

## The Phenix

By Bliss Perry

I.

“Countess, my I trouble you for that cauliflower?”

The Countess’s eyes were hovering restlessly about the farther end of the long *pension*<sup>1</sup> table, but she recollected herself instantly at the sound of this mandatory voice at her right.

“Certainly, Frau Lieutenant,” she exclaimed. “Pardon me;” and as the servant was still busy at the other extremity of the room, she lifted the nearly empty platter and passed it.

The Frau Lieutenant surveyed the cauliflower with an eye trained by twenty-five years of experience at table-d’hôte<sup>2</sup> dinners. The selection of fricasseed chicken was her specialty, though there was not a woman in Berlin who could be more implicitly trusted to secure the best piece of anything the first time trying; but really the cauliflower offered no opportunity for her skill. There was but one bunch untouched, and she divided this into two exactly equal portions.

“Letty, my dear,” she said in English, balancing one of these portions upon the spoon, “take this.”

“But Mammachen,” protested Miss Letty, a slender, delicate-complexioned girl of twenty-three, “I don’t—”

“Take it, my dear,” said the Frau Lieutenant, imperturbably, depositing the cauliflower by the side of the stewed mutton on her daughter’s plate, and rapidly assisting herself to the remaining portion. “It is very fattening.”

This last was in a tone intended for a whisper, but the Frau Lieutenant Dettmar’s strident voice had a remarkably penetrating quality, and an under-sized Englishman who sat directly opposite Miss Dettmar, looked up at the words. He was near-sighted, and the dining-room of the Countess von Eckmüller’s *pension* was never brilliantly illuminated, especially on a dingy winter afternoon. It was only two o’clock, but the murky fog was already settling down into the Dorotheen Strasse<sup>3</sup>, and the corners of the high, ugly room were growing dusky. The Englishman peered across the table curiously at his two countrywomen, for such did the mother and daughter unmistakably appear to be. Stubbworth’s insight into character, like his visual faculty, was not of the keenest, but he could not help noting the difference between the muscular assertive body of Mrs. Dettmar, her square, red face, with combative black eyes overtopped by a blacker false front of hair, and the slightly stooping figure of Miss Letty, with her light-blue child’s eyes, the vague pink of her cheeks, and the shyness with which she pecked with her fork at the cauliflower. The daughter had evidently the physical characteristics of her father, the lamented Lieutenant Dettmar. So, Stubbworth reflected, as the result of his inspection, and wished that he might address the girl in English; but not daring to transgress the Countess’s rule that only German should be spoken at meal-times, he let his spectacled eyes fall to his plate again, began to separate the bones out

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<sup>1</sup> Accommodations especially at a continental European hotel or boardinghouse

<sup>2</sup> A complete meal of several courses served to all guests at a stated hour and fixed price

<sup>3</sup> Street

of his muttom stew, and to meditate upon his forthcoming edition of "Middle English Homilies," the preparation of which had brought him to Berlin.

The lower end of the table, where sat the students and the commercial young men, was uproarious, as usual. A Jewess—studying for the opera—who sat at Stubbworth's left, laughed once or twice at a student witticism so immoderately that the sedate Englishman was embarrassed, but the effervescing<sup>4</sup> humor lost its sparkle by the time it reached the neighborhood of the Countess. The people there were dull. The Widow Dettmar's soup had been cold, she had lost the first chance at the stew, and she ate away morosely. The Countess said nothing, but glanced from time to time toward the empty plate at her left, and once she whispered an order to the servant. By and by the Jewess turned her dark face toward the head of the table.

"Countess von Eckmüller," she asked, "is not Herr Jarlson coming today?"

"Certainly," was the answer. "He was called at half-past one, as usual."

"At half-past one!" interrupted the Frau Lieutenant Dettmar. "You don't mean to say that that young man—"

"Exactly," said the Countess. "He is called at half-past one. If he does not get up by a quarter to two, I take one of his shoes, I open the door, and I cry 'Hamlet! Arise!' and toss the shoe at him. Then he gets up."

"I never heard of such a thing," cried the Englishwoman. "Did you, Letty, my dear?"

"No, Mammachen," replied Miss Letty, "but it is very funny."

"It is very irregular," said Mrs. Dettmar, severely. "He is a wild young man. One does not have to look at him twice to know that."

"No, Frau Lieutenant," remarked the Countess, "you misunderstand Herr Jarlson completely. It is only his way."

"Yes, his way. I know men. When a young actor sits in the café til four o'clock in the morning and that every night in the week, and sleeps half the day, of course he is wild. He must be. Oh, I know! It's better for him to have his fling, though; he'll settle down when he's thirty. My husband used to say to me that those men were always steady afterward. They make the best husbands. As I told Letty the other day—"

"Mammachen," pleaded Miss Letty, crimsoning.

But the widow's worldly philosophy was cut short. A door opened half-way down the room, and a tall young fellow entered, apologetically. Everyone looked up.

"Here he comes," cried the Countess, with a smile on her shrewd old face. "He has risen, like—like—why, he is my Phenix<sup>5</sup>."

