

Curt stares at them as if he had seen two ghosts. The guard passes by, and, remembering him as the traveller who had given him so generous a present, feels drawn to a little conversation.

"Handsome lady that, sir, ain't she? She's quite a celebrity, too, at the Karsten Circus. Her father arrived yesterday by an extra train; but perhaps your Excellency would take a cup of coffee, as the morning is uncommon fresh?" he added, looking at Curt's pale face.

The man is right. Curt is shivering from head to foot, but he refuses to take anything and sinks back in his seat, as if decidedly disinclined to carrying on the conversation. The guard, who feels particularly chatty and amiable this morning, is obliged to look out for some more cheerfully-disposed traveller.

At last Curt is alone. She is gone, after having spent these long hours with him. The moment God had perhaps sent them in which to clear up every doubt is now irretrievably past. One word might have saved them, and neither spoke it.

"Nora! Nora!" he now cries in wild despair, covering his face with his hands. "Oh, why did you not give me that look a second earlier?" and in the agony of his grief, remembering that it is too late, all his buried love lives in him again and tortures him.

The day is advanced when the train stops at the station Curt is to get out at. Lily's smart footman is already awaiting the traveller on the platform, hat in hand, and leads him at once to the carriage.

The sun is shining on the neatest possible equipage, so bright and clean, that it quite dazzles one, and the little ponies toss about their heads with a coquettish wagging, as much as to say: "If there is taste left in the world, people must think us remarkably pretty!"

But Curt is in no mood for admiring anything, and he throws himself, tired and exhausted, into the vehicle with as little ado as if it were a common fly, and closing his eyes, he does not even bestow a look at the green meadows or upon the fine house which now rises in so stately a manner before him, amidst the luxurious trees of its beautiful park.

Lily has already asked herself ten times the same two questions to-day: "Will he come? Will he not come?" She had often peeped out of the window opening upon the pathway which leads up to the house, like Sister Ann, to see whether anyone is coming. Now, at last, the rolling sound of wheels upon the bridge announces that her guest has at last arrived. She hastens to her drawing-room in order to receive him with all the dignity of the mistress of the house.

The mixture of reserve and of intense joy depicted on her face are really very becoming; but, alas, it is only the footman who enters.

The count's compliments, and he begs to be excused from appearing to-night. He has been obliged to go to his room, feeling too exhausted to present his homage at once, after the fatigue of a long journey. He hopes to be able to come down to-morrow."

Lily's face sinks to zero, for hope deferred maketh the heart sick. But what is to be done?

CHAPTER XVIII.

"That was an uncommonly silent companion, upon my word!" muttered old Hannah, rubbing her sleepy eyes, as she sat down in the carriage by the side of her young mistress. Dear old Hannah! she had remained faithful to the director, and accompanied Nora everywhere; taking care of her as devotedly now as she had done in the days of her childhood. "Nora dear! I'm sure you're shivering," she added anxiously, pulling up the carriage-rug in order to cover her completely with it. "That all comes of racing about the world, and travelling day and night as we do. Thank God! we shall stay here some time at least! My old bones can hardly put up with it, and I'm sure your young ones cannot do so either," she went on to herself, as she now with some difficulty got down from the carriage which had stopped at one of the best hotels.

The gentleman who had met Nora at the station was likewise there to receive her.

"The director arrived last night," he reported. "Everything is fixed for the day after to-morrow, unless you are too tired, Miss Nora."

Nora did not seem to hear him, and only nodded silently, without taking any further notice of him.

"She's ungacious!" muttered Landolfo. "I suspect you're a little too much spoilt, young lady! You'll have to get out of the way of that, if I am not much mistaken. But, now I think of it, the young gentleman who looked out of the carriage window bore a great resemblance to the count. . . I hope no *rendez-vous*! However, it doesn't much matter, she may do what she likes, our *belladonna*, but she won't get him back again in a hurry! So that's the reason why our young duchess was so ungacious! Well! Never mind! We can wait, and settle our accounts a little later on," he added, laughing sardonically, and entering the dining-room in order to drown his rage in spirits.

Old Hannah had already arranged Nora's room as comfortably as she used to do her mother's in days gone by; and now, smoothing out the white pillows, she drew the window-curtains, and brought her a comfortable dressing-gown in which to rest after her fatiguing journey. Nora had submitted to everything passively, and lay extended speechless upon the sofa. Old Hannah looked at her, and shook her head deprecatingly.

"This restless life will kill her, just as it did her mother," she muttered as she went out. "Yes, yes, kill her, I say, were she ten times as strong! Poor, handsome missy!"

Nora was alone, and complete rest had followed the well-nigh endless motion. But she hardly realised the difference; everything seemed still to be puffing and blowing, rushing and roaring in her brain, and to be hunting her to death. She saw him still before her, so cold, so mute, so inanimate! It had been a dreadful night, and the storm of those hours appeared to have annihilated her poor, suffering heart. Three years had passed by since that first appearance in the circus, after which she had lain thus broken down, then, as now, by great physical and moral exertion. Since then her reputation had spread far and wide in all the towns on the Continent, and Landolfo's calculations had

so far been crowned by complete success. Her beauty and her talent had worked wonders, and the director might well be pleased.

To her soul, meanwhile, a reaction had gradually taken place, for we poor mortals are alike unable to remain for ever in the depths of woe or on the pinnacle of joy. In the place of an irrevocable fact, we are generally visited by a certain inward tranquillity—all the more so when this fact brings with it an active and busy life which requires continual bodily fatigue. The latter is indeed the best remedy against the mind's sickness. Nora's occupation in itself was one which she liked, and as she did it well she could not help feeling some pleasure in it. She had gradually become used to the public, and its applause did not move her more than the sudden cessation of it would have astonished her. She was accustomed to such homage, and accepted it as an understood thing.

Her father had tried to spare her feelings as much as he possibly could. She was never forced to mix with the rest of the company, and never took part in any combined or theatrical representation. She always appeared at his side, displaying her skill in riding, or showing off the paces of some new horse.

She certainly had thought, when first she appeared in public, that she would never be able to bear it—that she would die from the pain of humiliation and of lost love—but one does not die so easily. There was steel in her blood, steel in her mind, which caused her unwittingly to raise her head once more, feeling how great was the sacrifice she had made, feeling at peace, for she had been unselfish. It had been until now her great object to remain upon this pedestal of self-respect and of conviction that she was worthy of Curt's esteem.

The sight of her unopened letter had indeed smitten her as with a dagger, but at that time she was almost incapable of feeling anything very acutely—her feelings being quite benumbed by all the anguish she had gone through. She did not even recognise his handwriting, so changed was it, and the envelope was so covered by stamps and postmarks that she fancied, perhaps, the letter had never reached him. She put it carefully away just as it was, so that she might one day let him read therein of all the deep sorrow which alone could justify her in his eyes. Her life, too, would be a justification—she lived quietly and gravely, away from the noisy pastimes, even from the innocent ones, of the people who surrounded her. Wherever she went, she was pursued by the obnoxious admiration of young men. She found admirers in every rank, and her step-mother assured her over and over again that she need only raise her little finger in order to have ten counts at her feet, instead of the faithless one she chose to pine for.

But Nora only shook her head silently when such speeches were made to her; she never received any of their tokens of admiration, nor did ever an encouraging look fall upon any aspirant.

The young men asserted that the proud Amazon never touched any of the bouquets or of the wreaths which fell at her feet. The clowns generally picked them up, and, with