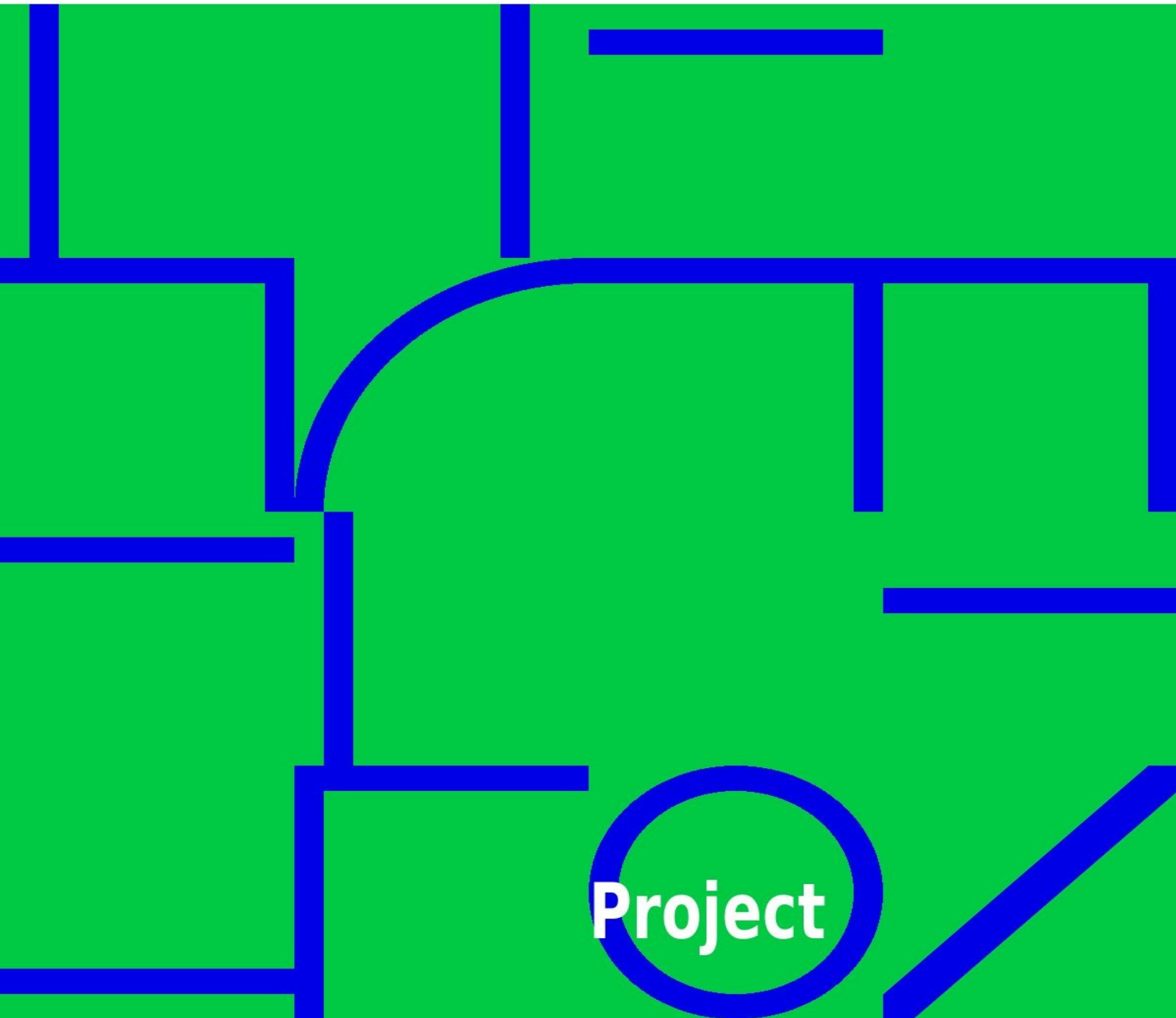
The Puppet Crown

Harold MacGrath



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Author: Harold MacGrath

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THE PUPPET CROWN

by Harold MacGrath

TO THE MEMORY OF THAT GOOD FRIEND
AND
COMRADE OF MY YOUTH
MY FATHER

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Ah Love! Could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire
  Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mold it nearer to the Heart's desire!

—Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

CHAPTER I. THE SCEPTER WHICH WAS A STICK

The king sat in his private garden in the shade of a potted orange tree, the leaves of which were splashed with brilliant yellow. It was high noon of one of those last warm sighs of passing summer which now and then lovingly steal in between the chill breaths of September. The velvet hush of the mid-day hour had fallen.

There was an endless horizon of turquoise blue, a zenith pellucid as glass. The trees stood motionless; not a shadow stirred, save that which was cast by the tremulous wings of a black and purple butterfly, which, near to his Majesty, fell, rose and sank again. From a drove of wild bees, swimming hither and thither in quest of the final sweets of the year, came a low murmurous hum, such as a man sometimes fancies he hears while standing alone in the vast auditorium of a cathedral.

The king, from where he sat, could see the ivy-clad towers of the archbishop's palace, where, in and about the narrow windows, gray and white doves fluttered and plumed themselves. The garden sloped gently downward till it merged into a beautiful lake called the Werter See, which, stretching out several miles to the west, in the heart of the thick-wooded hills, trembled like a thin sheet of silver.

Toward the south, far away, lay the dim, uneven blue line of the Thalian Alps, which separated the kingdom that was from the duchy that is, and the duke from his desires. More than once the king leveled his gaze in that direction, as if to fathom what lay behind those lordly rugged hills.

There was in the air the delicate odor of the deciduous leaves which, every little while, the king inhaled, his eyes half-closed and his nostrils distended. Save for these brief moments, however, there rested on his countenance an expression of disenchantment which came of the knowledge of a part ill-played, an expression which described a consciousness of his unfitness and inutility, of lethargy and weariness and distaste.

To be weary is the lot of kings, it is a part of their royal prerogative; but it is only a great king who can be weary gracefully. And Leopold was not a great king; indeed, he was many inches short of the ideal; but he was philosophical, and by the process of reason he escaped the pitfalls which lurk in the path of

peevishness.

To know the smallness of the human atom, the limit of desire, the existence of other lives as precious as their own, is not the philosophy which makes great kings. Philosophy engenders pity; and one who possesses that can not ride roughshod over men, and that is the business of kings.

As for Leopold, he would rather have wandered the byways of Kant than studied royal etiquette. A crown had been thrust on his head and a scepter into his hand, and, willy-nilly, he must wear the one and wield the other. The confederation had determined the matter shortly before the Franco-Prussian war.

The kingdom that was, an admixture of old France and newer Austria, was a gateway which opened the road to the Orient, and a gateman must be placed there who would be obedient to the will of the great travelers, were they minded to pass that way. That is to say, the confederation wanted a puppet, and in Leopold they found a dreamer, which served as well. That glittering bait, a crown, had lured him from his peaceful Osian hills and valleys, and now he found that his crown was of straw and his scepter a stick.

He longed to turn back, for his heart lay in a tomb close to his castle keep, but the way back was closed. He had sold his birthright. So he permitted his ministers to rule his kingdom how they would, and gave himself up to dreams. He had been but a cousin of the late king, whereas the duke of the duchy that is had been a brother. But cousin Josef was possessed of red hair and a temper which was redder still, and, moreover, a superlative will, bending to none, and laughing at those who tried to bend him.

He would have been a king to the tip of his fiery hair; and it was for this very reason that his subsequent appeals for justice and his rights fell on unheeding ears. The confederation feared Josef; therefore they dispossessed him. Thus Leopold sat on the throne, while his Highness bit his nails and swore, impotent to all appearances.

Leopold leaned forward from his seat. In his hand he held a riding stick with which he drew shapeless pictures in the yellow gravel of the path. His brows were drawn over contemplative eyes, and the hint of a sour smile lifted the corners of his lips. Presently the brows relaxed, and his gaze traveled to the opposite side of the path, where the British minister sat in the full glare of the sun.

In the middle of the path, as rigid as a block of white marble, reposed a young bulldog, his moist black nose quivering under the repeated attacks of a persistent insect. It occurred to the king that there was a resemblance between the dog and

his master, the Englishman. The same heavy jaws were there, the same fearless eyes, the same indomitable courage for the prosecution of a purpose.

A momentary regret passed through him that he had not been turned from a like mold. Next his gaze shifted to the end of the path, where a young Lieutenant stood idly kicking pebbles, his cuirass flaming in the dazzling sunshine. Soon the drawing in the gravel was resumed.

The British minister made little of the three-score years which were closing in on him, after the manner of an army besieging a citadel. He was full of animal exuberance, and his eyes, a trifle faded, it must be admitted, were still keenly alive and observant. He was big of bone, florid of skin, and his hair—what remained of it—was wiry and bleached. His clothes, possibly cut from an old measure, hung loosely about the girth—a sign that time had taken its tithe. For thirty-five years he had served his country by cunning speeches and bursts of fine oratory; he had wandered over the globe, lulling suspicions here and arousing them there, a prince of the art of diplomacy.

He had not been sent here to watch this kingdom. He was touching a deeper undercurrent, which began at St. Petersburg and moved toward Central Asia, Turkey and India, sullenly and irresistibly. And now his task was done, and another was to take his place, to be a puppet among puppets. He feared no man save his valet, who knew his one weakness, the love of a son on whom he had shut his door, which pride forbade him to open. This son had chosen the army, when a fine diplomatic career had been planned—a small thing, but it sufficed. Even now a word from an humbled pride would have reunited father and son, but both refused to speak this word.

The diplomat in turn watched the king as he engaged in the aimless drawing. His meditation grew retrospective, and his thoughts ran back to the days when he first befriended this lonely prince, who had come to England to learn the language and manners of the chill islanders. He had been handsome enough in those days, this Leopold of Osia, gay and eager, possessing an indefinable charm which endeared him to women and made him respected of men. To have known him then, the wildest stretch of fancy would never have placed him on this puppet throne, surrounded by enemies, menaced by his adopted people, rudderless and ignorant of statecraft.

“Fate is the cup,” the diplomat mused, “and the human life the ball, and it's toss, toss, toss, till the ball slips and falls into eternity.” Aloud he said, “Your Majesty seems to be well occupied.”

“Yes,” replied the king, smiling. “I am making crowns and scratching them

out again—usurping the gentle pastime of their most Christian Majesties, the confederation. A pretty bauble is a crown, indeed—at a distance. It is a fine thing to wear one—in a dream. But to possess one in the real, and to wear it day by day with the eternal fear of laying it down and forgetting where you put it, or that others plot to steal it, or that you wear it dishonestly—Well, well, there are worse things than a beggar's crust."

"No one is honest in this world, save the brute," said the diplomat, touching the dog with his foot. "Honesty is instinctive with him, for he knows no written laws. The gold we use is stamped with dishonesty, notwithstanding the beautiful mottoes; and so long as we barter and sell for it, just so long we remain dishonest. Yes, you wear your crown dishonestly but lawfully, which is a nice distinction. But is any crown worn honestly? If it is not bought with gold, it is bought with lies and blood. Sire, your great fault, if I may speak, is that you haven't continued to be dishonest. You should have filled your private coffers, but you have not done so, which is a strange precedent to establish. You should have increased taxation, but you have diminished it; you should have forced your enemy's hand four years ago, when you ascended the throne, but you did not; and now, for all you know, his hand may be too strong. Poor, dishonest king! When you accepted this throne, which belongs to another, you fell as far as possible from moral ethics. And now you would be honest and be called dull, and dream, while your ministers profit and smile behind your back. I beg your Majesty's pardon, but you have always requested that I should speak plainly."

The king laughed; he enjoyed this frank friend. There was an essence of truth and sincerity in all he said that encouraged confidence.

"Indeed, I shall be sorry to have you go tomorrow," he said, "for I believe if you stayed here long enough you would truly make a king of me. Be frank, my friend, be always frank; for it is only on the base of frankness that true friendship can rear itself."

"You are only forty-eight," said the Englishman; "you are young."

"Ah, my friend," replied the king with a tinge of sadness, "it is not the years that age us; it is how we live them. In the last four years I have lived ten. To-day I feel so very old! I am weary of being a king. I am weary of being weary, and for such there is no remedy. Truly I was not cut from the pattern of kings; no, no. I am handier with a book than with a scepter; I'd liever be a man than a puppet, and a puppet I am—a figurehead on the prow of the ship, but I do not guide it. Who care for me save those who have their ends to gain? None, save the archbishop, who yet dreams of making a king of me. And these are not my people who surround me; when I die, small care. I shall have left in the passing

scarce a finger mark in the dust of time."

"Ah, Sire, if only you would be cold, unfriendly, avaricious. Be stone and rule with a rod of iron. Make the people fear you, since they refuse to love you; be stone."

"You can mold lead, but you can not sculpture it; and I am lead."

"Yes; not only the metal, but the verb intransitive. Ah, could the fires of ambition light your soul!"

"My soul is a blackened grate of burnt-out fires, of which only a coal remains."

And the king turned in his seat and looked across the crisp green lawns to the beds of flowers, where, followed by a maid at a respectful distance, a slim young girl in white was cutting the hardy geraniums, dahlias and seed poppies.

"God knows what her legacy will be!"

"It is for you to make it, Sire."

Both men continued to remark the girl. At length she came toward them, her arms laden with flowers. She was at the age of ten, with a beautiful, serious face, which some might have called prophetic. Her hair was dark, shining like coal and purple, and gossamer in its fineness; her skin had the blue-whiteness of milk; while from under long black lashes two luminous brown eyes looked thoughtfully at the world. She smiled at the king, who eyed her fondly, and gave her unengaged hand to the Englishman, who kissed it.

"And how is your Royal Highness this fine day? he asked, patting the hand before letting it go.

"Will you have a dahlia, Monsieur?" With a grave air she selected a flower and slipped it through his button-hole.

"Does your Highness know the language of the flowers?" the Englishman asked.

"Dahlias signify dignity and elegance; you are dignified, Monsieur, and dignity is elegance."

"Well!" cried the Englishman, smiling with pleasure; "that is turned as adroitly as a woman of thirty."

"And am I not to have one?" asked the king, his eyes full of paternal love and pride.

"They are for your Majesty's table," she answered.

"Your Majesty!" cried the king in mimic despair. "Was ever a father treated

thus? Your Majesty! Do you not know, my dear, that to me 'father' is the grandest title in the world?”

Suddenly she crossed over and kissed the king on the cheek, and he held her to him for a moment.

The bulldog had risen, and was wagging his tail the best he knew how. If there was any young woman who could claim his unreserved admiration, it was the Princess Alexia. She never talked nonsense to him in their rambles together, but treated him as he should be treated, as an animal of enlightenment.

“And here is Bull,” said the princess, tickling the dog's nose with a scarlet geranium.

“Your Highness thinks a deal of Bull?” said the dog's master.

“Yes, Monsieur, he doesn't bark, and he seems to understand all I say to him.”

The dog looked up at his master as if to say: “There now, what do you think of that?”

“To-morrow I am going away,” said the diplomat, “and as I can not very well take Bull with me, I give him to you.”

The girl's eyes sparkled. “Thank you, Monsieur, shall I take him now?”

“No, but when I leave your father. You see, he was sent to me by my son who is in India. I wish to keep him near me as long as possible. My son, your Highness, was a bad fellow. He ran away and joined the army against my wishes, and somehow we have never got together again. Still, I've a sneaking regard for him, and I believe he hasn't lost all his filial devotion. Bull is, in a way, a connecting link.”

The king turned again to the gravel pictures. These Englishmen were beyond him in the matter of analysis. Her Royal Highness smiled vaguely, and wondered what this son was like. Once more she smiled, then moved away toward the palace. The dog, seeing that she did not beckon, lay down again. An interval of silence followed her departure. The thought of the Englishman had traveled to India, the thought of the king to Osia, where the girl's mother slept. The former was first to rouse.

“Well, Sire, let us come to the business at hand, the subject of my last informal audience. It is true, then, that the consols for the loan of five millions of crowns are issued to-day, or have been, since the morning is passed?”

“Yes, it is true. I am well pleased. Jacobi and Brother have agreed to place them at face value. I intend to lay out a park for the public at the foot of the lake. That will demolish two millions and a half. The remainder is to be used in city

improvements and the reconstruction of the apartments in the palace, which are too small. If only you knew what a pleasure this affords me! I wish to make my good city of Bleiberg a thing of beauty—parks, fountains, broad and well paved streets."

"The Diet was unanimous in regard to this loan?"

"In fact they suggested it, and I was much in favor."

"You have many friends there, then?"

"Friends?" The king's face grew puzzled, and its animation faded away. "None that I know. This is positively the first time we ever agreed about anything."

"And did not that strike you as rather singular?"

"Why, no."

"Of course, the people are enthusiastic, considering the old rate of taxation will be renewed?" The diplomat reached over and pulled the dog's ears.

"So far as I can see," answered the king, who could make nothing of this interrogatory.

"Which, if your Majesty will pardon me, is not very far beyond your books."

"I have ministers."

"Who can see farther than your Majesty has any idea."

"Come, come, my friend," cried the king good-naturedly; "but a moment gone you were chiding me because I did nothing. I may not fill my coffers as you suggested, but I shall please my eye, which is something. Come; you have something to tell me."

"Will your Majesty listen?"

"I promise."

"And to hear?"

"I promise not only to listen, but to hear," laughing; "not only to hear, but to think. Is that sufficient?"

"For three years," began the Englishman, "I have been England's representative here. As a representative I could not meddle with your affairs, though it was possible to observe them. To-day I am an unfettered agent of self, and with your permission I shall talk to you as I have never talked before and never shall again."

The diplomat rose from his seat and walked up and down the path, his hands clasped behind his back, his chin in his collar. The bulldog yawned, stretched

himself, and followed his master, soberly and thoughtfully. After a while the Englishman returned to his chair and sat down. The dog gravely imitated him. He understood, perhaps better than the king, his master's mood. This pacing backward and forward was always the forerunner of something of great importance.

During the past year he had been the repository of many a secret. Well, he knew how to keep one. Did not he carry a secret which his master would have given much to know? Some one in far away India, after putting him into the ship steward's care, had whispered: “You tell the governor that I think just as much of him as ever.” He had made a desperate effort to tell it the moment he was liberated from the box, but he had not yet mastered that particular language which characterized his master's race.

“To begin with,” said the diplomat, “what would your Majesty say if I should ask permission to purchase the entire loan?”

CHAPTER II. THE COUP D'ETAT OF COUSIN JOSEF

The king, who had been leaning forward, fell back heavily in his seat, his eyes full wide and his mouth agape. Then, to express his utter bewilderment, he raised his hands above his head and limply dropped them.

“Five millions of crowns?” he gasped.

“Yes; what would your Majesty say to such a proposition?” complacently.

“I should say,” answered the king, with a nervous laugh, “that my friend had lost his senses, completely and totally.”

“The fact is,” the Englishman declared, “they were never keener nor more lucid than at this present moment.”

“But five millions!”

“Five millions; a bagatelle,” smiling.

“Certainly you can not be serious, and if you were, it is out of the question. Death of my life! The kingdom would be at my ears. The people would shout that I was selling out to the English, that I was putting them into the mill to grind for English sacks.”

“Your Majesty will recollect that the measure authorizing this loan was rather a peculiar one. Five millions were to be borrowed indiscriminately, of any man or body of men willing to advance the money on the securities offered. First come, first served, was not written, but it was implied. It was this which roused my curiosity, or cupidity, if you will.”

“I can not recollect that the bill was as you say,” said the king, frowning.

“I believe you. When the bill came to you, you were not expected to recollect anything but the royal signature. Have you read half of what you have signed and made law? No. I am serious. What is it to you or to the people, who secures this public mortgage, so long as the money is forthcoming? I desire to purchase at face value the twenty certificates.”

“As a representative of England?”

The diplomat smiled. The king's political ignorance was well known. “As a representative of England, Sire, I could not purchase the stubs from which these certificates are cut. And then, as I remarked, I am an unfettered agent of self.

The interest at two per cent. will be a fine income on a lump of stagnant money. Even in my own country, where millionaires are so numerous as to be termed common, I am considered a rich man. My personal property, aside from my estates, is five times the amount of the loan. A mere bagatelle, if I may use that pleasantry."

"Impossible, impossible!" cried the king, starting to his feet, while a line of worry ran across his forehead. He strode about impatiently slapping his boots with the riding stick. "It is impossible."

"Why do you say impossible, Sire?"

"I can not permit you to put in jeopardy a quarter of a million pounds," forgetting for the moment that he was powerless.

"Aha!" the diplomat cried briskly. "There is, then, beneath your weariness and philosophy, a fear?"

"A fear?" With an effort the king smoothed the line from his forehead. "Why should there be fear?"

"Why indeed, when our cousin Josef—" He stopped and looked toward the mountains.

"Well?" abruptly.

"I was thinking what a fine coup de maitre it would be for his Highness to gather in all these pretty slips of parchment given under the hand of Leopold."

"Small matter if he should. I should pay him." The king sat down. "And it is news to me that Josef can get together five millions."

"He has friends, rich and powerful friends."

"No matter, I should pay him."

"Are you quite sure?"

"What do you mean?"

"The face of the world changes in the course of ten years. Will there be five millions in your treasury ten years hence?"

"The wealth of my kingdom is not to be questioned," proudly, "nor its resources."

"But in ten years, with the ministers you have?" The Englishman shrugged doubtfully. "Why have you not formed a new cabinet of younger men? Why have you retained those of your predecessor, who are your natural enemies? You have tried and failed."

The expression of weariness returned to the king's face. He knew that all this

was but a preamble to something of deeper significance. He anticipated what was forming in the other's mind, but he wished to avoid a verbal declaration. O, he knew that there was a net of intrigue enmeshing him, but it was so very fine that he could not pick up the smallest thread whereby to unravel it. Down in his soul he felt the shame of the knowledge that he dared not. A dreamer, rushing toward the precipice, would rather fall dreaming than waken and struggle futilely.

“My friend,” he said, finally, sighing, “proceed. I am all attention.”

“I never doubted your Majesty's perspicacity. You do not know, but you suspect, what I am about to disclose to you. My hope is that, when I am done, your Majesty will throw Kant and the rest of your philosophers out of the window. The people are sullen at the mention of your name, while they cheer another. There is an astonishing looseness about your revenues. The reds and the socialists plot for revolution and a republic, which is a thin disguise for a certain restoration. Your cousin the duke visits you publicly twice each year. He has been in the city a week at a time incognito, yet your minister of police seems to know nothing.” The speaker ceased, and fondled the dahlia in his button-hole.

The king, noting the action, construed it as the subtle old diplomat intended he should. “Yes, yes! I am a king only for her sake. Go on. Tell me all.”

“The archbishop and the chancellor are the only friends you possess. The Marshal, from personal considerations merely, remains neutral. Your army, excepting the cuirassiers, are traitors to your house. The wisest thing you have done was to surround yourself with this mercenary body, whom you call the royal cuirassiers, only, instead of three hundred, you should have two thousand. Self-interest will make them true to you. You might find some means to pay them, for they would be a good buffer between you and your enemies. The president of the Diet and the members are passing bills which will eventually undermine you. How long it will take I can not say. But this last folly, the loan, which you could have got on without, caps the climax. The duke was in the city last week unknown to you. Your minister of finance is his intimate. This loan was a connivance of them all. Why ten years, when it could easily be liquidated in five? I shall tell you. The duke expects to force you into bankruptcy within that time, and when the creditor demands and you can not pay, you will be driven from here in disgrace.

“And where will you go? Certainly not to Osia, since you traded it for this throne. It was understood, when you assumed the reign, that the finances of the kingdom would remain unimpeachable. Bankrupt, the confederation will be forced to disavow you. They will be compelled to restore the throne to your

enemy, who, believe me, is most anxious to become your creditor.

“This is an independent state,—conditionally. The confederation have formed themselves into a protectorate. Why? I can only guess. One or more of them covet these beautiful lands. What are ten years to Josef, when a crown is the goal? Your revenues are slowly to decline, there will be internal troubles to eat up what money you have in the treasury. O, it is a plot so fine, so swiftly conceived, so cunningly devised that I would I were twenty years younger, to fight it with you! But I am old. My days for acting are past. I can only advise. He was sure of his quarry, this Josef whose hair is of many colors. Had you applied to the money syndicates of Europe, the banks of England, France, Germany, or Austria, your true sponsor, the result would always be the same: your ruin. Covertly I warned you not to sign; you laughed and signed. A trap was there, your own hand opened it. How they must have laughed at you! If you attempt to repudiate your signature the Diet has power to overrule you.

“Truly, the shade of Macchiavelli masks in the garb of your cousin. I admire the man's genius. This is his throne by right of inheritance. I do not blame him. Only, I wish to save you. If you were alone, why, I do not say that I should trouble myself, for you yourself would not be troubled. But I have grown to love that child of yours. It is all for her. Do you now understand why I make the request? It appears Quixotic? Not at all. Put my money in jeopardy? Not while the kingdom exists. If you can not pay back, your kingdom will. Perhaps you ask what is the difference, whether I or the duke becomes your creditor? This: in ten years I shall be happy to renew the loan. In ten years, if I am gone, there will be my son. You wonder why I do this. I repeat it is for your daughter. And perhaps,” with a dry smile, “it is because I have no love for Josef.”

“I will defeat him!” cried the king, a fire at last shining in his eyes.

“You will not.”

“I will appeal to the confederation and inform them of the plot.”

“The resource of a child! They would laugh at you for your pains. For they are too proud of their prowess in statecraft to tolerate a suspicion that your cousin is a cleverer man than all of them put together. There remains only one thing for you to do.”

“And what is that?” wearily.

“Accept my friendship at its true value.”

The king made no reply. He set his elbows on the arms of the rustic seat, interlaced his fingers and rested his chin on them, while his booted legs slid out before him. His meditation lengthened into several minutes. The diplomat

evinced no sign of impatience.

“Come with me,” said the king, rising quickly. “I will no longer dream. I will act. Come.”

The diplomat nodded approvingly; and together they marched toward the palace. The bulldog trotted on behind, his pink tongue lolling out of his black mouth, a white tusk or two gleaming on each side. The Lieutenant of the cuirassiers saluted as they passed him, and, when they had gone some distance, swung in behind. He observed with some concern that his Majesty was much agitated.

The business of the kingdom, save that performed in the Diet, was accomplished in the east wing of the palace; the king's apartments, aside from the state rooms, occupied the west wing. It was to the business section that the king conducted the diplomat. In the chamber of finance its minister was found busy at his desk. He glanced up casually, but gave an ejaculation of surprise when he perceived who his visitors were.

“O, your Majesty!” he cried, bobbing up and running out his chair. “Good afternoon, your Excellency,” to the Englishman, adjusting his gold-rimmed glasses, through which his eyes shone pale and cold.

The diplomat bowed. The little man reminded him of M. Thiers, that effervescence of soda tinctured with the bitterness of iron. He understood the distrust which Count von Wallenstein entertained for him, but he was not distrustful of the count. Distrust implies uncertainty, and the Englishman was not the least uncertain as to his conception of this gentleman of finance.

There were few men whom the count could not interpret; one stood before him. He could not comprehend why England had sent so astute a diplomat and politician to a third-rate kingdom. Of that which we can not understand we are suspicious, and the guilty are distrustful. Neither the minister of police nor his subordinates could fathom the purpose of this calm, dignified old man with the difficult English name.

“Count,” began the king, pleasantly, “his Excellency here has made a peculiar request.”

“And what might that be, Sire?”

“He offers to purchase the entire number of certificates issued to-day for our loan.”

“Five millions of crowns?” The minister's astonishment was so genuine that in jerking back his head his glasses slipped from his nose and dangled on the string.

The Englishman bowed again, the wrinkle of a smile on his face.

“I would not believe him serious at first, count,” said the king, laughing easily, “but he assured me that he is. What can be done about it?”

“O, your Majesty,” cried the minister, excitedly, “it would not be politic. And then the measure—”

“Is it possible that I have misconstrued its import?” the diplomat interposed with a fine air of surprise.

“You are familiar—” began the count, hesitatingly.

“Perfectly; that is, I believe so.”

“But England—”

“Has nothing whatever to do with the matter. Something greater, which goes by the name of self-interest.”

“Ah,” said the count, his wrinkles relaxing; “then it is on your own responsibility?”

“Precisely.”

“But five millions of crowns—two hundred and fifty thousand pounds!” The minister could not compose himself. “This is a vast sum of money. We expected not an individual, but a syndicate, to accept our securities, to become debtors to the various banks on the continent. But a personal affair! Five millions of crowns! The possibilities of your wealth overwhelm me.”

The Englishman smiled. “I dare say I have more than my share of this world's goods. I can give you a check for the amount on the bank of England.”

“Your Majesty's lamented predecessor—”

“Is dead,” said the king gently. He had no desire to hear the minister recount that ruler's virtues. “Peace to his ashes.”

“Five millions of crowns!” The minister had lost his equipoise in the face of the Englishman's great riches, of which hitherto he had held some doubts. Suddenly a vivid thought entered his confused brain. The paper cutter in his hand trembled. In the breathing space allowed him he began to calculate rapidly. The king and the diplomat had been in the garden; something had passed between them. What? The paper cutter slowly ceased its uneven movements. The count calmly placed it behind the inkwells. .... The Englishman knew. The glitter of gold gave way to the thought of the peril. A chasm yawned at his feet. But he was an old soldier in the game of words and cross-purposes.

“We should be happy to accord you the privilege of becoming the kingdom's

creditor," he said, smiling at the diplomat, whom nothing had escaped. "I am afraid, however, that your request has been submitted too late. At ten o'clock this morning the transfer of the certificates would have been a simple matter. There are twenty in all; it may not be too late to secure some of them." He looked tranquilly from the Englishman to the king.

The smiling mask fell from the king's face; he felt that he was lost. He tried to catch his friend's eye, but the diplomat was deeply interested in the console of the fireplace.

"They seem to be at a premium," the Englishman said, "which speaks well for the prosperity of the country. I am sorry to have troubled you."

"It would have been a pleasure indeed," replied the count. He stood secure within his fortress, so secure that he would have liked to laugh.

"It is too bad," said the king, pulling his thoughts together.

"Your Majesty is giving the matter too much importance," said the diplomat. "It was merely a whim. I shall have the pleasure and honor of presenting my successor this evening."

The count bent low, while the king nodded absently. He was thinking that a penful of ink, carelessly trailed over a sheet of paper, had lost him his throne. He was about to draw the arm of the diplomat through his own, when his step was arrested by the entrance of a messenger who presented a letter to the minister of finance.

"With your Majesty's permission," he said, tearing open the envelope. As he read the contents, his shoulders sank to their habitual stoop and benignity once more shone in the place of alertness. "Decidedly, fate is not with your Excellency to-day. M. Jacobi writes me that four millions have already been disposed of to M. Everard & Co., English bankers in the Konigstrasse, who are representing a French firm in this particular instance. I am very sorry."

"It is of no moment now," replied the Englishman indifferently.

The adverb which concluded this declaration caught the keen ear of the minister, who grew tall again. What would he not have given to read the subtle brain of his opponent, for opponent he knew him to be! His intense scrutiny was blocked by a pair of most innocent eyes.

"Well," said the king impatiently, "let us be gone, my friend. The talk of money always leaves a copperish taste on my tongue."

Arm in arm they passed from the chamber. When the door closed behind them, the minister of finance drew his handkerchief across his brow.

“Everard & Co.,” mused the Englishman aloud. “Was it not indeed a stroke for your cousin to select them as his agents? You will in truth be accused of selling out to the English. But there is a coincidence in all this.”

“I am lost!” said the king.

“On the contrary, you are saved. Everard & Co. are my bankers and attorneys; in fact, I own an interest in the firm.”

“What is this you tell me?” cried the king.

“Sire, we English have a peculiar trait; it is asking for something after we have taken it. The human countenance is a fine picture book. I should like to read that belonging to your cousin Josef, providing I could read unobserved.”

“My friend!” said the king.

“Say nothing. Here is the bulldog; take him to her Royal Highness with my compliments. There is no truer friend than an animal of his breed. He is steadfast in his love, for he makes but few friends; he is a good companion, for he is undemonstrative; he can read and draw inferences, and your enemies will be his. I shall bid you good afternoon. God be with your Majesty.”

“Ah, to lose you now!” said, the king, a heaviness in his heart such as presentiment brings.

The diplomat turned and went down the grand corridor. The bulldog tugged at his chain. Animals are gifted with prescience. He knew that his master had passed forever out of his life. Presently he heard the voice of the princess calling; and the glamour of royalty encompassed him,—something a human finds hard to resist, and he was only a dog.

Meanwhile another messenger had entered the chamber of finance and had gone. On the minister's desk lay a crumpled sheet of paper on which was written:

“Treason and treachery! It has at this moment been ascertained that, while pretending to be our agents in securing the consols, M. Everard & Co. now refuse to deliver them into the custody of Baron von Rumpf, as agreed, and further, that M. Everard & Co. are bankers and attorneys to his Excellency the British minister. He must not leave this city with those consols.”

With his eyes riveted on these words, the minister of finance, huddled in his chair, had fallen into a profound study.

There were terrible times in the house of Josef that night.

CHAPTER III. AN EPISODE TEN YEARS AFTER

One fine September morning in a year the date of which is of no particular importance, a man stepped out of a second-class carriage on to the canopied platform of the railway terminus in the ancient and picturesque city of Bleiberg. He yawned, shook himself, and stretched his arms and legs, relieved to find that the tedious journey from Vienna had not cramped those appendages beyond recovery.

He stood some inches above the average height, and was built up in a manner that suggested the handiwork of a British drill-master, his figure being both muscular and symmetrical. Besides, there was on his skin that rich brown shadow which is the result only of the forces of the sun and wind, a life in the open air. This color gave peculiar emphasis to the yellow hair and mustache. His face was not handsome, if one accept the Greek profile as a model of manly beauty, but it was cleanly and boldly cut, healthful, strong and purposeful, based on determined jaws and a chin which would have been obstinate but for the presence of a kindly mouth.

A guard deposited at his feet a new hatbox, a battered traveling bag and two gun cases which also gave evidence of rough usage. The luggage was literally covered with mutilated square and oblong slips of paper of many colors, on which were printed the advertisements of far-sighted hotel keepers all the way from Bombay to London and half-way back across the continent.

There was nothing to be seen, however, indicative of the traveler's name. He surveyed his surroundings with lively interest shining in his gray eyes, one of which peered through a monocle encircled by a thin rim of tortoise shell. He watched the fussy customs officials, who, by some strange mischance, overlooked his belongings. Finally he made an impatient gesture.

“Find me a cab,” he said to the attentive guard, who, with an eye to the main chance, had waved off the approach of a station porter. “If the inspectors are in no hurry, I am.”

“At once, my lord;” and the guard, as he stooped and lifted the luggage, did not see the start which this appellation caused the stranger to make, but who, after a moment, was convinced that the guard had given him the title merely out of politeness. The guard placed the traps inside of one of the many vehicles stationed at the street exit of the terminus. He was an intelligent and deductive

servant.

The traveler was some noted English lord who had come to Bleiberg to shoot the famed golden pheasant, and had secured a second-class compartment in order to demonstrate his incognito. Persons who traveled second-class usually did so to save money; yet this tall Englishman, since the train departed from Vienna, had almost doubled in gratuities the sum paid for his ticket. The guard stood respectfully at the door of the cab, doffed his cap, into which a memento was dropped, and went along about his business.

The Englishman slammed the door, the jehu cracked his whip, and a moment later the hoarse breathings of the motionless engines became lost in the sharper noises of the city carts. The unknown leaned against the faded cushions, curled his mustache, and smiled as if well satisfied with events. It is quite certain that his sense of ease and security would have been somewhat disturbed had he known that another cab was close on the track of his, and that its occupant, an officer of the city gendarmerie, alternately smiled and frowned as one does who floats between conviction and uncertainty. At length the two vehicles turned into the Konigstrasse, the principal thoroughfare of the capital, and here the Englishman's cab came to a stand. The jehu climbed down and opened the door.

“Did Herr say the Continental?” he asked.

“No; the Grand.”

The driver shrugged, remounted his box, and drove on. The Grand Hotel was clean enough and respectable, but that was all that could be said in its favor. He wondered if the Englishman would haggle over the fare. Englishmen generally did. He was agreeably disappointed, however, when, on arriving at the mean hostelry, his passenger plunged a hand into a pocket and produced three Franz-Josef florins.

“You may have these,” he said, “for the trouble of having them exchanged into crowns.”

As he whipped up, the philosophical cabman mused that these tourists were beyond the pale of his understanding. With a pocket full of money, and to put up at the Grand! Why not the Continental, which lay close to the Werter See, the palaces, the royal and public gardens? It was at the Continental that the fine ladies and gentlemen from Vienna, and Innsbruck, and Munich, and Belgrade, resided during the autumn months. But the Grand—ach! it was in the heart of the shops and markets, and within a stone's throw of that gloomy pile of granite designated in the various guide books as the University of Bleiberg.

The Englishman had some difficulty in finding a pen that would write, and the

ink was oily, and the guest-book was not at the proper angle. At last he managed to form the letters of his name, which was John Hamilton. After some deliberation, he followed this with “England.” The proprietor, who acted as his own clerk, drew the book toward him, and after some time, deciphered the cabalistic signs.

“Ah, Herr John Hamilton of England; is that right?”

“Yes; I am here for a few days' shooting. Can you find me a man to act as guide?”

“This very morning, Herr.”

“Thanks.”

Then he proceeded up the stairs to the room assigned to him. The smell of garlic which pervaded the air caused him to make a grimace. Once alone in the room, he looked about. There was neither soap nor towel, but there was a card which stated that the same could be purchased at the office. He laughed. A pitcher of water and a bowl stood on a small table, which, by the presence of a mirror (that could not in truth reflect anything but light and darkness), served as a dresser. These he used to good advantage, drying his face and hands on the white counterpane of the bed, and laughing quietly as he did so. Next he lit a pipe, whose capacity for tobacco was rather less than that of a lady's thimble, sat in a chair by the window, smoked quietly, and gazed down on the busy street.

It was yet early in the morning; sellers of vegetables, men and women peasants, with bare legs and wooden shoes, driving shaggy Servian ponies attached to low, cumbersome carts, passed and repassed, to and from the markets. A gendarme, leaning the weight of his shoulder on the guard of a police saber, rested against the corner of a wine shop across the way. Students, wearing squat caps with vizors, sauntered indolently along, twirling canes and ogling all who wore petticoats. Occasionally the bright uniform of a royal cuirassier flashed by; and the Englishman would lean over the sill and gaze after him, nodding his head in approval whenever the cuirassier sat his horse well.

In the meantime the gendarme, who followed him from the station, had entered the hotel, hastily glanced at the freshly written name, and made off toward the palace.

“Well, here we are,” mused the Englishman, pressing his thumb into the bowl of his pipe. “The affair promises some excitement. To-morrow will be the sixth; on the twentieth it will be a closed incident, as the diplomats would say. I don't know what brought me here so far ahead of time. I suppose I must look out for a crack on the head from some one I don't know, but who knows me so deuced

well that he has hunted me in India and England, first with fine bribes, then with threats." He glanced over his shoulder in the direction of the gun cases. "It was a capital idea, otherwise a certain ubiquitous customs official, who lies in wait for the unwary at the frontier, would now be an inmate of a hospital. To have lived thirty-five years, and to have ground out thirteen of them in her Majesty's, is to have acquired a certain disdain for danger, even when it is masked. I am curious to see how far these threats will go. It will take a clever man to trap me. The incognito is a fort. By the way, I wonder how the inspectors at the station came to overlook my traps? Strange, considering what I have gone through."

At this moment the knuckles of a hand beat against the door.

"Come in!" answered the Englishman, wheeling his chair, but making no effort to rise. "Come in!"

The door swung in, and there entered a short, spectacled man in dark gray clothes which fairly bristled with brass buttons. He was the chief inspector of customs. He bowed.

The Englishman, consternation widening his eyes, lowered his pipe.

"Monsieur Hamilton's pardon," the inspector began, speaking in French, "but with your permission I shall inspect your luggage and glance at your passports." He bowed again.

"Now do you know, mon ami," replied the Englishman, "that Monsieur Hamilton will not permit you to gaze even into yonder washbowl?" He rose lazily.

"But, Monsieur," cried the astonished official, to whom non-complaisance in the matter of inspection was unprecedented, "you certainly will not put any obstacle in the path of my duty!"

"Your duty, Monsieur the Spectacles, is to inspect at the station. There your assistants refused to award me their attention. You are trespassing."

"Monsieur forgets," sternly; "it is the law. Is it possible that I shall be forced to call in the gendarmes to assist me? This is extraordinary!"

"I dare say it is, on your part," admitted the Englishman, polishing the bowl of his pipe against the side of his nose. "You had best go at once. If you do not, I shall take you by the nape of your Bleibergian neck and kick you down the stairs. I have every assurance of my privileges. The law here, unless it has changed within the past hour, requires inspection at the frontier, and at the capital; but your jurisdiction does not extend beyond the stations. Bon jour, Monsieur the Spectacles; bon jour!"

“O, Monsieur!”

“Good day!”

“Monsieur, it is my duty; I must!”

“Good day! How will you go, by the stairs or by the window? I—but wait!” an idea coming to him which caused him to reflect on the possible outcome of violence done to a government official, who, perhaps, was discharging his peculiar duty at the orders of superiors. He walked swiftly to the door and slid the bolt, to the terror of the inspector, on whose brow drops of perspiration began to gather. “Now,” opening the hat box and taking out a silk hat, “this is a hat, purchased in Paris at Cook's. There is nothing in the lining but felt. Look into the box; nothing. Take out your book and follow me closely,” he continued, dividing the traveling bag into halves, and he began to enumerate the contents.

“But, Monsieur!” remonstrated the inspector, who did not enjoy this infringement of his prerogatives; his was the part to overhaul. “This is—”

“Be still and follow me,” and the Englishman went on with the inventory. “There!” when he had done, “not a dutiable thing except this German-Scotch whisky, and that is so bad that I give it to you rather than pay duty. What next? My passports? Here they are, absolutely flawless, vised by the authorities in Vienna.”

The slips crackled in the fluttering fingers of the inspector. “They are as you say, Monsieur,” he said, returning the permits. Then he added timidly, “And the gun cases?”

“The gun cases!” The pipe spilled its coal to the floor. “The gun cases!”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“And why do you wish to look into them?” with agitation.

“Smugglers sometimes fill them with cigars.”

“Ah!” The Englishman selected two loaded shells, drew a gun from the case, threw up the breech and rammed in the shells. Then he extended the weapon to within an inch of the terrified inspector's nose. “Now, Monsieur the Spectacles, look in there and tell me what you see.”

The fellow sank half-fainting into a chair. “Mon Dieu, Monsieur, would you kill me who have a family?”

“What's a customs inspector, more or less?” asked the terrible islander, laughing. “I advise you not to ask me to let you look into the other gun, out of consideration for your family. It has hair triggers, and my fingers tremble.”

“Monsieur, Monsieur, you do wrong to trifle with the law. I shall be obliged to

report you. You will be arrested."

"Nothing of the kind," was the retort. "I have only to inform the British minister how remiss you were in your obligations. I should go free, whereas you would be discharged. But what I demand to know is, what the devil is the meaning of this farce."

"I am simply obeying orders," answered the inspector, wiping his forehead. "It is not a farce, as Monsieur will find." Then, as if to excuse this implied threat: "Will Monsieur please point the gun the other way?"

The Englishman unloaded the gun and tossed it on the bed.

"Thanks. In coming here I simply obeyed the orders of the minister of police."

"And what in the world did you expect to find?"

"We are looking—that is, they are looking—O, Monsieur, it is impossible for me to disclose to you my government's purposes."

"What and whom were you expecting?" demanded the Englishman. "You shall not leave this room till you have fully explained this remarkable intrusion."

"We were expecting the Lord and Baronet Fitzgerald."

"The lord!" laughing. "Does the lord visit Bleiberg often, then, that you prepare this sort of a reception? And the Baronet Fitzgerald?"

"They are the same and the one person."

"And who the deuce is he; a spy, a smuggler, a villain, or what?"

"As to that, Monsieur," with a wonder why this man laughed, "I know no more than you. But I do know that for the past month every Englishman has been subjected to this surveillance, and has submitted with more grace than you," with an oblique glance.

"What! Examined his luggage at the hotel?"

"Yes, Monsieur. It is the order of the minister of police. I know not why." The natural color was returning to his cheeks.

"This is a fine country, I must say. At least the king should acquaint his visitors with the true cause of this treatment." In his turn the Englishman resorted to oblique glances.

"The king?" The inspector raised a shoulder and spread his hands. "The king is a paralytic, Monsieur, and has little to say these days."

"A paralytic? I thought he was called `the handsome monarch'?"

"That was years ago, Monsieur. For three years he has been helpless and bedridden. The archbishop is the real king nowadays. But he meddles not with

the police."

"This is very sad. I suppose it would be impossible for strangers to see him now."

"An audience?" a sparkle behind the spectacles. "Is your business with the king, Monsieur?"

"My business is mine," shortly. "I am only a tourist, and should have liked to see the king from mere curiosity. However, had you explained all this to me, I should not have caused you so many gray hairs."

"Monsieur did not give me the chance," simply.

"True," the Englishman replied soberly. He began to think that he had been over hasty in asserting his privileges. "But all this has nothing to do with me. My name is John Hamilton. See, it is engraved on the stock of the gun," catching it up and holding it under the spectacled eyes, which still observed it with some trepidation. "That is the name in my passports, in the book down stairs, in the lining of my hat. I am sorry, since you were only obeying orders, that my rough play has caused you alarm." He unbolted the door. "Good morning."

The inspector left the room as swiftly as his short legs could carry him, ignoring the ethics of common politeness. As he stumbled down the stairs he cursed the minister of police for requiring this spy work of him, and not informing him why it was done. Ah, these cursed Anglais from Angleterre! They were all alike, and this one was the worst he had ever encountered. And those ugly black orifices in the gun! Peste! He would resign! Yes, certainly he would resign.

As to the Englishman, he stood in the center of the room and scratched his head. "Hang it, I've made an ass of myself. That blockhead will have the gendarmes about my ears. If they arrest me there will be the devil to pay. The Lord and the Baronet Fitzgerald!" he repeated. He sat down on the edge of the bed, and fell to laughing again. "Confound these picture-book kingdoms! They always take themselves so seriously. Well, if the gendarmes call this afternoon I'll not be at home. No, thank you. I shall be hunting pheasants."

And thereat he set to work cleaning the gun which had all but prostrated the inspector. Soon the room smelled of oiled rags and tobacco. Some-times the worker whistled softly. Sometimes he let the gun fall against his knee, and stared dreamily through the window at the flight of the ragged clouds. Again, he would shake his head, as if there were something which he failed to understand. Half an hour passed, when again some one knocked on the door.

"Come in!" Under his breath he added: "The gendarmes, likely."

But it was only the proprietor of the hotel. “Asking Herr's pardon,” he said, “for this intrusion, but I have secured a man for you. I have the honor to recommend Johann Kopf as a good guide and hunter.”

“Send him up. If he pleases me, I'll use him.”

The proprietor withdrew.

Johann Kopf proved to be a young German with a round, ruddy face, which was so innocent of guile as to be out of harmony with the shrewd, piercing black eyes looking out of it. The Englishman eyed him inquisitively, even suspiciously.

“Are you a good hunter?” he asked.

“There is none better hereabout,” answered Johann, twirling his cap with noticeably white fingers. It was only in after days that the Englishman appreciated the full significance of this answer.

“Speak English?”

“No. Herr's German is excellent, however.”

“Humph!” The Englishman gave a final glance into the shining tubes of the gun, snapped the breach, and slipped it into the case. “You'll do. Return to the office; I'll be down presently.”

“Will Herr hunt this morning?”

“No; what I wish this morning is to see the city of Bleiberg.”

“That is simple,” said Johann. The fleeting, imperceptible smile did not convict his eyes of false keenness.

He bowed out. When the door closed the Englishman waited until the sound of retreating steps failed. Then he took the gun case which he had not yet opened, and thrust it under the mattress of the bed.

“Johann,” he said, as he put on a soft hat and drew a cane from the straps of the traveling bag, “you will certainly precede me in our hunting expeditions. I do not like your eyes; they are not at home in your boyish face. Humph! what a country. Every one speaks a different tongue.”

The city of Bleiberg lay on a hill and in the valleys which fell away to the east and west. It was divided into two towns, the upper and the lower. The upper town and that part which lay on the shores of the Werter See was the modern and fashionable district. It was here that the king and the archbishop had their palaces and the wealthy their brick and stone. The public park skirted the lake, and was patterned after those fine gardens which add so much to the picturesqueness of Vienna and Berlin. There were wide gravel paths and long avenues of lofty chestnuts and lindens, iron benches, fountains and winding

flower beds. The park, the palaces, and the Continental Hotel enclosed a public square, paved with asphalt, called the Hohenstaufenplatz, in the center of which rose a large marble fountain of several streams, guarded by huge bronze wolves. Here, too, were iron benches which were, for the most part, the meeting-place of the nursemaids. Carriages were allowed to make the circuit, but not to obstruct the way.

The Konigstrasse began at the Platz, divided the city, and wound away southward, merging into the highway which continued to the Thalian Alps, some thirty miles distant. The palaces were at the southeast corner of the Platz, first the king's, then the archbishop's. The private gardens of each ran into the lake. Directly across from the palaces stood the cathedral, a relic of five centuries gone. On the northwest corner stood the Continental Hotel, with terrace and parapet at the water's edge, and a delightful open-air cafe facing the Platz. September and October were prosperous months in Bleiberg. Fashionable people who desired quiet made Bleiberg an objective point. The pheasants were plump, there were boars, gray wolves, and not infrequently Monsieur Fourpaws of the shaggy coat wandered across from the Carpathians.

As to the lower town, it was given over to the shops and markets, the barracks, the university, and the Rathhaus, which served as the house of the Diet. It was full of narrow streets and quaint dwellings.

Up the Konigstrasse the guide led the Englishman, who nodded whenever the voluble chatter of the German pleased him. When they began the descent of the hill, the vista which opened before them drew from the Englishman an ejaculation of delight. There lay the lake, like a bright new coin in a green purse; the light of the sun broke on the white buildings and flashed from the windows; and the lawns twinkled like emeralds.

“It makes Vienna look to her laurels, eh, Herr?” said Johann.

“But it must have cost a pretty penny.”

