

to-day, when I opened it to take out my treasure—there was nothing there! The mills of time had ground it into dust. There was not a blessed thing left of the whole lot.

Rosmer. But are you certain of that?

Brendel. There is no room for doubt, my dear boy. The President has convinced me of that.

Rosmer. The President?

Brendel. Oh, well—His Excellency, then. *Ganz nach Belieben.*

Rosmer. But whom do you mean?

Brendel. Peter Mortensgaard, of course.

Rosmer. What!

Brendel (*mysteriously*). Hush, hush, hush! Peter Mortensgaard is Lord and Chieftain of the Future. I have never stood in a more august presence. Peter Mortensgaard has the power of omnipotence in him. He can do whatever he wants.

Rosmer. Oh, come—don't you believe that!

Brendel. It is true, my boy—because Peter Mortensgaard never wants to do more than he can. Peter Mortensgaard is capable of living his life without ideals. And *that*, believe me, is precisely the great secret of success in life. It sums up all the wisdom of the world. *Basta!*

Rosmer (*in a low voice*). Now I see that you are going away from here poorer than you came.

Brendel. *Bien!* Then take an example from your old tutor. Erase from your mind everything that he imprinted there. Do not build your castle upon the shifting sand. And look well ahead, and be sure of your ground, before you build upon the charming creature who is sweetening your life here.

Rebecca. Do you mean me?

Brendel. Yes, most attractive mermaid!

Rebecca. Why am I not fit to build upon?

Brendel (*taking a step nearer to her*). I understood that my former pupil had a cause which it was his life's work to lead to victory.

Rebecca. And if he has—?

Brendel. He is certain of victory—but, be it distinctly understood, on one unalterable condition.