

other tools of his trade: a young, well-grown lad he was, with shining eyes. The grimy fellow pointed to a similar branch in the doorway of the house, and said, threateningly:

'See here, you, do you know that I put that there?'

The professor inspected the huge may and nodded, comprehendingly.

'Yes, yes!' he said, with a smile of radiant friendliness. 'I understand! Ah, love, love! But don't despair, my friend, perhaps the young woman will give you the preference over your rival. I see you have selected *betula pendula*, the so-called weeping birch. Why was that? You should not lose courage so quickly. Good morning to you, my dear fellow.'

With these words of comfort he turned and continued his walk. The other stared after him in perplexity, then pulled the door-bell violently, and when the maid came to the door, began a harangue in tones which did not harmonise with the gentle tribute he had laid on the door sill at dawn.

When Miss Greta Schaffner came down to breakfast an hour later a letter lay beside her plate. She smiled as she recognised the handwriting.

'Well, Babette, did you get any may?' she asked the housekeeper as she opened the envelope. She had innocently stumbled on a sore point, for Babette had waited twenty years for her first may, and found the reminder of it bitter.

'Good heavens!' she said, shrugging her shoulders. 'I am glad that no one bothers me with such nonsense. The girl next door has fought with her young man already this morning because he came along as an old gentleman from the town was leaving a piece of may for her.'

Greta was not listening; her whole mind was occupied with the verses of the amateur poet. 'Yes?' she asked absent-mindedly, and continued reading.

'Yes,' Babette went on, eyeing her. 'I don't know what has come over the city folks; they are playing all sorts of tricks. Now, look what was on our window ledge this morning! The night watchman, the one who took our *Azor* to the pound, saw who put it there. And who do you think? Young Dr. Borndorf.'

The paper in Greta's hand trembled; she grew pale and stared speechlessly at the spray of wild cherry that Babette placed beside her plate.

'Now, what do you say to that?' asked the good Babette. 'Was that nice?'

'No, certainly not,' said poor Greta, with unsteady voice. 'Throw the nasty thing into the fire, Babette, and say nothing to your master about it.'

She rose and left the room, and Babette looked after her, well satisfied.

'That settles it,' she thought; and she might well say so.

The theatricals were going badly. Greta Schaffner had retracted her promise to take part and had fallen out with several of her friends in consequence. A substitute for the character of wood-fairy was found, but the poet and director seemed to have lost interest in the affair, and excused himself on the plea of studies, leaving the young ladies to do what they could with his verses by themselves. Greta Schaffner had returned his poetical effusion on the true and false may, with the following note:

'Miss Greta Schaffner thanks Dr. Karl Borndorf for his tactful remembrance and begs that he will spare her his attentions in future.'

Since then he had forsworn society and lived among old German manuscripts. His scornful lady went around looking so troubled and pale that even her learned father noticed it; her diary was the repository of several closely-written pages full of the hollowness of life, longing for death, and impressive exclamation points. She also spent hours walking in the woods, and when she met Professor Wendelin Borndorf, she returned his paternal greeting with a certain sympathetic friendliness, as if to commiserate him on being afflicted with such a nephew.

Of course Professor Wendelin Borndorf had no idea that there was anything wrong between his nephew and the fair-haired daughter of his colleague, Schaffner. But about a week after that portentous May-day he made a great discovery. He was sitting in the wood on a bench by the road which led from the town to a village on the heights, letting the morning breeze play with his venerable locks, and gazing thoughtfully up into the branches of an oak tree in front of him. Suddenly he became aware of a round object that seemed to protrude from the middle of a broad branch. He reinforced the spectacles by the lorgnette, peered up excitedly, muttering to himself, and finally rose and began a zealous attempt to clamber up the tree. But the trunk was too thick and the lowest branch was several feet above his highest jump.

At this moment the young chimney-sweep happened to come along whistling. He had work to do in the village on the hill and was in full working trim. When he recognised the old gentleman he stopped whistling and scowled.

'Ah, my lad, you come at the right time with your ladder,' cried the professor in delight. 'Would you mind helping me up this tree? I believe I see something up there that demands my presence.'

An unholy grin spread over the face of the chimney-sweep.

'I'll take care of you all right!' he said, placing the ladder against the tree. The professor mounted, swung himself into the branches, and climbed toward his

goal with such eagerness that he did not see his helper take away the ladder and hide behind a bush some distance off.

It actually is *viscum album*, the popular mistletoe! The first time I have ever seen the species on this sort of tree,' cried the professor from above, greatly excited.

