

so dangerous an illness. The countess, probably in order to excite no suspicion, had written home that he was perfectly recovered; and now the people shrugged their shoulders, and said to one another, "Is that what the countess calls being perfectly recovered?" Pale, grave, quiet, and exhausted, he could hardly draw his limbs after him, and he, usually so friendly and so cordial, hardly gave a nod to his old attendants.

He had completely lost his friendliness and ease of manner, and when his agents appeared before him he only addressed them a few short, cold, and indifferent words. Even to the chaplain he did not open his heart, and only faintly alluded to his dislike for festivities, as if that were the cause which had made him arrive so unexpectedly.

The chaplain, who had no notion of what had taken place, thought he was fighting out some inward combat, and left him alone.

Yes, alone! Shut up in his room as a recluse in his cell, he remained alone; alone, too, did he ride about over the country, or cross his woods on foot; always alone. Those who saw him shook their heads, and the old servants prophesied evil, from the change which had come over their bright and joyous young master. Even the chaplain began to think such conduct inexplicable, until at last Lily's letter cleared up the mystery.

He disbelieved the contents of the paragraph as firmly as Lily had disbelieved them, but yet he was deeply moved by it, knowing the world as he did, and knowing how long it would be before all trace of the calamity would be washed away.

The chaplain now determined to break the ice. He went to Curt, and found him in his room standing by the window, his hand pressed upon his forehead, and looking out dreamily upon the green trees, and upon the blue skies, looking at them, but not seeing them. The chaplain gave him at once the letters which had come for him.

Curt looked at them rapidly, and threw them all aside, with the exception of one which bore Dahnow's handwriting.

He then looked up questioningly at the chaplain, for he saw that he had something more for him. The latter handed him the newspaper together with Lily's letter, which he considered would do the most towards soothing him.

Curt read the paragraph, and then all the pent-up anger of the foregoing days broke out with a violence and a rage, until that moment unknown to his sweet temperament. He crushed up the paper passionately, and throwing it, with gnashing teeth, away from him, he burst out into a loud laugh.

"Serves me right! Who touches pitch shall be defiled. In my folly I took rotten wood for bright stone, and now I have my reward. Serves me right, I say! I chose to have to do with *canaille*, and now I am created as such myself. And all that for the sake of a pair of dreamy eyes! Why don't you laugh at me, chaplain? Laugh at me, do, as the whole world will. You don't even know what I was on the point of doing! I was on the point of marrying that creature! Why don't you laugh, chaplain? But you were also mistaken; you also spoke of

your undiminished esteem for her. Ah, ah!" and he laughed again.

"Curt," answered the chaplain gravely, "will you tell me how much truth there is in the assertion that you once more approached her? As for the rest, of course, Nora is as innocent of it all as you yourself are."

"Innocent? Yes, indeed, she looks so immensely innocent that I did not believe her own words; she was at all events sincere enough to tell me that it was too late."

"You saw her, then?"

"Yes, I saw her!" said Curt peevishly. "I went to her after Lily had called upon her. I wished to silence my conscience, and to free myself from the reproach of having condemned her unheard. I wanted to save her if it were possible, and would even now have risked everything for her, so pure and so noble I thought her. Oh, my God! fool that I was! I loved her so intensely!" The words broke forth from him in his deep despair.

"And you met that man there?" asked the chaplain in his quiet way. "Then, probably, the paragraph has been inspired by low hatred and by irritated jealousy. Tell me, Curt, how it all came about."

Curt told him in a few disjointed words.

"She told you that it was too late? She promised you an explanation, and yet pressed you to go away? Those are, indeed, strange words. Oh, what can have induced this poor girl for the second time to take so dreadful a step?"

"Appearance, comedy, show!" cried Curt bitterly. "She has played her part well from the very beginning. Oh! my mother was fearfully right when she prophesied that education would only make her more fit to lead an intrigue."

"Don't be as reckless in your hatred as you were in your love," said the chaplain severely. "It is extremely difficult to us to form a right judgment in this case; and often when we believe our opinions the most founded, they are the least so."

The chaplain durst not say any more, he would not awaken the old love which, after all, had not died away yet, nor would he add to the anger which he considered unjust.

"Read your cousin's letter," he said after a few minutes of reflection, "we will talk the matter over later on, and see what had better be done to put an end to such low scandal."

"My position in society is completely lost," cried Curt, breaking out again.

"It is pleasant to no one to lose ground anywhere," he said, "and although one may not prize certain things very highly, it is all the same disagreeable to lose them."

Curt knew his circle very well, and he knew what an effect the story would produce upon it. "My poor mother!" he added, picturing to himself her wounded pride, and feeling full of contrition for having brought himself into such a position by not having followed her advice.

The chaplain tried to soothe him. "After all, these are only calumnies, and you are quite innocent. Don't go to the capital for some time—your delicate health is a

sufficient reason for keeping away—and then the gossip will be forgotten, as all such gossip is. Meanwhile, I will take the necessary steps for arriving at the particulars of the case, and will see that the untruths contained in the paragraph are denied. I am quite sure that that man whom you met at Nora's is also the writer of the paragraph. . . . Poor, poor girl!" and the chaplain heaved a sigh, thinking of how her life had been ruined; and how, being laid out, as it were, for happiness, there had grown in it nothing but sorrow and misery. Yes, indeed, God's ways were unfathomable. But he reckoned upon Nora's high character and upon the pure motive which had first led her to enter upon that dreadful career. Such a sacrifice as she had made could not have been made by an ignoble woman. He believed there must be some misunderstanding, although, indeed, the facts seemed crushing. "It is strange," he thought, "to mark how all her life is constantly and mysteriously to be crossed by some dreadful misfortune. But her mother's last prayer was not that she should be happy here below, but that she should be saved hereafter. Whatever the road may be, she will be saved, so please it God. His flowers can bloom anywhere."

Curt had remained a prey to the greatest agitation, but perhaps this was preferable to the dreadful doubts and uncertainties of the foregoing days. He had had a vague presentiment that after all he might be mistaken as he had once been, or at least as he had thought he had been; nor could he rid himself of the remembrance of the love and of the innocence which had seemed to emanate from Nora's whole person. But now he was quite certain, he was indignant too, and he would give full play to his indignation.

He took up Lily's letter, and the simple and loving words which he there read touched him deeply. "Good, faithful, little creature!" he exclaimed, moved at the remembrance that he had given her nothing, and that she had given him all; whilst the other one had only returned ingratitude, as he thought, and ill-usage, for the whole life he had wished to lay at her feet. Again he repeated: "Good, faithful little creature," and looked again almost tenderly at the somewhat stiff and unpractised handwriting. It was pleasant to think of her now. There was something which rested him about the simple and everyday sort of life she led—something soothing in circumstances which had nothing complicated about them, and in a life which flowed tranquilly along as a gentle stream.

That other girl's life was so entangled, so torn about from side to side, and, like a torrent passing over stones and dust and mud, it drew through the mud all those who wished to follow it in its restless and unhallowed career. Lily's peaceful path had something inexpressibly attractive for him. There are hours of total weariness in which the common beaten track pleases us more than the most enchanting wilderness.

Weary—yes, that was the word—Curt was weary of the inward combat which had lasted so long; he was weary of all these ex-

E. S. Robson

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