

embrace her cousin, the dear relative of whom Carl had brought her tidings.

At Carl's home, Bertha tenderly embraced the new comer; and in truth it must have been a hard heart which could be proof against the young Elise; for, added to her youth and freshness, was a peculiar lightness and grace of manner to which she would never have attained had the years of her life been passed in the Fatherland. Then, compared with Bertha and the peasantry around, the girl was quite clever and learned; she could read and write both French and German, whereas her cousin had spent her time mostly in hard work—a continual struggle, as it were, for daily bread. Yet, Bertha seemed sadly ignorant and behindhand in the days which followed, and yet, will you believe it? her hands toiled for both, for Elise could make herself useful in no other way than in the ornamenting of her own and Bertha's clothing, so that it was doubly good for her not to be entirely friendless, as her cousin had been even from childhood. Words would fail me to tell of Bertha's tender pride in Elise, how fondly she spared her the slightest hardship, lavishing caresses and fondest tokens of love upon her day by day. Her heart seemed to expand, too, for did not Carl and Elise both dwell therein, and it more than pleased her to note how kindly these two took to each other.

One evening in winter-time, the winter after Elise's coming, when Bertha, for lack of other employment, had been out gathering firewood on the castle domain, Carl came in, as was his wont, to sit awhile with the girls by the side of the blazing fire. Bertha, for a wonder, was quite gay; indeed, she had been growing more so both in spirits and apparel ever since Elise's advent in the small, German village; but this evening her face was positively glowing, and her beddice was quite brave with crimson and silver tinsel, the remains of some of Elise's Paris finery; and with her usual light childishness, the latter soon called the young man's attention to mark how well her cousin looked in her bright colours. Carl glanced across, and Bertha, whose whole life seemed wrapped up in his very lightest word or look, blushed almost as deeply as the crimson knots themselves. But he did not take note of the rising colour, did not see the intense beauty and passion of her love-lit face; true, it was homely compared with the delicate changeableness of the other face which, till last autumn, he had never seen; but then it was true and full of love, full also of the rare sweetness of a noble, unselfish heart.

"And these fingers did the work?"

Bertha gazed at her lover in surprise, for instead of saying something pretty to her, he was holding, and evidently admiring, Elise's pretty, toy-like hand. Her own, she remembered, was coarse and hard; but then it had grown so by reason of honest toil, and—again she smiled. Why should she be jealous? Carl loved her truly. Elise was a sister to him; why, therefore, should he not be as a brother unto her? He was all hers (Bertha's), and she found it in her heart to pity Elise for not having found a "Carl" of her very own. But what were the two saying?

"Yes, it is indeed a splendid night, and the river must look grand, with the stars shining above." These were Elise's words.

"Is it too cold for you to go into the town (Oberwerel), think you?"

"Oh, no, no!" and yet she glanced half fearfully, half timidly, into Bertha's face.

"No, it is not too cold," and Bertha smiled in a reassuring way as she rose to go and fetch wraps, both for herself and Elise.

It seemed to her that she had been gone but a moment, and yet, when she came back, the two had found time to settle one point between them; and that was, that they would rather go alone. "You are cold and tired, Bertha," said Carl. "I cannot let you venture out again after freezing your poor fingers all day as you have done."

He held her hands as he spoke, but not tenderly as he had clasped Elise's; and then she, too, added her pretty voice, saying, "No, not for me, cousin mine, it is enough that you toil in the daytime, and—and Carl wishes me to listen to the echo, he says that it will sound fine to-night."

Bertha saw that they were bent on leaving her behind, and so, in all simplicity, allowed them to depart. "Carl is very careful of me," she whispered, as she closed the door behind them, and yet she was somewhat sad, somewhat disappointed, in spite of all his care. So she turned away to her spinning-wheel, in order to make the time pass less heavily. In four

more weeks she would have accomplished a goodly store of linen; sufficient, as all the housewives assured her, to last her lifetime; and as soon as this task was complete, she and Carl were to wed. These thoughts rendered her labour very sweet, nay, she soon became glad to think that she was staying in to do it, glad that the others were gone, and she not sitting idly by the fire, as when they had been there. Her eyes were often dim with the sweet visions which came before her, so dim that she had often to pass her hand across them to be able to continue her work; but it was the dimness of a great joy, a joy which she felt was soon to be all her own. By and by, the two returned, she noticed that Carl was quiet, and that Elise turned half angrily from her when she rose to let her pass to her usual place, and a something seemed there by the blazing fire which made her shiver, as though it, with its icy hand, were grasping ever and anon at her young heart, which till now had been so blithe and hopeful.

"What is it, Elise?" she pleaded; she who had ever been so strong and brave. They were alone, those two girls who had been as sisters together, and Bertha cowered at the other's feet in her weakness, for she had seen Carl whisper to Elise at parting, and then both had looked upon her in a way which she knew full well boded trouble of some sort—what, she could not, and would not guess.

"Nothing, nothing," and Elise was quite angry now, and went to bed in the little room which Bertha in her love had shared with her, asking nothing in return.

But in the still hours of the night a murmuring of words fell upon Bertha's ear, for she had not as yet closed her weary eyes, by reason of the trouble which lay gnawing at her heart. She listened as Elise babbled on, now in French, now German—she was talking to Carl of the beautiful river, telling him that it was like the love of her heart, while that of Bertha was as some slumbering lake. Then she would laugh at the well-known echo of the hills, and go into ecstasies over the ruins of the proud Schauburg, which looked so serene and grand from its great height as compared with the quiet town and the mysterious beauty of the river. It appeared at times, too, as though Carl was urging her on to something which she knew to be wrong, and over and over again she repeated her resolve of remaining firm in what she had said. But as much of this confusion of speech was in the language she best knew, and constantly used when greatly excited, Bertha was not quick to discover its meaning. She pitied the poor dreamer, and once was about to arouse her from her troubled sleep, but just then the voice rose high and clear, and the words which next fell on her ear were these:—"I will not, Carl! I will not! You must speak to Bertha, for I will not, only," and the voice grew still more fierce and loud, "I shall hate her if she does not give you up!"

Poor Bertha! The blood seemed to grow cold in her veins. I think the coldness, however, kept her from feeling to the full the agony which would otherwise have been hers. She was alone—*once more alone!* The moonbeams crept softly through the casement, and she removed the curtain she had hung there earlier in the evening to keep the morning light from her cousin's eyes. She, as I have said, removed it, and gazed long upon the speaker. To her eyes the features seemed more beautiful than any she had seen, and yet she felt as though in her inmost soul she could have cursed her as she lay, still babbling of love, of Carl, and her own self. A thought of God came to her then, of Jesus too, and as she raised her eyes whence the moonlight came, and gazed straight out to the blue heavens and the bright glowing stars, which somehow seemed to her as the innumerable host of saints looking down upon her woe, a holier feeling fell over her. There came, too, a sense of the loneliness of the Man of Sorrows, and of what He had left for her—*her alone*, it seemed, and I do not rightly think she knew what she was doing; but she, on her part, resolved to give up all for others. Tenderly she kissed the sleeping girl—a stupor seemed to pervade her the while, or I do not say that she could have done it—carefully she rehung the curtain, and then passed out into the starlit night as calmly as though nothing had disturbed her. She went onwards towards the hills which had been clad with vines in the golden, autumn weather; but whereas her step then had been elastic and free, like to the glad season itself, it was now swift, solemn, and sure. Not once did she trip over the root of a tree or a rolling stone, it seemed almost as though an unseen hand guided her steps.

She stood at length upon the topmost height, the one on