she remains in the land. Heaven knows

whom she may now have stirred up to rescue her brother. Some reckless

madman it must have been, who sets no store by his life. The prisoners

under sentence of deportation are most closely guarded. Notwithstanding

this, the accessory has, or the accessories have, managed to establish

communication with the Count, and to furnish him with the means of

escape. They have found their way into the interior of the fortress,

have reached the very walls of his prison. Traces have been found which

show that the fugitive was there received by them and conveyed past

posts and sentries, over fortifications and ramparts--how is still an

enigma. Half the sentinels on duty must have been bribed. The whole

fort is in commotion at the unheard-of boldness of the enterprise.

Scouts have been out all over the neighbourhood for the last ten days,

but no clue has as yet been found."

Fabian at first had merely listened with some interest to Hubert's

story, but as he heard such repeated mention of the amazing boldness of

the undertaking, he began to be uneasy. A vague presentiment arose in

his mind. He was about to put a hasty question, but just in time he met

a warning look from his father-in-law. That look distinctly forbade him

to speak. The Professor was silent, but his heart quailed within him.

Gretchen had not noticed this dumb intelligence between the two; she

was following the tale with naïve and eager attention. Hubert went on:

"The fugitives cannot be far off, for the escape was discovered almost

immediately. The Count has not yet passed the frontier, that is

certain, and it is equally sure that he will make for it and attempt to

get over on to German territory, where he would be in less danger. He

will probably turn his steps to Rakowicz in the first place, Wilicza,

thank God, being now closed to all such scheming plots and intrigues,

though Herr Nordeck does not happen to be there just at present."

"No," said the steward, speaking with much decision. "He is over at

Altenhof."

"I know; he told the President he was going there when he called to

take leave of him. This absence of his will spare him much trouble and

annoyance. It would be very painful to him to see his uncle captured

and given up, as he will be beyond a doubt."

"What, you would give him up?" cried Gretchen, impetuously.

Hubert looked at her in astonishment.

"Of course; he is a criminal, convicted of treason to a friendly State.

Its Government will insist upon his being delivered up."

The girl looked from her husband to her father; she could not

understand how it was they neither of them joined in her

expostulations, but Frank's eyes were fixed on something in the far

distance, and Fabian uttered not a syllable.

Brave Gretchen, however, was not so easily intimidated. She indulged in

a series of no very flattering comments on the 'friendly State,' and

even directed some very pointed remarks against the Government of her

own land. Hubert listened in horror. For the first time he thanked God

in his heart that he had not made of this young lady a Counsellor's

consort. She was proving herself unfit to be the wife of a loyal

official. There was a taint of treason in her too!

"In your place, I should have refused the mission," she concluded at

last. "Just on the eve of your retirement, you could very well have

done so. I would not have closed my official career by delivering up a

poor hunted captive into the hands of his tormentors."

"The Government has named me Counsellor," replied Hubert, solemnly

emphasising the title, "and as such I shall do my duty. My State

commands, I obey--but I see that my carriage has got safely over the

critical spot. Madam, adieu; adieu, gentlemen. Duty calls me away!" and

with a bow and a flourish, he left them.

"Did you hear, Emile?" asked the young lady, when they were once more

seated in the carriage. "They have made him a Counsellor just a week

before he retires, so that he shall have no time to do anything stupid

in his new capacity. Well, he can't do much harm in future with the

mere title!"

She went on in this way, discussing her old friend's advancement and

Count Morynski's escape at great length, but received only short and

unsatisfactory answers. Her father and husband had become remarkably

monosyllabic, and it was fortunate that they soon reached the Wilicza

domain, for the conversation began to flag hopelessly.

The Professor's wife found many occasions for surprise, some even for

annoyance, during the course of the day. What perplexed her most, was

her father's behaviour. He was undoubtedly pleased to have them there;

he had taken her in his arms that morning and welcomed them both with

such hearty warmth, yet it seemed as though their coming, which had

been announced to him by a telegram the day before, was not quite

opportune, as though he would willingly have deferred it a little. He

declared himself to be overwhelmed with business, and appeared indeed

to be constantly occupied. Soon after they got home, he took his

son-in-law with him into his room, and they remained nearly an hour

closeted there together.

Gretchen's indignation waxed hot within her on finding that she was

neither included in this secret conference, nor enlightened as to its

nature by her husband. She set herself to watch and to think, and

suddenly many little things, which she had noticed during the journey,

recurred to her mind. Skilfully putting these together, she arrived at

a result, the correctness of which, to her mind, admitted of no doubt.

After dinner, the husband and wife remained alone together in the

parlour. The Professor paced up and down the room in a manner very

unusual to him, striving in vain to hide some inward uneasiness, but

too much absorbed by his thoughts to notice the silent fit which had

overtaken his young companion, generally so animated. Gretchen sat on

the sofa, and watched him for some time. At last she advanced to the

attack.

"Emile," she began, with a solemnity not exceeded by Hubert's, "Emile,

I am shamefully treated here!"

Fabian looked up, greatly shocked.

"You! Good Heavens, by whom?"

"By my papa, and, what is worst of all, by my own husband."

The Professor was at his wife's side in a moment. He took her hand in

his, but she drew it away very ungraciously.

