Wichita Eagle

THE DOUBLE CROSS

By ARDENNES JONES-POSTER.

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CHAPTER I.

"How charming you have grown!"

Cesca is my name—Cesca Melin. I was born at Westeras, Sweden, not far from Stockholm, in 186—. My father, Greafve Carl Melin, was an officer of high rank in the king's army. My mother, Grafvinna Carlotta Bertha, descended from one of the oldest families about Waxholm.

Before I had arrived at the importance of 16 years my parents died.

Olof Olsen, the only son of a barrister, was fiance to me. He begged me to stop longer at Westeras; but I had come into possession of the 100,000 kronor left to me by my father in his will, and being seized by a sudden desire to see the world and all that is in it I uttered a cry of delight upon the morning of the 3d of June, 188—, when I received a letter from America postmarked New York, which upon opening I found had been jointly written by my great-great-uncle Ivan Trolsky and his wife Vera, who had gone from Cronstadt, in Russia, to the states two years previous.

I had frequently been a visitor at their house at Cronstadt, my uncle and aunt both being natives of Stockholm. And being readers of the Swedish newspapers, Ivan and Vera had come upon the announcement of my succession to my father's fortune—a fact which seemed to highly impress them, for they congratulated me upon it, at the same time extending a pressing invitation to pay them an early visit, underscoring the assurance that I would be most affectionately welcomed.

Of course I read this letter to Olef, who, now that my parents were gone, found no person sufficiently interested in me to interpose cage objections to our suit of wooing.

From the very outset Olef seriously opposed my uncle and aunt's invitation. It was but quite natural that he should, inasmuch as we were betrothed, and the dear, good lad wanted to possess me wholly in person.

But in spite of Olef's protests my spirit bent itself to my mind's selfishness, and early in August I departed from Scandinavia by one of the Swedish line of steamships, arriving in New York upon the 28th day of the month, and was most profusely welcomed by Ivan and Vera.

"How charming you have grown!" exclaimed my aunt, after the salutations had ended.

"But not half as charming as her dot," cautiously whispered Ivan.

"Silence, idiot! The girl will hear you!" protested Vera, angrily. "Dear niece," she continued anew, suddenly turning to me, "you won't mind Ivan's and my little tete-a-tets now and then, will you? We are both so deeply interested in your welfare, you know, that we find it hard enough to do for you. To our great disadvantage we are far from being rich in worldly goods, and we fear that however great may be our attention it will not compare with your surroundings at home."

"My dear aunt and uncle," I replied, "it is not in the quantity of our efforts, but in the quality, that the heart finds richest enjoyment." And although I noticed that Ivan winced and made the remark I paid no further attention to it at the time, but begging my aunt to show me to my apartment I bade Ivan good night and we left him.

Arrived at my room I kissed Vera, and as she went away I bolted my door, threw myself, exhausted, in my traveling gown upon the bed, buried my face in my pillow, and in spite of myself, overcome by Olef's absence and my great distance from home, now that the stimulating excitement of my voyage was ended, I burst into tears, while between my sobs my sorrowing heart again and again repeated Ivan's strange words, "Not half as charming as her dot!"

Was I positively ugly, then? I began to rummage the past. What if my dowry had been Olef's sole motive for winning my hand after all? Was it his main reason for wishing me to stop in Sweden? Am I ugly? I repeated. To which Truth gave me but one answer. My mirror had never turned from me with disdain. What, then, did Ivan mean?

Surfeited by them, lost in curious suspicions, I fell into a bothered sleep. Nor did I recover consciousness again until morning dawned, when my eyes were jarred open by a sound rapping at my door and a voice that softly asked:

"Are you awake, Cesca dear?"

"Yes, Aunt Vera."

"Breakfast is waiting for you, my dear," she replied in ipseling tones. "Will you be down soon?"

"Right away, aunt," and I heard the echo of her footsteps as she descended the staircase.

"How fresh you look! You must have enjoyed a most quiet night of sleep," was Ivan's greeting, as I gained my place at the table.

I was ashamed to explain to them that I had not taken my clothes off during all of those hours; that my dreams had coined themselves into pages upon pages of horrors, and that, although I had hurriedly convinced myself by a brief glance in my glass that I did look comparatively fresh, I really could not quite make outwhy, after my whole night of misery, I should not present the appearance of a fright.

The breakfast was progressing when a ring came at the door and a telegraph messenger was admitted, bearing a dispatch addressed to my aunt. Nervously she received it, rapidly tearing it open, as one unused to receiving messages.

