

sharply awakened Lise from a moral stupor. As she walked toward the forest, clasping and wringing her fingers, she was in despair. Her truthful, tranquil nature was brought face to face with her position. She honored and respected the man who had loved and chosen her—the man she had accepted as her husband in innocent ignorance of the fact that the old brother and sister tie between herself and the boy count had been a real, actual tie; now, she knew, she felt, that the childish tenderness and mutual dependance was the mere sign of a fact—a deep, unutterable and passionate love.

She was in the forest. Along the narrow path lay a felled pine, and here Lise seated herself and wept, until she was roused to self-possession by the sound of a foot-step. She dried her eyes and rallied herself.

The tall, slender figure of Alexis came through the shades. As he came near, she shrank back; but he saw her white dress, and with one spring was close to her, seated at her side.

"Now, Fraulein Barmann, what does this mean?" His happy blue eyes sparkled under his long lashes. "You see it is of no use to avoid me—I know where you are."

His bantering, his actual, loved presence, was too much for poor Lise. She turned aside her head, to hide the big tears that welled from her eyes.

Alexis was in dismay. He saw that Lise trembled. He waited a minute, then he heard a sob. He threw himself on his knees at her feet, in anguish.

"What have I done? what have I said?" he cried; "oh Lise, for pity's sake tell me. I would rather die than hurt you."

"You have not hurt me, except by coming to me when I thought I should be alone."

"Then you cry when you are alone, Lise?"

"I did not cry before you came." Lise was rallying her forces to defend herself—but they were scattered—and she blundered.

"People who cry are not happy, Lise."

"I am quite happy." That rebellious lip of hers would quiver, and her hands would tremble, though her eyes were fixed upon Alexis with a steady gaze.

"You are not my darling sister?" The tender, manly voice was a torture. With a violent effort she brought herself to say, in an unnatural voice, "Count Alexis—I am not well—I am troubled—please go, please leave me."

"If you are in trouble, my darling Lise, who but I should help you?"

He was by her side, sitting on the felled trunk, his supporting arm round her. "My sister, whom I have always loved best in the world, will you not let me help you?"

"You cannot." Lise rallied herself, slid from his embrace, and roused her drooping energies to help her to be true to herself, to Franz and to Alexis.

The movement, her repudiation of his sympathy, touched him to the quick. "If I thought it would make you happier," he cried, passionately, "I would leave you here, now, this moment, Lise! But I know you better

than you do yourself; I know that no one can ever be to you what I have been."

Her eyelids drooped, and Alexis gained courage. "Tell me all about this engagement," he said, with the tender authority of an elder brother. "Perhaps, when you have described this Herr Ulrich to me and have told me the circumstances I may believe that he will make you a better husband than—any one else could."

"I met him in Dresden," began Lise, after a pause, then she sighed.

"Well, I did not imagine that you met him here. They seem to have imprisoned you in Dresden, pretty well." He spoke bitterly.

"It was—at church."

"Quite romantic, in fact—like *Gretchen* in 'Faust.'" (She looked reproachfully at him.) "You must not mind me, Lise. It makes me so angry to see you unhappy that I cannot help saying sharp things."

"We sat just opposite. I did not notice him, but my aunt used to laugh about his looking at me. One day I dropped my hymn book and he picked it up; then some months afterward we went to a party, and he was introduced to me; he did not say much, and did not ask me to dance, but he stayed in the corner; then—then—soon after that, his father came to my uncle, and said that—Franz wished to be betrothed to me." She blushed and sighed.

"So, when he did come out of his corner, it was to some purpose! Well, I can continue your story for you. There was the betrothal, and the cards were sent out (you took good care not to send one to me, by the way), and this ring" (he took her hand, then flung it from him,) "was put on your finger by him. Bah! I could tear it off and throw it into the stream—the badge of your being bound to that ugly, black-bearded, solemn idiot—oh yes! Lise, you needn't start—I know his face."

"How?" Her blue eyes were round with astonishment.

"How? Now do you know how?" he cried, furiously, tearing a photograph from his pocket. "Ah! you look guilty, don't you? You never missed it—you never thought of looking at the portrait of your beloved since you left it in my mother's room. And you call that love? I am ashamed of you, Lise! And as for the man who can inspire such a poor, sham sentiment, that is what he deserves!" and he tore the portrait and flung the fragments contemptuously from him.

Her breast heaved—it was true she had not noticed the loss of the photograph.

"The fact is, I am not worthy of him!" she cried. "He is so clever, and oh! so good. From the first moment he spoke to me I felt how far above me he was; how different to the people I usually met. I trusted him with my whole soul. Ah! I could go to him now and tell him all—everything, sure and safe that he would forgive me and help—"

In her agitation she had betrayed herself. Alexis suddenly changed—paled. "All?" he said, with assumed calm. "What is there, Lise, he would have to forgive?"