

Marie raised her hands in astonishment.

"Who would have thought such a thing of Herr Allitsen?" said Marie. "Why, he does not like lending me a match."

Bernardine laughed and passed on to her room.

And the Disagreeable Man meanwhile was cutting a new scientific book which had just come from England. He spent a good deal of money on himself. He was soon absorbed in this book, and much interested in the diagrams.

Suddenly he looked up to the corner where the old camera had stood, before Bernardine took it away in triumph.

"I hope she won't hurt that camera," he said a little uneasily. "I am half sorry that——"

Then a kinder mood took possession of him.

"Well, at least it will keep her from fussing and fretting and thinking. Still I hope she won't hurt it."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A DOMESTIC SCENE.

ONE afternoon when Mrs. Reffold came to say good-bye to her husband before going out for the usual sledge-drive, he surprised her by his unwonted manner.

"Take your cloak off," he said sharply. "You cannot go for your drive this afternoon. You don't often give up your time to me; you must do so to-day."

She was so astonished that she at once laid aside her cloak and hat, and touched the bell.

"Why are you ringing?" Mr. Reffold asked testily.

"To send a message of excuse," she answered, with provoking cheerfulness.

She scribbled something on a card, and gave it to the servant who answered the bell.

"Now," she said, with great sweetness of manner. And she sat down beside him, drew out her fancy-work, and worked away contentedly. She would have made a charming study of a devoted wife soothing a much-loved husband in his hours of sickness and weariness.

"Do you mind giving up your drive?" he asked.

"Not in the least," she replied. "I am rather tired of sledging."

"You soon get tired of things, Winifred," he said.

"Yes, I do," was the answer. "I am so easily bored. I am quite tired of this place."

"You will have to stay here a little longer," he said, "and then you will be free to go where you choose. I wish I could die quicker for you, Winifred."

Mrs. Reffold looked up from her embroidery.

"You will get better soon," she said. "You are better."

"Yes, you've helped a good deal to make me

better," he said bitterly. "You have been a most unselfish person, haven't you? You have given me every care and attention, haven't you?"

"You seem to me in a very strange mood to-day," he said, looking puzzled. "I don't understand you."

Mr. Reffold laughed.

"Poor Winifred," he said. "If it is ever your lot to fall ill and be neglected, perhaps then you will think of me."

"Neglected?" she said, in some surprise. "What do you mean? I thought you had everything you wanted. The nurse brought excellent testimonials. I was careful in the choice of her. You have never complained before."

He turned wearily on his side, and made no answer. And for some time there was silence between them. Then he watched her as she bent over her embroidery.

"You are very beautiful, Winifred," he said

quietly, "but you are a selfish woman. Has it ever struck you that you are selfish?"

Mrs. Reffold gave no reply, but she made a resolution to write to her particular friend at Cannes and confide to her how very trying her husband had become.

"I suppose it is part of his illness," she thought meekly. "But it is hard to have to bear it."

And Mrs. Reffold pitied herself profoundly. She stitched sincere pity for herself into that piece of embroidery.

"I remember you telling me," continued Mr. Reffold, "that sick people repelled you. That was when I was strong and vigorous. But since I have been ill, I have often recalled your words. Poor Winifred! You did not think then that you would have an invalid husband on your hands. Well, you were not intended for sick-room nursing, and you have not tried to be what you were not intended for. Perhaps you were right, after all."

"I don't know why you should be so unkind to day," Mrs. Reffold said with pathetic patience. "I can't understand you. You have never spoken like this before."

"No," he said, "but I have thought like this before. All the hours that you have left me lonely, I have been thinking like this, with my heart full of bitterness against you, until that little girl, that Little Brick came along."

After that, it was some time before he spoke. He was thinking of his Little Brick, and of all the pleasant hours he had spent with her, and of the kind, wise words she had spoken to him, an ignorant fellow. She was something like a companion.