"Shamefully!" she repeated. "You show no confidence in me whatever. You

have secrets from me. You treat me like a child, me, a married woman,

wife of a Professor of the J---- University! It is abominable!"

"Dear Gretchen," said Fabian, timidly, and then stopped.

"What was papa saying to you just now, when you were in his room?"

enquired Gretchen. "Why do you not confide in me? What are these

secrets between you two? Do not deny it, Emile, there are secrets

between you."

The Professor denied nothing. He looked down, and seemed extremely

oppressed and uncomfortable. His wife darted a severe, rebuking glance

at him.

"Well, I will tell \_you\_, then. There is a new plot on foot at Wilicza,

a conspiracy, as Hubert would say, and papa is in it this time, and he

has dragged you into it too. The whole thing is connected with Count

Morynski's rescue ..."

"Hush, child, for Heaven's sake!" cried Fabian in alarm; but Gretchen

paid no heed to his adjuration; she went on quite undisturbed.

"And Herr Nordeck is not at Altenhof, that is pretty sure, or you would

not be in such a state of anxiety. What is Count Morynski to you, or

his escape either? But your beloved Waldemar is concerned in it, and

that is why you are in such a flutter. It has been he who has carried

off the Count--that is just the sort of thing he would do."

The Professor was struck dumb with astonishment at his wife's powers of

discernment and combination. He was much impressed with her cleverness,

but a little disturbed to hear her count off on her fingers those

secrets which he had believed to be impenetrable.

"And no one says a word to me of it," continued Gretchen, with

increasing irritation, "not a word, although you know very well I can

keep a secret, though it was I, all by myself, who saved the Castle

that time by sending the Assessor over to Janowo. The Princess and

Countess Wanda will know everything. The Polish ladies always do

know everything. \_Their\_ husbands and fathers make confidants of

them--\_they\_ are allowed to take a part in politics, even in

conspiracies; but we poor German women are always oppressed and kept in

the background. We are humiliated, and treated like slaves ..." Here

the Professor's wife was so overcome with the sense of her slavery and

humiliation that she began to sob.

"Gretchen, my dear Gretchen, don't cry, I beseech you. You know that I

have no secrets from you in anything concerning myself; but there are

others implicated in this, and I have given my word to speak of it to

no one, not even to you."

"How can a married man give his word not to tell his wife!" cried

Gretchen, still sobbing. "It does not count for anything; no one has a

right to ask it of him."

"Well, but I have given it," said Fabian in despair, "so calm yourself.

I cannot bear to see you in tears. I ..."

"Well, this is a pretty specimen of petticoat government," exclaimed

Frank, who had come in meanwhile unnoticed, and had been a witness of

the little scene. "When she talks of oppression and slavery it seems to

me my young lady makes a mistake in the person. And you can put up with

that, Emile? Don't be offended--you may be a most remarkable scholar,

but, as a husband, I must say you play a sorry part."

He could not have come to his son-in-law's aid more effectually than by

these last words. Gretchen had no sooner heard them than she went over

to her husband's side.

"Emile is an excellent husband," she declared, indignantly, the source

of her tears suddenly drying up. "You need not reproach him, papa; it

is right and proper that a husband should have some feeling for his

wife."

Frank laughed. "Don't be so hasty, child, I meant no harm. Well, you

have put yourself out quite needlessly. As you have guessed so near the

truth, we must take you into the plot now, we can't help ourselves.

News has just arrived ..."

"From Waldemar?" inquired the Professor, interrupting him with eager

anxiety.

His father-in-law shook his head.

"No, from Rakowicz. We cannot hear from Herr Nordeck. He will either

come or ... or we must make up our minds to the worst. But the Princess

and her niece are to arrive in the course of the afternoon, and as soon

as they are there, you must go up to the Castle. It may look strange

that the two ladies, who have not been near Wilicza for a year, should

come over just now so unexpectedly, and should remain there alone in

the absence of the master. Your presence will give a more harmless

colour to the business; it will seem quite a natural coincidence. You

must pay a visit to the mother of your former pupil, and present

Gretchen as your wife. That will satisfy the servant-folk. The

ladies know the exact state of the case. I shall ride over to the

border-station, and wait there with the horses, as has been agreed. And

now, child, your husband must tell you all the rest, I have no time to

lose."

He went, and Gretchen sat down on the sofa again to receive her

husband's communications, well-pleased that she was now to be placed on

a par with Polish women, and admitted to take part in a conspiracy.

Evening had come, or rather night. All was quiet and asleep at the

manor-farm, and up at the Castle the servants had been despatched to

bed as early as possible. Some windows on the first story were still

lighted up, those of the green salon and the two adjoining rooms. In

one of the latter stood the tea-table, which had been prepared as

usual--any change might have excited surprise below stairs--but the

meal was naturally a mere form. Neither the Princess nor Wanda was to

be induced to take any refreshment, and even Professor Fabian turned

rebellious, and refused to have any tea. He declared he could not

swallow a drop, when his wife urged on him the necessity of taking some

support. She had brought him to the table almost by force, and was

administering a low-toned but most impressive lecture.

