

than he,' said the astonished wife. 'Perhaps that very thing made him so much the dearer to his mother?'

The doctor's wife reflected a little. 'Well, of course to his mother. But I will not say anything against him. He does what I want him to do, is industrious and willing, but I can find no heart in him. He can, of course, visit his brothers and sisters often and have good friends in us.'

The doctor made no reply. But when his wife went to bed that night she had a certain feeling of dissatisfaction with herself, without exactly knowing the reason why.

'Just see whether I am not right about the boy,' said Mrs. Brandt the next morning as the doctor remained sitting a few minutes after he had finished his breakfast. 'He has been sitting there a long time motionless and speechless. There is no life in him. His brothers and sisters may play and shout about him as they please, but he doesn't even notice them.'

'Come here, my boy,' the doctor called to him as he sat in the corner holding his head in both hands. 'Does anything all you?'

'My head pains me.'

'Since when?'

'Since always.'

'Since always? That means, I guess, since you came here, doesn't it?'

The boy nodded.

'And what else pains you?'

'My eyes and my neck, and sometimes I feel dizzy.'

'So? And no one has heard a word of all this?' The doctor felt his pulse, listened to his breathing, and then said: 'Go to your room now and lie down. I will come to you immediately.'

His wife had listened in silent anxiety. 'I hope you don't consider him seriously sick?'

'Very seriously. As well as I can judge he is coming down with brain fever.'

She clasped her hands in terror. 'And just now! What shall I do with the other children?'

'Well, well, the disease is not contagious, but he needs absolute quiet. It will be best if I report at once to the hospital and have him taken there. It is possible that the disease may take a bad turn.'

'Do you think he will die?'

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. 'He has carried the disease too long unobserved.'

His wife became suddenly very serious and quiet. 'Then the boy shall not be allowed to go to the hospital,' she said resolutely.

'But you wanted to have him leave anyway.'

'Yes, if he had kept well. My heart is not much drawn to this child, it is true, but just for that reason I will do my duty by him. I could never enjoy the other children if I should allow their brother to die in the hospital.'

'That is all very fine,' said the doctor, quietly, 'but where will you put him? Perfect quiet is indispensable.'

'He can lie in Stina's gable-chamber. It is sunny and quiet there. Stina can get up her bed in the kitchen while he is sick.'

'H'm, that would do. But who would take care of him? Neither you nor Stina has time.'

'No, but I will let old Mrs. Miller, who took such good care of me two years ago, come. When she has to rest I will stay with him. Don't make any objections. I guess I can sacrifice a few nights if you can stand at the call of your patients day and night the year round.'

The doctor passed his hand fondly over his wife's head and said: 'Well, then, in God's name make your preparations with Stina. Meanwhile I will send the nurse and the necessary things from the druggist's.'

Hard days and still harder nights followed. It seemed as if the boy

could not wait to follow his mother. Hour after hour he lay at fever heat calling her name, until the parched lips refused to speak.

'I have very little hope,' said the doctor, when several days later, after a careful examination, he was about to leave the boy for the night. 'If the fever does not abate early to-morrow morning he is lost.'

'Then I will stay with him to-night,' said his wife decidedly.

'You will wear yourself out.'

'Do not worry about me. What one must do, that he can.'

The doctor lovingly clasped her hand. 'If you need me, call me.'

The hours of the night passed slowly by. With wide-open eyes the boy tossed restlessly about on his bed moaning and wailing. 'Mother, mother,' and ever again 'Mother' sounded piteously through the room. The heart of the doctor's wife melted in compassion. Stroking his cheeks, she bent over him caressingly. The boy's countenance suddenly changed. 'Is it you, mother? Are you here at last?' He threw both arms tightly about her neck and drew her so near that her cheeks touched his.

A feeling of joy stole over her as the fearful tension of his limbs relaxed and his heart beat less violently. But as often as she attempted to loose herself from his arms, he cried out in anguish.

Nothing remained for her but to draw her feet carefully upon the bed and lie close beside him. His regular breathing assured her that he was asleep, and while she rapturously pressed her cheek against that of the boy who had called her mother, sleep closed also her weary eyes.

The sun was shining brightly when she awoke. Her husband stood bending over the bed. She started up in fright. 'I hope I have not been asleep.'

'You have, indeed. But see here.' He pointed to the boy, who lay in a deep, sweet sleep, with drops of perspiration covering his brow. 'He is saved, thanks to you.'

Tears of joy filled her eyes.

'The danger is over,' continued the husband. 'Once on the road to recovery he will recuperate rapidly. Perhaps he will be sufficiently improved in fourteen days to be removed to his new home.'

'Do you indeed suppose that I would allow the boy to be taken away from me after this?' asked the doctor's wife softly. 'He has called me mother, and although he only did it in his fever, I will be a mother to him. He belongs to me.'

'So you would rather send the younger boy to the orphan asylum?'

'No, I will not do that.'

'Or the girl?'

'Certainly not.'

'But you still less wish to give up the two little ones?'

'I will keep them all five.'

'All five?' The doctor's voice had an uncertain sound. 'You'll allow yourself to be carried away by your good heart. Consider how risky it is with strange children; one never knows what is in them.'

'That can be said also of one's own children.'

'They take our kindness as their rightful claim.'

'They have a right to do so.'

'And when they are grown up it suddenly occurs to them that they are not our children.'

'If we were true parents to them this would not be so.'

'And all the trouble and work they make.'

'I will gladly take that upon myself. But—' she glanced anxiously at him—'perhaps all five are too many for you?'

'Me?' He took both her hands and said: 'Anna, when the poor mother was struggling with death, and could not die because of her distress for her children, I bent over her and said: "I will take the children and they shall be all my own."

"All five?" she asked incredulously. "All five," I replied, "so help me God." Thereupon she died in peace.' 'Poor mother,' whispered his wife, hiding her face in his shoulder. Suddenly she raised her head. 'But, Albert, if you promised that, you brought the children into the house with the express purpose of keeping them all.'

He nodded assent.

'But what if I had not been willing?'

'I knew your heart.'

'So? And if you knew my heart why did you not come confidently and tell me what you wished?'

The doctor put on a somewhat critical expression. 'You wanted on that very day to have new floors and modern style of carpets and curtains and—'

She was about to interrupt him when a feeble sound came from the bed. The boy lay there with clear, feverish eyes looking over at her. Had he heard what she had said? Did he suspect what decision she had made?

'Mother,' he whispered softly, stretching out his weak hand to her.

She threw herself down on her knees before the bed. 'Yes, my child, I will be your mother.' She covered his face with kisses and sat down on the bed beside him, and, tenderly smoothing the moist hair from his forehead, said, smiling through her tears: 'What fine soft hair he has! And such good honest eyes! And—'

'Now that sounds like a genuine mother,' said the doctor, laughing. 'I see already you will spoil the child in a most terrible manner.'

'You don't say so. But, listen, there are the other children outside in the hall. They would like to get in. Can they be admitted?'

The doctor was already at the door. There stood the little group of children, huddled together as they had been a few weeks previous, the little ones in front and the older ones in the background. But this time they were not so timid and bashful.

They tripped confidently nearer, and while the two little ones climbed into the lap of the doctor's wife, and the two older ones crowded close to her, they gazed cautiously at their brother, who lay upon the bed before them so pale and still.

With one hand she held that of the sick boy and with the other tightly clasped the other children; and, beaming with joy, exclaimed to her husband

'Our children! May God bless them and make them happy!'

'All five!' added the doctor.—From the German.

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