

THE SACRIFICE;

FOR HER FAMILY'S SAKE.

CHAPTER I.

The autumn sun shone merrily into the little guest-chamber of Frau Maria von Tullen; glanced back from the little mirror on the bare wall; and played about the point of an infantry helmet, which peeped out of the open box, day, together with all manner of toilet articles, on the old-fashioned table which the room contained. The window offered a view of the floating battlement of a ruined fort, of a uniform, which lay about the field and chairs. On one of the plain wooden chairs sat a slender young man, easily recognized as the owner of this array. He had a handsome, intelligent face, thick brown hair, and on his upper lip an important little mustache. At this moment he was looking, with an air of vexation, at a very elegant pair of boots.

"Confound it!" he muttered, "my only pair of nice boots not paid for yet by a long way—and that idiot of a servant has blotted them with common ink!" It is outrageous!"

He rang the bells, and his footman hurried his hands down to his trousers pockets, and placing himself before the window of the small whitewashed room, gazed down at the cold brick of ground beneath him which was dignified by the name of garden, and upon whose narrow path the warm autumn wind was blowing down the yellow leaves of the wild linden, its only ornament. A young girl was just throwing a clothe-line round the thick trunk of the old tree. She stepped upon the bench that ran round it, and stood on tiptoe to throw the end of the rope over a branch. It was a charming, slender figure, with simple grey stockings and stockings. The stockings which were turned back, showed a pair of finely modeled arms. Her hair, ruffled at the touch of the hand in thick, heavy bands, shimmered like pale gold from under the simple straw hat.

An old woman came across the little grass-plot, painfully dragging along a basket of wet clothes with the help of the servant-maid; a small, red-haired, weakly creature. Her blue linen apron still showed the wet traces of the wash-tub. She set down the basket and nodded to the young girl, who had sprung down off the bench, and now began busily to hang the pieces on.

The young officer's face flushed a deep crimson as he watched this simple scene. Just at that moment, the young girl glanced up at his window. She stopped her work and came toward him.

"Lowenthal? Who is Lowenthal?"

"What does he want? You never said anything about him last year."

"Are you out already?" she patted out gaily. "Only wait a moment, Rudolph, and you shall have your coffee, directly."

She took off her apron, threw it on the ground, and hurried into the house.

He turned and left the room. In the dark entry he could hear the rattling of cups and plates in the kitchen below.

He went down the narrowreaking stairs, and who met by his mother at the foot. Her eyes, flushed by her recent efforts, brightened as she saw him.

"Good-morning, Rud," she said pleasantly. "You will have had a little for you, when you suppose you would be in so early? Did you sleep well, my dear boy?"

She put out her hand, still swollen and wrinkled from washing. "Come into the dining-room," she said. "Lord will see the breakfast ready."

He followed in embarrassed silence. His tall form, in elegant uniform, could not enter the low door without stooping. He looked around the small room, whose blue and gray carpet bore traces of long service, with a disconsolate air, and leaning against the neatly set table. Before the seat on which his mother had already taken her seat, he said, in a tone of vexation:

"Why do you do the washing yourself, mother?"

"Why, Rudolf," cried the old lady, hastily buttoning a roll, "because—well, because—I do it, and Lord does too."

"Please tell you must have! Can you afford a washerwoman?"

Franz von Tullen, the thin, nervous, thin-lipped, and bony friend of the little school which six years before had been established for Rudolf, on a "very urgent occasion," but who still had his borrowed money of von Tullen,

"I don't tell him today," she at length managed to say, "anything till after his birthday, at least, Rudolph." And as he made a movement of impatience, she added softly, "I can not help you any more."

"The devil he can't!" murmured the lieutenant. "Who else is going to do it? My worthy brother refuses, point-blank. My uncle says he is tired of doing it."

"You wrote to Victor?" cried the young girl, a burning flush overspreading her face. "Rudolf how could you do that? how was it possible?"

"I'd rather write, I went myself," he replied, carelessly brushing the ashes of the young girl. "This new lead of yours is a perfect hole. This is a little more presentable than any rate, but—"

"But this cost eighty thalers less," said Leon von Tullen. "It is your cream and sugar. You had better take a good deal of it, and perhaps it may sweeten your conversation."

Still smiling, she pushed the sugar-bowl toward him, and left the room.

"Mamma," she cried, coming back again, "now you must sit quite still here, and talk with Rud; I will see to everything. Papa's coco is on the stove, if you should want it."

The mother sat opposite her son and gazed at him with mute admiration. Then, however, began the stream of talk, so long with difficulty restrained. At last she had him alone, and could ask him all the thousand things which he must needs have had to know, and which there had been no time since her arrival last evening.

"Your father is so happy, Rud," she concluded, at length; "you must tell him everything you can. I am so glad that you have four weeks' leave on Lora's account, too. The poor girl has no pleasure at all in her young life."

"Yes, in this hole," said the son, as he lighted a cigar, and drawing a few whiffs, he asked: "Does she still keep that unlucky idea of marrying that poverty-stricken fellow, that Dr. What's-his-name?"

"You ask more than I can answer, Rudl. I do not know. I know that the young people are interested in each other; but Lora has never spoken to me on the subject, and I do not like to say anything myself."

"You have some sense at last," he muttered. "But do you hear? my father is aware."

her husband's whole family is a burden on her."

"Ah, bah! Helen exaggerated; she has grown nervous and irritable on account of her everlasting engagement, and she has put on all the airs of an old maid. It is quite like her beloved Franz was taking her to his heart and home," he replied. "Clodilda is not the only one who complained of her," he continued, "my uncle did it, too. The old fool can go to Boros for all I care, I shall never trouble him again. He wrote, in answer to my polite letter, that he was on the point of getting married, and I modestly told him all his sins on the back; and, I had him to his room, and ran quickly out of the room. Rudolf looked after her, with an air of vexation. "What's the great hurry?"

"I beg your pardon, Rudl, but I'm serious about living with him. I have no means; he has nothing but his pension—as lieutenant-general," said Lora. "He pays for Katz's school, and gives Helen and me a little pocket-money, and he sends wife and tobacco to papa, and—"

"Oh, yes! he is indeed enough to you girls, but for me—"

"I should think he had done enough for you," said the young girl, in a low tone.

"Oh, yes; he has been sweet to you girls, but I must tell him, I have not told him about it; I must tell him money, what is all there is about it?"

"No, don't say so!" cried Lora, starting up again. "I will talk to mother, and perhaps Franz will suggest something."

"Helen's lover, who has been waiting five years to get married on such a day, must be the best man for a few days, if he is not ill again."

"Then?" she said, "now talk to me, Rudl, you must have enough to tell it is so long since we have seen each other."

As she spoke she began with nimble fingers to shell the beans, and did not look into her brother's face for some time, until she perceived that he would not answer. She must have known the significance of the brief, anxious expression with which he looked at her; her bettered brown eyes suddenly opened wide with terror.

"We can wait if you like," he said, "we have three weeks yet. What in the world can a man do here all day?" he continued, looking out into the quiet garden, where the fluttering gayly in the wind. "It is a miserable hole, there isn't even a decent cafe. Do they keep up the same old routine?"

"They're not bad," he said, "but I'm not ill again."

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"For heaven's sake, Rudl, you haven't got into trouble again?"

"All right! It is nothing of any consequence—but I wish papa knew about it."

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