The Lancaster Intelligencer.

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FRIDAY EVENING, MAY 27, 1881.

FROM STEP TO STEP;

Or, The Mysterious Letter.

From the German of Ernst Fritze.

Translated Especially for the INTELLIGENCER.

[Continued.]

CHAPTER IX.

Oswald's letter had in some degree disturbed the peace of the dwellers in the modest house on Walloon street. Although Hofrath Marklin had not communicated its purport to his family, they inferred that it had some relation to the advertisement in the *Official Gazette*.

The hour of noon was past Elsie sat at her usual place and sewed. Her mother was taking her afternoon nap in the adjoining room. The Hofrath played upon his violin in an upper room.

All things apparently wore their usual aspect, yet appearances were deceptive. Elsie listened anxiously from time to time to the sounds from above, and when the lovely tones stole softly and regularly down, she drew a deep breath. It was the first time her father had touched his violin since the reception of Oswald's letter. With unstrung nerves and weary of life, he had spent long hours in his easy chair battling fiercely with sorrowful memories of the past. He was once more beset by terrors of that period, he was again plunged in the dream-life in which he had quaffed from the goblet of life in full draughts as the indulged favorite, the nearest relative and heir apparent of a distinguished state official. The Hofrath had turned over the leaflets of his tablets of memory one by one, had reviewed with impartial scrutiny each event therein described, and then placed upon them the seal of eternal silence and renunciation.

There lay the letter of his son Oswald. There before him lay a lso the letter containing the laconic answer to its questions. There it lay, the result of long-continued, calm and dispassionate reflection. In a few words he announced his will, which was also to serve as a rule of conduct for his children, if they wished to remain at one with him.

"I am the son of my father—death once proved this to me with cruel severity—every other answer is superfluous." Thus ran the answer that Hofrath Marklin flung back to the high and noble family von Haidek-Bohnhausen, as his final decision.

Elsie had an intuitive conviction of this decision, which was not at all agreeable to her wishes. She had hoped that this public citation, would open to her a door of entrance into that social circle to which she aspired with her whole soul. But her filial and affectionate spirit suffered with her father when she saw him gloomy and melancholy, depressed and exhausted, by his mental conflicts.

Now he had returned to his violin, he was seeking to soothe his disturbed spirit by intercouse with this faithful companion, the only precious object he had brought with him from his former life of splendor into his present obscure and humble existence.

Elsie knew that now his battle had been fought, and not, she feared, to her satisfaction. Her attention was suddenly called into another direction, as she saw the stately form of Counsellor Bergland crossing over the church-place and approaching the house. A sensation of joyful pride thrilled her young and somewhat worldly heart. He, whom the noblest in the city esteemed and honored, he was coming to visit them freely and without pretence, a mark of appreciation that would at all events bear its fruits.

She hastened eagerly to the door, in order to meet him. The counsellor asked with unusual friendliness, whether her father was to be seen, and she invited him to enter.

"Do not announce me, do not disturb his playing," he exclaimed as Elsie was about to open the door of her father's room.

The music ceased abruptly in the middle of a fantasie. Elsbeth softly pushed back the door, the Hofrath did not notice it. He was slowly pacing back and forward, with drooping head, and holding the violin loosely in his hand. When he found himself opposite the door, he raised his eyes. His glance met that of the state counsellor. A look of friendly welcome quickly banished from his features the gloomy sternness that betrayed deep and inexpressible sorrow. He placed his violin upon a piano standing in the background, and greeted the unexpected guest with great cordiality.

Elsie left them alone. When the two men had taken their seats, the counsellor upon the sofa, the Hofrath sidewise on a chair, so placed as to keep his face in the shadow, they exchanged the polite phrases, usually forming the preface to a conversation, yet in both might have been noticed an excitement foreign to their words.

"If I were to propose to you without diplomatic digression that which brings me here in reality," said the counsellor, with a faint smile, "I should run the risk of an abrupt dismissal from your presence, my dear Hofrath."

The Hofrath looked thoughtfully down, it appeared clear to him that in consequence of the late citation in the public journals he was about to hear some friendly counsel from the man of business.

"You proceed at least more honestly than diplomats by profession generally do," replied the Hofrath with courtesy.

"For the sake of this honesty I claim an honest reply, my best Hofrath."

"That shall be yours in so far as is compatible with my circumstance."

"O, no conditions; I swear to you to be unreserved and candid, and confess, again without any diplomatic reservation, that your circumstances are intimately concerned in the matter."