"Anything to pay, aunt, my uncle will have read over the dispatch."

"No, sir," replied the lad.

"There is no answer. You may go," my aunt added.

"Who is it from?" Ivan asked as the boy departed.

"Sara's mother."

"From Pittsburg?"

"Yes."

"What news?" he earnestly inquired, noticing his wife's dangerous whiteness.

"Sara is sick unto death!"

Vera nervously mused. "Poor cousin! I must go to her at once. How sad!" she exclaimed, turning to me. "And you, Cesca—I do so much dread to leave you. But Sara is so dear to me. I love her as a sister, and duty calls me to her. But let us hope that she will brave it, that I may soon hasten home. Your Uncle Ivan will do all in the world for you while I am away."

Before nightfall we had been to the railway station and seen Aunt Vera safely started upon her journey. The train sped out, the tears rushed into my eyes, and I felt myself buoyed homeward upon the wave of desertion. And once alone I felt a reluctance in accepting even the kind offices of Uncle Ivan, wishing, all the time, from the bottom of my crying heart that I might but cast one glance into Olef's fond eyes. Then, thought I, would the world have little of her own to claim, for my dear Olef was all the world to me!

CHAPTER II.

A week had gone by before Ivan received a letter from Vera. In this she told him that her Cousin Sara was improving.

But fancy our mutual discomfiture when, within the next three days, another letter came to Ivan, signed by Sara's mother, Esther, saying that Vera had suddenly been taken seriously ill with the same malady that had prostrated Sara—a type of fever which the attending physician pronounced very malignant; and so reduced in strength had Vera already become that fatal results were feared.

An immediate consultation followed and it was agreed that Ivan's duty lay in a quick visit to his wife, an obligation that I insisted was his first sacred debt. He quite readily agreed with me and by the next train he was bound for Pittsburg.

The weary hours dragged on. By the second morning's post I received a brief note from Uncle Ivan telling me that poor Vera was rapidly sinking; in fact, the family physician had given her up. Eminent medical counsel had been called in—but their deliberation only went to confirm the opinion of the family's medical adviser.

What was my surprise and joy, however, upon the third day after Ivan's departure when I received a letter postmarked Stockholm! I tore open the envelope as if expecting to disclose a gem of the rarest worth. And, believe me, I did; for I read there the name of my dear Olef! A name sweeter to me than all the wealth of nations. How I prized that letter! And to this day I cling to it as one of the choicest jewels in my diadem of maiden love!

"You have but just set out on your voyage," Olef ran on, "as I begin to write you. No doubt this will reach the New World quite as soon as you do, for I direct it 'via England.' But do not make light of my haste, my anxiety to commune with you, I beg. When you went away you took my heart with you. Oh, Cesca, why did we part? God grant that it may not be for long. Had I but the wings of a dove I would follow you. My soul mourns. Do not stop long away. Do not let the glamour of life's new phase lead you to forget me. Sleep in my heart as I sleep in your's. Let your faith wake with mine in the love jeweled morning of our meeting. * * * Ever your betrothed, Olef."

He had written other words. I preserve them. They are too sacred for public reading.

I at once answered this letter, telling Olef all that had happened, and went out to post it in time to catch the first steamer.

But I had no sooner returned to the house than a messenger brought me a dispatch. I opened it and read three words:

"Vera is dead!" (Signed), "IVAN."

CHAPTER III.

"What must happen to me now?" I meditated. "Here in this strange city am I, unattended, unprotected! My conscience will not permit me to stop here alone."

A week went on, with no further tidings from my uncle save one letter, in which he said that it had been decided to lay poor Vera at rest in Esther's family plot.

Within ten days Ivan came home. He was attired out of severest respect for his departed wife, and as I tried to console him during our conversation the tears rushed into his eyes and he cried as if his heart would break. Endeavor as I might my words seemed to afford him no soothing. Upon the following day and for a week longer he steadily refused to go to his business office, declaring that life had lost all attraction for him now that poor Vera had gone.

The season flew by. Olef's letters came and mine went. I had entered a musical college and arranged for a term of vocal instruction; and before I realized it May month was upon us. Nature had put on her warm, green robes. The flowers never smelled sweeter, the leaves never looked brighter—and but for the absence of the music of Olef's dear voice the warble of the bird notes would never have rung out in more delightful harmony.

I had already begun to look for another letter from Olef. I remarked to Ivan that it was quite time. And I also told him that upon receipt of that letter I should return to Stockholm, having informed Olef to that end.

What was my surprise when Ivan at once began to wean me from the notion of going home!