So he went on thinking, and Mrs. Reffold went on embroidering. She was now feeling herself to be almost a heroine. It is a very easy matter to make oneself into a heroine or martyr. Selfish, neglectful? What did he mean? Oh, it was just part of his illness. She must go on bearing her burden as she had borne it these

many months. Her rightful position was in a London ball-room. Instead of which, she had to be shut up in an Alpine village: a hard lot. It was little enough pleasure she could get, and apparently her husband grudged her that.

His manner to her this afternoon was not such as to encourage her to stay in from her drive on another occasion. To-morrow she would go sledging.

That flash of light which reveals ourselves to ourselves had not yet come to Mrs. Reffold.

She looked at her husband, and thought from his restfulness that he had gone to sleep, and she was just beginning to write to that particular friend at Cannes, to tell her what a trial she was undergoing, when Mr. Reffold called her to his side.

"Winifred," he said gently, and there was tenderness in his voice, and love written on his face, "Winifred, I am sorry if I have been sharp to you. Little Brick says we must n't come down like sledge-hammers on each other; and

that is what I have been doing this afternoon. Perhaps I have been hard: I am such an illness to myself, that I must be an illness to others too. And you were n't meant for this sort of thing—were you? You are a bright, beautiful creature, and I am an unfortunate dog not to have been able to make you happier. I know I am irritable. I can't help myself, indeed I can't."

This great long fellow was so yearning for love and sympathy.

What would it not have been to him if she had gathered him into her arms, and soothed all his irritability and suffering with her love?

But she pressed his hand, and kissed him lightly on the cheek, and told him that he *had* been a little sharp, but that she quite understood, and that she was not hurt. Her charm of manner gave him some satisfaction; and when Bernardine came in a few minutes later, she found Mr. Reffold looking happier and more contented than she had ever seen him. Mrs. Reffold, who was relieved at the interruption,

received Bernardine warmly, though there was a certain amount of shyness which she had never been able to conquer in Bernardine's presence. There was something in the younger woman which quelled Mrs. Reffold: it may have been some mental quality, or it may have been her boots!

"Little Brick," said Mr. Reffold, "isn't it nice to have Winifred here? And I have been so disagreeable and snappish."

"Oh, we won't say anything about that now," said Mrs. Reffold, smiling sweetly.

"But I've said I am sorry," he continued. "And one can't do more."

"No," said Bernardine, who was amused at the notion of Mr. Reffold apologizing to Mrs. Reffold, and of Mrs. Reffold posing as the gracious forgiver, "one can't do more." But she could not control her feelings, and she laughed.

"You seem rather merry this afternoon," Mr. Reffold said, in a reproachful tone of voice.

"Yes," she said. And she laughed again.

Mrs. Reffold's forgiving graciousness had altogether upset her gravity.

"You might at least tell us the joke," Mrs. Reffold said.

Bernardine looked at her hopelessly, and laughed again.

"I have been developing photographs all the afternoon," she said, "and I suppose the closeness of the air and the badness of my negatives have been too much for me. Anyway, I know I must seem very rude."

She recovered herself after that, and tried hard not to think of Mrs. Reffold as the dispenser of forgiveness, although it was some time before she could look at her hostess without wishing to laugh. The corners of her mouth twitched, and her brown eyes twinkled mischievously, and she spoke very rapidly, making fun of her first attempts at photography, and criticising herself so comically, that both Mr. and Mrs. Reffold were much amused.

All the same, Bernardine was relieved when

Mrs. Reffold went to fetch some silks, and left her with Mr. Reffold.

"I am very happy this afternoon, little Brick," he said to her. "My wife has been sitting with me. But instead of enjoying the pleasure as I ought to have done, I began to find fault with her. I don't know how long I should not have gone on grumbling, but that I suddenly recollected what you taught me: that we were not to come down like sledge-hammers on each other's failings. When I remembered that, it was quite easy to forgive all the neglect and thoughtlessness. Since you have talked to me, Little Brick, everything has become easier to me."

