

"Oh! its offended artist pride! Miss Nora didn't choose to return her visit. A little display of judicious pride, which did not quite suit our beauty. They're not made of such pliant stuff as the like of us."

"Stupid nonsense!" answered the director; "the girl will spoil everything for me before the day's out, with her hoity-toity ideas."

Faithful to his old habit, the director began once more pacing the room.

"What on earth shall we do, Landolfo?" he said at last.

"Engage another beauty; Miss Elise already belonged to the old stock."

"That's all very fine!" cried the director, "but where am I to find her—this new beauty? Remember, too, what enormous pretensions they make, now that they know how the other man will arm them with money, and I haven't wherewithal to pay them. I tell you again its ruin; I can't bear it any longer!"

"I know no one better able to laugh at ruin than you," remarked Landolfo, rising and knocking his ashes carefully with his second finger into a dainty little ash-dish.

"I?" asked the director astonished, and trying in vain to catch a glimpse of Landolfo's averted face. "What do you mean? I know you're a clever man. Have you any other plan in your head? Speak!"

"Miss Nora," said Landolfo, with his face still averted as if occupied with his cigar. "Miss Nora is the best rider I know. Mademoiselle Elise was not to be talked of on the same day with her; moreover, she is remarkably beautiful, and will soon bring the whole world to admire her. Let Miss Nora appear in public, and you have won the day."

Karsten started back.

"My daughter does not ride in public," he said, after a pause, with a hoarse voice.

Landolfo was silent.

"Her mother did not wish it," continued Karsten, as if to strengthen his conscience against himself.

"Circumstances alter the case," said Landolfo shortly.

"She will never consent to it," exclaimed the director.

"Miss Nora is said to be very pious, I hear; she will assuredly know what her duty to her father is, and will make a sacrifice in order to save him from certain ruin."

The director felt heavy drops of sweat chasing one another upon his brow.

"The fact is that she has other duties to perform; she is engaged, and I have given the count my word."

Landolfo indulged in a low laugh.

"Ah! really engaged with a young Austrian count, perhaps; anyhow, it wasn't very official until now."

"It was to remain a secret during the two years," answered the director somewhat awkwardly.

"Ha! ha! We know what such engagements mean," said Landolfo, shrugging his shoulders; "engagements, *entre nous*, so that one may be at liberty to do as one likes. I suppose that's the reason why the young gentleman has hurried off to the East. The haughty mamma seems to encourage the matter."

"Where did you say?" asked Karsten, to

whom Nora had said nothing of Curt's absence; she herself knew the reason why.

"He has been named attaché to the embassy at Pera," said Landolfo. "I suppose a little change of air was considered good for his health. Believe me, my friend, this Eastern traveller will not cross your plans much," he added, laying his hand confidentially upon the director's shoulder. "Don't let us mince matters. It's the old story; one may be in love, but marriage" . . . and a low whistle completed the sentence.

"I believe the count to be a man of honor," said the director, with a deep blush rushing to his cheeks. He turned indignantly away from the touch of his inferior, and stood before him for one moment with all his former dignity.

"So do I," answered Landolfo with perfect calmness; "but he is young, very young! You must be fair, director. From his point of view it's a great folly; and follies, as a rule, do not last. Three days' constancy in such circumstances is already very meritorious. However sweet the folly may be, it destroys itself, and in this case I happen to know that the pair have already had a little tiff."

"How do you know anything about it?" asked the director in a commanding tone.

"A lucky or unlucky circumstance, as you may take it, was the cause of my witnessing a little love scene between them: Miss Nora in tears, because the count was reproaching her for having gone to Vienna, and thus mixing herself up with the troop; Miss Nora, indignant at first, then imploring her lover not to undertake his journey to the East. The count's answer was to start off that very same night, without even bidding her farewell."

"I have heard nothing of all this."

"I daresay it was unpleasant to Miss Nora, and that she therefore kept it to herself," answered Landolfo. "I have noticed her irritation of late. But Miss Nora is a remarkable young lady, and a clever one, to boot; as soon as a thing is put clearly before her, she will herself understand the necessity of action. She will understand," he continued slowly and distinctly, "that her situation towards the count will not be improved by her father's bankruptcy, and that Count Degenthal's family will hardly be more inclined to receive her with open arms as the daughter of a ruined circus-rider than as that of a rich man."

Karsten seemed to have been turned to stone during this last speech of Landolfo. Yes; he remembered his conversation with the chaplain and the dowry he had promised his daughter, and which he would now be unable to pay. Once again he said to himself, that she would be an unnatural daughter if she could forsake him in such a moment; if she did not make the small sacrifice in order to save him. And yet he felt it, and said it with a moan, "She will never do it!"

"She must have a strange idea of filial piety," observed Landolfo coldly. "We are not supposed to be worth much, and yet we should understand our duty otherwise. Anyhow, wait till to-morrow before you make up your mind. The house is not yet on fire. During three months we can keep up our

credit, and if the worse comes to the worst, depend upon it, Miss Nora will not be heartless enough to say no. Just try it." So saying, he lit another cigar, and remained standing a moment as if he expected the director to speak.

But Karsten was silent. The red spots on his cheek darkened, and his thoughts seemed to be painfully at work; yet he said not a syllable. When Landolfo asked whether he might retire, a silent nod was the only answer. He went, and the director was alone.

It would be unnatural if the child refused to save her father. This was the one thought which occupied his brain. The count! The count! That had been a foolish love story, which was already at an end. After all she would only return to the position to which she had been born. He had kept his word to her mother in giving her the education she had desired for her. But circumstances now altered the case, as Landolfo had so justly said. For one moment it had occurred to him to sell all that he possessed, and to retire from the whole business. This, however, he could not do without incurring great loss; and then how humiliating it would be to have given way before his rival!

"It wouldn't serve her, and it would be of no good to me," he thought to himself. . . . "However, I will not try to force her," he murmured. "I will explain the whole matter to her, and she will do as she chooses."

"No, I will not speak to her—I will not be such a coward!" he repeated later on to himself during that long and sleepless night. But then again the tempter's voice said, "Would it not be unnatural that she child should refuse to save her father?"

CHAPTER XIV.

Early the next morning Nora had mounted her horse and had set off for a pleasant ride in the fresh and brisk morning air. Her heart was dancing for joy, and her horse was prancing about under her, as if in accordance with her feelings. This was a joyful anniversary for her. A month ago, Curt had held her in his arms and told her, at least for the hundredth time, that his love was unchanged and unchangeable.

As she passed through the court which was separated by a low wall from the park, she saw her father standing at the window of his writing-room. She nodded to him, and then made her horse perform all sorts of graceful and pretty freaks, such as she knew he loved, then nodding once more, and springing over the wall, she set off at full gallop through the park.

Did he see her? Yes, indeed! We watched with pride the manner in which she ruled her horse, and the grace with which she directed its steps.

It was a young and fiery animal, which he had lately picked out of his stables so that she might try her hand and exercise her talent upon it. It had hardly been mounted before she took it in hand, and now she might have led it with a silk thread. As she flew proudly through the air, he was once more struck by her incomparable beauty.

"He is right! she would soon have the whole world at her feet," he muttered; "she would surpass them all. And she

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