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<sup>4</sup> Bubbling, or lively

<sup>5</sup> Typically spelled "Phoenix. A legendary bird which from one account lived 500 years, burned itself to ashes on a pyre, and rose alive from the ashes to live another period

There was a chorus of laughter. "The Phenix! The Phenix!" echoed from the students, as Herr Jarlson took his seat at the Countess's left. There was indeed something eagle-like in the curve of his nose, and the stiff masses of his hair, brushed à la Pompadour<sup>6</sup>, seemed curiously like a bird's crest. "The Phenix," chuckled the Countess again to herself, delighted at her own fantasy.

"Letty, my dear," whispered Mrs. Dettmar in English, to her daughter, "what is a Phnix?"

"I think, Mammachen," was the doubtful answer, murmured behind a handkerchief, lest the new-comer opposite should hear, "I think it was a bird. Anyway, it rose."

The Norwegian, bowing respectfully to the English ladies, proceeded to open a bottle of beer, which the Countess provided at dinner for each of her numerous family, and to empty it bodily into a huge silver goblet that stood beside his plate. It was a very bad beer, in truth, but Herr Jarlson always maintained it was delicious in his Scandinavian goblet. He took a draught of it now, before unrolling his napkin, and then turning to the Countess he exclaimed, enthusiastically: "It was grand!"

"Do you mean the beer, Herr Jarlson?" demanded Mrs. Dettmar, with veiled irony.

The Phenix lifted his gray eyes to the widow's face. He had a proper terror of her, a terror not diminished by his secret admiration of her daughter.

"No, not this time," he replied, in fluent German. "It was the 'Ghosts.'"

"The ghosts? What do you mean? Do you see ghosts all the forenoon, after coming in at four o'clock in the morning?" The widow was so amused at her joke that she did not hear Miss Letty whispering that Herr Jarlson meant a play.

"It was Ibsen's 'Ghosts,' Frau Lieutenant," explained the Countess, quietly, "given at the Residenz Theatre yesterday."

"Ah," said the widow. She was not interested in such matters.

"It was a feast to my soul," Herr Jarlson went on; "almost as good as hearing it in Norwegian again."

"You must tell me all about it later," said Countess von Eckmüller. That was the first representation of "Ghosts" in Berlin, and it had not yet become fashionable to discuss the play at dinner.

"Herr Jarlson," spoke up the Jewess, "did you remember?"

"Certainly, Fräulein," and the Phenix unbuttoned his frock-coat and pulled out a complimentary ticket to 'Siegfried,' which he asked Stubbworth to pass to her. She thanked him so effusively that he forgot to mention that the ticket for which she had applied through him had not really been granted, and that he had presented her with his own instead. As an accredited student of acting and a fellow of some promise in her calling Herr Jarlson's name stood higher on the complimentary lists than did hers.

It was curious to see how the Norwegian's appearance changed the atmosphere of the upper end of the table. The Countess became chatty. The servant brought a new dish of cauliflower, expressly kept hot for Herr Jarlson, but Mrs. Dettmar had a helping from it, and was thereby in good spirits again. Miss Letty glanced across the table timidly, from time to time, and wondered why the Phenix did not brush

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<sup>6</sup> A hairstyle worn especially by men in which the hair is combed into a high mound at the front of the head

his hair like other people; he was such an odd young man. She fancied how he would look with a moustache—such a moustache, for instance, as had Major Vischer, her formal engagement to which was to be announced next week at Christmas. The Major had a luxuriant growth upon his upper lip, but Miss Letty somehow wished he were not so bald; she would almost have rather have his hair stand on end like Herr Jarlson's. Then Miss Letty blushed to think what Mammachen would say if she knew her daughter had ventured to criticize the estimable Major Vischer. The Major had been so kind, and her ring next week would be no cheap little German affair, she was quite sure. Mammachen was right, of course; a husband of forty—even if he were bald and fat—was forty times better than no husband; and the Major was so kind; and yet—

But Mammachen was talking about Christmas, with the Countess and Herr Jarlson. "No, they shouldn't be useful," she was saying in her polemic voice. "The idea of sending flowers as a gift! They wither in two days, and it is money thrown away. If anybody should send me flowers, I should be mad."

The Countess nodded assent, having kept a *pension* too long to differ unnecessarily with her patrons; but what she was thinking of was this: "Send flowers to you? *Ich danke*. I should be more likely to send you a roast-beef rare."

"I remember the first present Lieutenant Dettmar ever gave me," continued the widow. "It was a book, and I have it yet; whereas, you see, if it had been flowers, I should have had to throw them away the day after. My husband was so sensible. Letty, my dear, what was that book that Papa gave me?"

"It was 'Proverbs of All Nations,' Mammachen."

As Miss Letty gave this information, she was conscious that both Jarlson and Stubbworth were looking at her. She thought that a certain whimsical look passed over the Norwegian's thin lips, and she blushed again. She was very timid.

The conversation turned to other subjects, but as for the Phenix, he continued to meditate upon these countrywomen of Shakespeare until the dinner was over, and then he pushed back his chair, opened another bottle of beer, and began to talk with the Countess about the third act of Ibsen's "Ghosts."