"Then do not hope for a definite answer," broke in the Hofrath with decision. "Look upon me as one dead—look upon me as the close of an unaccountable history in which nothing can ever be altered. Whatever questions you may ask, whatever advice you may wish to offer in regard to it, will be all in vain since I am pursuing a course that has been well considered.

"You have misunderstood me," returned the counsellor, in some perplexity. He had proceeded in the belief that the father of Clotilde would be prepared to consider his proposal as referring to the hand of his daughter, rather than to a question of business. As the Hofrath gave no sign of coming to the relief of his perplexity, he added, "The unveiling of your past was in nowise my aim."

"Then I am ready for every answer."

"It is wonderful that you are so determinedly silent in regard to your former circumstances, yet we will put that aside. Every man has his own peculiar ways, and it is apparently from very honorable motives, that you shrink from all allusions to the past. For my part, I hold that birth is an inheritance; rank and high standing, the aim of ambitious striving; wealth and property, something to be acquired by personal exertion. Why you have hidden yourself in an obscure government office, and why you have remained there with all your abilities, is a mystery to me."

"Had I been capable of filling another position efficiently they would have been able to find me, but as in the service of the state, all depends upon patronage, and as I have no patrons, I have simply remained fixed in the position, forced upon me by necessity."

"A severe reproach for those whom it concerns; but it lies in the nature of things, that not every one who is fitted should rise, yet I consider it necessary that one should take the trouble of climbing."

"Whoever undertakes to do so without the probability of a favorable result, only makes himself ridiculous."

"Perhaps I should, in your place, be of the same opinion, but my quiet mode of life makes it easy for me to turn my abilities to account, like the talent God has lent us."

"I shall probably live to see the like in my son; his spirit is not broken; for him those things have value, which you have valued. It is a satisfaction to me that I have sought to inoculate my children with the spirit, but ennobled and improved, that was my peculiar inheritance by birth."

"You seek to influence the decisions of your children through their filial love," replied the counsellor, with some hesitation, for he was approaching the real object of his visit. His heart beat anxiously; he was now to venture upon a confession without any guaranty that it would lead to a favorable result. He was to ask this man, who lived out his principles so obstinately, who was scarcely four or five years older than himself—he was to demand of him his daughter as a wife; his courage failed, after the short test he had applied to this inflexible man. But he felt that the attainment of his most lively wishes depended on the continuation of this conversation.

"Perhaps the development of our present views depends upon the events of our youth, my dear Hofrath. You have followed the impulse of the moment and have closed your account with that which had made you unhappy. You created for yourself a sphere of activity, and a family circle, still in the strength of your youth. I acted otherwise. My continued exertions were directed towards the accumulation of wealth. When I reached the point of satisfaction with regard to this, I failed in attaining the true enjoyment of life. Fate led to me my deceased wife. How I, the earnest, serious man of business, was brought so far as to woo and marry the lovely butterfly of fashion, I cannot explain even to this day. To speak candidly, it sometimes appears to me that she willed it, and it was done. We were never one in soul and mind, yet we were united in gentle bonds. So long as my late wife formed the central point of our fable like glittering society, I was not averse to it. A sort of enchantment took possession of me, rendering me a stranger to myself. But I awoke when she had closed her eyes forever. Whether this would have happened if her life had been spared, I can really not venture to decide."

"In my judgment you would not yet have awaked, Herr Counsellor," remarked the Hofrath, somewhat surprised by this statement, "for the magic spell of the wife we love hallows the circle in which she holds us bound, and we gladly remain blind so long as she smiles upon and loves us."

"I am, however, glad that I have again escaped from the enchantment; I feel myself happier," said the counsellor, so quickly that his speech seemed the involuntary outburst of an overflowing heart. "I have come back to myself, the element in which I feel myself well, floats around me; the atmosphere in which I find satisfaction environs me now. When my wife departed, the frightful solitude resulting from this unexpected loss appalled me. Afterwards a quiet peace took possession of my mind; I knew not and inquired not whence came the beautiful tranquillity of home."

He paused. The Hofrath deeply moved by this unrestrained confidence, did not venture to speak.

"Lulled by the certainty of my heartfelt happiness, I took no measures to secure it in another way, until of late the conviction forced itself upon me that I might find myself more grievously bereaved than by my earlier loss. I seldom saw your daughter and my children—only at noon and at table. The fear that I might one day miss her from my house, opened my eyes to the truth at last. I recognized the slumbering regard for Clotilde that lay deep in my soul."

