

which put him out, for after the letter had gone he was more serious and more meditative than before.

"I also must try what distance will do for me," he said at last. "What's the good of being free from all social or family duties if I cannot do what I like? Upon my word, all that studying has put me quite out of sorts."

Shortly afterwards Baron Dahnow astonished his numerous relations by announcing his intention of henceforward giving up books for nature.

"Are you going to turn *mobile*?" asked his brothers with a laugh. "You'll end by becoming an African explorer!"

"I prefer eating to being eaten," said the fat one, "and I will therefore leave Africa alone. But I must get away from civilisation and from railways. I shall study *un-civilised* lands and people; everything is so flat and commonplace in Europe!"

"You of all people in the world! How will you ever bring your lazy self to scramble up the Chimborazo or the Himalayas?"

"No! I shall be carried up," answered Dahnow laconically. "I know how to make myself comfortable anywhere." And he certainly considered his comfort in the preparations he made for his journey.

Curt had meanwhile returned to Constantinople after his wild escape. Count X., the ambassador, was sitting in his room one morning when his youngest attaché was announced. "So you're quite well again?" asked the old gentleman, looking fixedly at him.

"Oh! I never felt better," answered the youth, who did indeed look radiant with health and happiness.

"Your servant kept severe custody upon you," the ambassador continued slowly. "Although I called more than once, I never could get at you. The doctor, too, was very silent."

"Your Excellency was really too kind," stammered the youth. "The doctor"—

The ambassador arose and laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder. "You're a bad diplomatist, my friend," he said with a satirical smile. "Your intrigues are not finely woven, and your face does not conceal your feelings. To what bathing-place did the Trieste ship take you?"

Curt stood silent and confused before his chief.

The latter traversed the room a few times, and then said impressively, "Young man, do not flitter away the best years of your life in unworthy bondage."

Curt looked up frankly and proudly at him. "Excellency, the happiness of a person I esteem as much as I love was at stake."

Count X looked at him more earnestly than before. "I think well of you," he said, "but I have been told that you were in danger of committing some great folly—of shipwrecking your life's happiness. I see that the folly is at least no unworthy one; but be careful. Unless I am much mistaken, you are not the man to conquer your passion at any cost, and, notwithstanding opposition. God grant that you may not make yourself miserable for life!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The world seemed beautiful to Nora after Curt's flying visit, and yet there were clouds in the distant horizon, and cold showers threatened to chase the spring away. At home, too, clouds were to be seen, and to be seen with a sad foreboding. But Nora would not look at them, she would not rob her heart of the calm and joy with which Curt's visit had filled it; otherwise, she might, indeed, have been sad at the great change which had come over her father's temper since his illness. He had irritable and agitated about every small thing; and even the birth of a son did not suffice to cure him of his ill-humor. He had received the new-comer with intense satisfaction, but after the first days his brow had once more become clouded.

Nora had been overjoyed at the thought of possessing a little brother who might, in time be a comfort to her father when she would no longer be at his side. She thought Karsten's ill-humor must proceed from some physical reason, for both his wife and his boy were blooming with health. But he was more indefatigable than ever, coming often to the villa, in which, it is true, he only spent a few hours. He was always accompanied by Landolfo, Landolfo, the indispensable, with whom he held long and mysterious consultations.

He was, indeed, a remarkable man this "Signor Landolfo," for thus he chose to be called, and thus his name was always to be seen in large letters upon the play-bills. His tall figure, his fine profile, and his shiny black locks, produced a great effect upon the vulgar crowd. But those of more refined taste were disagreeably impressed by the false and yet impertinent look of his dark eyes, and by the sensuality of his thick lips, imperfectly concealed as they were by a well-trimmed moustache and beard. Had anyone felt a wish to study his past—no very edifying or improving study—one might have traced Landolfo back to a simple "Levi." But he reminded one more of Schiller's poetical image, inasmuch as "one knew not whence he came," and one might add: "his track was quickly lost whenever he took leave."

He had appeared under all sorts of different names, and had disappeared a dozen times at least, without leaving any trace of his old self behind him. A disappointed genius, he had tried his fortune first on the stage, then at the brush, then again at the pen. One day, finding himself particularly short of money, he had engaged himself to a small circus. His showy appearance and his agility gained him some reputation in the insignificant troop, and at last, with the assurance which characterised him, he had offered his valuable services to Director Karsten. Landolfo's talent as an equestrian was about the average, but Karsten was struck by his taste in decoration and effect, and his aptitude for business. He soon became a very important member of the troop, by the ease and originality with which he fitted up new scenes; and his facility with the pen made him likewise very valuable in the director's eyes. Landolfo was not the man to let opportunities slip out of his hands, and

he made such good use of Karsten's foible for him, that he very soon was entrusted with the whole management of affairs. The director, who had never had any particular talent for business, was delighted to be able thus to rid himself of trouble, and Landolfo's quick and cunning eye to the main chance always impressed his employers with a great opinion of his cleverness.

During the last few months the director had stood in great need of advice. Until then he had been the first and best in his line. He had thus reaped such a golden harvest, that he could afford every kind of comfort and luxury to himself and to his family. But now, since the preceding winter, Karsten had a rival who did all he could to put his adversary in the shade, and to gain the favor of the public. He evidently had money to lay out for the purpose; and had more inventive power than Karsten in bringing new elements into his Circus, and in exciting the interest of the lookers-on.

Novelty hath ever a charm, and the director soon perceived that his audience was no longer so numerous, and his purse no longer so well-filled as of yore. He found himself compelled to make new and greater efforts, in order to compete successfully with his rival. Some of his best forces, tempted by greater offers, had gone over to the enemy, so that, in reality, Karsten's Circus was no longer so good as it had been. This fact stung his pride to the very quick, and at any cost he wished to create some new means of attraction, in order to regain his former popularity. He was, however, forced to spend enormous sums in the attempt, and what with these expenses, and the maintaining of so many people and horses, he felt himself going rapidly down hill.

He could not give up the villa or change anything in his mode of living, lest people should say he was ruined, and as, in this world, a natural and logical consequence, completely forsake his Circus.

It was these preoccupations which, during the winter, had affected his health, and now, a new disaster fell upon him. The banker, with whom he had placed his capital, had made unfortunate speculations, and had gone bankrupt. This naturally made the director gloomy, and, at the same time, it brought him oftener to the villa, in order to consult certain lawyers in the neighboring town.

To-day he had arrived quite unexpectedly, and had sent Landolfo at once into town with commissions. The sight of the baby and of his wife, so completely restored to health, cheered him up a little, but as often as he looked at Nora, his ill-humor seemed to return. Her engagement to the count weighed upon him uncomfortably in the present state of his affairs.

He was sitting with his family on the evening of his return; and it was a comfortable little party which was established in Mrs. Karsten's drawing-room as Landolfo entered it.

The director arose rapidly and went towards him. In him he saw his only remaining resource, so blinded was he by the advice Landolfo had given him, and which had now and then been crowned with success.