“Aye, that it did; and the king is being impressed with that fact every day. There are few such fine palaces outside of first-class kingdoms. The cathedral there was erected at the desire of a pope, born five hundred years ago. It is full of romance. There is to be a grand wedding there on the twentieth of this month. That is why there are so many fashionable people at the hotels. The crown prince of Carnavia, which is the large kingdom just east of us, is to wed the Princess Alexia, the daughter of the king.”

“On the twentieth? That is strange.”

“Strange?”

“I meant nothing,” said the Englishman, jerking back his shoulders; “I had in mind another affair.”

There was a flash in Johann's eyes, but he subdued it before the Englishman was aware of its presence. “However,” said Johann, “there is something strange. The prince was to have arrived a week ago to complete the final arrangements for the wedding. His suite has been here a week, but no sign of his Highness. He stopped over a train at Ehrenstein to visit for a few hours a friend of the king, his father. Since then nothing has been heard from him. The king, it is said, fears that some accident has happened to him. Carnavia is also disturbed over this disappearance. Some whisper of a beautiful peasant girl. Who can say?”

“Any political significance in this marriage?”

“Leopold expects to strengthen his throne by the alliance. But—” Johann's mouth closed and his tongue pushed out his cheek. “There will be some fine doings in the good city of Bleiberg before the month is gone. The minister from the duchy has been given his passports. Every one concedes that trouble is likely to ensue. Baron von Rumpf—”

“Baron von Rumpf,” repeated the Englishman thoughtfully.

“Yes; he is not a man to submit to accusations without making a disagreeable defense.”

“What does the duke say?”

“The duke?”

“Yes.”

“His Highness has been dead these four years.”

“Dead four years? So much for man and his futile dreams. Dead four years,” absently.

“What did you say, Herr?”

“I? Nothing. How did he die?”

“He was thrown from his horse and killed. But the duchess lives, and she is worthy of her sire. Eh, Herr, there is a woman for you! She should sit on this throne; it is hers by right. These Osians are aliens and were forced on us.”

“It seems to me, young man, that you are talking treason.”

“That is my business, Herr.” Johann laughed. “I am a socialist, and occasionally harangue for the reds. And sometimes, when I am in need of money, I find myself in the employ of the police.”

The muscles of the Englishman's jaws hardened, then they relaxed. The

expression on the face of his guide was free from anything but bonhomie.

“One must live,” Johann added deprecatingly.

“Yes, one must live,” replied the Englishman.

“O! but I could sell some fine secrets to the Osians had they money to pay. Ach! but what is the use? The king has no money; he is on the verge of bankruptcy, and this pretty bit of scenery is the cause of it.”

“So you are a socialist?” said the Englishman, passing over Johann's declamatory confidences.

“Yes, Herr. All men are brothers.”

“Go to!” laughed the Englishman, “you aren't even a second cousin to me. But stay, what place is this we are passing?” indicating with his cane a red-brick mansion which was fronted by broad English lawns and protected from intrusion by a high iron fence.

“That is the British legation, Herr.”

The Englishman stopped and stared, unconscious of the close scrutiny of the guide. His eyes traveled up the wide flags leading to the veranda, and he drew a picture of a square-shouldered old man tramping backward and forward, the wind tangling his thin white hair, his hands behind his back, his chin in his collar and at his heels a white bulldog. Rapidly another picture came. It was an English scene. And the echo of a voice fell on his ears. “My way and the freedom of the house and the key to the purse; your way and a closed door while I live. You can go, but you can not come back. You have decided? Yes? Then good morning.” Thirteen years, thirteen years! He had sacrificed the freedom of the house and the key to the purse, the kind eyes and the warm pressure of that old hand. And for what? Starvation in the deserts, plenty of scars and little of thanks, ingratitude and forgetfulness.

And now the kind eyes were closed and the warm hand cold. O, to recall the vanished face, the silent voice, the misspent years, the April days and their illusions! The Englishman took the monocle from his eye and looked at it, wondering what had caused the sudden blur.

“There was a fine old man there in the bygone days,” said Johann.

“And who was he?”

“Lord Fitzgerald, the British minister. He and Leopold were close friends.” Johann's investigating gaze went unrewarded. The Englishman's face had resumed its expression of mild curiosity.

“Ah; a compatriot of mine,” he said. Inwardly he mused: “This guide is

watching me; let him catch me if he can. His duchess? I know far too much of her!”

“He was a millionaire, too,” went on Johann.

“Well, we can't all be rich. Come.”

They crossed the Strasse and traversed the walk at the side of the palace enclosures. The Englishman aimlessly trailed his cane along the green pickets of the fence till they ended in a stone arch which rose high over the driveway. The gates were open, and coming toward the two wanderers as they stood at the curb rolled the royal barouche, on each side of which rode a mounted cuirassier, sashed and helmeted. The Englishman, however, had observed nothing; he was lost in some dream.

“Look, Herr!” cried Johann, rousing the other by a pull at the sleeve. “Look!” Socialist though he claimed to be, Johann touched his cap.

In the barouche, leaning back among the black velvet cushions, her face mellowed by the shade of a small parasol, was a young woman of nineteen or twenty, as beautiful as a da Vinci freshly conceived. The Englishman saw a pair of grave dark eyes which, in the passing, met his and held them. He caught his breath.

“Who is that?” he asked.

“That is her Royal Highness the Crown Princess Alexia.”

Afterward the Englishman remembered seeing a white dog lying on the opposite seat.

CHAPTER IV. AN ADVENTURE WITH ROYALTY

Maurice Carewe, attached to the American legation in Vienna, leaned against the stone parapet which separated the terraced promenade of the Continental Hotel from the Werter See, and wondered what had induced him to come to Bleiberg.

He had left behind him the glory of September in Vienna, a city second only to Paris in fashion and gaiety; Vienna, with its inimitable bands, its incomparable gardens, its military maneuvers, its salons, its charming women; and all for a fool's errand. His Excellency was to blame. He had casually dropped the remark that the duchy's minister, Baron von Rumpf, had been given his passports as a persona non grata by the chancellor of the kingdom, and that a declaration of war was likely to follow. Maurice's dormant love of journalistic inquiry had become aroused, and he had asked permission to investigate the affair, a favor readily granted to him.

But here he was, on the scene, and nobody knew anything, and nobody could tell anything. The duchess had remained silent. Not unnaturally he wished himself back in Vienna. There were no court fetes in the city of Bleiberg. The king's condition was too grave to permit them. And, besides, there had been no real court in Bleiberg for the space of ten years, so he was told. Those solemn affairs of the archbishop's, given once the week for the benefit of the corps diplomatique, were dull and spiritless. Her Royal Highness was seldom seen, save when she drove through the streets. Persons who remembered the reign before told what a mad, gay court it had been. Now it was funereal. The youth and beauty of Bleiberg held a court of its own. Royalty was not included, nor did it ask to be.

A strange capital, indeed, Maurice reflected, as he gazed down into the cool, brown water. He regretted his caprice. There were pretty women in Vienna. Some of them belonged to the American colony. They danced well, they sang and played and rode. He had taught some of them how to fence, and he could not remember the times he had been “buttoned” while paying too much attention to their lips and eyes. For Maurice loved a thing of beauty, were it a woman, a horse or a Mediterranean sunset. What a difference between these two years in Vienna and that year in Calcutta! He never would forget the dingy office, with its tarnished sign, “U. S. Consul,” tacked insecurely on the door, and the utter

loneliness.

He cast a pebble into the lake, and watched the ripples roll away and disappear, and ruminated on a life full of color and vicissitude. He remembered the Arizona days, the endless burning sand, the dull routine of a cavalry trooper, the lithe brown bodies of the Apaches, the first skirmish and the last. From a soldier he had turned journalist, tramped the streets of Washington in rain and shine, living as a man lived who must.

One day his star had shot up from the nadir of obscurity, not very far, but enough to bring his versatility under the notice of the discerning Secretary of State, who, having been a friend of the father, offered the son a berth in the diplomatic corps. A consulate in a South American republic, during a revolutionary crisis, where he had shown consummate skill in avoiding political complications (and where, by a shrewd speculation in gold, he had feathered his nest for his declining years), proved that the continual incertitude of a journalistic career is a fine basis for diplomatic work. From South America he had gone to Calcutta, thence to Austria.

He was only twenty-nine, which age in some is youth. He possessed an old man's wisdom and a boy's exuberance of spirits. He laughed whenever he could; to him life was a panorama of vivid pictures, the world a vast theater to which somehow he had gained admission. His beardless countenance had deceived more than one finished diplomat, for it was difficult to believe that behind it lay an earnest purpose and a daring courage. If he bragged a little, quizzed graybeards, sought strange places, sported with convention, and eluded women, it was due to his restlessness. Yet, he had the secretiveness of sand; he absorbed, but he revealed nothing. He knew his friends; they thought they knew him. It was his delight to have women think him a butterfly, men write him down a fool; it covered up his real desires and left him free.

What cynicism he had was mellowed by a fanciful humor. Whether with steel or with words, he was a master of fence; and if at times some one got under his guard, that some one knew it not. To let your enemy see that he has hit you is to give him confidence. He saw humor where no one else saw it, and tragedy where it was not suspected. He was one of those rare individuals who, when the opportunity of chance refuses to come, makes one.

“Germany and Austria are great countries,” he mused, lighting a cigar. “Every hundredth man is a king, one in fifty is a duke, every tenth man is a prince, and one can not take a corner without bumping into a count or a baron. Even the hotel waiters are disquieting; there is that embarrassing atmosphere about them which suggests nobility in durance vile. As for me, I prefer Kentucky, where

every man is a colonel, and you never make a mistake. And these kingdoms!" He indulged in subdued laughter. "They are always like comic operas. I find myself looking around every moment for the merry villagers so happy and so gay (at fifteen dollars the week), the eternal innkeeper and the perennial soubrette his daughter, the low comedian and the self-conscious tenor. Heigho! and not a soul in Bleiberg knows me, nor cares.

"I'd rather talk five minutes to a pretty woman than eat stuffed pheasants the year around, and the stuffed pheasant is about all Bleiberg can boast of. Well, here goes for a voyage of discovery;" and he passed down the stone steps to the pier, quite unconscious of the admiring glances of the women who fluttered back and forth on the wide balconies above.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon; a fresh wind redolent of pine and resin blew across the lake. Maurice climbed into a boat and pulled away with a strong, swift stroke, enjoying the liberation of his muscles. A quarter of a mile out he let the oars drift and took his bearings. He saw the private gardens of the king and the archbishop, and, convinced that a closer view would afford him entertainment, he caught up the oars again and moved inland.

The royal gardens ran directly into the water, while those of the archbishop were protected by a wall of brick five or six feet in height, in the center of which was a gate opening on the water. Behind the gate was a small boat dock. Maurice plied the oars vigorously. He skirted the royal gardens, and the smell of newly mown lawns filled the air. Soon he was gliding along the sides of the moss-grown walls. A bird chirped in the overhanging boughs. He was about to cast loose the oars again, when the boat was brought to a violent stop. A few yards waterward from the gate there lay, hidden in the shadowed water, a sunken pier. On one of the iron piles the boat had become impaled.

Maurice was tumbled into the bow of the boat, which began rapidly to fill. First he swore, then he laughed, for he was possessed of infinite good humor. The only thing left for him to do was to swim for the gate. With a rueful glance at his thin clothes, he dropped himself over the side of the wreck and struck out toward the gate. The water, having its source from the snowclad mountains, was icy. He was glad enough to grasp the lower bars of the gate and draw himself up. He was on the point of climbing over, when a picture presented itself to his streaming eyes.

Seated on a bench made of twisted vine was a young girl. She held in her hand a book, but she was not reading it. She was scanning the unwritten pages of some reverie; her eyes, dark, large and wistful, were holding communion with the god of dreams. A wisp of hair, glossy as coal, trembled against a cheek white

as the gown she wore.

At her side, blinking in the last rays of the warm sun, sat a bulldog, toothless and old. Now and then a sear leaf, falling in a zig-zag course, rustled past his ears, and he would shake his head as if he, too, were dreaming and the leaves disturbed him. All at once he sniffed, his ears stood forward, and a low growl broke the enchantment. The girl, on discovering Maurice, closed the book and rose. The dog, still growling, jumped down and trotted to the gate. Maurice thought that it was time to speak.

“Mademoiselle,” he said, “pardon this intrusion, but my boat has met with an accident.”

The girl came to the gate. “Why, Monsieur,” she exclaimed, “you are wet!”

“That is true,” replied Maurice, his teeth beginning to knock together. “I was forced to swim. If you will kindly open the gate and guide me to the street, I shall be much obliged to you.”

The gate swung outward, and in a moment Maurice was on dry land, or the next thing to it, which was the boat-dock.

“Thank you,” he said.

“O! And you might have been drowned,” compassion lighting her beautiful eyes. “Sit down on the bench, Monsieur, for you must be weak. And it was that sunken pier? I shall speak to Monseigneur; he must have it removed. Bull, stop growling; you are very impolite; the gentleman is in distress.”

Maurice sat down, not because he was weak, but because the desire to gain the street had suddenly subsided. Who was this girl who could say “must” to the formidable prelate? His quick eye noticed that she showed no sign of embarrassment. Indeed, she impressed him as one who was superior to that petty disturbance of collected thought. Somehow it seemed to him, as she stood there looking down at him, that he, too, should be standing. But she put forth a hand with gentle insistence when he made as though to rise. What an exquisite face, he thought. Against the whiteness of her skin her lips burned like poppy petals. Innocent, inquisitive eyes smiled gently, eyes in whose tranquil depths lay the glory of the world, asleep. Presently a color, faint and fugitive, dimmed the whiteness of her cheeks. Maurice, conscious of his rudeness and of a warmth in his own cheeks, instinctively lowered his gaze.

“Pardon my rudeness,” he said.

“What is your name, Monsieur,” she asked calmly.

“It is Maurice Carewe. I am living in Vienna. I came to Bleiberg for pleasure,

but the first day has not been propitious," with an apologetic glance at his dripping clothes.

"Maurice Carewe," slowly repeating the full name as if to imprint it on her memory. "You are English?"

He said: "No; I am one of those dreadful Yankees you have possibly read about."

Her teeth gleamed. "Yes, I have heard of them. But you do not appear so very dreadful; though at present you are truly not at your best. What is this—this Yankeeland like?"

"It would take me ever so long to tell you about it, it is such a great country."

"You are a patriot!" clapping her hands. "No other country is so fine and large and great as your own. But tell me, is it as large as Austria?"

"Austria? You will not be offended if I tell you?"

"No."

"Well," with fun in his eyes, "it is my opinion that I could hide Austria in my country so thoroughly that nobody would ever be able to find it again." He wondered how she would accept this statement.

She lifted her chin and laughed, and the bulldog wagged his tail, as he always did when mirth touched her. He jumped up beside Maurice and looked into his face. Maurice patted his broad head, and he submitted. The girl looked rather surprised.

"Are you a magician?" she asked.

"Why?"

"Bull never makes friends."

"But I do," said Maurice; "perhaps he understands that, and comes half-way. But it is rather strange to see a bulldog in this part of the country."

"He was given to me, years ago, by an Englishman."

"That accounts for it." He was experiencing a deal of cold, but he dared not mention it. "And may I ask your name?"

"Ah, Monsieur," shyly, "to tell you my name would be to frighten you away."

"I am sure nothing could do that," he declared earnestly. Had he been thinking of aught but her eyes he might have caught the significance of her words. But, then, the cold was numbing.

She surveyed him with critical eyes. She saw a clean-shaven face, brown, handsome and eager, merry blue eyes, a chin firm and aggressive, a mischievous

mouth, a forehead which showed the man of thought, a slim athletic form which showed the man of action—all of which combined to produce that indescribable air which attaches itself to the gentleman.

“It is Alexia,” she said, after some hesitation, watching him closely to observe the effect.

But he was as far away as ever. “Alexia what?”

“Only Alexia,” a faint coquetry stealing into her glance.

“O, then you are probably a maid?”

“Y—es. But you are disappointed?”

“No, indeed. You have put me more at ease. I suppose you serve the princess?”

“Whenever I can,” demurely.

He could not keep his eyes from hers. “They say that she is a very lonely princess.”

“So lonely.” And the coquetry faded from her eyes as her glance wandered waterward and became fixed on some object invisible and far away. “Poor lonely princess!”

Maurice was growing colder and colder, but he did not mind. He had wished for some woman to talk to; his wish had been granted. “I feel sorry for her, if what they say is true,” having no other words.

“And what do they say, Monsieur?”

“That she and her father have been socially ostracized. I should be proud to be her friend.” Once the words were gone from him, he saw their silliness. “A presumptuous statement,” he added; “I am an obscure foreigner.”

“Friendship, Monsieur, is a thing we all should prize, all the more so when it is disinterested.”

He said rapidly, for fear she might hear his teeth chatter: “They say she is very beautiful. Tell me what she is like.”

“I am no judge of what men call beauty. As to her character, I believe I may recommend that. She is good.”

He was sure that merriment twitched the corners of her lips, and he grew thoughtful. “Alexia. Is that not her Highness's name also?”

“Yes, Monsieur; we have the same names.” Her eyes fell, and she began to finger the pages of the book.

“I am rested now,” he said, with a sudden distrust. “I thank you.”

“Come, then, and I will show you the way to the gate.”

“I am sorry to have troubled you,” he said.

She did not reply, and together they walked up the path. The plants were dying, and the odor of decay hovered about them. Splashes of rich vermilion crowned the treetops, leaves of gold, russet and faded green rustled on the ground. The sun was gone behind the hills, the lake was tinted with salmon and dun, and Maurice (who honestly would have liked to run) was turning purple, not from atmospheric effect, but from the partly congealed state of his blood. Already he was thinking that his adventure had turned out rather well. It was but a simple task for a man of his imagination to construct a pretty romance, with a kingdom for a background. A maid of honor, perhaps; no matter, he would find means for future communication. A glamour had fallen upon him.

As to the girl, who had scarce spoken to a dozen young men in her life, she was comparing four faces; one of a visionary character of which she had dreamed for ten years, and three which had recently entered into the small circle of her affairs. It was little pleasure to her to talk to those bald diplomats, who were always saying what they did not mean, and meaning what they did not say. And the young officers in the palace never presumed to address her unless spoken to.

What a monotonous life it was! She was like a bird in a cage, ever longing for freedom, not of the air, but of impulse. To be permitted to yield to the impulses of the heart! What a delightful thought that was! But she, she seemed apart from all which was desirable to youth. Women courtesied to her, men touched their hats; but homage was not what she wanted. To be free, that was all; to come and go at will; to laugh and to sing. But ever the specter of royal dignity walked beside her and held her captive.

She was to wed a man on whom she looked with indifference, but wed him she must; it was written. A toy of ambition, she was neither more nor less. Ah, to be as her maids, not royal, but free. Of the three new faces one belonged to the man whom she was to wed; another was a tall, light-haired man whom she had seen from her carriage; the last walked by her side. And somehow, the visionary face, the faces of the man whom she was to wed and the light-haired man suddenly grew indistinct. She glanced from the corner of her eyes at Maurice, but meeting his glance, in which lay something that caused her uneasiness, her gaze dropped to the path.

“I shall be pleased to tell her Highness that a stranger, who has not met her, who does not even suspect her rebel spirit, desires to be her friend.”

“O, Mademoiselle,” he cried in alarm, “that desire was expressed in confidence.”

“I know it. It is for that very reason I wish her to know. Have no fear, Monsieur;” and she laughed without mirth. “Her Highness will not send you to prison.”

Close at hand Maurice discovered a cuirassier, who, on seeing them, saluted and stood attention. Maurice was puzzled.

“Lieutenant,” said the girl, “Monsieur—Carewe?” turning to Maurice.

“Yes, that is the name.”

“Well, then, Monsieur Carewe has met with an accident; please escort him to the gate. I trust you will not suffer any inconvenience from the cold. Good evening, Monsieur Carewe.”

She retraced her steps down the path. The bulldog followed. Once he looked back at Maurice, and stopped as if undecided, then went on. Maurice stared at the figure of the girl until it vanished behind a clump of rose bushes.

“Well, Monsieur Carewe!” said the Lieutenant, a broad smile under his mustache.

“I beg your pardon, Lieutenant. May I ask you who she is?”

“What! You do not know?”

Maurice suddenly saw light. “Her Royal Highness?” blankly.

“Her Royal Highness, God bless her!” cried the Lieutenant heartily.

“Amen to that,” replied Maurice, his agitation visible even to the officer.

They arrived at the gate in silence. The cuirassier raised the bar, touched his helmet, and said, with something like an amused twinkle in his eyes: “Would Monsieur like to borrow my helmet for a space?”

Maurice put up a hand to his water-soaked hair, and gave an ejaculation of dismay. He had forgotten all about his hat, which was by now, in-all probabilities, at the bottom of the lake.

“Curse the luck!” he said, in English.

“Curse the want of it, I should say!” was the merry rejoinder, also in English.

Maurice threw back his head and laughed, and the cuirassier caught the infection.

“However, there is some compensation for the hat,” said the cuirassier, straightening his helmet. “You are the first stranger who has spoken to her Highness this many a day. Did the dog take to your calves? Well, never mind; he

has no teeth. It was only day before yesterday that the Marshal swore he'd have the dog shot. Poor dog! He is growing blind, too, or he'd never have risked his gums on the Marshal, who is all shins. If you will wait I will fetch you one of the archbishop's skull caps."

"Don't trouble yourself," laughed Maurice. "What I need is not a hat, but a towel, and I'll get that at the hotel. George! I feel so like an ass. What is your name, Lieutenant?"

"Von Mitter, Carl von Mitter, at your service. And you are Monsieur Carewe."

"Of the American legation in Vienna. Thanks for your trouble."

"None at all. You had better hurry along; your nails are growing black."

Maurice passed into the street. "Her Royal Highness!" he muttered. "The crown princess, and I never suspected. Her name is Alexia, and she serves the princess whenever she can! Maurice, you are an ass!"

Having arrived at this conclusion, and brushing the dank hair from his eyes, he thrust his hands into his oozing pockets, and proceeded across the square toward the Continental, wondering if there was a rear entrance. Happily the adventure absorbed all his thoughts. He was quite unobservant of the marked attention bestowed on him. Carriages filled the Strasse, and many persons moved along the walks. It was the promenade hour. The water, which still dripped from his clothes and trickled from his shoes, left a conspicuous trail behind; and this alone, without the absence of a hat, would have made him the object of amused and wondering smiles.

A gendarme stared at him, but seeing that he walked straight, said nothing. Maurice, however, was serenely unaware of what was passing around him. He did not notice even the tall, broad-shouldered man who, with a gun under his arm, brushed past him, followed by a round-faced German over whose back was slung a game-bag. The man with the gun was also oblivious of his surroundings. He bumped into several persons, who scowled at him, but offered no remonstrance after having taken his measure. The German put his pipe into his pocket and advanced a step.

"The other gun, Herr," he said, "would have meant the boar."

"So it would, perhaps," was the reply.

"We've done pretty good work these two days," went on the German; but as the other appeared not to have heard he fell to the rear again, a sardonic smile flitting over his oily face.

When Maurice reached the hotel cafe he left an order for a cognac to be sent

to his room, whither he repaired at once. As he got into dry clothes he mused.

“I wonder what sort of a man that crown prince is? Now, if I were he, an army could not keep me away from Bleiberg. Either he is no judge of beauty, or the peasant girls hereabout are something extraordinary. Pshaw! a man always makes an ass of himself on his wedding eve; the crown prince is simply starting in early. I believe I'll hang on here till the wedding day; a royal marriage is one of those things which I have yet to see. I have a fortnight or more to knock around in. I should like to know what the duchess will eventually do.”

He sipped the last drop of the cognac and went down the stairs.

CHAPTER V. BEHIND THE PUPPET BOOTH

While the absent-minded hunter strode down toward the lower town, and Maurice sipped his cognac, the king lay in his bed in the palace and aimlessly fingered the counterpane. There was now no beauty in his face. It was furrowed and pale, and an endless fever burned in the sunken eyes—eyes like coals, which suddenly flare before they turn to ash.

The archbishop nor the chancellor could see anything in the dim corners of the royal bed chamber, but he could. It was the mocking finger of death, and it was leveled at him. Spring had come, and summer and autumn and winter, and spring again, but he had not wandered through the green fields, except in dreams, and the byways he loved knew him no more. Ah, to sit still like a spectator and to see the world pass by! To be a part of it, and yet not of it! To see the glory of strength and vigor just beyond one's grasp, the staffs to lean on crumble to the touch, and the stars of hope fade away one by one from the firmament of one's dreams! Here was weariness for which there was no remedy.

Day by day time pressed him on toward the inevitable. No human hand could stay him. He could think, but he could not act. He could move, but he could not stand nor walk. And that philosophy which had in other days sustained him was shattered and threadbare. He was dead, yet he lived. Fate has so many delicate ironies.

He had tried to make his people love him, only to acquire their hate. He had reduced taxation, only to be scorned. He had made the city beautiful, only to be cursed. A paralytic, the theme of ribald verse, the butt of wineroom wits, the object of contumely to his people, his beneficiaries!

The ingratitude of kings bites not half so deep as the ingratitude of the people. Tears filled his eyes, and he fumbled his lips. There were only two bright spots in his futile life. The first was his daughter, who read to him, who was the first in the morning to greet him and last at night to leave him. The second was the evening hour when the archbishop and the chancellor came in to discuss the affairs of state.

“And Prince Frederick has not yet been heard from?” was his first inquiry.

“No, Sire,” answered the chancellor. “The matter is altogether mysterious. The police can find no trace of him. He left Carnavia for Bleiberg; he stopped at Ehrenstein, directed his suite to proceed; there, all ends. The ambassador from

Carnavia approached me to-day. He scouts the idea of a peasant girl, and hinted at other things."

"Yes," said the king, "there is something behind all this. Frederick is not a youth of peccadilloes. Something has happened to him. But God send him safe and sound to us, so much depends on him. And Alexia?"

"Says nothing," the archbishop answered, "a way with her when troubled."

"And my old friend, Lord Fitzgerald?"

The prelate shook his head sadly. "We have just been made acquainted with his death. God rest his kindly soul."

The king sank deeper into his pillows.

"But we shall hear from his son within a few days," continued the prelate, taking the king's hand in his own. "My son, cease to worry. Alexia's future is in good hands. I have confidence that the public debt will be liquidated on the twentieth."

"Or renewed," said the chancellor. "Your Majesty must not forget that Prince Frederick sacrifices his own private fortune to adjust our indebtedness. That is the wedding gift which he offers to her Highness. One way or the other, we have nothing to fear."

"O!" cried the king, "I had forgotten that magnanimity. His disappearance is no longer a mystery. He is dead."

His auditors could not repress the start which this declaration caused them to make.

"Sire," said the chancellor, quietly, "princes are not assassinated these days. Our worry is perhaps all needless. The prince is young, and sometimes youth flings off the bridle and runs away. But he loves her Highness, and the Carnavians are not fickle."

The prelate and the statesman had different ideas in regard to the peasant girl. To the prelate a woman was an unknown quantity, and he frowned. The statesman, who had once been young, knew a deal about woman, and he smiled.

"Sometimes, my friends," said the king, "I can see beyond the human glance. I hear the crumbling of walls. But for that lonely child I could die in peace. The crown I wear is of lead; God hasten the day that lifts it from my brow." When the king spoke again, he said: "And that insolent Von Rumpf is gone at last? I am easier. He should have been sent about his business ten years ago. What does Madame the duchess say?"

"So little," answered the chancellor, "that I begin to distrust her silence. But

she is a wise woman, though her years are but five and twenty, and she will not make any foolish declaration of war which would only redound to her chagrin."

"What is the fascination in these crowns of straw?" said the king to the prelate. "Ah, my father, you strive for the crown to come; and yet your earnest but misguided efforts placed this earthly one on my head. You were ambitious for me."

"Nay," and the prelate bent his head. "It was self that spoke, worldly aggrandizement. I wished—God forgive me!—to administer not to the prince but to the king. I am punished. The crown has broken your life. It was the passing glory of the world; and I fell."

"And were not my eyes as dazzled by the crown as yours were by the robes? Why did we leave the green hills of Osia? What destiny writes, fate must unfold. And oh, the dreams I had of being great! I am fifty-eight and you are seventy. And look; I am a broken twig, and you tower above me like an ancient oak, and as strong." To the chancellor he said: "And what is the budget?"

"Sire, it is fairly quiet in the lower town. The native troops have been paid, and all signs of discontent abated. The duchess can do nothing but replace von Rumpf. The Marshal is a straw in the wind; von Wallenstein and Mollendorf, I hold a sword above their necks. Nearly half the Diet is with us. There has been some strange meddling in the customs. Englishmen have brought me complaints, through the British legation, regarding such inspections as were never before heard of in a country at peace. I consulted the chief inspector and he affirmed the matter. He was under orders of the minister of police. It appears to me that a certain Englishman is to be kept out of the country for reasons well known to us. I have suspended police power over the customs. Ah, Sire, if you would but agree with Monseigneur to dismiss the cabinet."

"It is too late," said the king.

"There is only one flaw," continued the chancellor. "This flaw is Colonel Beauvais, chief in command of the cuirassiers, who in authority stands between the Marshal and General Kronau. I fear him. Why? Instinct. He is too well informed of my projects for one thing; he laughs when I suggest in military affairs. Who is he? A Frenchman, if one may trust to a name; an Austrian, if one may trust from whence he came, recommended by the premier himself. He entered the cuirassiers as a Captain. You yourself, Sire, made him what he is—the real military adviser of the kingdom. But what of his past? No one knows, unless it be von Wallenstein, his intimate. I, for one, while I may be wrong, trust only those whose past I know, and even then only at intervals."

“Colonel Beauvais?” murmured the king. “I am sure that you are unjustly suspicious. How many times have I leaned on his stout arm! He taught Alexia a thousand tricks of horse, so that to-day she rides as no other woman in the kingdom rides. Would that I stood half so straight and looked at the world half so fearlessly. He is the first soldier in the kingdom.”

“All men are honest in your Majesty's eyes,” said the archbishop.

“All save the man within me,” replied the king.

At this juncture the king's old valet came in with the evening meal; and soon after the prelate and the chancellor withdrew from the chamber.

“How long will he live?” asked the latter.

“A year; perhaps only till to-morrow. Ah, had he but listened to me several years ago, all this would not have come to pass. He would see nothing; he persisted in dreams. With the death of Josef he was convinced that his enemies had ceased to be. Had he listened, I should have dismissed the cabinet, and found enough young blood to answer my purposes; I should have surrounded him with a mercenary army two thousand strong; by now he should have stood strongly entrenched.

“They have robbed him, but you and I were permitted to do nothing. Where is the prosperity of which we formerly boasted? I, too, hear crumbling walls. Yet, the son of this Englishman, whose strange freak is still unaccountable, will come at the appointed time; I know the race. He will renew the loan for another ten years. What a fancy! Lord Fitzgerald was an eccentric man. Given a purpose, he pursued it to the end, neither love nor friendship, nor fear swerved him. Do you know that he made a vow that Duke Josef should never sit on this throne, nor his descendants? What were five millions to him, if in giving them he realized the end? The king would never explain the true cause of this Englishman's folly, but I know that it was based on revenge, the cause of which also is a mystery. If only the prince were here!”

“He will come; youth will be youth.”

“Perhaps.”

“You have never been young.”

“Not in that particular sense to which you refer,” dryly.

* * * * * *

In the chamber of finance Colonel Beauvais leaned over the desk and perused the writing on a slip of paper which the minister had given him. Enough daylight remained to permit the letters to stand out legibly. When he had done the Colonel

tossed back the missive, and the minister tore it into shreds and dropped them into the waste basket.

“So much for your pains,” said Beauvais. “The spy, who has eaten up ten thousand crowns, is not worth his salt. He has watched this man Hamilton for two days, been his guide in the hills, and yet learns nothing. And the rigor of the customs is a farce.”

“This day,” replied the minister, “the police lost its jurisdiction over the customs. Complaints have been entered at the British legation, which forwarded them to the chancellor.”

“O ho!” The Colonel pulled his mustache.

“I warned you against this. The chancellor is a man to be respected, whatever his beliefs. I warned you and Mollendorf of the police what the result would be. The chancellor has a hard hand when it falls. He was always bold; now he is more so since he practically stands alone. In games of chance one always should play close. You are in a hurry.”

“I have waited six years.”

“And I have waited fourteen.”

“Well, then, I shall pass into the active. I shall watch this Englishman myself. He is likely to prove the agent. Count, the time for waiting is gone. If the debt is liquidated or renewed—and there is Prince Frederick to keep in mind—we shall have played and lost. Disgrace for you; for me—well, perhaps there is a power behind me too strong. The chancellor? Pouf! I have no fear of him. But you who laugh at the archbishop—”

“He is too old.”

“So you say. But he has dreams unknown to us. He has ceased to act; why? He is waiting for the curtain to rise. Nothing escapes him; he is letting us go to what end we will, only, if we do not act at once, to draw us to a sudden halt. Now to this meddling Englishman: we have offered him a million—five millions for four. He laughs. He is a millionaire. With characteristic bombast he declares that money has no charms. For six months, since his father's death, we have hounded him, in vain. It is something I can not understand. What is Leopold to these Englishmen that they risk a princely fortune to secure him his throne? Friendship? Bah, there is none.”

“Not in France nor in Austria. But this man was an Englishman; they leave legacies of friendship.”

The Colonel walked to the window and looked down into the gardens. He

remained there for a time. Von Wallenstein eyed him curiously. Presently the soldier returned to his seat.

“We are crossing a chasm; a man stands in our way; as we can not go around him, we, being the stronger, push him aside. Eh?”

“You would not kill—” began the minister.

“Let us use the French meaning of the word `suppress.' And why not? Ambition, wherever it goes, leaves a trail of blood. What is a human life in this game we play? A leaf, a grain of sand.”

“But, since the prince promises to liquidate the debt, what matters it if the Englishman comes? It is all one and the same.”

“Within twenty, nay, within fifteen days, what may not happen?”

“You are ambitious,” said von Wallenstein, slyly.

“And who is not?”

“Is a Marshal's baton so much, then, above your present position? You are practically the head of the army.”

“A valiant army!” laughing; “five thousand men. Why, Madame the duchess has six thousand and three batteries.”

“Her army of six thousand is an expedient; you can raise volunteers to the amount of ten thousand.”

“To be sure I could; but supposing I did not want to?”

The minister dropped his gaze and began fingering the paper cutter. The Colonel's real purpose was still an enigma to him. “Come, you have the confidence of the king, the friendship of her Royal Highness. What do you gain in serving us? The baton?”

“You embarrass me. Questions? I should not like to lie to you. Batons were fine things when Louises and Napoleons conferred them. I have thrown my dice into the common cup; let that be sufficient.”

“A man who comes from a noble house such as you come from—”

“Ah, count, that was never to be referred to. Be content with my brain and sword. And then, there is the old saying, Give a man an ell, and look to your rod. We are all either jackals or lions, puppets or men behind the booth. I am a lion.” He rose, drew his saber half-way from the scabbard, and sent it slithering back. “In a fortnight we put it to the touch to win or lose it all, as the poet says. Every man for himself, and let the strongest win, say I.”

“You are playing two games,” coldly.

“And you? Is it for pure love of Madame the duchess that you risk your head? Come, as you say; admit that you wish to see my hand without showing yours. A baton is not much for me, as you have hinted, but it is all that was promised me. And you, if we win, will still be minister of finances? What is that maggot I see behind your eyes? Is it not spelled `chancellor'? But, remember, Madame has friends to take care of in the event of our success. We can not have all the spoils. To join the kingdom and the duchy will create new offices, to be sure, but we can have only part of them. As to games, I shall, out of the kindness in my heart, tell you that I am not playing two, but three. Guess them if you can. Next to the chancellorship is the embassy to Vienna, and an embassy to Paris is to be created. Madame is a superior woman. Who knows?” with a smile that caused the other to pale.

“You are mad to dream of that.”

“As you say, I come of a noble house,” carelessly.

“You are mad.”

“No, count,” the soldier replied. “I have what Balzac calls a thirst for a full life in a short space.”

“I would give a deal to read what is going on in that head of yours.”

“Doubtless. But what is to become of our friends the Marshal and Mollendorf? What will be left for them? Perhaps there will be a chamber of war, a chamber of the navy. As a naval minister the Marshal would be nicely placed. There would be no expense of building ships or paying sailors, which would speak well for the economy of the new government. The Marshal is old; we shall send him to Servia. At least the office will pay both his vanity and purse to an extent equal to that of his present office. By the way, nothing has yet been heard from Prince Frederick. Ah, these young men, these plump peasant girls!”

Both laughed.

“Till this evening, then;” and the Colonel went from the room.

The minister of finance applied a match to the tapers. He held the burning match aloft and contemplated the door through which the soldier had gone. The sting of the incipient flame aroused him.

“What,” he mused aloud, as he arranged the papers on his desk, “is his third game?”

“It appears to me,” said a voice from the wall behind, “that the same question arises in both our minds.”

The minister wheeled his chair, his mouth and brows puckered in dismay.

From a secret panel in the wall there stepped forth a tall, thin, sour-visaged old man of military presence. He calmly sat down in the chair which Beauvais had vacated.

“I had forgotten all about you, Marshal!” exclaimed the count, smiling uneasily.

“A statement which I am most ready to believe,” replied old Marshal Kampf, with a glance which caused the minister yet more uneasiness. “What impressed me among other things was, `But what is to become of our friends the Marshal and Mollendorf?' I am Marshal; I am about to risk all for nothing. Why should I not remain Marshal for the remainder of my days? It is a pleasant thing to go to Vienna once the year and to witness the maneuvers, with an honorary position on the emperor's staff. To be Marshal here is to hold a sinecure, yet it has its compensations. The uniforms, gray and gold, are handsome; it is an ostrich plume that I wear in my chapeau de bras; the medals are of gold. My friend, it is the vanity of old age which forgives not.” And the Marshal, the bitterest tongue in all Bleiberg, reached over and picked up the cigar which lay by the inkwells. He lit it at one of the tapers, and sank again into the chair. “Count, how many games are you playing?”

“My dear Marshal, it was not I who spoke of games. I am playing no game, save for the legitimate sovereign of this kingdom. I ask for no reward.”

“Disinterested man! The inference is, however, that, since you have not asked for anything, you have been promised something. Confess it, and have done.”

“Marshal!”

“Well?”

“Is it possible that you suspect me?” The cold eyes grew colder, and the thin lips almost disappeared.

“When three men watch each other as do Beauvais, Mollendorf and you, it is because each suspects the other of treachery. You haven't watched me because I am old, but because I am old I have been watching you. Mollendorf aspires to greatness, you have your gaze on the chancellorship, and curse me if the Colonel isn't looking after my old shoes! Am I to give up my uniform, my medals and my plume—for nothing? And who the devil is this man Beauvais, since that is not his name? Is he a fine bird whose feathers have been plucked?”

The minister did not respond to the question; he began instead to fidget in his chair.

“When I gave my word to his Highness the duke, it was without conditions. I

asked no favors; I considered it my duty. Let us come to an understanding. Material comfort is necessary to a man of my age. Fine phrases and a medal or two more do not count. I am, then, to go to Servia. You were very kind to hide me in your cabinet."

"It was to show you that I had no secrets from you," quickly.

"Let us pass on. Mollendorf is to go to Paris, where he will be a nonentity, while in his present office he is a power in the land—Devil take me, but it seems to me that we are all a pack of asses! Our gains will not be commensurate with our losses. The navy? Well, we'll let that pass; the Colonel, I see, loves a joke."

"You forget our patriotism for the true house."

"Why not give it its true name—self-interest?"

"Marshal, in heaven's name, what has stirred your bile?" The minister was losing his patience, a bad thing for him to do in the presence of the old warrior.

"It is something I've been swallowing this past year." The Marshal tipped the ash of his cigar into the waste basket.

"Marshal, will you take the word not of the minister, but of the von Wallenstein, that whatever my reward shall be for my humble services, yours shall not be less?"

"Thanks, but I have asked for no reward. If I accepted gain for what I do, I should not be too old to blush."

"I do not understand."

"Self-interest blinds us. I have nothing but pity for this king whose only crime is an archbishop; and I can not accept gain at his expense; I should blush for shame. Had I my way, he should die in peace. He has not long to live. The archbishop—well, we can not make kings, they are born. But there is one thing more: Over all your schemes is the shadow of Austria."

"Austria?"

"Yes. The Colonel speaks of a power behind him. Bismarck looks hungrily toward Schleswig-Holstein. Austria casts amorous eyes at us. A protectorate? We did not need it. It was forced on us. When Austria assumed to dictate to us as to who should be king, she also robbed us of our true independence. Twenty years ago there was no duchy; it was all one kingdom. Who created this duchy when Albrecht came on the throne? Austria. Why? If we live we shall read." He rose, shook his lean legs. "I have been for the most part neutral. I shall remain neutral. There is an undercurrent on which you have failed to reckon. Austria, mistress of the confederation. There are two men whom you must watch. One is

the archbishop.”

“The archbishop?” The minister was surprised that the Marshal should concur with the Colonel. “And the other?”

“Your friend the Colonel,” starting for the door.

The minister smiled. “Will you not dine with me?” he asked.

“Thanks. But I have the Servian minister on my hands to-night. A propos, tell the Colonel that I decline Belgrade. I prefer to die at home.” And he vanished.

Von Wallenstein reviewed the statements of both his visitors.

“I shall watch Monseigneur the archbishop.” Then he added, with a half-smile: “God save us if the Marshal's sword were half so sharp as his tongue! It was careless of me to forget that I had shut him up in the cabinet.”

Meanwhile Beauvais walked slowly toward his quarters, with his saber caught up under his arm. Once he turned and gazed at the palace, whose windows began to flash with light.

“Yes, they are puppets and jackals, and I am the lion. For all there shall serve my ends. I shall win, and when I do—” He laughed silently. “Well, I am a comely man, and Madame the duchess shall be my wife.”

CHAPTER VI. MADEMOISELLE OF THE VEIL

The public park at night was a revelation to Maurice, who, lonely and restless, strolled over from the hotel in quest of innocent amusement. He was none the worse for his unintended bath; indeed, if anything, he was much the better for it. His imagination was excited. It was not every day that a man could, at one and the same time, fall out of a boat and into the presence of a princess of royal blood.

He tried to remember all he had said to her, but only two utterances recurred to him; yet these caused him an exhilaration like the bouquet of old wine. He had told her that she was beautiful, indirectly, it was true; she had accepted his friendship, also indirectly, it was true. Now the logical sequence of all this was—but he broke into a light laugh. What little vanity he possessed was without conceit. Princesses of royal blood were beyond the reach of logical sequence; and besides, she was to be married on the twentieth of the month.

He followed one of the paths which led to the pavilion. It was a charming scene, radiant with gas lamps, the vivid kaleidoscope of gowns and uniforms. Beautiful faces flashed past him. There were in the air the vague essences of violet, rose and heliotrope. Sometimes he caught the echo of low laughter or the snatch of a gay song. The light of the lamps shot out on the crinkled surface of the lake in tongues of quivering flame, which danced a brave gavot with the phantom stars; and afar twinkled the dipping oars. The brilliant pavilion, which rested partly over land and partly over water, was thronged.

The band was playing airs from the operas of the day, and Maurice yielded to the spell of the romantic music. He leaned over the pavilion rail, and out of the blackness below he endeavored to conjure up the face of Nell (or was it Kate?) who had danced with him at the embassies in Vienna, fenced and ridden with him, till—till—with a gesture of impatience he flung away the end of his cigar.

Memory was altogether too elusive. It was neither Nell nor Kate he saw smiling up at him, nor anybody else in the world but the Princess Alexia, whose eyes were like wine in a sunset, whose lips were as red as the rose of Tours in France, and whose voice was sweeter than that throbbing up from the 'cello. If he thought much more of her, there would be a logical sequence on his side. He laughed again—with an effort—and settled back in his chair to renew his interest in the panorama revolving around him.

“They certainly know how to live in these countries,” he thought, “for all their comic operas. All I need, to have this fairy scene made complete, is a woman to talk to. By George, what's to hinder me from finding one?” he added, seized by the spirit of mischief. He turned his head this way and that. “Ah! doubtless there is the one I'm looking for.”

Seated alone at a table behind him was a woman dressed in gray. Her back was toward him, but he lost none of the beautiful contours of her figure. She wore a gray alpine hat, below the rim of which rebellious little curls escaped, curls of a fine red-brown, which, as they trailed to the nape of the firm white neck, lightened into a ruddy gold. Her delicate head was turned aside, and to all appearances her gaze was directed to the entrance to the pavilion. A heavy blue veil completely obscured her features; though Maurice could see a rose-tinted ear and the shadow of a curving chin and throat, which promised much. To a man there is always a mystery lurking behind a veil. So he rose, walked past her, returned and deliberately sat down in the chair opposite to hers. The fact that gendarmes moved among the crowd did not disturb him.

“Good evening, Mademoiselle,” he said, politely lifting his hat.

She straightened haughtily. “Monsieur,” she said, resentment, consternation and indignation struggling to predominate in her tones, “I did not give you permission to sit down. You are impertinent!”

“O, no,” Maurice declared. “I am not impertinent. I am lonesome. In all Bleiberg I haven't a soul to talk to, excepting the hotel waiters, and they are uninteresting. Grant me the privilege of conversing with you for a moment. We shall never meet again; and I should not know you if we did. Whether you are old or young, plain or beautiful, it matters not. My only wish is to talk to a woman, to hear a woman's voice.”

“Shall I call a gendarme, Monsieur, and have him search for your nurse?” The attitude which accompanied these words was anything but assuring.

He, however, evinced no alarm. He even laughed. “That was good! We shall get along finely, I am sure.”

“Monsieur,” she said, rising, “I repeat that I do not desire your company, nor to remain in the presence of your unspeakable effrontery.”

“I beseech you!” implored Maurice, also rising. “I am a foreigner, lonesome, unhappy, thousands of miles from home—”

“You are English?” suddenly. She stood with the knuckle of her forefinger on her lips as if meditating. She sat down.

Maurice, greatly surprised, also sat down.

“English?” he repeated. His thought was: “What the deuce! This is the third time I have been asked that. Who is this gay Lothario the women seem to be expecting?” To her he continued: “And why do you ask me that?”

“Perhaps it is your accent. And what do you wish to say to me, Monsieur?” It was a voice of quality; all the anger had gone from it. She leaned on her elbows, her chin in her palms, and through the veil he caught the sparkle of a pair of wonderful eyes. “Let us converse in English,” she added. “It is so long since I have had occasion to speak in that tongue.” She repeated her question.

“O, I had no definite plan outlined,” he answered; “just generalities, with the salt of repartee to season.” He pondered over this sudden transition from wrath to mildness. An Englishman? Very well; it might grow interesting.

“Is it customary among the English to request to speak to strangers without the usual formalities of an introduction?”

“I can not say that it is,” he answered truthfully enough; “but the procedure is never without a certain charm and excitement.”

“Ah; then you were led to address me merely by the love of adventure?”

“That is it; the love of adventure. I should not have spoken to you had you not worn the veil.” He remarked that her English was excellent.

“You differ from the average Englishman, who is usually wrapt up in himself and has no desire to talk to strangers. You have been a soldier.”

The evolutions of his cane ceased. “How in the world did you guess that?” surprised beyond measure.

“Perhaps there is something suggestive in your shoulders.”

He tried to peer behind the veil, but in vain. “Am I speaking to one I have met before?”

“I believe not; indeed, sir, I am positive.”

“I have been a soldier, but my shoulders did not tell you that.”

“Perhaps I have the gift of clairvoyance,” gazing again toward the entrance.

“Or perhaps you have been to Vienna.”

“Who knows? Most Englishmen are, or have been, soldiers.”

“That is true.” Inwardly, “There's my friend the Englishman again. She's guessing closer than she knows. Curious; she has mistaken me for some one she does not know, if that is possible.” He was somewhat in a haze. “Well, you have remarkable eyes. However, let us talk of a more interesting subject; for instance,

yourself. You, too, love adventure, that is, if I interpret the veil rightly."

"Yes; I like to see without being seen. But, of course, behind this love of adventure which you possess, there is an important mission."

"Ah!" he thought; "you are not quite sure of me." Aloud, "Yes, I came here to witness the comic opera."

"The comic opera? I do not understand?"

"I believed there was going to be trouble between the duchy and the kingdom, but unfortunately the prima donna has refused the part."

"The prima donna!" in a muffled voice. "Whom do you mean?"

"Son Altesse la Grande Duchesse! 'Voici le sabre de mon pere!'" And he whistled a bar from Offenbach, his eyes dancing.

"Sir!—I!—you do wrong to laugh at us!" a flash from the half-hidden eyes.

"Forgive me if I have offended you, but I—"

"Ah, sir, but you who live in a powerful country think we little folk have no hearts, that we have no wrongs to redress, no dreams of conquest and of power. You are wrong."

"And whose side do you defend?"

"I am a woman," was the equivocal answer.

"Which means that you are uncertain."

"I have long ago made up my mind."

"Wonderful! I always thought a woman's mind was like a time-table, subject to change without notice. So you have made up your mind?"

"I was born with its purpose defined," coldly.

"Ah, now I begin to doubt."

"What?" with a still lower degree of warmth.

"That you are a woman. Only goddesses do not change their minds—sometimes. Well, then you are on the weaker side."

"Or the stronger, since there are two sides."

"And the stronger?" persistently.

"The side which is not the weaker. But the subject is what you English call 'taboo.' It is treading on delicate ground to talk politics in the open—especially in Bleiberg."

"What a diplomat you would make!" he cried with enthusiasm. Certainly this was a red-letter day in his calendar. This adventure almost equalled the other,

and, besides, in this instance, his skin was dry; he could enjoy it more thoroughly. Who could this unknown be? “If only you understood the mystery with which you have enshrouded yourself!”

“I do.” She drew the veil more firmly about her chin.

“Grant me a favor.”

“I am talking to you, sir.”

This candor did not disturb him. “The favor I ask is that you will lift the corner of your veil; otherwise you will haunt me.”

“I am doomed to haunt you, then. If I should lift the corner of my veil something terrible would happen.”

“What! Are you as beautiful as that?”

There was a flash of teeth behind the veil, followed by the ripple of soft laughter. “It is difficult to believe you to be English. You are more like one of those absurd Americans.”

Maurice did not like the adjective. “I am one of them,” wondering what the effect of this admission would be. “I am not English, but of the brother race. Forgive me if I have imposed on you, but it was your fault. You said that I was English, and I was too lonesome to enlighten you.”

“You are an American?” She began to tap her gloved fingers against the table.

“Yes.”

