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## EVENING BEFORE THE WEDDING.

FROM THE GERMAN OF ZSCHOKKE.

'We shall certainly be very happy!' said Lady Louise to her aunt, the evening before her marriage; and her cheeks wore a brighter hue, and her eyes were radiant with inward joy. Every one knows who a young bride means, when she says 'we.'

'I don't doubt it, Louise,' replied her aunt; 'and only hope that your happiness may be enduring.'

'Fear not for its continuance. I know myself, dear aunt, and know, that whatever faults I now possess, my love for him will correct. As long as we love, we must be happy; and our love can never change.'

'Ah!' sighed her aunt, 'you speak like a girl of nineteen, on the eve of marriage, with the exhilaration of satisfied wishes, the intoxication of bright hopes, and fond expectations. But remember, my beloved child, that even the heart grows old. The day will come, when the enchantment will be broken, the illusions of love dispersed. When the beauty and grace that charmed us is gone with the freshness of youth, then is it first evident whether we are truly worthy of love. Shadows are ever the attendants of sunshine, even in domestic life. When they fall, then can a wife first know whether her husband is truly estimable; then can the husband first know whether the virtues of his wife are imperishable. The day before marriage, all anticipations and protestations are to me ridiculous.'

'I understand you, aunt; you mean that it is only mutual virtue that can preserve mutual affection and happiness. As for myself, I will not boast; but is *he* not the best, the noblest? Is he not possessed of every quality necessary to insure the happiness of life?'

'My child,' replied her aunt, 'I acknowledge that you are right; without flattery, I can say that you are both amiable and excellent. But your blooming virtues have been kindly nurtured in sunshine. No flowers deceive like these. We know not how they can bear the storm; we know not in what soil they take root; neither know we what seed is hidden in the heart.'

'Alas! dear aunt, you make me fearful!'

'So much the better, Louise; I would that some good might result from this evening's conversation. I love you sincerely, and will tell you what I have *proved*. I am not yet an old aunt; an austere, bigotted woman. At seven-and-twenty, I look cheerfully upon life. I have an excellent husband, and a happy family; therefore you will not consider what I say as the splenetic effusions of disappointment. I will tell you a secret; of something which few speak to a lovely young maiden; something that occupies little of the attention of young men; and yet something of the highest importance to all, and from which eternal love and indestructible happiness alone proceed.'

Louise pressed the hand of her aunt, as she said: 'I know what you would say, and I certainly believe with you, that continued happiness and enduring love are not the result of accident or perishable attractions; but of the virtues of the heart, the graces of the mind. These are the best marriage treasures that we can gather; they never become old.'

'Ah, Louise! the virtues can become old and ugly, like the fading charms of the face.'

'Alas, dear aunt! say you so?'

'Name me one virtue that cannot become disagreeable or hateful with years.'

'Surely, aunt, the virtues are not mortal?'

'Even so!'

'Can mildness and gentleness ever become odious?'

'When, with time, they become weakness and indecision.'

'And manly spirit?'

'Becomes rude defiance.'

'And modesty—discretion?'

'Prudery—reserve.'

'And noble pride?'

'Arrogance and presumption.'

'And a wish to please?'

'Becomes sycophancy, and cringing for the approbation of all men.'

'My dear aunt, you make me almost angry. My future husband however, can never so degenerate. One thing will keep him from all by-paths; his own noble mind, his deep and indelible love for all that is great, and good; and beautiful. This delicate perception I think I also possess; and it is to me an innate security for our happiness.'

'And when this changes to a vicious or sickly sensibility? My child, believe me, sentimentality is the true marriage-fiend. I speak not of your sentiment for each other; that may God preserve; but of a sentimentality which may make you a ridiculous or quarrelsome woman. Do you know the Countess Stammern?'

'Who separated from her husband a year or two ago?'

'Yes; do you know the true cause of their separation?'

'No; there has been so many contradictory reports.'

'She told me herself; and as the story is both amusing and instructive, I will repeat it to you.'

'Louise was all curiosity, and her aunt proceeded:

'COUNT STAMMERN and his wife had long been considered an enviably happy pair. Their union was the result of a long and ardent attachment. Beautiful, good, and intellectual; congenial in taste and feeling; they seemed made for each other.'

After their betrothment, some disagreement occurred between their parents, which threatened to put a stop to the consummation of the marriage. The young countess became alarmingly ill from grief; and the enthusiastic lover threatened to destroy himself, like Goethe's Werther, or Miller's Siegwart. However, to restore the countess, and prevent the desperate act of the count, the parents became apparently reconciled. This saved the life of the lovers; but no sooner was the young lady pronounced out of danger, than her parents removed her, and sought to delay their union for an indefinite period. This was not to be endured. The young couple contrived to meet one night, escaped beyond the frontier, and under another government were united before the altar. They returned man and wife, having secured, as they fondly thought, a heaven upon earth. From this time, they seemed models of love and harmony. From morning until evening never separate, they seemed but to think of, and live for, each other. The romance and sentimental tenderness of their love made their existence like life in a faery tale. In winter, as well as in summer, he filled her apartment with significant flowers; and even every article of furniture was hallowed by some association or recollection.'

