

'Here is the cordial,' said the little maid, taking a bottle from the mantelpiece. 'She'll be all right when she takes it.'

And so it proved.

'You are overwrought,' said Marga gently, as the woman sat up, apparently revived, and dismissed the maid with a friendly smile. 'Have you consulted a doctor? For I see you are subject to such attacks.'

'No—quite seldom,' she answered evasively. 'It is not worth speaking of, and work has nothing to do with it. But—I have been in great trouble. My brother—'

Here she broke down and sobbed despairingly.

'O God! my own brother! my only friend! We loved each other so—from childhood. And he had nobody but me. Since I married, nothing went well with him. I tried to help him—but he was so unhappy! And now—he is gone from me forever.'

'Is it long since you have lost him?' I asked compassionately.

'Some months,' she murmured in a low voice. 'I lost heart—although I promised him not to fret. I should work more than ever for the child's sake—he left me a little girl to look after. I cannot bring her here—my husband would not like it—and I cannot bear to send her to an orphan asylum. I have found a home for her with nice people—but it is a struggle.'

'And your health is failing. You must bring her here!' I said indignantly. 'Your husband cannot object when he sees how you are wearing yourself out in order to pay for her elsewhere.'

'Oh, no!' she said quietly. 'I do not ask to bring her here; and—Raimund is not fond of children.'

'Is the child's mother dead, too?' asked Marga.

'His wife?'

For the first time I saw the pretty, patient face darken with anger.

'Ah, no! She is alive, but she has abandoned the child. And he loved her so! But she it was who drove him—to death. My poor, poor brother! He was so good, so religious as a child. He would not hurt a living thing or wrong a soul. And so gay, so cheerful always. Everybody loved him.'

Her tears welled forth afresh, and Marga—tender-hearted Marga—sat down by her side and drew her head on to her breast.

'Cheer up!' she said. 'The child will not be neglected, and who knows? Herr Strell may consent to adopt it when it is a little older. Do not worry yourself any more just now. We shall all try to help you, and God will reward your sisterly devotion.'

We left her calm and comforted, if not consoled.

'Did I not say there was some noble sacrifice at the bottom of her untiring industry?' I said as we drove away. 'Now do you know what I propose?' She must have rest; and the villa at Baden is empty, for we go to Marienbad next week. She could go there with the child till we return in a month or so. My old Martha will feed her and nurse her and pet her, if I only give a hint.'

'Splendid!' cried Marga. 'That would set her up. Write to her at once about it!'

I did so, but my offer was declined—very gratefully, of course, but still declined.

'I do not feel justified in accepting Madam's kind offer,' wrote Frau Strell, 'and shall explain my reasons on the first occasion when I shall have the honor of meeting Madam.'

But it seemed to me that she avoided this explanation, and I took care not to force her confidence.

'She speaks and acts as if there were some disgrace attaching to the child,' said Marga. 'And she never mentioned its name, which would be her own maiden one, too. Poor thing! Just think of her toiling and moiling day and night probably to provide luxuries for that other woman. And all for love of a brother. But I must say I understand her husband's feeling aggrieved.'

'Nonsense! He is a conceited, selfish brute!' I declared. 'Surely no fit mate for that little golden-hearted wife of his. If he were worth his salt, he would have divided her cares and been a solace, not a hindrance.'

'True,' said Marga. 'But why fall upon him thus? His role in the affair is negative.'

'And that is just what I reproach him with,' I insisted, as the carriage drew up before Marga's door. 'I have a perfect spite against the man. A Christian's role in life is never negative.'

III.

Life in Vienna is a selfish, absorbing whirl. True, it is pretty much the same in other capitals; but I am trying to find an excuse for the fact that, amid a thousand cares and pursuits, I lost sight of Marga's dress-

maker for a considerable time. We had continued to employ her (although she spoiled our gowns, which we often got remade or altered without her knowledge; and in spite of her extravagant prices) until she herself ceased working, owing to the death of the child.

Next time I saw her it was on a hospital bed in the Cancer Ward. She had written to Marga, asking her to come.

'I hope you do not mind my having come too,' I said, as we approached the bed. 'I am truly sorry to find you here. Let us hope it won't be for long.'

'Oh, no! it won't be for long,' she said. 'But the next move is to the grave, and to the better life beyond it. I want to ask a last favor of you, Madam'—turning to Marga.

I moved away quickly, but she called me back.

'Don't go, please,' she said, with her old, timid smile. 'I want to ask your pardon, too, for having deceived you. My brother is not dead.'

Her tears began to flow, and Marga tried to soothe her.

'Only tell us what we can do for you,' she said.

'Bring Albert to see me,' she sobbed. 'He is in prison, but if Herr B——' (naming Marga's husband) 'would speak a word, surely they would let him come to say good-bye. He knows I am dying, poor fellow, and he wants to come. The warders would be with him, of course; nor would he try to escape, for his life is ended too. Ah, God! what has he to look forward to, now I am gone?'

My eyes were wet and so were Marga's.

'You must tell me his name,' she said, 'if I am to procure your wish. I promise you I will do my best.'

'It is Albert M——,' said the invalid, in a low voice, pronouncing the name of a bank defrauder with which all Austria had rung some years before. 'She made him take the money, and he got twenty years. She escaped to spend it and he gave himself up. Poor boy!'

Yes, we remembered. A sensational drama that thrilled us at the time.

'Be assured,' said Marga, 'that we shall try to obtain his liberty under escort for a couple of hours. But do not count on it too much. Prison regulations may stand in the way.'

'Does your husband come regularly to see you?' I asked.

'Well, no, Madam. He knows this long time that I am incurable,' was the answer; which seemed to her—poor wife!—a natural explanation.

We tried to cheer her by speaking with compassion of the unhappy convict, declaring that we had never in our hearts found him so deserving of blame; it was clear he had been led away, and so forth.

She listened, clasping her rosary, while the tears coursed down her pale cheeks. But her face lit up with a smile of welcome as the Sister in charge came near.

'Sister,' she said, 'I think I am not going to wait for the other side to have a taste of happiness, after all! It is possible that I shall see my brother; but if not—God's will be done!'

Marga and I paused outside the door of the ward.

'To think of it!' she murmured. 'Such heroism, such devotedness! These things do exist among us; and for the sake of this one soul, perhaps, are many of the cowardly and selfish spared.'

'I thank God,' was my reply, 'for the lively faith in a better land that sustained her in her weary task all these years.'

Marga lost not a moment in endeavoring to compass the invalid's wish; but there were inevitable delays, and she died—this humble heroine of sisterly devotion—with her last earthly wish unfulfilled.

We saw the husband at the funeral, in coldly correct mourning. Some months later we saw him again, apparently well pleased with himself and with a stout, smiling young woman on his arm. Evidently he wished to impress her with his high connections; for, as he caught sight of the livery, he actually turned out of his way to accomplish an elaborate salute. But Marga sat straight and gave him a haughty stare.

'You are thinking of that poor little woman who was his wife?' I said, with a sigh.

'Yes,' replied Marga. 'I cannot excuse him. While she was happy and healthy, he liked her well enough. When trouble fell on her he drew off. Had he been a man she need never have fretted and worked herself to death.'

'You said once his role was negative,' I reminded her. 'As for me, I prefer the brother, convict as he is, who sobbed in remorse over her coffin, to the heartless husband.'

And Marga acknowledged that she agreed with me.—
'Ave Maria.'