Then, to his astonishment, she gave way to laughter, honest and hearty. “How dense of me not to have known the moment you addressed me! Who but the American holds in scorn custom's formalities and usages? Your grammar is good, so good that my mistake is pardonable. The American is always like the terrible infant; and you are a choice example.”

Maurice was not so pleased as he might have been. His ears burned. Still, he went forward bravely. “A man never pretends to be an Englishman without getting into trouble.”

“I did not ask to speak to you. No one ever pretends to be an American. Why is it you are always ashamed of your country?” with malice aforethought.

Maurice experienced the sting of many bees. “I see that your experience is limited to impostors. I, Mademoiselle, am proud of my country, the great, free land which stands aside from the turmoil and laughs at your petty squabbles, your kings, your princes. Laugh at me; I deserve it for not minding my own business, but do not laugh at my country.” His face was flushed; he was almost angry. It was not her words; it was the contempt with which she had invested

them. But immediately he was ashamed of his outburst. “Ah, Mademoiselle, you have tricked me; you have found the vulnerable part in my armor. I have spoken like a child. Permit me to apologize for my apparent lack of breeding.” He rose, bowed, and made as though to depart.

“Sit down, Monsieur,” she said, picking up her French again. “I forgive you. I do more; I admire. I see that your freak had nothing behind it but mischief. No woman need fear a man who colors when his country is made the subject of a jest.”

All his anger evaporated. This was an invitation, and he accepted it. He resumed his seat.

“The truth is, as I remarked, I was lonesome. I know that I have committed a transgression, but the veil tempted me.”

“It is of no matter. A few moments, and you will be gone. I am waiting for some one. You may talk till that person comes.” Her voice was now in its natural tone; and he was convinced that if her face were half as sweet, she must possess rare beauty. “Hush!” as the band began to breathe forth Chopin's polonaise. They listened until the music ceased.

“Ah!” said he rapturously, “the polonaise! When you hear it, does there not recur to you some dream of bygone happy hours, the sibilant murmur of fragrant night winds through the crisp foliage, the faint call of Diana's horn from the woodlands, moon-fairies dancing on the spider-webs, the glint of the dew on the roses, the far-off music of the surges tossing impotently on the sands, the forgetfulness of time and place and care, and not a cloud 'twixt you and the heavens? Ah, the polonaise!”

“Surely you must be a poet!” declared the Veil, when this panegyric was done.

“No,” said he modestly, “I never was quite poor enough for that exalted position.” He had recovered his good humor.

“Indeed, you begin to interest me. What is your occupation when not in search of—comic operas?”

“I serve Ananias.”

“Ananias?” A pause. “Ah, you are a diplomat?”

“How clever of you to guess.”

“Yours is a careless country,” observed the Veil.

“Careless?” mystified.

“Yes, to send forth her green and salad youth. Eh, bien! There are hopes for you. If you live you will grow old; you will become bald and reserved; you will

not speak to strangers, to while away an idle hour; for permit me, Monsieur, who am wise, to tell you that it is a dangerous practice.”

“And do I look so very young?”

“Your beard is that of a boy.”

“David slew Goliath.”

“At least you have a ready tongue,” laughing.

“And you told me that I had been a soldier.”

But to this she had nothing to say.

“I am older than you think, Mademoiselle of the Veil. I have been a soldier; I have seen hard service, too. Mine is no cushion sword. Youth? 'Tis a virtue, not a crime; and, besides, it is an excellent disguise.”

For some time she remained pensive.

“You are thinking of something, Mademoiselle.”

“Do you like adventure?”

“I subsist on it.”

“You have been a soldier; you are, then, familiar with the use of arms?”

“They tell me so,” modestly. What was coming?

“I have some influence. May I trust you?”

“On my honor,” puzzled, yet eager.

“There may be a comic opera, as you call it. War is not so impossible as to be laughed at. The dove may fly away and the ravens come.”

“Who in thunder might this woman be?” he thought.

“And,” went on the Veil, “an extra saber might be used. Give me your address, in case I should find it necessary to send for you.”

Now Maurice was a wary youth. Under ordinary circumstances he would have given a fictitious address to this strange sybil with the prophecy of war; for he had accosted her only in the spirit of fun. But here was the key which he had been seeking, the key to all that had brought him to Bleiberg. Intrigue, adventure, or whatever it was, and to whatever end, he plunged into it. He drew out a card case, selected a card on which he wrote “Room 12, Continental,” and passed it over the table. She read it, and slipped it into her purse.

Maurice thought: “Who wouldn't join the army with such recruiting officers?”

While the pantomime took place, a man pushed by Maurice's chair and crossed over to the table recently occupied by him. He sat down, lit a short pipe,

rested his feet on the lowest rung of the ladder-like railing, and contemplated the western hills, which by now were enveloped in moon mists. Neither Maurice nor his mysterious vis-a-vis remarked him. Indeed, his broad back afforded but small attraction. And if he puffed his pipe fiercely, nobody cared, since the breeze carried the smoke waterward.

After putting the card into her purse, Mademoiselle of the Veil's gaze once more wandered toward the entrance, and this time it grew fixed. Maurice naturally followed it, and he saw a tall soldier in fatigue dress elbowing his way through the crush. Many moved aside for him; those in uniform saluted.

“Monsieur,” came from behind the veil, “you may go now. I dismiss you. If I have need of you I promise to send for you.”

He stood up. “I thank you for the entertainment and the promise you extend. I shall be easily found,” committing himself to nothing. “I suppose you are a person of importance in affairs.”

“It is not unlikely. I see that you love adventure for its own sake, for you have not asked me if it be the duchy or the kingdom. Adieu, Monsieur,” with a careless wave of the gray-gloved hand. “Adieu!”

He took his dismissal heroically and shot a final glance at the approaching soldier. His brows came together.

“Where,” he murmured, “have I seen that picturesque countenance before? Not in Europe; but where?” He caught the arm of a passing gendarme. “Who is that gentleman in fatigue uniform, coming this way?”

“That, Monsieur,” answered the gendarme in tones not unmixed with awe, “is Colonel Beauvais of the royal cuirassiers.”

“Thanks.... Beauvais; I do not remember the name. Truly I have had experiences to-day. And for what house is Mademoiselle of the Veil? Ravens? War? `Voici le sabre de mon pyre!'” and with a gay laugh he went his way.

Meanwhile Colonel Beauvais arrived at the table, tipped his hat to the Veil, who rose and laid a hand on his arm. He guided her through the pressing crowds.

“Ah, Madame,” he said, “you are very brave to choose such a rendezvous.”

“Danger is a tonic to the ill-spirited,” was the reply.

“If aught should happen to you—”

“It was in accord with her wishes that I am here. She suffers from impatience; and I would risk much to satisfy her whims.”

“So would I, Madame; even life.” There was a tremor of passion in his voice, but she appeared not to notice it. “Here is a nook out of the lights; we may talk

here with safety.”

“And what is the news?” she asked.

“This: The man remains still in obscurity. But he shall be found. Listen,” and his voice fell into a whisper.

“Austria?” Mademoiselle of the Veil pressed her hands together in excitement. “Is it true?”

“Did I not promise you? It is so true that the end is in sight. Conspiracy is talked openly in the streets, in the cafes, everywhere. The Osians will be sand in the face of a tidal wave. A word from me, and Kronau follows it. It all would be so easy were it not for the archbishop.”

“The archbishop?” contemptuously.

“Ay, Madame; he is a man so deep, with a mind so abyssmal, that I would give ten years of my life for a flash of his thoughts. He has some project; apparently he gives his whole time to the king. He loves this weak man Leopold; he has sacrificed the red hat for him, for the hat would have taken him to Italy, as we who procured it intended it should.”

“The archbishop? Trust me; one month from now he will be recalled. That is the news I have for you.”

“You have taken a weight from my mind. What do you think in regard to the rumor of the prince and the peasant girl?”

“It afforded me much amusement. You are a man of fine inventions.”

“Gaze toward the upper end of the pavilion, the end which we have just left. Yes—there. I am having the owner of those broad shoulders watched. That gendarme leaning against the pillar follows him wherever he goes.”

“Who is he?”

“That I am trying to ascertain. This much—he is an Englishman.”

Mademoiselle of the Veil laughed. “Pardon my irrelevancy, but the remembrance of a recent adventure of mine was too strong.”

Maurice could not regain his interest in the scene. He strolled in and out of the moving groups, but no bright eyes or winning smiles allured him. Impelled by curiosity, he began to draw near the shadowed nook. Curiosity in a journalist is innate, and time nor change can efface it. Curiosity in those things which do not concern us is wrong. Ethics disavows the practice, though philosophy sustains it. Perhaps in this instance Maurice was philosophical, not ethical. Perhaps he wanted to hear the woman's voice again, which was excusable. Perhaps it was neither the one nor the other, but fate, which directed his footsteps. Certain it is

that the subsequent adventures would never have happened had he gone about his business, as he should have done.

“Who is this who stares at us?” asked Beauvais, with a piercing glance and a startled movement of his shoulders.

“A disciple of Pallas and a pupil of Mars,” was the answer. “I have been recruiting, Colonel. There is sharpness sometimes in new blades. Do not draw him with your eyes.”

The Colonel continued his scrutiny, however, and there was an ugly droop at the corners of his mouth, though it was partly hidden under his mustache.

Maurice, aware that he was not wanted, passed along, having in mind to regain his former seat by the railing.

“Colonel,” he mused, “your face grows more familiar every moment. It was not associated with agreeable things. But, what were they? Hang it! you shall have a place in my thoughts till I have successfully labeled you. Humph! Some one seems to have appropriated my seat.”

He viewed with indecision the broad back of the interloper, who at that moment turned his head. At the sight of that bronzed profile Maurice gave an exclamation of surprise and delight. He stepped forward and dropped his hand on the stranger's shoulder.

“John Fitzgerald, or henceforth garlic shall be my salad!” he cried in loud, exultant tones.

CHAPTER VII. SOME DIALOGUE, A SPRAINED ANKLE, AND SOME SOLDIERS

The stranger returned Maurice's salute with open-mouthed dismay; the monocle fell from his eye, he grasped the table with one hand and pushed back the chair with the other, while Maurice heard the name of an exceedingly warm place.

The gendarme, who was leaning against the pillar, straightened, opened his jaws, snapped them, and hurried off.

“Maurice—Maurice Carewe?” said the bewildered Englishman.

“No one else, though I must say you do not seem very glad to see me,” Maurice answered, conscious that he was all things but welcome.

“Hang you, I'm not!” incogitantly.

“Go to the devil, then!” cried Maurice, hotly.

“Gently,” said Fitzgerald, catching Maurice by the coat and pulling him down into a chair. “Confound you, could you not have made yourself known to me without yelling my name at the top of your voice?”

“Are you ashamed of it?” asked Maurice, loosing his coat from Fitzgerald's grip.

“I'm afraid of it,” the Englishman admitted, in a lowered voice. “And your manly, resonant tones have cast it abroad. I am here incognito.”

“Who the deuce are you?”

“I am Don Jahpet of Armenia; that is to say that I am a marked man. And now, as you would inelegantly express it, you have put a tag on me. When I left you in Vienna the other day I lied to you. I am sorry. I should have trusted you, only I did not wish you to risk your life. You would have insisted on coming along.”

“Risked my life?” echoed Maurice. “How many times have I not risked it? By the way,” impressed by a sudden thought, “are you the Englishman every one seems to be expecting?”

“Yes.” Fitzgerald knocked his pipe against the railing. “I am the man. Worse luck! Was any one near when you called me by name?”

“Only one of those wooden gendarmes.”

“Only one of those wooden gendarmes!” ironically. “Only one of those dogs who have been at my heels ever since I arrived. And he, having heard, has gone back to his master. Well, since you have started the ball rolling, it is no more than fair that you should see the game to its end.”

“What's it all about?” asked Maurice, his astonishment growing and growing.

“Where are your rooms?”

“You have something important to tell me?”

“Perhaps you may think so. At the Continental? Come along.”

They passed out of the pavilion, along the path to the square, thence to the terrace of the Continental, which they mounted. Not a word was said, but Maurice was visibly excited, and by constant gnawing ruined his cigar. He conducted his friend to the room on the second floor, the window of which opened on a private balcony. Here he placed two chairs and a small table; and with a bottle of tokayer between them they seated themselves.

“What's it all about?”

“O, only a crown and a few millions in money.”

“Only a crown and a few millions in money,” repeated Maurice very slowly, for his mind could scarcely accept Fitzgerald and these two greatest treasures on earth.

A gendarme had leisurely followed them from the park. He took aside a porter and quietly plied him with questions. Evidently the answers were satisfactory, for he at once departed.

Maurice stared at the Englishman.

“Knocks you up a bit, eh?” said Fitzgerald. “Well, I am rather surprised myself; that is to say, I was.”

“Fire away,” said Maurice.

“To begin with, if I do not see the king to-morrow, it is not likely that I ever shall.”

“The king?”

“My business here is with his Majesty.”

Maurice filled the glasses and pushed one across the table.

“Here's!” said he, and gulped.

Fitzgerald drank slowly, however, as if arranging in his mind the salient points in his forthcoming narrative.

“I have never been an extraordinarily communicative man; what I shall tell

you is known only to my former Colonel and myself. At Calcutta, where you and I first met, I was but a Lieutenant in her Majesty's. To-day I am burdened with riches such as I know not how to use, and possessor of a title which sounds strange in my ears."

The dim light from the gas-jet in the room flickered over his face, and Maurice saw that it was slightly contorted, as if by pain.

"My father was Lord Fitzgerald."

"What!" cried Maurice, "the diplomat, the historian, the millionaire?"

"The same. Thirteen years ago we parted—a misunderstanding. I never saw him again. Six months ago he died and left me a fortune, a title and a strange legacy; and it is this legacy which brings me to Bleiberg. Do you know the history of Leopold?"

"I do. This throne belongs to the house of Auersperg, and the Osian usurps. The fact that the minister of the duchess has been discredited was what brought me here. Continue."

And Fitzgerald proceeded briefly to acquaint the other with the strange caprice of his father; how, when he left Bleiberg, he had been waylaid and the certificates demanded; how he had entrusted them to his valet, who had gone by another route; how the duke had sought him in Vienna and made offers, bribes and threats; how he had laughed at all, and sworn that Duke Josef should never be a king.

"My father wished to save Leopold in spite of himself; and then, he had no love for Josef. At a dinner given at the legation, there was among others a toast to her Majesty. The duke laughed and tossed the wine to the floor. It lost him his crown, for my father never forgave the insult. When the duke died, his daughter took up the work with surprising vigor. It was all useless; father was a rock, and would listen neither to bribes nor threats. Now they are after me. They have hunted me in India, London, and Vienna. I am an obscure soldier, with all my titles and riches; they threaten me with death. But I am here, and my father's wishes shall be carried out. That is all. I am glad that we have come together; you have more invention than I have."

"But why did you come yourself? You could have sent an agent. That would have been simple."

"An agent might be bought. It was necessary for me to come. However, I might have waited till the twentieth. I should have come openly and informed the British minister of my mission. As to the pheasants, they could have waited. Perhaps my fears are without foundation, unless you have been the unconscious

cause of my true name being known. Every one has heard the story. It is known as 'Fitzgerald's folly,' and has gone the rounds of the diplomatic circles for ten years. I shall ask for an audience to-morrow morning."

"And these certificates fall due the same day that the princess is to be married," mused his auditor. "What a yarn for the papers!" his love of sensation being always close to the surface. "Your father, you say, took four million crowns; what became of the fifth?"

"The duke was permitted to secure that."

"A kind of court plaster for his wounds, eh? Why don't you get that other million and run the kingdom yourself? It's a great opportunity." Maurice laughed.

"Her Royal Highness must not be forgotten. My father thought much of her."

"But really I do not see why you are putting yourself to all this trouble. The king will pay off the indebtedness; the kingdom is said to be rich, or Austria wouldn't meddle with it."

"The king, on the twentieth of this month, will be some three millions short."

"And since he can not pay he is bankrupt. Ah, I see the plan. The duke knew that he wouldn't be able to pay."

"You have hit it squarely."

"But Austria, having placed Leopold here, is his sponsor."

"Austria has too many debts of her own; she will have to disavow her protege, which is a fact not unthought of by the house of Auersperg. By constant machination and intrigue the king's revenues have been so depleted that ordinary debts are troublesome. The archbishop, to stave off the probable end, brought about the alliance between the houses of Carnavia and Osia. My business here is to arrange for a ten years' renewal of the loan, and that is what the duchess wishes to prevent, mon ami. What's to become of the king and his daughter if aught in the way of mishap should befall me? I have not seen the king, but I have seen her Royal Highness."

"What is she like?" Maurice asked, innocently. He saw no reason why he should confide to the Englishman his own adventure.

"I'm not much of a judge," said Fitzgerald cautiously. "I have lived most of my life in cantonments where women were old and ran mostly to tongue. I should say that she is beautiful." A short sigh followed this admission.

"Ah!" said Maurice with a loud laugh to cover the sudden pang of jealousy which seized him; "in gratitude for saving her father's throne the daughter will

fall in love with you. It is what the dramatist calls logical sequence.”

“Why don't you write novels? Your imagination has no bounds.”

“Writing novels is too much like work. But I'm serious. Your position in the world to-day is nearly equal to hers, and certainly more secure. Ah, yes; I must not forget that prince. He's a lucky dog—and so are you, for that matter. Millions and titles! And I have slapped you cavalierly on the back, smoked your cigars, drunk your whisky, and beaten you at poker!” comically.

“Ah, Maurice, it is neither wealth nor titles; it is freedom. I am like a boy out of school for good and all. Women, the society of women, who are the salt of earth; that is what I want. I have knocked out thirteen years of my life in furnace holes, and have not met nor spoken to a dozen young women in all that time. How I envy you! You know every one; you have seen the world; you are at home in Paris, or London, or Vienna; you have enjoyed all I wish to enjoy.”

“Why did you ever get into the army?”

“You ought to know.”

“But it was bread and butter to me.”

“Well, I was young; I saw fame and glory. If the matter under hand is closed to-morrow, what do you say to the Carpathians and bears? I shall not remain here; some one will be looking for blood. What do you say?”

“I don't know,” said Maurice, thoughtfully. He was thinking of Mademoiselle of the Veil and her prophecy of ravens. “I don't know that I shall be able. It is my opinion that your part in the affair is only a curtain-raiser to graver things. Every one of importance in town goes about with an air of expectancy. I never saw anything like it. It is the king, the archbishop and the chancellor against two hundred thousand. You're a soldier; can't you smell powder?”

“Powder! You do not believe the duchess mad enough to wage war?”

“Trust a woman to do what no one dreams she will.”

“But Austria would be about her ears in a minute!”

“Maybe. Have you seen this Colonel Beauvais of the royal cuirassiers, the actual head of the army here?”

“A fine soldier,” said the Englishman, heartily. “Rides like a centaur and wields a saber as if it were a piece of straw.”

“I can hold a pretty good blade myself; I've an idea that I can lick him at both games.”

Fitzgerald laughed good-naturedly. “There is the one flaw in your make-up. I

admit your horsemanship; but the saber! Believe me, it is only the constant practice and a wrist of iron which make the saber formidable. You are more familiar with the pen; I dare say you could best him at that."

"What makes you think I can not lick him?"

"Since when have the saber and the civilian been on terms? And these continental sabers are matchless, the finest in the world. I trust you will steer clear of the Colonel; if you have any challenge in mind, spring it on me, and I'll let you down easy." Then: "Why the devil do you want to lick him, anyway?"

"I don't know," said Maurice. "I had a close range to-night, and somehow the man went against the grain. Well, Jack, I'll stay with you in this affair, though, as the county judge at home would say, it's out of my circuit."

They shook hands across the table.

"Come," said Fitzgerald; "a toast, for I must be off."

"What do you say to her Royal Highness?"

"Let us make it general: to all women!"

They set down the glasses and shook hands again.

"It seemed good to run across you in Vienna, Maurice. You were one of the bright spots in the old days."

"Do you want me to walk with you to the Grand? It's a fine night," said Maurice, waving his hand toward the moon. "By George, what a beautiful place this end of Bleiberg is! I do not wonder that the duchess covets it."

"No, I'll go alone. All I have to do is to march straight up the Strasse."

"Well, good-night and good luck to you," said Maurice, as he led the Englishman into the hallway. "Look me up when you have settled the business. I say, but it gets me; it's the strangest thing I ever heard." And he waited till the soldierly form disappeared below the landing.

Then he went back to his chair on the balcony to think it over. At four o'clock that afternoon he had grumbled of dullness. He lit a pipe, and contemplated the soft and delicate blues of earth and heaven, the silvery flashes on the lake, and the slim violet threads of smoke which wavered about his head. It was late. Now and then the sound of a galloping horse was borne up by the breeze, and presently Maurice heard the midnight bell boom forth from the sleepy spires of the cathedral—where the princess was to be married.

One by one the lamps of the park went out, but the moon shone on, lustrous and splendid. First he reviewed his odd adventure in the archbishop's gardens. He had spoken to princesses before, but they were women of the world,

hothouse roses that bloom and wither in a short space. The atmosphere which surrounded this princess was idyllic, pastoral. She had seen nothing of the world, its sports and pastimes, and the art of playing at love was unknown to her. Again he could see her serious eyes, the delicate chin and mouth, the oval cheeks, and the dog that followed in her steps. Here was an indelible picture which time could never efface. Something stirred in his heart, and he sighed.

And ah, the woman in the veil! Who could she be? The more he thought of her the more convinced he was that she stood high in the service of any one but Leopold of Osia. And Fitzgerald! That sober old soldier concerned with crowns and millions! It was incredible; it was almost laughable. They had met up-country in India, and had hunted, and Maurice had saved the Englishman's life. Occasionally they had corresponded.

“Well, to bed,” said the young diplomat. “This has been a full day.” And, like the true newspaper man he was, for all his diplomacy, he emptied the bottle and entered the room. He was about to disrobe, when some one rapped on the door. He opened it, and beheld a man in the livery of the Grand Hotel. He was breathing hard.

“Herr Carewe?”

“Yes. What's wanted?”

“Herr Hamilton—”

“Hamilton? O, yes. Go on.”

“Herr Hamilton bade me to tell your Excellency that in returning to the hotel he sprained his ankle, and wishes to know if Herr would not be so kind as to spend the night with him.”

“Certainly. Run down to the office, and I shall be with you shortly.” Again alone, Maurice opened his trunk. He brought forth a pint flask of brandy, some old handkerchiefs to be used as bandages, and a box of salve he used for bruises when on hunting expeditions. In turning over his clothes his hand came into contact with his old army revolver. He scratched his head. “No, it's too much like a cannon, and there's no room for it in my pockets.” He pushed it aside, rose and slammed the lid of the trunk. “Sprained his ankle? He wasn't gone more than an hour. How the deuce is he to see the king to-morrow? Probably wishes to appoint me his agent. That's it. Very well.” He proceeded to the office, where he found the messenger waiting for him. “Come on, and put life into your steps.”

Together they traversed the moonlit thoroughfare. Few persons were astir. Once the night patrol clattered by. They passed through the markets, and not far ahead they could see the university. It looked like a city prison.

“This is the hotel, Herr,” said the messenger.

They entered. Maurice approached the proprietor, who was pale and flurried; but as Maurice had never seen the natural repose of his countenance, he thought nothing of it.

“My friend, Herr Hamilton, has met with an accident. Where is his room?”

“Number nine; Johann will show you.” He acted as if he had something more to say, but a glance from the round-faced porter silenced him. Maurice lost much by not seeing this glance. He followed the messenger up the stairs.

There were no transoms. The corridor was devoid of illumination. The porter struck a match and held it close to the panel of a door under which a thread of light streamed.

“This is it, Herr,” he bawled, so loudly that Maurice started.

“There was no need of waking the dead to tell me,” he growled.

The door opened, and before Maurice could brace himself—for the interior of the room made all plain to him—he was violently pushed over the threshold on to his knees. He was up in an instant. The room was filled with soldiers, foot soldiers of the king, so it seemed.

“What the devil is this?” he demanded, brushing his knees and cursing himself because he had not brought his Colt when fate had put it almost in his hand.

“It is a banquet, young man. We were waiting for the guest of honor.”

Maurice turned to the speaker, and saw a medium-sized man with gray hair and a frosty stubble of a mustache. He wore no insignia of office. Indeed, as Maurice gazed from one man to the next he saw that there were no officers; and it came to him that these were not soldiers of the king. He was in a trap. He thought quickly. Fitzgerald was in trouble, perhaps on his account. Where was he?

“I do not see my friend who sprained his ankle,” he said coolly.

This declaration was greeted with laughter.

“Evidently I have entered the wrong room,” he continued imperturbably. He stepped toward the door, but a burly individual placed his back to it.

“Am I a prisoner, or the victim of a practical joke?”

“Either way,” said the man with the frosty mustache.

“Why?”

“You have recently formed a dangerous acquaintance, and we desire to aid you in breaking it.”

“Are you aware, gentlemen—no, I don't mean gentlemen—that I am attached to the American legation in Vienna, and that my person is inviolable?”

Everybody laughed again—everybody but Maurice.

“Allow me to correct you,” put in the elderly man, who evidently was the leader in the affair. “You are not attached; you are detached. Gentlemen, permit me, M. Carewe, detache of the American legation in Vienna, who wishes he had stayed there.”

Maurice saw a brace of revolvers on the mantel. The table stood between.

“Well,” he said, banteringly, “bring on your banquet; the hour is late.”

“That's the way; don't lose your temper, and no harm will come to you.”

“What do you wish of me?”

“Merely the pleasure of your company. Lieutenant, bring out the treasure.”

One of the soldiers entered the next room and soon returned pushing Fitzgerald before him. The Englishman was bound and gagged.

“How will you have the pheasant served?” asked the leader.

“Like a gentleman!” cried Maurice, letting out a little of his anger. “Take out the gag; he will not cry.”

The leader nodded, and Fitzgerald's mouth was relieved. He spat some blood on the carpet, then looked at his captors, the devil in his eyes.

“Proceed to kill me and have done,” he said.

“Kill you? No, no!”

“I advise you to, for if you do not kill me, some day I shall be free again, and then God help some of you.”

Maurice gazed at the candles on the table, and smiled.

“I'm sorry they dragged you into it, Maurice,” said Fitzgerald.

“I'm glad they did. What you want is company.” There was a glance, swift as light. It went to the mantel, then passed to the captive. “Well,” said Maurice, “what is next on your damned program?”

“The other side of the frontier.”

“Maybe,” said Maurice.

With an unexpected movement he sent the table over, the lights went out; and he had judged the distance so accurately that he felt his hands close over the revolvers.

“The door! the door!” a voice bawled. “Knock down any one who attempts to

pass.”

This was precisely what Maurice desired. With the soldiers massed about the door, he would be free to liberate Fitzgerald; which he did. He had scarcely completed the task, when a flame spurted up. The leader fearlessly lit a candle and righted the table. He saw both his prisoners, one of them with extended arms, at the ends of which glistened revolver barrels.

“The devil!” he said.

“Maybe it is,” replied Maurice. “Now, my gay banqueteers, open the door; and the first man who makes a suspicious movement will find that I'm a tolerable shot.”

“Seize him, your Excellency!” shouted one of the troopers. “Those are my revolvers he has, and they are not loaded.”

CHAPTER VIII. THE RED CHATEAU

Two o'clock in the morning, on the king's highway, and a small body of horse making progress. The moon was beginning to roll away toward the west, but the world was still frost-white, and the broad road stretched out like a silver ribbon before the horsemen, until it was lost in the blue mist of the forests.

The troop consisted of ten men, two of whom rode with their hands tied behind their backs and their feet fastened under the bellies of the horses. The troop was not conspicuous for this alone. Three others had their heads done up in handkerchiefs, and a fourth carried his arm in a sling.

Five miles to the rear lay the sleeping city of Bleiberg, twenty miles beyond rose the formidable heights of the Thalians. At times the horses went forward at a gallop, but more often they walked; when they galloped the man with his arm in the sling complained. Whenever the horses dropped into a walk, the leader talked to one of the prisoners.

“You fight like the very devil, my friend,” he said; “but we were too many by six. Mind, I think none the less of you for your attempt; freedom is always worth fighting for. As I said before, no harm is meant to you, physically; as to the moral side, that doesn't concern me. You have disabled four of my men, and have scarcely a dozen scratches to show for it. I wanted to take only four men with me; I was ordered to take eight. The hand of providence is in it.”

“You wouldn't be so polite, Colonel,” spoke up the trooper whose arm was in the sling, “if you had got this crack.”

“Baron, who told you to call me Colonel?” the leader demanded.

“Why, we are out of the city; there's no harm now that I can see.”

“Is it possible,” said Maurice ironically, “that I have had the honor of hitting a baron on the head and breaking his arm?”

The baron muttered a curse and fell back.

“And you,” went on Maurice, addressing the leader, “are a Colonel?”

“Yes.”

“For the duchess?”

“For the duchess.”

“A black business for you, Colonel; take my word for it.”

“A black business it is; but orders are orders. Have you ever been a soldier?”

“I have.”

“Well, there's nothing more to be said.”

“America—” Maurice began.

“Is several thousand miles away.”

“Not if you reckon from Vienna.”

“I'd rather not reckon, if it's all the same to you. Your friend—I might say, your very valuable friend—takes the matter too much to heart.”

“He's not a talkative man.”

Fitzgerald looked straight ahead, stern and impassive.

“But now that we are talking,” said Maurice, “I should like to know how the deuce you got hold of my name and dragged me into this affair?”

“Simple enough. A card of yours was given to me; on it was your name and address. The rest was easy.”

Maurice grew limp in the saddle.

“By George! I had forgotten! The woman is at the bottom of it.”

“Quite likely. I thought you'd come to that conclusion. Sometimes when we play with foxes they lead us into bear traps. Young man, witness these gray hairs; never speak to strange women, especially when they wear veils.”

Fitzgerald was now attending the conversation.

“And who is this woman?” asked Maurice.

“Mademoiselle of the Veil, according to your picturesque imagination; to me she is the intimate friend and adviser of her Highness Stephonia.” He wheeled to the troopers with a laugh: “Hoch, you beggars, hoch!”

Maurice indulged in some uncomplimentary remarks, among which was: “I'm an ass!”

“Every man improves on making that discovery; the Darwinian theory is wrong.”

After a pause Maurice said: “How did you get on the ground so quickly?”

“We arrived yesterday afternoon as the escort of your charmer. A pretty woman finds it troublesome to travel alone in these parts. When you slapped your friend on the back and bawled out his name—a name known from one end of the kingdom to the other—the plan of action was immediately formed. You were necessary, for it was taken for granted that you knew too much. You had

also promised your sword," with a chuckle.

"I made no promise," said Maurice. "I only said that I should easily be found when wanted."

"Well, so you were; there's no gainsaying that."

Maurice said some more uncomplimentary things.

"It was neatly done, you will admit. Life is a game of cards; he wins who plays first."

"Or he doesn't. Colonel, a game is won only when it is played'."

"That's true enough."

"Kings are a tolerable bother on earth," Maurice declared, trying to ease his wrists by holding them higher against his back.

"What do you know about them?"

"When I was in the army I often fell in with three or four of a night."

"Eh?—kings?"

"Yes; but usually I was up against aces or straight flushes."

"Cards! Well, well; when you get down to the truth of the matter, real kings differ but little from the kings in pasteboard; right side up, or wrong side up, they serve the purpose of those who play them. There's a poor, harmless devil back there," with a nod toward Bleiberg. "He never injured a soul. Perhaps that's it; had he been cruel, avaricious, sly, all of them would be cringing at his feet. Devil take me—but I'm a soldier," he broke off abruptly; "it's none of my business."

"Have you any titles?" Maurice asked presently.

"Titles?" The Colonel jerked around on his horse. "Why?"

"O," said Maurice carelessly, "I thought it not unlikely that you might have a few lying around loose."

The Colonel roared. "You Americans beat the very devil with your questions. Well, I am politely known as Count Mollendorf, if that will gratify you."

"What! brother of Mollendorf of the king's police?"

"God save the mark! No; I am an honest man—some of the time."

Maurice laughed; the old fellow was amusing, and besides, this conversation helped to pass away the time.

"Wake up, Jack; here's entertainment," he said.

A scowl added itself to the stern expression on Fitzgerald's face.

"I trust that none of your teeth are loose," ventured the Colonel.

“If they are, they'll be tight enough ere many days have passed,” was the threatening reply.

“Beware the dog!” cried the Colonel, and he resumed his place at the head of the little troop.

Maurice took this opportunity to bend toward Fitzgerald. “Have you anything of importance about you?” he whispered significantly.

“Nothing. But God send that no chambermaid change the sheet in my bed at the hotel.”

“Are they—”

“Silence.” Fitzgerald saw the trooper next with his hand to his ear.

After a time the Colonel sang out: “Fifteen miles more, with three on the other side, men; we must put more life into us. A trot for a few miles. The quicker the ride is done, baron, the quicker the surgeon will look to your arm.”

And silence fell upon the troop. Occasionally a stray horse in the fields whinneyed, and was answered from the road; sometimes the howl of a dog broke the monotony. On and on they rode; hour and mile were left behind them. The moon fell lower and lower, and the mountains rose higher and higher, and the wind which had risen had a frosty sting to it. Maurice now began to show the true state of his temper by cursing his horse whenever it rubbed against one of its fellows. His back was lame, and there was a dull pain in one of his shoulders. When he had made the rush for the door, clubbing right and left with the empty revolvers, he had finally been thrown on an overturned chair.

“Here, hang you!” he said to the trooper who held the bridle of his horse, “I'm cold; you might at least turn up my collar about my throat.”

“You are welcome to my cloak,” said the trooper, disengaging that article from his shoulders.

“Thank you,” said Maurice, somewhat abashed by the respectful tone.

The trooper offered his blanket to Fitzgerald.

“I wish no favors,” said the Englishman, thanklessly.

The trooper shrugged, and caught up Maurice's bridle.

At length the troop arrived at the frontier. There was no sign of life at the barrack. They passed unchallenged.

“What!” exclaimed Maurice, “do they sleep here at night, then? A fine frontier barrack.” He had lived in hopes of more disturbance and a possible chance for liberty.

“They will wake up to-day,” answered the Colonel; “that is, if the wine we gave them was not too strong. Poor devils; they must be good and cold by this time, since we have their clothes. What do you think of a king whose soldiers drink with any strangers who chance along?”

Maurice became resigned. To him the present dynasty was as fragile as glass, and it needed but one strong blow to shatter it into atoms. And the one hope rode at his side, sullen and wrathful, but impotent; the one hope the king had to save his throne. He had come to Bleiberg in search of excitement, but this was altogether more than he had bargained for.

The horses began to lift and were soon winding in and out of the narrow mountain pass. The chill of the overhanging snows fell upon them.

“It wouldn't have hurt you to accept the blanket,” said Maurice to Fitzgerald.

“Curse it! I want nothing but two minutes freedom. It would be warm enough then.”

“No confidences, gentlemen,” warned the Colonel; “I understand English tolerably well.”

“Go to the devil, then, if you do!” said Fitzgerald discourteously.

“When the time comes,” tranquilly. “Of the two I like your friend the better. To be resigned to the inevitable is a sign of good mental balance.”

“I am not used to words,” replied the Englishman.

“You are used to orders. I am simply obeying mine. If I took you off your guard it was because I had to, and not because I liked that method best. Look alive, men; it's down hill from now on.”

A quarter of an hour later the troop arrived at the duchy's frontier post. There was no sleep here. The Colonel flung himself from his horse and exercised his legs.

“Sergeant,” he said, “how far behind the others?”

“They passed two hours ago, Excellency. And all is well?” deferentially.

“All is indeed well,” with a gesture toward the prisoners.

“I've a flask of brandy in my hip pocket,” said Maurice. “Will you help me to a nip, Colonel?”

“Pardon me, gentlemen; I had forgotten that your hands were still in cords. Corporal,” to a trooper, “relieve their hands.”

The prisoners rubbed their wrists and hands, which were numb and cold. Maurice produced his flask.

“I was bringing it along for your sprained ankle,” he said, as he extended the flask to Fitzgerald, who drank a third of it. “I'd offer you some, Colonel, only it would be like heaping coals of fire on your head; and, besides, I want it all myself.” He returned the emptied flask to his pocket, feeling a moderate warmth inside.

“Drink away, my son,” said the Colonel, climbing into the saddle; “there'll be plenty for me for this night's work. Forward!”

The troop took up the march again, through a splendid forest kept clear of dead wood by the peasants. It abounded with game. The shrill cry of the pheasants, the rustle of the partridges in the underbrush, the bark of the fox, all rose to the ears of the trespassers. The smell of warm earth permeated the air, and the sky was merging from silver into gold.

When Napoleon humiliated Austria for the second time, one of his mushroom nobles, who placed too much faith in the man of destiny, selected this wooded paradise as a residence. He built him a fine castle of red brick, full of wide halls and drawing rooms and chambers of state, and filled it with fabulous paintings, Gobelin tapestries, and black walnut wainscot. He kept a small garrison of French soldiers by converting the huge stables partly into a barrack. One night the peasantry rose. There was a conflict, as the walls still show; and the prince by patent fled, no one knew where. After its baptism in blood it became known far and wide as the Red Chateau. Whenever children were unruly, they were made docile by threats of the dark dungeons of the Red Chateau, or the ghosts of the French and German peasants who died there. As it now stood, it was one of the summer residences of her Highness.

It was here that the long night's journey came to an end.

“Gentlemen,” said the Colonel, dismounting, “permit me, in the name of her Highness, to offer you the hospitality of Red Chateau. Consider; will you lighten my task by giving me your word of honor to make no attempt to escape? Escape is possible, but not probable. There are twenty fresh men and horses in the stables. Come, be reasonable. It will be pleasanter on both sides.”

“So far as I'm concerned,” said Maurice, who needed liberty not half so much as sleep, “I pass my word.”

“And you, sir?” to Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald gazed about him. “Very well,” he said, as he saw the futility of a struggle.

“Your humble servant, Messieurs,” touching his cap. “Take the ropes off their ankles, men.”

When Maurice was lifted from his horse and placed on the ground, his legs suddenly bent under him, and he went sprawling to the grass. A trooper sprang to his assistance.

“My legs have gone to sleep!”

The Englishman was affected likewise, and it was some moments before either could walk. They were conducted to a chamber high up in the left wing, which overlooked the forest and the mountains. It was a large airy room, but the windows were barred and there were double locks on the doors. The Colonel followed them into the room and pointed to the table.

“Breakfast, Messieurs, and a good sleep for you till this noon. As for the rest, let that take care of itself.” And he left them.

Maurice, after having tried all the bars and locks in answer to his conscience, gave his attention to the breakfast. On lifting the covers he found fish, eggs, toast and coffee.

“Here's luck!” he cried. “We were expected.”

“Curse it, Maurice!” Fitzgerald began pacing the room.

“No, no,” said Maurice; “let us eat it; that's what it's here for,” and he fell to with that vigor known only to healthy blood.

“But what's to be done?”

“Follow Solomon's advice, and wait.”

“You're taking it cursed cool.”

“Force of habit,” breaking the toast. “What's the use of wasting powder? Because I have shown only the exterior, our friend the Colonel has already formed an opinion of me. I am brave if need be, but young and careless. In a day or so—for I suppose we are not to be liberated at once—he'll forget to use proper caution in respect to me. And then, 'who can say?' as the Portuguese says when he hasn't anything else to say. They'll keep a strict watch over you, my friend, because you've played the lion too much. Just before I left the States, as you call them, a new slang phrase was going the rounds;—'it is better to play the fox some of the time than to roar all of the time.' Ergo, be foxy. Take it cool. So long as you haven't got that mint packed about your person, the game breaks even.”

“But the king!”

“Is as secure on his throne as he ever was. If you do not present those consols, either for renewal or collection, on the twentieth, he loses nothing. As you said, let us hope that the chambermaid is a shifty, careless lass, who will not touch your room till you return.” Maurice broke an egg and dropped a lump of sugar

into his cup.

“Is this the way you fight Indians?”

“Indians? What the deuce has fighting Indians to do with this? As to Indians, shoot them in the back if you can. Here, everything depends not on fighting but the right use of words. A man may be a diplomat and not render his country any large benefit; still, it's a fine individual training. Thrones stand on precipices and are pushed back to safety by the trick of a few words. Have an egg; they're fresh.”

Fitzgerald sat down and gulped his coffee. “They broke my monocle in the struggle.”

Maurice choked in his cup.

“I've worn it twelve years, too,” went on Fitzgerald.

“Everything is for the best,” said Maurice. “You will be able to see out of both eyes.”

“Confound you!” cried Fitzgerald, smiling in spite of himself; “nothing will disturb you.”

“You mean, nothing shall. Now, there's the bed and there's the lounge. Since you are the principal, that is to say, the constituent part of this affair, and also the principal actor in this extravaganza, suppose you take the bed and leave me the lounge? And the deuce take the duchess, who is probably a woman with a high forehead and a pair of narrow eyes!” He threw down his napkin and made for the lounge, without giving any particular attention to the smile and frown which were struggling in the Englishman's eyes. In less than a minute Maurice was dozing.

Fitzgerald thought that the best thing he could do was to follow the philosophical example of his friend. “These Americans,” he mused, as he arranged the pillow under his ear, “are `fifteen puzzles'; you can move them, or you can't.”

As for Maurice, he was already dreaming; he was too tired to sleep. Presently he thought he was on a horse again, and was galloping, galloping. He was heading his old company to the very fringe of the alkali. The Apaches had robbed the pay train and killed six men, and the very deuce was to pay all around.... Again he was swimming, and a beautiful girl reached out a hand and saved him. Ah! how beautiful she was, how soft and rich the deep brown of her eyes!... The scene shifted. The president of the South American republic had accepted his sword (unbeknown to the United States authorities), and he was

aiding to quell the insurrection. And just then some one whispered to him that gold would rise fifty points. And as he put out his hands to gather in the glittering coins which were raining down, the face of Colonel Beauvais loomed up, scowling and furious.... And yet again came the beautiful girl. He was holding her hand and the archbishop had his spread out in benediction over their heads.... A hand, which was not of dreamland, shook him by the arm. He opened his eyes. Fitzgerald was standing over him. The light of the sun spangled the walls opposite the windows. The clock marked the eleventh hour of day.

“Hang you!” he said, with blinking eyes; “why didn't you let me be? I was just marrying the princess, and you've spoiled it all. I—” He jumped to his feet and rubbed his eyes, and, forgetful of all save his astonishment, pursed his lips into a low whistle.

CHAPTER IX. NOTHING MORE SERIOUS THAN A HOUSE PARTY

Standing just within the door, smiling and rubbing the gray bristles on his lip, was the Colonel. In the center of the room stood a woman dressed in gray. Maurice recognized the dress; it belonged to Mademoiselle of the Veil, who was now sans veil, sans hat. A marvelous face was revealed to Maurice, a face of that peculiar beauty which poets and artists are often minded to deny, but for the love of which men die, become great or terrible, overturn empires and change the map of the world.

Her luxuriant hair, which lay in careless masses about the shapely head and intelligent brow, was a mixture of red and brown and gold, a variety which never ceases to charm; skin the pallor of ancient marble, with the shadow of rose lying below the eyes, the large, gray chatoyant eyes, which answered every impulse of the brain which ruled them. The irregularity of her features was never noticeable after a glance into those eyes. At this moment both eyes and lips expressed a shade of amusement.

Maurice, who was astonished never more than a minute at a time, immediately recovered. His toilet was somewhat disarranged, and the back of his head a crow's nest, but, nevertheless, he placed a hand over his heart and offered a low obeisance.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” she said, in a voice which Maurice would have known anywhere. “I hope the journey has caused you no particular annoyance.”

“The annoyance was not so particular, Madame,” said Fitzgerald stiffly, “as it was general.”

“And four of my troopers will take oath to that!” interjected the Colonel.

“Will Madame permit me to ask when will the opera begin?” asked Maurice.

“I am glad,” said she, “that you have lost none of your freshness.”

Maurice was struck for a moment, but soon saw that the remark was innocent of any inelegance of speech. Fitzgerald was gnawing his mustache and looking out of the corner of his eyes—into hers.

“My task, I confess, is a most disagreeable one,” she resumed, lightly beating her gauntlets together; “but when one serves high personages one is supposed not to have any sentiments.” To Fitzgerald she said: “You are the son of the late

Lord Fitzgerald."

"For your sake, I regret to say that I am."

"For my sake? Worry yourself none on that point. As the agent of her Highness I am inconsiderable."

"Madame," said Maurice, "will you do us the honor to inform us to whom we are indebted for this partiality to our distinguished persons?"

"I am Sylvia Amerbach," quietly.

"Amerbach?" said Maurice, who was familiar with the great names of the continent. "Pardon me, but that was once a famous name in Prussia."

"I am distantly related to that house of princes," looking at her gauntlets.

"Well, Madame, since your business doubtless concerns me, pray, begin;" and Fitzgerald leaned against the mantelpiece and fumbled with the rim of his monocle.

Maurice walked to one of the windows and perched himself on the broad sill. He began to whistle softly:

Voici le sabre de mon pere! Tu vas le mettre a ton cote....

Beyond the window, at the edge of the forest, he saw a sentinel pacing backward and forward. Indeed, no matter which way he looked, the autumnal scenery had this accessory. Again, he inspected the bars. These were comparatively new. It was about thirty feet to the court below. On the whole, the outlook was discouraging.

"Count," said the distant relative of the house of Amerbach, "how shall I begin?"

"I am not a diplomat, Madame," answered the Colonel. "If, however, you wish the advice of a soldier, I should begin by asking if my lord the Englishman has those consols about his person."

"Fie, count!" she cried, laughing; "one would say that was a prelude to robbery."

"So they would. As for myself, I prefer violence to words. If we take these pretty papers by violence, we shall still have left our friend the Englishman his self-respect. And as for words, while my acquaintance with our friend is slight, I should say that they would only be wasted here."

The whistle from the window still rose and fell.

"Monsieur, I have it in my power to make you rich."

"I am rich," replied Fitzgerald.

“In honors?”

“Madame, the title I have is already a burden to me.” Fitzgerald laughed, which announced that the cause of the duchess was not getting on very well. Once or twice he raised the tortoiseshell rim to his eye, but dropped it; force of habit was difficult to overcome.

“Your father nourished a particular rancor against the late duke.”

“And justly, you will admit.”

“Her Highness has offered you five millions for slips of paper worth no more than the ink which decorates them.”

“And I have refused. Why? Simply because the matter does not rest with me. You have proceeded with a high hand, Madame, or rather your duchess has. Nothing will come of it. Had there been any possibility of my considering your proposals, this kidnaping would have destroyed it.”

She smiled. Maurice saw the smile and stopped whistling long enough to scratch his chin, which was somewhat in need of a razor. He had seen many women smile that way. He had learned to read it. It was an inarticulate “perhaps.”

“The rightful successor to the throne—”

“Is Madame the duchess,” Fitzgerald completed. “I haven't the slightest doubt of that. One way or the other, it does not concern me. I came here simply to fulfill the wishes of my father; and my word, Madame, fulfill them I shall. You are holding me a prisoner, but uselessly. On the twentieth the certificates fall due against the government. If they are not presented either for renewal or collection, the bankruptcy scheme of your duchess will fall through just the same. I will tell you the truth, Madame. My father never expected to collect the moneys so long as Leopold sat on the throne.”

The whistle grew shrill.

“This officer here,” continued Fitzgerald, while the Colonel made a comical grimace, “suggests violence. I shall save him the trouble. I have seen much of the world, Madame—the hard side of it—and, knowing it as I do, it is scarcely probable that I should carry about my person the equivalent of four millions of crowns.”

“Well, Madame,” said the Colonel, pushing his belt closer about his hips, as a soldier always does when he is on the point of departure, “what he says is true, every word of it. I see nothing more to do at present.”

Mademoiselle of the Veil was paying not so much attention to the Colonel's

words as she was to Maurice's whistle.

“Monsieur,” she said, coldly, “have you no other tune in your repertory?”

“Pardon me!” exclaimed Maurice. “I did not intend to annoy you.” He stepped down out of the window.

“You do not annoy me; only the tune grows rather monotonous.”

“I will whistle anything you may suggest,” he volunteered.

She did not respond to this flippancy, though the pupils of her gray eyes grew large with anger. She walked the length of the room and back.

“Count, what do you think would be most satisfactory to her Highness, under the circumstances?”

“I have yet to hear of her Highness' disapproval of anything you undertake.”

“Messieurs, your parole d'honneur, and the freedom of the chateau is yours—within the sentry lines. I wish to make your recollections of the Red Chateau rather pleasant than otherwise. I shall be most happy if you will honor my table with your presence.”

The Colonel coughed, Maurice smoothed the back of his head, and Fitzgerald caught up his monocle.

“My word, Madame,” said Maurice, “is not worth much, being that of a diplomat, but such as it is it is yours. However, my clothes are scarcely presentable,” which was true enough. Several buttons were missing, and the collar hung by a thread.

“That can be easily remedied,” said she. “There are several new hussar uniforms in the armory.”

“O, Madame, and you will permit me to wear one of those gay uniforms of light blue and silver lace?”

The Colonel looked thoughtfully at Maurice. He was too much a banterer himself to miss the undercurrent of raillery. He eyed Madame discreetly; he saw that she had accepted merely the surface tones.

“And you will wear one, too, Jack?” said Maurice.

“No, thank you. I pass my word, Madame; I do not like confinement.”

“Well, then, the count will shortly return and establish you in better quarters. Let us suppose you are my guests for a—a fortnight. Since both of us are right, since neither your cause nor mine is wrong, an armistice! Ah! I forgot. The east corridor on the third floor is forbidden you. Should you mistake and go that way, a guard will direct you properly. Messieurs, till dinner!” and with a smile which

illumined her face as a sudden burst of sunshine flashes across a hillside, she passed out of the room, followed by her henchman, who had not yet put aside the thoughtful repose of his countenance.

“A house party,” said Maurice, when he could no longer hear their footsteps. “And what the deuce have they got so valuable in the east corridor on the third floor?”

“It's small matter to me,” said Fitzgerald tranquilly. “The main fact is that she has given up her game.”

Said Maurice, his face expressing both pity and astonishment: “My dear, dear John! Didn't you see that woman's eyes, her hair, her chin, her nose?”

“Well?”

“True; you haven't had any experience with petticoats. This woman will rend heaven and earth rather than relinquish her projects, or rather those of her mistress. I should like to see this duchess, who shows a fine discernment in the selection of her assistants. Beware of the woman who is frankly your enemy. If she is frank, it is because she is confident of the end; if not, she is frank in order to disarm us of the suspicion of cunning. I would give much to know the true meaning of this house party.”

