

But if you wish to hear more about it I shall be happy to call there to-morrow and—

'Do you know him personally?' Dora quickly interrupted him.

'No, I have not that honour,' replied Sonnenberg. 'I have no relations with such people.'

'Then you would not learn anything from him, either, and I no longer feel any interest in the matter. Whatever he might tell me would not alter the fact that Gustav made out a promissory note like that.'

'That he did so,' observed Ernestine, 'proves that he was not worthy of your love, and you would do best not to think of him any longer.'

'Not to think of him?' repeated Dora. 'That would be impossible.'

'I agree with you,' rejoined Sonnenberg; 'one cannot forget so quickly. I can understand everything else, but not how Dornberg could prove himself unworthy of a love which ought to have made him supremely happy.'

At that moment the maid announced the carriage.

Sonnenberg hung the opera-cloak over Dora's shoulders, for which service she thanked him with a captivating smile.

Soon after the carriage rolled away with them, and when, a while later, Dora was seated beside Sonnenberg at the opera, she revolved in her mind all that the colonel had communicated to her, as well as the hints which he had thrown out.

Many opera glasses were directed toward her.

Dora paid no attention to this; she left it to her companion to return all inquiring glances, and Ernestine took pleasure in assuming that duty.

Now and then Sonnenberg would whisper something to his charming neighbour, and it was evident to her that he did so merely to exhibit, to those who ceased to see, his intimate relations with her.

She no longer suffered herself to be deceived. Her suspicions were awakened, and Sonnenberg now appeared to her, too, in the light of a fortune hunter who was endeavouring to step into Dornberg's place.

He had denied his acquaintance with Goldman without hesitation. That was a lie; and that lie could only serve to confirm the colonel's surmises.

What if those surmises were correct. But was it possible or even conceivable that Sonnenberg had committed that robbery? She once more recalled to memory all that she had heard on the subject.

Sonnenberg was at the Rolands' that evening. He had been seized with the nose-bleed and had left the room. Every one thought he had gone home, when he suddenly reappeared just after the discovery of the theft.

Strange that the examining magistrate had attached so importance to this—indeed, had paid no attention to it.

Where had Sonnenberg been in the interval? Had he really had the nose-bleed, or had that, too, been a lie?

Dora resolved to question Clement, the janitor, who knew all the circumstances.

And how about the understanding between Ernestine and Sonnenberg, of which Fannie said she had proof?

Well, Dora herself had seen enough this very evening to make her suspect a confidential relation between them; and if such a league existed, then Ernestine, too, was an impostor, and no longer worthy of her trust.

She took up her opera glass mechanically and turned it upon a lady dressed in grey, who sat in a third tier box opposite her, and who, since the commencement of the performance, had been gazing at her so fixedly that it could not fail to attract attention.

The music ceased, the act was at an end. Dora lowered her glass.

'Do you know that lady in grey up there?' she asked Sonnenberg, who was offering her a *bonbonniere*.

He took her glass and turned it in the direction indicated.

'I have not the pleasure,' he replied, rather coldly. 'A dressmaker, probably, who has worked for you, and whom you have forgotten.'

'I think not. She seems to be a stranger, an Englishwoman.'

'Possibly,' replied Sonnenberg, facetiously, 'and in that case your beauty is probably the magnet that attracts her eyes to you.'

'Are you a flatterer, too?' she asked in the same tone, helping herself to a *bonbon*. 'I was not aware of that.'

'You are mistaken, my dear madam; I only speak the truth.'

'You are, indeed, looking very handsome to night,' whispered Ernestine, who sat behind them.

'Thanks!' replied Dora, indifferently. 'I can't understand why that lady should stare at me so incessantly.'

'Unfortunately, we cannot forbid her being so rude,' said Sonnenberg, regretfully.

Dora remained silent, but from that time she observed the lady in grey more closely and, as her glass was an excellent one, she soon recognised that hatred, anger, and other kindred passions were depicted on that sharp, thin face.

