

CHAPTER XLVIII

WHEN the door had shut behind Gregory, Madame von Marwitz spoke, her eyes still closed:

"Am I now permitted to rise?"

Mrs. Talcott released her ankles and stood up.

"You've made a pretty spectacle of yourself, Mercedes," she remarked as Madame von Marwitz raised herself with extraordinary stateliness. "I've seen you behave like you were a devil before, but I never saw you behave like you were quite such a fool. What made you fight him and bite him like that? What did you expect to gain by it I'd like to know? As if you could keep that strong young man from his wife."

Madame von Marwitz had walked to the small mirror over the mantelpiece and was adjusting her hair. Her face, reflected between a blue and gold shepherd and shepherdess holding cornucopias of dried honesty, was still ashen, but she possessed all her faculties. "This is to kill Karen," she now said. "And yours will be the responsibility."

"Taken," Mrs. Talcott replied, but with no facetiousness.

Several of the large tortoiseshell pins that held Madame von Marwitz's abundant locks were scattered on the floor. She turned and looked for them, stooped and picked them up. Then returning to the mirror she continued, awkwardly, to twist up and fasten her hair. She was unaccustomed to doing her own hair and even the few days without a maid had given her no facility.

Mrs. Talcott watched her for a moment and then remarked: "You're getting it all screwed round to one side, Mercedes. You'd better let me do it for you."

Madame von Marwitz for a moment made no reply. Her eyes fixed upon her own mirrored eyes, she continued to insert the pins with an air of stubborn impassivity; but when