"Why, do you know," he exclaimed, "that I had fully made up my mind to ask you to write Olef to pay us a visit that he might be enabled to go back with you? I like Olef very much. He seems such a capital good fellow, and I am heartily glad that you have set your hearts one upon the other."

I thanked him for his kind regard, although not without blushing a bit, I must confess.

"And now," he resumed, "let me offer you a bit of advice. Olef is getting ready to enter the profession of law, is he not?"

"He has graduated and been admitted to the bar," I replied.

"Quite to my notion, then. If I am not mistaken your dot, left to you by your father, Grefve Melin, amounted to one hundred thousand kronor—about twenty-eight thousand dollars in American money."

"Yes," was my answer, as his words, "Not half as charming as her dot," uttered upon the night of my arrival, flew back to my memory, and still I could not connect their meaning with the present, because Ivan seemed so interested in Olef's and my future.

"Could your fortune be converted into ready money?" he bluntly asked.

"It is invested in securities which might be negotiated," I returned.

"Very good. Of course you want to double your fortune. It would be but quite natural that you should. Olef, being a barrister, can quite readily accomplish the preliminaries for you. If you will write to him and instruct him to fetch over—well, say, twenty thousand dollars of that money, I, through my brokerage office, can invest it for you in New York Stock Exchange listed securities that will yield you 100 per cent. profit. In fact, I know of such an opportunity today. Do as I advise you and I will make your fortune double itself and give Olef a permanent place as manager in my office. His legal learning will stand him in to great advantage and he will find twice the amount of profit in stocks that he would in the law."

Being only a woman of inexperience, I, of course, gave harbor to Ivan's advice. Twenty thousand invested would yield me an additional twenty thousand—besides giving Olef a start in life! How happy we could be upon our little fortune.

And so by the outgoing steamer I sent Olef a letter, instructing him to carry out Ivan's suggestion.

I must mention here that for a fortnight past I had experienced the strangest sensations—a feeling of langor stealing upon me and spells of morning dreariness. At times my limbs would seem stiff, almost dead. My back ached and I felt giddy. Twice I recall having stumbled over the floor when those dizzy waves swayed my head. I looked at my skin. It was growing parched, colorless, lifeless! I could not make it out. My exercise and habits were regular. My mode of living was perfect. I took plenty of baths, fresh air and good, wholesome food; and yet I grew weaker day by day, almost tottering at times. It seriously affected my vocal powers; four or five notes dropped out of my register, top and bottom. I consulted the old housekeeper about it. We called in Ivan. At first he suggested the advice of a doctor, but finally concluded that the cause might lie in the tin poisoning from certain imported fruits that I had been using—a Swedish brand of preserves of which no member of the family, except myself, had ever partaken.

It happened that his surmises tallied with the cause, for I did put aside the fruits, took certain remedies, including a powerful tonic, and within a few days my physical strength began to mend, my voice came back and the roses rushed to my cheeks once more, as if glad to meet old acquaintances, and I got on without the least hint of my former failing.

CHAPTER IV.

One night as we walked a shadow fell in front of us.

The Thingvalla, which was expected to arrive at the end of the following month, would have given Olef time to convert my securities and reach New York.

Just eighteen days after posting my letter I received a cablegram dated at Stockholm which told me that Olef's father had died, and that a visit to the States would be impossible. This cablegram bore Olef's signature, and as I read it my spirits fell beneath their load of sorrow. I refused all offers of consolation, and in spite of the fact that my musical examination was to occur the following Monday I resolved to return home at once.

"I hardly think that I would lose your opportunity to carry off first prize if I were in your place," urged Ivan. "Besides, Olef's detention can be but momentary."

I remarked that it was strange that had not received my regular weekly letter from him. But Ivan soon turned my course of thoughts by saying that no doubt Olef's duties at home had crowded upon him so fast that he could find no time to write, and especially while watching at the bedside of a dying father. And this argument, together with the stimulating hope of winning the prize, won me over.

"Bide your time, Cesca," Ivan went on. "The next steamer may fetch good news."

I waited a week, and in the meantime my sorrow had been somewhat assuaged by my receipt of the first prize for vocal honors at the institute.

One morning Ivan handed me a letter postmarked Stockholm. It was in Olef's handwriting and yet it did not seem the same. I turned it over and over again, upside down and then held it between me and the light of the sun.

"Here is a double cross made with a pen upon the lid of the envelope. I wonder what he could have intended that to mean?" I asked, showing the cross to Ivan.

"He might have made it to reveal to you any attempt that should be made to open the letter," he suggested, looking at the cross.