## II.

It was five o'clock in the morning, the day before Christmas. Outside, in the Dorotheen Strasse, it was bitter cold. The *droschke*<sup>7</sup> drivers on the night service slapped their arms and shivered on their boxes, and the tramway horses staggered on the slippery frost as the huge double-decked cars swung groaning around the curve by the Countess von Eckmüller's *pension*. In Stubbworth's tiny bedroom on the third floor, it was not much warmer. The tall porcelain stove was polished and white like a tombstone, and fully as cold. The Englishman had already risen and was seated by his lamp, wrapped in a blanket dressing-gown, and with a towel around his forehead. He was turning the leaves of a huge Latin folio from the Royal Library, and making annotations. His edition of Homilies had been almost ready, poor fellow, when a German published the startling suggestion that the English monk who wrote them was indebted for some of his ideas to the Latin sermons of a certain Dutch bishop of the thirteenth century, whereupon Stubbworth had secured a month's respite from his duties as private tutor in the family of a

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<sup>7</sup> A cab

Norfolk nobleman, and had spent half his year's savings in a trip to Berlin, in order to investigate the extent of the monk's obligation to his worthy Dutch contemporary. The laborious comparison promised to be singularly barren of results, but Stubbworth had the comfort of knowing that, provided his methods were sufficiently painstaking, his chances of securing a Ph.D. were not invalidated by the worthlessness of his conclusions.

It was with a slight feeling of annoyance at an interruption that Stubbworth paused in his task and listened to a footstep coming down the corridor. He knew it well, for it was the habit of the Phenix to study his rôles in the early morning, after getting home from the *Kneipe*<sup>8</sup> and before going to bed, and many a time in the preceding three weeks had Stubbworth been awakened by the actor's coming in to borrow his Shakespeare, or to ask puzzling questions about the mounting of Irving's plays.

"Come in," grumbled Stubbworth, in answer to the knock; and then he was ashamed of his inhospitality, for he had been ill the day before and Jarlson had sat by him the whole afternoon, trying to amuse him by showing a collection of Scandinavian coins, and by telling him about student life at the university of Christiania.

The door opened quietly, and the Phenix entered, his latch-key still in his hand. He unbuttoned his pelisse<sup>9</sup>, threw his fur cap on the bed, and sat down, dejectedly. "Do you not feel better, Mr. Stubbworth?" he asked.

"Something of a headache," said the Englishman, "but I think I shall work it off. And you?"

The actor shrugged his shoulders. "I am freezing, for one thing. May I light a cigarette?"

As Jarlson rolled it, Stubbworth noticed that his fingers, which were of extraordinary length and delicacy, were blue with cold.

"Have you been in the Kneipe till now?" asked Stubbworth, handing him a match.

"Till three o'clock," was the answer. "It was stupid, to-night. And since then I have been walking the streets. I suppose, if I had been a practical Englishman, I should have had my gloves with me." He tossed the burned match toward the stove, and settled back gloomily into his chair again, muttering an imprecation upon Berlin tobacco. Stubbworth watched him silently, not having sufficient conversational command of German to say exactly what he thought. "What did you walk the streets for?" he finally asked.

"Without doubt because I was a fool. All men are fools in Berlin; read what Heine says about it. Do you know Major Vischer?"

"I have seen him here. Miss Dettmar's—?"

"Yes, the betrother of Mees Letty. We were both in the Café Buer last evening; I had been reading the *Fliegende Blätter*<sup>10</sup> and it lay on my table. He sent a waiter for it—and I handed it to the waiter." This last clause was in a stage tone that made Stubbworth smile.

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<sup>8</sup> A pub

<sup>9</sup> A long cloak or coat made of fur or lined or trimmed with fur

<sup>10</sup> The Flying Butler

“Well?” said he.

“But I should have flung it in the Major’s face,” cried Jarlson, fiercely, “and then two hours from now we should have been standing over on the Hasenheide, waiting for the word. Would you have been my second? I would have wanted you there to tell Mees Letty afterward.”

“God forbid!” exclaimed Stubbworth. “The Major would have brought you down like a partridge, and it would have broken Miss Letty’s heart.”

“Do you think she would really care?”

“Of course she would care, you silly fellow,” growled Stubbworth, affectionately. “Do you think any girl with an English mother wants to have a duel fought about her? She is to be formally engaged to the Major to-morrow, is she not? Do you suppose she would want to marry a man who had just killed you?” Stubbworth had very rarely put together as much German as that as a time, and was rather proud of it.

The Phenix tossed away his cigarette, and thrusting his shivering fingers deep into the pockets of his pelisse, dropped his chin upon his breast.

“You would better go to bed and get warm,” continued Stubbworth, virtuously, “if you had nothing better to think of than fighting Major Vischer, while you were walking Unter den Linden.”

“But I had!” exclaimed the young fellow, eagerly. “Much of the time I was thinking about her.”

Stubbworth shut his Latin folio, and pushed his chair around to face Herr Jarlson. There were no love episodes in the “Middle English Homilies,” and he felt ill at ease in his role as confidant.