"It is something in your own mind which has worked this," she said; your own kind, generous mind, and you put it down to my words."

But he shook his head.

"If I knew of any poor unfortunate devil that wanted to be eased and comforted," he said, "I should tell him about you, Little Brick. You have been very good to me. You may be clever,

but you have never worried my stupid brain with too much scholarship. I'm just an ignorant chap, and you've never let me feel it."

He took her hand and raised it reverently to his lips.

"I say," he continued, "tell my wife it made me happy to have her with me this afternoon; then perhaps she will stay in another time. I should like her to know. And she was sweet in her manner, was n't she? And, by Jove, she is beautiful! I am glad you have seen her here to-day. It must be dull for her with an invalid like me. And I know I am irritable. Go and tell her that she made me happy—will you?"

The little bit of happiness at which the poor fellow snatched, seemed to make him more pathetic than before. Bernardine promised to tell his wife, and went off to find her, making as an excuse a book which Mrs. Reffold had offered to lend her. Mrs. Reffold was in her bedchamber. She asked Bernardine to sit down whilst she

searched for the book. She had a very gracious manner when she chose.

"You are looking much better, Miss Holme," she said kindly. "I cannot help noticing your face. It looks younger and brighter. The bracing air has done you good."

"Yes, I am better," Bernardine said, rather astonished that Mrs. Reffold should have noticed her at all. "Mr. Allitsen informs me that I shall live, but never be strong. He settles every question of that sort to his own satisfaction, but not always to the satisfaction of other people!"

"He is a curious person," Mrs. Reffold said, smiling; "though I must say he is not quite as gruff as he used to be. You seem to be good friends with him."

She would have liked to say more on this subject, but experience had taught her that Bernardine was not to be trifled with.

"I don't know about being good friends," Bernardine said, "but I have a great sympathy

for him. I know myself what it is to be cut off from work and active life. I have been through a misery. But mine is nothing to his."

She rose to go, but Mrs. Reffold detained her.

"Don't go yet," she said. "It is pleasant to have you."

She was leaning back in an arm-chair, playing with the fringe of an antimacassar.

"Oh, how tired I am of this horrid place!" she said suddenly. "And I have had a most wearying afternoon. Mr. Reffold seems to be more irritable every day. It is very hard that I should have to bear it."

Bernardine listened to her in astonishment.

"Yes," she added, "I am quite worn out. He never used to be so irritable. It is all very tiresome. It is quite telling on my health."

She looked the picture of health.

Bernardine gasped; and Mrs. Reffold continued:

"His grumbling this afternoon has been inc-

sant ; so much so that he himself was ashamed, and asked me to forgive him. You heard him, didn't you ?”

“Yes, I heard him,” Bernardine said.

“And of course I forgave him at once,” Mrs. Reffold said piously. “Naturally one would do that, but the vexation remains all the same.”

“Can these things be ?” thought Bernardine to herself.

“He spoke in a most ridiculous way,” she went on ; “it certainly is not encouraging for me to spend another afternoon with him. I shall go sledging to-morrow.”

“You generally do go sledging, don't you ?” Bernardine asked mildly.

Mrs. Reffold looked at her suspiciously. She was never quite sure that Bernardine was not making fun of her.

“It is little enough pleasure I do have,” she added, as though in self-defense. “And he seems to grudge me that too.”

“I don't think he would grudge you anything,”

Bernardine said, with some warmth. “He loves you too much for that. You don't know how much pleasure you give him when you spare him a little of your time. He told me how happy you made him this afternoon. You could see for yourself that he was happy. Mrs. Reffold, make him happy whilst you still have him. Don't you understand that he is passing away from you—don't you understand, or is it that you *won't* ? We all see it, all except you !”

She stopped suddenly, surprised at her boldness.