I opened the envelope and read:

"Do not let your heart sight upon the rock of life by that action. Heavily must be my penalty example. Cease to hope. My heart is true to you.

"You will see why I have not kept my word. I can but say that my father's will, opened after his death, has reversed my life, into which now shines the beam of a new love.

"I am to marry the daughter of Lieut. Boline to-morrow. OLEF OLSEN."

My heart, torn with the anguish of my own sad life, I could only sob and weep over it. And then, as often a woman will do, I tried to lull my sorrow to sleep by the strains of melody. And as I played softly I followed the lines of that plaintive song, "Drifting Apart," that I remembered having read in "Broken Barriers":

Drifting apart! as the cruel shades
Of the years rise up 'twixt you and me!
Drifting apart!—two separate tides
Carry us out o'er the wide, wild sea!
Drifting apart! for another's love
Hath blinded you to the love I plighted.
Drifting apart! for that alien love
Hath frozen your heart and chilled your hand.
Drifting! Drifting and farther astray!
My God! will we ever again one day
Meet in the passion of life's hottest fray,
And love, as we did, in the good old way?

For the first time since my arrival in America—nearly one year now—my Uncle Ivan began to show me warm attention. And embittered, weighed down, galled by Olef's cruel letter, I had let myself drift into closer communion with Ivan, and—yes, I confess it—to avenge the past I had given him to understand that his ministry was not wholly rejected. He was not too old—thirty-seven, I seventeen.

From the moment of Vera's sad death Ivan had taken every precaution to throw about me the barriers of protection, in order that any possible attempts to criticise my abode at his house might be set at rest. He had engaged an elderly housekeeper, in addition to whom I had induced one of the young women from the Conservatoire to make her home with me.

We walked a good bit, Ivan and I. And by this time his affection had grown to fire. It was no mere assumption, that love of Ivan's. He was deeply in earnest. I am not the woman to read a man's heart amiss. The name of his wife, Vera, had faded into a mere memory now, and I received certain proofs that Ivan would have stripped his heart of all else in the world for me. "What were those proofs?" you ask. Oh, that is but for a woman to understand.

I must say that I returned the passion measure for measure. I had come to honor, respect and love Ivan. His image grew daily brighter and holier in my heart. And as we walked together, wrapped in one another's confidence, the very soul of joy lighted our pathway. Of course Irene, my companion, had noticed it. She seemed astonished at our mutual affection.

"Why, you are uncle and niece—blood relatives!" she exclaimed one day.

"Bless you, no; not blood relatives. Ivan is my uncle by marriage, and only great-gr t uncle at that, his wife having been great aunt to my mother."

One night and once again, as we walked beneath the heavy screen of the park trees, a shadow fell in front of us—the figure of a woman, it appeared to me—and as quickly did it flit away again. I remember having twice remarked it to Ivan. On the second occasion the shadow came just as we were replighting our troth and naming the day. I started, considerably frightened. Ivan calmed me.

"It was nothing," he remarked; "only a branch of that tall tree swinging across our path."

"But if it had been—if it could have understood—if it could have spoken—that shadow would have heard our pledges!"

"And you are ashamed of them, my darling?"

"No! oh, no, Ivan. Only I am a creature of such silly suspicions. My nation—my dear Swedish people—are somehow imbued more or less with a belief in 'eerie things,' as the Scots say. It may be a fault, but it was born in me. Even when I was a child my old nurse used to tell me tales of strange gnomes and hobgoblins, saying that they swarmed about us, and the lesson seems to have followed me. So do not chide me!"

His answer was that which he always gave when I pleaded for grace.

He kissed me.

The shadowy figure had faded into space.

As it was his custom to confide all of his little adventures to me, he found it quite in his turn of fancies one evening to relate a little incident that had that morning leaped into his life. It happened fully a fortnight after my receipt of Olef's letter. Ivan had returned home long after his usual hour.

"What kept you so long, Ivan?" I asked as he came down to dinner.

"A most peculiar circumstance, my darling Cesca," he answered. "I was passing along Broadway, near Canal street, to my office when a young man met me. He carried a traveler's bag in his hand and had evidently just arrived from a journey. As our eyes clashed he stopped suddenly, shocked, it seemed, by a momentary pang in his head—vertigo it looked like to me—threw up his hand, quickly passed his fingers over his brow, clutched at his throat as if he would tear open his collar to relieve a strangling sensation, and losing consciousness he reeled and fell. As he came to the ground I supported him, and with the aid of a passerby we carried him to a little shop in Canal street. But as he did not survive I had him conveyed to the hospital."