The Hofrath started up; trembling and pale he gazed at the man, who had ventured to make him this confession.

"Do not be angry with the elderly man," entreated the counsellor mildly, "do not refuse me harshly, when I beg you to be my intercessor with Clotilde—that she will not forsake me and my children—that she will become my wife."

"My Clotilde your wife?" asked the Hofrath, taken greatly by surprise, and the doubt remained whether it was joy or pain that gave color to the exclamation.

A solemn, uncomfortable silence followed, which neither ventured for a time, to break. A whirl of ideas passed through the brain of the father, who had never yet reflected upon the possibility of such an event.

Greatly disturbed, he finally raised his eyes to the counsellor, as the latter again began: "I entreat you now for your decision, and as we agreed in the beginning of our conference for your candid reply, as honest man opposed to honest man, I ask you whether you have anything to say against my proposal for Clotilde; speak freely, my dear Herr Hofrath."

"I know no man upon God's earth to whom I would so gladly give my Clotilde to wife, in spite of the difference of years, as to yourself," replied the Hofrath, "yet I warn you against too hasty a decision—I warn you of the illusion—of the enchantment that seems to have entangled you in its chains."

"Fear no romantic whims on my part; I am not in this instance the prey of a fanciful illusion, as I was in my first choice, but offer myself with all the sympathy of a tender friend as a suitor to your daughter."

"And have you hopes of finding your affection returned?" asked the Hofrath, anxiously.

"You shall bring me intelligence of that," said the counsellor, quickly. "I wish Clotilde to have time to test her inclinations, to become familiarized with the relations that await her. If she is well disposed toward me, she will grant a speedy affirmative to my suit and this bliss-conferring sentence shall be followed by a quiet betrothal. In this way, we shall be safely harbored from possible storms, and I doubt not that the similarity of principle underlying our respective characters will soon render us one family. In the exchange of our ideas I will then seek to combat your erroneous ideas concerning your earlier life. It is now necessary to come forward with the truth, for the advantage and benefit of your children. I hope you will then, in view of our happy relationship, allow me to take off the edge of your romantic sensitiveness, while you give me full power to regulate the affair of your heirship in concert with the Haideks."

"What do you know about the matter?" inquired the Hofrath calmly, but with a slight contraction of the brow.

"I know just as much as is needful," replied the counsellor, deliberately.

"Who could have given you the information?"

"The church records—there I find your name inscribed as the son of Meyer Marklin and his wife Meta Marklin, born Von Haidek Bohnhausen. Nothing further is needed to convince me that you are the sought for Oswald Marklin. These, however, are business matters that can be attended to later, but I was obliged to tell you that I had recognized you."

With hearty cordiality he extended his hand to the Hofrath, who grasped it firmly and warmly. "Perhaps I shall yet have to acknowledge that just such a friend has been wanting to me hitherto," he said, with emotion.

Both men parted, assured of the existence of a thorough understanding between themselves, but the brow of the Hofrath became overcast as his eye fell upon the letter which was to carry to his son the required decision. He took it up, contemplating it with a bitter smile. Shall he destroy this defiant letter? Yes! replied an inward voice, for this decision concerns the welfare of your children. The man who is soon to be your daughter's husband is entitled to require you to protect your rights.

Taking up the letter coolly he held it to the flame of a match, and inspired by new views, which bid defiance to the ghosts of the past, he wrote to the Counsellor Von Haidek Bohnhausen that he was about to entrust the affairs of his inheritance to an attorney.

"A prosaic conclusion to the sadly romantic events of my youthful life," he muttered, as he closed his second epistle. No friendly advances could be expected to result from so formal a declaration, but he wished for none. Then, too, came his daughter Clotilde, as if it was the will of heaven, to destroy the icy crust in which he was encased as if fate would, by force, draw him out of his self-imposed misery.

Clotilde entered shyly; she came with an uneasy conscience, for she knew now that she had yielded to the father of her pupils a more tender sympathy than became her position. Dared she, however, confess the feelings she indulged before he, the object of her reverence, had declared that his heart beat but for her and that he wished to make her his wife? Clotilde did not suspect that the counsellor had visited her father. She went, as always, directly up to him and found him restlessly pacing his chamber.

"I have kept you waiting," she said, with a hearty greeting and a kiss; "shall we play now?"

"Not to-day, my dear Clotilde, I am greatly disturbed."

