

The Old Mam'selle's Secret.

CHAPTER XIII.

Three days had passed since the professor's arrival; three days which had completely transformed the monotonous life in the old house, but contrary to Felicitas's expectation, they had elapsed, to her, very quietly. The professor had not troubled himself any further about her; he seemed desirous of limiting their intercourse to that one interview. She felt relieved, and yet, strangely enough, had never been more humiliated and wounded. He had passed her several times in the hall without seeing her—true, on these occasions he had been very angry and the expression of vexation by no means improved his features. Spite of his entreaties, Frau Hellwig persisted in sending for him when visitors called on her and desired to see him. He came, when forced to do so, but was always a gruff, unamiable member of the company. Many other people came daily, whom Heinrich took upstairs to the second story—often poorly-clad, wretched looking creatures—whom Frederica, at any other time, would have turned rudely from the door. Now, to her great wrath, and indeed against Frau Hellwig's wish, they went up the snow-white, freshly cleaned stair, of the stately mansion, and found, without distinction of person, admittance and a hearing. The professor was famed as an oculist—he had made several cures in cases pronounced by other distinguished physicians to be hopeless, and thus the young man's name had become renowned.

Frau Hellwig had ordered Felicitas to take charge of the sweeping and dusting of her son's room. The little apartment seemed completely transformed since it had been occupied by its present tenant—instead of its former air of comfort it now looked like the cell of a Carthusian friar. The bright chintz curtains had shared the fate of the garlands—they had been dragged down by the professor's hands because they obscured the light; several rudely painted, highly colored battle-pieces had also been removed, and instead, a very old copper-plate engraving which had been banished to a dark corner of the hall, hung—spite of its worm-eaten black wooden frame—over the writing-table. It was a perfect masterpiece of the engraver's art—a picture of a beautiful young mother tenderly wrapping her child in a fur-bordered silk cloak. The woollen table-cover and several embroidered cushions had been banished as "dust collectors," and on a chest of drawers, instead of the statuettes that had formerly adorned it, stood the professor's books, closely arranged in the most symmetrical order. No turned pages nor battered corners were to be seen, yet they had been constantly used. Their bindings were extremely plain—the color indicated the language in which the work was written—the Latin once in gray, the German in brown, etc.

"Precisely as he tries to regulate human beings," thought Felicitas, bitterly, the first time she saw the volumes—"and woe betide any one who is dissatisfied with the appointed color!"

The professor took his coffee in the morning with his mother and the charming widow, then he went up to his own room and studied until noon. He had refused the wine Frau Hellwig sent up for his refreshment the day after his arrival, but a carafe of water was always placed beside him. He seemed to avoid being waited on, and never rang his bell. If the water lost its freshness, he went downstairs and refilled the carafe himself.

On the morning of the fourth day letters arrived for the professor. Heinrich had gone out, so Felicitas was sent up with them. She lingered at the door, some one was talking inside—a

woman's voice, apparently just ending some long story.

"Doctor Boehm told me about your son's disease of the eyes," said the professor kindly. "I will see what can be done."

"Oh, Herr Professor, such a famous man as you—"

"Never mind that," he interrupted, so harshly that she stopped in terror. "I will come and look at his eyes tomorrow," he added, more gently.

"But we are very poor people, we earn so little—"

"You have already said so twice," the professor again interrupted, some what impatiently. "Pray go, my time is very much occupied. If I can help your son it shall be done; good-bye!"

The woman came out and Felicitas entered. The professor sat at his writing-table, his pen was already flying swiftly over the paper. But he had seen the young girl come in and, without a word, held out his left hand for the letters. He broke the seal of one while Felicitas was returning to the door.

"By the way," he exclaimed, while reading the letter, "who dusts this room?"

"I do," replied the young girl, stopping.

"Well, then, I must beg you not to disturb my writing-table. It is very unpleasant to me to have a book even moved, and there is one that I can not find at all."

Felicitas quietly approached the table, on which lay several piles of books.

"What is the title of the volume?" she asked.

Something akin to a smile flashed across the professor's grave face. Such a question from girlish lips sounded strangely in the physician's study.

"You will hardly be able to find it—it is a French book. Cruveilhier, 'Anatomie du Systeme Nerveux' is on the back," he added. The semblance of a smile again appeared.

Felicitas instantly drew out the desired work; it was lying in a pile of French works.

"Here it is," she said. "It was just where you laid it yourself. I never disturb any of these books."

The professor leaned his left elbow on the table, and turning with a sudden jerk looked the young girl full in the face.

"Do you understand French?" he asked in a quick, stern tone.

Felicitas started; she had betrayed herself. She not only understood French, but spoke it easily and fluently. The old mam'selle had taught her most thoroughly. Now she must answer, and at once. Those steel gray eyes were fixed intently upon her face, they would instantly detect a falsehood—she must speak the truth.

"I have had lessons," she replied.

"Ah, yes, I remember, until you were nine years old—you have recollected part of the instruction," he said, rubbing his forehead with his hand.

Felicitas said nothing.

"That is the unfortunate cause which so utterly frustrated the plans my mother and I had formed for your education," he went on. "You had already acquired too much knowledge, and because we had our own opinions on this point, you detest us as your tormentors and Heaven knows what besides. Do you not?"

Felicitas struggled with herself for a moment, but resentment conquered. Her white lips answered coldly, "I have every reason to do so."

For a moment he knit his brows angrily; but perhaps he remembered how often as a physician, he had been forced to listen calmly to many a cross, impatient answer from irritable patients. The young girl before him was ill in mind, he thought, and this idea gave rise to the composure with which he said, "Well, I absolve you from the duplicity of which you are

accused—you are more than sincere. For the rest, we will try to console ourselves for your bad opinion."