"But that did not keep you all day. Come, Ivan, confess now."

"Ah," he answered, "it took up three or four hours of my time, and as my office duties require a measured amount of attention each day I was obliged to stop there until I got through with my correspondence."

I accepted his explanation.

"But the man's name?" I added. "You did learn that?"

"How could I? He had not come to his senses when I left him."

"But he must have carried papers?"

"If he did they were locked in his bag."

"How old was he?"

"Perhaps five-and-twenty."

"American?"

"A foreigner, I fancy."

"A foreigner!" I cried. My head reeled. "What if it had been—but such nonsense! It could not have been Olef! You know Olef, of course! You were born next door to him, or he to you, rather."

"What put that thought into your little head?" he laughed. "Besides, this will dispel your presentiment," and he handed me a letter addressed to him, received that morning, postmarked Stockholm. I read it.

Ivan Trolsky.

Sir—As I have failed to get an answer to my letter to Mlle Cesca Melin, I have my fears that she might not have received it. I believe that she still remains in America. If you should see her kindly say that I made no effort to arrange her business affairs, and that her securities still remain with her guardians. My bride and I start for a tour of Norway to-morrow. Please give my best wishes to Mlle. Melin, for whom I hope the richest of life's blessings. Most sincerely,

OLEF MELIN.

And so I dried my eyes and set another seal of late mass my heart to lock out forever the image of him who in my girl days I had learned to love!

CHAPTER V.

"Olef!"

The sun upon the third Sunday in June had gold tinged nature's sweetest garb. I have never witnessed a more perfect dawn. And it was the beauty of that morning that caused Ivan to invite Irene and me to take a run over the Palisades. Ivan had been making a day of it every Sabbath for a month past, and his descriptions of the scenes had so awakened us to the anticipation of a jolly outing that Irene and I gladly consented to go.

Ten o'clock found us high upon the cliffs overlooking the grand old Hudson.

It must have been an hour past midday when a cloud, a mere dot, appeared like a freckle upon the face of the sun. A nervous breeze sprang up, more active than the calm, fanning wind of the morning. The cloud cast a shadow upon the treetop, and for a moment its limbs formed the outlines of a double cross upon the white cloth beneath our little banquet. I started as one out of a dream and looked at Ivan. My face must have been as colorless as the spread, for he asked if I were ill.

"Look!" I exclaimed. "That double cross!"

He seemed not to understand.

"It is only a shadow," he said.

"But once before I saw it. Don't you remember—upon the back of my letter?"

He laughed outright, called me a foolish woman and told me that I must not cling to superstitions.

"A strange trait, that, with the Swedish people," he added. "They swear by signs. Why, upon my word, Cesca, if you go on like this you will be telling us that you see some of those funny little men popping out of the rocks yonder, akin to those that your Swedish peasants declare dwell in the forest. And while I think about it, Rip Van Winkle's little gnomes did use to play at tenpins not far up the river—over in Sleepy Hollow, you know," he jested.

He had no sooner spoken than a huge, thick cloud flung its black mantel over the face of the sun. The wind arose, higher, madder, faster. The waters of the Hudson rose and pranced and stood upright. A great, roaring noise of threat and chaos filled the air, deafening in its force. The waters below dashed and foamed. Small sails were picked up, tossed and hurled shoreward.

The outing parties made for the shelter of cafes and the village near by. Confusion reigned. The sky grew dark black. The imps of evil seemed to rise out of the very earth beneath our feet. Agents of fury and warning dangled from the sky. A brilliant flash of lightning crossed the scene, quickly followed by a crash of thunder. I clung to Irene, who was quaking with fright. The flash had told me that Ivan was deathly pale.

"Too late to move now!" was all that he could say.

"But it is hardly upon us. We might reach the nearest cafe. Besides, this tree is a dangerous conductor," I protested.

"The whole scene is shrouded," he whispered. "We are as safe here as anywhere!"

Another flash came! In the direction of the bushes to the west I noticed a figure stealing toward us—a woman.

"Look! She has lost her way. Come nearer to me—closer, Ivan, closer! I fear! I tremble!" I cried, as he clasped me in his arms. But the woman only quickened her pace, which we discovered by the frequent flashes of light. Faster and faster she ran toward us. Irene, becoming inconsolable, rushed off to the nearest cafe.

The woman was now upon us! For an instant a bright flash illuminated the spot. I looked; I saw a face.

Great God! Vera!