'Now we will see how he gets down again,' said the chimney-sweep below, complacently.

Half an hour later Greta Schaffner came and sat down on the bench. She loved this place, so shady and solemn, particularly when the wind played among the branches.

'The forest rustles, the clouds float by,' she quoted, and raised her blue eyes to the tree. There, close to the mistletoe, she saw the professor, with blackened hands and dangling legs. He bowed to her benevolently, pointed to the parasite, and called down:

'This is indeed a lucky morning, dear child. See this big piece of mistletoe, *viscum album*. The common people call it also oak mistletoe, but, as a matter of fact, it very seldom grows on the oak trees, and this is the first time I have ever seen it in our locality. Am I not to be congratulated?'

'How did you get up there, Professor?' asked Greta.

'A kind young man, a chimney-sweep, helped me with his ladder. But I don't see him now. Do you see him anywhere, child?'

'I see neither man nor ladder,' replied Greta.

'Oh,' said the Professor, 'I am sorry. I remember now that I neglected to ask him to wait. Will you please get me another ladder, my dear? I really think I had better not attempt to jump.'

'For heaven's sake, don't, Professor!' cried Greta.

'Stay where you are, and I will see if I can get help.'

She must have walked about five minutes before she saw two people; they were her father and—Dr. Borndorf. The geheimrath had brought his companion into this secluded place to confide to him his theories regarding certain questions of Gothic acoustics. Hastily, and without looking at Karl, Greta told her father of the professor's plight.

'H'm! What are we going to do about it?' asked the geheimrath. 'If you were to notify the fire department to send the hook and ladder company—'

'I think we can manage,' interrupted the doctor, stretching himself to the full height of his tall figure, 'if Miss Schaffner will show us the way to the tree.'

'With pleasure,' said Greta, coldly, and led the way.

'The hypocrite!' she thought. 'He has sat under that tree with me for many years, and knows where it is as well as I do. He only wishes to annoy me with his presence.'

The professor was waving a branch of mistletoe at them in the distance.

'A splendid discovery, my friends!' he cried. 'But where is your ladder?'

'I am afraid we must do without, uncle,' said the doctor, standing under the tree. 'But if you will put your foot on my shoulder—'

'That isn't necessary, sir,' said the chimney-sweep, emerging from his hiding-place. 'The old gentleman should have whistled for me: I was in the wood picking wild flowers. But I want to take this chance to ask the gentleman why he brought my girl a may branch when he didn't even know her. Such foolishness isn't dignified for a learned gentleman with white hair.'

The professor meantime had descended the ladder. He looked at his questioner in amazement.

'Ah,' he said, 'now I remember. It was in Dis-marek street, wasn't it? Why, my dear fellow, that was a mistake. You refer to a branch of flowering may tied with a blue ribbon, do you not? It was lying on the window-sill when I came along. I took it away quite absent-mindedly, and was merely putting it back.'

Dr. Karl Borndorf looked doubtfully at his uncle and then at Greta, who had changed color, and was leaning against the oak.

'Are you sure, uncle, that you put the may back in the right window?' he asked. 'Perhaps it belonged to the next house.'

'There was a wild cherry branch there,' said Greta, with downcast eyes, pulling at an oak leaf.

'Oh, good gracious, yes!' exclaimed the professor. 'I had been carrying that in my hand. Where could my wits have been that morning? Ah, tell me, my friend,' he continued, taking the geheimrath a few paces aside, 'do you suppose that this unknown servant girl of your neighbor's could—what shall I say?—bring a suit against me on account of this misunderstanding? It would be very unpleasant.'

'No, I don't think so,' laughed the geheimrath, and he beckoned to the chimney-sweep.

'You see, my man,' he said, 'it was all a mistake.'

'All right,' replied the sweep. 'We've made it up, anyway, me and my girl.'

'And I am very glad to hear it,' said the professor, diving into his pocket. 'Here, take this and give it to your fiancée.'

The sweep eyed the gold piece undecidedly.

'I won't take any presents for my girl,' he said at last, 'but I'll tell you, I'll take it for helping you into the tree.' With which he pocketed the gold piece and walked off.

'So this is the mistletoe, is it?' asked the geheimrath, examining the twig in his colleague's hand. 'Curious! It was a sacred plant to our heathen forefathers, and you know that in England it still retains certain traditions of love; if a man catches a girl under the mistletoe at Christmastide he may kiss her. And now, what are you young people doing?'