

way stood the dark man of the Circus, a sarcastic smile playing upon his lips.

"The director begs Miss Nora to come to him at once," he said, and disappeared.

Curt bit his lips. "Who is that insupportable creature?" he said angrily. "Quite the face of a spy. Did not I tell you how imprudent it was that you should have come here?"

"That is Landolfo, my father's man of business," she said depressed. "He is also very antipathetic to me, and forces himself so upon us. He thinks himself so much more than other people. But my father praises his cleverness, and we must not be difficult if we want to have the necessary forces."

"We!" said Curt again angrily. "For Heaven's sake, don't identify yourself with those people!"

"O Curt! you take everything the wrong way to-day!" she said sadly. "You know before what my father's business was!" This time she moved not a step towards him, and the handsome head was erect and proud. "I must go to my father," she added. "Do you wish to see him? He is a little better since yesterday."

"I had rather not see him to-day," said Curt. "I do not feel in the proper mood, nor do I wish to knock against that fellow again; but I shall call another day to see him. It is not our fault that chance should have brought us together. I shall also know more about my journey. Remember me to your father."

He wanted to kiss her, but with a proud gesture she moved a step back, and only allowed her hand to rest a moment in his.

Curt went away displeased with her, with himself, and with the whole meeting. The fact that some one else was aware of their having met, and the parting in which Nora had shown herself so much hurt, were equally unpleasant thoughts to him. He would have grieved more had he seen the scolding tears which rolled down Nora's cheeks as she sat by her father's bed and thought the scene over again. He would have felt more uncomfortable still had he seen the malignant black eyes which followed him down the stairs.

"I say, pretty one," asked Landolfo of the chambermaid, who was just coming his way, "how was the gentleman called who was here just now?"

"There's his card, please, sir," said the girl. "The waiter said I ought to have given it to the young lady, but the gentleman was already in the room."

"Ah! ah!" said he, grinding his teeth. "That's why the Bella Donna is so precious fine! She only thinks a count good enough to make up to her! He's got just the right name for offering that sort of thing to his stuck-up family!"

The same evening Countess Degenhal found amongst her letters one written in an unknown hand. Its contents ran thus: "A friend warns you that your son called to-day upon Miss Nora Karsten, the daughter of the circus-rider. Should you wish to prevent further intrigue, it is high time. Everything is done in order to bind him and to make the matter public. I cannot warn you otherwise."

The Countess was dumfounded on reading

this. What a dreadful blow to her newly-born hopes. Had his conduct only changed, in order to throw dust in her eyes? Had it only been a base calculation? She was indignant with her son; indignant with "those people," although, indeed, she added, that nothing else could be expected of them.

It went against her to act upon an anonymous letter; but intrigue for intrigue she must, at every cost, detach her son from such unworthy links.

Her mind was soon made up; a letter was sent off at once to the old Excellency, who must have found she had made progress in the virtue he had praised her for a day earlier. She brought him to manage that her son should be sent away at once—every hour was precious. She said nothing, but the tone of the letter was such that the experienced man of the world guessed the reason of her energetic.

"So, so! Is that the way the wind blows?" said the old gentleman, applying a pinch of snuff to his nose. "Who would have thought the steady young man given to such freaks? Still waters run deep! In that case it will certainly be good for him to be sent away. So that's the reason why the mamma did not mind his being sent to Constantinople, and looked so dissatisfied with him! She is a wise woman in her conviction! Well, we must see what can be done."

The old gentleman liked to show all that he was capable of. Notwithstanding the late hour, his carriage rolled to the door of one of his numerous friends. The countess might well be satisfied with his zeal.

Early the next morning Count Curt received a message, stating that he was begged to go to the Foreign Office, where he was given despatches, and was at once ordered off to Pera.

Curt, who had expected this for some time, was not in the least surprised. Had he not been so busy he might have noticed that his mother showed hardly any signs of emotion at this sudden and distant separation. Lily's face was the sadder and the more surprised of the two.

Of course, there was a great deal too much to be done at the last moment, for him to think even of bidding Nora a last farewell, or of making her any explanation. Before the short winter day had been brought to a close, Curt sat in the express train which carried him farther and farther away from her.

## CHAPTER XII.

Curt had been established a month at Constantinople. He had been so busy, so taken up by new impressions, that he had not had much time left for past memories. After all the various emotions of the foregoing year, it did him good to find himself amongst a fresh set of people. A constant state of agitation is wearing in the long run, notwithstanding any amount of love. Moreover, he was dissatisfied with Nora and with himself since their last meeting, and he was glad to chase away these thoughts and those attached to them, if only for a while.

A month passes quickly, when we are surrounded by fresh interests and associations. But a month passes slowly when we are hang-

ing for news, and one day after another goes by without our receiving any. The parallel had evidently not struck Curt, but a letter from Dahnowscon brought it home to him, and awoke him from the sort of trance he had been living in.

"You may think what you like about my meddling," wrote the Meeklenburger dryly and categorically, "but I cannot see what right you have to make any girl so miserable, particularly one to whom you have vowed fidelity and love. Of course, I cannot judge of the validity of those reasons which made you take so sudden and so distant a flight; but it strikes me that you ought not to have concealed them from her to whom you have given a right over your life. I need hardly tell you the name of her who has been waiting in vain all these long weeks for news of you, for one explanatory word. You ought to know better than I how so sensitive a nature must have suffered during this trial. I very much question whether she derived any great comfort from the fact that I—having accidentally heard she was here—called upon her, and told her that you had arrived safely at Pera. Perhaps it would have been better, had she been able to think that an indisposition had prevented your writing to her, rather than to know that you had no reason whatsoever for such unpardonable conduct. Pardon me this phrase; but I can find no other when I think of her grief. You seem uncommonly particular in keeping the conditions, notwithstanding the change in your plans, which made an explanation due to her. Love's logic is rather different to yours, it strikes me! Karsten's wife and daughter leave this town to-morrow; until now they were kept here by the director's illness. I shall also start to-morrow on my way home. Should you feel inclined to send me a sample of your epistolary style, pray address to me there."

This letter was clear enough. Curt did not require a long examination of conscience in order to recognise his fault. What had he been about? What was he thinking of to have left her thus, after so cold a parting? As he now thought over the last four weeks, they fell with a heavy weight of remorse upon his heart. Once more the words she had said resounded in his ears: "O Curt! Curt! don't go away! They only want to separate us for ever." And instead of answering her, he had left her without one explanatory or conciliatory word. And, after all, why had he started off so hurriedly? The scales now fell from his eyes, and he saw that the matter must have been arranged by his mother. Why had she been so pleased when he told her that he was to start at once. And how calm she was when he took leave of her! His chief at Constantinople, too, had also manifested a passing surprise when he presented himself before him. Now, everything was clear to him. Nora was right—they had wanted to separate him from her, and they had succeeded. His mother had taken measures in order to hasten his departure, with the hope he would thus forget his love. He understood now what her intention had been, and it pained him all the more, because he felt that she had won the day.

With his love, his feeling of independence