"Don't be so anxious, Emile. I shall have you ill with the agitation,

and the two ladies in there as well. Countess Wanda looks as pale as a

corpse, and the Princess's face is enough to frighten one. Neither of

them utters a word. I can't bear this state of mute suspense any

longer, and it will be a relief to them to be alone. We will leave them

together for half an hour."

Fabian assented, but pushed away the tea-cup she had forced upon him.

"I can't think why you are all in such despair. If Herr Nordeck has

declared that he will be here with the Count before midnight, he will

be here, even if a whole regiment is posted on the border ready to take

him. That man can manage anything. There must be something in the

superstition of his Wilicza people who one and all hold him to be

bullet-proof. He has just gone through dangers, only to hear of which

makes one's hair stand on end, and gone through them unharmed. He will

get safely across the frontier, you'll see."

"God grant it!" sighed Fabian. "If only that fellow Hubert were not

over at W----, precisely to-day of all days. He would recognise

Waldemar and the Count in any disguise. Suppose he should meet them!"

"Hubert has been doing stupid things all his life, he won't be likely

to do a clever one now in the last week of his official career. It is

not in him," said Gretchen contemptuously. "But he is right in one

thing. One no sooner sets foot in this Wilicza than one finds one's

self in the midst of a conspiracy. It must be in the air, I think, for

I don't understand else how we Germans allow ourselves to be brought

into it, how it is we are made to conspire in favour of these Poles,

Herr Nordeck, papa, even you and I. Well, I hope this is the last plot

Wilicza will ever see!"

The Princess and Wanda had remained in the adjoining room. Nothing had

been changed, either here, or in any of the other apartments, since she

had left them a year before; yet there was a desolate, uninhabited look

about the house, which seemed to say that the mistress had been long

absent. The lamp, which stood on a side-table, only lighted up a part

of the dark and lofty chamber; the rest of it lay altogether in shadow.

In this deep shadow sat the Princess, motionless, her eyes fixed on

vacancy. It was the very place in which she had sat on the morning of

Leo's fatal visit, of that visit which had resulted in so terrible a

catastrophe. The mother struggled hard against the recollections which

assailed her on all sides at the return to a place so associated with

her most cruel griefs. What had become of those proud, far-reaching

plans, of those hopes and projects which had all found their centre

here. They lay in ruins. Bronislaus' rescue was the one concession

wrung from Fate, and even this rescue was but half achieved. Perhaps at

this instant he and Waldemar were paying with their lives for their

attempt to consummate it.

Wanda stood in the recess of the centre window, looking out with a

fixed, strained gaze, as though her eyes could pierce through the

darkness reigning without. She had opened the window, but she did not

feel how sharply the night air smote her, did not know that she

shivered beneath its breath. For the Countess Morynska this hour

contained no remembrance of the past, with all its shattered plans and

hopes; all her thoughts were concentrated on the coming event, as she

waited in an anguish of expectation and deadly suspense. She no longer

trembled for her father alone, but for Waldemar also--\_chiefly\_ for

Waldemar, indeed, her heart maintaining its rights, spite of

everything.

It was a cool and rather stormy night; there was no moonlight, and the

stars, which here and there twinkled forth in the overcast sky, soon

disappeared again behind the clouds. All around the Castle there was

peace, deep peace; the park lay silent and dark, and, in the pauses

between the gusts of wind, each falling leaf might be heard.

Suddenly Wanda started, and a half-suppressed exclamation escaped her

lips. In an instant the Princess stood by her side.

"What is it? Did you see anything?"

"No; but I thought I heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the distance."

"Mere fancy! You have so often thought you heard it. It was nothing."

Yet the Princess followed her niece's example, and leaned far out of

the window. The two women waited, listening breathlessly. Yes, a sound

was borne over to them certainly; but it was distant and indistinct,

and now again the wind rose, and wafted it from them altogether. Full

ten minutes passed in torturing suspense--then, at last, steps were

heard in one of the side avenues of the park, where there was an outlet

into the forest--careful steps, warily approaching, and their eyes,

strained to the uttermost, could discern through the darkness two

figures issuing from among the trees.

Fabian rushed into the room. He had been watching too.

"They are there," he whispered, hardly able to restrain his emotion.

"They are coming up the side steps. The little door leading to the park

is open. I went to see not half an hour ago."

Wanda would have flown to meet the new-comers, but Gretchen, who had

followed her husband, held her back.

"Stay here, Countess Morynska," she entreated. "We are not alone in the

Castle. There is no safety but in your own rooms."

The Princess said not a word, but grasped her niece's hand to check the

imprudent impulse. They were not long kept on the rack now. Only a few

minutes--then the door flew open, and Count Morynski stood on the

threshold, Waldemar's tall figure appearing in the background. Almost

in the same instant Wanda lay in her father's arms.

Fabian and Gretchen had tact enough to withdraw, feeling that, after

all, they were but strangers, and that the family should be left alone.

But Waldemar, too, seemed to reckon himself among the strangers, for,

instead of going in, he closed the door behind the Count, and stayed

himself in the outer room. Turning to his old friend and tutor, he held

out his hand to him with hearty warmth.

"Well, we have got here in safety," said he, drawing a deep breath.

"The principal danger, at least, is over. We stand on German soil."

Fabian clasped the offered hand in both his own. "Oh, Waldemar, what a

venture for you to plunge into! Suppose you had been discovered!"

