

Hildesheim. Several years later Katharine and Prince Anton meet face to face in Paris. Rumour had of late linked Anton's name with that of Madame Baria (the great singer). Later he tells Katharine that his wife has gone off in a frantic rage to her brother in Pomerania, and means to divorce him. He also tells her that his amour with Madame Baria has been conducted with a view to that end. Now, did Katharine understand? Katharine understood so well that next day she left her godmother behind in Paris and joined Lord Peterborough in Devonshire.

Anton, not daring to love her there, raised upon her such Liebesbriefe as only a German can write. Not merely mixing reverence with passion, others have many of that sort, but combining with it a coldness as to naïveté simplicity, a naked directness, as electric as disarming. An effect, this, due chiefly to the language in which he wrote, lending itself to that combination of the rational and the emotional, and the sentimental that sounds so much more possible in German than in English—poetising, philosophising, appealing with every polished phrase of the man who has made this theme his study as well as his pastime. The same letters in English would have missed their mark; spoiled by that shrinking of the heart from the phrase worn commonplace, its significance chiefly ironic, reminiscent of long alone. The old things said in another tongue came charged with the excitement of discovery, wearing a freshness as of Eden.

And he made good his claim to being more than a soldier. Not only sent her books as time went on, wrote about them pertinently. In his more impassioned moods, made and sent dedicated to her little Gedichte, that because they were not notably bad seemed brilliant.

But for all this lifting the mark, Liebesbriefe and Gedichte got for their return:

"It is no use, I wonder at your lack of knowledge of womanhood. This kind of woman you should know, I am not."

And again:

"Your highness is very daring. You will even be writing to me of Tugend as well as of Liebe. I do not know if 'Virtue' is as strong in me as Pride. I only know that, although my feeling about you keeps me from anyone else, it will equally keep me from you."

"Till the divorce" he interpreted by return with the comment: "Strange what civility so gentle a being can willfully inflict." In each after letter confident reference to the divorce. Then proceedings were already instituted.

Anton finds a great ally in Lady Peterborough, who has all along been in favour of the morganatic marriage, telling Katharine that they had an illustrious example in their own Royal family, totally overlooking the fact that while one was a marriage of love in the highest sense of the word, the other was a marriage in which no feeling was, on his side at least, except that of sensuous gratification, only to be obtained through the portals of lawful marriage, after every unlawful means had failed. News from time to time reached her privately of the progress of the divorce, and tired at last of the importunities of Lady Peterborough and Prince Anton, she consents to go with Lady Peterborough to Berlin to meet Anton. In Berlin Lady Peterborough receives a letter from Anton, saying that he regrets not being in Berlin to receive her, and suggesting that she and Miss Dereham should come two-thirds of the way the following day by train to meet himself and his cousin (Graf Wilhelm) for half a day's coaching in the Sachische Schweiz. They go, and after the drive are taken to Wilhelmshöhe, the seat of the Graf, to see his art treasures, and drink Russian caravan tea. After tea Anton proposed to show Katharine the Porcelain Room, Lady Peterborough being left behind to be entertained by Graf Wilhelm. He leaves the room to find out the hour at which their train starts for Berlin, and in his absence the servant brings in the evening mail. He drops a letter by accident at Lady Peterborough's feet, addressed (in a beautifully clear feminine hand) to Prince Anton, and on Lady Peterborough asking him if he had ever seen the hand-writing before, (tells her that it is the hand-writing of Princess Margaretha, who writes to the Prince every day, and is wretched if she does not receive one in return. In a flash Lady Peterborough sees that there has never been any question of divorce, and that Anton's story of the divorce proceedings has been a tissue of lies from beginning to end, in order to obtain Katharine's consent to what would have proved a mock marriage. Now, Lady Peterborough, though steeped in worldliness, was not a wicked woman, and she resents in every fibre of her body the great wrong that was to be done to Katharine. The moment the Graf returned she demanded Katharine's presence, and the carriage to take them to the station, but is told

that Anton and Miss Dereham are gone out to see the cathedral. Lady Peterborough leaves for the station, and insists on calling at the cathedral en route. Not finding Katharine either there or at the station, she goes back to Wilhelmshöhe, and declares her intention of not leaving that place until she sees Anton and Katharine. In the meantime Anton has been driven to the cathedral with Katharine, but does not attempt to alight. He gives the order "home" to the coachman, and tells him to drive to the clock tower entrance. They reach it, and Katharine is taken upstairs to a small room, lamp lit and luxuriously furnished.

