

# THE SACRIFICE;

—OR—

FOR HER FAMILY'S SAKE.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

What had happened to Westenberg? The old streets wore quite a different aspect. It was not only the fresh coat of paint which the houses had put on that had made the alteration, but the many merry girls' faces that looked out of the windows, the street-boys who, in a state of perfect delight, clattered over the pavement in their wooden shoes, making noise enough to overpower the sound of the horses' feet, and the gay, bright music which already scounded through the streets from a distance, drawing men and women out to their doors.

Hurrah! The Uhlans were coming back from the parade ground.

The golden morning sun sparkled on the tips of the lances; the black and white banner waved in the warm summer wind; in front the staff trumpeter with the band, all on bay horses; then the commander with the adjutant, and behind them the long line of riders, dusty from their warm ride. But how magnificently the animals caught the tic of the waltz; how straight the young fellows sat in their saddles; how the bright eyes sparkled through the windows, and how the young girls blushed when an officer gazed up so boldly. Now the train turned round the corner of the old gymnasium, and in the house of the Frau Majorin von Tollen a window was flung open, and a brown face looked out with a pair of magnificent brown eyes on the glittering train that wound beneath her like a serpent with shining scales.

Katie's foot kept time to the waltz, her hair waved in the wind over the narrow forehead, and her delicate nostrils quivered with pleasure.

The officers all looked up and greeted her, lowering their swords; and she returned the greeting, smiling and blushing, till her white teeth gleamed out from the rosy lips. In fact the whole regiment looked up and admired the charming picture. At the corner of the street the band went one way, the squadrons separated and rode off to their various stables, and two officers came back at a gallop, and stopped before Katie's window.

"Fraulein von Tollen," cried the elder, the commander, "we are going to drive to Buchenhagen this afternoon. You will come with us, will you not? Gussie will be very much hurt if you keep to your refusal of yesterday."

"Oh, I should like to go so much," replied the young girl, "but I cannot; really I can't, for mamma will never let me."

"I will speak to Auntie Tollen," declared the young officer, who had sprung off his horse and given it to a scoldier, who hurried out of the Tollens' house. "Only leave it to me, Fraulein Katharine." He smiled at the girl with his good-natured eyes as he spoke.

"Ah, yes, do, Herr von Wegstedt. Mamma is in the garden," cried Katie.

"This minute," was the reply. The lieutenant saluted his superior officer and clattered into the house.

The elder officer saluted Katie, called out "Auf wiedersehen," and turned away.

Katie clapped the window to, without perceiving that Doctor Schonberg was coming down the street, and had been looking up for a long time as he approached her house.

Katie, who was hurrying toward the garden, met him in the hall, close by the new door which von Tollen had got made to give the upper and lower apartments a more separate aspect.

"Good-morning," said she, returning his greeting; "just go upstairs, Ernest. I want to ask mamma something."

"Can't I come with you?"

"No, Herr von Wegstedt is with her."

"I don't see that that need prevent me," he replied. But she would not permit it; she took his arm and led him upstairs, giving up her intention. Her eldest sister, Helen, was there sewing on her little trousseau. The sewing-machine was making a deafening noise, and the canary-bird was singing its loudest in addition.

"Be quiet," cried Katie loudly, in her clear, ringing voice, producing a momentary pause.

The doctor took the hand of his betrothed, and drew her toward him. "Are you coming to see my mother this afternoon?" he inquired.

She flushed deeply. "To-day?" she said. "I really cannot tell you just now, Ernest; but if I am not there by two o'clock you need not expect me—yes, that is the way we will arrange it."

"Very well," he said indifferently; "I only thought as it is Wednesday—"

"Yes, I know."

"And because this day belongs to us, to my mother and me, while Sunday is yours."

"Ah, it is so silly to bind one's self down to regular days," replied Katie.

"That is as you think, Katie. Then we will give it up."

