

A SILESIAN LOVE STORY.

NOT far from Breslau lies a wild plain, where the broken, rocky soil throws up fir trees, bushes and myriads of wild flowers, that clamber caressingly among the stones, while mere patches of vegetation stud the land. Still, each few miles, clusters of huts, a church and a few big houses, testify to a population. One village boasts of a large castle, whose white towers are a feature in the landscape. Within the massive walls there are vast halls, rich in carving, and full of old armor and trophies of ancient weapons. One wing of the castle is occupied by the countess—a tall, stately lady of some fifty years. Her still golden masses of wavy hair are carefully arranged, drawn back from her high forehead. She moves her blue eyes slowly, her lips unclosed carefully, for the countess is fighting a daily duel with Time, and has acquired many a little knack of parrying his thrusts. She has so far succeeded in her fight against Time that as she reclines in her muslin draperies in an arm-chair—her profile cameo-like against the velvet, her white arms carelessly poised—she still is undoubtedly a handsome woman.

A tall, well-made girl, with long plaits of dark brown hair falling upon the blue and white dress, which seems somehow to match the blue eyes that look out of her clear skin, is standing before the countess, her hands crossed. On one of her fingers is a plain gold ring. This is Lise, the daughter of Herr Barmann, a well-to-do farmer—a distant connection of the noble family—who after his wife's death, when Lise was a child, came to take charge of the estate, sending his little daughter to be brought up by a married sister in Dresden.

At first Lise used to stay with her father during the summer, and she and the young Count Alexis were great playmates. But when they were both fourteen some little incident that occurred caused the countess serious thought. From that time it so happened that Alexis and Lise never came home simultaneously. When Count Alexis, who was now a lieutenant in the Prussian army, happened to get leave, Lise would be suddenly summoned by her aunt on some pretext. Just now the countess remembered with satisfaction that Alexis' last furlough was only a month ago. It was better so, even though Lise was now engaged to a serious-minded, most satisfactory young solicitor in Dresden.

Just now she was talking to Lise of her betrothed, Franz Ulrich, whose square, sensible face was pictured in the photograph Lise had brought to show the countess, which the lady held in her hand, glancing at it as she concluded a long speech, containing much moral advice, with, "and I hope the engagement will not be too long, for—"

She stopped abruptly, rose to her feet, and turned fiery red. Quick footsteps with the sound of clanking sword and spurs were followed by the entrance of a tall young officer. There was a cry of "mother" in a manly voice, and a helmet and gloves clattered to Lise's feet as the countess was boisterously embraced by the last human being she expected to see at that moment—her son.

"How—why, what is this, Alexis?" There was more annoyance than surprise in her tone, and she glanced at Lise with a look that meant, "Go—as quickly as you please." But Lise stood, amazed, with parted lips, wide-open eyes and heaving breast. Taken aback by the strangeness of the tall figure, that one word "mother" by its familiar tone took her back years in her life.

The tall young soldier, with the bright boyish face and fair close-shaven head, turned, gave a short, staid bow as he saw that a young lady was present, then sprang forward, and clasping both her hands, cried, "Lise! Is it possible? Can it be you?"

"To-morrow, my child," and the countess nodded significantly.

Lise vanished, but Alexis sprang after her. "Lise, don't go so soon. I have so much to say to you." But she was gone.

"Why, mother, you never told me how beautiful Lise had grown," said the young soldier, as he unbuckled his sword. His mother picked up the photograph and handed it to him. He looked puzzled. "What has this ugly fellow to do with me?"

"He is to be Lise's husband."

"Lise married? Why, she is a child. What are you all about?"

The countess detailed Lise's engagement. "But this is waste of time," she continued, "talking over the affairs of the intendant's daughter. How was it you got leave?"

While Alexis replied somewhat sulkily, his mother was thinking how to get Lise away. Lise had only been home a few days. What subterfuge was available? Ah! a sudden idea flashed across her.

"I am glad it happened that you came to-day," she began. "Had you arrived a day later you would not have found us. To-morrow we start for Warmbrunn. I am anxious about your father's health, and shall persuade him to take the baths."

To her discomfiture in walked the count himself, a fine old man, with piercing dark eyes and white hair.

"I am sorry you are not well," said Alexis, bending from his altitude to kiss his father's hand.

The old man stared. "I never felt better. Who said I was ill?" he said irascibly, turning to his wife.

The countess was equal to the occasion. She gave a lengthy, roundabout explanation of her opinion of his "waning health" to the count, and then, without pausing, smilingly suggested to Alexis that he required rest before rejoining them at dinner. As soon as the door closed the countess' manner changed. She always carried her will with her husband by storm. So she burst into a tirade—how cruel, how annoying it was, that after keeping Alexis and that girl apart all these years, they should have met like this. She had always had a presentiment some mischief would come of that companionship. If it were not that Barmann was simply indispensable to them, she would get rid of him at once—then there would be no fear.

However, the adjournment to the baths of Warmbrunn was not to be! The unpleasant excitement produced an