"Ivan!" I cried. "Do you see! A spirit! Her spectre! Vera's ghost!"

The man strove to speak. His tongue was lashed to the roof of his mouth. He moved—confronted her, the phantom like figure, as a daredevil might face a harbinger of death!

"At last!" the woman cried.

"Vera!" screamed Ivan, and fell upon his knees before her.

"It is here that I find you!" she continued. "I have tracked you many times, thinking that you were but building our plans as we agreed."

"As who agreed?" Ivan cried.

"You, Ivan Trolsky, my husband, and I, Vera, your wife!" she answered, as her hot temper fired her. "Yes, as we agreed! I have crossed your path a score of times. Under the park tree I heard you plight your troth. In the lower's seat I have heard your passionate words of love. I have watched and waited patiently, believing that you but schemed as we had promised. But now you have gone too far. Your words are no longer empty sounds. You love that girl! Ah, deny it not! Trust to a woman's eyes to read the perfidy in a man's heart!"

"Vera!" he protested, as I crept further into the shade to miss the flash of her temper.

"Out upon it!" she exclaimed. "The farce has gone far enough! You would have made it tragedy! Oh, I know! The girl's failing health but a few weeks back, by discovery of her weakness, your attempts to poison her! It is too true! And where is the stranger you found fainting in the street? Olef—where is he?"

"God! Olef!" I screamed, as the frightful truth all darted to my brain. "The stranger, the accident, the hospital!" I bent my tortured heart to listen.

"Where is he?" she repeated. "You have told me in your letters—the forcible detention of Olef at your friend's house—now confess it! And the securities that you stole from his bag and sent to me! Ah! you would—would have killed the girl for her fortune, as we agreed! But your heart, even blacker than mine, turned false to your wife! You ruined the plot by your perfidy! Jealousy drives me to confess it! You loved her! I am here to avenge the wrong! You would have wrought a tragedy—till your mind turned topsy-turvy, and then you would have wed the girl, deceiving her into the belief that I was dead! But now it is my turn! We will end it here! Aye, and with a tragedy indeed! Now pay for your sins!" And with the stout arms of a maniac Vera bound him in his tracks; then with giant force she pushed him to the cliff. My heart stood still! The ground whirled!

At last Ivan found his speech.

"Woman! what would you do?" and he struggled with her as one of his feet slipped over the rock. He was falling!

"Vera!" he gasped.

"No words, man! Over, I say!" And as she gathered strength to force him down he clutched a bush. "Your false, lying tongue shall deceive no more! Down!"

"Stop!" rang out a voice, and to Ivan's aid came a strong arm, dragging him back to the green turf, where he lay exhausted and speechless.

The dense clouds hung heavier. A tremendous flood of fire swept down. A deafening crash instantly followed and a hewn bolt of thunder fell at our feet. The ragged clouds parted. The light swung over the scene.

"Olef!"

And I leaped into the arms of my boy lover!

"Your worthless life is spared you this time!" cried Vera to Ivan. But he spoke not. The sun broke forth from the edge of a ragged cloud, shining over the upturned face of the defenseless man.

We looked. Vera had been talking to the dead!

The forked light had left the seared mark of a double cross upon his brow!

"Cesca dear, can you not speak?" cried Olef.

"Yes, that is all that I can do. You find me here, the withered bush that you have made me—a heart without a green leaf upon its twigs; a dead tree, upon which you hung your cruel letter, your message of adieu, your declaration to become the husband of another!"

"Cesca!" was all the protest that he could make.

"Cesca!" cried Vera. "It was my wickedness! It was I who wrote my own death letter. I went to Stockholm, and from one of Olef's letters that he had sent to you, forwarded back to Sweden to me by Ivan Trolsky, I forged Olef's hand; and that Ivan might recognize it I marked the letter with the "double cross," as understood between us. It was I who sent the cable dispatch and the last letter to Ivan, signed 'Olef.' I released him from his bondage with Ivan's false friends, and the old housekeeper told us where you were today. I saved your securities. They are here," she concluded, handing me a packet.

The sun beamed brighter. The freshened trees and grasses held up their green heads with pride as they drank from nature's cup. The daisies never looked more beautiful. I saw the fond, dead hopes of the past spring into new life. The birds sang again their sweet carols as my boy lover's hand crept into mine and our fond lips met.

"You have not forgotten!" I cried.

"Nej, min lilla kara Cesca, I have never forgotten! Af allt mitt hjerta Jag alskar dig!"

"And I, too," I repeated, translating his fond words, "'With all my heart I love you?'"

THE END.

