

A DOLL'S GRAVE

By Marianna Perl.

"MUST you go, Herr von Klelogg? It is so early and Boreas seems contented in our stables. Won't you stay another hour with me?"

"Don't you know, Hermine, that I would gladly stay here to the end of my life, if you really and truly wished it?"

He looked tenderly into the face of the young widow who smiled coquettishly in return, thereby displaying a tantalizing dimple in her chin.

How well she dressed her hair! How charming she looked in this summer gown of pale gray with yoke of lace and girdle of gold!

They stood close together at the open window over which climbed an ivy. The soft spring zephyr blew the ringlets about her forehead, and the waving branches of the tall snowball bushes occasionally touched her shoulders. Out in the garden two young gardeners were turning the sod and sowing fresh seed in the newly turned earth. A spicy, penetrating, earthy odor prevailed.

"There will be plenty of time to talk that over," she said. "In the meantime there is much to be considered—I am not free—that child is a great burden. You have no idea what a naughty, stubborn, contrary creature she is. She has inherited an unconquerable will from her father."

"For that reason, if for no other, you need help, my dear friend. And I'll promise you that my little friend Trude shall be no care to you."

She smiled again, showing glistening white teeth between her somewhat too red lips, and without turning her head looked at him slyly, critically out of the corners of her eyes with one of those quick, fleeting glances.

"Give me one word of hope, Hermine."

"Victor—"

Suddenly they heard a loud outcry mingled with the barking of dogs and laughter and shouts. The woman's expression changed immediately. A look of intense anger, held within bounds only by the greatest effort, came to her eyes.

"Oh, look—there—it is awful!" Looking down an avenue bordered with chestnut trees to an open space in the corner of the garden where mighty firs cast their deep shadows, he saw that the gardeners had progressed with their work to this point. Here they also wished to turn up the soil with their spades. Before them stood a little girl, legs apart, arm outstretched, face red as a cherry, defending the place with angry screams. Then she seized a branch of a fir tree from the ground and struck the oncomers with such violence that the needles pricked their faces. "You little witch!" they cried.

"Trude, Trude, do you hear! Go to Made-moiselle at once! You shall be well punished," the mother called in unconquerable passion.

The young man took his hat and whistled to his dog. "Good day, my dear friend," and he had already stepped through the window, down the steps into the garden, and followed by Nero, was soon at the scene of battle.

"You will stop this digging—stand back."

At once the gardeners halted, respectfully, as is customary. "Our overseer told us to dig up the whole garden."

"That is all right, but there is time for this tomorrow. Trude, come to me."

The child flew to him, threw her arms about his neck, trembling, sobbing, panting as if in pain. "Uncle Victor!" and then she wept aloud.

He stroked her rumpled, coal-black hair soothingly and led her a few steps farther to a bench under the firs where he took her upon his knees. He waited quietly until her sobs were spent and the convulsive quivers of her little body had ceased.

"What was the matter, child? Why don't you let these people go on with their work unmolested? Did they harm you?"

Trude again threw both arms about him, her warm little mouth lying close to his ear.

"But, uncle," she stammered, "here, here is the grave of Leonor."

"Leonor? Who is she?"

"Oh, uncle, don't ask such foolish questions—you know. Leonor, she is my jointed doll, that sweet little thing in rose-colored silk that you gave me for my birthday. She had such beautiful, natural, light hair and blue eyes with real lashes. And she could sit and stand and move her legs and arms."

She now remained quiet and her large, tear-dimmed, childish eyes, that appeared to become larger each moment as if looking into Dreamland where tiny porcelain-faced creatures walk and dwell in houses made of blocks and live on caramels, stared ahead into vacancy. There was where Leonor had come from.

Victor asked seriously, "Of what did she die?"

"You see, she fell from the balcony. I had given her a bath, and the red came from her cheeks and she was very pale. Then I carried her out on the balcony and set her between the flower pots so that she could breathe good fresh air. Mamma became very angry and threw her down and boxed my ears. That didn't matter for it didn't hurt; I cried only because Leonor's head was broken. She was dead and so I buried her here in the garden."

"Oh, that is it!" He did not smile, but looked with deep feeling on the little one who began to sob again as if she had experienced the greatest sorrow of earth.