He turned to his letter again, and Felicitas withdrew. As she stood on the threshold of the open door, he glanced once more at her. The landing was brightly illumined with sunshine—the girl's figure, at the entrance of the darker room, stood out like a picture on a golden background. The outlines of her form still lacked the roundness necessary for the perfection of feminine beauty; but they possessed the delicacy and grace which fairy lore ascribes to the floating, gliding shapes of its wondrous tales. And what marvelous hair! It usually looked chestnut brown; but when the sunshine fell upon it, at this instant, it glittered like red gold. It was not at all like the long tresses that had floated down beneath the helmet of the juggler's beautiful wife. It was still rather short, but immensely thick, and the rippling waves were evidently hard to confine in the simple knot worn at the back of the head. Little curls were constantly escaping and resting, as now, on her white neck.

The professor bent over his work again, but the flow of thought, which had been interrupted by the poor mother, could not be immediately recovered. He rubbed his forehead impatiently, and drank a glass of water—but in vain. At last, vexed by so many interruptions, he threw his pen on the table, took his hat, and went down-stairs. If the Moor's head, which had served its learned master for a pen wiper many years, could have opened its grinning mouth still wider, it would surely have done so in amazement—there lay the pen filled with ink, and the luckless Moor vainly longed for the pleasure of cleaning its point on its dress. Incredible. The punctilious professor absent-minded!

"Mether," said the professor, entering the sitting-room on his way out, "please do not send that girl up to me again—let Heinrich come; if he is away I can wait."

"Ah!" replied Frau Hellwig, triumphantly. "This girl's face has become unendurable to you in three days; but you condemned me to tolerate her presence for nine years."

Her son silently shrugged his shoulders, and turned away.

"The instruction she had received up to the time of my father's death ceased entirely when she entered the parish school, I suppose?" he asked, glancing back.

"What a foolish question, John!" replied his mother, angrily. "Didn't I write to you explicitly about the matter, and I think I also spoke of it during my visit to Bonn. The school-books were sold, and the exercise-books I burned."

"And with whom has she associated?"

"Associated? Why, she has had no companions except Frederica and Heinrich; she wanted no one else." The cruel, spiteful expression appeared on Frau Hellwig's face, her upper lip curled, showing one of her upper teeth. "Of course, I could not have her eat at my table and sit in my room," she went on. "I always saw in her the creature who had caused alienation between your father and myself; and, besides, she constantly became more disagreeable and insolent to me. But I chose two or three daughters of Christian mechanics for her friends. As you know, she declared that she would have nothing to do with them, that they were wolves in sheep's clothing, etc. Well, you'll see enough of her during the six weeks with which you have burdened yourself."

The professor left the house to take a long walk.

In the afternoon of the same day Frau Hellwig expected several ladies, most of them visitors to the baths, to drink coffee with her in the garden,

and as Frederica was suddenly taken ill, Felicitas was sent to prepare every thing. Her arrangements were soon finished. The neatly laid table was standing on the smooth gravel in the shade of a high cypress hedge, and in the kitchen of the summer-house in the garden the water was bubbling and hissing, all ready to be changed into delicious mocha. The young girl leaned against the open window of the summer-house and gazed sadly out. Everything without was as green and fragrant as though no destroying autumnal blasts had ever shaken the boughs, no winter frost had ever spun its death-dealing network of shining crystal over the fragile blossoms. Years before, bushes and flower-beds had displayed as brilliant an array of varied hues for him whose kind, warm heart was now moldering into dust; for him whose protecting, helping hand had been extended wherever it was needed—among his flowers as well as among his poor and suffering fellow-mortals. Yet the fair young blossoms smiled just as brightly into the faces of others and his name was no longer mentioned.

Hither he and the little orphan had fled from unkind looks and angry words—not only in summer, but when spring was still struggling with the retiring forces of winter. A fire blazed merrily in the stove: a thick carpet covered the floor, the bushes outside tapped their boughs, filled with swelling buds, against the warm panes, down which ran, ever and anon, a melting snow-flake, and beyond the wide, bare garden rose the dear old mountain, still half covered with snow, and wearing on its brow its familiar diadem of poplars. Oh, how beloved, how precious were these memories! And over opposite stood the chestnut-trees, their young leaves, as yet scarcely unfolded, hung idly as if half intoxicated by the golden sunlight. What had they once whispered to the child? Sweet, blissful promises of the future, dreams bright and unshadowed as the cloudless sky above—then dark tempests suddenly gathered over the guiltless head of the player's child, a sharp flash of reality had made the leafy tongues liars.

The sound of men's voices and the creaking of the garden-gate roused Felicitas from her sad thoughts. Through the northern bay-window she saw the professor, accompanied by another gentleman, enter the garden. They walked slowly toward the summer-house. The visitor had of late been a frequent guest at the Hellwig mansion; he was the son of a very old friend. Of the same age as the professor, he had received his education at the school kept by the Hellwigs' devout relative on the Rhine. Both had then been for a short time fellow-students at the same university, and though wholly unlike in character and opinions, had always remained friends. While John Hellwig had occupied his professor's chair almost immediately after completing his course at the university, young Frank had gone traveling, returning only a short time before, at his parent's desire, to pass his legal examination. He was now a lawyer in his native town, awaiting future cases and clients.

As he advanced, Felicitas saw that he was almost the ideal of manly beauty—his features were intelligent and regular, his figure was slender and graceful. The delicate outlines of the profile might have given him an appearance of effeminacy had not the virile vigor of his movements and the masculine breadth of his shoulders precluded any suggestion of this sort.

He removed his cigar from his mouth, examined it a moment, and then flung it contemptuously aside. The professor drew out his cigar-case and offered it to him.

"Heaven forbid!" cried the lawyer putting out both hands with a comical gesture of refusal. "I could never