Waldemar smiled. "It does not do to suppose anything in such an

undertaking. A man, who wants to cross an abyss, must not think of

turning giddy, or he is lost. I only took such possibilities into

account so far as to provide against them. I kept my aim steadily in

view, and looked neither to the right nor to the left. You see my plan

has answered."

He threw off his cloak, drew a revolver from his breast-pocket, and

laid it on the table. Gretchen, who was standing by, retreated a step.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear young lady," said Nordeck, reassuringly.

"The weapon has not been used. No blood has been spilled in this

business, though at first it did not seem likely we should get through

it without. We found unexpected succour in time of need from our friend

the Assessor Hubert."

"From the new Counsellor?" exclaimed Gretchen, in astonishment.

"Yes,--is he made Counsellor? Well, he can air his new dignity over in

Poland. We came across the frontier with his carriage and papers."

The Professor and his wife uttered a simultaneous expression of

surprise.

"He certainly did not render us the service voluntarily," went on

Nordeck. "On the contrary, he will not fail to call us highway robbers;

but necessity knows no law. Life and liberty were at stake, and we did

not stay long to consider. Yesterday at noon, we arrived at an inn in a

Polish village, not much more than a couple of leagues from the

frontier. We knew that they were on our track, and we were anxious to

get over on to German territory at any price; but the host warned us

not to continue our flight before dusk. He said it was impossible, the

whole country was up after us. The man was a Pole; his two sons had

served under Count Morynski during the insurrection; the whole family

would have given their lives for their former chief. The warning was

not to be disregarded, so we stayed. Towards evening, when our horses

were standing ready saddled for us in the stables, the Assessor Hubert

suddenly made his appearance in the village on his way back from W----.

His carriage had met with some slight accident, which was to be

repaired as speedily as possible. He had left it at the village smithy,

and had come on to the inn with the main intention of finding out

whether any traces of us had been found. As he was unacquainted with

the language, his Polish coachman had to act as interpreter--he had

brought the man on with him for this purpose, instead of leaving him

with the carriage. The landlord, of course, declared he knew nothing.

We were hidden in the upper story, and could distinctly hear the

Assessor declaiming in his favourite way about traitors and criminals

fleeing from justice, adding that the pursuers were already on their

track. In this way he was kind enough to disclose to us the fact that

we really were pursued, and that it was known which way we had taken.

He had even heard there were two of us, and that we were mounted. Now

we had no choice left but to get away as quickly as possible. The

imminence of the danger inspired me with a happy thought. I transmitted

the necessary instructions to the landlord through his wife, and he

understood them at once. The Assessor was informed that it would take a

full hour to mend his carriage. He was very wrath at first, but after a

time came to the conclusion that he had better stay at the inn and have

some supper, as was suggested to him. Meanwhile we were out of the back

door, and off to the smithy. The landlord's son had taken care that the

carriage should be ready for us. I got in, my uncle"--this was the

first time Waldemar had so designated the Count--"my uncle, who had

passed for my servant throughout the journey, took the reins, and we

drove out of the village on the other side.

"In the carriage I made an invaluable discovery. The Assessor's

overcoat lay on the back seat with his pocket-book and all his papers

which this prudent official had either confidingly left in it, or

forgotten--a fresh proof of his eminent qualifications for the service

of the State. Unfortunately, with my gigantic stature, I could make no

use of his passport, but among the other papers I found many that were

likely to be of use to us. For instance, a warrant from the L----

police for Count Morynski's arrest, even upon German soil, a letter

empowering the Assessor to consult with the authorities at W---- as to

the best means of attaining this object, together with several notices

from these authorities as to the probable direction we had taken, and

the measures already adopted for our capture. We were unscrupulous

enough to turn these documents, destined for our confusion, to our own

advantage. The Assessor had said at the inn that he had come through

A---- that morning. There the carriage would no doubt be recognised,

and the change in its occupants remarked, so we made a \_détour\_ round

by the next military post, and drove up quite openly as Assessor Hubert

and his coachman. I showed the necessary papers, and demanded to be let

through as speedily as possible, alleging that I was on the track of

the fugitives, and that there was pressing need for haste. That plea

was irresistible. Nobody asked for our passports. We were considered as

sufficiently identified, and so got safely across the frontier. A mile

or two from it on this side we left the carriage on the high road in

the neighbourhood of a village where it is sure to be found, and

reached the Wilicza woods on foot. At the border-station we found the

steward waiting with horses, according to previous agreement. We

mounted, rode off at full speed, and here we are."

Gretchen, who had been listening with eager interest, was highly

delighted at the trick played on her former suitor, but Fabian's good

nature would not allow of his feeling any such mischievous pleasure. On

the contrary, he asked in quite an anxious tone--

"And poor Hubert?"