"I want to hear—," she began.

The faint creak that came along about him— tobacco, Russian leather, and some discreet hint of flowers—came towards her like a tide. It closed about her.

"It is settled at last!" he said.

"The divorce?" she asked.

"That you are mine."

"Then the divorce is granted."

He stopped her mouth with kissing. Even in that headlong moment, the horrible intensity of woman descended on her like a curse—or like some blessing—was through anguish. As she lay that moment passive in his arms, the great struggle of her life went forward in her soul: "He has been deceiving me!" The old turmoil of the mind that let her see in dread of lies, produced in her, gave her the sense that all the securities of life had failed her, all standards were in the dust.

If this man did not speak true, then was chaos come. The main fact of existence was that she was shut in here alone with him—not that he was every second nearer using what was left of self-command—those things were obscured by the horror of "the lies." But where was her quick sense of truth? Why was she taking so meagrely to betrayal? And with a shuddering distinctness she saw why it was that she was lamed.

Truth violated even in the secret places of the heart may be trusted to wreak this revenge: deadening perception, hampering revolt. And in the secretest place of all, Katharine Dereham had known, "I have felt it coming all the afternoon, each turn of his thought, each rush, and each recoil and doubling—deep down in my heart, faithful below admitted even to myself, I have been conscious of it all. No innocent maiden trapped. His accomplice, I."

Yet for all the moment's rude unshelling of herself to herself, she saw in flashes pieces of the Katharine Dereham who should play the willing creature, stand a sympathetic figure in the general eye while she tasted the sweet of yielding.

"Anton," she said, "the divorce is not granted."

"She is Catholic," he whispered thickly, holding her closer and looking into her face with half-shut eyes.

"She is right, and the Church is right, and you and I are wrong, all wrong, Anton." She spoke monotonously, with filling eyes. He laid his face on hers. She drew away, not gently.

"It would have been kinder to write me the truth to England," she said.

"You and I would not be here if I'd done that."

"No—and I at least would have been spared some of this pain." She turned blindly to the door. A quick movement, and he interposed between her outstretched, shaking hand and the high-up ancient latch of heavy iron.

"There is no time for more now," she said.

"I will go back to Lady Peterborough."

"No!"

"Oh, yes—"

"I do not mean you to go back."

She opened her lips. He stopped her. "You don't mean to leave me to go?"

"Lady Peterborough—"

"Lady Peterborough has gone."

"She would never do that."

"I tell you she has gone without you. On my honour" (Katharine shivered) "she is gone."

She sat down in the nearest chair, staring at the lamp. Although he came and knelt beside her, his low words seemed to reach her from a long way off. Things he never dared to say aloud before about the conservation of a great love, about the holiness of freedom in these high affairs. "Pretty middle-class principles!" had no application to people such as they.

"I seem to see, as it were, at last, how well I have prepared me to hear all this. Little by little, since we met in Rome, you have— No, why should I blame you? It is myself who is to blame, for letting go, one by one, the things that—that I believe I cannot live without, Anton."

"What things?"

"She shook her head slowly, and the tears rose again to her eyes."

"You can't give them to me, after all." She drew her hands away from his, his hand, crying softly, she rose up. Not seeing the door for tears, she yet moved towards it.

"Hush! stop! You don't understand; one must speak so carefully. You are lifted up, you are down with a phrase. I saw you think when I said how easily that 'marrying with the left hand' could be done tomorrow. I meant to-night—and what's in the left hand less than in the right—"

He took her shaking fingers away from the high latch.

"No, no, you must not touch me. I—I can't think when you do." But his arms were round her. That he did not kiss the face was because the face was hidden. Over the lips and head he poured out an excited torrent half in German, half in English—his boundless devotion; his loyalty, that being the man he was, no witnessed vow nor legal form could ever hope to coerce, but that she, his lady for ever, remained in his heart, would share her ransom and her slave— As suddenly the lifted her white

face, and looked at him, he recoiled: "No, no!" he exclaimed, as if she had spoken— and then on a lower note, "You are a statue—not a woman!"

