

"How I can remember you sitting there in the corner!" said Alexis. "You were knitting and pretending to be the hausfrau, with your little round serious face, and the golden curls peeping from under your funny little cap."

"While you went out shooting with a toy gun, and brought home a sour apple or two," laughed Lise.

"We will go everywhere!" cried Alexis. "Lise, I am determined we will be happy by ourselves these next few days. If we are to lead the dull, hard lives other people lead for the rest of our lives, we will have something to look back upon to comfort us. Oh, Lise! it is a shame that we should be separated. Why?"

This impetuous cry reached other ears. A figure came along the path leading to the boathouse. It was the count. Seeing them, he stopped short, then gave Lise a satirical little bow, and, without glancing at his son, passed on.

They looked at each other in dismay.

"Who cares?" said Alexis, so defiantly that Lise smiled. After all, what a boy he was! But her heart sank as he told her about the planned expedition to Warmbrunn. She had been somewhat puzzled by the countess' colder manner that morning. Now she understood; the knowledge brought the blood to her cheek, reserve to her manner. She left Alexis abruptly. She would promise nothing in answer to his entreaties, not even that she would meet him again, and he went back to the castle dejected, and secretly hardened himself against all but Lise herself, whom he regarded as an innocent victim to the machinations of her elders.

Meanwhile the count had gone straight to his wife, greatly irritated by what he had seen and heard, confessing that she was right. The countess sent at once for Herr Barmann, and forced herself to arise and receive him. In a few moments he appeared and expressed his regret at the sudden illness of the gnädige Frau.

"Yes, my good Barmann, I am not strong. It is for this reason I have sent for you. Be seated, and let us speak low, for it is of my most private affairs I would speak."

Herr Barmann took the proffered chair. What was coming?

"You are aware, my dear Barmann, that the count would never have sunk his capital on the estate, as he has done, had it not been that he wished to keep up the property that our son might inherit and perpetuate the family name. Were Alexis to offend his father—were he, for instance, to suggest a marriage which we should not approve—the count is just in the humor to sell the property, and to will everything to his sister's children. I have no power with my husband, when he is once stirred into action, Barmann; and this is why I have sent for you. I have been urging the count to make his will. His excuse is that there is no notary at hand. Your future son-in-law is, I believe, a lawyer. Lise is here. What more natural than that he should wish to pay you a visit? If you could privately suggest the matter to Herr, Herr—Ulrich, and invite him openly, we

should make his acquaintance, and I might lead the count to make a will in Alexis' favor. Do you understand?" she concluded, meaningly.

"I believe I do," said her factotum, somewhat drily. He understood that she was afraid of Lise, and was strategizing for the presence of Franz Ulrich to annul the embryo flirtation. He knew it was a wise idea. Yet the countess' dread annoyed him, and he went home frowning as blackly as the count himself.

In the evening he wrote to Ulrich, but he did not tell Lise. He was silent at supper time, until she filled his pipe and brought it to him; then he seized her fair little hand, and said, very gently:

"Lise, you would oblige me by not going out to-morrow—at least, by keeping in the garden. And do not receive any one, my child. Believe me, I have a good reason, a serious reason, for asking you this."

The blood rushed to Lise's face. Innocent though she was, she felt guilty.

"But I had promised to go to the Frau Pastorin's coffee the day after to-morrow," she faltered. "I promised Lenuchen to teach her a new embroidery stitch."

"You may go where you please the day after to-morrow. I spoke only of to-morrow."

"What could it mean?" thought Lise; but as she asked herself she fancied she knew. The countess did not think her good enough for the companionship of her son! First came a rush of angry pride, then a burst of tears. She was leaning out of window that the evening air might cool her burning eyes, when the scent of a cigar mingled with the perfume of the jasmine on the veranda floated upward; she heard a footstep on the path outside the garden wall. Some one went along whistling a Prussian quick march. It was Alexis. The thought comforted her. Her adopted brother did not despise her; she was good enough for him. He would find a way of seeing her, too, in spite of them! and with incipient rebellion in her heart she fell asleep that night.

Alexis, who guessed that his father's moody air was the result of "some nonsense his mother had put into his father's head about Lise," pretended to lounge about the house, but as soon as he felt himself unwatched, he stole off.

Lise's heart beat as the bell rang. She dropped her work and crouched upon the sofa as she heard the old servant repeat the sentence her master had taught her before leaving the house:

"The Fraulein had a headache and could see no one."

"Very well."

Lise heard the words distinctly. They sounded careless or angry. What would Alexis think of her? Why should they have forced her to be rude to Alexis? It was tyranny. When her father came in she had so far controlled herself as to maintain that outward unruffled serenity which was her principal charm. But she could not steady her voice, and her blue eyes shone and scintillated.

"She loves that boy—better than Franz!" was her father's dismayed conclusion.