

nificant. True, she had a few admirers of her fortune—pattern young men who followed the wise advice of their mothers. With these apologies for lovers she was equally silent and passive; and reddened and smiled exactly in the same manner to each one.

People gifted with a fine spirit of observation, declared that she always followed her handsome cousin with her eyes, although he only avoided her. Just now he had turned most rudely away from her, in order to greet with unusual warmth his old friend Dahnow who, passing through town, had not been able to refuse Countess Degenthal's pressing invitation.

"I can't say that you're very civil to your cousin," said Dahnow in a tone of reproach, as Degenthal led him away into another room. "You were in the middle of a dance."

"Ah, bosh! One need not be so civil with relations! Why did she choose me? But now, tell me—What on earth can have brought you here at the very end of Carnival?"

"Oh, just the wish of making a little tour before throwing myself headlong into reading up for the examination. I tell you your cousin can turn out to be a very pretty girl, once she has developed herself a little more. She has such a pretty line about the mouth too."

"Really?" said Curt, "do you think so? Oh, I daresay you're right; for me, she belongs to those set of people who do not exist."

"But you exist for her, anyhow. Poor thing! she quite touched me, as she stood there, following you with a sad look upon her poor face, when you left her in the lurch."

"Oh, it's all nonsense which has been put into her head, and which she must get out of it again. Dahnow, look here at my talisman. I did not like to write to you about it, but now, see!" and Curt pulled out of his waistcoat pocket a small gold locket, containing the miniature of a lovely face.

"Oh! beautiful!" said Dahnow. "So you have remained faithful to her after all! You were so silent, and went away so suddenly, that I thought it was all over. But have you any hope of success?"

"I have succeeded, I may say; a few conditions have been made; quite bearable ones, too; my mother insisted upon two years' separation and complete secrecy. Did anything transpire on the Rhine about the whole thing?"

"Oh, very little! It was simply said that your mother had very sensibly called you away. As the director and his family also went away directly, the matter was soon forgotten. Students' loves are never thought very much of."

"*Nous verrons!*" said Curt drily, smoothing his moustache, and giving one more look at the miniature before closing the locket.

"Where is she now?" asked Dahnow.

"In a villa not far from X, in which she will spend the two years to come. I can't bear to think of her in contact with the company, and therefore asked her father to make that arrangement," he added in a changed tone.

Dahnow looked meditatively before him. "Do you know," . . . he began, and then, speaking off, suddenly asked: "Apropos what

are your plans? I know you have entered the diplomatic career. Do you remain here during the first months?"

"Oh no; my studies are over, and I shall probably be sent away as *attaché* to some embassy or other in a few days."

"Ah!" said Dahnow, as if relieved. "And now, my good fellow, you're evidently wanted. There is a footman in the doorway looking at you with such a woful face, that you had better try to comfort him."

"Ah, yes!" said Degenthal, "I suppose it is about the supper. We shall do it without any ceremony, sitting at small tables. You look out for yourself, old fellow. As master of the house, I must take some important personage upon myself. I will come to your table later on; take my cousin in; as it is, you don't know anyone else."

"I shall know how to get on, never fear," muttered Dahnow; and, indeed, he got on very well, for a short time afterwards he was at the side of the so-called "Belle of the season," amidst a group of fashionable young men, whom he was amusing with his flow of wit and humor.

"Ah, Count Degenthal!" now exclaimed the handsome young lady, beaming upon him with her black eyes—a thing she had done without success during the whole winter, and she had not yet quite given up all hope of attaching him to her triumphal car. "Count Degenthal, tell us why your North German friend only visits our town now, when our festivities are at an end, and when we are going to cover our heads with ashes."

"Because, as I have already observed, I am only a poor heretic, and know nothing about covering my head with ashes. But I have the worst of all penances to bear, for I know not what I have lost, unless you compensate me by giving me a turn to-night."

"Flatterer!" said Degenthal laughing. "Countess Hedwig, punish him by giving him a great many rounds; for he is like a Turk who prefers looking on when others dance, to dancing himself."

"Ah! then I can guess what has brought you here, Baron Dahnow," said another gentleman. "North Germany has sent us a few artists of the kind, or rather of the jumping and springing kind. The famous Karsten Circus has arrived, and will help to shorten Lent a little."

Dahnow so completely engrossed the attention, that no one noticed Degenthal's sudden change of expression.

"Baron, how you blush!" cried Miss Hedwig laughing. "So those quadrupeds seem to have more attractions for you than anything or anyone else. Now, see, I declare you're blushing again!"

It was strange, but Dahnow did not somehow find as usual a ready answer to the young lady's saucy speech.

Degenthal, standing opposite to him, looked at him with surprise. "Did you know that the Karsten Circus was coming here?" he said in a somewhat forced tone.

"Why, my dear Degenthal," answered Dahnow with a laugh, "you seem to think very little of the attractions of your town, to notice so trifling an event. Karsten was, moreover, not in B. this year, but further up north."

"And therefore, you have come here in order to find—well, not him, I suppose, here!" said one of the gentlemen. "*Chi sa* whether it is on account of the quadrupeds! I have heard that Karsten has a daughter who has created an immense sensation everywhere. Last autumn, one talked of nothing else on the Rhine. I hope she will also show herself off to us!"

"Nora Karsten never shows herself in public," Lily suddenly said in her quiet voice. "She has never done it, and will never do it either."

Everyone looked in surprise at the little speaker.

"But what on earth do you know about it?" exclaimed Countess Hedwig. "How do you come by such an acquaintance?"

"I know Nora Karsten very well, and am very fond of her," said Lily in the same quiet manner. "I was nearly a year in the convent with her, where she was brought up. She was the handsomest and the best of the pupils, and particularly good to us new girls."

"Really, Countess Lily, that is an original combination—a rider in the circus, who has been brought up in a convent—"

"I tell you that she is no circus-rider," repeated Lily obstinately. "Her mother did not wish it, and her father, who was very rich, caused her to be brought up in a convent. At that time we did not know anything about her father. Our chaplain told me all this later on."

"What does she look like?" asked Countess Hedwig with curiosity; "and where does she live?"

"She is more beautiful than any other girl I know," replied Lily, just a little spitefully. "I don't know where she lives, but I suppose with her father. But one thing I *do* know, and that is, that she will never do anything which we would not do ourselves; she is much too pious and too well brought up."

Lily had become quite red in her vehement defence. But for the first time a pair of eyes were fixed with interest upon her; it seemed as if Degenthal could bless her for each word she was uttering. For the first time also, he noticed the truth of Dahnow's praise of the line about her mouth.

A few minutes later, and he stood behind her chair.

"Can I have the cotillon, little cousin?" he asked softly.

Lily blushed deeply, and nodded in silence; she could not bring a "yes" out for very joy at so unexpected and blissful an event.

A few hours later, as the cotillon—the dance which lovers prefer—was in full swing, the countess could hardly believe her own eyes when she saw the couple sitting side by side. Curt seemed absorbed in his conversation, and Lily seemed to be in the seventh heaven.

The countess could not hear that it was only because the topic of their conversation was the convent that Curt was so attentive; she only saw the light dancing in Lily's small eyes. What! Had she perhaps been blind until now? Had she not noticed what the intimacy of home-life had brought about? Had she been in too great a hurry to get her son away? And now it would be folly indeed