They stood there breathing quickly in the silence, looking in each other's eyes.

Then, muttering something in German she did not catch, he set his broad back against the oaken door, and looked down upon his wife every feature of whose face he came closer. He did not move an eyelash.

"Open the door," she said.

"Do you imagine for a moment that I shall?"

"It is impossible for you to keep me here against my will."

"You speak as though such a thing had never been done."

"It never has been. Not"—the trembling lips smiled faintly—"not since woman realised—"

"I am better informed. I know of cases."

She winced inwardly. Barla, once? Oh, no, she was the Prince's favorite like a jewel—

confronted him once in the tower—

where he heard these words? The sense of moral sickness made her physically faint.

"You have not known a case like this."

Not where the woman really did not want to stay? She interrupted his prompt asseveration.

"Oh, yes, once, but I pretended very well. But not really wanted to—"

He only shifted his position slightly, leaning more heavily on the door. Standing so, looking at each other, they heard steps.

Anton turned sharply, and held a hand ready to shoot the heavy bolt.

"If you do that," said Katharine very low, "I shall call out."

And Graf Wilhelm's voice pitched cautiously.

"Well."

"Come here. I must speak to you."

An instant's reflection, and Prince Anton opened the door a few inches, standing with hand upon the latch and face to the intruder. Katharine never moved from behind the door—every sense strained to make effective use of the interruption.

Graf Wilhelm's whisper, perturbed, angry, reached her distinctly, as he jerked out in indignation German:—

"The devil to pay downstairs. She refused to go without me!"

She has insisted on returning here."

"Good God!" the Prince ejaculated under his breath.

"She is questioning the servants," the man outside added in growing agitation.

"On what?"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

The Prince's words were addressed to Graf Wilhelm—but they merely marked time.

The real question was put when the hand, dropped from the latch, was held out in silent appeal to the woman behind the door.

—the fingers groping and trying to fasten on her arm. She seemed not so much to refuse as not to notice that vain asking for convenience—for courage to carry the fight to a finish.

Katharine came quietly round behind the Prince, and over his shoulder nudged to the man without.

"Already train time is it?" she asked in even tones.

At that sound her voice Prince Anton drew himself up suddenly another man.

"I am sorry if we have kept Lady Peterborough waiting," he said. "We will come at once."

Shortly after this Lady Peterborough dies, and Katharine goes abroad with Lord Peterborough. Her views have changed considerably, and she often finds herself regretting Lady Wick, or rather that strata of society to which Lady Wick belongs. She has, in addition to finding Anton worthless, the horror to discover that her father is a confirmed slave to opium. Much that before he has been mysterious is now clear to her, and the shock, acting on an already weakened nervous system, almost brings her to a state of dissolution. At this stage she is persuaded by her friend, Mrs. Bruton, to consult Garth Vincent, the great nerve specialist. She does so, and is ordered the rest cure, which means in her case six weeks' entire isolation from every living soul except doctor and nurse. No letters, newspapers, or indeed any news of the outside world is to reach her. The description of Garth Vincent, as the professional man, the nurse, and the routine of the six weeks, is more than ordinarily interesting. Sufficient it is to say that the cure is a success, and Katharine at the end of her convalescence finds herself in love with the once-dispised Garth Vincent. She also finds that Lord Peterborough has died, and her father re-married. Though left very wealthy, with renewed health and beauty, and numbers of true friends, Katharine feels more keenly than even that no true woman's life can be perfect without its crown of love. Though Garth Vincent has never ceased to love her, he is thoroughly determined that she shall, to use a figure of speech, be brought to her knees to him before he lifts her up to walk with him hand in hand to the end of their life's journey. When a woman is in love she may be said to live on her knees, and so it was not very long before Garth and Katharine were married. Commonly speaking, everything is over to the looker on when the hero and heroine of a story are married. But to the