“Hang me if I can see what difference it makes. She can not do anything either by frankness or by cunning.”

“She gathered us in neatly, this red-haired Amazon.”

“Red-haired!” in a kind of protest.

“Why, yes; that's the color, isn't it?” innocently.

“I thought it a red-brown. It's too bad that such a woman should be mixed up in an affair like this.”

“Woman will sacrifice to ambition what she never will sacrifice to love. Hush; I hear the Colonel returning.”

They were conducted to the opposite wing of the chateau, to a room on the second floor. Its windows afforded an excellent view of the land which lay south. Hills rolled away like waves of gold, dotted here and there with vineyards. Through the avenue of trees they could see the highway, and beyond, the river, which had its source in the mountains ten miles eastward.

The room itself was in red, evidently a state chamber, for it contained two canopied beds. Several fine paintings hung from the walls, and between the two windows rose one of those pier glasses which owe their existence to the first empire of France. On one of the beds Maurice saw the hussar uniform. On the

dresser were razors and mugs and a pitcher of hot water.

“Ah,” he said, with satisfaction.

“The boots may not fit you,” said the Colonel, “but if they do not we will manage some way.”

“I shall not mind the fortnight,” said Maurice. “By the way, Colonel, I notice that French seems to prevail instead of German. Why is that?”

“It is the common language of politeness, and servants do not understand it. As for myself, I naturally prefer the German tongue; it is blunt and honest and lacks the finesse of the French, which is full of evasive words and meanings. However, French predominates at court. Besides, heaven help the foreigner who tries to learn all the German tongues to be found in the empires of the Hohenzollern and Hapsburg. Luncheon will be served to you in the dining hall; the first door to the right at the foot of the grand staircase. I shall send you a trooper to act as valet.”

“Spare me, Colonel,” said Maurice, who did not want any one between him and the Englishman when they were alone.

“I have never had a valet,” said Fitzgerald; “he would embarrass me.”

“As you please,” said the Colonel, a shade of disappointment in his tones. “After all, you are soldiers, where every man is for himself. Make yourselves at home;” and he withdrew.

Maurice at once applied lather and razor, and put on the handsome uniform, which fitted him snugly. The coat was tailless, with rows of silver buttons running from collar to waist. The breast and shoulders and sleeves were covered with silver lace, and Maurice concluded that it must be nothing less than a captain's uniform. The trousers were tight fitting, with broad stripes of silver; and the half boots were of patent leather. He walked backward and forward before the pier-glass.

“I say, Fitz, what do you think of it?”

“You're a handsome rascal, Maurice,” answered the Englishman, who had watched his young friend, amusement in his sober eyes. “Happily, there are no young women present.”

“Go to! I'll lay odds that our hostess is under twenty-five.”

“I meant young women of sixteen or seventeen. Women such as Madame have long since passed the uniform fever.”

“Not when it has lace, my friend, court lace. Well, forward to the dining hall.”

Both were rather disappointed to find that Madame would be absent until

dinner. Fitzgerald could not tell exactly why he was disappointed, and he was angry with himself for the vague regret. Maurice, however, found consolation in the demure French maid who served them. Every time he smiled she made a courtesy, and every time she left the room Maurice nudged Fitzgerald.

“Smile, confound you, smile!” he whispered. “There's never a maid but has her store of gossip, and gossip is information.”

“Pshaw!” said Fitzgerald, helping himself to cold ham and chicken.

“Wine, Messieurs?” asked the maid.

“Ah, then Madame offers the cellars?” said Maurice.

“Yes, Messieurs. There is chambertin, champagne, chablis, tokayer and sherry.”

“Bring us some chambertin, then.”

“Oui, Messieurs.”

“Hurry along, my Hebe,” said Maurice.

The maid was not on familiar terms with the classics, but she told the butler in the pantry that the smooth-faced one made a charming Captain.

“Keep your eyes open,” grumbled the butler; “he'll be kissing you next.”

“He might do worse,” was the retort. Even maids have their mirrors, and hers told a pretty story. When she returned with the wine she asked: “And shall I pour it, Messieurs?”

“No one else shall,” declared Maurice. “When is the duchess to arrive?”

“I do not know, Monsieur,” stepping in between the chairs and filling the glasses with the ruby liquid.

“Who is Madame Sylvia Amerbach?”

“Madame Sylvia Amerbach,” placing the bottle on the table and going to the sideboard. She returned with a box of “Khedives.”

Fitzgerald laughed at Maurice's disconcertion.

“Where has Madame gone?”

“To the summer home of Countess Herzberg, who is to return with Madame.”

“Oho!” cried Maurice, in English. “A countess! What do you say to that, my Englishman?”

“She is probably old and plain. Madame desires a chaperon.”

“You forget that Madame desires nothing but those certificates. And the chaperon does not live who could keep an eye on Madame Sylvia Amerbach.”

The mention of the certificates brought back all the Englishman's discomfort, and he emptied his glass of wine not as a lover of good wine should. Soon they rose from the table. The maid ran to the door and held it open. Fitzgerald hurried through, but Maurice lingered a moment. He put his hand under the porcelain chin and looked into the china-blue eyes. Fitzgerald turned.

“What was that noise?” he asked, as Maurice shouldered him along the hall.

“What noise?”

Madame came back to the chateau at five, and dinner was announced at eight. The Countess Herzberg was young and pretty, the possessor of a beautiful mouth and a charming smile. The Colonel did the honors at the table. Maurice almost fancied himself in Vienna, the setting of the dining room was so perfect. The entire room was paneled in walnut. On the mantel over the great fireplace stood silver candlesticks with wax tapers. The candlestick in the center of the table was composed of twelve branches. The cuisine was delectable, the wines delicious. Madame and the countess were in evening dress. The Colonel was brimming with anecdote, the countess was witty, Madame was a sister to Aspasia.

Maurice, while he enjoyed this strange feast, was puzzled. It was very irregular, and the Colonel's gray hairs did not serve to alter this fact. What was the meaning of it? What lay underneath?

Sometimes he caught Fitzgerald in the act of staring at Madame when her attention was otherwise engaged; at other times he saw that Madame was returning this cursory investigation. There was, however, altogether a different meaning in these surreptitious glances. In the one there were interest, doubt, admiration; in the other, cold calculation. At no time did the conversation touch politics, and the crown was a thousand miles away—if surface indications went for aught.

Finally the Colonel rose. “A toast—to Madame the duchess, since this is her very best wine!”

Maurice emptied his glass fast enough; but Fitzgerald lowered his eyes and made no movement to raise his glass. The pupils in Madame's eyes grew small.

“That is scarcely polite, Monsieur,” she said.

“Madame,” he replied gently, “my parole did not include toasts to her Highness. My friend loves wine for its own sake, and seldom bothers his head about the toast as long as the wine is good. Permit me to withdraw the duchess and substitute yourself.”

“Do so, if it will please you. In truth, it was bad taste in you, count, to suggest

it.”

“It's all the same to me;” and the Colonel refilled his glass and nodded.

The countess smiled behind her fan, while Maurice felt the edge of the mild reproach which had been administered to him.

“I plead guilty to the impeachment. It was very wrong. Far from it that I should drink to the health of the Philistines. Madame the countess was beating me down with her eyes, and I did not think.”

“I was not even looking at you!” declared the countess, blushing.

The incident was soon forgotten; and at length Madame and the countess rose.

Said the first: “We will leave you gentlemen to your cigars; and when they have ceased to interest you, you will find us in the music room.”

“And you will sing?” said Maurice to the countess.

“If you wish.” She was almost beautiful when she smiled, and she smiled on Maurice.

“I confess,” said he, “that being a prisoner, under certain circumstances, is a fine life.”

“What wicked eyes he has,” said the countess, as she and Madame entered the music room.

“Do not look into them too often, my dear,” was the rejoinder. “I have asked not other sacrifice than that you should occupy his attention and make him fall in love with you.”

“Ah, Madame, that will be easy enough. But what is to prevent me from falling in love with him? He is very handsome.”

“You are laughing!”

“Yes, I am laughing. It will be such an amusing adventure, a souvenir for my old age—and may my old age forget me.”

The men lit their cigars and smoked in silence.

“Colonel,” said Maurice at last, “will you kindly tell me what all this means?”

“Never ask your host how old his wine is. If he is proud of it, he will tell you.” He blew the smoke under the candle shades and watched it as it darted upward. “Don't you find it comfortable? I should.”

“Conscience will not lie down at one's bidding.”

“I understood that you were a diplomat?” The Colonel turned to Fitzgerald. “I hope that, when you are liberated, you will forget the manner in which you were brought here.”

“I shall forget nothing,” curtly.

“The devil! I can not fight you; I am too old.”

Fitzgerald said nothing, and continued to play with his emptied wine-glass.

“The Princess Alexia,” went on the Colonel, “has a bulldog. I have always wondered till now what the nationality of the dog was. The bulldog neither forsakes nor forgives; he is an Englishman.”

This declaration was succeeded by another interval of silence. The Englishman was thinking of his father; the thoughts of Maurice were anywhere but at the chateau; the Colonel was contemplating them both, shrewdly.

“Well, to the ladies, gentlemen; it is half after nine.”

The countess was seated at the piano, improvising. Madame stood before the fireplace, arranging the pieces on a chess board. In the center of the room was a table littered with books, magazines and illustrated weeklies.

“Do you play chess, Monsieur?” said Madame to Fitzgerald.

“I do not.”

“Well, Colonel, we will play a game and show him how it is done.”

Fitzgerald drew up a chair and sat down at Madame's elbow. He followed every move she made because he had never seen till now so round and shapely an arm, hands so small and white, tipped with pink filbert nails. He did not learn the game so quickly as might be. He, like Maurice, was pondering over the unusual position in which he found himself; but analysis of any sort was not his forte; so he soon forgot all save the delicate curve of Madame's chin and throat, the soft ripple of her laughter, the abysmal gray of her eyes.

“Monsieur le Capitaine,” said the countess, “what shall I sing to you?”

“To me?” said Maurice. “Something from Abt.”

Her fingers ran lightly over the keys, and presently her voice rose in song, a song low, sweet, and sad. Maurice peered out of the window into the shades of night. Visions passed and repassed the curtain of darkness. Once or twice the countess turned her head and looked at him. It was not only a handsome face she saw, but one that carried the mark of refinement.... Maurice was thinking of the lonely princess and her grave dark eyes. He possessed none of that power from which princes derive benefits; what could he do? And why should he interest himself in a woman who, in any event, could never be anything to him, scarcely even a friend? He smiled.

If Fitzgerald was not adept at analysis, he was. Nothing ever entered his mind

or heart that he could not separate and define. It was strange; it was almost laughable; to have fenced as long and adroitly as he had fenced, and then to be disarmed by one who did not even understand the foils! Surrender? Why not?... By and by his gaze traveled to the chess players. There was another game than chess being played there, though kings and queens and knights and bishops were still the sum of it.

“Are you so very far away, then?” The song had ceased; the countess was looking at him curiously.

“Thank you,” he said; “indeed, you had taken me out of myself.”

“Do you like chestnuts?” she asked suddenly.

“I am very fond of them.”

“Then I shall fetch some.” It occurred to her that the room was very warm; she wanted a breath of air—alone.

“Checkmate!” cried the Colonel, joyfully.

“Do you begin to understand?” asked Madame.

“A little,” admitted Fitzgerald, who did not wish to learn too quickly. “I like to watch the game.”

“So do I,” said Maurice, who had approached the table. “I should like to know what the game is, too.”

Both Madame and the Colonel appeared to accept the statement and not the innuendo. Madame placed the figures on the board.

Maurice strolled over to the table and aimlessly glanced through the Vienna illustrated weeklies. He saw Franz Josef in characteristic poses, full-page engravings of the military maneuvers and reproductions of the notable paintings. He picked up an issue dated June. A portrait of the new Austrian ambassador to France attracted his attention. He turned the leaf. What he saw on the following page caused him to widen his eyes and let slip an ejaculation loud enough to be heard by the chess players. Madame seemed on the point of rising. Maurice did not lower his eyes nor Madame hers.

“Checkmate in three moves, Madame!” exclaimed the Colonel; “it is wonderful.”

“What's the matter, Maurice?” asked Fitzgerald.

“Jack, I am a ruined man.”

“How? What?” nearly upsetting the board.

“I just this moment remember that I left my gas burning at the hotel, and it is

extra.”

The Colonel and Fitzgerald lay back in their chairs and roared with laughter.

But Madame did not even smile.

CHAPTER X. BEING OF LONG RIDES, MAIDS, KISSES AND MESSAGES

Fitzgerald was first into bed that night.

“I want to finish this cigar, Jack,” said Maurice, who wished to be alone with his thoughts. He sat in the chair by the window and lifted his feet to the sill. The night wind was warm and odorous. He had found a clue, but through what labyrinth would it lead him? A strange adventure, indeed; so strange that he was of half a mind that he dreamed. Prisoners.... Why? And these two women alone in this old chateau, a house party. There lay below all this some deep design.

Should he warn his friend? Indeed, as yet, of what had he to warn him? To discover Madame to Fitzgerald would be to close the entrance to this labyrinth which he desired to explore. How would Madame act, now that she knew he possessed her secret? Into many channels he passed, but all these were blind, and led him to no end. Madame had a purpose; to discover what this purpose was Fitzgerald must remain in ignorance. What a woman! She resembled one of those fabulous creatures of medieval days. And why was the countess on the scene, and what was her part in this invisible game?

He finished his cigar and lit another; but the second cigar solved no more than the first. Mademoiselle of the Veil! He knew now what she meant; having asked her to lift her veil, she had said, “Something terrible would happen.” At last he, too, sought bed, but he did not sleep so soundly as did Fitzgerald.

Ten days of this charming captivity passed; there was a thicker carpet of leaves on the ground, and new distances began to show mistily through the dismantling forest. But there were no changes at the Red Chateau—no outward changes. It might, in truth, have been a house party but for the prowling troopers and the continual grumbling of the Englishman when alone with Maurice.

During the day they hunted or took long rides into the interior of the duchy. Both women possessed a fine skill in the saddle. In the evenings there were tourneys at chess, games and music.

Each night Fitzgerald learned a little more about chess and a little less about woman. The countess, airy and delicate as a verse of Voiture's, bent all her powers (and these were not inconsiderable) toward the subjugation of Maurice.

She laughed, she sang, she fascinated. She had the ability to amuse hour after hour. She offered vague promises with her eyes, and refused them with her lips. Maurice, who was never impregnable under the fire of feminine artillery, was at times half in love with her; but his suspicions, always near the surface, saved him.

Sometimes he caught her hand and retained it over long; and once, when he kissed it, there was no rebuke. Again, when she sang, he would lean so close that she could feel his breath on her cheek, and her fingers would stumble into discords. Often she would suddenly rise from the piano and walk swiftly from the room, through the halls, into the park, where, though he followed, he never could find her. One day she and Madame returned from a walk in the forest, the one with high color and brilliant eyes, the other impassive as ice. Now, all these things did not escape Maurice, but he could not piece them together with any result.

On the morning of the tenth day the two prisoners came down to breakfast, wondering how much longer this house party was going to last.

“George! I wish I had a pipe,” said Maurice.

“So do I,” Fitzgerald echoed glumly. “I am tired of cigars and weary of those eternal cigarettes. How the deuce are we going to get out of this?”

“What's your hurry? We're having a good time.”

“That's the trouble. Hang the duchess!”

“Hang her and welcome. But why do you complain to me and not to Madame? Are you afraid of her? Does she possess, then, what is called tamer's magnetism? O, my lion, if only you would roar a bit more at her and less at me!”

“I don't know what she possesses; but I do know that I'd give a deal to be out of this.”

“Is the chambermaid idea bothering you?”

“No, Maurice, it is not the chambermaid. I feel oppressed by something which I can not define.”

“Maybe you are not used to tokay forty years old?”

“Wine has nothing to do with it.”

He was so serious that Maurice dropped his jesting tone. “By the way,” he said, “do you sleep soundly?”

“No. Every night I am awakened by the noise of a horse entering the court-yard.”

“So am I. Moreover, Madame seems to be troubled with the same sleeplessness.

“Madame?”

“Yes. She is so troubled with sleeplessness that nothing will quiet her but the sight of the man who rides the horse: all of which is to say that a courier arrives each night with dispatches from Bleiberg. Now, to tell the truth, the courier does not keep me awake half so much as the thought of who is eating three meals a day at the end of the east corridor on the third floor. But there are Madame and the countess; we have kept them waiting.”

“Good morning,” said Madame, smiling as they came up. “And how have you slept?”

“Nothing wakes me but the roll of the drum or thunder,” answered Fitzgerald diffidently.

“I dream of horses,” said Maurice carelessly.

“Bon jour, M. le Capitaine!” cried the countess. Then she added with a light laugh: “Come, let me try you. Portons armes! Presentons armes!—How beautifully you do it!—Par le flanc gauche! En avant—marche!”

Maurice swung, clicked his heels and, with a covert glance at Madame, led the way into the dining hall, whistling, “Behold the saber of my father!”

“Ah, I do not see the Colonel,” said Maurice; for night and day the old soldier had been with them.

“He has gone to Brunnstadt,” said Madame, “but will return this evening.”

The breakfast was short and merry. Words passed across the table that were as crisp as the toast. Maurice remarked the advent of two liveried servants, stolid Germans by the way, who, as he afterward found, did not understand French.

“So the Colonel has gone to Brunnstadt?” said Maurice; which was a long way of asking why the Colonel had gone to Brunnstadt.

“Yes,” said Madame; “he has gone to consult Madame the duchess to see what shall be done to you, Monsieur.”

“To be done to me?” ignoring the challenge in her eyes.

“Yes. You must not forget that you promised me your sword, and I have taken the liberty of presenting it to her Highness.”

“I remember nothing about promising my sword,” said Maurice, gazing ceiling-ward.

“What! There was a mental reservation?”

“No, Madame. I remember my words only too well. I said that I loved adventure, thoughtless youth that I was, and that I was easy to be found. Which is all true, and part proved, since I am here.”

“Still, the uniform fits you exceedingly well. The hussars hold a high place at court.”

“Madame,” replied he pleasantly, “I appreciate the honor, but at present my sword and fealty are sworn to my own country. And besides, I have no desire to take part in the petty squabble between this country and the kingdom.”

The forecast of a storm lay in Madame's gray eyes.

“Eh? You wish to placate me, Madame?” thought Maurice.

“He is right, Madame,” interposed the countess. “But away with politics! It spoils all it touches.”

“And away with the duchess, too,” put in Fitzgerald, reaching for a bunch of yellow grapes. “With all due respect to your cause and beliefs, Madame the duchess, your mistress, is a bugbear to me. The very sound of the title arouses in my heart all that is antagonistic.”

“You have not seen her Highness, Monsieur,” said Madame, quietly. “Perhaps she is all that is desirable. She is known to be rich, her will is paramount to all others. When she sets her heart on a thing she leaves no stone unturned until she procures it. And, countess, do they not say of her that she possesses something—an attribute—more dangerous than beauty—fascination?”

“Yes, Madame.”

“Madame the duchess,” said Maurice dryly, “has a stanch advocate in you, Madame.”

“It is not unnatural.”

“Be that as it may,” said Fitzgerald, “she is mine enemy.”

“Love your enemies, says the Book,” was the interposition of the countess, who stole a sly glance at Maurice which he did not see.

“That would not be difficult—in some cases,” replied the Englishman.

“Ah, come,” thought Maurice, “my friend is beginning to pick up his lines.” Aloud he said: “Madame, will you confer a favor on me by permitting me to inform my superior in Vienna of my whereabouts?”

“No, Monsieur; prisoners are not allowed to communicate with the outside world. Are you not enjoying yourself? Is not everything being done for your material comfort? What complaint have you to offer?”

“A gilded cage is no less a cage.”

“It is but temporary. The duchess has commanded that you be held until it is her pleasure to come to the chateau. O, Monsieur, where is your gallantry? Here the countess and I have done so much to amuse you, and you speak of a gilded cage!”

“Pretty bird! pretty bird!” said Maurice, in a piping voice, “will it have some caraway?”

Madame laughed. “Well, I hear the grooms leading the horses under the porte cochere. Go, then, for the morning ride. I am sorry that I can not accompany you. I have some letters to write.”

Fitzgerald curled his mustache. “I'll forswear the ride myself. I was reading a good book last night; I'll finish it, and keep Madame company.”

Madame trifled with the toast crumbs. Fitzgerald's profound dissimulation caused a smile to cross Maurice's lips.

“Come, countess,” said Maurice, gaily; “we'll take the ride together, since Madame has to write and my lord to read.”

“Five minutes until I dress,” replied the countess, and she sped away.

“What a beautiful girl!” said Madame, fondly. “Poor dear! Her life has not been a bed of roses.”

“No?” said Maurice, while Fitzgerald raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

“No. She was formerly a maid of honor to her Highness. She made an unhappy marriage.”

“And where is the count?” asked Fitzgerald in surprise. He shot a glance of dismay at Maurice, who, translating it, smiled.

“He is dead.”

Fitzgerald looked relieved.

“What a fine thing it is,” said Maurice, rising, “to be a man and wed where and how you will!” He withdrew to the main hall to don his cap and spurs. As he stooped to strap the latter, he saw a sheet of paper, crinkled by recent dampness, lying on the floor. He picked it up—and read it.

> “The plan you suggest is worthy of you, Madame. The Englishman is fair game, being a common enemy. Let us gain our ends through the heart, since his purse is impregnable to assaults. But the countess? Why not the pantry maid, since the other is an American? They lack discrimination. The king grows weaker every day. Nothing was found in the Englishman's rooms. I fear that the consols are in the safe at the British legation. As usual, a courier will arrive each night.

B."

"Why—not—the—pantry maid?" Maurice drawled. "That is flippant." He read the message again. "What plan?" Suddenly he struck his thigh. "By George, so that is it, eh, Madame? So that is why we are so comfortably lodged here? I am in the way, and you bait the hook with a countess! Since the purse will not lead the way, the heart, eh? Certainly I shall tell my lord the Englishman all about his hostess when I return from the ride. Decidedly you are clever. O, how careless! Not even in cipher, so that he who reads may run. And who is B.?—Beauvais! Something told me that this man had a hand in the affair. I remember the look he gave me. A traitor, too.

"Hang my memory, which seems always to forget what I wish to remember and remember what I wish to forget! Where have I met this man Beauvais before? Ah, the countess!" He thrust the message into his breast. "Evidently Madame thinks I am worth consideration; uncommonly pretty bait. Shall I let the play run on, or shall I tell her? Ah! you have two minutes to spare," he said, as she approached. "But you do not need them," throwing a deal of admiration into his glance.

"It does not take me long to dress—on occasions."

"A compliment to me?" he said.

"If you will accept it."

It was an exhilarating morning, full of forest perfumes. Through the haze the mountains glittered like huge emeralds and amethysts.

"What a day!" said the countess, as they galloped away.

"Aye, for plots and war and love!"

"For plots and war?" demurely. Her cheeks were rosy and her hair as yellow as the silk of corn.

"Well, then, for love." He shortened his rein. "A propos, have you ever been in love, countess?"

"I? What a question!"

"Have you?"

"N—no! Let us talk of plots and war," gazing across the valley.

"No; let us talk of love. I am in love, and one afflicted that way wishes a confidant. I appoint you mine."

"Some rosy-cheeked peasant girl?" laughing.

"Perhaps. Perhaps it's only a—a pantry maid," with a sly look from the corner of his eyes. Evidently she had not heard. She was still laughing. "I have heard of

hermits falling in love with stars, and have laughed. Now I am in the same predicament. I love a star—”

“Operatic? To be sure! Mademoiselle Lenormand of the Royal Vienna is in Bleiberg. How she keeps her age!”

It was Maurice's turn to laugh.

“And that is why you came to Bleiberg! Ah, these opera singers, had I my way, they should all be aged and homely.”

“Countess, you are pulling the bit too hard,” said he. “I noticed yesterday that your horse has a very tender mouth.”

“Thank you.” She slacked the rein. “He was going too close to the ditch. You were saying—”

“No, it was you who were saying that all actresses should be aged and homely. But it is not Mademoiselle Lenormand, it is not the peasant, nor the pantry maid.”

This time she looked up quickly.

“The woman I love is too far away, so I am going to give up thinking of her. Countess, I made a peculiar discovery this morning.”

“A discovery, Monsieur? What is it?”

“Do you see that fork in the road, a mile away? When we reach it and turn I'll tell you what it is. If I told you now it might spoil the ride. What a day, truly! How clear everything is! And the air is like wine.” He drew in deep breaths.

“Let us hurry and reach the fork in the road; my curiosity is stifling me.”

Maurice did not laugh as she expected he would. As she observed the thoughtful frown between his brows, a shiver of dread ran through her. It did not take long to cover the intervening mile. They turned, and the horses fell into a quick step.

“Now, Monsieur; please!”

After all... But he quelled the gentle tremor in his heart. A month ago, had he known her, he might now have told her altogether a different story. He could see that she had not an inkling of what was to come (for he had determined to tell her); and he vaguely wondered if he should bring humiliation to the dainty creature. It would be like nicking a porcelain cup. Her brows were arched inquisitively and her lips puckered....He had had a narrow escape.

He drew the message from his breast, leaned across and handed it to her.

“Why, what is this, Monsieur?”

“Read it and see.” And he busied himself with the tangled mane of his horse. When they had ridden several yards, he heard her voice.

“Here, Monsieur.” The hand was extended, but the face was averted.

“Countess, you are too charming a woman to lend yourself to such schemes.”

There was no reply.

“Did you not volunteer to make me fall in love with you to keep me from interfering with Madame's plans?” It was brutal, but he was compelled to say it.

Silence.

“Did you not?” he persisted. “When one writes such messages as these, one should use an intricate cipher. Had I been other than a prisoner, what I have done would not be the act of a gentleman. But I am a prisoner; I must defend myself. To rob a man through his love! And such a man! He is a very infant in the hands of a woman. He has been a soldier all his life. All women to him are little less than angels; he knows nothing of their treachery, their deceit, their false smiles. It will be an easy victory, or rather it would have been, for I shall do my best to prevent it. Madame is not unknown to me; I have been waiting to see what meant this peculiar house party.

“Perhaps I am now too late. Madame distrusts me. I dare say she has her reasons. She went to you. You were to occupy me. I was young, I liked the society of women, I was gay and careless. She has decked me out as one would deck a monkey (and doubtless she calls me one behind my back), and has offered me a sword to play with.

“In America, when a man puts a sword in his hand, it is to kill somebody. Here—aye, all over the continent, for that matter—swords are baubles for young nobles, used to slash each other in love affairs. I respect and admire you; had I not done so, I should not have spoken. Countess, be frank with me, as frank as I have been with you; have I not guessed rightly?”

“Yes, Monsieur,” her head bowed and her cheeks white. “Yes, yes! it was a miserable game. But I love Madame; I would sacrifice my pride and my heart for her, if need be.”

“I can believe that.”

“And believe me when I say that the moment I saw you, I knew that my conduct was going to be detestable. But I had given my promise. A woman has but little to offer to her country; I have offered my pride, and I am a proud woman, Monsieur. I am ashamed. I am glad that you spoke, for it was becoming unbearable to throw myself at a man whose heart I knew intuitively to be

elsewhere.” She raised her eyes, which were filled with a strange luster. “Will you forgive me, Monsieur?”

“With all my heart. For now I know that we shall be friends. You will be relieved of an odious part; for you are too handsome not to have in keeping some other heart besides your own.”

He then began gaily to describe some of his humorous adventures, and continued in this vein till they arrived once more at the chateau. Sometimes the countess laughed, but he could see that her sprightliness was gone. When they came under the porte cochere he sprang from his horse and assisted her to dismount; and he did not relinquish her hand till he had given it a friendly pressure. She stood motionless on the steps, centered a look on him which he failed to interpret, then ran swiftly into the hall, thence to her room, the door of which she bolted.

“It would not be difficult,” he mused, communing with the thought which had come to him. “It would be something real, and not a chimera.”

He turned over the horses to the grooms, and went in search of Fitzgerald to inform him of his discovery; but the Englishman was nowhere to be found. Neither was Madame. Being thirsty, he proceeded to the dining hall. Fadette, the maid, was laying the silver.

“Ah, the `pantry maid,'” he thought. “Good day, Fadette.”

“Does Monsieur wish for something?”

“A glass of water. Thanks!”

She retreated and kept her eyes lowered.

“Fadette, you are charming. Has any one ever told you that?”

“O, Monsieur!” blushing.

“Have they?” lessening the distance between them.

“Sometimes,” faintly. She could not withstand his glance, so she retired a few more steps, only to find herself up with the wall.

With a laugh he sprang forward and caught her face between his hands and imprinted a kiss on her left cheek. Suddenly she wrenched herself loose, uttered a frightened cry and fled down the pantryway.

“What's the matter with the girl?” he muttered aloud. “I wanted to ask her some questions.”

“Ask them of me, Monsieur,” said a voice from the doorway.

Maurice wheeled. It was Madame, but her face expressed nothing. He saw

that he had been caught. The humor of the situation got the better of him, and he laughed. Madame ignored this unseemly hilarity.

“Monsieur, is this the way you return my kindness?”

“Permit me to apologize. As to your kindness, I have just discovered that it is of a most dangerous quality.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that I could not kiss Madame the countess with the same sense of security as I could the—pantry maid,” bowing.

Just now Madame's face expressed a good deal. “Of what are you talking?” advancing a step.

“I had in mind what our friend, Colonel Beauvais, remarked in his recent dispatch: I know no discrimination. The fact is, I do. I found the dispatch on the floor this morning. Allow me to return it to you. I have kept silent, Madame, because I did not know how to act.”

“You have dared—?” her lips pressed and her eyes thunderous.

“To read it? Aye. I am a prisoner; it was in self-defense. Madame, you do me great honor. A countess! What consideration to the indiscriminate! Au revoir, then, till luncheon;” and he left the room, whistling—

Voici le sabre de mon pere!

CHAPTER XI. THE DENOUEMENT

At no time during the afternoon did Maurice find the opportunity to speak privately to Fitzgerald. Madame hovered about, chatting, smiling and humming snatches of song. She seemed to have formed a sudden attachment for Maurice; that is to say, she could not bear to lose sight of him, not for the briefest moment.

He swallowed his chagrin, for he could but confess that it was sugar-coated. Madame had at last considered his case, and had labeled him dangerous. Somehow a man always likes to be properly valued. It re-establishes his good opinion of himself.

Well, well; however affectionate Madame might be, she could scarcely carry it beyond the threshold of his chamber, and he was determined to retire at an early hour. But he had many things to learn.

Fitzgerald was abandoned to the countess, who had still much color to regain. From time to time the Englishman looked over his shoulder to see what was going on between Madame and his friend, and so missed half of what the countess said.

“Come,” thought Maurice, “it is time I made a play.”

The blackberries were ripe along the stone walls which surrounded the chateau. Maurice wandered here and there, plucking what fruit he could find. Now and then he would offer a branch to Madame. At length, as though by previous arrangement with Madame, the countess led Fitzgerald around to the other side of the chateau, so that Madame and Maurice were alone. Immediately the smile, which had rested on her lips, vanished. Her companion was gazing mountainward, and cogitating. How fared those in Bleiberg?

“What a beautiful world it is!” said a low, soft voice close to his ear.

Maurice resumed his berry picking.

“What exquisite tints in the skies!” went on the voice; “what matchless color in the forests!”

Maurice plucked a berry, ate it, and smacked his lips. It was a good berry.

“But what a terrible thing it would be if one should die suddenly, or be thrown into a windowless dungeon, shut out from all these splendid reaches?”

Maurice plucked another berry, but he did not eat it. Instinctively he turned—and met a pair of eyes as hard and cold and gray as new steel.

“That,” said he, “sounds like a threat.”

“And if it were, Monsieur, and if it were?”

“If it were, I should say that you had discovered that I know too much. I suspected from the first; the picture merely confirmed my suspicions. I see now that it was thoughtless in me not to have told my friend; but it is not too late.”

“And why, I ask, have I not suppressed you before this?”

“Till to-day, Madame, you had not given me your particular consideration.” Then, as if the conversation was not interesting him, he returned to the berries. “There's a fine one there. It's a little high; but then!” He tiptoed, drew the branch from the wall, and snatched the luscious fruit. “Ah!”

“Monsieur, attend to me; the berries can wait.”

“Madame, the life of a good blackberry is short.”

“To begin with, you say that I did not show you consideration. Few princes have been shown like consideration.”

“I was wrong. It is not every man that has a countess—and a pretty one, too!—thrown at his head.”

Madame was temporarily silenced by this retort; it upset her calculations. She scrutinized the clean, smooth face, and she saw lines which had hitherto escaped her notice. She was at last convinced that she had to contend with a man, a man who had dealt with both men and women. How deep was he? Could honors, such as she could give, and money plumb the depths?... He was an American. She smiled the smile of duplicity.

“Monsieur,” she said, “do you lack wealth?”

“Yes, I lack it; but that is not to say that I desire it.”

“Perhaps it is honors you desire?”

“Honors? To what greater honor may I aspire than that which is written in my passports?”

“What is written in your passports?”

“That I am a citizen of the United States of America. It would not be good taste in me to accept honors save those that my country may choose to confer.”

Again Madame found her foil turned aside. She began to lose patience. Her boot patted the sod. “Monsieur, since the countess is not high enough, since gold and honors have no charm, listen.”

“I am listening, Madame.”

“I permit you to witness the comic opera, but I shall allow no prompting from

outsiders.”

“Madame, do you expect me to sit calmly by and see my friend made a fool?” He spoke warmly and his eyes remained steadfast.

“Certainly that is what you shall do,” coldly.

“Madame, you are a beautiful woman; heaven has endowed you with something more than beauty. Is it possible that the gods forgot to mix conscience in the mold?”

“Conscience? Royalty knows none.”

“Ah, Madame, wait till you are royal.”

“Take care. You have not felt my anger.”

“I would rather that than your love.”

She marveled at her patience.

“If you have no conscience, Madame, I have. I shall warn him. You shall not dishonor him if I can prevent it. You wish to win his love, and you have gauged the possibilities of it so accurately that you know you will have but to ask, be it his honor or his life. A far finer thing it would be for you to win your crown at the point of the sword. There would be a little glory in it then. But even then, the world would laugh at you. For you would be waging war against a lonely woman, a paralytic king, a prelate who is a man of peace. What resistance could these three offer?

“But to gain your ends by treachery and deceit, to rob a man of his brains and heart, laughing the while in your sleeve; to break his life and make him curse all women, from Eve to you and the mother who bore him! Ah, Madame, let me plead with you. Give him his liberty. Let him go back and complete the task imposed on him. Do not break his life, for life is more than a crown; do not compel him to sully his honor, for honor is more than life.

“Your cause is just, I will admit, but do not tarnish it by such detestable means. 'Tis true that a crown to me signifies nothing, but life and honor are common to us both. With all his strength and courage, my friend is helpless. All his life he has been without the society of women. If he should love you—God help him! His love would be without calculation, without reason, blind and furious. Madame, do not destroy him.”

Sometimes, in the passing, we are stopped by the sound of a voice. It is not the words it utters, nor the range nor tone. It is something indefinable, and, though we can not analyze it, we are willing to follow wherever it leads. Such a voice Maurice possessed, though he was totally ignorant of its power. But

Madame, as she listened, felt its magic influence, and for a moment the spell rendered her mute.

“Monsieur, you have missed your vocation; you plead well, indeed. Unfortunately, I can not hear; my ears are of wax. No, no! I have nourished these projects too long; they are a part of me. Laughed at, you say? Have I not been laughed at from one end of the continent to the other?” passionately. “It is my turn now, and woe to those who have dared to laugh. I shall sweep all obstacles away; nothing shall stop me. Mine the crown is, and mine it shall be. I am a woman, and I wished to avoid bloodshed. But not even that shall stay me; not even love!” Her bosom heaved, her hands were clenched, and her gray eyes flashed like troubled waters in the sunlight.

“Madame, if you love him—”

“Well?” proudly.

“No, I am wrong. If you loved him you would prize above all else this honor of which you intend to rob him.”

“I brought you here not to discuss whether I am right or wrong. Look about you.”

Maurice was somewhat troubled to discover several troopers lounging about just out of earshot. They were so arranged as to prevent egress from the park. He looked thoughtfully at the wall. It was eight feet in height.

Madame saw the look, and said, “Corporal!”

There was a noise on the other side of the wall, and presently a head bobbed up.

“Madame?” inquired the head.

“Nothing. I wished to know if you were at your post.” She turned to Maurice, who was puzzled to know what all this was preamble to. “Monsieur Carewe, I never forget details. I had an idea that when I submitted my proposals to you, you might be tempted to break your parole.”

Maurice gnawed his lip. “Proceed, Madame.”

“There are only two. If you do not promise here and now in no way to interfere with my plans, these troopers will convey you to Brunnstadt, where you will be kept in confinement until the succession to the throne is decided one way or the other. The other proposal is, if you promise—and I have faith in your word—the situation will continue the same as at present. Choose, Monsieur. Which is it to be?”

The devil gleamed in his eyes. He remained silent.

“Well! Well!” impatiently.

“I accept the alternative,” with bad grace. “If I made a dash—”

“You would be shot; those were my orders.”

“And if I went to prison—”

“You would miss what you call the comic opera, but which to me is all there is in life. You say that I have read your friend well. That is true. Do you think that it is easy for me to lessen myself in my own eyes? No woman lives who is prouder than I. Remember, you are not to hint at what I propose to do, nor who I am. See! It is all because you read something which was not intended for your eyes. Be my friend, or be my enemy, it is a matter of indifference to me. You have only yourself to blame. Had you gone about your business and not intruded where you were not wanted, neither you nor your friend would be here. No interference from you, Monsieur; that is the understanding.” She raised her hand and made a sign, and the troopers took themselves off. “Now you may go—to the countess, if you wish; though I dare say that she will not find you in the best of tempers.”

“I dare say she won't,” said Maurice.

Fitzgerald sat by a window in the music room. He had resurrected from no one knew where a clay with a broken stem. There was a thoughtful cast to his countenance, and he puffed away, blissfully unconscious of, or indifferent to, the close proximity of the velvet curtains. A thrifty housewife, could she have seen the smoke rise and curl and lose itself in the folds above, would have experienced the ecstasy of anxiety and perturbation. But there was no thrifty housewife at the Red Chateau, nothing but dreams of conquest and revenge.

Twilight was gathering about, soft-footed and shadowful. Long reaches of violet and vermilion clouds pressed thickly on the western line of hills. The mists began to rise, changing from opal to sapphire. The fantastic melodies of wandering gypsy songs went throbbing through the room; rollicking gavots, Hungarian dances, low and slumbrous nocturnes. As the music grew sadder and dreamier, the smoker moved uneasily.

Somehow, it gripped his heart; and the long years of loneliness returned and overwhelmed him. They marshaled past, thirteen in all; and there were glimpses of deserts, snowcapped mountains, men moving in the blur of smoke, long watches in the night. Thirteen years in God-forsaken outposts, with never a sight of a woman's face, the sound of her voice, the swish of her gown, nor a touch of the spell which radiates from her presence.

He had never made friends. Others had come up to him and passed him, and

had gone to the cities, leaving him to bear the brunt of the cold, the heat, the watchfulness. He had made his bed; he was too much his father's son to whine because it was hard. Often he used to think how a few words, from a pride humbled, would have removed the barrier. But the words never came, nor was the pride ever humbled.

Out of all the thirteen years he could remember only six months of pleasure. He had been transferred temporarily to Calcutta, where his Colonel, who had received secret information concerning him, had treated him like a gentleman, and had employed him as regimental interpreter, for he spoke French and German and a smattering of Indian tongues. During his lonely hours he had studied, for he knew that some day he would be called upon to administer a vast fortune.... He laid the pipe on the sill, rested his elbows beside it, and dropped his chin in his hands. What a fool he had been to waste the best years of his life! His father would have opened to him a boundless career; he would have seen the world under the guidance of a master hand. And here he was to-day, the possessor of millions, a beggar in friends, no niche to fill, a wanderer from place to place.

The old pile in England, he never wished to see it again; the memories which it would arouse would be too bitter.... The shade of Beethoven touched him as it passed; Mozart, Mendelssohn, Chopin. But he was thinking only of his loneliness, and the marvelous touch of the hands which evoked the great spirits was lost upon him.

Maurice was seated in one of the gloomy corners. He had still much good humor to recover. He pulled at his lips, and wondered from time to time what was going on in Fitzgerald's head. Poor devil! he thought; could he resist this woman whose accomplishments were so varied that at one moment she could overthrow a throne and at the next play Phyllis to some strolling Corydon? Since he himself, who knew her, could entertain for her nothing but admiration, what hope was there for the Englishman? What a woman! She savored of three hundred years off. To plan by herself, to arrange the minutest detail, and above all to wait patiently! Patience has never been the attribute of a woman of power; Madame possessed both patience and power.

The countess was seated in another dark corner. Suddenly she arose and said, in a voice blended with great trouble and impatience: “For pity's sake, Madame, cease those dirges! Play something lively; I am sad.”

The music stopped, but presently began again. Maurice leaned forward. Madame was playing Chopin's polonaise. He laughed silently. He was in Madame's thoughts. It struck him, however, that the notes had a defiant ring.

“Lights!” called Madame, rising from the stool.

Immediately a servant entered with candles and retired. Maurice, when his eyes had grown accustomed to the lights, scanned the three faces. Madame's was radiant. Fitzgerald's was a mixture—a comical mixture—of content and enjoyment, but the countess's was as colorless as the wax in the candlesticks. He asked himself what other task she had to perform that she should take so long to recover her roses. Had the knowledge of her recent humiliation been too much for her?

She was speaking to him. “Monsieur, will you walk with me in the park? I am faint.”

“Are you ill, countess?” asked Madame, coming up and placing her hand under the soft round chin of the other and striving to read her eyes.

“Not so ill, Madame, that a breath of fresh air will not revive me.” When they had gained the park, the countess said to Maurice: “Monsieur, I have brought you here to tell you something. I fear that your friend is lost, for you can do nothing.”

“Not even if I break my word?” he asked.

“It would do no good.”

“Why?”

“It is too late,” lowly. “I have been Madame's understudy too long not to read. Forgive me. I was to keep you apart; I have done so. The evil can not now be repaired. Your hope is that Madame has not fully considered his pride.”

“Has she any regard for him?”

“Sentiment?—love?” She uttered a short, incredulous laugh. “Madame has brain, not heart. Could a woman with a heart plan as she plans?”

“Well, let us not talk of plots and plans; let us talk of—”

“Monsieur, do not be unkind. I have asked your forgiveness. Let us not talk; let us be silent and listen to the night;” and she leaned over the terrace balustrade.

Maurice floated. As he leaned beside her a strand of perfumed hair blew across his nostrils. ... The princess was at best a dream. It was not likely that he ever would speak to her again. The princess was a poem, unlettered and unrhymed. But here, close to him, was a bit of beautiful material prose. The hair again blew out toward him and he moved his lips. She heard the vague sound and lifted her head.

Far away came the call of the sentry; a horse whinneyed in the stables. There

was in the air the odor of an approaching storm.

CHAPTER XII. WHOM THE GODS DESTROY AND A FEW OTHERS

Some time passed before Fitzgerald became aware of Maurice's departure. When he saw that he and Madame were alone, he said nothing, but pulled all the quicker at his clay. He wondered at the desire which suddenly manifested itself. Fly? Why should he fly? The beat of his pulse answered him.... What a fine thing it was to feel the presence of a woman—a woman like this! What a fine thing always to experience the content derived from her nearness!

He looked into his heart; there was no animosity; there was nothing at all but a sense of gratefulness. In the dreary picture of his life there was now an illumined corner. He had ceased to blame her; she was doing for her country what he, did necessity so will, would do for his. And after all, he could not war against a woman—a woman like this. His innate chivalry was too deep-rooted.

How soft her voice was! The color of her hair and eyes followed him night and day. Once he had been on the verge of sounding Maurice in regard to Madame, Maurice was so learned in femininities; but this would have been an acknowledgment of his ignorance, and pride closed his mouth. It was all impossible, but then, why should he return to his loneliness without attempting to find some one to share it with him? The king was safe; his duty was as good as done; his conscience was at ease in that direction. He needed not love, he thought, so much as sympathy.... Sympathy. He turned over the word in his mind as a gem merchant turns over in his hand a precious jewel. Sympathy; it was the key to all he desired—woman's sympathy. There was nothing but ash in the bowl of his pipe, but he continued to puff.

Madame was seated at the piano again, idly thrumming soft minor chords. She was waiting for him to speak; she wanted to test his voice, to know and measure its emotion. At times she turned her head and shot a sly glance at him as he sat there musing. There was a wrinkle of contempt and amusement lurking at the corners of her eyes. Had Maurice been there he would have seen it. Fitzgerald might have gazed into those eyes until doomsday, and never have seen else than their gray fathoms. Minute after minute passed, still he did not speak; and Madame was forced to break the monotony. She was not sure that the countess could hold Maurice very long.

“Of what are you thinking, Monsieur?” she asked, in a soft key.

He started, looked up and laid the pipe on the sill. “Frankly, I was thinking that nothing can be gained by keeping us prisoners here.” He told the lie rather diffidently.

“Not even forgiveness?” The lids of the gray eyes drooped and the music ceased.

“Forgiveness? O, there is nothing to forgive you; it is only your mistress I can not forgive. On the contrary, there is much to thank you for.”

“Still, whatever I do or have done is merely in accordance with her Highness's wishes.”

He moved uneasily. “It is her will, not yours.”

“Yes; the heart of Madame Amerbach is supine to the brain of Madame the duchess.” She rose and moved silently to the window and peered out. He thought her to be star-gazing; but she was not. She was endeavoring to see where Maurice and the countess were.

“Madame, shall I tell you a secret?”

“A secret? Tell me,” sitting in the chair next to his.

“This has been the pleasantest week I have known in thirteen years.”

“Then you forgive me!” Madame was not only mistress of music but of tones.

“Yes.”

And then, out of the fullness of his lonely heart, he told her all about his life, its emptiness, its deserts, its longings. Each sentence was a knife placed in her hands; and as she contemplated his honest face which could conceal nothing, his earnest eyes which could hide nothing, Madame was conscious of a vague distrust of herself. If only he had offered to fight, she thought. But he had not; instead, he was giving to her all his weapons of defense.

“Ah, Monsieur, you do wrong to forgive me!” impulsively.

He smiled.

“Why should you be friendly to me when I represent all that is antagonistic to you?”

“To me you represent only a beautiful woman.”

“Ah; you have been taking lessons of your friend.”

“He is a good teacher. He is one of those men whom I admire. Women have never mastered him. He knows so much about them.”

“Yes?” a flicker in her eyes.

“Beneath all his banter there is a brave heart. He is a rare man who, having

brain and heart to guide, follows the heart." He picked up the pipe and began to play a tattoo on the sill. "As for me, I know nothing of women, save what I have read in books, and save that I have been too long without them."

"And you have gone all these years without knowing what it is to love?" To a man less guileless, this question would not have been in good taste.

Fitzgerald was silent; he dared not venture another lie.

"What! you are silent? Is there, after all, a woman somewhere in your life?"

"Yes." He continued to tap the pipe. His gaze wandered to the candles, strayed back to the window, then met hers steadfastly, so steadfastly, that she could not resist. She was annoyed.

"Tell me about her."

"My vocabulary is too limited. You would laugh at me."

"I? No; love is sacred." She had boasted to Maurice that she was without conscience; she had only smothered it. "Come; is she beautiful?"

"Yes." These questions disturbed him.

"Certainly she must be worthy or you would not love her. She is rich?"

"That does not matter; I am." He was wishing that Maurice would hurry back; the desire to fly was returning.

"And she rejected you and sent you to the army?"

"She has not rejected me, though I dare say she would, had I the presumption to ask her."

"A faint heart, they say—"

"My heart is not faint; it is my tongue." He rose and wandered about the room. Her breath was like orris, and went to his head like wine.

"Monsieur," she said, "is it possible that you have succumbed to the charms of Madame the countess?"

He laughed. "One may admire exquisite bric-a-brac without loving it."

"Bric-a-brac! Poor Elsa!" and Madame laughed. "If it were the countess I could aid you."

"Love is not merchandise, to traffic with."

Madame's cheeks grew warm. Sometimes the trick of fence is beaten down by a tyro's stroke.

"Eh, bien, since it is not the countess—"

He came toward her so swiftly that instinctively she rose and moved to the

opposite side of her chair. Something in his face caused her to shiver. She had no time to analyze its meaning, but she knew that the shiver was not unmixed with fear.

“Madame, in God's name, do not play with me!” he cried.

“Monsieur, you forget yourself,” for the moment forgetting her part.

“Yes, there is no self in my thoughts since they are all of you! You know that I love you. Who could resist you? Thirteen years? They are well wasted, in the end to love a woman like you.”

Before she could withdraw her hands from the top of the chair he had seized them.

“Monsieur, release me.” She struggled futilely.

“I love you.” He began to draw her from behind the chair.

“Monsieur, Monsieur!” she, cried, genuinely alarmed; “do not forget that you are a gentleman.”

“I am not a gentleman now; I am a man who loves.”

Madame was now aware that what she had aroused could not be subdued by angry words.

“Monsieur, you say that you love me; do not degrade me by forcing me into your arms. I am a woman, and weak, and you are hurting me.”

He let go her hands, and they stood there, breathing deeply and quickly. But for her it was a respite. She had been too precipitate. She brought together the subtle forces of her mind. She could gain nothing by force; she must use cunning. To hold him at arm's length, and yet to hold him, was her desire. She had reckoned on wax; a man stood before her. All at once the flutter of admiration stirred in her heart. She was a soldier's daughter, the daughter of a man who loved strong men. And this man was doubly strong because he was fearless and honest. She read in his eyes that a moment more and he had kissed her, a thing no man save her father had ever done.

“O, Monsieur,” she said lightly, “you soldiers are such forward lovers! You have not even asked me if I love you.” He made a move to regain her hands. “No, no!” darting behind the chair. “You must not take my hands; you do not realize how strong you are. I am not sure that my heart responds to yours.”

“Tell me, what must I do?” leaning across the chair.

“You must have patience. A woman must be wooed her own way, or not at all. What a whirlwind you are!”

“I would to heaven,” with a gesture indicative of despair, “that you had kept me behind bars and closed doors.” He dropped his hands from the chair and sought the window, leaning his arms against the central frame.

Madame had fully recovered her composure. She saw her way to the end.