"Father!" exclaimed the daughter in dismay; it was the first time such a refusal had escaped his lips.

"My spirit would soar far above the harmonies; I am too greatly delighted. Counsellor Bergland has been with me," he said, gazing with unutterable love on the glowing countenance of his daughter.

"Father! and you are delighted?" she asked, shyly.

"Yes; rejoiced through the goodness of God which sought me just as I was on the point of endangering the well-being of my children; your heart beats for him, who has asked me for your hand, my dear Clotilde."

She threw herself upon her father's breast; he pressed her forehead closely and caressingly to his fatherly heart. "See," the love of this frank, magnanimous man for my child, has raised my self-confidence. I feel myself suddenly more assured and protected, by my communion with him. Your love for him will confirm the change in me, and I shall make head against the worldly phantoms, to which prejudice and calumny alone give importance. Let us hope, through my new resolutions, for a peaceful solution of all difficulties, and let us anticipate for yourself a quiet and pure happiness in the relations that seem to have united your hearts."

"O, my father! Your blessing hallows what I have sought to conceal in my inmost soul" said Clotilde, raising her wistful, beautiful eyes to heaven, "there has long been for me no other aim in life, than to be allowed to care for his happiness."

"Well for you, and well for him, that you have recognized and claimed each other; the counsellor gives you time for reflection."

"Wherefore reflection, since my heart belongs to him?"

"If his proposal receives a prompt 'Yes,' he will arrange for a speedy and quiet marriage."

Clotilde again buried her blushing face in her father's breast.

"I am his own, however he may order it, but for to-day keep it from my mother and Elsie, for my spirit must be more composed before I can talk it over with them."

"To that I agree; but to him, who is stretched upon the rack of suspense—to him I must, at once, communicate your decision."

"It will, it can scarcely surprise him," returned Clotilde, with a charming smile, "I will now return home, father; follow me, and be a witness to my promise."

They left the house separately, as had been agreed upon between them. Their own excitement caused both to overlook the probability, that during the visits, events of an especially disquieting character might have occurred to Elsbeth also. The young girl, otherwise addicted to jokes and teasing, had taken no notice whatever of the unusual haste in which Clotilde had left the house, just as little had she wondered at her father's going out, contrary to his custom. She sat there subdued and quiet, sadly reflecting upon something that had entered the sphere of her life. Yes, something had happened to make her tremble, she had learned something that had aroused her reflection. Elsbeth had received a letter from her brother Oswald,—a letter from him of whom she was so proud. O, how had her child-heart exulted and rejoiced, when alone in the family room, she opened the letter and prepared to read it. But when she had read it, she passed from joy to grief as a bird soaring joyfully to the sun, suddenly sinks to the earth with broken wing when struck by a fatal shot. The contents of the letter were as follows:

"You are the only one, my dear Elsie, who is in a condition to rescue me from an incomprehensible situation. I turn to you, therefore, with full and certain confidence, first warning you against indiscreet disclosures. Listen, and put a keen edge to your memory and your judgment for it concerns no trifling matter, it is my honor that is in question. A thing has happened, the issue of which, in the consciousness of my innocence, I might calmly await. But, if scorn should glance from any eye, or contemptuous words fall from the lips of strange people, what then? Recollect yourself, my dear Elsie, has any packet been delivered to my father during the past week, by a fair-haired man? I doubt the same, and will not disturb my father's peace by any inquiries to him. See, there awaits us a series of important revelations, but the mysterious force of circumstances excites in me a displeasure that will never be allayed, should the name of Marklin ever be branded with infamy. Since the visit of Counsellor von Haidek, I have been annoyed by inquiring glances. They are looking for a fair-complexioned gentleman; the loquacity of the Haidek's servant betrayed this at last upon my pressing on him, with terrible earnestness, the question as to what they wanted of me. Do you comprehend in your freedom from care what it means to molest and insult an honorable man with suspicious inquiries? First appeared the butler of a hotel, who examined me with searching eyes. He came under the pretense that a gentleman who had come from Normandy by the express post, has since disappeared, leaving his trunk behind. It had been declared that this person lived in my quarter, but he was convinced at the first glance, of the error of this declaration, since the man whom he sought was of fair complexion. Then came a lady of middle age, who withdrew at once, remarking that the gentleman of whom she was in search was a blond, a decided blond. Finally a richly laced servant made his appearance, cast a searching glance upon me, and would have retreated with an apology, dropping the words, 'No, it was not you whom I introduced.' But now my indignation was aroused. I questioned the lackey, but could gather nothing from his confused babble, except that in the house of Haidek inquiries were being made concerning a certain fair-skinned man, who had apparently been entrusted with the delivery of a valuable packet. Are these the evil spirits of the past, that thus hover about me? What have I done, meanwhile, to subject myself especially to their persecution? Feverish suspense and deep vexation confuse my powers of thought, therefore I must seek to satisfy myself in regard to these tales. If you are unable to help me, dear sister, then apply to our father, put my letter into his hand, and entreat him to hasten his explanation to State Counsellor von Haidek; possibly the storm may then be calmed."