“I was thinking of Mees Letty,” Jarlson went on, “and the air was all like spring. Is she not beautiful?”

“Why, yes,” admitted Stubbworth, wondering at the Norseman’s simplicity.

“Do you think she would accept a gift from me to-day, the day before she is betrothed?”

Stubbworth stared at him. “A gift?”

“It is only a philopena<sup>11</sup>. I lost it to her at dinner yesterday. But I did not think the Frau Mamma wished me to pay, and I did not know the English customs. She is really an English girl, you know, in spite of her German father and her continental life. Must I send her gloves?”

“Why, no,” said Stubbworth, hesitatingly. “I don’t see what you can’t give her anything you like, if you fairly owe it.”

“Very good;”—Jarlson’s hands came out of his pockets with an inquiring gesture—“and now, could I give her a book?”

“I should think so; why can’t you put it on the Christmas-tree to-night?”

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<sup>11</sup> A custom, presumably of German origin, in which two persons share the kernels of a nut and determine that one shall receive a forfeit from the other at a later time upon the saying of a certain word or the performance of a certain action; or a gift made as a forfeit

The Phenix sprang to his feet. He was blessed with a volatile temperament, and notwithstanding his tragic designs of the past night, he had the healthy courage of his twenty-four years. He struck his hand into Stubbworth's just as *Don Carlos* greets the *Marquis of Posa*. "Mr. Stubbworth," he cried, "if I had a confidant like you six weeks ago, when I first met her, all might have been different. I do not understand the English ways; I have not dared address her, and I have been afraid of the Mammachen. But now I will put that book upon the Christmas-tree in spite of all the Majors in Prussia, and if she thanks me for it, I will tell her in English—"

"You had better put it in German," interrupted Stubbworth grimly.

"*Bewahre!* It shall either be in her mother tongue or in mine; she knows not a word of Norwegian, and I shall say to her in English, '*I atore you!*' If she is angry, you will find me lying out on the Hasenheide in the morning."

And nodding his head sententiously at the astonished Englishman, who had not taken the actor's devotion to Miss Letty quite seriously enough, Herr Jarlson gathered his pelisse about him, and bowed himself grandly out of the bedroom door, in what would have been an admirable stage exit, had he not backed into a frightened servant, hurrying around the narrow corridor to start the kitchen fire. As for Mr. Stubbworth, he stood a full minute looking at the door, before he found breath enough to grumble out something to himself about love being blind. But it was chillier in his room than it had been before, and he lighted his pipe and wasted ten minutes in a dull dream of something that had happened in his own undergraduate days. Then he wiped his spectacles, knotted the towel more closely around his forehead, tightened the belt of his old dressing-gown, and found his place again in the Latin folio.

III.

At six o'clock that evening the whole *pension*, with a single exception, was gathered in the long dining-room. Through the crack in the folding doors at one end, there could be seen the green and gilt of the Christmas-tree, which had been selected by the Countess herself at the *Jahrmarkt*<sup>12</sup> the night before. The beloved Crown Prince Frederick, wandering with his younger children through the *Jahrmarkt* also—and, as it sadly proved, for the last time—had stopped in admiration before this very tree, though they had finally decided that it was not quite tall enough. But the incident was sufficient to add to the aroma of the fir a sort of odor of royalty.

There had been a remarkably good dinner at four o'clock, but now the table was cleared, save for a huge punch-bowl in the middle. Several toasts had been drunk already, and there were plenty more to come, for the tree was not to be lighted until eight o'clock. Each member of the miscellaneous family was pledged to do something for the common entertainment, and the Countess began, bringing out a dusty harp from behind the sideboard, and playing fantasies in a fashion which made it easy for her audience to believe that the harp had resounded in the Countess's ancestral halls upon the Oder for immemorial centuries. Frau Lieutenant Dettmar, who was sceptical about the antiquity of the Countess's title, was unfortunately not in the dining-room. The postman had brought her some letters, just as dinner was over, and she had retired to her own room to read them. She did not come back. A medical student from Madrid danced a Spanish dance amid thunderous applause, and a toast was drunk to Spain; but Mrs.

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<sup>12</sup> A funfair

Dettmar was still absent. Miss Letty, arrayed in her last season's Homburg finery, played, in the most modest and pretty way imaginable, her whole repertory of five pieces upon the guitar, and a toast was drunk to her native land; but Mammachen was not there to see. Mr. Stubbworth, under the mellowing warmth of the occasion, delivered, in broken German, an impressive homily upon the intimate relations of England with Germany, and the students insisted upon toasting England once more; and still Mrs. Dettmar sat in her room, reading those two letters.

The first was from a retired Prussian officer, an old friend of her husband. Presenting his apologies for referring to a matter so delicate, and alleging as his excuse his deep interest in the family of the late Lieutenant Dettmar, the writer made bold to inquire, in view of the approaching betrothal, whether Frau Lieutenant was aware that Major Vischer, so far from being the man of property he was reputed, was, as a matter of fact, considerably in debt? Knowing that mere word on this subject would be sufficient to impress upon such a prudent mother the importance of an exact understanding of the financial condition of her future son-in-law, the writer begged leave to subscribe himself her very humble servant and the devoted friend of her lamented husband.