COST OF REARING A FAMILY.

Here Are Some Extracts from the Diary of a Father Who Spent $40,000.

What does it cost to bring up a family? A gentleman whose experience will be recognized as having points in common with other householders has preserved an account of the expense to which he has been in rearing a family of four children. He entered the following statement in his diary. It might be a valuable statistical fact for thoughtless takers:

"Today I close my diary. Twenty-six years ago today I undertook to keep an accurate statement of all my earnings and expenses, so that I might know actually how much it costs to live in the married state. Then all was anticipation. I and my young wife counted our resources and our expectations. I received $15 a week, with a promise of more. I owned a house comfortable enough for frugal young people to begin life in. We were spared house rent, therefore, and our expenses have never included this item. Retrospectively I see that we have brought up four children in comparatively easy circumstances.

"My health has been good and my earnings have been constantly received. I now receive $30 a week, and we still own the homestead without any great additions to its wealth, except in an increased amount of furniture. I have little more money than I had when first married. Perhaps, all told, I have $3,500 now of assets; then I had perhaps $2,000. We have never wanted for bread. Sometimes we have felt in need of more money. Three of the children are now making their own way. The fourth graduates at the high school, having received the same schooling that the others have had, and will begin to look out for himself.

"I shall not necessarily be at any more expense on account of my children, and the diary properly ends now. Would I be willing to go through the same experience again of rearing a family? I asked my companion, who had borne the greater part, this question, and I know that she spoke with a heart full of love, but was compelled to say, 'Not for all that money could buy would I go through again what has been necessary to rear a family.'

"Expressed in dollars the totals are these: In twenty-six years we have received from my wages and incidental moneys that came through my wife and the children $40,000—or my $40,000—besides the amount of increase in the permanent assets. Given a plant of about $6,000 and two employes, a man and wife, it has taken, therefore, about $10,000 to each man produced. This of course includes all employes' expenses. The plant is slightly enhanced in value, but the employes have seen their best days. The quality of the goods is yet to be demonstrated. Prospects happily point to cessation of labor and an increase of receipts, but there is no certainty about this. The employes are proud of their work, but don't want another job.

"Some of the items of expense have been these: Doctors' bills (twenty-seven years), $3,100 (and all paid, probably the only instance on record); groceries, average per week first five years, $7, next three, $9; remainder of the twenty-six years, $13 a week. For ten years it has taken on an average of one pair of shoes per week for the family, including myself and wife. The most annoying thing I have ever known is the rapidity with which children wear out shoes. Only one thing approaches it—the high price of children's shoes. I never could understand how, with all the civilization of the age, and the demand for cheaper results, children's shoes have not been reduced in price. The human shoe is a failure. No man net rich can afford to buy shoes for a family, and if I had it to do I would go to Timbuctoo, where neither horses, mules, camels nor men are shod."—Indianapolis News.

SLANG OF THE STAGE.

SOME TERSE AND EXPRESSIVE, IF NOT ELEGANT, WORDS.

De Wolf Hopper Acts as Translator—The Hog Not Unknown Behind the Footlights—Terms in Common Use Among Actors Explained—Queer Expressions.

"It is a case of extra frappe," said De Wolf Hopper during one interval, "and enough to give you pneumonia just to look at them."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked one of the little party.

"I mean it's a bitingly cold audience," replied the comedian, and he continued in a monologue, which was broken by sensational mad rushes to the stage, from which he returned perspiring and crosser than ever, if Hopper ever could be cross. "Frappe is a bit of stage slang which is gradually coming into general use. As its originator (father myself) it is somewhat expressive and a trifle neat.

"Have you ever thought, by the way, how terse and expressive the generality of stage slang is? Not? Well, let me give you a few of the most common of our professional expressions, appending thereto a translation into the vulgar tongue, and then I think you will agree with me.

"To 'hog,' for instance, means to try and get the laughter and applause which in the nature of things belong to your fellow performers—a more easy task to the experienced actor than an outsider would imagine, and one which is an especial favorite of some stars, who would take a fit if one of their company were to 'get a hand.'

"There, that is another expressive term. What can be more significant of applause? A 'jay' is an outsider of any description.

THE "ANGEL" AND THE "COAT."

"'An angel' is, I think, a delicious term. The angel is the meritorious individual who is backing a company or a star, and who, as a general rule, is gaining experience and losing a little hard cash in the course of the operation.