The second year, this enthusiastic fondness seemed rather an over-strained, false sentiment; but still, in all society, whether in gay routs and balls, or in a small circle of friends, they seemed to see and think only on each other; so much so indeed, as to render themselves almost ridiculous. In the third year, they laid aside this amiable weakness before the world, though at home they love still retained its romantic fondness. In the fourth, they seemed to have recovered from this first intoxication of happiness, so far at least as to be contented apart. They often passed the evening, sometimes the whole day, in company; he here, she there. This, however, but enhanced the pleasure of their reunion. By the fifth year, the count could leave home for a week, without being almost heart-broken; and the countess could bear his absence with fortitude. But their letters to each other, written daily, were as tender and impassioned as those of Heloise. The sixth, they became more sensible; and even when separated for several weeks, were satisfied with a few friendly letters. In the seventh, both felt that they could love sincerely, without its being necessary to assure each other of it, from morning until night.'

So far, all was well. In place of the all-absorbing passion of their first love, there was that abiding affection, that silent confidence in each other, that deeper friendship, which is the height of human happiness. In the eighth year, they had gradually thrown off so much of the selfishness of love, as to become sensible of the claims of the rest of the world, and no longer lived solely for each other, as if they were only sentient beings, and the rest of mankind but pictures or statues upon the stage of life. In nine, they were amiable, sensible people, abroad as well as at home. In ten, they seemed very much like mankind in general, and like excellent people who had been married ten years, and could take care of themselves. They had certainly grown ten years older; so had their love; and, alas! so had their virtues also.'

Next, they began to see the faults and foibles that had heretofore been covered with the mantle of love. They spoke not of them, but viewed each other's errors with kindness and indulgence. Soon, however, came a gentle admonition; but if it wounded the feelings, the offender was sure to make a full and sweet atonement. Then these admonitions came oftener; atonement was not so easily made; yet still harmony prevailed. They felt lowered occasional irritation, and anger, and differences of opinion;

but they still loved each other, and such things will occur in the happiest unions. At length their mutual feeling dictated avoidance of too frequent contact.

'You are sentimental, and sometimes irritable,' said the count, one day, to his wife, 'So am I. It is useless to have these idle differences. We will not interfere with each other, but each take our own way. We can be sincerely attached, without letting our attachment torment us to death.'

The countess acquiesced in her husband's sensible view of the matter, and henceforth they led an almost separate existence. Rarely meeting, except at meals, no one asked, 'Whence comest or whither goest thou?' In this complaisant manner, they lived in peace and harmony.'

One evening, in the twentieth year of their marriage, they attended the theatre, and were charmed with the delightful picture of domestic life and connubial happiness which the play represented. They returned full of the feelings which had been excited in their susceptible hearts. The love of their youth seemed revived, and they sat conversing affectionately by the fireside, before supper.

'Ah!' said the countess, 'it would all be charming, if we could only remain young!'

'You, at least, have no reason to regret the loss of youth,' said her husband, tenderly. 'Few women remain so youthful and lovely. Indeed, I can see no difference between you now, and the day of our marriage. Some little faults of temper, perhaps, are discoverable; but that we must all expect; for were it not for these, our happiness would be too great for this earth. Indeed, were I to live my life over again, you would be my choice.'

'You are kind and gallant,' answered the countess, with a sigh; 'but I think what I was twenty years ago, and what I am now?'

'Now a lovely wife—then a lovely maiden! I would not exchange the one for the other,' said her husband, kissing her affectionately.

'We want but one thing, my love, to perfect our happiness,' said the countess.

'Ah! I understand you; an only child, to perpetuate your virtues and graces. Heaven may yet bless us.'

'We should be indeed happy; but then an *only* child causes more anxiety and care, than pleasure; lest, by some accident, we should lose it. Two children—'

'You are right; and not two, but three; for with two, if we lose one, there is the same anxiety and fear, lest we should be robbed of the other. I trust that heaven will yet hear our prayers, and bestow upon us three children.'

'My beloved friend,' said the countess, smiling, 'three are almost too many. We should be placed in a new embarrassment; for example, if they were all sons—'

'Good! We have five-and-twenty thousand florins a year; enough for us and for them. I would place the eldest in the army; of the second I would make a diplomatist; neither requires much expense; and we have rank, friends, and influence.'

'But you forgot the youngest!'

'The youngest! By no means! He shall be in the church; a canon—perhaps a prebend.'

'What! a priest?—my son a priest? No, indeed! Besides, he has no prospect of advancement.'

'No prospect of advancement?—and why not? He might become an abbot, a bishop, or even a cardinal.'

'Never! I would never be the mother of a monk, and see my son with the shaven crown and dark habit of the cloister! What can you be thinking of? If I had a *hundred* sons, not *one* should be a priest!'

'You are in a very strange temper, my dear wife, to withhold your consent to a profession which would not only be for his happiness and advantage, but ours.'

'Call it temper, or what you please, I care not. But I firmly declare, that I shall never consent; and remember, Sir, a mother has some right.'

'Very little. The father has the authority, and superior knowledge.'

'But the father is often wrong; his 'superior knowledge' is not infallible.'

'Ah well! I, at least, do not claim knowledge that I do not possess! and I repeat when the time arrives, I shall act as I think proper, without paying the slightest attention to your ridiculous and unfounded prejudices.'

'I am aware, Sir that you are my lord and husband; but I de-