

and attractive scene, such as had rarely been witnessed at the circus; but every one rushed to see, above all, the incomparable Nora Karsten in the character of Libussa.

A few weeks later, and the circus had moved on as usual to the Austrian capital. There, also, the representations were expected with great interest, considerably augmented by the report that some of Libussa's more fanatic admirers had followed the troop to Vienna. It was, however, maintained, that now as ever, and notwithstanding her change of manner, Nora had not changed her coldness to, and hatred of, men.

It was a fashionable and motley assemblage to be seen at the Karsten Circus on the evening of the first representation, and the director had been careful that none of the accessories of the scene should be neglected.

Beautiful, distractingly beautiful, was Libussa as she now rode in, surrounded by the light legion of her Amazons. She rode a black steed of the purest race, which seemed longing to be in the thick of the affray. A gilt coat of mail imprisoned her elegant and powerfully built form, and a skirt of heavy silver stuff flowed in rich folds from her lovely waist. On her head was a silver helmet, which left her features perfectly free, and from which her long, black locks fell beneath her waist. She sat there, so lightly on her fiery horse, that one might have taken her for some vision breathed there by poetry; and yet, firm and strong as iron, she was the very embodiment of that proud heroine.

The whole scene was magnificent, showing off in this cavalry skirmish the most artistic and most varied positions the noble animals could take; but all eyes rested alone upon Libussa, who, as if conducted by some charm, was always to be seen rising high above the others, ever conspicuous by her beauty, as well as by the masterly management of her horse.

One thundering applause followed upon another. Then came the still more dramatic representation of the chase after the flying, in which the Amazons seemed to be dashing forth wildly, headed by Libussa, with her lance held high above her helmet, her hair flowing, and her eyes flashing fire. The words: "*Walkyire Schild-Jungfrau*," passed whisperingly round the ranks.

Now the moment was come in which the last remaining warrior places himself courageously before Libussa, surrounded by her triumphant Amazons. Libussa, on the point of shooting her arrow, suddenly stops; and her horse raising itself almost straight up into the air adds as much excitement to the scene, as the flashing look of triumph which its mistress bestows on the public. Her look now falls upon a group of men assembled in one part of the large circus. The audience breaks out into loud applause, but Libussa's eyes remain riveted to that spot as if she could never turn them away again. The unfortunate Scharka places himself in vain in the most daring attitudes before her, awaiting the death-blow; but she seems completely to overlook him.

A ghastly pallor suddenly overspreads her face, and she is seized with so convulsive a trembling, that her step-mother, who is one

of the Amazons, notices it, and hastening forward to her side, whispers a few words which bring her back to consciousness.

Nora then seems to awake as out of a dream, and with great self-control brings the scene to a close. The public has taken the little *intermezzo* for a masterly representation of Libussa's inward struggle, and her complete annihilation, as she glides from her horse into the arms of her weeping Amazons, lighted up by mystical and blood-red flames, crowns the whole.

But it is well for Nora that it enters into her part to be carried out as if senseless. It would have been impossible for her to remain standing. She does not see the wreaths which are showered down upon her, nor hear the thundering applause which accompanies her exit—for as soon as she has left the arena she falls into a violent and hysterical fit of sobbing. There, however, where she had evidently seen something like a ghost of happy times, there stood a man, clad in a long priestly coat, and who, surrounded by a number of brilliant uniforms, had followed the representation with a breathless attention and a meditative, almost a stern, look. He now seemed unconscious of the tumultuous rejoicings around him. "That's right, sir, I'm glad to see you don't quite despise our worldly pleasures," said a tall, thin officer, stroking his moustache. "Have you been brought to town by this eighth wonder of the world? Or have you any other reason for visiting us again? The countess has deserted us completely during the last years."

"The illness and absence of her son have been good reasons for keeping her away from society," answered the priest. "I am on my way to Count Curt, who has, unfortunately, fallen ill again at Göhlitz—Countess Lily's place."

"What! has Curt returned at last from his travels? and is he at Göhlitz, too? Well, I suppose his mother won't complain at his being kept a prisoner *there*. But what on earth is the matter with him?"

"His health seems to have been destroyed by that brain-fever in Pera; he has never been quite himself since then," explained the chaplain. "And I suppose that the fatigue of the journey has caused this relapse."

"That's too sad!" said the officer sympathizingly. "I always thought it an unlucky idea of his mother to send him away; she gave herself a deal of trouble about it too. Heaven knows why! Is he better now?"

"Yes, he is getting better, I am happy to say, and has expressed a great wish to see me. I am on my way there, and shall start to-morrow. Countess Degenthal has been staying there for a few weeks."

"Then I shall go also one of these days to see my old friend, and to pay my respects to the young lady. Where is the younger son, Count Nicholas?"

"With his regiment. He has grown very strong, and has really turned out very well during the last few years."

"Really!" But he will never be able to hold a candle to Curt; a capital fellow that was! There are few like him, and it would really be dreadful if he did not get well again! But come now, sir, the crowd has diminished, and I think we can get out."

They made a few steps forward, and a group of young officers joined the "Rittmeister."

"What an uncommonly beautiful girl that is!" cried out one of the youngest enthusiasts. "Upon my word, I have never seen anyone like that girl—anyone to be named in the same breath. And such riding, too! I've seen her over and over again, but I've never admired her so much as to-day; she has really made enormous progress."

"I don't know about that," said the Rittmeister drily. "I liked her better as she used to be. There was something which struck one as out of the ordinary line seeing her ride, as it were, for riding's sake, and leaving herself completely out of the question. Now, she's just like anyone else, and shows herself off as well as her horse. But just look, baron; there's Prince B., who, they say, has come over from the North only on her account."

"Ah! the tall gentleman with the bald head?"

"Yes, I've heard fabulous stories about all the trouble he gives himself in order to please her, but it's quite useless. She has a long-standing engagement with her father's agent, who watches over her with the jealous eye of a lynx."

The chaplain heaved a sigh as he heard this last remark, and the Rittmeister, turning to him, said: "But, surely, you will come with us a little way in order to refresh yourself after this suffocating air."

"Thank you," said the chaplain, "I have had enough worldliness for one evening. Moreover, I start somewhat early to-morrow, and shall, therefore, look forward to seeing you at Göhlitz." And with these words the two men shook hands heartily and parted.

CHAPTER XIX.

The next morning, at an early hour, a note was brought in to Nora. The gentleman who had brought it, her maid told her, was waiting for an answer. She had spent the night in feverish restlessness, and was now sitting at her writing-desk, trying in vain to word a letter, and tearing up one failure after another. She now tore the envelope open and found a card, on which was written: "Will you allow me to call upon you?" Nora hesitated a few seconds, and then, as if she could not help herself, she wrote on the same card a few words of consent. The servant had already taken the card, or else she would have recalled her consent almost as soon as it was written.

In a few minutes, the chaplain appeared. He extended his hand to Nora, who rose in an agitated manner to meet him. For a moment he held her hand in his, and looked gravely, gently, and sympathetically in her eyes.

This look brought all the remembrances of her childhood before her with an overpowering gush of feeling.

"And so, after all, you find me thus!" she cried in anguish. "A circus-rider! a horse-breaker!" and throwing herself upon a sofa, she covered her face and sobbed aloud.

"God be praised for those tears," said the priest, laying his hand upon her head. "My poor child, I thank heaven that it should be

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