married, life is only just beginning. Just as the grape with its delicate bloom is gathered, put through the press, and after the blinding process, emerges wine, the quality of which is determined first by the soundness of the raw material, and the care with which the various constituents are commingled—so is the life of two made one. After their marriage, Garth Vincent—now Sir Garth— and Katharine go back to London, where Rife by little Sir Garth sees Katharine slipping back again to her old friends and world, in which he has no place. He becomes furiously jealous of Lord Falconbridge, an old friend of her youth. Katharine has written poetry, all her life, more or less. Of this Sir Garth is unaware, and one day finds her showing a certain white vellum book (which he has always seen locked) to Lord Falconbridge, and is furious that he, Lord Falconbridge, should be allowed to see what had hitherto been kept secret from him. Things go from bad to worse with them, and one day, Katharine returns to find that Sir Garth has sent her baby away, with its nurse. She follows it to High Winstone, where Sir Garth has a house, only to find that Sir Garth has suddenly recalled child and nurse to town. Mrs. Bruton, her friend, lives quite close to High Winstone, where she is now entertaining a large house party, to which Katharine has been invited, but has refused from motives of expediency. But now she determines to go there, but had scarcely arrived when she hears Sir Garth's voice asking for her in the hall. Katharine is afraid, and her friends deny her presence there, and Sir Garth, unbelieving, starts for home. Katharine, in the meanwhile, has left by another gate, and is being driven home in Lord Falconbridge's car, trusting to reach there before Sir Garth. She does, and gives her maid instructions to tell Sir Garth that she cannot see him until morning. Then she went to her room.

On the dressing-table lay the white vellum book, wrenched and married, the lock broken off.

Well, he had seen the Baby's Songs—

what then? Why was she trembling? If

was it as if some of the heat and tumult of the passion which she had torn the book hinged yet about the reading to touch her with contagion. She could see him doing this. His bootless errands to London, and to Little Matley, would not he made him grumble. Oh, why had she fled away? She might have known it would only make things worse. "I must keep my head," she said to herself as she hid the shattered book in a drawer. "I may have left him from himself to-night. To-night? No!" her nerves cried out. "Tomorrow. He would see clearer then," she crossed the room to bolt the door, paused, listened, opened it cautiously, went out and stood at the top of the stairs. All quiet. She went back and rang her bell.

"Was the octagon room yet ready for the nurse?"

"Yes, m' lady," said the sleepy maid.

"Take Sir Garth's things in there. Ask him, when he comes, please not to disturb me. I hardly slept last night."

"He's gone to London, m' lady."

"Must move his things—and quickly. I am very tired."

For all that, when the maid at last was gone, and the doors locked and bolted, Katharine did not go to bed, did not even undress. She turned out the blinding light, drew up the blinds, and sat by the open window facing the gate. The time dragged leaden. Surely he ought to be back by now. The sleepy maid would be giving in to weariness. He might not get the message.

She left the window and threw herself on the bed. Vividly a vision of him stamped itself upon the dark, Garth as he had stood there that morning at the foot of the bed, his quick hair swaying moving in that horrible way, and his slow lips saying: "If you did I don't know what might come."

Hush! was that a horse galloping? "I'd think that must be Garth if I didn't know he had the dog-cart." While she listened for wheels, the moments passed.

Now Garth was so near, she said, "I must keep my head." The sense was all about her of impending horror. She sat up suddenly. Someone was moving in the passage. Not he, for she would have heard him driving in at the gate.

The handle of the door turned. She held her breath.

"Open the door!" he said.

She had meant to answer. If at all, quietly, from the bed, but the voice brought her to her feet, carried her across the room.

"Wait! I'm coming, Garth."

"Open the door!"

Silence. She looked at the bolt, saying to herself, with exultant terror, that it was strong. And still as she stood on the inside, he stood there without, waiting, but striving to send every sense through the barrier between them.

The woman, holding her breath on the other side, felt as if those fierce eyes were forcing sight through the fibres of the wood. The sound of his breathing came to her. Even now in her body was conscious of the intensity of his listening.

"Open the door, or I'll—"

She heard his quick step going down the corridor. The door closed. The light came to the light, and with uncertain fingers felt for the clasp of her necklace. At that instant