In debt? Major Vischer in debt? Major Vischer, who had served under her Franz in that Holstein business and again in the Austrian campaign; who had sowed his wild oats long ago; who owned, as she supposed, that fine estate in Saxony, and who was devoted to Miss Letty—Major Vischer actually in debt! The valiant widow trembled, like a rider put on the verge of a precipice. She had almost made the one blunder of her life!

The second letter was from the Major himself. He was chagrined to inform her that his duties as staff-officer suddenly called him away from Berlin that day, to inspect the fortress of Königstein. In vain had he pleaded with her superiors the importance of his family engagement; they had been inexorable, and the morrow, to which he had looked forward with such ardent anticipation, would behold him in Saxon-Switzerland. He hoped to return by Sylvester Evening<sup>13</sup>, the 31<sup>st</sup>, and he trusted that his dearest Letty would consider New Year's Day as propitious a time for their betrothal as Christmas Day would have proved, had it not been for the stern duties of his profession.

Mrs. Dettmar breathed a little easier on reading this. Providence had come to her help, she was sure. There was a whole week in which to break to her daughter the dreadful news of the Major's poverty, and to prepare her for the inevitable rupture. Miss Letty worshipped the Major! It would nearly break the dear child's heart, but that could not be helped. No girl of hers would marry a man who had misrepresented his income! Still, she could not bear to spoil Letty's Christmas eve.

She went back into the dining-room. The Jewess was just ending an aria from "Norma," amid rapturous expressions of delight. Then there was a moment's awkwardness. Tolerant as was this cosmopolitan *pension*, it could hardly be expected that anyone would propose a toast to the Hebrews. But Herr Jarlson was equal to the emergency.

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<sup>13</sup> A Catholic celebration of the New Year named after Pope Sylvester I, a saint who oversaw the Council of Nicea and Roman Emperor Constantine I's conversion to Christianity. The celebration, or feast day, is held on the anniversary of Sylvester's death, a date that coincided with December 31<sup>st</sup> since the adoption of the Gregorian calendar. Many European countries prefer to use a variant of Sylvester's name for the holiday, but in Hebrew tradition that it is a celebration of an anti-Semitic pope who convinced Constantine to prohibit Jews from living in Jerusalem.



“Gentlemen and ladies,” he cried, “in token of our appreciation of Fräulein Goldschmidt’s talent, I propose that we drink to the glory of Art!”

“Bravo!” called out the Countess.

Miss Letty clapped her little hands enthusiastically; it had not been so quick-witted in Herr Jarlson; not even the Major could have shown a kinder heart. Mrs. Dettmar, who had taken the seat reserved for her between the Countess and Stubbworth, and at some little distance, as it happened, from Miss Letty, joined with the rest in the formal homage to Art. Then there were loud calls for the Phenix, from all over the room: “Play something for us!” “Herr Jarlson!” “Herr Jarlson!” and some of those who knew the rôles he had been studying, cried, “Uriel Acosta!” and others “Der Prince von Homburg!” The Phenix glanced inquiringly at the Countess.

“You must obey, my Hamlet,” she said, “but you shall take whatever rôle you please.”

He rose, buttoned his coat, and passed to the farther end of the room, where the students made place for him.

“It will be nothing improper, will it?” whispered Mrs. Dettmar.

“No,” answered the Countess, sharply. “He is as innocent as a child. He is thoroughly good; he is not so much of a worldling as you or I, Frau Lieutenant. His late hours and his *Künstlerleben*<sup>14</sup> are nothing but boyishness.”

“Gentlemen and ladies,” said the Phenix, “I shall have the honor of reciting from the first act of ‘Don Carlos’ where the *Prince* confesses to the *Marquis of Posa* his love for the *Queen*.”

His face was pale and his voice husky. Instead of sleeping, that forenoon, he had instead been the round of Berlin bookstores. There was a hush all through the room. Half-way down one side sat Miss Letty, leaning forward in her chair, an eager color in her gentle face. She expected to enjoy this so much. It was not often that Mammachen could be persuaded to go to the theatre, and here was the theatre come to them.

Slowly and somewhat heavily did the Phenix get under way, shaking his crest once or twice as if to free himself, but rising gallantly as he caught the gusts of that great scene; and then ascending, whirling in swift gyre<sup>15</sup> upon gyre, he swept onward down the splendid strom of Schiller’s passion; and the frail English girl, who was half German after all, followed him with dilating eyes of admiration. She had never seen Herr Jarlson look so handsome.

As he paused at the end of the scene, there was a great clapping of hands.

“Is Herr Jarlson really a good actor?” asked Mrs. Dettmar of the Countess.

“That is for you to judge. I think so. He plays these First Lover rôles well, do you see, because he has so much feeling, and because he is so young,” she added shrewdly; “but his voice and his face fit him admirably for old men’s parts. You should hear him play *Polonius*.”

“You don’t mean to say that he can earn a living on the stage?”