Such a letter the innocent young maiden had never received in the whole course of her previous life; it seemed to render her helpless; her features moved convulsively; she sat for some minutes as if stupefied; then a beam of light flashed over her darkened countenance; she raised her head, gazed around as if to see whether she was dreaming; whether these were not mere vague ideas swarming in her brain. Formless yet, but with indistinct outlines, these ideas arose in her mind; thoughts sprung up, wave upon wave, rendering these ideas possible realities. Suddenly she resolved to act upon the impulse that had, like a glittering flash, illumined her soul. Again she reflected; again she read her brother's letter. O, if she, the lightly valued child of the house, should be able to throw light upon the darkness that had gathered over the brother whom she so proudly reverenced—if she might venture to put her suspicions into words! But who could help her to take the proper course in this exigency? She did not waver long in her choice of a confident. Counsellor Bergland was the man to whose experience the affair might be entrusted. Now, too, she remembered her sister Clotilde's dream. Had not the latter, in a nightly vision, seen that her brother had been slain in combat with a stranger, and that she had let him perish?

Driven almost to frenzy by these recollections, Elsie left her home unnoticed and without reflection took the way to Counsellor Bergland's house. On flying feet she hurried over the space that separated her humble dwelling from the stately mansion of the counsellor, her beautiful countenance all aglow, partly from her hasty action, partly from the feelings urging her on. As she neared the residence of the man who was to become her adviser, she moderated her pace, and considered how to begin her speech. Her mental powers seemed exhausted; not one rational idea came to her aid; her organs of speech appeared to be paralyzed by fear.

Cautiously she mounted the steps; she must not meet her sister or any of the domestics if she did not wish to endanger her secret. On the right lay the private room of the counsellor, on the left, the apartments where Clotilde held sway. Elsie stood still. Should she ring and ask for Clotilde? No! she must act quite alone and quite secretly. Poor little Elsie! an alliance for life had just been concluded here, that rendered all secret doings useless. She opened the door, stole softly through the open corridor, and knocked lightly at the office door. A hasty "come in" told her the counsellor was at home and to be seen. She raised her clear blue eyes imploringly to the gentleman who came to meet her, and who did not, at first, recognize her.

"May I trouble you a moment, Herr Counsellor?" she asked tremblingly.

"Elsie! Fraulein Marklin! ejaculated the counsellor, clapping his hands with glee.

"I see no other way than to confide to you a matter that threatens the honor and happiness of our family," continued Elsbeth, with more composure. She could not have chosen her words better.

"For Heaven's sake," exclaimed the counsellor, in great agitation, and drew the young girl toward the sofa.

"If you will graciously hear me; I will use exemplary brevity."

"Speak! speak, dear child!"

"A wonderful mystery hovers over us, and in this is involved a rising suspicion. My father seems to have reasons for disowning his mother's family, and the latter appears to be working against us in hostile estrangement. Read my brother's letter, Herr Counsellor, and give me your advice. I know no one else of whom I can take counsel. I wish to spare my father this mortification."

Bergland took the letter eagerly. Elsbeth threw herself back upon the sofa in an excess of exhaustion and scrutinized the countenance of the reader. Flushes and pallor alternated like light and shade upon a face that exhibited a union of mental firmness and vivacity. She studied with anxiety the expression of this manly face, not beautiful, but uncommonly attractive and interesting. Already silver threads, the heralds of advancing age, were mixing through his abundant locks of hair, already light furrows were tracing themselves upon his high, arching forehead, but no other tokens of age were discernible in his manly and stately form.

The counsellor ran swiftly over the letter with changing emotions, and then glanced up quickly to Elsie.

"Might there not be treachery at the bottom of this matter?" he asked abruptly.

The young girl raised her hands up to him as to a divinity, "You believe that also? You believe that also?" she cried in great excitement. "Some one has misused our name."