"He is over yonder in Poland without his carriage or papers of

identification," said Waldemar, drily. "He may think himself lucky if

he is not taken for a traitor himself this time. It is quite on the

cards. If our pursuers really do reach the inn to-night, they will find

two strangers with their horses ready saddled, and the landlord will

take care not to clear up any possible mistake which might favour our

flight. The coachman, whose every feature betrays the Pole, and who,

moreover, is rather an imposing-looking person, might at need pass for

a nobleman in disguise, and the Assessor for his accomplice and

liberator. The latter cannot prove his identity, he does not speak the

language, and our neighbours are not in the habit of using much

ceremony in the matter of arrests, or of adhering very strictly to

prescribed forms. Perhaps the eminent Counsellor is now enjoying the

little treat he wished to give us on our arrival at Wilicza, that of

being taken up as a 'suspicious character' and transported handcuffed

to the nearest town."

"That would indeed be an incomparable close to his official career,"

laughed Gretchen, disregarding her husband's grave look.

"But enough now of this Hubert," broke off Waldemar. "I shall see you

again when I come back? I am here at the Castle \_incognito\_ to-night.

It will be some days before I officially return from Altenhof, where I

am supposed to be all the time. Now I must go and see my mother and my

cousin. The first agitation of the meeting will be over now."

He opened the door, and went into the next room where his family was

assembled. Count Morynski was seated in an easy-chair, still holding

his daughter in his arms, as she kneeled before him, resting her head

on his shoulder. The Count had aged considerably. The thirteen months

of his imprisonment seemed to have been so many years to him. His hair

and beard had grown quite white, and his face showed indelible traces

of the sufferings he had undergone through captivity and sickness, and,

above all, through the knowledge of his people's fate. He had been a

robust and energetic man when, little more than a year ago, he had

taken leave of his sister and daughter at Wilicza; he came back now old

and broken, his appearance telling plainly of health irremediably

shattered.

The Princess, who was standing by the Count's side, was the first to

notice her son's entrance. She went forward to meet him.

"So you have come at last, Waldemar," she said, reproachfully. "We

thought you were going to abandon us altogether."

"I did not wish to disturb your first meeting," said Waldemar.

"Do you still insist on being as a stranger to us? You have been so

long enough. My son"--and the Princess, deeply moved, held out her arms

to him--"my son, I thank you."

Waldemar was folded to his mother's heart for the first time since his

childhood, and in that long and ardent embrace the bitter estrangement

of years gave way; all that had once been the cause of coldness and

hostility between them sank out of sight. Here, too, a barrier was

torn down, an invisible barrier, but one productive of much evil, which

had too long stood between two human beings bound to each other by the

most sacred ties of blood. At length the son had entered into his

birthright, had won for himself his mother's love.

The Count now rose in his turn, and held out his hand to his deliverer.

"You do well to thank him, Hedwiga," said he; "as yet you do not know

all that he has risked in my behalf."

"The venture was not so great as it seemed," Waldemar replied, lightly.

"I had smoothed the way beforehand. Wherever there are prisons, bribery

is possible. Without that golden key I should never have made my way

into the fortress, still less should we have forced a passage out."

Wanda stood by her father, still clinging to his arm as though she

feared he might be torn from her again. She alone had spoken no word of

thanks, but her eyes had sought Waldemar's as she turned to him on his

entrance, and their glance must have been more eloquent than words. He

seemed satisfied, and made no attempt to approach her more directly.

"The danger is not quite over yet," he said, turning to the Count

again. "We have it unfortunately in black and white that even here you

are threatened with imprisonment and extradition. At the present moment

you are safe at Wilicza. Frank has promised to keep watch for us, and

you have urgent need of a few hours' rest, but to-morrow morning must

see us on the road to S----.

"You will not take the direct route to France or England then?" said

the Princess.

"No, time is too precious, and that is precisely the route they will

expect us to choose. We must make for the sea. S---- is the nearest

port--we can be there by to-morrow evening. I have arranged everything.

An English ship has been lying in harbour for the last month, of which

I have secured to myself the sole disposal. She is ready to put to sea

at any moment, and will take you straight to England, uncle. From

thence, France, Switzerland, Italy may easily be reached. You can take

up your abode where you will. Once out on the open sea, and you are

safe."

"And you, my dear Waldemar?" His uncle now addressed him in the

affectionate tone he had so long reserved for his younger brother.

"Will you pay no penalty for your boldness? Who can tell whether the

secret of my escape will be strictly kept? There are so many in it."

Waldemar smiled. "I certainly have been forced to give the lie to my

nature on this occasion, and to make confidences right and left.

Nothing could be done without it. Happily, all my confidants have

become my accessories; they cannot betray me without exposing

themselves. The rescue will be laid to my mother's charge, and

if, at some future time, reports of the truth get wind, well, we live

here on German territory. Count Morynski was neither accused nor

sentenced in this country, his rescue cannot therefore be here

accounted as a crime. It will seem natural enough that, in spite

of our political differences, I should stretch out my hand to save my

uncle--particularly when it is known that to that relationship another

has been added--that he has become my father also."

A quiver passed over Morynski's face at this reminder. He tried to

repress it, but in vain--it told of a pain he was unable to master. He

had long known of this love, which to him, as to his sister, had

appeared as a misfortune, almost as a crime. He, too, had fought

against it with all the means in his power, and, quite lately, had

endeavoured to withdraw Wanda from its influence. He had acquiesced

when she resolved on going with him to almost certain destruction; he

had accepted her offer with the one view of preventing this marriage.