"Indeed, Trude, this is very sad and I am very sorry for Leonor. But you know a grave must be so chosen that it will certainly be left unmolested. What do you say to taking her up and interring her elsewhere?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" Already Trude was on her knees digging into the soft earth. The young man took a spade from among the tools of the gardeners and soon had the grave open. There lay the broken doll in her damp, dirty little dress; the head was broken and the wet earth clung to her hair and limbs.

Carefully he picked her up with the spade, Trude looking on curiously through her tears.

"This isn't a pretty sight," said Victor. "Some day she shall look like this. But here, take my handkerchief and we'll dry her dress and laces. This young lady was elegantly dressed for her burial. Then, too, I'd like a casket for her. Do you know whether you have that bonbonniere which I recently brought you, the one with an angel painted on it? You certainly have emptied it by this time."

The child nodded eagerly and ran away, quickly returning with it. Soon the doll was laid in the ring, a few large leaves from the overhanging bough of a linden tree hid her from view, then the bright cover was put on and again covered with leaves.

"Come." The funeral procession started. In the middle, Trude carrying the improved casket, behind her, Herr von Klelogg with the spade and ahead of both marched Nero, slowly, sadly, as if he knew what was going on.

At the other end of the garden on a little mound beneath a wide-spreading lilac bush, they halted.

"Do you see, Trude, here no grass will be sown the roots of the bush will not permit it. Here Leonor can sleep in peace."

The box was placed in a quickly dug opening, lilac twigs were spread over it and a little mound was soon over all. Nero walked solemnly about it.

"Some day we can erect a little cross and every spring you will see that the first leaves and flowers are here and the falling lilacs will rain upon this grave. Now, come away, Trude."

He took her to him. "I'll bring you a new and

prettier doll, larger than Leonor and with eyes that move!"

"No, no!" the child sobbed. "I do not want her, I want no other!"

"Poor little doll—mother! You little heart of pure gold—so misunderstood and so lonesome and yet so strong and true! Happy he who ever wins you. All right, we'll have no other doll. But listen. I must go on a long, long journey, and I don't want to take Nero with me. Will you keep him until I come again? If you wish, forever!"

"Oh, Uncle Victor! Uncle! Uncle!" Trude rushed to the young man and pressed her face in great happiness against his arm. She stretched her little hand back of her toward Nero who sniffed at her fingers.

"Will mamma allow it?"

"I think she will." Involuntarily he frowned. Always this same distrust of her mother. No doubt Hermine called this training. He had another idea of the word and would have done differently had this little soul been entrusted to him.

"Tell mamma that I was in a great hurry and could not call on her again before going away, but that I ask her the favor of keeping my dog until I come again. At all events, I'll write her, and you—" He lifted the black-haired little head and kissed her upon the forehead. She looked up at him with eyes filled with love and adoration, and when she smiled, the self-same dimple that had held him captive with the mother appeared in the child's round chin.

"Grow up strong and sound and always be as sweet as you are now. When I come again, you may be a young lady—don't forget your old uncle before then."

A few moments later, the young man on horseback rode out of the court and along the fence. His quick glance took in the ivy encircled window which was empty now. Ahead of him lay the open highway. But he turned around once more and his eyes sought the slight eminence where the lilac bushes grew the thickest and where a little jointed doll and a great love lay buried beneath.—Town Talk.

A drill sergeant was drilling a recruit squad in the use of a rifle. All went smoothly until blank cartridges were distributed. The recruits were instructed to load their pieces and stand at "ready," and then the sergeant gave the command: "Fire at will!"

Private Lunn was puzzled. He lowered his gun.

"Which one is Will?" he asked.—Boston Post.

"I am watching Italy's course with much interest," remarked the South American dictator. "What's the idea?" inquired the state treasurer.

"I was just wondering if we couldn't collect a little rakeoff for remaining neutral.—Louisville Courier Journal.

Dorothy was visiting her grandparents in the country for the first time. Seeing a quantity of feathers scattered about the henyard, she shook her head in disapproval.

"Grandpa," she told him gravely, "you ought to do something to keep your chickens from wearing out so."—San Francisco Star.

"Why is it that you are so resentful of the idea that imitation is the sincerest flattery?"

"I once ate a toadstool and I assure you it was no compliment to a mushroom."—Washington Star.

The chief trouble with a phonograph is that some of the records never get broken.—Mound City (Kan.) Republican.