"I must at least believe in that, rather than an inconsistency of your father which we should be obliged to presuppose, if he had accepted a packet from that family. Whoever knows your father will not doubt him, but the mass must be convinced. I only wonder that your brother himself has not conceived the possibility that an imposition may have been practised. How did you come upon the idea?"

"Do not require me to become an accuser?" Elsbeth anxiously entreated, "I cannot answer your question."

"You would probably facilitate the prosecution of the matter by your evidence."

"I believe it, but it would embitter my whole future life, were I selfishly to destroy the reputation of any human being."

"Have you a definite suspicion?"

Elsie nodded in reply.

"What was your design in making this confidential revelation, since you wish to be silent as to your grounds of suspicion against a particular individual, my dear Elsie?"

"I believed it would be enough, if you should undertake to intimate to the von Haidek family the possibility of an imposition."

"That might easily be undertaken, still it would not suffice, such things are not believed without positive proof."

"It would then devolve upon the Haidek family to pursue the matter further, and their information would make more impression than a declaration of the truth from our side."

"Only see, with what sophistry you try to evade being an accuser," said the counsellor, delighted with her naivete.

"I wish to see no one punished, I wish nothing—nothing at all but to secure my brother's happiness and my father's honor from any injury."

"But, if through my intimation, the one whom you suspect should be traced?"

"Really—then I must still bear the blame," said Elsbeth, under her breath; "tell me what to do, would my sacred assurance satisfy the proud noble family, would it suffice under the circumstances,—would each one be convinced that we never received a packet from a blond gentleman, was I to swear to it with all the power of truth?"

"No," answered the counsellor with a sympathetic smile, "that would not help you at all, we are hard men, dried up in legal dust, and believe nothing without all-sufficient proof. But compose yourself. You shall not be disturbed in any way; I shall willingly relieve you of the burthen of unmasking an impostor. Whatever happens, your tender heart shall not be wounded in the least degree. In reality, I justify you in not wishing to appear as an accuser—there is nothing more ignoble than a wanton betrayal. You would have been able to save us much trouble; that you insist upon not wishing to do so does not render you less amiable in my eyes. Depend upon it, that I will give the matter another direction.

"O, how shall I thank you!" exclaimed Elsbeth, greatly relieved. Thank me thus, by hereafter looking upon me as your friend and brother," replied the counsellor with cordiality. "Perhaps you will shortly find this request justified, my dear Elsbeth."

"But the affair will remain secret?" inquired the young girl, hastily rising.

"I cannot promise that unconditionally but you shall be satisfied with me, even if I should turn traitor," said the usually serious man, in a jesting tone.

She looked at him anxiously, but his cordial smile reassured her. Had she known that Clotilde and this man had been betrothed a few hours since, she might have considered his demeanor in a different light.

She prepared for her return home, greatly relieved. She had placed the responsibility of her suspicions upon a stronger, firmer mind, she had chosen the right man, who boldly ventured to say "I will bring the matter to light—invalidate my accusation if you can." She left quietly and unnoticed, in order to avoid any meeting with Clotilde.

As she was about to cross the church court, a funeral train moving from the house of Herr Otto Marklin towards the opposite side, drew her attention. She stopped hesitatingly and inquired whom they were burying from the opposite house. She was told that it was Madame Spalding, Herr Otto Marklin's housekeeper, who had been found dead, swimming in her blood. It was at first believed that she had been murdered, but further inquiries had developed the fact that the poor woman had fallen a victim to her own carelessness. Returned from the baptismal festival, where wine and punch must have circulated freely, she had imagined that some one was in her room, although she had the key of it in her pocket. She had run up the stair-case as if frantic, with a large knife, just sharpened, in her hand, had raved and scolded, ran against an arras door that had somehow been opened, overthrowing a small closet in the next room. Then she must have lost her balance and in falling wounded herself fatally with the knife. The house had been searched for the murderer, but no traces of any having been found, people had arrived at the conviction that the imagination of the good woman must have been supernaturally incited. The district physician had declared that the fatal wound was inflicted by herself, that her strong grasp on the the knife was evidence of this.

Elsbeth listened to this report with an inward shudder. Moved by an emotion easily conceivable she raised her eyes at the close of the relation, to the dwelling of the counsellor. He stood at the window, looking down at her, their glances met! Like a flash from a dark cloud it passed through the heart of the strong man—the blond gentleman—Felix Marklin! It was the first step of the avenging Nemesis.

[To be Continued.]

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