“It is true,” she said, “that I do not love you, but it is also true that I am not indifferent to you. What proof have I that you really love me? None, save your declaration; and that is not sufficient for a woman such as I am. Shall I place my life in your hands for better or for worse, simply because you say you love me?”

“My love does not reason, Madame.”

She passed over this stroke. “I do not know you; it is not less than natural for me to doubt you. What proof have I that your declaration of love is not a scheme to while away your captivity at my expense? My heart is not one to be taken by storm. There is only one road to my affections; it is narrow. Other men have made love to me, but they have hesitated to enter upon this self-same road.”

“Love that demands conditions? I have asked none.”

Madame blushed. “A man offers love; a woman confers it.”

“And what is this narrow road called which leads to your affections? Is your heart a citadel?”

“It is called sacrifice. Those who dwell in my heart, which you call a citadel, enter by that road.”

“Sacrifice?” Fervor lighted his face again. “Do you wish my fortune? It is yours. My life? It is yours. Do you wish me to lead the army of the duchess into Bleiberg? It shall be done. Sacrifice? I have sacrificed the best years of youth for nothing; my life has been made up of sacrifices.”

“Monsieur, if I promised to listen to you here-after, if I promised a heart that has never known the love of man, if I promised lips that have never known the lips of any man save my father—” She moved away from the chair, within an arm's length of him. “If I promised all these without reservation, would you aid me to give back to the duchess her own?”

Instantly her arms were pinioned to her sides, and he had drawn her so close that she could feel his heart beat against her own.

“Have no fear,” he said. The voice was unfamiliar to her ears. “I shall not kiss you. Let me look into your eyes, Madame, your eyes, and read the lie which is written there. My fortune and my life are not enough. Keep your love, Madame; I have no wish to purchase it. What! if I surrender my honor it is agreed that you surrender yours? A love such as mine requires a wife. You would have me break

my word to the dead and to the living, and you expect me to believe in your promises! Faugh!” He pushed her from him, and resumed his stand by the window.

The hate of a thousand ancestors surged into her heart, and she would have liked to kill him. Mistress! He had dared. He had dared to speak to her as no other man living or dead had dared. And he lived. All that was tigerish in her soul rose to the surface; only the thought of the glittering goal stayed the outburst. She had yet one weapon. A minute went by, still another; silence. A hand was laid tremblingly on his arm.

“Forgive me! I was wrong. Love me, love me, if you must. Keep your honor; love me without conditions. I—” She stumbled into the chair, covered her eyes and fell to weeping.

Fitzgerald, dumfounded and dismayed, looked down at the beautiful head. He could fight angry words, tempests of wrath—but tears, a woman's tears, the tears of the woman he loved!

“Madame,” he said gently, “do you love me?”

No answer.

“Madame, for God's sake, do not weep! Do you love me? If you love me—if you love me—”

She sprang to her feet. Once again she experienced that shiver; again her conscience stirred.

“I do not know,” she said. “But this I may say: your honor, which you hold above the price of a woman's love, will be the cause of bloodshed. Mothers and wives and sisters will execrate your name, brave men will be sacrificed needlessly. What are the Osians to you? They are strangers. You will do for them, and uselessly, what you refuse to do for the woman you profess to love. I abhor bloodshed. Your honor is the offspring of pride and egotism. Can you not see the inevitable? War will be declared. You can not help Leopold; but you can save him the degradation of being expelled from his throne by force of arms. The army of the duchess is true to its humblest sword. Can you say that for the army of the king? Would you witness the devastation of a beautiful city, by flame and sword?

“Monsieur, Austria is with us, and she will abide with us whichever way we move. Austria, Monsieur, which is Leopold's sponsor. And this Leopold, is he a man to sit upon a throne? Is he a king in any sense of the word? Would a king submit to such ignominy as he submits to without striking a blow? Would he permit his ministers to override him? Would he permit his army to murmur, his

agents to plunder, his people to laugh at him, if he possessed one kingly attribute? No, no! If you were king, would you allow these things? No! You would silence all murmurs, you would disgorge your agents, you would throttle those who dared to laugh.

“Put yourself in the duchess's place. All these beautiful lands are hers by right of succession; is she wrong to desire them? What does she wish to accomplish? She wishes to join the kingdom and the duchy, and to make a great kingdom, as it formerly was. Do you know why Leopold was seated upon the throne?

“Some day the confederation will decide to divide all these lands into tidbits, and there will be no one to oppose them. Madame the duchess wishes to be strong enough to prevent it. And you, Monsieur, are the grain of sand which stops all this, you and your pride. Not even a woman's love—There, I have said it!—not even a woman's love—will move your sense of justice. Go! leave me. Since my love is nothing, since the sacrifice I make is useless, go; you are free!” The tears which came into her eyes this time were genuine; tears of chagrin, vexation, and of a third sensation which still remained a mystery to her.

To him, as she spoke, with her wonderful eyes flashing, a rich color suffusing her cheeks and throat and temples, the dim candle light breaking against the ruddy hair; honor or pride, whichever it was, was well worth the losing. He was a man; it is only the pope who is said to be infallible. His honor could not save the king. All she had said was true. If he held to his word there would be war and bloodshed.

On the other hand, if he surrendered, less harm would befall the king, and the loss of his honor—was it honor?—would be well recompensed for the remainder of his days by the love of this woman. His long years of loneliness came back; he wavered. He glanced first at her, then at the door; one represented all that was desirable in the world, the other more loneliness, coupled with unutterable regret. Still he wavered, and finally he fell.

“Madame, will you be my wife?”

“Yes.” And it seemed to her that the word, came to her lips by no volition of hers. As she had grown red but a moment gone, she now grew correspondingly pale, and her limbs shook. She had irrevocably committed herself. “No, no!” as she saw him start forward with outstretched arms, “not my lips till I am your wife! Not my lips; only my hands!”

He covered them with kisses.

“Hush!” as she stepped back.

It was time. Maurice and the countess entered the room. Maurice glanced

from Madame to Fitzgerald and back to Madame; he frowned. The Englishman, who had never before had cause to dissemble, caught up his pipe and fumbled it. This act merely discovered his embarrassment to the keen eyes of his friend. He had forgotten all about Maurice. What would he say? Maurice was something like a conscience to him, and his heart grew troubled.

“Madame,” Maurice whispered to the countess, “I have lost all faith in you; you have kept me too long under the stars.”

“Confidences?” said Madame, with a swift inquiring glance at the countess.

“O, no,” said Maurice. “I simply complained that Madame the countess had kept me too long under the stars. But here is Colonel Mollendorf, freshly returned from Brunnstadt to inform you that the army is fully prepared for any emergency. Is not that true, Colonel?” as he beheld that individual standing in the doorway.

“Yes; but how the deuce—your pardon, ladies!—did you find that out?” demanded the Colonel.

“I guessed it,” was the answer. “But there will be no need of an army now. Come, John, the Colonel, who is no relative of the king's minister of police, has not the trick of concealing his impatience. He has something important to say to Madame, and we are in the way. Come along, AEneas, follow your faithful Achates; Thalia has a rehearsal.”

Fitzgerald thrust his pipe into a pocket. “Good night, Madame,” he said diffidently; “and you, countess.”

“Good night, Colonel,” sang out Maurice over his shoulder, and together the pair climbed the stairs.

Fitzgerald was at a loss how to begin, for something told him that Maurice would demand an explanation, though the affair was none of his concern. He filled his pipe, fired it and tramped about the room. Sometimes he picked up the end of a window curtain and felt of it; sometimes he posed before one of the landscape oils.

“You have something on your mind,” said Maurice, pulling off his hussar jacket and kicking it across the room.

“Madame has promised to be my wife.”

“And the conditions?” curtly.

Fitzgerald pondered over the other's lack of surprise. “What would you do if you loved a woman and she promised to be your wife?”

“I'd marry her,” sitting down at the table.

“What would you do in my place, and Madame had promised to marry you?” puffing quickly.

“I'd marry her,” answered Maurice, banging his fist on the table, “even if all the kings and queens of Europe rose up against me. I would marry her, if I had to bind her hands and feet and carry her to the altar and force the priest at the point of a pistol, which, in all probability, is what you will have to do.”

“I love her,” sullenly.

“Do you know who she is?”

“No.”

“Would it make any difference?”

“No. Who is she?”

“She is a woman without conscience; she is a woman who, to gain her miserable ends, will stop neither at falsehood, deceit nor bloodshed. Do you want me to tell you more? She is—”

“Maurice, tell me nothing which will cause me to regret your friendship. I love her; she has promised to be my wife.”

“She will ruin you.”

“She has already done that,” laconically.

“Do you mean to tell me—”

“Yes! For the promise of her love I am dishonored. For the privilege of kissing her lips I have sold my honor. To call her mine, I would go through hell. God! do you know what it is to be lonely, to starve in God-forsaken lands, to dream of women, to long for them?”

“And the poor paralytic king?”

“What is he to me?”

“And your father?”

“What are my dead father's wishes? Maurice, I am mad!”

“You are a very sick man,” Maurice replied crossly. “What's to become of all these vows—”

“You are wasting your breath! Do you remember what Rochefoucauld said of Madame de Longueville?—`To win her heart, to delight her beautiful eyes, I have taken up arms against the king; I would have done the same against the gods!' Is she not worth it all?” with a gesture of his arms which sent the live coals of his pipe comet-like across the intervening space. “Is she not worth it all?”

“Who?—Madame de Longueville? I thought she was dead these two hundred years!”

“Damn it, Maurice!”

“I will, if you say so. The situation is equal to a good deal of plain, honest damning.” Maurice banged his fist again. “John, sit down and listen to me. I'll not sit still and see you made a fool. Promises? This woman will keep none. When she has wrung you dry she will fling you aside. At this moment she is probably laughing behind your back. You were brought here for this purpose. Threats and bribes were without effect. Love might accomplish what the other two had failed to do. You know little of the ways of the world. Do you know that this house party is scandalous, for all its innocence? Do you know that Madame's name would be a byword were it known that we have been here more than two weeks, alone with two women? Who but a woman that feels herself above convention would dare offer this affront to society? Do you know why Madame the countess came? Company for Madame? No; she was to play make love to me to keep me out of the way. Ass that I was, I never suspected till too late! Madame's name is not Sylvia Amerbach; it is—”

The door opened unceremoniously and in walked the Colonel.

“Your voices are rather high, gentlemen,” he said calmly, and sat down in an easy chair.

CHAPTER XIII. BEING OF COMPLICATIONS NOT RECKONED ON

Maurice leaped to his feet, a menace in his eyes. The Colonel crossed his legs, rested his hands on the hilt of his saber, and smiled.

“I could not resist the desire to have a friendly chat with you.”

“You have come cursed inopportune,” snarled Maurice. “What do you want?”

“I want to give you the countersigns, so that when you start for Bleiberg to-morrow morning you'll have no trouble.”

“Bleiberg!” exclaimed Maurice.

“Bleiberg. Madame desires me to say to you that you are to start for that city in the morning, to fetch those slips of parchment which have caused us all these years of worry. Ah, my friend,” to Fitzgerald, “Madame would be cheap at twenty millions! You sly dog! And I never suspected it.”

Fitzgerald sent him a scowl. “You are damned impertinent, sir.”

“Impertinent?” The Colonel uncrossed his legs and brought his knees together. “Madame has been under my care since she was a child, Monsieur; I have a fatherly interest in her. At any rate, I am glad that the affair is at an end. It was very noble in you. If I had had my way, though, it would have been war, pure and simple. I left the duchess in Brunnstadt this morning; she will be delighted to attend the wedding.”

“She will attend it,” said Maurice, grimly; “but I would not lay odds on her delight. Colonel, the devil take me if I go to Bleiberg on any such errand.” He went to the window seat.

The Colonel rose and followed him. “Pardon me,” he said to Fitzgerald, who did not feel at all complimented by Madame's haste; “a few words in Monsieur Carewe's ear. He will go to Bleiberg; he will be glad to go.” He bent towards Maurice. “Go to Bleiberg, my son. A word to him about Madame, and off you go to Brunnstadt. Will you be of any use there? I think not. The little countess would cry out her pretty eyes if she heard that you were languishing in the city prison at Brunnstadt, where only the lowest criminals are confined. Submit gracefully, that is to say, like a soldier against whom the fortunes of war have gone. Go to Bleiberg.”

“I'll go. I give up.” It was not the threat which brought him to this decision. It was a vision of a madonna-like face. “I'll go, John. Where are the certificates?”

“Between the mattresses and the slats of my bed you will find a gun in a case. The certificates are in the barrels.” His countenance did not express any particular happiness; the lines about his mouth were sharper than usual.

“The devil!” cried the Colonel; “if only I had known that!” He laughed. “Well, I'll leave you. Six o'clock—what's this?” as he stooped and picked up Maurice's cast-off hussar jacket.

“I was about to use it as a door mat,” said Maurice, who was in a nasty humor. That Fitzgerald had surrendered did not irritate him half so much as the thought that he was the real puppet. His hands were tied, he could not act, and he was one that loved his share in games.

The Colonel reddened under his tan. “No; I'll not lose my temper, though this is cause enough. Curse me, but you lack courtesy. This is my uniform, and whatever it may be to you it is sacred to me. You were not forced into it; you were not compelled to wear it. What would you do if a man wore your uniform and flung it around in this manner?”

“I'd knock him down,” Maurice admitted. “I apologize, Colonel; it was not manly. But you must make allowances; my good nature has suffered a severe strain. I'll get into my own clothes to-morrow if you will have a servant sew on some buttons and mend the collar. By the way, who is eating three meals a day in the east corridor on the third floor?”

Their glances fenced. The Colonel rubbed his mustache.

“I like you,” he said; “hang me if I don't. But as well as I like you, I would not give a denier for your life if you were found in that self-same corridor. The sentinel has orders to shoot; but don't let that disturb you; you will know sooner or later. It is better to wait than be shot. A horse will be saddled at six. You will find it in the court. The countersigns are Weixel and Arnoldt. Good luck to you.”

“The same to you,” rejoined Maurice, “only worse.”

The Colonel's departure was followed by a period of temporary speechlessness. Maurice smoked several “Khedives,” while Fitzgerald emptied two or three pipe-bowls.

“You seem to be in bad odor, Maurice,” the latter ventured.

“In more ways than one. Where, in heaven's name, did you resurrect that pipe?”

“In the stables. It isn't the pipe, it's the tobacco. I had to break up some

cigars.”

Then came another period in the conversation. It occurred to both that something yawned between them—a kind of abyss. Out of this abyss one saw his guilt arise.... A woman stood at his side. He had an accomplice. He had thrown the die, and he would stand stubbornly to it. His pride built yet another wall around him, impregnable either to protests or to sneers. He loved—that was recompense enough. A man will forgive himself of grave sins when these are debtors to his love.

As for the other, he beheld a trust betrayed, and he was powerless to prevent it. Besides, his self-love smarted, chagrin made eyes at him; and, more than all else, he recognized his own share in the Englishman's fall from grace. It had been innocent mischief on his part, true, but nevertheless he stood culpable. He had no business to talk to a woman he did not know. The more he studied the aspects of the situation the more whimsical it grew. He was the prime cause of a king losing his throne, of a man losing his honor, of a princess becoming an outcast.

“Your bride-elect,” he said, “seems somewhat over-hasty. Well, I'm off to bed.”

“Maurice, can you blame me?”

“No, John; whom the gods destroy they first make mad. You will come to your senses when it is too late.”

“For God's sake, Maurice, who is she?”

“What will you do if she breaks her promise?” adroitly evading the question.

“What shall I do?” He emptied the ashes from his pipe, and rose; all that was aggressive came into his face. “I will bind her hands and feet and carry her to the altar, and shoot the priest that refuses to marry us. O Maurice, rest easy; no woman lives who will make a fool of me, and laugh.”

“That's comfort;” and Maurice turned in.

This night it was the Englishman who sat up till the morning hours. Sylvia Amerbach.... A fear possessed him. If it should be, he thought; if it should be, what then?

Midnight in Madame's boudoir; no light save that which streamed rosily from the coals in the grate. The countess sat with her slippered feet upon the fender. She held in her hand a screen, and if any thoughts marked her face, they remained in blurred obscurity.

“Heu!” said Madame from the opposite side; “it is all over. It was detestable.

I, to suffer this humiliation! Do you know what I have done? I have promised to be his wife! His wife, I! Is it not droll?" There was a surprising absence of mirth in the low laugh which followed.

"I trust Madame will find it droll."

"And you?"

"And I, Madame?"

"Yes; did you not bring the clown to your feet?"

"No, Madame."

"How? You did not have the joy denied me—of laughing in his face?"

"No, Madame." With each answer the voice grew lower.

"Since when have I been Madame to you?"

"Since to-day."

Madame reached out a hand and pressed down the screen. "Elsa, what is it?"

"What is what, Madame?"

"This strange mood of yours."

Silence.

"You were gay enough this morning. Tell me."

"There is nothing to tell, Madame, save that my sacrifices are at an end. I have nothing left."

"What! You forsake me when the end is won?" in astonishment.

"I did not say that I should desert you; I said that I had no more sacrifices to make." The Countess rose. "For your sake, Madame, because you have always been kind to me, and because it is impossible not to love you, I have degraded myself. I have pretended to love a man who saw through the artifice and told me so, to save me further shame. O Madame, it is all execrable!

"And you will use this love which you have gained—this first love of a man who has known no other and will know no other while he lives!—to bring about his ruin? This other, at whose head you threw me—beware of him. He is light-hearted and gay, perhaps. You call him a clown; he is cunning and brave; and unless you judge him at his true value, your fabric of schemes will fall ere it reaches its culmination. Could even you trick him with words? No. You were compelled to use force. Is he not handsome, Madame?" with a feverish gaiety. "Is there a gentleman at your court who is a more perfect cavalier? Why, he blushes like a woman! Is there in your court—" But her sentence broke, and she could not go on.

“Elsa, are you mad?”

“Yes, Madame, yes; they call it a species of madness.” Then, with a sudden gust of wrath: “Why did you not leave me in peace? You have destroyed me! O, the shame of it!” and she fled into her own room.

Madame sat motionless. This, among other things, she had not reckoned on.

Only the troopers and the servants slept in peace that night.

Maurice was up betimes next morning. The hills and valleys lay under a mantle of sparkling rime, and the very air, keen of edge and whistling, glistened in the sunlight. The iron shoes of the horses beat sharply on the stone flooring of the court yard. Maurice examined his riding furniture; pulled at the saddle, tugged at the rein buckles, lifted the leather flaps and tried the stirrup straps. It was not that he doubted the ability of the groom; it was because this particular care was second nature to him.

Fitzgerald watched him, and meditated. Some of his thoughts were not pleasant. His eyes were heavy. At times he would lift his shoulders and permit half a smile to flicker over his lips; a certain thought caused this. The Colonel sat astride a broad-chested cavalry horse, spotless white. He was going to accompany Maurice to the frontier. He had imbibed the exhilarating tonic of the morning, and his spirits ran high. At length Maurice leaped into the saddle, caught the stirrups well, and signaled to the Colonel that he was ready.

“You understand, Maurice?” Fitzgerald asked.

“Yes, John; all the world loves a lover. Besides, it is a glorious morning for a ride. Up, portcullis, down drawbridge!” waving his hand to the Colonel.

And away they went through the gateway, into the frosted road. Maurice felt the spirit of some medieval ancestor creep into his veins and he longed for an hour of the feudal days, to rescue a princess from some dungeon-keep and to harry an over-lord. After all, she was a wonderful woman, and Fitzgerald was only a man. To give up all for the love of woman is the only sacrifice a man can make.

“En avant!” cried the Colonel. “A fine day, a fine day for the house of Auersperg!”

“And a devilish bad one for the houses of Fitzgerald and Carewe. Woman's ambition, coupled with her deceit, is the root of all evil; money is simply an invention of man to protect himself from her encroachments. Eve was ambitious and deceitful; all women are her daughters. When the pages of history grow dull __”

“Time puts a maggot in my lady's brain,” supplemented the Colonel. “It is like a row of dominoes. The power behind the throne, the woman behind the power; an impulse moves the woman, and lo! how they clatter down. But without woman, history would be poor reading. The greatest battles in the world, could we but see behind, were fought for women. Men are but footnotes, and unfortunately history is made up of footnotes. But it is a fine thing to be a footnote; that is my ambition.

“Ah, if you but knew what a pleasure it is for an old man like me to have a finger in the game time plays! To meddle with affairs, directly or indirectly! Kingdoms are but judy shows, kings and queens but puppets; but we who pull the strings—Ah, that is it! To play a game of chess with crowns!”

“There are exceptions; Madame seems to hold the strings in this instance.”

“Madame follows my advice in all she does.”

Maurice opened his eyes at this statement.

“Would you believe an old man like me could lay such a train? All this was my idea. It was difficult to get Madame to agree with my views. War? I am not afraid of it; I am suspicious of it. One day your friend returned a personal letter of Madame's having written across it, `I laugh at you.' It was very foolish. No man laughs at Madame more than once. She will, one day, return this letter to him. A crown, a fine revenge, in one fell swoop.”

“She will ruin him utterly?”

“Utterly.”

“Have you any idea what sort of man my friend is?”

“He lacks the polish of a man of affairs, and he surrenders too easily.”

“He will never surrender—Madame.”

“How?”

“You remember his father; he will prove his father's son, every inch of him. O, my Colonel, the curtain has only risen. One fine morning your duchy will wake up without a duchess.”

“What do you imply—an abduction?” The Colonel laughed.

“That is my secret.”

“And the pretty countess?” banteringly.

“It was rather bad taste in Madame. It was putting love and patriotism to questionable purposes. I am a gentleman.”

“It was out of consideration for you; Madame was not quite sure about you.

But you are right; all of it has rather a dark shade. You may rob a man of his valuables and give them back; a broken word is not to be mended. Why did you keep the hiding place so secret? I could have got those consols, and all this would have been avoided."

"How should I know where they were? It was none of my affair."

"We are trusting you; I might have gone myself. You will return with the treasure. Why have I not asked your word? Curiosity will bring you back; curiosity. Besides this, you have an idea that with your presence about, a flaw in the glass may be found. Yes, you will be back. History is to be made; when you are old you will glance at the page and say: `Look there; rather a pretty bit, eh? Well, I helped to make it; indeed, had it not been for me and my curiosity it would not have been made at all.' Above all things, do not stop to talk to veiled women."

There was a chuckling sound. "I say, your Englishman is clever now and then. In the gun barrels! Who would have looked for them there? But why did he come himself? Why did he not trust to his bankers? Why did he not turn over the affair to his representative, the British minister? There were a hundred ways of averting the catastrophe. Why did he not use a little fore-thought when he knew how anxious we were for his distinguished person?"

"Why does the moon rise at night and the sun at dawn? I am no Cumaean Sybil. Perhaps it is the impulse which moves the woman behind the power behind the throne; they call it fate. Had I been in his place I dare say I should have followed his footsteps."

Not long after they arrived at the frontier where they were to separate, to meet again under conditions disagreeable to both. The Colonel gave him additional instructions.

"Go; return as quickly as possible."

"Never fear; I should not like to miss the finale to this opera bouffe."

"Rail on, my son; call it by any name you please, only do not interrupt the prompter;" and with this the Colonel waved him an adieu.

Maurice began the journey through the mountain pass, thinking and planning and scheming. However he looked at the situation, the end was the same: the Osians were doomed. If he himself played false and retained the certificates until too late to be of benefit to the duchess, war would follow; and the kingdom would be soundly beaten.... Would Prince Frederick still hold to his agreement and marry her Royal Highness, however ill the fortunes of war fared? There was a swift current of blood to his heart. The Voiture-verse of a countess faded

away.... Supposing Prince Frederick withdrew his claims? Some day her Highness would be free; free, without title or money or shelter. It was a wild dream. Was there not, when all was said, a faint hope for his own affairs in the fall of Fitzgerald?

She was lonely, friendless, personally known to few. Still, she would be an Osian princess for all her misfortunes. But an Osian princess was not so great that love might not possess her. Without royalty she would be only a woman. What would Austria do; what would Austria say? If Austria had placed Leopold on the throne, certainly it was to shut out the house of Auersperg.

And who was this man Beauvais, who served one house openly and another under the rose? Where had he met him before, and why did the thought of him cause unrest? To rescue her somehow, to win her love, to see the glory of the world light the heavens in her eyes! If the dream was mad, it was no less pleasant.

He was a commoner; he had nothing in the world but his brain and his arm. Fitzgerald, now, possessed a famous title and an ancient name. These kings and princes hereabout could boast of but little more than he; and there were millions to back him. He could dream of princesses and still be sane. Maurice did not envy the Englishman's riches, but he coveted his right of way.

How often had he indulged in vain but pleasant dreams! Even in the old days he was always succoring some proud beauty in distress. Sometimes it was at sea, sometimes in railroad wrecks, sometimes in the heart of flames; but he was ever there, like a guardian angel. It was never the same heroine, but that did not matter; she was always beautiful and rich, high placed and lovable, and he never failed to brush aside all obstacles that beset the path to the church door. He had dreamed of paladins, and here at last was his long-sought opportunity—but he could do nothing! He laughed. How many such romances lay beneath the banter and jest of those bald bachelor diplomat friends of his? Had fate reserved him for one of these?

It was noon when he entered the city of Bleiberg. He went directly to his hotel, where a bath and a change of clothes took the stiffness from his limbs. He was in no great hurry to go to the Grand Hotel; there was plenty of time. Happily there was no mail for him; he was not needed in Vienna.

At two o'clock he set out for the lower town. On the way he picked up odd ends of news. The king was rapidly sinking; he had suffered another stroke, and was now without voice. There was unusual activity in the barracks. The students of the university were committing mild depredations, such as building bonfires,

holding flambeau processions, and breaking windows which contained the photographs of Prince Frederick of Carnavia, who, strangely enough, was still wrapt in obscurity. When Maurice entered the Grand Hotel he looked casually among the porters, but the round-faced one was missing. He approached the desk. The proprietor did not recognize him.

“No, my friend,” said Maurice, affably, as a visitors' book was pushed forward, “I am not going to sign. Instead, I wish to ask a favor. A week ago a party of the king's troopers met upstairs.”

The proprietor showed signs of returning memory, together with a strange agitation.

“There was a slight disturbance,” went on Maurice, still using the affable tone. “Herr—ah—Hamilton, I believe—”

The proprietor grew limp and yellow. “I—I do not know where he is.”

“I do,” replied Maurice. “Don't you recognize me? Have I changed so since I came here to doctor a sprained ankle?”

“You?—Before God, Herr, I was helpless; I had nothing to do with it!” terrified at the peculiar smile of the victim.

“The key to this gentleman's room,” was the demand.

“I—”

“The key, and be quick about it.”

The key came forth. “You will say nothing, Herr; it would ruin my business. It was a police affair.”

“Has any one been in this room since?”

“No, Herr; the key has been in my pocket.”

“Where is the porter who brought me here?”

“He was not a porter; he was with the police.”

Maurice passed up the stairs. He found the room in disorder, but a disorder rather familiar to his eyes. He had been the cause of most of it. Here was where he broke the baron's arm and thumped three others on the head. It had been a good fight. Here was a hole in the wall where one of the empty revolvers had gone—missing the Colonel's head by an inch.

There was a smudge on the carpet made by the falling candles. He saw Fitzgerald's pipe and picked it up. No; the chamber maid had not yet been there. He went over to the bed, stared at it and shrugged. He raised the mattress. There was the gun case. He drew it forth and took out the gun, not, however, without a

twist of his nerves.

Four millions of crowns, a woman's love, the fall of one dynasty and the rise of another, all wadded in those innocent looking gun barrels! He hesitated for a space, then unlocked the breech and held the tubes toward the window. There was nothing in the barrels, nothing but the golden sunlight, which glinted along the polished steel.

CHAPTER XIV. QUI M'AIME, AIME MON CHIEN

On making this discovery Maurice was inclined to declaim in that vigorous vocabulary which is taboo. He had been tricked. He was no longer needed at the Red Chateau. Four millions in a gun barrel; hoax was written all over the face of it, and yet he had been as unsuspicious as a Highland gillie. Madame had tricked him; the countess had tricked him, the Colonel and Fitzgerald.

That Madame had tricked him created no surprise; what irritated him most was the conviction that Fitzgerald was laughing in his sleeve, and that he had misjudged the Englishman's capacity for dissimulation. Very well. He threw the gun on the bed; he took Fitzgerald's pipe from his pocket and cast it after the gun, and with a gesture which placed all the contents of the room under the ban of his anathema, he strode out into the corridor, thence to the office.

Here the message to Madame from Beauvais flashed back. The Colonel of the royal cuirassiers had lied; he had found the certificates. But still there was a cloud of mystery; to what use could Beauvais put them? He threw the key to the landlord.

“You lied to me when you said that no one had entered that room,” he said.

“O, Herr, I told you that no one but the police had been in the room since your departure. They made a search the next morning. Herr Hamilton was suspected of being a spy of the duchy's. I could not interfere with the police.”

Maurice saw that there was nothing to be got from the landlord, who was as much in the dark as he. He passed into the street and walked without any particular end in view. O, he would return to the Red Chateau, if only to deliver himself of the picturesque and opinionated address on Madame. Once he saw his reflection in a window glass, and he stopped and muttered at it.

“Eh, bien, as Madame herself says, we develop with crises, and certainly there is one not far distant. I never could write what I wish to say to Madame; I'll go back to-morrow morning.”

Situated between the university and the Grand Hotel on the left hand side of the Konigstrasse, east, stood an historical relic of the days when Austria, together with the small independent states, strove to shake off the Napoleonic yoke. In those days students formed secret societies; societies full of strange ritual, which pushed devotion to fanaticism, which stopped at nothing, not even

assassination. To exterminate the French, to regain their ancestral privileges, to rescue their country from its prostrate humiliation, many sacrificed their lives and their fortunes.

Napoleon found no means of reaching these patriots, for they could not be purchased. This convinced Napoleon of their earnestness, for he could buy kings and princes. The students were invisible, implacable, and many a brilliant officer of the imperial guard disappeared, never to return.

This historic relic of the Konigstrasse had been the headquarters of one of the branches of these numerous societies; and the students still held to those ancient traditions. But men and epochs pass swiftly; only the inanimate remain. This temple of patriotism is simply an inn to-day, owned by one Stuler, and is designated by those who patronize it as “Old Stuler's.” It is the gathering place of the students. It consists of a hall and a garden, the one facing the street, the other walled in at the rear.

The hall is made of common stone, bald and unadorned save by four dingy windows and a tarnished sign, “Garten,” which hangs obliquely over the entrance. At the curb stands a post with three lamps pendant; but these are never lit because Old Stuler can keep neither wicks nor glass beyond the reach of canes.

Old Stuler was well versed in the peculiarities of students. In America they paint statues; in Austria they create darkness. On warm, clear nights the students rioted in the garden; when it rained, chairs and tables were carried into the hall, which contained a small stage and a square gallery. Never a night passed without its animated scene.

Here it was that the evils of monarchical systems were discussed, the army service, the lack of proper amusement, the restrictions at the stage entrance to the opera; here it was that they concocted their exploits, fought their duels, and planned means of outwitting Old Stuler's slate.

Stuler was a good general; he could keep the students in order, watch his assistants draw beer, the Rhine wine, and the scum (dregs of the cask, muddy and strong), and eye the accumulating accounts on the slate. This slate was wiped out once the month; that is to say, when remittances came from home. The night following remittances was a glorious one both to Stuler and the students. There were new scars, new subjects for debate, and Stuler got rid of some of his prime tokayer. The politics of the students was socialism, which is to say they were always dissatisfied. Tourists seldom repeated their visits to Stuler's. There was too much spilling of beer in laps, dumping of pipe ash into uncovered steins,

and knocking off of stiff hats.

It was in front of Old Stuler's that Maurice came to a pause. He had heard of the place and the praise of its Hofbrau and Munich beers. He entered. He found the interior dark and gloomy, though outside the sun shone brilliantly. He ordered a stein of Hofbrau, and carried it into the main hall, which was just off the bar-room. It was much lighter here, though the hall had the tawdry appearance of a theater in the day-time; and the motes swam thickly in the beams of sunshine which entered through the half-closed shutters. It was only at night that Stuler's was presentable.

Scarcely a dozen men sat at the tables. In one corner Maurice saw what appeared to be a man asleep on his arms, which were extended the width of the table. It was the cosiest corner in the hall, and Maurice decided to establish himself at the other side of the table, despite the present incumbent. Noiselessly he crossed the floor and sat down. The light was at his back, leaving his face in the shadow, but shone squarely on the sleeper's head.

“I do not envy his headache when he wakes up,” thought Maurice. He had detected the vinous odor of the sleeper's breath. “These headaches, while they last, are bad things. I know; I've had 'em. I wonder,” lifting the stein and draining it, “who the duffer was who said that getting drunk was fun? His name has slipped my memory; no matter.” He set down the stein and banged the lid.

The sleeper stirred. “Rich,” he murmured; “rich, rich! I'm rich! A hundred thousand crowns!”

“My friend, I'm not in the position to dispute with you on that subject,” said Maurice, smiling. He rapped the stein again.

The sleeper raised his head and stared stupidly,

“Rich, aye, rich!” He was still in half a dream. “Rich, I say!”

“Hang it, I'm not arguing on that,” Maurice laughed.

The other swung upright at this, his round, oily face sodden, his black eyes blinking. He threw off the stupor when he saw that it was a man and not the shadow of one.

“Who the devil are you?” he asked, thickly.

Maurice seldom forgot a face. He recognized this one. “Oho!” he said, “so it's you, eh? I did not expect to meet you. Happily I had you in mind. You are not employed at present as a porter at the Grand Hotel? So it is you, my messenger!”

“Who are you and what are you talking about? I don't know you.”

“Wait a moment and I'll refresh your memory.” Maurice theatrically thrust a

cigar between his teeth and struck a match. As the flame illumined his features the questioner started. “So you do not recognize me, eh? You haven't the slightest remembrance of Herr Hamilton and his sprained ankle, eh? Sit down or I'll break your head with this stein, you police spy!” dropping the bantering tone.

The other sat down, but he whistled sharply; and Maurice saw the dozen or so rise from the other tables and come hurriedly in his direction. He pushed back his chair and rose, his teeth firmly embedded in the cigar, and waited.

“What's the trouble, Kopf?” demanded the newcomers.

“This fellow accuses me of being a spy and threatens to break my head.”

“O! break your head, is it? Let us see. Come, brothers; out with this fellow.”

Maurice saw that they were about to charge him, and his hand went to his hip pocket and rested on the butt of the revolver which the Colonel had given him. “Gentlemen,” he said, quietly, “I have no discussion with you. I have a pistol in my pocket, and I'm rather handy with it. I desire to talk to this man, and talk to him I will. Return to your tables; the affair doesn't concern you.”

The intended assault did not materialize. They scowled, but retired a few paces. They saw the movement toward the hip pocket, and they noted the foreign twist of the tongue. Moreover, they did not like the angle of the speaker's jaws. They shuffled, looked questioningly at one another, and, as if all of a single mind, went slowly back to their chairs. Kopf grew pale. Indeed, his pallor was out of all proportion with the affair, which Maurice took to be no more than a comedy.

“Brothers,” he said, huskily, “he will not dare.”

“Don't you doubt it for a moment,” interrupted Maurice, taking out the revolver and fondling it. “Any interference will mean one or more cases for the hospital. Come, I'm not the police,” to Kopf. “I am not going to hurt you. I wish only to ask you a few questions, which is my right after what has passed between us. We'll go to my hotel, where we shan't be disturbed.”

Together they left the hall. As they passed through the bar-room Stuler looked questions, but refrained from asking them. Maurice put away the revolver. As they went out into the street he drew Kopf's arm within his own.

“What do you want?” asked Johann, savagely.

“First. What is your place in this affair?”

“What affair?”

“The abduction.”

“I had nothing to do with it, Herr, on my honor. I was only a porter, and I

supposed my errand was in good faith.”

“How about the gentle push you gave me when the door opened? My friend, I'm no infant. Lies will do you no good. I know everything, and wish only to verify. You are a police spy, in the employ of the duchess.” Maurice felt the arm draw, and bore down on it.

“If I was, do you suppose I'd fool my time on this side of the Thalians?” Johann shrugged.

“I'm not sure about that,” said Maurice, puffing into Johann's face. “When cabinet ministers play spy, small fry like you will not cavil at the occupation. And you are not in their pay?” Johann glared. “I want to know,” Maurice went on, “what you know; what you know of Colonel Beauvais, his plans, his messengers to the duchy, what is taking place underneath.”

Johann's face cleared and a cunning light brightened his eyes. “If that is all you are after, I'll tell you. I'm a spy no longer; they have no more use for me, despite their promises. I'll play them off for quits.”

“If that's all,” repeated Maurice, “what did you think I wanted to ask you?”

Johann bit his lip. “I'm wanted badly by the chancellor, curse you, if you must know. I thought he might be behind you.”

“Don't worry about that,” said Maurice, to whom this declaration seemed plausible. “We'll talk as we go along.”

And Johann loosened his tongue and poured into Maurice's ear a tale which, being half a truth, had all the semblance of straightforwardness. What he played for was time; to gain time and to lull his captor's suspicions. Maurice was not familiar with the lower town; Johann was. A few yards ahead there was an alley he knew, and once in it he could laugh at all pursuit. It might be added that if Maurice knew but little of the lower town, he knew still less about Johann.

Suddenly, in the midst of his narrative, Johann put his leg stiffly between his enemy's and gave a mighty jerk with his arm, with the result that Maurice, wholly unprepared, went sprawling to the pavement. He was on his feet in an instant, but Johann was free and flying up the alley. Maurice gave chase, but uselessly. Johann had disappeared. The alley was a cul de sac, but was lined with doors; and these Maurice hammered to ease his conscience. No one answered. Deeply disgusted with his lack of caution, Maurice regained the street, where he brushed the dust from his knees.

“I'll take it out of his hide the next time we meet. He wasn't worth the trouble, anyway.”

A sybil might have whispered in his ear that a very large fish had escaped his net, but Maurice continued, conscious of nothing save chagrin and a bruised knee. He resumed the piecing together of events, or rather he attempted to; very few pieces could be brought together. If Beauvais had the certificates, what was his object in lying to Madame? What benefit would accrue to him? After all, it was a labyrinth of paths which always brought him up to the beginning. He drooped his shoulders dejectedly. There was nothing left for him to do but return to the Red Chateau and inform them of the fruitlessness of his errand. He would start on the morrow. Tonight he wanted once more to hear the band, to wander about the park, to row around the rear of the archbishop's garden.

“A fine thing to be born in purple—sometimes,” he mused. “I never knew till now the inconveniences of the common mold.”

He tramped on, building chateaux en Espagne. That they tumbled down did not matter; he could rebuild in the space of a second, and each castle an improvement on its predecessor.

His attention was suddenly drawn away from this idle but pleasant pursuit. In a side street he saw twenty or thirty students surging back and forth, laughing and shouting and jostling. In the center of this swaying mass canes rose and fell. It was a fight, and as he loved a fight, Maurice pressed his hat firmly on his head and veered into the side street. He looked around guiltily, and was thankful that no feminine eyes were near to offer him their reproaches. He jostled among the outer circle, but could see nothing. He stooped. Something white flashed this way and that, accompanied by the sound of low growls. A dog fight was his first impression, and he was on the point of leaving, for, while he secretly enjoyed the sight of two physically perfect men waging battle, he had not the heart to see two brutes pitted against each other, goaded on by brutes of a lower caste. But even as he turned the crowd opened and closed, and the brief picture was enough for him.

Her dog! And the students were beating it because they knew it to be defenseless. Her dog! toothless and old, who could not hold when his jaws closed on an arm or leg, but who, with that indomitable courage of his race, fought on and on, hopelessly and stubbornly.

He was covered with blood, one of his legs was hurt, but still the spirit burned. It was cowardly. Maurice's jaws assumed a particularly ferocious angle. Her dog! Rage choked him. With an oath he flung this student aside and that, fought his way to the center. A burly student, armed with a stout cane, was the principal aggressor.

Maurice doubled his fist and swung a blow which had one hundred and sixty pounds behind it, and it landed squarely on the cheek of the student, who dropped face downward and lay still. This onslaught was so sudden and unexpected that the students were confounded. But Maurice, whose plans crystallized in moments like these, picked up the cane and laid it about him.

The students swore and yelled and stumbled over one another in their wild efforts to dodge the vindictive cane. Maurice cleared a wide circle. The dog, half blinded by his blood and not fully comprehending this new phase in the tide of events, lunged at Maurice, who nimbly eluded him. Finally the opportunity came. He flung the cane into the yelling pack, with his left arm caught the dog about the middle, and leaped back into the nearest doorway. The muscles of his left arm were sorely tried; the dog considered his part in the fray by no means ended, and he tugged and yelped huskily. With his right hand Maurice sought his revolver, cocked and leveled it. There came a respite. The students had not fully recovered from their surprise, and the yells sank into murmurs.

“You curs!” said Maurice, panting. “Shame on you! and an old dog that can't defend himself! You knew he had no teeth.”

“God save your Excellency!” laughed a student in the rear, who had not tasted the cane; “you may be sure we knew he had no teeth or we wouldn't have risked our precious calves. Don't let him scare you with the popgun, comrades. At him, my brave ones; he will be more sport than the dog! Down with the Osians, dogs, followers and all!”

“Come on, then,” said Maurice, whose fighting blood was at heat. “Come on, if you think it isn't over. There are six bullets in this popgun, and I don't give a particular damn where they go. Come on!”

Whether or not this challenge would have been accepted remains unwritten. There now came on the air the welcome sound of galloping hoofs, and presently two cuirassiers wheeled into the street. What Maurice had left undone with the cane the cuirassiers completed with the flat of their sabers. They had had a brush with the students the night before, and they went at them as if determined to take both interest and principal. The students dispersed like leaves in the wind—all save one. He rose to his feet, his hands covering his jaw and a dazed expression in his eyes. He saw Maurice with the revolver, the cuirassiers with their sabers, and the remnant of his army flying to cover, and he decided to follow their example. The scene had changed somewhat since he last saw it. He slunk off at a zigzag trot.

One of the cuirassiers dismounted, his face red from his exertions.

“Eh?” closely scanning Maurice's white face. “Well, well! is it you, Monsieur Carewe?”

“Lieutenant von Mitter?” cried Maurice, dropping the dog, who by now had grasped the meaning of it all. “You came just in time!”

They shook hands.

“I'll lay odds that you put up a good fight,” the Lieutenant said, pleasantly. “Curse these students! If I had my way I'd coop them all up in their pest-hole of a university and blow them into eternity.”

“And how did the dog come in this part of the town?” asked Maurice, picking up his hat.

“He was with her Royal Highness. This is charity afternoon. She drives about giving alms to the poor, and when she enters a house the dog stands at the entrance to await her return. She came out of another door and forgot the dog. Max there remembered him only when we were several blocks away. A dozen or so of those rascally students stood opposite us when we stopped here. It flashed on me in a minute why the dog did not follow us. And we came back at a cut, leaving her Highness with no one but the groom. Max, take the dog to her Highness, and tell her that it is Monsieur Carewe who is to be thanked.”

Maurice blushed. “Say nothing of my part in the fracas. It was nothing at all.”

“Don't be modest, my friend,” said the cuirassier, laughing, while his comrade dismounted, took the dog under his arm, and made off. “This is one chance in a lifetime. Her Royal Highness will insist on thanking you personally. O, I know Mademoiselle's caprices. And there's your hat, crushed all out of shape. Truly, you are unfortunate with your headgear.”

“It's felt,” said Maurice, slapping it against his leg. “No harm done to the hat. Well, good day to you, Lieutenant, and thanks. I must be off.”

“Nay, nay!” cried the Lieutenant. “Wait a moment. `There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood—' How does that line go? I was educated in England and speak English as I do my mother tongue—”

“Won't you let me go?” asked Maurice. “Look at my clothes.”

“You ought to be thankful that they are dry this time. Come; you'll have a good story to carry back to Vienna. Princesses do not eat people.”

“No,” said Maurice.

“Ye gods, listen to that! One would think by the tone of your voice that you wished they did!”

There was no resisting this good humor; and Maurice wanted only an excuse

to wait. He sat down on the steps, sucked the knuckles of his hand, and contemplated the grin on the cuirassier's face.

“I like you,” said the Lieutenant; “I like your sangfroid. The palace is a devil of a dull place, and a new face is a positive relief. I suppose you know that affairs here are bad; no honesty anywhere. Everybody has his hands tied. The students know this, and do as they please. Think of two hundred gendarmes in the city, and an affair like this takes place without one of them turning up!

“I tell you frankly that it is all I can do to withhold the edge of my saber when I meet those students. Last night they held a noisy flambeau procession around the Hohenstaufenplatz, knowing full well that the king had had another stroke and quiet was necessary. They would have waked the dead. I have an idea that I forgot to use the flat of my sword; at least, the hospital report confirms my suspicions. Ah, here comes Max.”

“Her Royal Highness desires to thank Monsieur Carewe, and commands that he be brought to her carriage.”

Lieutenant von Mitter smiled, and Maurice stood up and brushed himself. The troopers sprang into the saddle and started on a walk, with Maurice bringing up behind on foot. The thought of meeting the princess, together with his recent exertions, created havoc with his nerves. When he arrived at the royal carriage, his usual coolness forsook him. He fumbled with his hat, tongue-tied. He stood in the Presence.

“Monsieur,” said the Voice, “I thank you with all my heart for your gallant service. Poor, poor dog!”

“It was nothing, your Highness; any man would have done the same thing.” The red in the wheel-spokes bothered his eyes.

“No, no! you must not belittle it.”

“If it had not been for Lieutenant von Mitter—”

“Whither were you going, Monsieur?” interrupted the Voice.

“Nowhere; that is, I was going toward my hotel.”

“The Continental?”

“Yes, your Highness.”

“Step into the carriage, Monsieur;” the Voice had the ring of command. “I will put you down there. It is the least that I can do to show my gratitude.”

“I—I to ride with your Highness?” he stammered. “O, no! I—that is—it would scarcely be—”

“You are not afraid of me, Monsieur?” with a smile which, though it had a bit of the rogue in it, was rather sad. She moved to the other side of the seat and put the dog on the rug at her feet. “Perhaps you are proud? Well, Monsieur, I too am proud; so proud that I promise never to forgive you if you refuse to gratify my wish.”

“I was not thinking of myself, your Highness, or rather I was. I am not presentable. Look at me; my hat is out of shape, my clothes dusty, and I dare say that my face needs washing.”

The Presence replied to this remarkable defense with laughter, laughter in which Maurice detected an undercurrent of bitterness.

“Monsieur Carewe, you are not acquainted with affairs in Bleiberg, or you would know that I am a nobody. When I pass through the streets I attract little attention, I receive no homage. Enter: I command it.”

“If your Highness commands—”

“I do command it,” imperiously. “And you would have pleased me more fully if you had accepted the invitation and not obeyed the command.”

“I withdraw all objections,” he said hastily, “and accept the invitation.”

“That is better,” the Voice said.

Maurice, still uncovered, sat down on the front seat.

“Not there, Monsieur; beside me. Etiquette does not permit you to ride in front of me.”

As he took the vacant place beside her he felt a fire in his cheeks. The Voice and Presence were disquieting. As the groom touched the horses, Maurice was sensible of her sleeve against his, and he drew away. The Presence appeared unmindful.

“And you recognize me?” she asked.

“Yes, your Highness.” He tried to remember what he had said to her that day in the archbishop's garden. Two or three things came back and the color remounted his cheeks.

“Have you forgotten what you said to me?”

“I dare say I was impertinent,” vaguely.

“Ah, you have forgotten, then!”

In all his life he never felt so ill at ease. To what did she refer? That he would be proud to be her friend? That if the princess was as beautiful as the maid he could pass judgment?

“Yes, you have forgotten. Do you not remember that you offered to be my friend?” She read him through and through, his embarrassment, the tell-tale color in his cheeks. She laughed, and there was nothing but youth in the laughter. “Certainly you are afraid of me.”

“I confess I am,” he said. “I can not remember all I said to you.”

Suddenly she, too, remembered something, and it caused the red of the rose to ripple from her throat to her eyes. “Poor dog! Not that they hated him, but because I love him!” Tears started to her eyes. “See, Monsieur Carewe; princesses are human, they weep and they love. Poor dog! My playmate and my friend. But for you they might have killed him. Tell me how it happened.” She knew, but she wanted to hear the story from his own lips.

His narrative was rather disjointed, and he slipped in von Mitter as many times as possible, thinking to do that individual a good turn. Perhaps she noticed it, for at intervals she smiled. During the telling he took out his handkerchief, wiped the dog's head with it, and wound it tightly about the injured leg. The dog knew; he wagged his tail.

How handsome and brave, she thought, as she observed the face in profile. Not a day had passed during the fortnight gone that she had not conjured up some feature of that intelligent countenance; sometimes it had been the eyes, sometimes the chin and mouth, sometimes the shapely head. It was wrong; but this little sin was so sweet. She had never expected to see him again. He had come and gone, and she had thought that the beginning and the end. Ah, if only she were not a princess! If only some hand would sweep aside those insurmountable barriers called birth and policy! To be free, to be the mistress of one's heart, one's dreams, one's desires!

“And you did it all alone,” she said, softly; “all alone.”

“O, I had the advantage; I was not expected. It was all over before they knew what had happened.”

“And you had the courage to take a poor dog's part? Did you know whose dog it was?”

“Yes, your Highness, I recognized him.”

A secret gladness stole into her heart, and to cover the flame which again rose to her cheeks, she bent and smoothed the dog's head. This gave Maurice an opportunity to look at her. What a beautiful being she was! He was actually sitting beside her, breathing the same air, listening to her voice. She exhaled a delicate perfume such as incorporates itself in persons of high degree and becomes a natural emanation, an incense vague and indescribable. He felt that he

was gazing on the culmination of youth, beauty, and elegance... Yes, Fitzgerald was right. To beggar one's self for love; honor and life, and all to the winds if only love remained.

Presently she straightened, and he centered his gaze on the back of the groom.

“Monsieur, place your hat upon your head,” smiling. “We have entered the Strasse, and I should not like to embarrass you with the attention of the citizens.”

He put on his hat. The impulse came to tell her all that he knew in regard to the kingdom's affairs; but his voice refused its offices. Besides, it was too late; the carriage was rolling into the Platz, and in a moment more it drew up before the terrace of the Continental Hotel. Maurice stepped out and bared his head.

“This evening, Monsieur, at nine, I shall expect to see you at the archbishop's reception to the corps diplomatique.” A hand was extended toward him. He did not know what to do about it. “I am offering you my hand to kiss, Monsieur Carewe; it is a privilege which I do not extend to all.”

