

the sidewalk in front of Number 60, and the passers-by prudently took to the middle of the street. Mrs. Hamlin, wholly unaware of the discomfort of the passers-by, sat on the top step eagerly exchanging views on child culture with Mrs. Hone and Mrs. Carter. Billy Keenan looked at Mrs. Billy, whistled softly, and remarked that if anyone said that a leopard could not change its spots, please refer that person to William Keenan!

The day that the option expired Mr. and Mrs. Hamlin came to call on the Keenans, and brought Edwin with them. Conversation was difficult. When Mr. Hamlin was not straightening the child's collar, Mrs. Hamlin was reknitting his tie; occasionally they combined their efforts to keep him from climbing on the piano or pounding the glass in the bookcase.

Suddenly Mr. Hamlin, removing his eyes for an instant from his heir, saw a man passing the bay window.

'Bless me, it's Sherry!' he said, making a dive for the door and the holder of the option.

When he had finished his conversation with Mr. Sherry, he found his wife and Edwin awaiting him on the Keenan doorstep. In the doorway stood Mr. and Mrs. Billy.

'Don't believe we've told you that we've changed our minds about selling,' Mr. Hamlin remarked to the doorway. Then, with the complacent self-assertion of one who announces original discoveries, he added: 'This is such a quiet street to bring the boy up in, so few trucks or autos to look out for, and a kindergarten so handy, it seems foolish to move out. Good, friendly, helpful neighborhood, too, none better!'

Mrs. Billy gasped; Billy coughed; but the Hamlins heard nothing and saw nothing except Edwin, who buried his sleepy face in his new mother's skirt. A smile lighted her thin face, and made it look sweet and motherly.

'I feel so safe when he is out playing with the Carters and Hones,' she said, in further explanation. 'They take such excellent care of him, and with Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Hone next door in case of colic or croup—oh, no, we shall not sell!'

HILDA'S BETROTHAL

Count Von Switzer was lord of the far-famed municipality of Bresenberg, and last of the noble name 'Von Switzer.'

He had married late in life, and the union, though a very happy one, had been blessed with only one child, and that a girl, christened Hildagard, or Hilda, as she was mostly called.

With the coming of Hilda's little life into the world that of her mother, always a frail, delicate creature, passed into the Great Beyond, and the babe was left to a father's care.

On that little frail creature he lavished all the love of a deep, passionate nature. From a dainty child she grew into a beautiful woman, inheriting all her mother's beauty and her father's goodness of heart.

In her childhood they were playmates; but now, when she had entered into the maturity of womanhood, they were comrades, caring little for company or enjoyment, content with each other's presence, their books, and their music. But enjoyment cannot live for ever, neither will joy endure for all time.

Count Von Switzer was old already; he was beginning to totter as he walked. His days on earth were numbered. Soon he would be forced to leave his handsome home and beautiful daughter and go the way where there can be no earthly arm to guide us.

The thought worried him.

How could he leave his daughter unprotected? The times were rough and there was much evil-doing in the land. Marrying or getting a husband for her had never before entered his head. Now the thought was always with him. Where could he get a suitable husband? Wealth and titles were but secondary considerations. The husband for his Hilda must be brave,

honorable, and good of heart, qualities hard to find in those days.

There was his next neighbor, Baron Weiss.

No!

It was a troublesome question, and one that required much thought.

At length he decided to send a messenger to each municipality where there was a marriageable lord, begging them come to Bresenberg as suitors for the hand of the Countess Hilda.

But that was not all, for as they journeyed to Bresenberg they were to perform some deed of bravery and not by their titles or possession, but by that deed would the choice be made.

Then it would be clearly shown who was worthy of being the husband of Hildagard Von Switzer, Countess of Bresenberg. At length the time arrived, and for over a week nobles had been gathering from distant parts of the country.

Flags were flying, bands were playing, wine ran like water in the streets, all was glitter and splendor.

The people fairly went wild with happiness, for did it not mean the marriage of their beloved Countess? A great platform was erected outside the palace that the people might all witness the betrothal.

On a throne-like seat draped with purple the Count and his daughter were seated.

How the people cheered when they saw them. Verily they were loved by all. As each lord or candidate stepped up to the platform a little boy dressed as a herald read—first his rank, then his possessions, and lastly the deed of bravery that he performed as he journeyed to Bresenberg.

The first in rank was Baron Weiss, Lord of Weiss and Grossberg, owner of castles, houses, and land, and famous for his courage and daring, for as he journeyed to Bresenberg he rode through the black forest and with his own hand slew three boars, the tusks of which he now presented to the Countess Hilda.

The people cheered and shouted as Hilda, smiling and blushing, stepped forward and accepted them.

The next in order was the jovial Count Werner. Nobody expected much bravery from him, for he was too indolent.

He had noted himself because he had drank a barrel of beer in one afternoon, after which he fought a duel with the Lord of X., and was victorious. After much laughter he, too, took his seat.

And so the list was read—until at length the herald was through.

Then Count Switzer arose, and, taking his daughter's hand, said:

'My lords and barons and neighbors,—I thank you all for your presence here and for the honor you have done me and mine by asking my daughter's hand in marriage.

'It is with deep pleasure that I have listened to your deeds of bravery. As I listened my heart bounded, then sank; bounded at your marvellous exploits, sank because I know that my days of joining you on the hunting field are over.

'You are indeed a gathering of men that any man might be proud to give his daughter to.

'But, friends, as I listened I missed one from among you. Tell me where is the Lord of Wicklestein? Is he not here? Came he not to grace my little gathering?'

Then a commotion arose. Where was the Lord of Wicklestein?

Count Werner said that he had passed him on the road near Blenheim:

Surely he did not put such an indignity on the lady as refusing to be present. A messenger was at once despatched, and in the meantime the merry-making went on.

The next day towards noon the messenger returned and they at once all gathered together to hear his news.

And this is the word he brought: As the Count of Wicklestein and his followers journeyed to Bresenberg they took a short cut through the hamlet of B. They were riding leisurely along when they heard moans coming from the roadside.