

toes—that is the trouble. Have you understood?"

"Yes."

New York's skyscrapers were blank shadows, with the bright ribbon of upper Broadway softening into the darkness of the lower city.

"Twenty-eight minutes!" said Rodd, as the guiding plane dipped for the descent.

"You take the long steps when you dance, and so quick!" said Toinette.

The Falcon skidded over the graveled boards of the long 52nd Street pier between the canal barges, stopping a few feet this side of a waiting automobile, which they entered. Toinette was silent and desperately sober. Rodd saw her under lip tremble.

"If I should forget myself—if I should fail!" she whispered. "If the maestro should guess! Oh, he would be more miserable than ever! 'Twould be the climax for him!"

At the stage door the manager himself, the most important accomplice, his manner breathing a generous yet astute cosmopolitanism, received them.

"I am not too late?" Toinette asked.

"No, but watch your steps—watch the steps which Valerie could not possibly do—the ones no one in the world but you can do, little one," he said; and passed her into the mysteries behind the scenes with a bearish pat on the head, while he bade Rodd follow him. At a door he stopped for his guest to precede him, and Rodd looked out on the auditorium through the frame of the manager's box, where sat a lean, withered man, and with him a girl, in ballet costume. The manager signalled to her with uplifted finger and she took her cue.

"It is time for me to go on, father," she said.

"Your triumph, Valerie! I shall hear them as they praise you. No, it is my triumph!" he answered, coughing with the words; "mine and Felicite's! Most of all is it her's! And then I go back to Arizona content."

Valerie went to the door, but there she paused and sank softly down on the step to wait while her comrade played her part. Rodd seated himself between the maestro and the manager.

The chorus fluttered away from the center of the stage; the tinsel king of a basso rested on the arm of his chair, pulling his false beard, and the tenor prince stood near, while the soprano peasant girl stood among the people.

Thus the court awaited the dancer. She appeared from the wings, but not with the smile of Toinette, crying, "I love to dance for you, for I have a spark in my feet!" It was the make-up smile of the professional without inspiration. People settled back, thinking, "Now we shall see what we have seen scores of times, all according to the bill." But as her feet took life a rustle ran through the house.

The maestro had his hand to his ear listening for the thip-thip of the toe-touches in the mighty silence. His daughter, watching

fearfully from her place at the entrance to the box, saw his face glow with happiness.

"Training! My training!" he said. "Application is better than genius! Now, will you believe me, my mischief Toinette, who would not practice?"

Toinette, keeping in psychic touch with the mood of the many-headed, critical monster watching her, had given just enough to insure a hearty encore. The audience instinctively felt the magnetism of a reserve force under control. It was hungry, expectant, leaning forward when she returned. At the command of ten thousand eyes calling for her art, she forgot herself. She let the spark in her toes have its abandoned way in the call of the music's enchantment. When she stopped, the monster drew a long, deep breath and through the film of her make-up Rodd saw the fairies' frolic playing for an instant in her natural smile. Then her face turned ghastly with the realization of her error as she ran into the wings in panic; while an old gentleman near the box sprang up and cried:

"It is, it must be, Toinette!" The thunders now rising from pit to arch drowned his voice. But the discriminating ear of the maestro had already heard the truth. He fell limp, all the life out of his body and face.

"No! no!" he said incoherently. "It is not all art. It is the thing born in you! That step! I can hear if I cannot see! No other foot had the bones, the muscles, to do that step except the foot I found in front of the bakeshop!"

Valerie, to whom his words were inaudible, took her cue and sprang forward, touching his shoulder.

"Are you pleased, father?" she asked, half strangling in her effort at triumph. The maestro pushed her away from him tragically.

"No, it was not in nature. We were to be denied our hope, Felicite and I, to make a great dancer of our child. But, Valerie," he gasped, "I did not think, with your mother's blood and mine, that you—you would play such a trick to the shame of art and truth!"

"Father!" Valerie sank at his feet. Her simple loyalty had not the resourcefulness to invent any explanation.

Rodd, with a realizing sense of the situation, found himself playing a new part which, in his philosophy, was guaranteed by the views of Toinette about the righteousness of some lies.

"Maestro," he said gently, putting that strong hand of his on the teacher's shoulder, "you forget how a child's love for her blind father may give her the spark!"

The maestro shrugged his shoulders. They could say, if his weak lungs could not, that he understood how the accomplices in the plot would come to the rescue of his daughter.

"But proof is the only way," continued Rodd. "Toinette was on the stage at ten thirty—in Philadelphia. It is now eleven forty-five. How could she be in

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