It was a heavy sacrifice--it cost him a great struggle with those

national prejudices, that national hatred, which had been the ruling

principle of his life--but he looked at the man whose hand had led him

forth out of prison, who had risked life and freedom in order to win

back both for him--then he bent down to his daughter.

"Wanda," he said in a low voice.

Wanda looked up at him. Her father's face had never appeared to her so

weary, so sorrowful, as at this moment. She had been prepared to find

him altered, but she had not expected so terrible a change, and, as she

read in his eyes all that it cost him to give his consent, her own

personal wishes receded into the background, and the daughter's

passionate love burned up brightly within her.

"Not now, Waldemar," she implored, with a trembling voice. "You see

what my father has suffered, what he is still suffering. You cannot ask

me to leave him now when we have but just met. Let me stay with him for

a time, only for one year! You have preserved him from the worst of

all; but he has to go out among strangers, into banishment. Shall I,

can I let him go alone?"

Waldemar was silent. He had not courage to recall to Wanda the words

she had spoken at their last meeting. The sight of the Count's bowed

frame forbade any touch of anger, and pleaded powerfully in favour of

the daughter's prayer, but all the egotism of love rose up in revolt

against it. The young man had braved so much to earn for himself the

hand of the woman he loved, he could not bear that the reward should

longer be denied him. With contracted brow and lips tightly pressed

together, he stood, looking to the ground, when all at once the

Princess interfered.

"I will take any anxiety on your father's account from you, Wanda,"

said she. "I shall go with him."

Her listeners started in extreme surprise.

"What, Hedwiga?" asked the Count. "You think of going with me?"

"Into exile," concluded the Princess, with a steady voice. "It will be

no new thing to either of us, Bronislaus. We have tasted it before,

during long years. We will take the old fate on us again."

"Never," cried Waldemar, with kindling eyes. "I will never consent to

your leaving me, mother. Your place, in future, is here at Wilicza,

with your son."

"Who is busy imprinting on his land the mark of the German?"--the

Princess Baratowska's tone was almost severe in its earnestness. "No,

Waldemar, you underrate the Pole in me, if you think I could stay on in

Wilicza, in the Wilicza which is growing up under your rule. I have

given you a mother's love tardily but completely, and it will ever be

yours, though we part, though I go to a distance, and we only see each

other from time to time--but to stay here at your side, to look on day

by day while you overturn all that I have laboured to build up, to

give the lie to my whole past life by associating with your German

friends--on each occasion when our opposite opinions come into

collision to bow to your word of authority, that, my son, I cannot do,

that would be more than, strive as I might, I could accomplish. It

would rend asunder the newly formed ties between us, would call up the

old strife, the old bitterness again. So let me go, it will be best for

us all."

"I did not think any of the old bitterness would intrude upon this

hour," said Waldemar, with some reproach in his tone.

The Princess smiled sadly. "There is none in my heart against you, but

not a little, perhaps, against the Fate which has ordained our ruin.

Over the Morynski and Baratowski families the decree has gone forth.

With Leo one noble Polish house died out, which for centuries had shone

with lustre in the annals of our country. My brother is the last scion

of another. His name will soon be extinct, for Wanda is the last to

inherit it, and she will merge it in yours. Wanda is young, she loves

you--perhaps she may learn to forget, which to us would be impossible.

Life is before you, the future belongs to you--we have only the past."

"Hedwiga is right," spoke Count Morynski. "I cannot remain, and she

will not. The marriage with your father brought nothing but evil to

her, Waldemar, and it seems to me, as though no union between a Nordeck

and a Morynska could be productive of happiness. The disastrous cause

of discord, which proved so fatal to your parents, exists in your case

also. Wanda, too, is a child of our people. She cannot renounce her

race any more than you can yours. You are entering upon a hazardous

experiment in this marriage, but you have willed it, both of you--I

make no further opposition."

This was no very happy betrothal for the young pair. The mother's

suddenly announced departure, the father's resignation and ominous

warnings, cast a deep shade over the hour which generally fills two

youthful hearts with brightest sunshine. It really seemed as though

this passion, which had fought so hard a fight, had triumphed over so

many obstacles, were destined to know no joy.

"Come, Bronislaus," said the Princess, taking her brother's arm. "You

are wearied to death with the hasty ride and the agitation of the last

few days. You must rest till morning, if you are to find strength to

continue your journey. We will leave these two alone. They have hardly

spoken to each other yet, and they have so much to say!"

She left the room with the Count. Hardly had the door closed upon them

when the shadow vanished. With quick, impetuous tenderness Waldemar

threw his arms round his betrothed, and clasped her to his breast. He

had won her at last!

Fabian and his wife were still in the next room. Gretchen seemed much

put out, and cast many melancholy glances at the tea-table.

"How can people give way to their romantic feelings so as to forget all

the decent, orderly routine of life?" she observed. "The anxiety and

excitement are over now, and the joy of their first meeting too; they

might quietly sit down to table, but such an idea never occurs to one

of them. I could not persuade the Princess or Count Morynski to touch a

thing, but Countess Wanda must and shall have a cup of tea. I have just

made some fresh--she shall have it, whether she likes it or not. I will

just see whether she and Herr Nordeck are still in there in the salon.

You stay here, Emile."