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<sup>14</sup> “Artist’s Life”

<sup>15</sup> A circular motion of spiraling form

“There is no doubt of it. He has good offers here, but prefers to make his *début* in some provincial theatre. He is no fool, my Phenix.”

There was a fresh burst of applause from the other end of the room. Herr Jarlson was going on. “I will give you the fifth scene in that same act,” he said gravely, “where *Don Carlos* makes his love declaration to the young *Queen*.”

Again there was the perfect silence, broken by his husky, fervent voice. The passage was perfectly familiar to most of those in the room, but Miss Letty had never seen it acted. It made her tremble at the outset; that hapless love was such a terrible thing. And the poor *Queen*, to be married to a graybeard when all the while she really loved the graybeard’s son! To marry the wrong person and find it out when too late—too late—it would be horrible. She wondered if Philip II was fat and bald like—like a certain person; and then she was ashamed of herself, and frightened at the way Herr Jarlson looked at her. He was playing his part to her; he was pleading there as *Don Carlos* with her alone, and his gray eyes flashed so that she could not look away from them. Her heart beat hard. It was so hot there in the dining-room, and something choked her. Why could she not look away from him? Her head swam; she grasped her poor soiled fan as tightly as she could, to hold on to herself, to make sure that it was herself and not the Queen. But she was the Queen; it was she herself who was saying: “*Sie wagen es, zu hoffen, Wo Allea, Alles schon verloren ist?*” and yet it was not Don Carlos, but Herr Jarlson, who cried, in passionate answer: “*Ich gebe Nichts verloren als die Todten.*”

The room whirled around. The actor’s figure was lost in a gray blur—she caught at her chair to save herself from falling.

But Herr Jarlson had stopped, and the uproarious plaudits and the clinking of glasses brought her to her senses. The Jewess leaned over and said: “You are a little faint, Miss Letty?”

“Oh not,” she answered, “not now.”

“Come, Phenix,” cried the Countess, “we have had enough tragedy. You must help me light the tree now.” Herr Jarlson bowed obediently, and they disappeared behind the folding-doors. Miss Letty sat there, strangely ill at ease. She was thinking.

Mammachen, whose black eyes had been riveted upon her daughter and the Phenix, was thinking too. She was a far-sighted woman, and that was a very distant horizon upon which she could not see a cloud like a man’s hand. But she was nervous. That letter about the Major had upset her, and she had to talk to somebody. Sitting next to her was Stubbworth, blinking in the light and awaiting fearfully the distribution of the gifts. He had inner visions of the Phenix lying out on the Hasenheide in the morning.

“Herr Jarlson is a capital actor, isn’t he?” she remarked affably, in English.

“Indeed, he is,” said Stubbworth; “he is a man of fine feeling.”

“Ah?”

“He is very good-hearted. I was ill yesterday, and he spent nearly all the afternoon showing me his collection of coins.”

Stubbworth spoke with some agitation.

“Of coins? I shouldn’t have supposed that he could afford to have a collection of coins.”

“Why, yes,” was the eager answer. “Herr Jarlson’s father is only a country clergyman, but his grandfather is a great land-owner. He sent him to the university of Christiania, and then here; and if all goes well with Herr Jarlson, he will inherit a very neat property.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed the widow. “I—I am somewhat surprised. But that is very fortunate—for him, I mean. You are quite sure, Mr. Stubbworth?”

“Quite,” said he. “But his voice was lost in the Christmas hymn that all the others were singing as the doors drew back. There blazed the noble tree, decked with colored candles and cheap gilt, and all the *pension* admired it immensely, laughing like children when the fir-needles caught fire or the candles burned crookedly, and most of them had no thought beyond the peace and good-will of that ever-blessed time. But Stubbworth and the Phenix scarcely looked at the Christmas-tree; they eyed the Countess as she distributed the presents that lay piled upon a table. At last she reached it; that little package upon whose reception a romantic Norseman had staked his happiness. Stubbworth himself handed it to Miss Letty; it was a *Prachtband*<sup>16</sup> in ugly cover of red and gold. Herr Jarlson’s card slipped from the title-page. Miss Letty’s fingers shook; she did not glance at the title.

“Mammachen!” she exclaimed, in a helpless whisper. “He has sent me a gift, and I am to be betrothed to-morrow. What shall I do?”

Mrs. Dettmar took up the card deliberately. It was a very stylish card, and “Philopena” was pencilled faintly upon it. She opened the book; it was a copy of “Proverbs of All Nations.”

“Letty, my dear, it is a philopena. He is a very sensible young man. Of course you must go and thank him.”

The Phenix was standing apart from the others, and Miss Letty obeyed. “Herr Jarlson,” she said, falteringly, “it was so kind—it was very good—” and then their eyes met. She stopped, but she did not turn away; a deep blush crimsoned her face, as she stood looking up at him. Nor did he speak at first. Then his English came to him.

“Mees Letty,” he whispered, “*I at—*”

But someone touched his arm. It was Mamachen. “Herr Jarlson,” she said, with black eyes straight in his face, “it was very thoughtful of you to give that useful book to my daughter. We have tea served in our room every afternoon at four; may we not see you there soon? Come, Letty, my dear, it is time for us to go.”