As he touched it to his lips, he was sure that a thousand pairs of eyes were centered on him. The truth is, there were less than one hundred. It was the first time in many months that the Crown Princess had stopped before the Continental Hotel. To the guests it was an event; and some even went as far as to whisper that the handsome young man was Prince Frederick, incognito.

“God save your Royal Highness,” said Maurice, at loss for other words. He released her hand and stepped back.

“Until this evening, then, Monsieur;” and the royal barouche rolled away.

“Who loves me, loves my dog,” said Maurice, as he sped to his room.

CHAPTER XV. IN WHICH FORTUNE BECOMES CARELESS AND PRODIGAL

On the night prior to the arrival of Maurice in Bleiberg, there happened various things of moment.

At midnight the chancellor left the palace, after having witnessed from a window the meeting of the cuirassiers and the students, and sought his bed; but his sleep was burdened with troubled dreams. The clouds, lowering over his administration, thickened and darkened. How many times had he contemplated resigning his office, only to put aside the thought and toil on?

Defeat in the end was to be expected, but still there was ever that star of hope, a possible turn in affairs which would carry him on to victory. Victory is all the sweeter when it seems impossible. Prince Frederick had disappeared, no one knew where, the peasant girl theory could no longer be harbored, and the wedding was but three days hence. The Englishman had not stepped above the horizon, and the telegrams to the four ends of the world returned unanswered. Thus, the chancellor stood alone; the two main props were gone from under. As he tossed on his pillows he pondered over the apparent reticence and indifference of the archbishop.

All was still in the vicinity of the palaces. Sentinels paced noiselessly within the enclosures. In the royal bedchamber the king was resting quietly, and near by, on a lounge, the state physician dozed. The Captain of the household troop of cuirassiers nodded in the ante-room.

Only the archbishop remained awake. He sat in his chamber and wrote. Now and then he would moisten his lips with watered wine. Sometimes he held the pen in midair, and peered into the shapeless shadows cast by the tapers, his broad forehead shining and deep furrows between his eyes. On, on he wrote. Perhaps the archbishop was composing additional pages to his memoirs, for occasionally his thin lips relaxed into an impenetrable smile.

There was little quiet in the lower town, especially in the locality of the university. Old Stuler's was filled with smoke, students and tumult. Ill feeling ran high. There were many damaged heads, for the cuirassiers had not been niggard with their sabers.

A student walked backward and forward on the stage, waving wildly with his

hands to command attention. It was some time before he succeeded.

“Fellow-students, brothers of freedom and comrades,” he began. “All this must come to an end, and that at once. Our personal liberty is endangered. Our rights are being trodden under foot. Our ancient privileges are being laughed at. It must end.” This declaration was greeted by shouts, sundry clattering of pewter lids and noisy rappings of earthenware on the tables. “Have we no rights as students? Must we give way to a handful of beggarly mercenaries? Must we submit to the outlawing of our customs and observances? What! We must not parade because the king does not like to be disturbed? And who are the cuirassiers?” Nobody answered. Nobody was expected to answer. “They are Frenchmen of hated memory—Swiss, Prussians, with Austrian officers. Are we or are we not an independent state? If independent, shall we stand by and see our personal liberties restricted? No! I say no!

“Let us petition to oust these vampires, who not only rob us of our innocent amusements, but who are fed by our taxes. What right had Austria to dictate our politics? What right had she to disavow the blood and give us these Osians? O, my brothers, where are the days of Albrecht III of glorious memory? He acknowledged our rights. He was our lawful sovereign. He understood and loved us.” This burst of sentiment was slightly exaggerative, if the history of that monarch is to be relied on; but the audience was mightily pleased with this recollection. It served to add to their distemper and wrath against the Osian puppet. “And where are our own soldiers, the soldiers of the kingdom? Moldering away in the barracks, unnoticed and forgotten. For the first time in the history of the country foreigners patrol the palaces. Our soldiers are nobodies. They hold no office at court save that of Marshal, and his voice is naught. Yet the brunt of the soldier's life falls on them. They watch at the frontiers, tireless and vigilant, while the mercenaries riot and play. Brothers, the time has come for us to act. The army is with us, and so are the citizens. Let ours be the glory of touching the match. We are brave and competent. We are drilled. We lack not courage. Let us secretly arm and watch for the opportunity to strike a blow for our rights. Confusion to the Osians, and may the duchess soon come into her own!”

He jumped from the stage, and another took his place; the haranguing went on. The orators were serious and earnest; they believed themselves to be patriots, pure and simple, when in truth they were experiencing the same spirit of revolt as the boy whose mother had whipped him for making an unnecessary noise, or stealing into the buttery.

While the excitement was at its height, a man, somewhat older than the

majority of the students, entered the bar-room from the street, and lounged heavily against the railing. His clothes were soiled and wrinkled, blue circles shadowed his eyes, which were of dull jet, the corners of his mouth drooped dejectedly, and his oily face, covered with red stubble, gave evidences of a prolonged debauch.

“Wine, Stuler, wine!” he called, laying down a coin, which gleamed dimly yellow in the opalescent light. “And none of your devilish vinegars and scums.”

Stuler pounced on the coin and rubbed it between his palms. “Gold, Johann, gold?”

“Aye, gold; and the last of a pocketful, curse it! What's this noise about?” with a gesture, toward the hall.

“The boys were in the Platz and had a brush with those damned cuirassiers. They'll play a harder game yet.” Stuler always took sides with the students, on business principles; they constituted his purse. “Tokayer?”

“No; champagne. Aye, these damned cuirassiers shall play a hard game ere the week is done, or my name is not Johann Kopf. They kicked me out of the palace grounds yesterday; me, me, me!” hammering the oak with his fist.

“Who?”

“Von Mitter, the English-bred dog! I'll kill him one of these days. Is it play to-night, or are they serious?” nodding again toward the hall.

“Go in,” said Stuler, “and look at some of those heads; a look will answer the purpose.”

Johann followed this advice. The picture he saw was one which agreed with the idea that had come into his mind. He returned to the bar-room. and drank his wine thirstily, refilled the glass and emptied it. Stuler shook his head. Johann was in a bad way when he gulped wine instead of sipping it. Yet it was always so after a carouse.

“Where have you been keeping yourself the past week?” he asked. If the students were his purse, Johann was his budget of news.

“You ask that?” surlily. “You knew I had money; you knew that I was off somewhere spending it—God knows where, I don't. Another bottle of wine. There's enough left from the gold to pay for it.”

Stuler complied. Johann's thirst seemed in no way assuaged; but soon the sullen expression, the aftermath of his spree, was replaced by one of reckless jollity. His eyes began to sparkle.

“A great game, Stuler; they're playing a great game, and you and I will be in at

the reaping. The town is quiet, you say? The troops have ceased murmuring, eh? A lull that comes before the storm. And when it breaks—and break it will!—gay times for you and me. There will be sacking. I have the list of those who lean toward the Osians. There will be loot, old war dog!”

Stuler smiled indulgently; Johann was beginning to feel the wine. Perhaps he was to learn something. “Yes, 'twill be a glorious day.”

“A week hence, and the king goes forth a bankrupt.”

“If he lives,” judiciously.

“Dead or alive, it matters not which; he goes.”

“And the wedding? What is it I hear about Prince Frederick and the peasant girl?”

Johann laughed. “There will be no wedding.”

“And the princess?”

“A pretty morsel, a tidbit for the king that is to be.”

“The king that—eh, Johann, are you getting drunk so soon?” Stuler exclaimed. “I know of no king—”

Johann reached over and caught the innkeeper's wrist. The grasp was no gentle one. “Listen, that was a slip of the tongue. Repeat it, and that for your life! Do you understand, my friend?”

“Gott in—”

“Do you understand?” fiercely.

“Yes, yes!” Stuler wiped his face with his apron.

“Good, if you understand. It was naught but a slip of the tongue,” nonchalantly. “In a little week, my friend, your till will have no vulgar silver in it; gold, yellow gold.”

“And the duchess?” with hesitance. The budget of news to-night was not of the usual kind.

Johann did not answer, save by a shrug.

The perturbation of the old man was so manifestly beyond control that he could not trust his legs. He dropped on the stool, giving his grizzled head a negative shake. “I would that you had made no slip of the tongue, Johann,” he murmured. “Gott, what is going on? The princess was not to wed, to be sure, but the duchess passed—a king besides—”

“Silence!” enjoined Johann. “Stuler, I am about to venture on a daring enterprise, which, if successful, will mean plenty of gold. Come with me into

your private office, where we shall not be interrupted nor overheard." He vaulted the bar. Stuler looked undecided. "Come!" commanded Johann. With another shake of his head Stuler took down the tallow dip, unlocked the door, and bade Johann pass in. He caught up another bottle and glass and followed. Without a word he filled the glass and set it down before Johann, who raised it and drank, his beady eyes flashing over the rim of the glass and compelling the innkeeper to withdraw his gaze.

"Well?" said Stuler, uneasily.

"I need you." Johann finished his glass with moderate slowness. "Your storehouse on the lake is empty?"

"Yes, but—"

"I shall want it, two nights from this, in case Madame the duchess does not conquer the Englishman. I shall want two fellows who will ask no questions, but who will follow my instructions to the letter. It is an abduction."

"A nasty business," was Stuler's comment. "You have women to thank for your present occupation, Johann."

"Stuler, you are a fool. It is not a woman; it is a crown."

"Eh?" Stuler's eyes bulged.

"A crown. The duchess may remain a duchess. Who is master in Bleiberg to-day? At whose word the army moves or stands? At whose word the Osians fall or reign? On whom does the duchess rely? Who is king in deed, if not in fact? Who will find means to liquidate the kingdom's indebtedness, whoever may be the creditor? Pah! the princess may marry, but the groom will not be Prince Frederick. The man she will marry will be the husband of a queen, and he will be a king behind a woman's skirts. It is what the French call a coup d'etat. She will be glad to marry; there is no alternative. She will submit, if only that her father may die in peace."

"And this king?" in a whisper.

"You are old, Stuler; you remember many things of the past. Do you recollect a prince of a noble Austrian house by the name of Walmoden, once an aide to the emperor, who was cashiered from the army and exiled for corresponding with France?"

Stuler's hand shook as he brushed his forehead. "Yes, I recollect. He fought against the Prussians in the Franco-Prussian war, then disappeared, to be heard of again as living in a South American republic. But what has he to do with all this? Ah, Johann, this is deep water."

“For those who have not learned to swim. You will aid me? A thousand crowns—two hundred pieces of gold like that which has just passed from my pocket into yours. It is politics.”

“But the sacking of the town?”

“A jest. If Madame the duchess conquers the Englishman, the king that is to be will pay her. Then, if she wages war Austria can say nothing for defending ourselves.”

“And Walmoden?” Stuler struck his forehead with his fist as if to pound it into a state of lucidity. “Where is he? It is a stone wall; I can see nothing.”

“Beauvais.”

“Beauvais!” Stuler half rose from his chair, but sank again.

“Exactly. This play, for some reason unexplained, is the price of his reestablishment into the graces of the noble Hapsburgs. Between us, I think the prince is playing a game for himself. But who shall blame him?”

“The devil! I thought Austria was very favorable to the Osian house.”

“Favorable or not, it is nothing to us.”

“Well, well, it's a thousand crowns,” philosophically.

“That's the sentiment,” laughed Johann. “It is not high treason, it is not lese majeste; it is not a crime; it is a thousand crowns. Votre sante, as the damned French say!” swallowing what was left of the wine. “And then, it is purely patriotic in us,” with a deceitful smile.

“The storehouse is yours, and the men. Now tell me how 'tis to be played.”

“Where does her Royal Highness go each Thursday evening, accompanied by her eternal cuirassiers, von Mitter and Scharfenstein?”

“Where but to see her old nurse Elizabeth? But two men will not be enough. Von Mitter and Scharfenstein—”

“Will as usual remain at the carriage. But what's to prevent the men from gaining entrance by the rear?—carrying off her Highness that way, passing through the alley and making off, to be a mile away before the cuirassiers even dream of the attempt?”

“After all, I'd rather the duchess.”

“We can not all be kings and queens.” Johann got up and slapped Stuler familiarly on the shoulder. “Forget not the gold, the yellow gold; little heaps of it to finger, to count, and to spend.”

Stuler's eyes gleamed phosphorescently. There was the strain of the ancient

marauder in his veins; gold easily gotten. He opened the door, and Johann passed out, swaying. The wine was taking hold of him. He turned into the hall, while Stuler busied himself with the spigots. Some one discovered the spy, and called him by name; it was caught up by others, and there were numerous calls for a speech.

As a socialist Johann was well known about the lower town. Besides, five years gone, he himself had been a student and a brother of freedom. He had fought a dozen successful duels, and finally had been expelled from the university for beating a professor who had objected to his conduct in the presence of ladies. Other ill reports added to his popularity. To be popular in this whimsical world of ours, one has either to be very good or very bad. Johann was not unwilling to speak. Stuler had given him the cue; the cuirassiers. His advice was secretly to arm and hold in readiness. As this was the substance of the other speeches, Johann received his meed of applause.

“And let us not forget the bulldog; let us kill him, too,” cried one of the auditors; “the prodigal bulldog, who has lived on our fatted calves.”

This was unanimously adopted. The bulldog was not understood; and he smacked of the English. Then, too, the bulldog roamed too freely in the royal enclosures; and, until late years, trespassers fared badly. The students considered that their privileges extended everywhere; the dog, not being conversant with these privileges, took that side which in law is called the benefit of a doubt.

After his speech Johann retired to the bar-room. What he desired most of all was a replenished purse. Popular he was; but the students knew his failings, among which stood prominently that of a forgetful borrower. They would buy him drinks, clothes and food, if need be, but they would not lend him a stiver. And he could not borrow from Stuler, whose law was only to trust. Johann gambled, and wine always brought back the mad fever for play. The night before he had lost rather heavily, and he wanted to recover his losses. Rouge-et-noir had pinched him; he would be revenged on the roulette. All day long combinations and numbers danced before his eyes. He had devised several plans by which to raise money, but these had fallen through. Suddenly he smiled, and beckoned to Stuler.

“Stuler, how much will you advance me,” he asked, “on a shotgun worth one hundred crowns?”

“A shotgun worth one hundred crowns? Ten.”

Johann made a negative gesture. “Fifty or none. You can sell it for seventy-five in the morning. So could I, only I want the money to-night.”

“If you want wine—” began Stuler.

“I want money.”

Stuler scratched his nose. “Bring the gun to me. If it is worth what you say, I'll see what I can do.”

“In an hour;” and Johann went out. A cold thin rain was falling, and a dash of it in the face had a cooling effect. Somehow, the exhilaration of the wine was gone, and his mood took a sullen turn. Money! he was ever in need of money. He cursed his ill luck. He cursed the cause of it—drink. But for drink he would not have been plain Johann Kopf, brawler, outcast, spy, disowned by his family and all save those who could use him. He remained standing in the doorway, brooding.

At last he drew his collar about his throat and struck off, a black shadow in a bank of gray. When he reached that part of the street opposite the Grand Hotel, he stopped and sought shelter under an awning. The night patrol came clattering down the street. It passed quickly, and soon all was still again. Johann stepped out and peered up and down. The street was deserted. All the hotel windows were in gloom, save a feeble light which beamed from the office windows.

Would it be robbery? He had not yet stooped to that. But he could hear the ivory ball clatter as it fell into the lucky numbers. He had a premonition that he would win if he stuck to a single combination. He would redeem the gun, replace it, and no one would be any the wiser. If his numbers failed him..... No matter. He determined to cross the Rubicon. He traversed the street and disappeared into the cavernous alley, shortly to loom up in the deserted courtyard of the hotel. He counted the windows on the first floor and stopped at the fourth. That was the window he must enter. Noiselessly he crept along the walls, stopping now and then to listen. There was no sound except the monotonous dripping of the rain, which was growing thinner and colder.

Presently he came across the ladder he was seeking. He raised it to the required height, and once more placed his hand to his ear. Silence. He mounted the rounds to the window, which he found unfastened. In another moment he was in the room. Not an object could he see, so deep was the darkness. If he moved without light he was likely to stumble, and heydey to his fifty crowns, not to say his liberty for many days to come. He carefully drew the blinds and struck a match. The first object which met his gaze was a fallen candle. This he lit and when the glare of the flame softened, all the corners of the room stood out. Nowhere was there any sign of a gun. He gave vent to a half-muttered curse. Some one had pilfered the gun, or the proprietor was keeping it until the

Englishman returned from the duchy. But he remembered that there were two guns, one of which the Englishman did not use in the hunting expeditions.

So he began a thorough search. It meant fifty crowns, green baize and the whims of fortune. Cautiously he moved between the fallen chairs. He looked behind the bed, under the dresser, but without success. His hand closed savagely around the candle, and he swore inaudibly. He threw back the bed coverings, not that he expected to find anything, but because he could vent his rage on these silent, noiseless things. When he lifted the mattress it was then he took a deep breath and smiled. What he saw was a gun case. He drew it from under. It was heavy; his fifty crowns were inside. Next he picked up a candlestick and stuffed the candle into it, and laid a quilt against the threshold of the door so that no light would pierce the corridor.

"This is the gun the Englishman did not use in the hunting expeditions," he thought. "If it is out of repair, as he said it was, my fifty crowns are not so many pfennige. The devil! it must be a valuable piece of gunsmithing, to hide it under the bedclothes. Let me see if my crowns are for the picking."

He investigated forthwith. The hammers and the triggers worked smoothly. He unlocked the breech and held the nozzles toward the candle light—and again cursed. The barrels were clogged up. Notwithstanding, he plucked forth the cleaning-rod and forced it into one of the tubes. There was a slight resistance, and something fluttered to the floor and rolled about. The second tube was treated likewise, with the same result. Johann laughed silently. The fifty crowns were tangible; he could hear them jingling in his pocket, and a pretty music they made. He returned the leather case to its original place and devoted his attention to the cylinder-shaped papers on the floor.

For a quarter of an hour Johann remained seated on the floor, in the wavering candle light, forgetful of all save the delicate tracings of steel engraving, the red and green inks, the great golden seal, the signatures, the immensity of the ciphers which trailed halfway across each crackling parchment. He counted sixteen of them in all. Four millions of crowns.... He was rich, rich beyond all his wildest dreams.

He rose, and restored the gun to its case. Fifty crowns? No, no! A hundred thousand, not a crown less; a hundred thousand! all thoughts of the green baize and the rattle of the roulette ball passed away. There was no need to seek fortune; she had come to him of her own free will. Wine, Gertrude of the opera, Paris and a life of ease; all these were his. A hundred thousand crowns, a hundred thousand florins, two hundred thousand francs, two hundred thousand marks! He computed in all monetary denominations; in all countries it was

wealth.

Something rose and swelled in his throat, and he choked hysterically. A voice whispered “No, not a hundred thousand; four millions!” But reason, though it tottered, regained its balance, and he saw the utter futility of attempting to dispose of the orders on the government independently. His hands trembled; he could scarcely hold this vast treasure. Twice, in his haste to pocket the certificates, they slipped from his grasp and scattered. How those six syllables frolicked in his mind! A hundred thousand crowns!

He extinguished the candle and laid it on the floor, put the quilt on the bed, then climbed through the window, which he closed without mishap. He descended the ladder. As he reached the bottom round his heart gave a great leap. From the alley came the sound of approaching steps. Nearer and nearer they came; a shadow entered the courtyard and made straight for the door, which was but a few feet from the reclining ladder. The kitchen door opened and the burst of light revealed a belated serving maid. A moment passed, and all became dark again. But Johann felt a strange weakness in his knees, and a peculiar thrill at the roots of his hair. He dared not move for three or four minutes. But he waited in vain for other steps. He cursed the serving maid for the fright, disposed of the ladder, and sought the street. He directed his steps toward Stuler's.

“The pig of an Englishman was deeper than I thought. In the gun barrels, the gun barrels! If I had not wanted to play they would have been there yet! A hundred thousand crowns!”

It had ceased to rain, and a frost was congealing the moisture under foot. On the way back to Stuler's Johann slipped and fell several times; but he was impervious to pain, bruises were nothing. He was rich! He laughed; and from time to time thrust his hand into his vest to convince himself that he was not dreaming. To whom should he sell? To the Osians? To the duchess? To the king that was to be? Who would pay quickest the hundred thousand crowns? He knew. Aye, two hundred thousand would not be too much. The Englishman would send for the certificates, but his agent would not find them. The abduction? He would carry it through as he had promised. It was five thousand crowns in addition to his hundred thousand. He was rich! He shook his hand toward the inky sky, toward the palace, toward all that signified the past..... A hundred thousand crowns!

CHAPTER XVI. WHAT HAPPENED AT THE ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE AND AFTER

Maurice, as he labored before his mirror, wondered why in the world it took him so long to dress. An hour had passed since he began his evening toilet; yet here he was, still tinkering, so to speak, over the last of a dozen cravats. The eleven others lay strewn about, hopelessly crumpled; mute witnesses of angry fingers and impassioned mutterings. Usually he could slip into his evening clothes in less than thirty minutes. Something was wrong. But perhaps this occasion was not usual.

First, the hems of his trousers were insurgent; they persisted in hitching on the tops of his button shoes. Laces were substituted. Then came a desultory period, during which gold buttons were exchanged for pearl and pearl for gold, and two-button shirts for three-button. For Maurice was something of a dandy. He could not imagine what was the matter with his neck, all the collars seemed so small. For once his mishaps did not appeal to his humor. The ascent from his shoes to his collar was as tortuous as that of the alpine Jungfrau.

Ah, Madam, you may smile as much as you please, but it is a terrible thing for a man to dress and at the same time think kindly of his fellow-beings. You set aside three hours for your toilet, and devote two hours to the little curl which droops over the tip of your dainty ear; but with a man who has no curl, who knows nothing of the practice of smiles and side glances, the studied carelessness of a pose, it is a dismal, serious business up to the last moment.

With a final glance into the mirror, and convinced that if he touched himself it would be only to disarrange the perfection which he had striven so hard to attain, Maurice went down stairs. He had still an hour to while away before presenting himself at the archbishop's palace. So he roamed about the verandas, twirled his cane, and smoked like a captain who expects to see his men in active engagement the very next moment. This, together with the bad hour in his room, was an indication that his nerves were finely strung.

He was nervous, not because he was to see strange faces, not because his interest in the kingdom's affairs was both comic and tragic, nor because he was to present himself at the archbishop's in a peculiar capacity, that of a prisoner on parole. No, it was due to none of these. His pulse did not stir at the prospect of meeting the true king. Diplomatic functions were every-day events with him. He

had passed several years of his life in the vicinity of emperors, kings, viceroys, and presidents, and their greatness had long ago ceased to interest or even to amuse him. He was conscious only of an agitation which had already passed through the process of analysis. He loved, he loved the impossible and the unattainable, and it was the exhilaration of this thought that agitated him. He never would be the same again—he would be better. Neither did he regret this love.

Even now he could see himself back in his rooms in Vienna, smoking before the fire, and building castles that tumbled down. It was worth while, if only to have something to dream about. He did not regret the love, he regretted its futility. How could he serve her? What could he do against all these unseen forces which were crumbling her father's throne? So she remembered what he had said to her in the archbishop's garden? He looked at his watch. It was nine.

“Let us be off,” he said. He started for the Platz. “How uncertain life is. It seems that I did not come to Bleiberg carelessly in the way of amusement, but to work out a part of my destiny.” He arrested his steps at the fountain and listened to the low, musical plash of the water, each drop of which fell with the light of a dazzling jewel. The cold stars shone from above. They were not farther away than she. A princess, a lonely and forlorn princess, hemmed in by the fabric of royal laws; a princess yet possessing less liberty than the meanest of her peasants. Nothing belonged to her, not even her heart, which was merchandise, a commodity of exchange, turned over to the highest bidder. “Royalty,” he mused, “is a political slave-dealer; the slaves are those who wear the crowns.”

Once inside the palace, he became a man of the world, polished, nonchalant, handsome, and mildly curious. Immediately after the usher announced his name, he crossed the chamber and presented his respects to the prelate, who, he reasoned not unwisely, expected him. The friendly greeting of the archbishop confirmed this reasoning.

“I am delighted to see you, Monsieur,” he said, showing his remarkably well preserved teeth in the smile that followed his words. “A service to her Royal Highness is a service to me. Amuse yourself; you will find some fine paintings in the west gallery.”

“I trust her Royal Highness is none the worse for the fright,” Maurice replied. He also remarked (mentally) that he did not see her Highness anywhere. Several introductions followed, and he found himself chatting with the British minister.

“Carewe?” the Englishman repeated thoughtfully. “Are you not Maurice Carewe, of the American Legation in Vienna?”

“Yes.”

“May I ask you a few questions?”

“A thousand.”

“A fellow-countryman of mine has mysteriously disappeared. He left Vienna for Bleiberg, saying that if nothing was heard of him within a week's time, to make inquiries about him. This request was left with the British ambassador, who has just written me, adding that a personal friend of the gentleman in question was in Bleiberg, and that this friend was Maurice Carewe, attache to the American Legation. Are you acquainted with Lord Fitzgerald, son of my late predecessor?”

“I am indeed. I saw him in Vienna,” said Maurice; “but he said nothing to me about coming here,” which was true enough. “Is there any cause for apprehension?”

“Only his request to be looked up within a certain time. The truth is, he was to have come here on a peculiar errand,” with lowered voice. “Did you ever hear of what is called 'Fitzgerald's folly?'”

“Yes; few haven't heard of it.” Maurice could never understand why he resisted the impulse to tell the whole affair. A dozen words to the man at his side, and the catastrophes, even embryonic, would be averted. “You must tell me who most of these people are,” he said, in order to get around a disagreeable subject. “I am a total stranger.”

“With pleasure. That tall, angular old man, in the long, gray frock, with decorations, is Marshal Kampf. You must meet him; he is the wittiest man in Bleiberg. The gentleman with the red beard is Mollendorf of the police. And beside him—yes, the little man with glasses and a loose cravat—is Count von Wallenstein, the minister of finance. That is the chancellor talking to the archbishop. Ah, Mr. Carewe, these receptions are fine comedies. The Marshal, the count and Mollendorf represent what is called the Auersperg faction under the rose. It is a continual battle of eyes and tongues. One smiles at his enemy, knows him to be an enemy, yet dares not touch him.

“Confidentially, this play has never had the like. To convict his enemies of treason has been for ten years the labor of the chancellor; yet, though he knows them to be in correspondence with the duchess, he can find nothing on the strength of which to accuse openly. It is a conspiracy which has no papers. One can not take out a man's brains and say, `Here is proof!' They talk, they walk on thin ice; but so fine is their craft that no incautious word ever falls, nor does any one go through the ice.

“I have watched the play for ten years. I should not speak to you about it, only it is one of those things known to all here. Those gentlemen talking to the chancellor's wife are the ministers from Austria, Prussia, France, and Servia. You will not find it as lively here as it is in Vienna. We meet merely to watch each other,” with a short laugh. “Good. The Marshal is approaching.”

They waited.

“Marshal,” said the minister, “this is Monsieur Carewe, who rescued her Highness's dog from the students.”

“Ah!” replied the Marshal, grimly. “Do not expect me to thank you, Monsieur; only day before yesterday the dog snapped at my legs. I am living out of pure spite, to see that dog die before I do. Peace to his ashes—the sooner the better.”

The minister turned to Maurice and laughed.

“Eh!” said the Marshal.

“I prophesied that you would speak disparagingly of the dog.”

“What a reputation!” cried the old soldier. “I dare say that you have been telling Monsieur Carewe that I am a wit. Monsieur, never attempt to be witty; they will put you down for a wit, and laugh at anything you say, even when you put yourself out to speak the truth. If I possess any wit it is like young grapes—sour. You are connected in Vienna?”

“With the American Legation.”

“Happy is the country,” said the Marshal, “which is so far away that Europe can find no excuse to meddle with it.”

“And even then Europe would not dare,” Maurice replied, with impertinence aforethought.

“That is not a diplomatic speech.”

“It is true.”

“I like your frankness.”

“Let that go toward making amends for saving the dog.”

“Are all American diplomats so frank?” inquired the Marshal, with an air of feigned wonder.

“Indeed, no,” answered Maurice. “Just at present I am not in a diplomatic capacity; I need not look askance at truth. And there is no reason why we should not always be truthful.”

“You are wrong. It's truth's infrequency which makes her so charming and refreshing. However, I thank you for your services to her Highness; your

services to her dog I shall try to forget.” And with this the Marshal moved away, shaking his head as if he had inadvertently stumbled on an intricate problem.

Not long after, Maurice was left to his own devices. He viewed the scene, silent and curious. Conversation was carried on in low tones, and laughter was infrequent and subdued. The women dressed without ostentation. There were no fair arms and necks. Indeed, these belong wholly to youth, and youth was not a factor at the archbishop's receptions. Most of the men were old and bald, and only the wives of the French and British ministers were pretty or young. How different from Vienna, where youth and beauty abound! There were no music, no long tables of refreshments, no sparkling wines, no smoking-room, good stories and better fellowship. There was an absence of the flash of jewels and color which make court life attractive.

There seemed to be hanging in the air some invisible power, the forecast of a tragedy, the beginning of an unknown end. And yet the prelate smiled on enemies and friends alike. As Maurice observed that smile he grew perplexed. It was a smile such as he had seen on the faces of men who, about to die, felt the grim satisfaction of having an enemy for company. The king lay on his death bed, in all probabilities the throne tottered; yet the archbishop smiled.

The princess did not know that her father was dying; this was a secret which had not yet been divulged to her. And this was the only society she knew. Small wonder that she was sad and lonely. To be young, and to find one's self surrounded by the relics of youth; what an existence! She had never known the beauty of a glittering ballroom, felt the music of a waltz mingle with the quick throbs of the heart, the pleasure of bestowing pleasure. She had never read the mute yet intelligent admiration in a young man's eyes. And what young woman does not yearn for the honest adoration of an honest man? Poor, lonely princess indeed. For, loving the world as he himself did, Maurice understood what was slipping past her. Every moment the roots of love were sinking deeper into his heart and twining firmly about, as a vine to a trellis.

Is there a mental telegraphy, an indefinable substance which is affected by the close proximity of a presence, which, while we do not see, we feel? Perhaps; at any rate, Maurice suddenly became aware of that peculiar yet now familiar agitation of his nerves. Instinctively he turned his head. In the doorway which separated the chamber from the conservatory stood her Royal Highness. She was dressed entirely in black, which accentuated the whiteness—the Carrara marble whiteness—of her exquisite skin. In the dark, shining coils swept back from her brow lay the subtle snare of a red rose. There was no other color except on the full lips. She saw Maurice, but she was so far away that the faint reflection of the

rose on her cheeks was gone before he reached her side.

“I was afraid,” she said, lowering her eyes as she uttered the fib, “that you would not come after all.”

“It would have been impossible for me to stay away,” he replied, his eyes ardent. The princess looked away. “And may I ask after the health of the dog?”

“Thanks to you, Monsieur; he is getting along finely. Poor dog; he will always limp. What is it that makes men inflict injuries on dumb creatures?”

“It is the beast that is envious of the brute.”

“And your hand?” with a glance sympathetic and inquiring.

“My hand?”

“Yes; did you not injure it?”

“O!” He laughed and held out two gloved hands for her inspection. “That was only a scratch. In fact, I do not remember which hand it was.”

“You are very modest. I should have made much of it.”

He could not translate this; so he said: “There was nothing injured but my hat. I seem unfortunate in that direction.”

She smiled, recalling the incident in the archbishop's garden.

“I shall keep the hat, however,” he said, “as a souvenir.”

“Souvenirs, Monsieur,” she replied carelessly, “and old age are synonymous. You and I ought not to have any souvenirs. Have you seen the picture gallery? No? Then I shall have the pleasure of showing it to you. Monseigneur is very proud of his gallery. He has a Leonardo, a Botticelli, a Murillo, and a Rembrandt. And they really show better in artificial light, which softens the effect of time.”

Half an hour was passed in the gallery. It was very pleasant to listen to her voice as she described this and that painting, and the archbishop's adventures in securing them. It did not seem possible to him that she was a princess, perhaps destined to become a queen, so free was she from the attributes of royalty, so natural and ingenuous. He caught each movement of her delicate head, each gesture of her hand, the countless inflections of her voice, the lights which burned or died away in the dark wine of her eyes.

Poor devil! he mused, himself in mind; poor fool! He forgot the world, he forgot that he was a prisoner on parole, he forgot the strife between the kingdom and the duchy, he forgot everything but the wild impossible love which filled his senses. He forgot even Prince Frederick of Carnavia.

In truth, the world was “a sorry scheme of things.” It was grotesque with inequalities. He had no right to love her; it was wrong to give in to the impulses of the heart, the natural, human impulses. A man can beat down the stone walls of a fort, scale the impregnable heights of a citadel, master the earth and the seas, but he can not surmount the invisible barriers which he himself erected in the past ages—the quality of birth. Ah! if only she had been a peasant, unlettered and unknown, and free to be won! The tasks of Hercules were then but play to him!

Next she led him through the aisles of potted plants in the conservatory. She was very learned. She explained the origin of each flower, its native soil, the time and manner of its transportation. Perhaps she was surprised at his lack of botanical knowledge, he asked so many questions. But it was not the flowers, it was her voice, which urged him to these interrogations.

They were on the point of re-entering the reception chamber, when the jingle of a spur on the mosaic floor caused them to turn. Maurice could not control the start; he had forgotten all about Beauvais. The soldier wore the regulation full dress of the cuirassiers, white trousers, tucked into patent leather half-boots, a gray jacket with gold lace and decorations, red saber straps and a gray pelisse hanging from the left shoulder. A splendid soldier, Maurice grudgingly admitted. What would the Colonel say? The situation was humorous rather than otherwise, and Maurice smiled.

“I was looking for your Highness,” said Beauvais, as he came up, “to pay my respects. I am leaving.” His glance at Maurice was one of polite curiosity.

“Colonel Beauvais,” said the princess, coldly, “Monsieur Carewe, of the American Legation in Vienna.”

She was not looking at the Colonel, but Maurice was, and the Colonel's total lack of surprise astonished him. The gaze of the two men plunged into each other's eyes like flashes of lightning, but that was all.

“I am charmed,” said the Colonel, a half-ironical smile under his mustache. “Your name is not unfamiliar to me.”

“No?” said Maurice, with studied politeness.

“No. It is connected with an exploit. Was it not you who faced the students this afternoon and rescued her Highness's dog?”

“Ah!” said Maurice, in a tone which implied that exploits were every day events with him; “it was but a simple thing to do. The students were like so many sheep.”

The princess elevated her brows; she felt an undercurrent of something which she did not understand. Indeed, she did not like the manner in which the two men eyed each other. Her glance passed from the stalwart soldier to the slim, athletic form of the civilian.

Conversation drifted aimlessly. Maurice had the malice to cast the brunt of it on the Colonel's shoulders. The princess, like a rose coming in contact with a chill air, drew within herself. She was cold, brief, and serenely indifferent. It was evident to Maurice that she had resumed her royal mantle, and that she had shown him unusual consideration.

Presently she raised her hand to her head, as sometimes one will do unconsciously, and the rose slipped from her hair and dropped to the floor. Both men stooped. Maurice was quickest. With a bow he offered to return it.

“You may keep it, Monsieur;” and she laughed.

They joined her. Maurice knew why the Colonel laughed, and the Colonel knew why Maurice laughed; but neither could account for the laughter of the princess. That was her secret.

All things come to an end, even diplomatic receptions. Soon the guests began to leave.

Said the princess to Maurice: “Your invitation is a standing one, Monsieur. To our friends there are no formalities. Good night; ah, yes, the English fashion,” extending her hand, which Maurice barely touched. “Good night, Monsieur,” to Beauvais, with one of those nods which wither as effectually as frost.

The Colonel bent gracefully.

“Decidedly the Colonel is not in high favor tonight,” thought Maurice; “a fact which is eminently satisfactory to me. Ah; he looks as if he had something to say to me. Let us wait.”

“Monsieur, have you any other engagement this evening?” asked Beauvais, swinging his pelisse over both shoulders. “If not, my rooms are quite handy. I have capital cigars and cognacs. Will you do me the honor? I should like to have you regale me with some Vienna gossip; it is so long since I was there.”

“Thanks,” said Maurice. “I shall be happy to smoke your cigars and drink your cognacs.” He was in the mood for any adventure, comic or serious. He had an idea what the Colonel wanted to say to him, and he was not unwilling to listen. Besides, he had no fear; he now wore an amulet close to his heart.

“Come, then,” said Beauvais, gaily; and the two made off. “It is a wonderful game of chess, this world of ours.”

“Yes,” said Maurice, “we do keep moving.”

“And every now and then one or the other of us steps out into the dark.”

“So we do.” Maurice glanced from the corner of his eye and calculated his chances in a physical contest with the Colonel. The soldier was taller and broader, but it was possible for him to make good this deficiency with quickness. But, above all, where and under what circumstances had he met this man before?

“Here we are!” cried the Colonel, presently.

He led Maurice into one of the handsome dwellings which faced the palace confines from the east. They passed up the stairs into a large room, Oriental in its appointments, and evidently the living room. The walls were hung with the paraphernalia of a soldier, together with portraits of opera singers, horses and celebrities of all classes. On the mantel Maurice saw, among other things, the glint of a revolver barrel. He thought nothing of it then. It occurred to him as singular, however, that the room was free from central obstruction. Had the Colonel expected to meet him at the archbishop's and anticipated his acceptance of a possible invitation?

Two chairs stood on either side of the grate. Between them was an octagon on which were cigars, glasses and two cognac bottles. The Colonel's valet came in and lit the tapers in the chandelier and woke up the fire.... Maurice was convinced that the Colonel had arranged the room thus for his especial benefit, and he regretted his eagerness for adventure.

“Francois,” said Beauvais, throwing his shako and pelisse on the lounge and motioning to Maurice to do likewise, “let no one disturb us.”

The valet bowed and noiselessly retired. The two men sat down without speaking. Beauvais passed the cigars. Maurice selected one, lit it, and blew rings at the Chinese mandarin which leered down at him from the mantel.

Several minutes marched into the past.

“Maurice Carewe,” said the Colonel, as one who mused.

“It is very droll,” said Maurice.

“I can not say that it strikes me as droll, though I am not deficient in the sense of humor.”

“'Twould be a pity if you were; you would miss so much. Through humor philosophy reaches its culmination; humor is the foundation upon which the palace of reason erects itself. The two are inseparable.”

“How came you to be mixed up in this affair, which is no concern of yours?”

“That question is respectfully referred to Madame the duchess. I was thrown

into it, head foremost, bound hand and foot. It was a clever stroke, though eventually it will embarrass her."

"You may give me the certificates," said Beauvais.

Maurice contemplated him serenely. "Impossible," with a fillip at the end of his cigar.

"You refuse?" coldly.

"I do not refuse. Simply, I haven't got them."

"What!" The Colonel half sprang from his chair.

His astonishment was genuine; Maurice saw that it was, and he reflected. Madame nor Fitzgerald had been dishonest with him.

"No. Some one has forestalled me."

"Are you lying to me?" menacingly.

"And if I were?" coolly.

Beauvais measured his antagonist, his eyes hard and contemptuous.

"I repeat," said Maurice, "the situation is exceedingly droll. I am not afraid of you, not a bit. I am not a man to be intimidated. You might have inferred as much by my willingness to accompany you here. I am alone with you."

"It is true that you are alone with me," in a voice, which, though it did not alarm Maurice, caused him to rest less comfortably in his chair. "In the first place, you know too much."

"The knowledge was not of my own seeking. You will agree with me in that." He took a swallow of the cognac. "However, since I am in the affair—"

"Well?"

"I'll see it to its end."

"Perhaps. We shall not cross purposes. When men plot as I do, they stop at nothing, not even at that infinitesimal minutiae called the spark of life. It becomes a matter of self-preservation. I am in too deep water; I must keep on. I can not now turn back; the first shore is too far away."

"Even villainy has its inconveniences," Maurice observed.

"What do you call villainy?"

"An act in which a man accepts pay from one to ruin him for another. That is villainy, without a single saving grace, for you are a native neither of the kingdom nor the duchy."

"That is plain language. You do not take into consideration the villain's

motives. There may be certain ends necessary as his life's blood, which may be gained only by villainy, which, after all, is a hard name for political conspiracy."

"Oh, I do not suppose you are worse than the majority. But it appeals to me as rather a small, unmanly game when your victims are a man who is dying and a girl who knows nothing of the world nor its treachery."

An almost imperceptible smile passed over Beauvais's countenance. "So her Highness has captured your sympathies?" with a shade of banter.

"I admit that; she would capture the sympathies of any man who has a good pair of eyes in his head. But you do not seem to be in favor just at present," banter for banter.

The Colonel studied the end of his cigar. "What is to be your stand in this affair?"

"Neutral as possible, for the simple reason that I have passed my word to Madame; compulsorily, it is true; I shall abide by it. That is not to say that my sympathies are not wholly with the Osians. Madame is a brilliant woman, resourceful, initiative; she has as many sides as a cut diamond; moreover, her cause is just. But I do not like the way she has gone about the recovery of her throne. She has broken, or will break, a fine honest heart; she tried to break another, but, not being above the pantry maid, the subject of her attention failed to appreciate the consideration."

Beauvais laughed at this. "You are very good company. Let me advise you to remain neutral. I wish you no harm. But if you change your mind and stand in my path—"

"Well, and if I stood in your path?"

"Pouf! you would vanish. O, I should not stoop to murder; that is a vulgar word and practice. I should place a sword in your hand and give you the preference of a gentleman's death. I see nothing to prevent me from carrying out that this very night," with a nod toward the rapiers which hung from the opposite wall.

"You might be surprised at the result," said Maurice, stretching his legs. "But at present I have no desire to quarrel with you, or to put your skill to a test. Once Madame gives me back my word, why, I do not say." He dipped his hand toward the ash-pan. "Human nature is full of freaks. A man will commit all sorts of crimes, yet stand by his word. Not that I have committed any crimes against the ten commandments."

And so they fenced.

“You picked up a rose to-night,” said the Colonel.

“So I did.” Maurice blew a puff of smoke into the chimneyplace and watched it sail upward and vanish. “Moreover, I propose to keep it. Have you any objections?”

“Only this: her Highness intended the rose for me.”

“No, no, my friend,” easily. “She would not have laughed had you picked it up.”

“That is to say I lie?”

“It is,” laconically.

There was no eluding a statement so bald as this. Beauvais sat upright. “To call me a liar is a privilege which I extend to no man.”

“I did not call you a liar,” undisturbed. “You wrote it down yourself, and I simply agreed to it. A duel? Well, I shall not fight you. Dueling is obsolete, and it never demonstrated the right or wrong of a cause. Since my part in this affair is one of neutrality, and since to gain that knowledge was the object of your invitation, I will take my leave of you.”

He rose and looked at the porcelain clock. As he did so his gaze rested on a small photograph standing at the side of it. He scanned it eagerly. It was a face of dark Castilian beauty. He turned and looked at Beauvais long and earnestly. There was an answering gaze, an immobility of countenance. Maurice experienced a slight shock. The haze over his memory was dispersed. The whole scene, in which this man loomed in the foreground, came back vividly.

“Your stare, Monsieur, is annoying.”

“I shouldn't wonder,” replied Maurice, leaning against the mantel.

“Do me the honor to explain it.”

Maurice, never dreaming of the trap, fell head foremost into it. “I have traveled a good deal,” he began. “I have been—even to South America.”

“Ah!” This ejaculation expressed nothing. In fact, Beavais was smiling. There was a sinister something behind that smile, but Maurice was unobservant.

He went on. “Yes, to South America. I was there in a diplomatic capacity, during one of the many revolutions. This country was the paradise of adventurers, the riff-raff of continental social outcasts. I distinctly remember the leader of this revolution. Up to the very last day, Captain Urquijo was the confidential friend of the president whom he was about to ruin. Through the president's beautiful daughter Urquijo picked up his threads and laid his powder train. The woman loved him as women sometimes love rascals. The president

was to be assassinated and his rival installed. Captain Urquijo was to be made General of the armies.

“One fine day the troops lined both sides of the plaza, the square also about which lay the government buildings. It was the event of some celebration; I believe the throwing off of the yoke of Spain. The city flocked into the plaza. Strangely enough, those who were disaffected—the soldiers under Urquijo—faced the loyal troops. By a preconceived plan, the artillery was under the command of Urquijo. Suddenly this Captain's murderous and traitorous guns swept the plaza, mangling women and children. There was a flaw, however, in the stroke. Urquijo fled, a reward posted for his head—mind you, his head; they did not want him alive.

“The daughter expiates her foolish love in a convent. Her disgraces proved too much for her father, who blew out his brains. The successor secured extradition papers in all the leading capitals of the world. The story was the sensation of the day; the newspapers made much of it. All governments offered to assist the republic in hounding down this rascal. To whatever country he belonged, that country promised to disown him.”

Maurice took the photograph and cast it into Beauvais's lap. “Do you recognize that face? Is it not a mute accusation to your warped conscience?” The voice, changing from the monotone of narrative, grew strong and contemptuous. “I know you. I recognized you the moment I laid eyes on you, only I could not place you. Perhaps it was because it did not seem possible that you would dare show your face to civilized people. That photograph has done its work. By the Lord, but you're a fine rascal! Not a bit changed. Have you forgotten your Spanish? As God hears me, I shall hold you up.”

“You are a very young man,” said Beauvais, rising. He was still smiling. “Do you know why I asked you here? For this very reason. Madame divined you well. She said that you had a dash of what romanticists call valor, but that you never saw an inch before your nose. I knew that you would be at the archbishop's; I knew that you would follow me to this room. Indeed, you might have suspected as much by the unusual arrangement of the fixtures of the room. I placed that photograph there, trusting to your rather acute eyesight.

“My memory seems to be better than yours. I knew you the first time I saw you in Bleiborg. I was waiting only to see how much you had remembered. I am not Colonel Beauvais; I am not Urquijo; I am the last of a noble Austrian house, in exile, but on the eve of recall. Your knowledge would, of course, be disastrous to my ambitions. That is why I wanted to find out how much you know. You know too much, too much by half; and since you have walked into the lion's den,

you shall never leave it alive.” With this he sprang to the wall and tore down the rapiers, one of which he flung at Maurice's feet.

Maurice felt the hand of paralysis on his nerves. He looked at the rapier, then at Beauvais, dazed and incapable of movement. It had been so sudden.

“And when they find you in some alley in the lower town they will put it down to thieves. You are young and thoughtless,” Beauvais went on banteringly. “A little discretion and you might have gone with a whole skin. We never forget a woman's face, and I knew that you would not forget hers. Don't trouble yourself about leaping through the windows; the fall will kill you less effectually than I shall.”

Maurice pulled himself together. The prospect of death brought back lucidity of mind. He at once saw the hopelessness of his position. He cursed his lack of forethought. He became pale and furious, but his head cleared. His life hung in the balance. He now translated Beauvais's smile.

“So you wish to add another to the list?” he said.

“To shield one crime, a man must commit many others. O, this will not be murder. It will be a duel, in which you will have no chance. Pick up the sword, if only for form's sake.” Beauvais caught the wrist thong of the rapier between his teeth and rapidly divested himself of his jacket and saber straps. With his back toward the door, he rolled up his sleeve and discovered a formidable forearm. He tried the blade and thrust several times into the air.

“What promise have I,” said Maurice, “that you will not run me through when I stoop for the sword?” This question did not serve.

Beauvais laughed. “I never get angry in moments like these. I am giving you a sword to ease my conscience. I do not assassinate boys.”

“But supposing I should kill you by chance?”

Beauvais laughed again. “That is not possible.”

Maurice had faced death before, but with more confidence. The thought that he had poked his head into a trap stirred him disagreeably. He saw that Beauvais possessed a superabundance of confidence, and confidence is half of any battle. He picked up the sword and held it between his knees, while he threw off his coat and vest, and unbuttoned his collar and cuffs. What he had to sell would be sold as dearly as possible. He tested the blade, took in a deep breath, fell easily into position—and waited.

CHAPTER XVII. SOME PASSAGES AT ARMS

There comes a moment to every man, who faces an imminent danger, when the mental vision expands and he sees beyond. By this transient gift of prescience he knows what the end will be, whether he is to live or die. As Maurice looked into the merciless eyes of his enemy, a dim knowledge came to him that this was to be an event and not a catastrophe, a fragment of a picture yet to be fully drawn. His confidence and courage returned. He thanked God, however, that the light above equalized their positions, and that the shadows were behind them.

The swords came together with a click light but ominous. Immediately Beauvais stepped back, suddenly threw forward his body, and delivered three rapid thrusts. Maurice met them firmly, giving none.

“Ah!” cried Beauvais; “that is good. You know a little. There will be sport, besides.”

Maurice shut his lips the tighter, and worked purely on the defensive. His fencing master had taught him two things, silence and watchfulness. While Beauvais made use of his forearm, Maurice as yet depended solely on his wrist. Once they came together, guard to guard, neither daring to break away until by mutual agreement, spoken only by the eyes, both leaped backward out of reach. There was no sound save the quick light stamp of feet and the angry murmur of steel scraping against steel. Sometimes they moved circlewise, with free blades, waiting and watching. Up to now Beauvais's play had been by the book, so to speak, and he began to see that his opponent was well read.

“Which side is the pretty rose?” seeking to distract Maurice. “Tell me, and I will pin it to you.”

Not a muscle moved in Maurice's face.

“It is too, bad,” went on Beauvais, “that her Highness finds a lover only to lose him. You fool! I read your eyes when you picked up that rose. Princesses are not for such as you. I will find her a lover, it will be neither you nor Prince Frederick—ah! you caught that nicely. But you depend too much on the wrist. Presently it will tire; and then—pouf!”

Now and then a a flame, darting from the grate, sparkled on the polished steel, and from the steel it shot into the watchful eyes. A quarter of an hour passed;

still Maurice remained on the defensive. At first Beauvais misunderstood the reason, and thought Maurice did not dare run the risk of passing from defensive to offensive. But by and by the froth of impatience crept into his veins. He could not penetrate above or below that defense. The man before him was of marble, with a wrist of iron; he neither smiled nor spoke, there was no sign of life at all, except in the agile legs, the wrist, and eyes. The Colonel decided to change his tactics.