Mrs. Reffold was still leaning back in the arm-chair, her hands clasped together above her beautiful head. Her face was pale. She did not speak. Bernardine waited. The silence was unbroken save by the merry cries of some children tobogganing in the Kurhaus garden. The stillness grew oppressive, and Bernardine rose. She knew from the effort which those few words had cost her, how far removed she was from her old former self.



"Good-bye, Mrs. Reffold," she said nervously.

"Good-bye, Miss Holme," was the only answer.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### CONCERNING THE CARETAKERS.

THE doctors in Petershof always said that the caretakers of the invalids were a much greater anxiety than the invalids themselves. The invalids would either get better or die: one of two things probably. At any rate, you knew where you were with them. But not so with the caretakers; there was nothing they were not capable of doing—except taking reasonable care of their invalids! They either fussed about too much, or else they did not fuss about at all. They all began by doing the right thing; they all ended by doing the wrong. The fussy ones had fits of apathy, when the poor irritable patients seemed to get a little better; the negligent ones had paroxysms of attentiveness, when their invalids, accustomed to loneliness and neglect, seemed to become rather worse by being worried.

To remonstrate with the caretakers would have been folly: for they were well satisfied with their own methods.

To contrive their departure would have been an impossibility: for they were firmly convinced that their presence was necessary to the welfare of their charges. And then, too, judging from the way in which they managed to amuse themselves, they liked being in Petershof, though they never owned that to the invalids. On the contrary, it was the custom for the caretakers to depreciate the place, and to deplore the necessity which obliged them to continue there month after month. They were fond, too, of talking about the sacrifices which they made, and the pleasures which they willingly gave up in order to stay with their invalids. They said this in the presence of their invalids. And if the latter had told them by all means to pack up and go back to the pleasures which they had renounced, they would have been astonished at the ingratitude which could suggest the idea.

They were amusing characters, these caretakers. They were so thoroughly unconscious of their own deficiencies. They might neglect their own invalids, but they would look after other people's invalids, and play the nurse most soothingly and prettily where there was no call and no occasion. Then they would come and relate to their neglected dear ones what they had been doing for others, and the dear ones would smile quietly, and watch the buttons being stitched on for strangers, and the cornflour which they could not get nicely made for themselves, being carefully prepared for other people's neglected dear ones.

Some of the dear ones were rather bitter. But there were many of a higher order of intelligence who seemed to realize that they had no right to be ill, and that being ill, and therefore a burden on their friends, they must make the best of everything, and be grateful for what was given them, and patient when anything was withheld. Others of a still higher order of

understanding attributed the eccentricities of the caretakers to one cause alone: the Petershof air. They knew it had the invariable effect of getting into the head, and upsetting the balance of those who drank deep of it. Therefore no one was to blame, and no one need be bitter. But these were the philosophers of the colony: a select and dainty few in any colony. But there were several rebels amongst the invalids, and they found consolation in confiding to each other their separate grievances. They generally held their conferences in the rooms known as the newspaper-rooms, where they were not likely to be interrupted by any caretakers who might have stayed at home because they were tired out.

To-day there were only a few rebels gathered together, but they were more than usually excited, because the Doctors had told several of them that their respective caretakers must be sent home.

“What must I do?” said little Mdle. Gerardy,

wringing her hands. “The Doctor says that I must tell my sister to go home: that she only worries me, and makes me worse. He calls her a ‘whirlwind.’ If I won’t tell her, then he will tell her, and we shall have some more scenes. *Mon Dieu!* and I am so tired of them. They terrify me. I would suffer anything rather than have a fresh scene. And I can’t get her to do anything for me. She has no time for me. And yet she thinks she takes the greatest possible care of me, and devotes the whole day to me. Why, sometimes I never see her for hours together.”