#### IV.

The Phenix did not go out to the Hasenheide and put a bullet through his brains; on the contrary he dragged Mr. Stubbworth around to the Café Bauer to partake of a most excellent late supper. But they

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<sup>16</sup> A book with handsome binding

did not talk about Miss Letty; the conversation was mostly upon philology<sup>17</sup> and the forthcoming edition of the Homilies.

The next day, at four, Jarlson presented himself at the Widow Dettmar's room, sipped his tea with counterfeited pleasure, and answered several shrewdly disguised interrogations about himself. He was as favorably received as any young man could have been, but alas! Miss Letty, to her mother's chagrin, had gone out with the Countess to admire the Christmas display in the Passage; and had stood so long before each shop window that even the Countess's impatience did not bring them back to the *pension* before Herr Jarlson had finished his call. Miss Letty's delay had been intentional; she dreaded talking with the Norwegian again so soon after that strange moment and that inexplicable half-uttered English sentence of the night before. Her profound admiration for the toys in the Passage was a make-shift for her frightened little heart; but Mammachen had no suspicion of this, and reprimanded her for her lack of courtesy to such a promising young man as Herr Jarlson. The widow was tempted to go farther and expose the deception of which Major Vischer had been guilty, but she did not quite have the heart to tell Miss Letty all. Her explanation, the night before, that the Major had been called to Saxony for a week on military service, must do for the present. That fact of itself should have been hard enough for the Major's fiancée to bear, and yet Mammachen thought that Letty had listened to the news without any very deep sense of disappointment. Upon almost every other subject the widow was extraordinarily unimaginative, but as a mother, and a provident mother, she had a sort of faith that something would happen before the week was over to make clearer her duty toward her darling child.

Nevertheless the week went by uneventfully. Herr Jarlson dropped in again for tea, it was true, but again Miss Letty absented herself. Sylvester Evening came, and as she sat with the others in the *pension* dining-room, after the eight o'clock supper was over, the widow was sorely troubled. The Major might arrive at any moment. To be sure, she had sent a note to his lodgings asking him not to come, not that night, but the next morning, when she proposed to herself to see him alone and charge him to his face with having deceived her about the property; but in his eagerness he might drive directly from the station to the *pension*, and then there would be a delightful state of affairs.

On Sylvester Evening it had long been customary at the *pension* to pass the time as merrily as possible until the old year was nearly gone, and then to sally forth to enjoy the brief carnival enacted each year in the Berlin streets at midnight. But the Widow Dettmar was in no mood for the songs and speeches and toasts which recalled the gayety of the week before. She sat in a corner with Miss Letty, and trembled whenever the door opened lest she might behold the countenance of Major Vischer. The hours seemed to her to crawl so slowly by; the merriment was only a forced echo of Christmas; at any moment—to-morrow at the latest—the Major would arrive, and Letty, thanks to her mother's consideration, was still ignorant of his baseness and unaccountably obstinate in avoiding Herr Jarlson. It was provoking. Gloomily did Mrs. Dettmar survey the Phenix as he rose in obedience to the Countess's desire and acted *Polonius*. He was a worthy young man, with fine prospects professionally and otherwise, and yet his *Polonius*, admirable as the Countess pronounced it to be, appeared to Mrs. Dettmar to lack some of the fervor which had characterized his *Don Carlos*. Miss Letty sat with her eyes in her lap all the time he was reciting. It was enough to discourage the stoutest maternal heart.

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<sup>17</sup> The study of language, especially the study of how languages or words develop

Eleven o'clock came, then half-past. The Major did not arrive. At a quarter to twelve, the company broke up in little parties. The Countess asked Mrs. Dettmar and Miss Letty, Herr Jarlson and Mr. Stubbworth, to accompany her. Miss Letty was very silent as she put on her wraps. Her mother, arraying herself in a fur cape and straw hat—for she had gone without a winter bonnet for the sake of adding to Letty's trousseau<sup>18</sup>—watched her nervously. The old year was almost gone; with the next morning would come the broken engagement, and then another campaign on the part of a devoted mother who had already fought her best.

"Mr. Stubbworth," said the Countess, as they descended the huge winding staircase, "you shall escort Miss Letty, and you may talk English. My Phenix must watch over the Frau Lieutenant and myself." Mrs. Dettmar's heart sank again.

Dorotheen Strasse was perfectly still, save for a few hurrying groups of people like themselves. There was no moon, but the night was fine, and warmer than the day had been. They turned down Charlotten Strasse, past the black shadow of the Hôtel de Rome, and crossed Unter den Linden diagonally. The wide street was empty, but almost every building was still lighted, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, and as they reached the southern side, they could see special policemen stationed everywhere. Just as the Countess's little company, keeping close together, started down Friedrich Strasse, somewhere, high up in that tranquil midnight air, a deep bell struck—one—two—Hark! There was a rush and a roar of many feet, a manifold cry of confused voices, and in an instant hundreds and thousands of people poured into the narrow street, a black stream issuing from every building and alley-way, and on every lip there was the one jubilant shout: "*Prosit Neujahr!*"<sup>19</sup> *Prosit! Prosit Neujahr!*"

"*Prosit!*" answered the Countess, as a workman shouted his greeting in her face, for the etiquette of this carnival demanded a perfect democracy of well-wishing. "*Prosit Neujahr!*" shrieked Herr Jarlson into the ear of a policeman, who was struggling to keep the crowd from trampling upon one another.