She looked at him for a moment with wide-open, startled eyes. But he looked past her toward the door, where he heard some one coming.

Frau von Tollen came in. She looked vexed, but she closed her lips, which she had opened to speak, when she saw her youngest daughter's betrothed, to whom she gave her hand in silence.

He began to talk on indifferent subjects, received hearty messages for his mother, and then took leave.

Katie went down with him to the door. Here she smilingly offered him her lips for a kiss; then she put her finger on her lips and pointed downstairs. From below there came up the sound of a voice:

"You idiot, if you ever unpack a box for me so clumsily again, you will be put under arrest, do you hear? This afternoon have the Second Ulanha and Favorite at the Crown, at half-past one."

The doctor went slowly downstairs. As he reached the foot of the stairs the door of the Tollen salon, which was now let to Herr von Wegstedt, was shut with a loud bang, and a handsome Ulan in a blue apron was trying to pick up the fragments of a little plaster statuette, and putting them back in the box from which he had taken them.

Ernest Schonberg could have laughed, if he had felt disposed to mirth, at the expression of the culprit; he looked so stupidly at the dainty arm of an Ariadne, by Dannecher.

He felt worn out, weary of the constant struggle with himself which he was carrying on. The limbs which had carried him to the house of his betrothed the day after their engagement had seemed heavy as lead; and when he had made his proposal to her mother, he had actually heaved a sigh of relief when she refused her unconditional consent. Katie was still too young, and it would be better that she should be sure of her own wishes; he might come there as often as he chose; she could not give her child to a better man, and she would gladly give her consent, if they were both in the same mind at the end of the year. So he must have patience till then. This was the substance of her words; and, deeply touched, he kissed her hand, and had gone away without seeing Katie.

But that very evening Katie had come to see his mother. She looked at him wistfully with large tears in her splendid eyes, and when he stroked her hair, parting and pressed her hand in a fatherly manner, such as was natural to him under the circumstances, he impetuously threw her arms round his neck, and declared with great agitation that she considered herself engaged to him, and should always do so, even though mamma did set her face against it; and mamma had no right to forbid her to kiss him, and she wouldn't be ordered about, especially now.

He stood in the street after he had left her, and lifted his hat from his burning brow, he felt so downcast and oppressed.

"The heat is unbearable," he murmured, as he turned into a shady side street; and as he walked slowly on, with his hat in his hand, the last few weeks passed in review before him.

The change in the house of his future mother-in-law had been great. Downstairs the blond Lieutenant von Wegstedt was now living; the doctor was not quite clear whether he disliked this fact or was indifferent to it. He was a modest young fellow, this young officer, not at all likely ever to become very prominent. He had only one advantage, a powerful one in these days, certainly; he was the only son of a rich and noble family, and, as such, had the prospect of one day succeeding to the oldest and richest baronial estate in the Mark of Brandenburg. He was the son of Frau von Tollen's most intimate friend in her youthful days, and when his mother had heard that his regiment was to be quartered in Westenberg, she had recommended her good, wild Hans, her only son, to the good offices of her dear Marie.

So it came about that he occupied the rooms on the first floor, and that with him a breath of the old merry soldier's life had entered into the little house, "which," Frau von Tollen had smilingly said, "is like the breath of our nostrils."

"Auntie Tollen" was the young officer's name for the Frau Majorin. Auntie Tollen! It sounded so friendly, so confidential, that they could not help laughing—the old lady, the quiet Helen, who had come home to make her modest trousseau, since at last they had scraped together the necessary sum, and could marry in the autumn—and Katie—

Into the usually bare cupboard of the household now poured in rare guests, asparagus and game of all sorts from the baronial estate, and sometimes the "dear, wild Hans" sat with the ladies at the table under the lindens, and with a dog on either side ate ham from home, and radishes which he had pulled from the majorin's garden with his own hands and told stories that made Katie's clear laugh ring out to the hall to the ears of the doctor as he came in.

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