

THE PUBLISHERS' INDEX

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THE TWO SISTERS OF COLOGNE.

(Continued from October.)

We sat down. I was very hungry, and fell to with right good will. Lori kept me company. She sat opposite; and whenever I raised my eyes, I saw the movement of her massive jaw and lined against the candle behind her. Gretchen sat on my right hand; thus the light fell sideways on her face, while that of her sister was in shadow; and the table being small, Gretchen's hand and mine came frequently in contact. She ate very little; she crumbled and played with a piece of bread, and seldom allowed those strange piercing eyes of hers to leave my face. As supper went on, Lori talked and laughed a good deal; Gretchen said nothing. She seemed to grow more and more absorbed in her own thoughts; and once, when her hand touched mine, I observed that it shook. She filled up a tumbler of water and drank it. Lori pushed the beer towards me.

"Fill up for yourself"—I drained the jug into my glass. I raised it to my lip and began to drink. Suddenly Gretchen uttered a sharp cry, and started up. In doing so, she nearly upset the table; and her elbow somehow came in contact with the glass in my hand. Its contents were spilt on the floor.

"Aah! the beetle,—the horrid thing!" she cried. "It has gone down my back, I believe!" She rushed from the room, as white as a sheet.

"Fool!" muttered Lori, setting her jaws tight. "What waste of good liquor! And there is no more in the house! I will send her, for her pains, to go fetch another schoppen."

"Not on my account, I pray. I like water quite a

well. No, your 'Byerliche beer' sometimes disagrees with me."

She looked up sharply into my face.

"Why, what manner of man are you, that 'beat water'?" she demanded.

"I seldom afford myself anything else," I replied.

The beer had streamed from the table to the floor, where it had formed into a long diagonal channel towards the stove. It was still dripping, which drew my attention I suppose, to the boards. The beer had encountered one or two black beetles in its course. I had heard of their fondness for fermented liquors; it had taken effect very quickly in this case. I saw them struggle, feebly and more feebly, to crawl away from the intoxicating flood. Lori's quick eye discerned what I was looking at.

"The nasty creatures! They soon make themselves tipsy," she said, as she ran and fetched a broom. Then she swept them up into a plate, and carefully wiped the floor.

Gretchen now returned to the room and helped her sister to clear away the supper. As she moved about I, my hunger being appeased, noted with a quickened perception what a supple, grandly formed creature this Gretchen was. The fancy came into my head that the White Cat, when transformed, must have resembled her: fair and lissom, with delicate pink nostrils and strange bright eyes. In the glare of the candle I thought thy eyes akin to the tigress; her sharp narrow teeth, heavy jaw, and stealthy, cruel eyes, filled me more and more with an indefinable repulsion. I was glad when she said,—

"I will go and see after your bed, young man. Gretchen will keep you company meanwhile."

I was sitting in the moonlight, near the window. Gretchen stood beside me.

"You are unlike all the men I have known," she said, after she had looked at me in her strange way for some minutes. "Are all Englishmen like you?"

"Happily for them, I suppose, very few."

"But Englishmen are faithful," she said, eagerly. "They never deceive, never betray. I have read about one Englishman in a book. Could you be true to a woman, without changing all your life?"

"I should hope so!" I cried, with the impetuosity of youth. "A man's love is not worth much otherwise."

She stretched forth her long white hands and laid them on my shoulders.

"Will you be my love, young Englishman?" she murmured, in a hoarse, tremulous voice. "I can make you rich. You need toil no more. I can save you from great dangers, too. I like your face."

I started up, blushing, for the thing came upon me suddenly after all; but I replied without hesitation,—

"Were I to say I could love you, Fraulein, I should be false. I have left behind me in England one whom I have long loved, and to whom my word is pledged. I—"

"Listen!" she interrupted, vehemently, but in a whisper, as though dreading to be overheard. "I have more in my power than you know of. Do not reject the love I offer, it may be the worse for you if you do. I would save you, young man."

I understood her to refer to my poverty and her own wealth, as I replied, with a little flourish of gallantry,—