“Well, at least she does not quarrel with every one, as my mother does,” said a Polish gentleman, M. Lichinsky. “Nearly every day she has a quarrel with some one or other, and then she comes to me and says she has been insulted. And others come to me mad with rage, and complain that they have been insulted by her. As though I were to blame! I tell them that now. I tell them that my mother’s quarrels

are not my quarrels. But one longs for peace. And the Doctor says I must have it, and that my mother must go home at once. If I tell her that, she will have a tremendous quarrel with the Doctor. As it is, he will scarcely speak to her. So you see, Mademoiselle Gerardy, that I, too, am in a bad plight. What am I to do?"

Then a young American spoke. He had been getting gradually worse since he came to Petershof, but his brother, a bright sturdy young fellow, seemed quite unconscious of the seriousness of his condition.

"And what am I to do?" he asked pathetically. "My brother does not even think I am ill. He says I am to rouse myself and come skating and tobogganing with him. Then I tell him that the Doctor says I must lie quietly in the sun. I have no one to take care of me, so I try to take a little care of myself, and then I am laughed at. It is bad enough to be ill; but it is worse when those who might help you a little won't even believe in your illness. I

wrote home once and told them; but they go by what he says; and they, too, tell me to rouse myself."

His cheeks were sunken, his eyes were leaden. There was no power in his voice, no vigor in his frame. He was just slipping quickly down the hill for want of proper care and understanding.

"I don't know whether I am much better off than you," said an English lady, Mrs. Bridgetower. "I certainly have a trained nurse to look after me, but she is altogether too much for me, and she does just as she pleases. She is always ailing, or else pretends to be; and she is always depressed. She grumbles from eight in the morning till nine at night. I have heard that she is cheerful with other people, but she never gives me the benefit of her brightness. Poor thing! She does feel the cold very much, but it is not very cheering to see her crouching near the stove, with her arms almost clasping it! when she is not talking of her own looks, all

she says is : 'Oh, if I had only not come to Petershof !' or, 'Why did I ever leave that hospital in Manchester?' or, 'The cold is eating into the very marrow of my bones.' At first she used to read to me; but it was such a dismal performance that I could not bear to hear her. Why don't I send her home? Well, my husband will not hear of me being alone, and he thinks I might do worse than keep Nurse Frances. And perhaps I might."

"I would give a good deal to have a sister like pretty Fraulein Muller has," said little Faulein Oberhof. "She came to look after me the other day when I was alone. She has the kindest way about her. But when my sister came in, she was not pleased to find Fraulein Sophie Muller with me. She does not do anything for me herself, and she does not like any one else to do anything either. Still, she is very good to other people. She comes up from the theatre sometimes at half-past nine—that is the hour when I am just sleepy—and she stamps

about the room and makes cornflour for the old Polish lady. Then off she goes, taking with her the cornflour together with my sleep. Once I complained, but she said I was irritable. You can't think how teasing it is to hear the noise of the spoon stirring the cornflour just when you are feeling drowsy. You say to yourself, 'Will that cornflour never be made? It seems to take centuries.'"

"One could be more patient if it were being made for oneself," said M. Lickinsky. "But at least, Fraulein, your sister does not quarrel with every one. You must be grateful for that mercy."

Even as he spoke, a stout lady thrust herself into the reading-room. She looked very hot and excited. She was M. Lickinsky's mother. She spoke with a whirlwind of Polish words. It is sometimes difficult to know when these people are angry and when they are pleased. But there was no mistake about Mme. Lichinsky. She was always angry. Her son rose from the sofa, and

followed her to the door. Then he turned round to his confederates, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Another quarrel!" he said hopelessly.

## CHAPTER XV.

WHICH CONTAINS NOTHING.

"YOU may have talent for other things," Robert Allitsen said one day to Bernardine, "but you certainly have no talent for photography. You have not made the slightest progress."

"I don't at all agreee with you," Bernardine answered rather peevishly. "I think I am getting on very well."

"You are no judge," he said. "To begin with you cannot focus properly. You have a crooked eye. I have told you that several times."

"You certainly have," she put in. "You don't let me forget that."

"Your photograph of that horrid little danseuse whom you like so much," he said, "is