

marriage would be to the proud lady whose greatest boast it was that her pedigree was without a flaw? Should she rob her beloved brother-friend of his birthright, for this she would most surely do were she to second him in what was most likely a mere boyish folly? "Never! never!" she cried; and before another half an hour had passed old Katchen had delivered a note at the Schloss directed to Count Alexis, containing a few words clearly and boldly written.

Next morning the countess—feeling strong in her belief that Franz Ulrich had arrived, and that after an interview with him all would be well—was breakfasting in the veranda with her husband, when Alexis came clattering along the corridors within, and emerged, in full uniform, his cheeks flushed, his eyes glittering. He greeted them with a military salute.

"Why—what—how—Alexis!" A sudden fear chilled her, she knew not what.

"I'm off, father and mother—that is all. I see you have not read your papers."

The papers were lying unopened on the breakfast table. Alexis took one, unfolded it, and pointed to an ominous sentence in huge, black letters—"Declaration of War."

"I heard from Von Mansfeldt. Here is his letter," and he handed a thin sheet to his pale mother, who recoiled at the ominous sight of his thick, military glove. The letter was from his friend, Captain Mansfeldt, written in great excitement.

"But Von Mansfeldt speaks of volunteering, of transferring into another regiment, does that not mean that yours will not be called out as yet?" stammered the countess, with a gleam of hope.

"I shall see when I reach Breslau." Alexis strode away to expedite the servants, who were hurrying to get their young master's luggage ready. It seemed but a few, short, cruel instants before the count and countess stood and watched the cloud of dust and the waving helmet as Alexis was whirled away to be hidden by the smoke of the battle-field—perhaps forever.

The pair could not look at each other. The count stood grimly watching the clouds of dust clear from the corner round which the carriage disappeared. The countess silently staggered into the house, pressing her hands to her weak heart; then Marie, her maid, came in, pale, with red eyes, and in a subdued voice announced, "Herr Ulrich."

"I cannot see him!" said the unhappy mother, passionately. Then, as Marie bowed her head, and would have retired, she said, "Never mind, bring him in."

"I regret to hear this unexpected news, madam," Ulrich said as he entered.

She bowed coldly to the square, somewhat awkward young man with the serious eyes and the bushy black beard. With a woman's swift changeableness she merely saw in Franz her son's rival. She forgot her horror of love between Alexis and Lise, and felt angry with Lise that she could tolerate this common, ordinary person.

The countess drew herself up. It seemed a liberty in this "lawyer fellow" to commence an ordinary conversation as if he were an equal, instead of confining himself to his business. "Is Lise with you?" she asked, haughtily.

He replied, "No."

"I think it would have been the least she could do to come to me at once and offer her sympathy," said the countess. It was a relief to feel angry with some one.

Ulrich, still standing hat in hand, explained that the news of the declaration of war had but just arrived at the cottage as he left, and that he had begged Herr Barmann to break it to Lise. The countess looked up sharply. Did she not detect a hidden meaning in his words? She rose and swept before Franz into the count's library, where the count was sitting before his table, staring miserably into the corners.

"Is this necessary to-day?" he asked, looking at them with dazed eyes. "Is it necessary that I should be tortured by making provisions that—that may never be required?"

Seating herself, she motioned Ulrich to a chair, and began to talk on the subject of Alexis' future as if he were destined to spend his days there, in safety, instead of tempting fate among bullets and cannon balls.

In an hour or two the count's will was executed, signed and witnessed. Alexis was heir to a fine property, provided he married with the consent of his parents. Otherwise, he could not claim one farthing.

Ulrich returned to the cottage deep in thought; indeed, every few minutes he paused and seemed to turn over something in his mind. "She is a determined woman," he thought, alluding to the countess. "But, if I am not greatly mistaken, it is more bravado than firmness. There is too much show of confidence. She is just the one to break down utterly at a moment's notice. Now for my poor, poor little Lise." His heart ached so much for the one he loved too dearly for her to anger him, that his own trouble was almost forgotten.

As the days passed and Alexis' regiment was not among those dispatched to the seat of war, the countess breathed more freely. After all, now that she had been privately reassured by friends in high quarters that Alexis' regiment would be one of the last called upon, and that it was quite possible that before this the war would be over, she persuaded herself that all had happened for the best. Alexis had been called away in the nick of time, before he had made a fool of himself, and it should not be her fault if Lise did not return to Dresden Ulrich's wife.

"I cannot quite make that man out," thought the countess. "Does he love the girl? He does not look in the least like a happy lover. Is he jealous? He does not treat her as if he were. I never saw greater reverence in a man's manner; he might really be of good family, to judge by his behavior to Lise." See occupied herself with the marriage, and had succeeded in talking over Herr Barmann to mention the subject to Franz.