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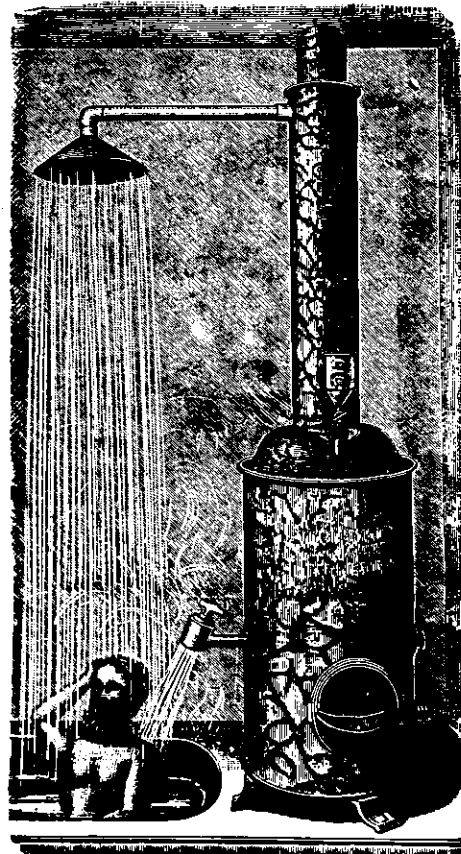
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Were they directed toward her or towards her escort? She could not remember ever to have seen the lady; it was, therefore, hardly conceivable that the latter should have any reason to hate her.

And if they were directed toward Sonnenberg, what could be his relations with this stranger?

She conversed with him in order to be able to observe him furtively, but in spite of her watchful glances she could discover nothing which confirmed her suspicions.

Sonnenberg remained perfectly calm and unembarrassed. He seemed to be giving his whole attention to the music.

Only once he raised his eyes to the box in which the lady sat, but his glance was cold and indifferent, and the next moment he turned to Dora again with a smile, in order to ask some unimportant question.

But Dora did not allow herself to be deceived as easily as he might have thought. She had no doubt but that she was standing face to face with some dark mystery, which Theodor Sonnenberg either did not wish or did not dare to solve for her.

If she could only speak to that lady! She felt convinced that, in that case, she would gain some information as to Sonnenberg's past life, and most probably learn something which might give a firm foothold to the colonel's suspicion.

Could it be done? How could she learn the lady's name and address?

Dora thought the matter over quite a while, and at last believed she had found a way of accomplishing her end.

She knew the box-opener personally; all that she needed was an opportunity of saying a few words to her in private.

Her plan was soon matured; she would try it; and should it prove unsuccessful no harm would come of it.

When the curtain dropped after the second act she asked Sonnenberg to take her to the foyer.

Ernestine was about to accompany them, but Dora told her it was unnecessary. She complained of a slight dizziness and took Sonnenberg's arm.

'Pray, allow me to take you to the buffet and offer you a glass of wine,' he said, in a sympathetic tone.

'No, I would rather remain here in the corridor where it is quiet and cool. I shall feel better in a few minutes. But if I might ask a favour of you—'

She hesitated and gave him a look which made his blood flow faster.

'You will make me happy,' he said, 'by expressing any wish that I can fulfil.'

'Might I trouble you to get me a small glass of claret?'

'With the greatest pleasure. But had I not better call your companion? I shall have to leave you alone—'

'No, no,' she hastily interrupted him. Ernestine's talk would only make me feel worse.'

Sonnenberg left her with a bow. Hardly was he out of sight when she quickly approached the box-opener, who was standing near by.

'Can you keep a secret?' she asked, softly.

'Certainly, madam,' replied the woman. You may trust me entirely.'

'Well, you will be satisfied with your reward in this case. No one must know of the commission which I am about to give you. Do you understand? No one! Opposite our box, in the third tier, there is a lady whose name and address I wish to learn. Do you think you could ascertain them for me?'

'Please describe the lady to me, madam.' She is young, very thin, with light, reddish hair. She is dressed in gray, with a grey hat and brown veil. One might take her for an Englishwoman.'

'That is enough,' said the woman, with a nod. 'I shall find her. May I tell her that some one wants to know her address?'

'If you cannot obtain it in any other way you may do so; but do not tell her who gave you the order. It is possible that she may make inquiries about me. In that case I give you permission to mention my name and to answer all her questions truthfully as far as I am concerned.'

'It shall be done as you wish, madam. And when may I bring you my answer to-morrow?'

'Will any hour suit you?'

'I can come at any hour you like.'

'Very well, then. I shall expect you about ten o'clock. Here is my handkerchief. You will bring it to me under pretences of having found it in the box. You will ask my maid to announce you to me, and will give the handkerchief to no one but me. If my companion should be present, and I cannot send her away without arousing her suspicions, you will not say a word about my commission. You had, therefore, better pin a paper with the name and address to the handkerchief. Have you understood me?'

'Perfectly,' said the box-opener, with a comprehensive smile. 'I am quite used to such commissions.'

'So much the better,' said Dora. 'I depend on you.'

With this she walked slowly away in the