"'Paper'—tout simple, as we say in Gaul, means the printed bills or lithographs of every description which herald forth to a suffering public that Mr. Cummins' Aggregation of Combat Comedians, and so forth, can be seen at or are coming to the Oshkosh opera house on such and such a night. 'To paper a house,' on the contrary, means to fill it with apathetic individuals who are afraid to applaud because their seats have cost them nothing. When the deadheads are once inside the building they are referred to as 'know,' concerning the origin of which phrase they say—but, as Mr. Rudyard Kiplin y would remark, 'that is another story.'

"When a play fails it is a 'post;' when it succeeds it is a 'hit,' and in the latter case the chances are that the 'ghost will walk;' or in other words, that salary will be promptly paid on 'treasury day,' as the day of the week sacred to this solemn rite is termed.

"When an actor does not know his part or his 'lines,' as we call it, he is 'fluffy,' and is liable to queer the fellow performers. He may also perform this feat by 'drying up' or forgetting a portion of his part, as frequently happens to everyone, no matter how often they have played that particular character. An experienced actor, however, even if he is not perfect in his lines, will get along and hold the audience by 'stringing it,' which means stretching enough of it, and his 'cues' in particular, from the prompter, who stands at the 'wings,' as the old fashioned side scenes were called.

"GAGGING" AND "GUYING."

"Every actor, except, of course, a comic opera comedian, will occasionally take liberties with the author's text and interpolate lines or phrases of his own; then he is 'gagging.' When he finds the lines so bad that he thinks he would lose his self respect by speaking them with a serious intent he burlesques them slightly in the delivery, and if he does it cleverly the audience are given to snigger at his 'guying,' as we term it. 'Guying' is just about one degree more serious a crime than 'gagging.' A short engagement is a 'nap,' and some unfortunates who can never get a regular engagement support a precarious existence on 'naps' alone. Then they are termed 'turkey actors,' for their richest pickings are to be found about Thanksgiving day, when every little town or village will support one show at least, however bad.

"An actor's part is divided into 'lengths' of forty-two lines each, and if he learns it quickly he is said to be 'a good studyer;' if not, he is naturally 'a bad studyer.' The auditorium is always 'in front,' and actors are always anxious to know how 'the piece went' 'in front.' Next day they look for 'notices' or criticisms in the papers.

"An actor who always 'wants the center,' or tries to get continually in the middle of the stage near the footlights, is abhorred by all his fellows. So is the fellow who always tries 'to get above,' or to stand so far up the stage as to compel his companions to turn their backs to the audience in order to address him.

"The actor who 'makes a hit,' or succeeds in a part and immediately wants his salary raised from $25 to $50 a week, is said to have 'a big head,' or an 'elephantine caput,' as we nowadays put it when we speak Bostonese.

"But if I bore you much longer you will be asking me, as we are wont to tenderly inquire of our fellow actor who has just stepped off the stage amid a whirlwind of applause, 'Have you been on yet?' and now I come to think of it, I shall have to 'make a break,' for I hear my 'cue,'" and Hopper waddled off to put life into his frappe audience.—New York Tribune.

Drew a Long Breath and Cheered.

A throng of spectators witnessed a thrilling rescue at a railroad crossing in Jersey City one Wednesday evening. A train was running at a lively rate when a woman with a baby carriage attempted to cross the track in advance of it. A young girl who was with her tripped and fell beneath the tracks over which the train was approaching. Henry Fleigauf and Warren Kennedy sprang to the rescue. Fleigauf reached her first, and, as he lifted her, he slipped and fell against Kennedy. The latter, however, seized the girl and rolled out of the way of the train, pulling Fleigauf along. The passing cars just grazed Fleigauf, but he escaped injuries. The crowd cheered the rescuers when it was able to draw a long breath.—Philadelphia Ledger.

A Big Clock.

A Brooklyn man, Mr. Boland, of the firm of Boland & Hyde, of the New York Stock Exchange, is said to own the biggest clock in this country. It is in the office of the firm, on Wall street. It is four feet across the face, and the second hands are as far apart as the hour hands on an ordinary timepiece. This really remarkable clock was made by a youth who is not 21 years old, and is said to keep excellent time.—Brooklyn Eagle.

Making Small Screws Easily.

A German watchmaker recommends taking from the water another screw, fitting in the hole in which the new screw is to be placed to guide that screw in the form of a tap, and to cut the thread in a piece of soft steel, hardened and afterward, and thus making a regular screw plate.

Of course the screw you attempt to tap must be properly screwed. Instead of one screw two may thus be made, but the advantage is if the first does after a time a collection of screws may be obtained, in which nearly any screw may be quickly made, in short time will be obtained one screw. Watch.