

"Have you seen Fraulein Lisbeth today?" he enquired.

"Not since nine o'clock, when she went out as usual," the man replied.

"Did she leave word when she would return?"

"No, but she usually comes in about noon," the man said, looking at his watch, "I can give her a message."

"All right! I'll go up and write a note, I want to see her particularly."

The man smiled as he watched Reinhardt mount the stairs to Lisbeth's room. Here was evidently another person who knew Reinhardt's affairs better than he did himself.

Reinhardt looked round the room with kindling interest, alive to sensations of environment that had hitherto been dormant.

Accustomed to treat the girl in all good comradeship he thought nothing of hunting for her writing desk and making use of its contents. In turning over the leaves of the blotter a slip of paper came to view, and in a moment he tingled from head to foot.

"Reinhardt" was scribbled over it in every variety of type. With all Lisbeth's familiarity there was a certain shy reticence about her that kept her from even addressing Reinhardt in any form but Herr Fischer.

He got up to go to the window to closer inspect this interesting scrip, in moving he awkwardly knocked the case to the floor, and from it there fell a shower of papers.

They were all in his own handwriting, he found, as he picked them from the ground.

Hurried scribbles with hour of appointment for his willing model, old envelopes that the girl must have found about his studio, bits of torn drawings, all with his sign, his mark upon them, kept and treasured with loving care.

"Arnold was right! What a blind fool I have been! I will write her a note now that will startle her possibly, but at any rate it shall be worth keeping, and perhaps make her forget my brutality of this morning."

He sat down and wrote steadily for a few moments, only pausing in between to smile quietly to himself as though surprised with sudden, glad thoughts.

Instead of leaving the note with the porter he placed it just where her eyes would at once see it when she entered the room.

Then he felt relieved and went home with a happy heart.

Love and devotion to his art had, from boyhood, held sway in his nature to the exclusion of the loves and fancies that attack most men of his age with the virulence of an epidemic. Somehow, since catching the despairing love light in Lisbeth's eyes, a sympathetic chord in his own heart unconsciously responded.

There was powerful wells of emotion in his artistic temperament, hitherto hidden, only waiting the magician's wand to burst forth into active, living springs.

The subtle essence of the girl's personality still pervading the room though she was absent, had exercised some occult influence over his psychic faculties, and the whole afternoon, while striving to work, little electric ripples kept passing over the surface of his being, whenever he paused and wondered when Lisbeth would read his note and come to him.

That she would not come never entered into his calculations, he felt so sure of her; so certain she would fly to him as a bird home to her nest.

In spite of all his eager anticipation the afternoon passed away without bringing Lisbeth. Evening came at last; now, he was positive she would not delay.

After making a tour of the studio, adjusting draperies, clearing away his work and preparing as though for a welcome, honoured guest, he arranged a basket of real roses with deep crimson centres, to greet Lisbeth with, on her arrival.

This all completed, he sat down before the window, his arms crossed on the sill, watching the corner of the street in anxious expectancy.

She was very late, but any moment, might bring her now; she would read his note and come at once, he was sure.

Eight o'clock — half-past — nine o'clock boomed slowly from the tower clock.

Still no sign of Lisbeth. He became nervously impatient, and began to walk up and down the room. How the time dragged!

Just then the house bell rang. "The outer door is closed, she cannot get in," he exclaimed, as he flew at a headlong pace down the stone stairs. A huge dark form stood between him and the last waning rays of daylight, as he pushed the great door back on its hinges. The transition from glad expectancy to keen, blank disappointment revealed a secret, had Reinhardt paused to analyse his feelings.

"What is it?" he asked abruptly. "I am seeking Herr Reinhardt Fischer," was the reply.

The gas lamp was at that moment lighted up, and disclosed the glittering buttons and insignia of a member of the police staff.

"I am he," replied Reinhardt. "What is your business with me?"

"Good," said the policeman, "you are wanted at the mortuary for the identification of a body picked up in the canal this morning. Your name and address were found in the person's grasp."

"My God," gasped Reinhardt, "what is that you say?" using unwittingly the same words Lisbeth had said to him. "Am I to go with you now?"

"Yes, sir," said the policeman. "You had better get your hat though," he added, as Reinhardt came into the street to start as he was, with his thick fair hair uncovered and dishevelled by the night breeze. He turned mechanically and went laboriously upstairs, followed closely by the policeman. They came down together and walked slowly through the quiet streets.

An unspeakable horror seized upon Reinhardt; his heart seemed frozen within him.

In a few moments they stood at the entrance of the narrow building he had often before entered indifferently for purposes of his profession. He paused and would have turned away unable to bear any longer the awful sensation of presentiment that held him in its grasp.

He should have waited for Lisbeth, he thought; she would go away before he returned. The policeman caught his arm, and drew him inside, and along a few paces.

"Here is the body," he said. Reinhardt's eyes were glued to the ground.

Slowly he lifted them on a level with that motionless form standing up in grim outline through the white covering.

Slowly, very slowly they travelled up, pausing long and painfully, at each mysterious curve. They reached the shoulder and rested there.

"Well, sir?" said an impatient voice. By a mighty effort he lifted his weighed eyelids and looked yet higher.

What hateful nightmare is this? He looks again.

Great God! That hair—those eyes—wide open and staring! The policeman declared afterwards they were closed when he went to fetch Herr Fischer.

It was Lisbeth.

An overwhelming rush of water seemed to roar in his ears and flood his brain. This was Lisbeth; the girl he had driven away that morning, the woman who had gradually crept into his heart and life—so gradually and imperceptibly that he never knew it till the light and sunshine of her presence had been withdrawn from him for—ever.

One more look. Then something went snap in his brain and all was a blank.

"He went down like a log," said the policeman, giving a graphic description of the unusual scene that had transpired under his notice on that calm and peaceful summer night. Just such another night as that on which Reinhardt caught the first glimpse of those fair white arms on the banks of the silvery Rhine.

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