“When I have killed you,” he said, “I shall search your pockets, for I know that you lie when you say that you have not those certificates. Madame was a fool to send you. No man lives who may be trusted. And what is your game? Save the Osians? Small good it will do you. Her Highness will wed Prince Frederick—mayhap—and all you will get is cold thanks. And in such an event, have you reckoned on Madame the duchess? War! And who will win? Madame; for she has not only her own army, but mine. Come, come! Speak, for when you leave this room your voice will be silent. Make use of the gift, since it is about to leave you.”

The reply was a sudden straightening of the arm. The blade slipped in between the Colonel's forearm and body, and was out again before the soldier fully comprehended what had happened. Maurice permitted a cold smile to soften the rigidity of his face. Beauvais saw the smile, and read it. The thrust had been rendered harmless intentionally. An inch nearer, and he had been a dead man. To accomplish such a delicate piece of sword play required nothing short of mastery. Beauvais experienced a disagreeable chill, which was not unmixed with chagrin. The boy had held his life in his hand, and had spared it. He set his teeth, and let loose with a fury before which nothing could stand; and Maurice was forced back step by step until he was almost up with the wall.

“You damned fool!” the Colonel snarled, “you'll never get that chance again.”

For the next few minutes it took all the splendid defense Maurice possessed to keep the spark in his body. The Colonel's sword was no longer a sword, it was a flame; which circled, darted, hissed and writhed. Twice Maurice felt the bite of it, once in the arm and again in the thigh. These were not deep, but they told him that the end was but a short way off. He had no match for this brilliant assault. Something must be done, and that at once. He did not desire the Colonel's death, and the possibility of accomplishing this was now extremely doubtful. But he wanted to live. Life was just beginning—the rough road had been left behind. He was choosing between his life and the Colonel's. Beauvais, after the fashion of the old masters, was playing for the throat. This upward thrusting, when continuous, is difficult to meet, and Maurice saw that sooner or later the blade

would reach home. If not sudden death, it meant speechlessness, and death as a finality. Then the voice of his guardian angel spoke.

“I do not wish your life,” he said, breaking the silence, “but at the same time I wish to live—ah!” Maurice leaped back just in time. As it was, the point of his enemy's blade scratched his chin.

They broke and circled. The Colonel feinted. Maurice, with his elbow against his side and his forearm extended, waited. Again the Colonel lunged for the throat. This time, instead of meeting it in tierce, Maurice threw his whole force forward in such a manner as to bring the steel guard of his rapier full on the Colonel's point. There was a ringing sound of snapping steel, and the Colonel stood with nothing but a stump in his grasp.

“There you are,” said Maurice, a heat-flash passing over him. Had he swerved a hair's breadth from the line, time would have tacked finis to the tale. “Now, I am perfectly willing to talk,” putting his point to the Colonel's breast. “It would inconvenience me to kill you, but do not count too much on that.”

“Damn you!” cried the Colonel, giving way, his face yellow with rage, chagrin and fear. “Kill me, for I swear to God that one or the other of us must die! Damn you and your meddling nose!”

“Damn away, chevalier d'industrie; damn away. But live, live, live! That will be the keenest punishment. Live! O, my brave killer of boys, you thought to play with me as a cat with a mouse, eh? Eh, Captain Urquijo-Beauvais-and-What-is-your-name?” He pressed the point here, there, everywhere. “You were too confident. Pardon me if I appear to brag, but I have taken lessons of the best fencing masters in Europe, and three times, while you devoted your talents to monologues, I could have pinned you like one of those butterflies on the wall there. Have you ever heard of the sword of Damocles? Well, well; it hangs over many a head to-day. I will be yours. I give you forty-eight hours to arrange your personal affairs. If after that time you are still in this part of the country, I shall inform the proper authorities in Vienna. The republic has representation there. Of a noble Austrian house, on the eve of recall? I think not.”

Beauvais made a desperate attempt to clutch the blade in his hands.

“No, no!” laughed Maurice, making rapid prods which caused Beauvais to wince. “Now, back; farther, farther. I do not like the idea of having my back to the door.”

Beauvais suddenly wheeled and dashed for the mantel. But as he endeavored to lay hand on the revolver Maurice brought down the blade on the Colonel's knuckles, leaving a livid welt. Maurice took possession of the weapon, while a

grimace of agony shot over the Colonel's face. Seeing that the chambers were loaded, Maurice threw down the sword.

“Well, well!” he said, cocking the weapon. “And I saw it when I entered the room. It would have saved a good deal of trouble.” Beauvais grew white. “O,” Maurice continued, “I am not going to shoot you. I wish merely to call your valet.” He aimed at the grate and pressed the trigger, and the report, vibrating within the four walls, was deafening.

A moment passed, and the valet, with bulging eyes and blanched face, peered in. Seeing how matters stood, he made as though to retreat.

Maurice leveled the smoking revolver. “Come in, Francois; your master will have need of you.”

Francois complied, vertigo in his limbs. “My God!” he cried, wringing his hands.

“Your master tried to murder me,” said Maurice. Francois had heard voices like this before, and it conveyed to him that a fine quality of anger lay close to the surface. “Take down yonder window curtain cord.” Francois did so. “Now bind your master's hands with it.”

“Francois,” cried the Colonel, “if you so much as lay a finger on me, I'll kill you.”

“Francois, I will kill you if you don't,” said Maurice.

“My God!” wailed the valet at loss which to obey when to obey either meant death. His teeth chattered.

“You may have all the time you want, Francois, to wring your hands when I am gone. Come; to work. Colonel, submit. I'm in a hurry and have no time to spare. While I do not desire to kill you, self-preservation will force me to put a bullet into your hide, which will make you an inmate of the city hospital. Bind his hands behind his back, and no more nonsense.”

“Monsieur,” appealingly to Beauvais, “my God, I am forced. He will kill me!”

“So will I,” grimly; “by God, I will!” Beauvais had a plan. If he could keep Maurice long enough, help might arrive. And he had an excellent story to tell. Still Francois doddered. With his eye on the Colonel and the revolver sighted, Maurice picked up the sword. He gave Francois a vigorous prod. Francois needed no further inducement. He started forward with alacrity. In the wink of an eye he threw the cord around Beauvais's arms and pinned them to his sides. Beauvais swore, but the valet was strong in his fright. He struggled and wound and knotted and tied, murmuring his pitiful “Mon Dieu!” the while, till the

Colonel was the central figure of a Gordian knot.

“That will do,” said Maurice. “Now, Francois, good and faithful servant, take your master over to the lounge, and sit down beside him until I get into my clothes. Yes; that's it.” He shoved his collar and tie into a pocket, slipped on his vest and coat, put on his hat and slung his topcoat over his arm. During these maneuvers the revolver remained conspicuously in sight. “Now, Francois, lead the way to the street door. By the time you return to your illustrious master, who is the prince or duke of something or other, pursuit will be out of the question. Now, as for you,” turning to Beauvais, “the forty-eight hours hold good. During that time I shall go armed. Forty-eight hours from now I shall inform the authorities at the nearest consulate. If they catch you, that's your affair. Off we go, Francois.”

“By God!—” began Beauvais, struggling to his feet.

“Come so far as this door,” warned Maurice, “and, bound or not, I'll knock you down. Hang you! Do you think my temper will improve in your immediate vicinity? Do you think for a moment that I do not lust for your blood as heartily as you lust for mine? Go to the devil your own way; you'll go fast enough!” He caught Francois by the shoulders and pushed him into the hall, followed, and closed the door. Francois had been graduated from the stables, therefore his courage never rose to sublime heights. All the way down the stairs he lamented; and each time he turned his head and saw the glitter of the revolver barrel he choked with terror.

“If you do not kill me, Monsieur, he will; he will, I know he will! My God, how did it happen? He will kill me!” and the voice sank into a muffled sob.

Despite the gravity of the situation, Maurice could not repress his laughter. “He will not harm you; he threatened you merely to delay me. Open the door.” He stepped out into the refreshing air. “By the way, tell your master not to go to the trouble of having me arrested, for the first thing in the morning I shall place a sealed packet in the hands of the British minister, to be opened if I do not call for it within twenty-four hours. And say to your master that I shall keep the rose.”

“Mon Dieu! A woman! I might have known!” ejaculated Francois, as the door banged in his face.

Maurice, on reaching the pavement, took to his legs, for he saw three men rapidly approaching. Perhaps they had heard the pistol shot. He concluded not to wait to learn. He continued his rush till he gained his room. It was two o'clock. He had been in the Colonel's room nearly three hours. It seemed only so many minutes. He hunted for his brandy, found it and swallowed several mouthfuls.

Then he dropped into a chair from sheer exhaustion. Reaction laid hold of him. His hands shook, his legs trembled, and perspiration rolled down his cheek.

“By George!” This exclamation stood alone, but it was an Odyssey. He remained stupefied, staring at his shoes, over which his stockings had fallen. His shirt buttons were gone, and the bosom was guiltless of its former immaculateness. After a time he became conscious of a burning pain in the elbow of his right arm. He glanced down at his hand, to find it covered with drying blood. He jumped up and cast about his clothes. One leg of his trousers was soaked, and the dull ache in his thigh told the cause. He salved the wounds and bound them in strips of handkerchiefs, which he held in place by using some of the cast-off cravats.

“That was about as close to death as a man can get and pull out. I feel as if I had swallowed that cursed blade of his. I am an ass, sure enough. I've always a bad cold when there's a rat about; can't smell him. And the rascal remembered me! Will he stay in spite of my threat? I'll hang on here till to-morrow. If he stays —I won't. He has the devil's own of a sword. Hang it, my nerves are all gone to smash.”

Soon some gentler thought took hold, and he smiled tenderly. He brought forth the rose, turned it this way and that, studied it, stroked it, held it to his lips as a lover holds the hand of the woman he loves. Her rose; somehow his heart told him that she had laughed because Beauvais had stooped in vain.

“Ah, Maurice,” he said, “you are growing over fond. But why not? Who will know? To have loved is something.”

He crept into bed; but sleep refused him its offices, and he tossed about in troubled dreams. He fought all kinds of duels with all sorts of weapons. He was killed a half dozen times, but the archbishop always gave him something which rekindled the vital spark. A thousand Beauvaises raged at him. A thousand princesses were ever in the background, waiting to be saved. He swore to kill these Beauvaises, and after many fruitless endeavors, he succeeded in smothering them in their gray pelisses. Then he woke, as dreamers always wake when they pass some great dream-crisis, and found himself in a deadly struggle with a pillow and a bed-post. He laughed and sprang out of bed.

“It's no use, I can't sleep. I am an old woman.”

So he lit his pipe and sat dreaming with his eyes open, smoking and smoking, until the sickly pallor of dawn appeared in the sky, and he knew that day had come.

CHAPTER XVIII. A MINOR CHORD AND A CHANGE OF MOVEMENT

Marshal Kampf, wrapt in his military cloak, with the peak of his cap drawn over his eyes, sat on one of the rustic benches in the archbishop's gardens and reflected. The archbishop had announced an informal levee, the first since the king's illness. He had impressed the Marshal with the fact that his presence was both urgent and necessary. Disturbed as he was by the unusual command, the Marshal had arrived an hour too early. Since the prelate would not rise until nine, the Marshal told the valet that he would wait in the gardens.

An informal levee, he mused. What was the meaning of it? Had that master of craft and silence found a breach in the enemy's fortifications? He rubbed the chill from his nose, crossed and re-crossed his legs and teetered till the spurs on his boots set up a tuneful jingle.

So far as he himself was concerned, he was not worried. The prelate knew his views and knew that he would stand or fall with them. He had never looked for benefits, as did those around him. He had offered what he had without hope of reward, because he had considered it his duty. And, after all, what had the Osian done that he should be driven to this ignominious end? His motives never could be questioned; each act had been in some way for the country's good. Every king is a usurper to those who oppose him.

Would the kingdom be bettered in having a queen against whom the confederation itself was opposed? Would it not be adding a twofold burden to the one? The kingdom was at peace with those countries from which it had most to fear. Was it wise to antagonize them? Small independent states were independent only by courtesy. Again, why had Austria contrived to place an alien on the throne, in face of popular sentiment? Would Austria's interests have been less safe in the advent of rightful succession? Up to now, what had Austria gained by ignoring the true house? Outwardly nothing, but below the surface? Who could answer?

For eleven years he had tried to discover the secret purpose of Austria, but, like others, he had failed; and the Austrian minister was less decipherable than the “Chinese puzzle.” He was positive that none of the arch-conspirators knew; they were blinded by self-interest. And the archbishop? The Marshal rubbed his nose again, not, however, because it was cold. Did any one know what was

going on behind the smiling mask which the reticent prelate showed to the world? The Marshal poked his chin above his collar, and the wrinkles fell away from his gray eyes.

The sky was clear and brilliant, and a tonic from the forests sweetened the rushing air. The lake was ruffled out of its usual calm, and rolled and galloped along the distant shores and flashed on the golden sands. Above the patches of red and brown and yellow the hills and mountains stood out in bold, decided lines.

Water fowl swept along the marshes. The doves in twos and threes fluttered down to the path, strutted about in their peculiarly awkward fashion, and doubtfully eyed the silent gray figure on the bench, as if to question his right to be there this time of the morning, their trysting hour. Presently the whole flock came down, and began cooing and waltzing at the Marshal's feet. He soon discovered the cause.

Her Royal Highness was coming through the opening in the hedgerow which separated the two confines. She carried a basket on her arm, and the bulldog followed at her heels, holding his injured leg in the air, and limping on the remaining three. At the sight of her the doves rose and circled above her head. She smiled and threw into the air handful after handful of cake and bread crumbs. In their eagerness the doves alighted on her shoulders, on the rim of the basket, and even on the broad back of the dog, who was too sober to give attention to this seeming indignity. He kept his eye on his mistress's skirts, moved when she moved, and stopped when she stopped. A gray-white cloud enveloped them.

The Marshal, with a curious sensation in his heart, observed this exquisite, living picture. He was childless; and though he was by nature undemonstrative, he was very fond of this youth. Her cheeks were scarlet, her rosy lips were parted in excitement, and her eyes glistened with pleasure. With all her twenty years, she was but ten in fancy; a woman, yet a child, unlettered in worldly wit, wise in her love of nature. Not until she had thrown away the last of the crumbs did she notice the Marshal. He rose and bowed.

“Good morning, your Highness. I am very much interested in your court. And do you hold it every morning?”

“Even when it rains,” she said, smiling. “I am so glad to see you; I wanted to talk to you last night, but I could not find the opportunity. Let me share the bench with you.”

And youth and age sat down together. The bulldog planted himself in the

middle of the path and blinked at his sworn enemy. The Marshal had no love for him, and he was well aware of it; at present, an armistice.

The princess gazed at the rollicking waters, at her doves, thence into the inquiring gray eyes of the old soldier.

“Do you remember,” she said, “how I used to climb on your knees, ever so long ago, and listen to your fairy stories?”

“Eh! And is it possible that your Highness remembers?” wrinkles of delight gathering in his cheeks. “But why `ever so long ago'? It was but yesterday. And your Highness remembers!”

“I am like my father; I never forget!” She looked toward the waters again. “I can recall only one story. It was about a princess who lost all her friends through the offices of a wicked fairy. I remember it because it was the only story you told me that had a sad ending. It was one of Andersen's. Her father and mother died, and the moment she was left alone her enemies set to work and toppled over her throne. She was cast out into the world, having no friend but a dog; but the dog always found something to eat, and protected her from giants and robbers and wolves.

“Many a time I thought of her, and cried because she was so unhappy. Well, she traveled from place to place, footsore and weary, but in her own country no one dared aid her, for fear of displeasing the wicked fairy, who at this time was all powerful. So she entered a strange land, where some peasants took her in, clothed and fed her, and gave her a staff and a flock of geese to tend. And day after day she guarded the flock, telling her sorrows to the dog, how she missed the dear ones and the home of her childhood.

“One day the reigning prince of this strange land passed by while hunting, and he saw the princess tending her geese. He made inquiries, and when he found that the beautiful goose-girl was a princess, he offered to marry her. She consented to become his wife, because she was too delicate to drudge. So she and her dog went to live at the palace. Once she was married the dog behaved strangely, whining softly, and refusing to be consoled. The prince was very kind to them both.

“Alas! It seems that when she left her own country the good fairy had lost all track of her, to find her when it was too late. The dog was a prince under a wicked spell, and when the spell fell away the princess knew that she loved him, and not her husband. She pined away and died. How many times I have thought of her, poor, lonely, fairy-tale princess!”

The old soldier blinked at the doves, and there was a furrow between his eyes.

Yes; how well he remembered telling her that story. But, as she repeated it, it was clothed with a strange significance. Somehow, he found himself voiceless; he knew not how to reply.

“Monsieur,” she said suddenly, “tell me, what has my poor father done that these people should hate him and desire his ruin?”

“He has been kind to them, my child,” his gaze still riveted on the doves; “that is all. He has given them beautiful parks, he has made them a beautiful city. A king who thinks of his people's welfare is never understood. And ignorant and ungrateful people always hate those to whom they are under obligations. It is the way of the world.”

“And—and you, Marshal?” timidly.

“And I?”

“Yes. They whisper that—that—O, Marshal, is it you who will forsake us in our need? I have heard many things of late which were not intended for my ears. My father and I, we are so alone. I have never known the comradeship of young people; I have never had that which youth longs for—a confidant of my own age. The young people I know serve me simply for their own ends, and not because they love me.

“I have never spoken thus before to-day, save to this dog. He has been my confidant; but he can not speak except with his kind old eyes, and he can not understand as I would have him. And they hate even him because they know that I love him. Poor dog!

“What my father has done has always been wrong in his own eyes, but he sinned for my sake, and God will forgive him. He gave up the home he loved for my sake. O, that I had known and understood! I was only six. We are so alone; we have no place to go, no friends save two, and they are helpless. And now I am to make a sacrifice for him to repay him for all he has done for me. I have promised my hand to one I do not love; even he forsakes me. But love is not the portion of princesses. Love to them is a fairy story. To secure my father's throne I have sacrificed my girlhood dreams. Ah! and they were so sweet and dear.”

She put a hand to her throat as if something had tightened there. “Marshal, I beg of you to tell me the truth, the truth! Is my father dying? Is he? He—they will not tell me the truth. And I. .. never to hear his voice again! The truth, for pity's sake!” She caught at his hands and strove to read his eyes. “For pity's sake!”

He drew his breath deeply. He dared not look into her eyes for fear she might see the tears in his; so he bent hastily and pressed her hands to his lips. But in his

heart he knew that his promise to the dead was gone with the winds, and that he would shed the last drop of blood in his withered veins for the sake of this sad, lonely child.

“Your father, my child, will never stand up straight again,” he said. “As for the rest, that is in the hands of God. But I swear to you that this dried-up old heart beats only for you. I will stand or fall with you, in good times or bad.” And he rubbed his nose more fiercely than ever. “Had I a daughter—But there! I have none.”

“My heart is breaking,” she said, with a little sob. She sank back, her head drooped to the arm of the bench, and she made no effort to stem the flood of tears. “I have no mother, and now my father is to leave me. And I love him so, I love him so! He has sacrificed all his happiness to secure mine—in vain. I laugh and smile because he asks me to, and all the while my heart is breaking, breaking.”

At this juncture the doves rose hurriedly. The Marshal discovered the archbishop's valet making toward him.

“Monsieur the Marshal, Monseigneur breakfasts and requests you to join him.”

“Immediately;” and the Marshal rose. He placed his hand on the dark head. “Keep up your heart, my child,” he said, “and we shall see if I have grown too old for service.” He squared his shoulders and followed the valet, who viewed the scene with a valet's usual nonchalance. When the Marshal reached the steps to the side entrance, he looked back. The dog had taken his place, and the girl had buried her face in his neck. A moment later the old soldier was ushered into the archbishop's presence, but neither with fear nor uneasiness in his heart.

“Ah! Good morning, Marshal,” said the prelate. “Be seated. Did you not find it chilly in the gardens?”

“Not the least. It is a fine day. I have just left her Royal Highness.”

The prelate arched his eyebrows, and an interrogation shot out from under them.

“Yes,” answered the observant soldier. “My heart has ever been hers; this time it is my hand and brain.”

The prelate's egg spoon remained poised in mid-air; then it dropped with a clatter into the cup! But a moment gone he had held a sword in his hand; he was disarmed.

“I have promised to stand and fall with her.”

“Stand and fall? Why not 'or'?” with a long, steadfast gaze.

“Did I say 'and'? Well, then,” stolidly, “perhaps that is the word I meant to use. If I do the one I shall certainly do the other.”

The archbishop absently stirred his eggs.

“God is witness,” said the Marshal, “I have always been honest.”

“Yes.”

“And neutral.”

“Yes; honest and neutral.”

“But a man, a lonely man like myself, can not always master the impulses of the heart; and I have surrendered to mine.”

The listener turned to some documents which lay beside the cup, and idly fingered them. “I am glad; I am very glad. I have always secretly admired you; and to tell the truth, I have feared you most of all—because you are honest.”

The Marshal shifted his saber around and drew his knees together. “I return the compliment,” frankly. “I have never feared you; I have distrusted you.”

“And why distrusted?”

“Because Leopold of Osia would never have forsaken his birthright, nor looked toward a throne, had you not pointed the way and coveted the archbishopric.”

“I wished only to make him great;” but the prelate lowered his eyes.

“And share his greatness,” was the shrewd rejoinder. “I am an old man, and frankness in old age is pardonable. There are numbers of disinterested men in the world, but unfortunately they happen to be dead. O, I do not blame you; there is human nature in most of us. But the days of Richelieus and Mazarins are past. The Church is simply the church, and is no longer the power behind the throne. I have served the house of Auersperg for fifty years, that is to say, since I was sixteen; I had hoped to die in the service. Perhaps my own reason for distrusting you has not been disinterested.”

“Perhaps not.”

“And as I now stand I shall die neither in the service of the house of Auersperg nor of Osia. It is not the princess; it is the lonely girl.”

“I need not tell you,” said the prelate quietly, “that I am in Bleiberg only for that purpose. And since we are together, I will tell you this: Madame the duchess will never sit upon this throne. To-day I am practically regent, with full powers from his Majesty. I have summoned von Wallenstein and Mollendorf for a

purpose which I shall make known to you.” He held up two documents, and gently waving them: “These contain the dismissal of both gentlemen, together with my reasons. There were three; one I shall now destroy because it has suddenly become void.” He tore it up, turned, and flung the pieces into the grate.

The Marshal glanced instinctively at his shoulder straps, and saw that they had come very near to oblivion.

“There is nothing more, Marshal,” went on the prelate. “What I had to say to you has slipped my mind. Under the change of circumstances, it might embarrass you to meet von Wallenstein and Mollendorf. You have spoken frankly, and in justice to you I will return in kind. Yes, in the old days I was ambitious; but God has punished me through those I love. I shall leave to you the selection of a new Colonel of the cuirassiers.”

“What! and Beauvais, too?” exclaimed the Marshal.

“Yes. My plans require it. I have formed a new cabinet, which will meet to-night at eight. I shall expect you to be present.”

The two old men rose. Suddenly, a kindly smile broke through the austereness of the prelate's countenance, and he thrust out his hand; the old soldier met it.

“Providence always watches over the innocent,” said the prelate, “else we would have been still at war. Good morning.”

The Marshal returned home, thoughtful and taciturn. What would be the end?

Ten minutes after the Marshal's departure, von Wallenstein and Mollendorf entered the prelate's breakfast room.

“Good morning, Messieurs,” said the churchman, the expression on his face losing its softness, and the glint of triumph stealing into his keen eyes. “I am acting on behalf of his Majesty this morning,” presenting a document to each. “Observe them carefully.” He turned and left the room. The archbishop had not only eaten a breakfast, he had devoured a cabinet.

Count von Wallenstein watched the retreating figure of the prelate till the door closed behind it; then he smiled at Mollendorf, who had not the courage to return it, and who stared at the parchment in his hand as if it were possessed of basilisk eyes.

“Monseigneur,” said the count, as he glanced through the contents of the document, “has forestalled me. Well, well; I do not begrudge him his last card. He has played it; let us go.”

“Perhaps,” faltered Mollendorf, “he has played his first card. What are you going to do?”

“Remain at home and wait. And I shall not have long to wait. The end is near.”

“Count, I tell you that the archbishop is not a man to play thus unless something strong were behind him. You do wrong not to fear him.”

Von Wallenstein recalled the warning of the Colonel of the cuirassiers. “Nevertheless, we are too strong to fear him.”

“Monseigneur is in correspondence with Austria,” said the minister of police, quietly.

“You said nothing of this before,” was the surprised reply.

“It was only this morning that I learned it.”

The count's gaze roamed about the room, and finally rested on the charred slips of paper in the grate. He shrugged.

“If he corresponds with Austria it is too late,” he said. “Come, let us go.” He snapped his fingers in the air, and Mollendorf followed him from the room.

* * * * * *

The princess still remained on the rustic bench; her head was bowed, but her tears were dried.

“O, Bull,” she whispered, “and you and I shall soon be all alone!”

A few doves fluttered about her; the hills flamed beneath the chill September sky, the waters sang and laughed, but she saw not nor heard.

CHAPTER XIX. A CHANCE RIDE IN THE NIGHT

Maurice, who had wisely slept the larger part of the day, and amused himself at solitary billiards until dinner, came out on the terrace to smoke his after-dinner cigar. He watched the sun as, like a ball of rusted brass, it slid down behind the hills, leaving the glowing embers of a smoldering day on the hilltops. The vermilion deepened into charred umber, and soon the west was a blackened grate; another day vanished in ashes. The filmy golden pallor of twilight now blurred the landscape; the wind increased with a gayer, madder, keener touch; the lake went billowing in shadows of gray and black, and one by one the lamps of the city sprang up, vivid as sparks from an anvil. Now and again the thin, clear music of the band drifted across from the park. The fountain glimmered in the Platz, the cafes began to glitter, carriages rolled hither and thither. The city had taken on its colorful night.

“Well, here's another day gone,” he mused, rubbing his elbow, which was yet stiff. “I am anxious to know what that sinner is doing. Has he pulled up stakes or has he stayed to get a whack at me? I hope he's gone; he's a bad Indian, and if anything, he'll want my scalp in his belt before he goes. Hang it! It seems that I have poked my head into every bear trap in the kingdom. I may not get out of the next one. How clever I was, to be sure! It all comes from loving the dramatic. I am a diplomat, but nobody would guess it at first sight. To talk to a man as I talked to him, and to threaten! He said I was young; I was, but I grow older every day. And the wise word now is, don't imitate the bull of the trestle,” as he recalled an American cartoon which at that day was having vogue in the American colony in Vienna.

“I like adventure, I know, but I'm going to give the Colonel a wide berth. If he sees me first, off the board I go. Where will he go—to the duchy? I trust not; we both can not settle in that territory; it's too small. And yet I am bound to go back; it is not my promise so much as it is my cursed curiosity. By George!” rubbing his elbow gently. “And to think, Maurice, that you might not have witnessed this sunset but for a bit of fencing trickery. What a turn that picture of Inez gave me! I knew him in a second—and like the ass I was, I told him so. And to meet him here, almost a left-handed king; no wonder I did not recognize him.

“I should like to come in on Fitzgerald to-night. His father must have had a crazy streak in him somewhere. Four millions to throw away; humph! And who

the deuce has those certificates?" He lolled against the parapet. "If I had four millions, and if Prince Frederick had disappeared for good.... Why are things so jumbled up, at sixes and sevens? We are all human beings; why should some be placed higher than others? A prince is no better than I am, and may be not half so good.

"Sometimes I like to get up high somewhere and look down on every one else; every one else looks so small that it's comforting. The true philosopher has no desire; he sits down and views the world as if he were not a part of it. Perhaps it is best so. Yes, I would like four millions and a principality.... Heigho! how bracing the air is, and what a night for a ride! I've a mind to exercise Madame's horse. A long lone ride on the opposite side of the lake, on the road to Italy; come, let's try it. Better that than mope."

He mounted to the veranda, and for the first time he noticed the suppressed excitement which lit the faces of those around him. Groups were gathered here and there, talking, gesticulating, and flourishing the evening papers. He moved toward the nearest group.

"The archbishop has dismissed the cabinet... crisis imminent."

"The Austrian minister has recalled his invitations to the embassy ball."

"The archbishop will not be able to form another cabinet."

"Count von Wallenstein..."

"Mollendorf and Beauvais, too—"

"The king is dying... The archbishop has been given full powers."

"The army will revolt unless Beauvais is recalled."

"And the Marshal says here..."

Maurice waited to hear no more, but climbed through the window into the office.

"By George, something has happened since last night. I must have an evening paper." He found one, and read an elaborate account of what had taken place during the day. Von Wallenstein had been relieved of the finance. Mollendorf of the police, Erzberg of foreign affairs, and Beauvais of his epaulettes. There remained only the archbishop, the chancellor and the Marshal. The editorial was virulent in its attack on the archbishop, blustered and threatened, and predicted that the fall of the dynasty was but a matter of a few hours. For it asserted that the prelate could not form another cabinet, and without a cabinet there could be no government. It was not possible for the archbishop to shoulder the burden alone; he must reinstate the ministry or fall.

“And this is the beginning of the end,” said Maurice, throwing aside the paper. “What will happen next? The old prelate is not a man to play to the gallery. Has he found out the double dealing of Beauvais? That takes a burden off my shoulders—unless he goes at once to the duchy. But why wasn't the cabinet dismissed ages ago? It is now too late. And where is Prince Frederick to the rescue? There is something going on, and what it is only the archbishop knows. That smile of his! How will it end? I'd like to see von Mitter, who seems to be a good gossip. And that poor, friendless, paralytic king! I say, but it makes the blood grow warm.”

He left the chair and paced the office confines. Only one thing went echoing through his brain, and that was he could do nothing. The sooner he settled down in the attitude of a spectator the better for him. Besides, he was an official in the employ of a foreign country, and it would be the height of indiscretion to meddle, even in a private capacity. It would be to jeopardize his diplomatic career, and that would be ridiculous.

A porter touched him on the shoulder.

“A letter for your Excellency.”

It was from the American minister in Vienna.

“My dear Carewe: I have a service to ask of you. The British minister is worried over the disappearance of a fellow-countryman, Lord Fitzgerald. He set out for Bleiberg, leaving instructions to look him up if nothing was heard of him within a week. Two weeks have gone. Knowing you to be in Bleiberg, I believed you might take the trouble to look into the affair. The British ambassador hints at strange things, as if he feared foul play. I shall have urgent need of you by the first of October; our charge d'affaires is to return home on account of ill-health, and your appointment to that office is a matter of a few days.”

Maurice whistled. “That is good news; not Haine's illness, but that I have an excuse to meddle here. I'll telegraph at once. And I'll take the ride besides.” He went to his room and buckled on his spurs, and thoughtfully slipped his revolver into a pocket. “I am not going to take any chances, even in the dark.” Once again in the office, he stepped up to the desk and ordered his horse to be brought around to the cafe entrance.

“Certainly,” said the clerk. Then in low tones “There has been a curious exchange in saddles, Monsieur.”

“Saddles?”

“Yes. The saddle in your stall is, curiously enough, stamped with the arms of the house of Auersperg. How that military saddle came into the stables is more

than the grooms can solve.”

“O,” said Maurice, with an assumption of carelessness; “that is all right. It's the saddle I arrived on. The horse and saddle belong to Madame the duchess. I have been visiting at the Red Chateau. I shall return in the morning.”

“Ah,” said the clerk, with a furtive smile which Maurice lost; “that accounts for the mystery.”

“Here are two letters that must get in to-night's mails,” Maurice said; “and also this telegram should be sent at once.”

“As Monsieur desires. Ah, I came near forgetting. There is a note for Monsieur, which came this afternoon while Monsieur was asleep.”

The envelope was unstamped, and the scrawl was unfamiliar to Maurice. On opening it he was surprised to find a hurriedly written note from Fitzgerald. In all probability it had been brought by the midnight courier on his return from the duchy.

“In God's name, Maurice, why do you linger?
To-morrow morning those consols must be here
or they will be useless. Hasten; you know what
it means to me.
Fitzgerald.”

Maurice perused it twice, and pulled at his lips. “Madame becomes impatient. Poor devil. Somebody is likely to become suddenly rich and somebody correspondingly poor. What will they say when I return empty-handed? Like as not Madame will accuse me—and Fitzgerald will believe her!... The archbishop! That accounts for this bold move. And how the deuce did he get hold of them? I give up.” And his shoulders settled in resignation.

He passed down into the cafe, from there to his horse, which a groom was holding at the curb. He swung into the saddle and tossed a coin to the man, who touched his cap.

The early moon lifted its silvery bulk above the ragged east, and the patches of clouds which swarmed over the face of that white world of silence resembled so many rooks. Far away, at the farthermost shore of the lake, whenever the moon went free from the clouds, Maurice could see the slim gray line of the road which stretched toward Italy.

“It's a fine night,” he mused, glancing heavenward. The horse answered the touch of the spurs, and cantered away, glad enough to exchange the close air of the stables for this fresh gift of the night. Maurice guided him around the palaces into the avenue, which derived its name from the founder of the opera, in which most of the diplomatic families lived. Past the residence of Beauvais he went,

and, gazing up at the lightless windows, a cold of short duration seized his spine. It bad been a hair's breadth betwixt him and death. “Your room, Colonel, is better than your company; and hereafter I shall endeavor to avoid both. I shall feel that cursed blade of yours for weeks to come.”

Carriages rolled past him. A gay throng in evening dress was crowding into the opera. The huge placard announced, “Norma—Mlle. Lenormand—Royal Opera Troupe.” How he would have liked to hear it, with Lenormand in the title role. He laughed as he recalled the episodes in Vienna which were associated with this queen of song. He waved his hand as the opera house sank in the distance. “Au revoir, Celeste, ma charmante; adieu.” By and by he reached the deserted part of the city, and in less than a quarter of an hour branched off into the broad road bordering the lake. The horse quickened his gait as he felt the stone of the streets no longer beneath his feet, which now fell with muffled rhythm on the sound earth. Maurice shared with him the delight of the open country, and began to talk to the animal.

“A fine night, eh, old boy? I've ridden many backs, but none easier than yours. This air is what gives the blood its color. Too bad; you ought not to belong to Madame. She will never think as much of you as I should.”

The city was falling away behind, and a yellow vapor rose over it. The lake tumbled in moonshine. Maurice took to dreaming again—hope and a thousand stars, love and a thousand dreams.

“God knows I love her; but what's the use? We can not all have what we want; let us make the best of what we have. Philosophy is a comfort only to old age. Why should youth bother to reason why? And I—I have not yet outgrown youth. I believed I had, but I have not. I did not dream she existed, and now she is more to me than anything else in the world. Why; I wonder why? I look into a pair of brown eyes, and am seized with madness. I hope. For what? O, Bucephalus! let us try to wake and leave the dream behind. The gratitude of a princess and a dog... and for this a rose. Well, it will prove the substance of many a pipe, many a kindly pipe. You miss a good deal, Bucephalus; smoking is an evil habit only to those who have not learned to smoke.”

The animal replied with a low whinney, and Maurice, believing that the horse had given an ear to his monologue, laughed. But he flattered himself. The horse whinneyed because he inhaled the faint odor of his kind. He drew down on the rein and settled into a swinging trot, which to Maurice's surprise was faster and easier than the canter. They covered a mile this way, when Maurice's roving eye discovered moving shadows, perhaps half a mile in advance.

“Hello! we're not the only ones jogging along. Eh, what's that?” Something flashed brightly, like silver reflecting moonlight; then came a spark of flame, which died immediately, and later Maurice caught an echo which resembled the bursting of a leaf against the lips. “Come; that looks like a pistol shot.”

Again the flash of silver, broader and clearer this time; and Maurice could now separate the shadow-shapes. A carriage of some sort rolled from side to side, and two smaller shadows followed its wild flight. One—two—three times Maurice saw the sparks and heard the faint reports. He became excited. Something extraordinary was taking place on the lonely road. Suddenly the top of the carriage replied with spiteful flashes of red. Then the moon came out from behind the clouds, and the picture was vividly outlined. Two continuous flashes of silver.... Cuirassiers! Maurice loosened the rein, and the horse went forward as smoothly as a sail. The distance grew visibly less. The carriage opened fire again, and Maurice heard the sinister m-m-m of a bullet winging past him.

“The wrong man may get hit, Bucephalus,” he said, bending to the neck of the horse; “which is not unusual. You're pulling them down, old boy; keep it up. There's trouble ahead, and since the cuirassiers are for the king, we'll stand by the cuirassiers.”

On they flew, nearer and nearer, until the pistol shots were no longer echoes. Two other horsemen came into view, in advance of the carriage. Five minutes more of this exciting chase, and the faces took on lines and grew into features. Up, up crept the gallant little horse, his hoofs rattling against the road like snares on a drum. When within a dozen rods, Maurice saw one of the cuirassiers turn and level a revolver at him. Fortunately the horse swerved, and the ball went wide.

“Don't shoot!” Maurice yelled; “don't shoot!”

The face he saw was von Mitter's. His heart clogged in his throat, not at the danger which threatened him, but at the thought of what that carriage might contain.

A short time passed, during which nothing was heard but the striking of galloping hoofs and the rumble of the carriage. Maurice soon drew abreast of von Mitter. There was a gash on the latter's cheek, and the blood from it dripped on his cuirass.

“Close for you, my friend,” he gasped; when he recognized the new arrival. “Have you—God! my leg that time,” with a groan.

For the fire of the carriage had spoken again, and true.

Maurice shut his teeth, drew his revolver, cocked it and applied the spurs.

With a bound he shot past von Mitter, who was cursing deeply and trying to reload. Maurice did not propose to waste powder on the driver, but was determined to bring down one of the carriage horses, which were marvelous brutes for speed. Scharfenstein kept popping away at the driver, but without apparent result. Finally Maurice secured the desired range. He raised the revolver, rested the barrel between the left thumb and forefinger and pressed the trigger. The nearest carriage horse lurched to his knees, a bullet in his brain, dragging his mate with him. The race had come to an end.

At once the two horsemen in front separated; one continued toward the great forest, while the other took to the hills. Scharfenstein started in pursuit of the latter. As for the carriage, it came to an abrupt stand. The driver made a flying leap toward the lake, but stumbled and fell, and before he could regain his feet Maurice was off his horse and on his quarry. He caught the fellow by the throat and pressed him to the earth, kneeling on his chest.

“Hold him!” cried von Mitter, coming up with a limp, “hold him till I knock in his head, damn him!”

“No, no!” said Maurice, “you can't get information out of a dead man.”

“It's all up with me,” groaned the Lieutenant. “I'll ask for my discharge. I could hit nothing, my hand trembled. I was afraid of shooting into the carriage.”

Maurice turned his attention to the man beneath him. “Now, you devil,” he cried, “a clean breast of it, or off the board you go. O!” suddenly peering down. “By the Lord, so it is you—you—you!” savagely bumping the fellow's head against the earth. “Spy!”

“You are killing me!”

“Small matter. Who is this fellow?” asked Maurice.

“Johann Kopf, a spy, a police rat, and God knows what else,” answered von Mitter, limping toward the carriage. “Curse the leg!” He forced the door and peered inside. “Fainted! I thought as much.” He lifted the inanimate bundle which lay huddled in between the seats and carried it to the side of the road, where he tenderly laid it. He rubbed the girl's wrists, unmindful of the blood which fell from his face and left dark stains on her dress. “Thank God,” heartily, “that her Royal Highness was suffering from a headache. She would have died from fright.”

Maurice felt the straining cords in the prisoner's neck grow limp. The rascal had fainted.

“Not her Highness?” Maurice asked, the weight of dread lifting from his heart.

“No. Her Royal Highness sent Camille, her maid of honor, veiled and dressed like herself, to play an innocent jest on her old nurse. Some one shall account for this; for they mistook Camille for her Highness. I'm going to wade out into the water,” von Mitter added, staggering to his feet.

“You'll never get off your boot,” said Maurice.

“I'll cut it off,” was the reply, “I shall faint if I do not cool off the leg. The ball is somewhere in the calf.” And he waded out into the water until it reached above his knees. Thus he stood for a moment, then returned to the maid, who, on opening her eyes, screamed. “It is all over, Camille,” said the Lieutenant, throwing an arm about her.

“Your face is bleeding!” she cried, and sank back with her head against his broad breast.

As Maurice gazed at the pair he sighed. There were no obstacles here.

Soon Scharfenstein came loping down the hill alone.

“I killed his horse,” he said, in response to queries, “but he fled into the woods where I could not follow. A bad night for us, Carl, a bad night,” swinging off his horse. “A boy would have done better work. Whom have we here?”

“Kopf,” said Maurice, “and he has a ball somewhere inside,” holding up a bloody hand.

“Kopf?” Scharfenstein cocked his revolver.

The maid of honor placed her hands over her ears and screamed again. Max gazed at her, and, with a short, Homeric laugh, lowered the revolver.

“Any time will do,” he said. “Ah, he opens his eyes.”

The prisoner's eyes rolled wildly about. That frowning face above him... was it a vision? Who was it? What was he doing here?

“Who put you up to this?” demanded Maurice.

“You are choking me!”

“Who, I say?”

“Beauvais.”

Scharfenstein and von Mitter looked at each other comprehensively.

“Who is this Beauvais? Speak!”

“I am dying, Herr... Your knees—”

Maurice withdrew his knees. “Beauvais; who is he?”

“Prince... Walmoden, formerly of the emperor's staff.”

Johann's eyes closed again, and his head fell to one side.

“He looks as if he were done for,” said Maurice, standing up. “Let us clear up the rubbish and hitch a horse to the carriage. The mate's all right.”

Von Mitter assisted the maid into the carriage and seated her.

“Go and stay with her,” said Maurice, brusquely; “you're half fainting.”

“You are very handy, Carewe,” said von Mitter gratefully, and he climbed in beside the maid, who, her fright gone, gave way to womanly instincts. She took her kerchief and wiped the Lieutenant's cheek, pressing his hand in hers the while.

Maurice and Scharfenstein worked away at the traces, and dragged the dead horse to the side of the road. Scharfenstein brought around von Mitter's horse, took oft the furnishings, and backed him into the pole.

Meanwhile the man lying by the water's edge showed signs of returning life. He turned his head cautiously. His enemies were a dozen yards away from him. Slowly he rolled over on his stomach, thence to his knees. They were paying no attention to him....

“Ho, there! the prisoner!” cried von Mitter, tumbling out of the carriage. He tried to stand up, but a numbness seized his legs, and he sank to a sitting posture.

Maurice and Scharfenstein turned too late. Johann had mounted on Scharfenstein's horse, and was flying away down the road. Maurice coolly leveled his revolver and sent two bullets after him. The second one caused Johann to straighten stiffly, then to sink; but he hung on to the horse.

“Hurry!” cried Maurice; “I've hit him and we'll find him along the road somewhere.”

They lifted von Mitter into the carriage, wheeled it about, and Scharfenstein mounted the box. Maurice sprang into his saddle, and they clattered off toward the city.

CHAPTER XX. THE LAST STAND OF A BAD SERVANT

The cuirassiers stationed in the guardroom of the royal palace walked gently on the tiling, when occasion required them to walk, and when they entered or left the room, they were particularly careful to avoid the chink of the spur or the clank of the saber. Although the royal bedchamber was many doors removed, the Captain had issued a warning against any unnecessary noise. A loud laugh, or the falling of a saber carelessly rested, drew upon the unlucky offender the scowling eyes of the commander, who reclined in front of the medieval fireplace, in which a solitary log burned, and brooded over past and present. The high revels in the guardroom were no more, the cuirassiers were no longer made up of the young nobles of the kingdom; they were now merely watch dogs.

Twenty years ago the commander had come from Dresden as an instructor in arms, and after the first year had watched over the royal household, in the service of the late king and the king who lay dying. He had come of good family, but others had come off better, and had carried off court honors, though his post in early days had been envied by many. He was above all else a soldier, the embodiment of patience and integrity, and he scorned to murmur because fortune had passed over his head. As he sucked at his pipe, he recalled the days of Albrecht and his opera singers, the court scandals, and his own constant employment as messenger in the king's love intrigues.

Albrecht had died a widower and childless, and with him had died the flower of court life. The courtiers and sycophants had flocked to the standard of the duke, and had remained there, primarily because Leopold of Osia promised a sedate and exemplary life. Sometimes the Captain shook his head, as if communing with some unpleasant thought. On each side of him sat a soldier, also smoking and ruminating.

At the mess table a dozen or so whiled away the time at cards. The wavering lights of the candle and hearth cast warring shadows on the wall and floor, and the gun and saber racks twinkled. If the players spoke, it was in tones inaudible to the Captain's ears.

“Our bread and butter,” said the Captain softly, “are likely to take unto themselves the proverbial wings and fly away.”

No one replied. The Captain was a man who frequently spoke his thoughts aloud, and required no one to reply to his disjointed utterances.

“A soldier of fortune,” he went on, “pins his faith and zeal to standards which to-day rise and to-morrow fall. Unfortunately, he takes it at flood tide, which immediately begins to ebb.”

The men on either side of him nodded wisely.

“The king can no longer speak. That is why the archbishop has dismissed the cabinet. While he could speak, his Majesty refused to listen to the downfall of his enemies. Why? Look to heaven; heaven only can answer. How many men of the native troops are quartered in these buildings? Not one—which is bad. Formerly they were in the majority. Extraordinary. His Majesty would have made friends with them, but the archbishop, an estimable man in his robes, practically ostracized them. Bad, very bad. Had we been comrades, there might be a different end.

“Faugh! if one of us sticks his head into the city barracks a breath of ice is our reward. Kronau never attends the receptions. A little flattery, which costs nothing, and they would have been willing to die for his Majesty. Now—” He knocked his pipe on the firedog. “Now, they would not lift a finger. A soldier will forgive all things but premeditated neglect.

“As for me, when the time comes I shall return to Dresden and die of old age. Maybe, though, I shan't. When his Majesty dies there is like to be a clash. The duchess is a clever woman, but she would make a balky wife; a capillary affection which runs in the family. Red hair in a man is useful; in a woman it is unmanageable.” He refilled his pipe and motioned toward the tongs. The soldier nearest caught up a brand and held it out. The Captain laid his pipe against it and drew. “It's a dreary watch I have from ten till daylight, in his Majesty's antechamber, but he will trust no other man at that post.” And with this he fell into silence.

Some time passed. Twice the Captain pulled out his watch and looked at it. Shortly after nine o'clock the beat of hoofs came up the driveway, and the Captain turned his head toward the entrance and waited. A moment later the door opened and three men stood framed in the doorway. Two of them—one in civilian dress—were endeavoring to hold up a third between them. The central figure presented an alarming picture. His cuirass and white trousers were splashed with blood, and his head rolled from side to side, almost insensibly.

“A thousand devils!” exclaimed the Captain at the sight of this unexpected tableau. He sprang up, toppling over his chair. “What's this? Von Mitter? Blood?

Have those damned students—”

“A brush on the lake road,” interrupted Sharfenstein, breathlessly. “Help him over to a chair, Monsieur Carewe. That's it.”

“Have you a knife, Captain?” asked Maurice.

The Captain whipped out his knife, locked it, and gave it to Maurice. “Riemer,” he called to one of the cuirassiers, who were rising from the mess table, “bring out your box of instruments; and you, Scharfenstein, a basin of cold water. Quick!”

Maurice knelt and deftly cut away the Lieutenant's boot. A pool of blood collected on the floor.

“God save us!” cried the Captain, “his boot is full of blood.” He turned to Scharfenstein, who was approaching with the basin. “What has happened, Max?”

Scharfenstein briefly explained.

“And Kopf?”

“Got away, curse him!”

“And the others?” with a lowering brow.

“They all got away,” adding an oath under his breath. Max set the basin on the floor.

“Bad, very bad. Why didn't you shoot?”

“He was afraid of hitting Mademoiselle Bachelier,” Maurice interposed.

Max threw him a grateful look.

“Humph!” The Captain called his men around him. “Two of you—. But wait. Who's back of Kopf?”

“Our distinguished Colonel,” snapped Max, “who was this day relieved of his straps. A case of revenge, probably.”

“Beauvais! Ah, ah!” The Captain smiled grimly. He had always hated Beauvais, who had, for no obvious reason, passed him and grasped the coveted colonelcy, and because, curiously enough, the native troops had made an idol of him. “Beauvais? I am not surprised. An adventurer, with neither kith nor country.”

“He is Prince Walmoden,” said Maurice, “and for some reason not known, the emperor has promised to recall him.”

This information caused the Captain to step back, and he muttered the name several times. “Austria....” A gloom settled on his face. “No matter. Prince or no

prince, or had he one thousand emperors behind him, no matter. Four of you seek him and arrest him. If he offers resistance, knock him on the head, but arrest him. A traitor is without name, country or respect. His purpose... Never mind.

“Four of you seek for Kopf. Look into Stuler's, in at the opera, and follow Kopf's woman home. I'll take it upon myself to telegraph the frontier to allow no one to cross on the pain of being shot. Pass the word to the officers in the stables. Hurry away before the archbishop hears of the matter. Away with you, and quietly. And one of you seek that blockhead of a coachman, who did not know enough to come back here and inform us. Beauvais, make him a prisoner, you are not to know why. As for Kopf, dead or alive—alive will be less convenient for all concerned. Off with you!”

The guardroom was at once emptied, and the cuirassiers turned off toward the stables, where the main body of the troops was stationed.

Riemer, who was both surgeon and soldier, probed the wound in von Miner's leg and extracted the bullet, which had lodged in the fleshy part of the calf. He applied cold water, lints and bandages. All the while von Mitter sat in the chair, his eyes shut and his lips closed tightly.

“There!” said the surgeon, standing up, “that's better. The loss of blood is the worst part of it.” Next he took a few stitches in the cut on the cheek and threw his cloak over the wounded man's knee. “He'll be all right in a day or so, though he'll limp. Carl?”

“O, I'm sound enough,” answered von Mitter, opening his eyes. “A little weak in the knees, that's all. I shouldn't have given in, only Kopf got away when we had him fair and fast. We found his horse wandering about the Frohngarten, but no sign of Johann. He's got it, though, square in the back.”

“I'm sure of it,” said Maurice, who leaned over the back of the speaker's chair.

The Captain eyed him inquiringly.

“Pardon me,” said Scharfenstein. “Captain, Monsieur Carewe, an American tourist, formerly of the United States cavalry. And a pretty shot, too, by the book! It would have gone badly with us but for him.”

“My thanks,” said the Captain, with a jerky nod. “Max, come, give me the whole story.”

And Scharfenstein dropped into a chair and recounted in picturesque diction the adventure; how they had remained by the royal carriage till the nurse, recovering from her faint, had rushed out and told them of the abduction; and the

long race on the south shore. While he listened the Captain smoked thoughtfully; and when the story was done, he rose and wagged his head.