"*Prosit Neujahr!*" called out Miss Letty, vaguely, fearing a condign punishment from some source if she did not conform to the law of the hour; and back and forth surged the tumult, and higher and higher rose the boisterous greeting to the opening year.

Herr Jarlson was in front, trying to keep the ladies from being too roughly jostled, and at the same time to guard his silk hat, which he had foolishly worn, and which was considered a fair target for friendly blows. Suddenly he stopped. A large café had flung open its doors, and hundreds of men were pouring out across the pavement; it was impossible to force a passage for the moment, and the five people from the *pension* were crowded out toward the street by the pressure from behind. The dazzling electric light from the café streamed across the disorderly mass of figures in a wide bar as bright as day; it gleamed on the faces of the men and women upon the opposite pavement.

"Oh, what is the matter over there?" cried Miss Letty.

It was only a couple of shop-girls, without escort, teased by a ring of men. The same instant that Miss Letty spoke, a short man with a sweeping mustache grasped one of the girls from behind and kissed her, then let her go again, and stood there with his face full in that brilliant bar of light laughing at his New Year's joke. It was Major Vischer, in civilian's dress. Stubbworth recognized him, and instinctively threw

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<sup>18</sup> A dowry; a hope chest, or the contents of one; a wedding dress or similar clothing

<sup>19</sup> Happy New Year! Or, literally, "Cheers to the New Year"

himself in front of Miss Letty, that she might not have the shame of seeing who it was. But he was too late.

“Mammachen,” said Miss Letty, in a choking voice, “can we not go home now? I am so tired!”

“Why, yes, Letty,” answered Mrs. Dettmar, who had been peering with some interest into the open door of the café; “certainly, if you have seen enough;” and with great difficulty they all turned around and began to struggle back through the on-coming crowd. The gentlemen made heroic efforts to clear a passage, but they were all separated more than once, and when they finally emerged into Unter den Linden again, Miss Letty was leaning against Jarlson’s arm, Stubbworth was supporting the Countess, and Mammachen toiled painfully in the rear. The Stubbworth offered her his other arm, and she took it, her maternal heart beating fast as she saw Letty’s slender figure close against the Norwegian’s pelisse. Mrs. Dettmar knew very well that it was not conversational in Berlin to allow two young people to walk together like that; but then, did not Napoleon win his battles by ignoring the Prussian rules?

The Phenix and Miss Letty walked together, therefore, across Unter den Linden and up the silent Charlotten Strasse. They walked slowly, the wide night above them, the uproar of the carnival growing fainter behind them, and before them was the New Year. They said little. The obligation to which Miss Letty had struggled for a whole week to be faithful had been suddenly and by no act of hers, destroyed. She was certain that the Major could not have loved her, any of the time; but her chagrin was already lost. It seemed hours since that moment back in Frederick Strasse; that was at the Old Year’s end, and now she was living in the New, as she and Herr Jarlson passed slowly, quietly toward home.

As they reached the *pension*, the others were close behind. Herr Jarlson unlocked the door, Miss Letty passed in, and he followed her. The Countess’s foot was already on the lower step, when Mrs. Dettmar stopped.

“Wait,” she said, “let us see if we can’t still hear that shouting.”

The three listened. Stubbworth thought he could detect a distant murmur; the Countess declared she could hear nothing at all; Mrs. Dettmar seemed in doubt.

“Wait,” she insisted, “let us listen once more.” But this time, after a longer trial, they all agreed that the noise had died quite away.

Miss Letty and the Phenix were awaiting them on the landing. Mammachen’s sudden curiosity about the shouting had given these two a minute’s time together. A minute is not much, but it is long enough for a simple English sentence.

When Mrs. Dettmar and her daughter were alone in their room, the girl broke down.

“I cannot marry Major Vischer,” she sobbed, hiding her face upon her mother’s robust bosom. “I do not love him. I cannot love him.”

“Don’t cry, Letty, my dear,” said the widow, gently stroking her daughter’s hot cheek, “don’t cry—don’t cry. If that’s the way you feel about him, Mammachen will arrange it—Mammachen will arrange it.”

Mammachen arranged it. Two years later, when Dr. Stubbworth visited Berlin to get material for a new edition of the Homilies, the Countess told him on the night of his arrival that his old friend Herr Jarlson was playing Second Old Man with great success at the Deutsches Theatre, and that he might be seen sitting by the side of Mammachen almost any Sunday in the English chapel, gravely reading the responses. The next morning Stubbworth took an early stroll in the Thiergarten, and whome should he meet coming down the Sieges Allée but the Phenix, pushing a baby carriage with one hand and with a play of Shakespeare in the other.