Emile remained obediently in his place near the tea-urn, but the time

seemed rather long to him, for ten minutes, at least, elapsed, and his

wife did not return. The Professor began to feel uncomfortable; he felt

his presence to be quite superfluous, and yet he would so gladly have

made himself useful, like Gretchen, whose practical nature was never at

a loss; in order to be doing something, he took the ready filled cup of

tea, and carried it into the adjoining drawing-room. To his surprise,

he found it untenanted, except by his wife, who was standing before,

and very near to, the closed door of the Princess's study.

"Dear Gretchen," said Fabian, balancing the cup in his hand with

as much anxious care, as if it had contained the most precious

life-elixir. "Dear Gretchen, I have brought the tea. I was afraid it

might be getting cold, if this went on much longer."

The young lady had narrowly escaped being caught in a most suspicious

attitude, namely, that of bending down with her eye to the keyhole.

Luckily, she had had time to raise herself quickly as her husband came

in. She took hold of him, cup and all, and led him back into the outer

room.

"Never mind, Emile. The Countess won't want any tea, and it will go on

ever so much longer. But you need not make yourself unhappy about your

beloved Waldemar any more. Things are going very well with him in

there, very well indeed. I'll own I did him a wrong--he has a heart

after all. That cold, stiff Nordeck is really capable of going down on

his knees and uttering the most ardent words of love. I never could

have believed it!"

"But, how do you know all this, dear child?" asked the Professor, who

in his innocence and erudition had never had anything to do with

keyholes. "You were outside."

Gretchen blushed crimson, but she recovered herself quickly, and said

with much decision--

"You know nothing about it, Emile, and it is not necessary you should.

As the tea is here all ready, we had better drink it ourselves."

CHAPTER XVI.

Out at sea the mild spring night was yielding before the approach of

day. Faint stars still twinkled in the sky, but the distant horizon

gleamed with the first streaks of dawn, and the slumbering waves

murmured softly, as in a dream.

Over the waters, through the ever strengthening morning twilight, a

ship was speeding. On board her were Count Morynski, his daughter, and

Waldemar. They had left the port of S---- about midnight, but it had

taken them some hours to steam through the vast river-mouth, and they

were only now issuing forth into the open sea. Wanda had not found

courage to part from her father so immediately after their reunion; she

had insisted on going with him, at least so far as the port of

embarkation, and Waldemar had yielded to her earnest entreaties. There

could hardly be danger in the plan; indeed, the journey to S---- might

perhaps be performed more safely in the company of a lady. The Princess

Baratowska would remain at Rakowicz for the present. As her son had

rightly foreseen, the Count's escape was attributed to her sole agency.

She alone was suspected, and any possible investigation of the matter

would be directed against her and her place of residence. Wanda's

absence was scarcely remarked; besides which, it had been arranged that

she should return from Altenhof in the course of a few days under

Waldemar's escort.

Old Squire Witold's estate, now the property of his adopted son, lay

near the coast along which the outward-bound ship must pass, and the

plan decided on was that the young people should bear the fugitive

company so far on his way. Count Morynski intended to await in England

the arrival of the Princess, who would stay on at Rakowicz some weeks

longer to be present at the marriage of her son and niece, setting out

immediately after it to join her brother. On meeting in England, they

would concert together as to the choice of their future place of abode.

Gradually day had dawned. Its first chill rays of early light played on

the broad surface of the sea, but colourless as yet, and conveying no

warmth. Now, as the coast receded and the open sea lay before the

traveller, the parting could no longer be deferred. Yonder stretched

the shore which bounded the domain of Altenhof, and, in close proximity

to the vessel, now slackening her speed, fenced in by a wall of white

morning mist, lay the Beech Holm. The leave-taking on deck was short

and pathetic. Count Morynski suffered most from the keen pain of it.

Strive as he might to retain his composure, he broke down utterly as he

placed his daughter in the arms of her future husband. Waldemar saw

that the torture of this moment must not be prolonged. He quickly

lifted his betrothed into the boat lying off in readiness, and in a few

minutes it bore them over to the Beech Holm, while the ship was once

more set in motion. A white handkerchief fluttered from the deck, the

farewell signal was returned from the Holm, then the distance grew

greater and greater between the traveller and the dear ones left

behind. The ship steamed off at full speed towards the North.

Wanda sank down on one of the large fragments of stone strewn beneath

the beeches, and gave vent to an outburst of passionate grief.

Waldemar, standing by her side, was mastered by no emotion, but his

face was very grave, saddened by the pain of that parting hour.

"Wanda," he said, laying his hand on hers. "This separation is not to

be a lasting one. If your father may not again set foot on his native

soil, nothing will hinder us from going to him. In a year you shall see

him again--I promise you."

Wanda shook her head sadly. "If I may yet find him! He has suffered too

much and too bitterly ever to regain health and an interest in life. It

seems to me that I have felt his arms round me for the last time."

Nordeck was silent. The same apprehension had forced itself on his mind

in that hour of parting. Count Morynski might rally from the effects of

his wounds and long confinement, but the defeat of that cause, to which

he had dedicated his life, was a blow but too likely to prove mortal.

When, years before, he had gone out into banishment, he could oppose to

his fate the mental and physical strength of a man in his prime; but

now that strength was sapped and failing--who could tell how long the

last remnants of it might hold good!

