

more bitter and hard to bear than this moment. Believe me, my child, it is for your good, and I am only saving you from great unhappiness." And as the director sank back exhausted upon his pillows, he was quite convinced of the truth of what he said. There is no orator more eloquent and more persuasive to a man than the voice of his own selfishness.

Nora laid her tired head by the side of that of her father, whilst he held her fingers tightly grasped, as if he feared she might escape in.

"Everything!" she again whispered to herself, and the whole magnitude of the sacrifice arose before her. Her love killed at a blow, her position destroyed, her happiness a myth, and her hopes blasted. All this fell upon her heart heavily, so heavily that she felt ready to cry aloud under the weight of the burden.

Had her father in his half somnolence the remotest idea of what his child was suffering? "She won't do it, she won't do it, Landolfo," . . . he said, in a broken tone.

"Yes, she will do it," repeated Nora firmly. Then, however, she arose, and gently disengaging her hand from his, she called the nurse, and for the first time since many days and nights she went to her room. It seemed to her as if she were some other person, very different from her former self, and everything around her seemed strange and new.

Upon her writing-desk lay the letter to Curt she had only had time to begin. The words stared at her, like ghosts, in an uncanny sort of way, and reminded her of what she had intended to write to him. And now it was all past, and she must write something else, something quite different. She hastily tore the paper in two. Something must be done and done at once, and although her eyes were burning from her late vigils, and her heavy eyelids were nearly closed with fatigue, she sat down and wrote—all as in a dream.

What did she write? Later on, she hardly knew herself; but it was a clear and graphic description of all the hours, of all the days which had passed since that dreadful moment in which her father had first asked her, as a matter of course, to give up her happiness to him. It struck her at the time that she was writing for some one else. Surely the suffering was too great for her to understand, and it was only at the end of her letter that she was overcome by the realisation of her dreadful woe. It sounded forth in her last words of farewell, for they brought home to her the depth and darkness of the abyss which henceforth separated her from him. It did not cross her mind for a second to consider their engagement otherwise than broken off for ever.

"As one dying, do I part from you, Curt! As one dying, and who is not even sure of salvation. Curt, I durst not take the hand which you, perhaps, will hold out to me. Oh! had you been here, you might have found a way to save me from misery! Thus, alone, I only saw one thing before me, and that was to do my duty at every cost. May the sacrifice which I now make expiate any error I may have committed in making it.

I could not act otherwise. Farewell, Curt!"

The pen fell out of her hand and her head sank upon the table, as if she were incapable of thought or action; but yet her mind was at work, nor could it rest even for a moment after so fearful a storm. Was she, perhaps, regretting that she was no longer the little child who had sobbed out her first grief in the arms of that bright and bonnie lad? Did she see her pale and agonising mother before her as that lad had carried the child to her bedside? Did she still feel the feverish hand which had pushed her away from that lad into her father's arms?

"Mother! mother! did you wish that it should be so?" she cried out aloud, and a torrent of tears fell from her eyes. "Am I to belong completely to my father? Well, then, if you wished it, it has been done; I have signed myself away to him with my very heart's blood. Now, come, and bless your child!"

There was a drop of comfort, something like a whispered blessing which came upon her at that moment; it was the drop of comfort, it was the blessing which comes to every sacrifice, to every pure and complete act of good-will.

Nora lay there still, until the grey morning-dawn broke into her room, when she was summoned to her father.

Before her lay her finished letter. Whether should she direct it? She could think of nothing, nor remember anything very exactly. At Curt's last visit they had determined not to break through orders any more, and to wait patiently until the two years of trial should have elapsed. He had, therefore, not told her his address, and she could not bear to think of her letter coming into strange hands.

"I will send it to his mother's care, and she may forward it on—she may see it if she likes. It will give her pleasure, for it is the only letter she would like him to receive from me," she added bitterly.

CHAPTER XVI.

Landolfo had attained his object sooner than he had hoped. That he had represented matters in a worse light than that in which they stood was his own secret. His consequent emotion upon seeing how tragically his little comedy might have ended was, therefore, anything but put on. But his conscience was not delicate enough to torment him long with remorse, especially when he saw that everything had happened according to his wishes.

It was his sincere conviction that Nora's appearance in public was the only thing which could save the director from ruin; and, last not least, be favorable to his own projects.

"After a few years, our haughty beauty will have got accustomed to me, and will no longer treat me as a dog," he thought to himself, and already he rubbed his hands, mentally, at the brilliant position he would occupy as Director Karsten's son-in-law and manager of the whole troop. His principal occupation now was to draw as much advantage as possible out of the present state of affairs, and he set everything in motion not only with a view to render it impossible

for Nora to change her mind, but also that the public might be worked up into a proper state of interest and curiosity. He was well acquainted with the manner of pulling the secret strings, and of directing the petty intrigues necessary to prepare the road for such an artist.

Nora was still at her father's bedside when paragraphs appeared about her in the most popular papers; the penny-a-liners made themselves very busy with her name. One day it was her beauty and her education, another her love story which was retailed with the most manifold variations, now and then, indeed, coming so near the truth, that one might almost have filled up the apparently discreet blanks with well-known names; but sometimes so improbable that people believed what was said on that very account. The pecuniary difficulties of the director were also alluded to, and Nora was presented to the public under the various and attractive forms of a forsaken and broken-hearted beauty, of a heroic daughter, and of a passionate votary to horsemanship.

All the paragraphs were read, discussed, and believed in. Karsten was a European celebrity, and it was thought interesting to catch glimpses of his private life. Of course, the darker and the more astounding the story, the more favor did it meet with. It must be admitted that a third part of those who read the papers skip the account of political events in order to devour items of gossip, and when they sniff scandal they rejoice, and read the paragraph over two or three times. Besides, just then the world was in a state of political torpor, such as it now and then falls into, and gossip was more welcome than usual; everybody was anxious to see the renowned beauty, of whom every paper wrote, each one ignoring the while that these various versions all emanated from the same pen and the same fertile brain.

In order to be on the safe side, Landolfo cut out these paragraphs and sent them to Countess Degenthal. The latter had long ago received Nora's letter to her son, and had felt indignant that her commands should be violated in so flagrant a manner; but she had not thought it her duty to forward the letter on to Curt. After receiving Landolfo's packet, she concluded that the letter had to do with this new aspect of affairs, though she hardly knew whether to be pleased or indignant, at the fact that a person whom her son had deigned to love should be thus brought before the public. Of course, she did not think for a moment that Nora had any excuse for having acted, thus, and even an irrefutable proof that the whole was an invention would not have altered the case in her eyes. A name which had thus been dragged into the mud could no longer be spoken in the same breath as that of her son. She now thought it quite justifiable to retain the letter until she had made sure of the truth of the report. . . . She had not to wait long.

Days went by; the director recovered more rapidly than might have been expected, and was now possessed with the one idea of bringing out his daughter upon the scene

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