"Your father will not be alone," returned Waldemar, at last. "My mother

is going to him, and I only now begin to see all that we owe her for

this resolution of hers. It takes a heavy care from both of us. You

know her love for her only brother; she will be the staff and support

he needs."

Wanda's gaze was still riveted on the ship, now a mere speck in the

far-off distance.

"And you are to lose the mother you have so lately found?" said she, in

a low voice.

His brow clouded over at the remembrance.

"You do not think that is a light matter to me? No; yet I fear she is

right. Our natures are too similar for one willingly to bend to the

other, and were we to live together, concessions must be made. Were I

of her people, or she of mine, there would be need of none; she would

take pride then in all that I undertook. My success would be hers--I

should be carrying out her wishes as well as my own--as it is, I should

find her will constantly opposed to mine. To clear a path for new

institutions at Wilicza, I must begin by breaking down those she has

set up. We can stretch out our hands to each other across the gap, and

feel at last that we are mother and son; we cannot walk on side by side

through life. She has seen this more clearly than I, and has chosen

what is best for us. The decision, to which she has come, will alone

insure our lasting reconciliation."

The young Countess raised her dark tearful eyes to his face. "Have you

forgotten my father's warning? The unhappy national feud, that cause of

dissension which has hitherto torn our family into two, exists between

us also. It made your parents miserable."

"Because they had no love for each other," replied Waldemar, "because

cold calculation on either side had bound them together by the closest

tie which can connect two human beings. How could peace come of such a

union? The old strife was sure to blaze out anew, more hotly than ever.

But we can bring other forces into the field. I have won my bride in

the teeth of this national hostility, and I shall be able to defend my

happiness from its influence. If our marriage is really a venture, it

is a venture we may fearlessly make."

The light morning clouds sailing over the heavens became more and more

lucent, and the East flushed radiant with the dawn. A rosy glow spread

over the whole horizon, and the waves shone as though edged with liquid

gold. Then came one bright sudden flash, the first herald of the rising

sun, and immediately following it, the great luminous planet rose from

the waves, mounting slowly higher and higher, until it orbed itself

above them, appearing in clear and perfect majesty. Rose-tinted rays

quivered in the chill, pure morning air, and the surface of the water,

a minute ago so dark and drear, gained a deep, wonderful blue. With the

sunrise light and life streamed forth over earth and sea.

The first beams fell on the Beech Holm, dispersing the remnants of

white mist which still hovered between the trees; they sank on to the

dew-covered grass, they fluttered off into the forest, until nothing

was left of them but a light vaporous gauze, thin as air. The wind

rustled among the crests of the mighty beeches, which gently bent

before it, murmuring softly to each other. On this occasion they

whispered no gloomy complaint of decay and death as on that memorable

day by the forest lake--memorable, for was it not there, mid the

autumnal woods, in the falling twilight, out of the bosom of the

shadowy mists, that the dream vision had arisen, faint picture of that

scene which now appeared in glowing reality, the sea-washed Beech Holm

of poetic story, lying bathed in the golden sunlight?

Waldemar and Wanda again stood on the spot where they had stood

together years before--he, the wild, impetuous boy who fancied he had

only to stretch forth his hand to take undisputed possession of that

which had aroused his first passion; she, the giddy, light-hearted

child who had played with that passion in her thoughtless vanity. At

that time they had neither of them known anything of life and its

tasks. Since then they had had experience of it in all its fearful

earnest, had been drawn into its bitterest conflicts. Every obstacle

that can divide two human beings had been raised between them, but the

old sea-legend had spoken truly. Since the hour in which the spell had

woven itself round their two youthful hearts, the charm had worked

continuously, had preserved its hold upon them, spite of estrangement

and separation, had drawn them irresistibly together while all around

them blazed the hot flame of strife and hatred, had brought them

triumphantly through all the array of hostile influences to this the

hour of fulfilment.

Waldemar had put his arm round his betrothed, and was looking

searchingly into her eyes.

"Do you think now that a Nordeck and a Morynska may be happy together?"

he asked. "We will dispel the shadow which has lain on their union

hitherto."

Wanda leaned her head against his shoulder. "You will have much to bear

with, and much to overcome. Your wife will not be able to renounce all

that has so long been dear and sacred to her. Do not sever me

altogether from my people, Waldemar. Part of my life is rooted there."

"Have I ever been hard to you?" Waldemar's voice was full of that

strange gentleness which but one human being on earth had had power to

win from that cold, inflexible man. "Those eyes could teach the wild,

headstrong boy docility--they will be able to hold the man in curb. I

know that the shadow will often fall between us, that it will cost you

many tears, and me many a struggle; but I know too that at any critical

moment my Wanda will stand where she stood once before, when danger was

threatening me, and where henceforth her place will be--at my, at her

husband's side."

The ship, which was bearing the fugitive away from his fatherland,

disappeared in the cloud-like distance. All around, the sapphire sea

rippled and murmured--the Beech Holm lay flooded in golden sunlight.

Once again the waves sang the old, old melody, the chant of billow and

breeze combined, while in the pauses came a faint, mysterious music

like the chiming of bells--Vineta's spirit-greeting from beneath the

waters.