“Call it revenge,” he said, “if it strikes you in that light. Monsieur Carewe, what is your opinion?”

“It occurs to me,” answered Maurice, rubbing the scratch the late Colonel's sword had left on his chin, “it occurs to me that the man played his hand a few days too late.”

“Which is to say?”

“Well, I do not call it revenge,” Maurice admitted, unwilling to venture any theory.

“No more do I;” and the Captain began drumming on the mantel. “What say, Max; how would the illustrious Colonel look with the shadow of a crown on his head? He comes from Austria, who, to my thinking, is cognizant of all he does and has done.”

The answer was not spoken. The door, leading to the main palace through the kitchens, opened, and the Marshal, the princess, and the maid of honor came down the steps. The Captain, Max and the surgeon stood at salute. Maurice, however, drew back into the shadows at the side of the grate. The old soldier gazed down at the pale face of the young Lieutenant, and smiled kindly.

“Even the best of soldiers make mistakes,” he said; “even the best. No,” as von Mitter made an attempt to speak. “I've heard all about it, and from a most reliable source,” nodding toward the anxious maid of honor. “Colonel,” he addressed the Captain, whose eyes started at this appellation, “Colonel, you will report to me in the morning to assume your new duties. You have been a faithful Captain and a good soldier. I know your value, your name and your antecedents, which till now was more than I knew of your late predecessor. Von Mitter will take upon himself your duties as Captain of the household troop; and you, Scharfenstein, will hereafter take charge of her Royal Highness's carriage, and you may choose whom you will as your comrade.”

“I have always tried to do my duty,” said von Mitter. He felt a small hand secretly press his.

“And you have always succeeded, Captain,” said a voice which made Maurice's foolish heart leap. “See, I am the first to give you your new rank. How you must suffer!”

“God bless your Royal Highness!” murmured the fellow, at once racked with pain and happiness. “But I am not the one you must thank for this night's work.”

The Marshal peered at the silent figure beyond the fireplace. Maurice was compelled to stand forth. “Ah!” said the Marshal.

“Yes,” went on von Mitter, “but for him no one knows what the end might have been. And I, thinking him one of the abducting party coming up from the rear, shot at him.”

The princess took a step forward, anxiety widening her dark eyes; and the swift glance added to the fever in the recipient's veins.... How beautiful she was, and how far away! He laid his hand on the top of von Mitter's chair.

“Monsieur Carewe,” said the Marshal, “seems to have plenty of leisure time on his hands—fortunately for us. You were not hit?”

“O, no,” said Maurice, blushing. He had discerned an undercurrent of raillery in the Marshal's tones. “The ball came close to my ear, that was all. It is strange how that fellow got away. I am positive that I hit him.”

“We shall find him,” said the Marshal, with a look at the newly-appointed Colonel which said: “Your straps hang in the balance.” He rubbed his nose. “Well, is your Royal Highness satisfied that there is no danger?”

“Yes, Marshal; but think, if he should have been killed! Ah, what does it all mean? What had this man against me, who have always been kind to him?”

“We shall, with your Highness's permission,” said the Marshal, “leave all questions to the future. Let us return to the archbishop, who is doubtless awaiting the news. Take good care of yourself, Captain. To-morrow, Colonel; good evening to you, Monsieur Carewe;” and the terse old soldier proceeded to the door and held it open for the women.

“Good night, Messieurs,” said her Highness. “I shall not forget. Thanks to you, Captain.” One more glance, and she was gone. But this glance blossomed in one heart into a flower of hope.

The Marshal, having closed the door behind the women, returned to the group before the fireplace. They watched him interestedly.

“Colonel,” he said, “make no effort to seek Beauvais. As for Kopf, that is different. But Beauvais—”

“To let him go?” exclaimed the Colonel in dismay.

“Aye, to let him go. We do not seek bears with birdshot, and that is all we have. He will leave the country.”

“And go to the duchy!”

“So much the better; when the time comes, our case against him will be so much the stronger. Mind you, this is not from sentiment. I have none,” glaring

around to see if any dared refute this assertion. “It is policy, and Monseigneur concurs with me.”

“But I have sent men after him!” cried the Colonel, in keen disappointment.

“Send men after them to rescind the order.”

“And if they should catch him?”

“Let him go; that is my order. The servant will be sufficient for our needs. Monsieur Carewe, I rely on your discretion;” and the Marshal passed into the kitchens.

The men looked at each other in silence. A moment later the Colonel dashed from the room, off to the stables.

“Well, I'm off,” said Maurice. The desire to tell what he knew was beginning to master him. It was too late now, he saw that. Besides, they might take it into their heads to detain him. He put on his hat. “Good night; and good luck to your leg, Captain.”

“Till to-morrow,” said von Mitter, who had taken a fancy to the smooth-faced young American, who seemed at home in all places.

“I am going away to-morrow,” said Maurice, pressing the Lieutenant's hand. “I shall return in a day or so.”

He led his horse to the hotel stables, lit a fresh cigar and promenaded the terrace. “Some day,” he mused, “perhaps I'll be able to do something for myself. To-morrow we'll take a look at Fitzgerald's affairs, like the good fairy we are. If the Colonel is there, so much the worse for one or the other of us.” He laughed contentedly. “Beauvais took my warning and lit out, or his henchman would never have made a botch of the abduction. It is my opinion that Madame wanted a hostage, for it is impossible to conceive that the man made the attempt on his own responsibility. I shall return to the duchy in a semi-official character as an envoy extraordinary to look into the whereabouts of one Lord Fitzgerald. Devil take me, but I did make a mess of it when I slapped him on the shoulder that night.” The princess had not addressed a word to him. Why?

When the princess and her maid of honor had passed through the kitchens into the princess's boudoir, the maid suddenly caught her mistress's hand and imprinted a hasty kiss on it, to the latter's surprise and agitation. There was something in that kiss which came nearer to sincere affection than Mademoiselle Bachelier had ever shown before.

“Camille?”

“God bless your Highness!” whispered the girl, again pressing the cold hand

to her lips. What had given rise to this new-born affection she herself could not say, but a sudden wave of pity rushed into her heart. Perhaps it was because she loved and was loved that caused this expansion of heart toward her mistress, who was likely never to love or beget love, who stood so lonely. Tears came into her eyes.

“You are hysterical!” said the princess.

“No; it is because—because—” She stopped and a blush suffused her face and temples.

The princess took the face between her hands and gazed long and earnestly into it. “Have you discovered a belated pity in your heart for me? Or is it because you thought him wounded unto death, and he was not?”

“It is both!” weeping.

The princess put her arms around the maid. “And you weep for happiness? Let us weep together, then; only—I can not weep for happiness.”

To return to the flight of Kopf. As he dashed down the road he heard two reports. At the second he experienced a terrible burning blow under the right shoulder-blade, and immediately his arm became paralyzed. He coughed. With a supreme effort he managed to recover his balance. Already his collar-bone had been cracked by a bullet either from von Mitter or from Scharfenstein.

“God's curse on them all!” he sobbed, pushing his knees into his horse; “God's curse!” He bit his lips; and when he drew his breath the pain which followed almost robbed him of his senses. Behind him the sound of hoofs came no nearer; he had a chance. He could not look back to see if he gained, however, as his neck was stiffening.

“Curse him and his damned gold! He never warned me as he said he would.” On he rode. The moon became obscured, and when it flashed again he could see it but indistinctly.... To reach the city, to reach Gertrude's, to give the horse a cut and send him adrift, this was his endeavor. But would he reach the city—alive? Was he dying? He could not see... Yet again he shut his jaws and drew on his entire strength. He was keeping in the saddle by will power alone. If the horse faltered he was lost. To Gertrude; she could use them. And after all he loved her. If he died she would be provided for.

The first of the city lamps. He sobbed. Into this street he turned, into that, expecting each moment to be challenged, for the white saddle blanket of the cuirassiers stood out conspicuously. At last he had but a corner to turn. He stopped, slid from the saddle and gave the animal a cut across the face. The horse reared, then plunged forward at a wild gallop. Johann staggered along the

street, fumbling in his pockets for his keys.

Gertrude of the opera company was usually in the ballet. To-night she had left the stage after the first dance. She had complained of a severe headache, and as the manager knew her worth he had permitted her withdrawal from the corps. She lived off the Frohngarten, in an apartment on the second floor, over a cheap restaurant. She was bathing her temples in perfumed ammonia water, when she heard footsteps in the corridor, and later the rasp of a key in the lock. As the door opened she beheld a spectacle which caused her to scream.

“Hush! Gertrude, I am dying.... Brandy! I must talk to you! Silence!” Johann tottered to a lounge and dropped on his side.

The woman, still trembling with fright and terror, poured into her palm some of the pungent liquid with which she had been bathing her temples, and held it under his nose. It revived him. And in a few broken sentences he made known to her what had happened.

“Gertrude, I am lost!” He breathed with difficulty. “I have lived like a rascal, and I die like one. But I have always loved you; I have always been true to you; I have never beaten nor robbed you.” His eyes closed.

“O God,” she cried, “what shall I do? Johann, you must not die! We will leave the country together. Johann, you do not speak! Johann!” She kissed him, pressed him in her arms, regardless of the stains which these frantic fondlings gathered from his breast. “Johann!”

“Rich,” he said dreamily; “rich... and to die like a dog!”

She left him and rushed to the sideboard, poured out a tumbler of brandy, and returned to his side. She raised his head, but he swallowed with effort.

“In the lungs,” he said. “God! how it burns! Rich; we are rich, Gertrude; a hundred thousand crowns.... And I am dying!... What a failure! Curse them all; they never offered to lend a hand unless it led toward hell! Gertrude... I must tell you. Here; here, put your hand in this pocket; yes. Draw them out... A hundred thousand crowns!”

The woman shuddered. Her hand and what it held were wet with blood.

“Hide them!” And Johann fainted away for the second time. When he came to his senses, several minutes had passed. Quickly, with what remaining strength he had, he unfolded his plan.

And her one idea was to save him. She drenched her handkerchief with the ammonia, and bade him hold it to his nose, while she fetched a basin of water and a sponge. Tenderly she drew back his coat and washed the blood from his

throat and lips, and moistened his hair.

“Listen!” he cried suddenly, rising on his elbow. “It is they! They have found me! Quick! to the roof!” He struggled to his feet, with that strength which imparts itself to dying men, super-human while it lasts. He threw one arm around her neck. “Help me!”

And thus they gained the hall, mounted the flight to the roof, he groaning and urging, she sobbing, hysterical, and frenzied. She climbed the ladder with him, threw back the trap, and helped him on the roof.

“Now leave me!” he said, kissing her hand.

She gave him her lips, and went down to her rooms, and waited and waited. This agony of suspense lasted a quarter of an hour, when again came the clatter of hoofs. Would this, too, prove a false alarm? She held her hand to her ear. If he were dying... They had stopped; they were mounting the stairs; O God, they were beating on the door!

“Open!” cried a voice without; “open in the king's name!”

She gasped, but words would not come. She clenched her hands until the nails sank into the flesh.

“Open, Madame, or down comes the door.”

The actress in her came to the rescue. The calm of despair took possession of her.

“In a moment, Messieurs,” she said. Her voice was without agitation. She opened the door and the cuirassiers pushed past her. “In heaven's name, Messieurs, what does this mean?”

“We want Johann Kopf,” was the answer, “and we have it from good authority that he is here. Do not interfere with us; you are in no wise connected with the affair.”

“He is not here,” she replied. She wondered at herself, her tones were so even, her mind was so clear.

One of the cuirassiers caught up her gown. “What's this, Madame?” he demanded, pointing to the dark wet stains; “and this?” to her hands, “and this?” to the spots on the carpet, the basin and the sponge. “To the roof, men; he has gone by the roof! Up with you!”

The ballet dancer held forth her hands in supplication; life forsook her limbs; she sank.

The cuirassiers rushed to the roof.... When they came down it was slowly and carefully. What they had found on the roof was of no use to them. They laid the

inanimate thing on the lounge, and frowned. One of the cuirassiers lifted the ballet dancer and carried her into her bed-room, and laid her on the bed. He had not the heart to revive her. Death softens all angers; even an enemy is no longer such when dead. And Johann Kopf was dead.

CHAPTER XXI. A COURT FETE AT THE RED CHATEAU

At eight o'clock of the following evening, that is to say, the nineteenth of September, Maurice mounted the Thalian pass and left the kingdom in the valley behind him. He was weary, dusty, lame and out of humor; besides, he had a new weight on his conscience. The night before he had taken the life of a man. True, this had happened before, but always in warfare. He had killed in a moment of rage and chagrin a poor devil who was at most only a puppet. There was small credit in the performance. However, the rascal would have suffered death in any event, his act being one of high treason.

In the long ride he had made up his mind to lock away forever the silly dream, the tender, futile, silly dream. All men die with secrets locked in their hearts; thus he, too, would die. His fancy leaped across the chasm of intervening years to the day of his death, and the thought was a happy one! He smiled sadly, as young men smile when they pity themselves. He knew that he would never get over it—in a day. But to-morrow, or to-morrow's to-morrow..

He took the pass's decline; the duchy spread away toward the south. A quarter of a mile below him he saw the barrack and the customs office which belonged to Madame the duchess. The corporal inspected him and his papers, spoke lowly to the customs inspector, who returned to his office.

“It is all right, Monsieur Carewe,” said the corporal; “I ought to recognize the horse a mile away. You will arrive just in time.”

“Just in time for what?”

“Ah, true. Her Highness gives a grand ball at the chateau to-night. The court has arrived from Brunnstadt. Some will reside at the chateau, some at General Duckwitz's, others at the Countess Herzberg's.”

“Has the duchess arrived at last, then?” was the cynical inquiry.

“She will arrive this evening,” answered the corporal, grinning. “A pleasant journey to you.”

Maurice proceeded. “And that blockhead of an Englishman has not tumbled yet! The court here? A grand ball? What else can it mean but that Madame is celebrating a victory to come? If the archbishop has those consols, she will wage war; and this is the prelude.” He jogged along. He had accomplished a third of

the remaining distance, when he was challenged. The sentry came forward and scrutinized the rider.

“O, it is Monsieur Carewe!” he cried in delighted tones. He touched his cap and fell back into the shadows.

A mile farther, and the great chateau, scintillating with lights, loomed up against the yellow sky. He felt a thrill of excitement. Doubtless there would be some bright passages before the night drew to a close. He would make furious love to the pretty countess; it would be something in the way of relaxation. How would they greet him? What would be Madame's future plans in regard to Fitzgerald? How would she get him out of the way, now that he had served her purpose? He laughed.

“The future promises much,” he said, half aloud. “I am really glad that I came back.”

“Halt!”

Maurice drew up. A sentry stepped out into the road.

“O, it is Monsieur Carewe!” he cried. With a short laugh he disappeared.

“Hang me,” grumbled Maurice as he went on, “these fellows have remarkable memories. I can't recollect any of them.” He was mystified.

Shortly he came upon the patrol. The leader ordered him to dismount, an order be obeyed willingly, for he was longing to stand again. He shook his legs, while the leader struck a match.

“Why, it is Monsieur Carewe!” he cried. “Good! We are coming out to meet you. This is a pleasure indeed.”

Maurice gazed keenly into the speaker's face, and to his surprise beheld the baron whose arm he had broken a fortnight since. He climbed on his horse again.

“I am glad you deem it a pleasure, baron,” he said dryly. “From what you imply, I should judge that you were expecting me.”

“Nothing less! Your departure from Bleiberg was known to us as early as two o'clock this after-noon,” answered the baron. “Permit us to escort you to the chateau before the ladies see you. 'Tis a gala night; we are all in our best bib and tucker, as the English say. We believed at one time that you were not going to honor us with a second visit. Now to dress, both of us; at ten Madame the duchess arrives with General Duckwitz and Colonel Mollendorf, who is no relation to the late minister of police in Bleiberg.”

Underneath all this Maurice discerned a shade of mockery, and it disturbed him.

“First, I should like to know—” he began.

“Later, later!” cried the baron. “The gates are but a dozen rods away. To your room first; the rest will follow.”

“The only clothes I have with me are on my back,” said Maurice.

“We shall arrange that. Your guard-hussar uniform has been reserved for you, at the suggestion of the Colonel.”

And Maurice grew more and more disturbed.

“Were they courteous to you on the road?”

“Yes. But—”

“Patience! Here we are at the rear gates.”

Maurice found it impossible to draw back; three troopers blocked the rear, the baron and another rode at his sides, and four more were in advance. The rear gates swung open, and the little troop passed into the chateau confines. Maurice snatched a glimpse of the front lawns and terraces. The trees and walls were hung with Chinese lanterns; gay uniforms and shimmering gowns flitted across his vision. Somewhere within the chateau an orchestra was playing the overture from “Linda di Chamounix.” Indeed, with all these brave officers, old men in black bedecked with ribbons, handsome women in a brilliant sparkle of jewels, it had the semblance of a gay court. It was altogether a different scene from that which was called the court of Bleiberg. There was no restraint here; all was laughter, music, dancing, and wines. The women were young, the men were young; old age stood at one side and looked on. And the charming Voiture-verse of a countess, Maurice was determined to seek her first of all. He vaguely wondered how Fitzgerald would carry himself throughout the ordeal.

The troopers dismounted in the courtyard.

“I'm a trifle too stiff to dance,” Maurice innocently acknowledged.

The baron laughed. “You will have to take luck with me in the stable-barrack; the chateau is filled. The armory has been turned into a ballroom, and the guard out of it.”

“Lead on!” said Maurice.

At the entrance to the guardroom, which occupied the left wing of the stables, stood a Lieutenant of the hussars.

“This is Monsieur Carewe,” said the baron, “who will occupy a corner in the guardroom.”

“Ah! Monsieur Carewe,” waving his hand cavalierly; “happy to see you

again.”

Maurice was growing weary of his name.

“Enter,” said the baron, opening the door.

Maurice entered, but not without suspicion. However, he was in a hurry to mingle with the gay assembly in the chateau. But that body was doomed to proceed without the honor or the knowledge of his distinguished presence. Several troopers were lounging about. At the sight of the baron they rose.

“Messieurs,” he said, “this is Monsieur Carewe, who was expected.”

“Glad to see you!” they sang out in chorus. They bowed ironically.

Maurice gazed toward the door. As he did so four pairs of arms enveloped him, and before he could offer the slightest resistance, he was bound hand and foot, a scarf was tied over his mouth, and he was pushed most disrespectfully into a chair. The baron's mouth was twisted out of shape, and the troopers were smiling.

“My faith! but this is the drollest affair I ever was in;” and the baron sat on the edge of the table and held his sides. “Monsieur Carewe! Ha! ha! You are a little too stiff to dance, eh? Shall I tender your excuses to the ladies? Ass! did you dream for a moment that such canaille as you, might show your countenance to any save the scullery maids? Too stiff to dance! Ye gods, but that was rich! And you had the audacity to return here! I must go; the thing is killing me.” He slipped off the table, red in the face and choking. “The telegraph has its uses; it came ahead of you. We trembled for fear you would not come! Men, guard him as your lives, while I report to Madame, I dare say she will make it droller in the telling.”

He stepped to the door, turned, looking into the prisoner's glaring eyes; he doubled up again. “We are quits; I forgive you the broken arm; this laugh will repay me. How Madame the countess will laugh! And Duckwitz—the General will die of apoplexy! O, but you are a sorry ass; and how neatly we have clipped your ears!” And into the corridor he went, still laughing, heartily and joyously, as if what had taken place was one of the finest jests in the world.

Maurice, white and furious, was positive that he never would laugh again. And the most painful thought was that his honesty had brought him to this pass —or, was it his curiosity?

Fitzgerald stood alone in the library. The music of a Strauss waltz came indistinctly to him. He was troubled, and the speech of it lay in his eyes. From time to time he drummed on the window sill, and followed with his gaze the

shadowy forms on the lawns. He was not a part of this fairy scene. He was out of place. So many young and beautiful women eyeing him curiously confused him. In every glance he innocently read his disgrace.

At Madame's request he had dressed himself in the uniform of a Lieutenant-Colonel, which showed how deeply he was in the toils. Though it emphasized the elegant proportions of his figure, it sat uncomfortably upon him. His vanity was not equal to his sense of guilt. The uniform was a livery of dishonor. He could not distort it into a virtue, try as he would. He lacked that cunning artifice which a man of the world possesses, that of winning over to the right a misdeed.

And Carewe, on whose honesty he would have staked his life, Carewe had betrayed him. Why, he could not conceive. He saw how frail his house of love was. A breath and it was gone. What he had until to-day deemed special favors were favors common to all these military dandies. They, too, could kiss Madame's hand, and he could do no more. And yet she held him. Did she love him? He could not tell. All he knew was that it was impossible not to love her. And to-night he witnessed the culmination of the woman beautiful, and it dazzled him, filled him with fears and oppressions.... To bind her hand and foot, to carry her by force to the altar, if need; to call her his in spite of all.

If she were playing with him, making a ball of his heart and her fancy a cup, she knew not of the slumbering lion within. He himself was but dimly conscious of it. Princess? That did not matter. Since that morning the veil had fallen from his eyes, but he had said nothing; he was waiting for her to speak. Would she laugh at him? No, no! The knowledge that had come to him had transformed wax into iron. Princess? She was the woman who had promised to be his wife.

Only two candles burned on the mantel-piece. The library was a room apart from the festivities. A soft, rose-colored darkness pervaded the room. Presently a darker shadow tiptoed over the threshold. He turned, and the shadow approached. Madame's gray eyes, full of lambent fires, looked into his own.

“I was seeking you,” she said. The jewels in her hair threw a kind of halo above her head.

“Have I the happiness to be necessary to you?” he asked.

“You have not been enjoying yourself.”

“No, Madame; my conscience is, unhappily, too green.” He turned to the window again for fear he would lose control of himself.

“I have a confession to make to you,” she said humbly. How broad his shoulders were, was her thought.

“It can not concern me,” he replied.

“How?”

“There is only one confession which I care to hear. You made it once, though you are not willing to repeat it. But I have your word, Sylvia; I am content. Not all the world could make me believe that you would willingly retract that word.”

Her name, for the first time coming from his lips, caused her to start. She sent him a penetrating glance, but it broke on a face immobile as marble.

“I do not recollect granting you permission to use my given name,” she said.

“O, that was before the world. But alone, alone as we are, you and I, it is different.” The smile which accompanied these words was frankness itself, but it did not deceive Madame, who read his eyes too well. “Ah, but the crumbs you give this love of mine are so few!” “You are the only man in the world permitted to avow love to me. You have kissed my hand.”

“A privilege which seems extended to all.”

Madame colored, but there was not light enough for him to perceive it.

“The hand you kissed is the hand of the woman; others kiss it to pay homage. Monsieur, forgive me for having deceived you, you were so easy to deceive.” His eyes met hers steadily.

“I am not Madame simply. I am Stephonia Sylvia Auersperg; the name I assumed was my mother's.” His lack of surprise alarmed her.

“I am well aware of that,” he said. “You are the duchess.”

Something in his tone warned her of a crisis, and she put forth her cunning to avert it. “And, you—you will not love me less?” her voice vibrant as the string of a viol. “I am a princess, but yet a woman. In me there are two, the woman and the princess. The princess is proud and ambitious; to gain her ends she stops at nothing. As a princess she may stoop to trickery and deceit, and step back untouched. But the woman-ah, well; for this fortnight I have been most of all the woman.”

“And all this to me-is a preamble to my dismissal, since my promise remains unfulfilled? Madame, do not think that because fate has willed that my promise should become void, that my conscience acquits me of dishonor. For love of you I have thrown honor to the winds. But do I regret it? No. For I am mad, and being mad, I am not capable of reason. I have broken all those ties which bind a man's respect to himself. I have burned all bridges, but I laugh at that. It is only with the knowledge that your love is mine that I can hold high my head.

“As the princess in you is proud, so is the man in me. A princess? That is

nothing; I love you. Were you the empress of all the Russias, the most unapproachable woman in the world, I should not hesitate to profess my love, to find some means of declaring it to you. I love you. To what further depths can I fall to prove it?" Again he sought the window, and leaned heavily on the sill. He waited, as a man waits for an expected blow.

As she listened a delicious sensation swept through her heart, a sensation elusive and intangible. She surrendered without question. At this moment the Eve in her evaded all questions. Here was a man. The mood which seized her was as novel as this love which asked nothing but love, and the willingness to pay any price; and the desire to test both mood and love to their full strength was irresistible. She was loved for herself alone; hitherto men had loved the woman less and the princess more. To surrender to both mood and love, if only for an hour or a day, to see to what length this man would go at a sign from her.

He was almost her equal in birth; his house was nearly if not quite as old and honored as her own; in his world he stood as high as she stood in hers. She had never committed an indiscretion; passion had never swayed her; until now she had lived by calculation. As she looked at him, she knew that in all her wide demesne no soldier could stand before him and look straight into his eyes. So deep and honest a book it was, so easily readable, that she must turn to its final pages. Love him? No. Be his wife? No. She recognized that it was the feline instinct to play which dominated her. Consequences? Therein lay the charm of it.

"Patience, Monsieur," she said. "Did I promise to be your wife? Did I say that I loved you? *Eh, bien*, the woman, not the princess, made those vows. I am mistress not only of my duchy, but of my heart." She ceased and regarded him with watchful eyes. He did not turn. "Look at me, John!" The voice was of such winning sweetness that St. Anthony himself, had he heard it, must have turned. "Look at me and see if I am more a princess than a woman."

He wheeled swiftly. She was leaning toward him, her face was upturned. No jewel in her hair was half so lustrous as her eyes. From the threaded ruddy ore of her hair rose a perfume like the fabulous myrrhs of Olympus. Her lips were a cup of wine, and her eyes bade him drink, and the taste of that wine haunted him as long as he lived. He made as though to drain the cup, but Madame pushed down his arms, uttered a low, puzzled laugh, and vanished from the room. He was lost! He knew it; yet he did not care. He threw out his arms, dropped them, and settled his shoulders. A smile, a warm, contented smile, came into his face and dwelt there. For another such kiss he would have bartered eternity.

And Madame? Who can say?

CHAPTER XXII. IN WHICH MAURICE RECURS TO OFFENBACH

Midnight; the music had ceased, and the yellow and scarlet lanterns had been plucked from the autumnal hangings. The laughing, smiling, dancing women, like so many Cinderellas, had disappeared, and with them the sparkle of jewels; and the gallant officers had ridden away to the jingle of bit and spur. Throughout the courtly revel all faces had revealed, besides the happiness and lightness of spirit, a suppressed eagerness for something yet to come, an event surpassing any they had yet known.

Promptly at midnight Madame herself had dropped the curtains on the gay scene because she had urgent need of all her military household at dawn, when a picture, far different from that which had just been painted, was to be limned on the broad canvas of her dreams. Darkness and quiet had fallen on the castle, and the gray moon film lay on terrace and turret and tile.

In the guardroom, Maurice, his hands and feet still in pressing cords, dozed in his chair. He had ceased to combat drowsiness. He was worn out with his long ride, together with the chase of the night before; and since a trooper had relieved his mouth of the scarf so that he could breathe, he cared not what the future held, if only he might sleep. It took him a long time to arrive at the angle of comfort; this accomplished, he drifted into smooth waters. The troopers who constituted his guard played cards at a long table, in the center of which were stuck half a dozen bayonets, which served as candlesticks. They laughed loudly, thumped the board, and sometimes sang. No one bothered himself about the prisoner, who might have slept till the crack of doom, as far as they were concerned.

Shortly before the new hour struck, the door opened and shut. A trooper shook the sleeper by the sleeve. Maurice awoke with a start and gazed about, blinking his eyes. Before him he discovered Madame the duchess, Fitzgerald and Mollendorf, behind whom stood the Voiture-verse of a countess. The languor forsook him and he pulled himself together and sat as upright as his bonds would permit him. Something interesting was about to take place.

Madame made a gesture which the troopers comprehended, and they departed. Fitzgerald, with gloomy eyes, folded his arms across his breast, and with one hand curled and uncurled the drooping ends of his mustache; the Colonel frowned and rubbed the gray bristles on his upper lip; the countess twisted and

untwisted her handkerchief; Madame alone evinced no agitation, unless the perpendicular line above her nose could have been a sign of such. This lengthened and deepened as her glance met the prisoner's.

He eyed them all with an indifference which was tinctured with contempt and amusement.

“Well, Monsieur Carewe,” said Madame, coldly, “what have you to say?”

“A number of things, Madame,” he answered, in a tone which bordered the insolent; “only they would not be quite proper for you to hear.”

The Colonel's hand slid from his lip over his mouth; he shuffled his feet and stared at the bayonets and the grease spots on the table.

“Carewe,” said Fitzgerald, endeavoring to speak calmly, “you have broken your word to me as a gentleman and you have lied to me.”

The reply was an expressive monosyllable, “O!”

“Do you deny it?” demanded the Englishman.

“Deny what?” asked Maurice.

“The archbishop,” said Madame, “assumed the aggressive last night. To be aggressive one must possess strength. Monsieur, how much did he pay for those consols? Come, tell me; was he liberal? It is evident that you are not a man of business. I should have been willing to pay as much as a hundred thousand crowns. Come; acknowledge that you have made a bad stroke.” She bent her head to one side, and a derisive smile lifted the corners of her lips.

A dull red flooded the prisoner's cheeks. “I do not understand you.”

“You lie!” Fitzgerald stepped closer and his hands closed menacingly.

“Thank you,” said Maurice, “thank you. But why not complete the melodrama by striking, since you have doubled your fists?”

Fitzgerald glared at him.

“Monsieur,” interposed the countess, “do not forget that you are a gentleman; Monsieur Carewe's hands are tied.”

“Unfortunately,” observed Maurice.

Madame looked curiously at the countess, while Fitzgerald drew back to the table and rested on it.

“I can not comprehend how you dared return,” Madame resumed. “One who watches over my affairs has informed me of your dishonorable act.”

“What do you call a dishonorable act?” Maurice inquired quietly.

“One who breaks his sacred promise!” quickly.

The prisoner laughed maliciously. Madame had answered the question as he hoped she would. “Chickens come home to roost. What do you say to that, my lord?” to the Englishman.

This time it was not the prisoner's cheeks which reddened. Even Madame was forced to look away, for if this reply touched the Englishman it certainly touched her as deeply. Incidentally, she was asking herself why she had permitted the Englishman to possess her lips, hers, which no man save her father had ever possessed before. A kiss, that was all it had been, yet the memory of it was persistent, annoying, embarrassing. In the spirit of play—a spirit whose origin mystified her—she had given the man something which she never could regain, a particle of her pride.

Besides, this was not all; she had in that moment given up her right to laugh at him when the time came; now she would not be able to laugh. She regretted the folly, and bit her lip at the thought of it. Consequences she had laughed at; now their possibilities disturbed her. She had been guilty of an indiscretion. The fact that the Englishman had ruined himself at her beck did not enter her mind. The hour for that had not yet arrived.

Seeing that his neat barb had left them all without answer, Maurice said: “Doubtless the informant who watches over your interests and various other interests of which you have no inkling, was the late Colonel Beauvais? For my part, I wish it was the late Beauvais in the sense in which we refer to the departed ones. But let us give him his true name—Prince Konrad, the last of the Walmodens, a cashiered gamester.”

Only Fitzgerald showed any surprise. Maurice once saw that the others were in the secret. They knew the Colonel. Did they know why he was in Bleiberg? Let them find it out for themselves. He would not lift a finger to aid them. He leaned back and yawned.

“Pardon me,” he said, with mock politeness, “but my hands are tied, and the truth is, I am sleepy.”

“Count,” said Madame, “release him. He will be too well guarded to fear his escaping.”

The Colonel performed this service with alacrity. He honestly admired the young fellow who so seldom lost his temper. Besides, he had a sneaking idea that the lad was being unjustly accused.

Maurice got up and stretched himself. He rubbed his wrists, then sat down and waited for the comedy to proceed.

“So you confess,” said Madame, “that you sold the consols to the archbishop?”

“I, confess?” Maurice screwed up his lips and began to whistle softly:

“Voici le sabre de mon Pere.”

“You deny, then?” Madame was fast losing patience, a grave mistake when one is dealing with a banterer.

Maurice changed the tune:

“J'aime les militaires, Leur uniforme coquet, Leur moustache et leur plumet __”

“Answer!” with a stamp of the foot.

“Je sais ce que je voudrais, Je voudrais etre cantiniere!”...

“Monsieur,” said the pretty countess, after a furtive glance at Madame's stormy eyes, “do you deny?”

The whistle ceased. “Madame, to you I shall say that I neither deny nor affirm. The affair is altogether too ridiculous to treat seriously. I have nothing to say.” The whistle picked up the thread again.

Doubt began to stir in the eyes of the Englishman. He looked at Madame with a kind of indecision, to find that she was glancing covertly at him. His gaze finally rested on Maurice, who had crossed his legs and was keeping time to the music with his foot. Indeed, these were not the violent protestations of innocence he had looked for. This demeanor was not at all in accord with his expectations. Now that he had possessed Madame's lips (though she might never possess the consols), Maurice did not appear so guilty.

“Carewe,” he said, “you have deceived me from the start.”

“Ah! c'est un fameux regiment, Le regiment de la Grande Duchesse!”

“You knew that Madame was her Highness,” went on the Englishman, “and yet you kept that a secret from me. Can you blame me if I doubt you in other respects?”

“Sonnez donc la trompette, Et battez les tambours!”

And the warbler nodded significantly at Madame, whose frown grew still darker.

“Eh! Monsieur,” cried the Colonel, with a protesting hand, “you are out of tune!”

“I should like to know why you returned here,” said Madame. “Either you have some plan, or your audacity has no bounds.”

The whistle stopped again. “Madame, for once we agree. I, too, should like to know why I returned here.”

“Carewe,” said Fitzgerald, “if you will give me your word—”

“Do not waste your breath, Monsieur,” interrupted Madame.

“Will you give me your word?” persisted Fitzgerald, refusing to see the warning in Madame's eyes.

“I will give you nothing, my lord; nothing. I have said that I will answer neither one way nor the other. The accusation is too absurd. Now, Madame, what is your pleasure in regard to my disposition?”

“You are to be locked up, Monsieur,” tartly. “You are too inquisitive to remain at large.”

“My confinement will be of short duration,” confidently.

“It rests with my pleasure alone.”

“Pardon me if I contradict your Highness. I returned here incidentally as a representative of the British ambassador in Vienna; I volunteered this office at the request of my own minister.”

A shade of consternation came into the faces of his audience.

“If nothing is heard of me within two days, an investigation will ensue. It is very droll, but I am here to inquire into the whereabouts of one Lord Fitzgerald, who has disappeared. Telegrams to the four ends of the world have brought no news of his present residence. The archbishop instituted the latter inquiries, because it was urgent and necessary he should know.”

Fitzgerald became enveloped in gloom.

“And your credentials, Monsieur?” said the duchess. “You have them, I presume?”

“I came as a private gentleman; a telegram to my minister in Vienna will bring indorsement.”

“Ah! Then you shall be locked up. I can not accord you recognition; without the essential representations, I see nothing in you but an impertinent meddler. To-morrow evening you shall be conveyed to Brunnstadt, where you will reside for some time, I can assure you. Perhaps on your head will rest the blood of many gallant gentlemen; for within another twenty-four hours I shall declare war against Leopold. This will be the consequence of your disloyalty to your word.” And she moved toward the door, the others imitating her. Fitzgerald, more than any one else, desired to get away.

And one by one they vanished. Once the countess turned and threw Maurice a glance which mystified him; it was half curtained with tears. Presently he was alone. His eye grasped every object. There was not a weapon in sight; only the bayonets on the table, and he could scarcely hope to escape by use of one of these. A carafe of water stood on the table. He went to it and half emptied it. His back was toward the door. Suddenly it opened. He wheeled, expecting to see the troopers. His surprise was great. Beauvais was leaning against the door, a half humorous smile on his lips. The tableau lasted several minutes.

“Well,” said Beauvais, “you do not seem very glad to see me.”

Maurice remained silent, and continued to gaze at his enemy over the tops of the upturned bayonets.

“You are, as I said before, a very young man.”

“I killed a puppet of yours last night,” replied Maurice, with a peculiar grimness.

“Eh? So it was you? However, Kopf knew too much; he is dead, thanks to your service. After all, it was a stroke of war; the princess, whose little rose you have, was to have been a hostage.”

“If she had refused to be a wife,” Maurice replied.

Beauvais curled his mustache.

“I know a good deal more than Kopf.”

“You do, certainly; but you are at a convenient nearness. What you know will be of no use to you. Let us sit down.”

“I prefer to stand. The honor you do me is too delicate.”

“O, you may have no fear.”

“I have none—so long as my back isn't turned toward you.”

Beauvais passed over this. “You are a very good blade; you handle a sword well. That is a compliment, considering that I am held as the first blade in the kingdom. It was only to-day I learned that formerly you had been a cavalryman in America. You have the making of a soldier.”

Maurice bowed, his hand resting near one of the bayonets.

“You are also a soldier of fortune-like myself. You made a good stroke with the archbishop. You hoodwinked us all.”

Maurice did not reply.

“Very well; we shall not dwell on it. You are discreet.”

Maurice saw that Beauvais was speaking in good faith.

“You have something to say; come to it at once, for it is trying to watch you so closely.”

“I will give you—” He hesitated and scratched his chin. “I will give you ten thousand crowns as the price of your silence in regard to the South American affair.”

A sardonic laugh greeted this proposal. “I did not know that you were so cheap. But it is too late.”

“Too late?”

“Doubtless, since by this time the authorities are in possession of the interesting facts.”

“I beg to differ from you.”

“Do as you please,” said Maurice, triumphantly. “I sent an account of your former exploits both to my own government and to the one which you so treacherously betrayed. One or the other will not fail to reach.”

“I am perfectly well aware of that,” Beauvais smiled. He reached into a pocket, and for a moment Maurice expected to see a pistol come forth. But he was needlessly alarmed. Beauvais extracted two envelopes from the pocket and sailed them through the intervening space. They fell on the table. “Put not your trust in hotel clerks,” was the sententious observation. “At least, till you have discovered that no one else employs them. I am well served. The clerk was told to intercept your outgoing post; and there is the evidence. Ten thousand crowns and a safe conduct.”

Maurice picked up the letters mechanically. They were his; the stamps were not canceled, but the flaps were slit. He turned them this way and that, bewildered. He was convinced that he could in no way cope with this man of curious industries, this man who seemed to have a key for every lock, and whom nothing escaped. And the wise old Marshal had permitted him to leave the kingdom without let or hindrance. Perhaps the Marshal understood that Beauvais was a sort of powder train, and that the farther he was away from the mine the better for all concerned.

“You are a great rascal,” Maurice said finally.

“We will waive that point. The matter at present is, how much will it take to buy your silence for the future?”

“And I am sorry I did not kill you when I had the chance,” continued Maurice, as if following a train of thought.

“We never realize how great the opportunity is till it has passed beyond our

reach. Well, how much?”

“I am not in need of money.”

“To be sure; I forgot. But the archbishop could not have given you a competence for life.”

“I choked a few facts out of Kopf,” said Maurice. “You will wear no crown—that is, earthly.”

“And your heavenly one is near at hand,” rejoined Beauvais.

Maurice absently fingered a bayonet.

“You refuse this conciliation on my part?” asked Beauvais.

“Positively.”

“Well, then, if anything happens to you, you will have only yourself to blame. I will leave you to digest that suggestion. Your life hangs in the balance. I will give you till to-morrow morning to make up your mind.”

“Go to the devil!”

“In that, I shall offer you the precedence.” And Beauvais backed out; backed out because Maurice had wrenched loose one of the bayonets.

Maurice flung the bayonet across the room, went back to his chair, and tore his ill-fated letters into ribbons. When this was done he stared moodily at the impromptu candlesticks, and tried to conceive the manner in which Beauvais's threat would materialize.

When the troops returned to their watch, they found the prisoner in a recumbent position, staring at the cracks in the floor, oblivious to all else save his thoughts, which were by no means charitable or humane. They resumed their game of cards. At length Maurice fell into a light slumber. The next time he opened his eyes it was because of a peculiar jar, which continued; a familiar, monotonous jar, such as the tread of feet on the earth creates. Tramp, tramp, tramp; it was a large body of men on the march. Soon this was followed by a lighter and noisier sound—cavalry. Finally, there came the rumbling of heavy metal—artillery. More than an hour passed before these varying sounds grew indistinct.

Maurice was now fully awake. An army had passed the Red Chateau.

CHAPTER XXIII. A GAME OF POKER AND THE STAKES

The next morning Beauvais came for his answer. It was not the answer he had expected.

“So be it,” he replied. “Your government had better appoint your successor at once. Good morning.”

“You will die suddenly some day,” said Maurice.

Beauvais shrugged, and departed.

It was a dreary long day for the prisoner, who saw no one but his jailers. He wondered what time they would start for Brunnstadt. He had never seen Brunnstadt. He hoped the city would interest him. Was he to be disposed of on the road? No, that would scarcely be; there were too many witnesses. In the city prison, then; that was possible. The outlook was not rose-colored. He set to work to challenge each of his jailers, but this did not serve. At five o'clock the bluff old Colonel Mollendorf came in. He dismissed the troopers, who were glad enough to be relieved.

“I'll be responsible for the prisoner from now on,” he said. As soon as he and Maurice were alone he propped his chin and contemplated the sullen face of the prisoner. “Well, my son, I am positive that you have been accused somewhat hastily, but that's the way women have, jumping at conclusions before they read the preface. But you must give Madame credit for being honest in the matter, as well as the others. Beauvais is positive that the move of the archbishop is due to your selling out to him. Come, tell me the story. If you wish, I'll promise not to repeat it. Madame is determined to lock you up in any event.”

There was something so likable about the old warrior that Maurice relented.

“There was nothing in the gun-barrels,” he said. “Some one had entered that room before me. I thought at first that Beauvais had them; but he is the last man in the world to dispose of them to the prelate. But has the archbishop got them? I wish I knew. That's all there is to the story.”

“And her Royal Highness's dog?” slyly.

“What! Did you hear about that?” Maurice flushed.

“There is little going on in Bleiberg that we don't hear about. The princess is

charming. Poor girl!”

“Madame's victory will have a strange odor. Can she not let the king die in peace?”

“My son, she dares not. If that throne were vacant of a king—Let us not talk politics.”

“Madame has no love for me,” said Maurice.

“Madame has no love for any one, if that will give you any satisfaction.”

“It does. My lord the Englishman came near striking me last night.”

“I would not lay that up against him. Madame was the power behind the throne.”

“And the impulse behind Madame?” smiling.

“You are the only man who has ever crossed Madame's path; she can not forget it.”

“And she has put me in a bad light, as far as Fitzgerald is concerned. A man will believe anything a woman says to him, if he loves her.”

“Let us avoid dissertations.”

“What do you want to talk about?”

“Yourself; you are interesting, entertaining, and instructive,” the Colonel answered, laughing. “I never ran across an American who wasn't, and I have met a number. What have you done to Beauvais?”

“It is not exactly what I've done; it is what I know.”

“What do you know?”

Maurice repeated the story.

“And you bested him at the rapiers?” in astonishment.

“Is there anything startling about it?” asked Maurice.

“He has no match hereabout.” The Colonel looked across the table at the smooth-faced boy—he was scarcely else—and reflected. “Why did you give up the army?”

“The army in America doesn't run to good clothes; the officers have to work harder than the privates, and, save in Washington, their social status is nil. Besides, there is too much fighting going on all the time. Here, an officer is always on dress parade.”

“Still, we are always ready. In the past we show up pretty well in history. But to return to Beauvais, it is very embarrassing, very.”

“It will be for him, if I live long enough.”

“Eh?”

“Beauvais has promised to push me off the board, to use his own words. I am wondering how he will do it.”

“Don't let that disturb you; he will do nothing—now. Well, well; it is all a sorry game; and I find that making history has its disadvantages. But I have dandled Madame as a child on my knee, and her wish is law; wherever her fortunes lead, I must follow. She will win; she can not help winning. But I pity that poor devil of a king, who, they say, is now bereft of speech. Ah, had he been a man, I could have gone into this heart and soul.”

“He is on his deathbed. And his daughter, God knows what is in store for her. Prince Frederick is dallying with his peasant girl. The day for the wedding has come and gone, unless he turned up to-day, which is not likely.”

“Which is not likely indeed,” repeated the Colonel sadly. He pulled out his pipe, and smoked for a time. “But let us not judge harshly, says the Book. There may be circumstances over which Prince Frederick has no control. I suppose your sympathies are on the other side of the path. Youth is always quick and generous; it never stops to weigh causes or to reason why. And strange, its judgment is almost always unerring. I am going to share my dinner with you to-night. I'll try to brighten you up a bit.”

“Thanks.”

“Then after dinner we'll play poker until they come to take you to Brunnstadt.”

“What sort of a city is it?”

“You will not see much of it; so I will not take the trouble to tell you that it is slightly inferior to Bleiberg.”

Sure enough, when the dark of evening fell, two servants entered with trays and baskets, and proceeded to lay the table. They put new candles in the bayonets.

“Ha!” said the Colonel; “you have forgotten the wine, rascals!”

“Bring a dozen bottles,” Maurice suggested, having an idea in mind.

“Eh?”

“Remember, Colonel, I've been a soldier and a journalist in a country where they only wash with water. In the summer we have whisky iced, in the winter we have it hot; an antidote for both heat and cold. Ah, Colonel, if you only might sniff a mint julep!”

“A dozen bottles, then,” said the Colonel to the servants, who retired to execute the order.

“How old will it be?” asked Maurice.

“Twice your age, my son. But do not make any miscalculation about my capacity for tokayer.”

“Any miscalculation?” Maurice echoed.

“Yes; if you plan to get me drunk. There are no troopers about, and it would be easy enough for you to slip out if I should lose my head.”

Maurice's laugh had a false ring to it. The Colonel had made a very shrewd guess.

“Well!” said the Colonel, with a gesture toward the table.

They sat down, and both made an excellent dinner. Maurice demolished a roasted pheasant, stuffed with chestnuts, while the Colonel disintegrated a duck. The wine came, and the servants ranged six bottles on the side of each plate. It was done so gravely that Maurice laughed heartily. The wine was the oldest in Madame's cellar, and Maurice wondered at the Colonel's temerity in selecting it. The bottles were of thick glass, fat-bottomed, and ungainly, and Maurice figured that there was more than a pint in each. It possessed a delicious bouquet. The Colonel emptied three bottles, with no more effect than if the wine had been water. Maurice did not appreciate this feat until he had himself emptied a bottle. It was then he saw that the boot was likely to be on the other foot.

He looked at the Colonel enviously; the old soldier was a gulf. He had miscalculated, indeed. But he was fertile in plans, and a more reasonable one occurred to him. He drank another bottle and began to talk verbosely. Later he grew confidential. He told the Colonel a great many things which—had never happened, things impossible and improbable. The Colonel listened soberly, and nodded now and again. Dinner past, they pushed the remains aside and began to play poker, a game at which the Colonel proved to be no novice, much to Maurice's wonder.

“Why, you know the game as thoroughly as an Arizona corporal.”

“I generally spend a month of the winter in Vienna. One of your compatriots taught me the interesting game.” The Colonel shuffled the cards. “It is the great American game, so I am told.”

“O, they play checkers in the New England states,” said Maurice, hiccoughing slightly. “But out west and in all the great cities poker has the way.”

“What have you got?” asked the Colonel, answering a call.

“Jacks full.”

“Takes the pot;” and this Americanism came so naturally that Maurice roared.

“Poker is a great preliminary study to diplomacy,” said the Colonel, as he scrutinized his hand. “You raise it?”

“Yes. One card. Diplomacy? So it is. I played a game with the Chinese ambassador in Washington one night. I was teaching him how to play. I lost all the ready money I had with me. Next day I found out that he was the shrewdest player in the diplomatic circles. Let's make it a jackpot.”

“All the same to me.”

And the game went on. Presently Maurice threw aside his coat. He was feeling the warmth of the wine, but he opened another bottle.

“Is there any truth,” said the Colonel, “about your shooting a man who is found cheating in your country?”

“There is, if you can draw quicker than he.” Maurice glanced at his hand and threw it down.

“What did you have?”

“Nothing. I was trying to fill a straight.”

“So was I,” said the Colonel, sweeping the board. “It's your deal.” He unbottoned his coat.

Maurice felt a shiver of delight. Sticking out of the Colonel's belt was the ebony handle of a cavalry revolver, and he made up his mind to get it. There were no troopers around—the Colonel had admitted as much. He began talking rapidly, sometimes incoherently. In a corner of the room he saw the cords which had been around his wrists and ankles the night before.

“Poker,” said the Colonel, “depends mostly on what you Americans call bluff. A bluff, as I understand it, is making the others think you have them when you haven't, or you haven't got them when you have. In one case you scare them, in the other you fish. You're getting flushed, my son; you'll have a headache to-night; and in an hour you start.”

An hour! There was fever in Maurice's veins, but it was not caused wholly by the heat of the wine. How should he manage it? He must have that revolver.

“Call? What have you got?” asked the Colonel.

“Three kings—no, by George! only a pair. I thought a queen was a king. My head's beginning to get shaky. Colonel, I believe I am getting drunk.”

“I am sure of it.”

Maurice got up and rolled in an extraordinary fashion, but he was careful not to overdo it. He began to sing. The Colonel got up, too, and he was laughing. Maurice accidentally knocked over some empty bottles; he kicked them about.

“Sh!” cried the Colonel, coming around the table; “you'll stampede the horses.”

Maurice staggered toward him, and the Colonel caught him in his arms. Maurice suddenly drew back, and the Colonel found himself looking into the cavernous tube of his own revolver. Not a muscle in his face moved.

“Take off your coat,” said Maurice, quietly.

The Colonel complied. “You are not so very drunk just now.”

“No. It was one of those bluffs when you make them think you haven't them when you have.”

“What next?” asked the Colonel.

“Those cords in the corner.”

The Colonel picked them up, sat down and gravely tied one around his ankles. Maurice watched him curiously. The old fellow was rather agreeable, he thought.

“Now,” the Colonel inquired calmly, “how are you going to tie my hands? Can you hold the revolver in one hand and tie with the other?”

“Hang me!” exclaimed Maurice, finding himself brought to a halt.

“My son,” said the Colonel, “you are clever. In fact, you are one of those fellows who grow to be great. You never miss an opportunity, and more often than not you invent opportunities, which is better still. The truth is, you have proceeded exactly on the lines I thought you would; and thereby you have saved me the trouble of lying or having it out with Madame. I am a victim, not an accomplice; I was forced at the point of a revolver; I had nothing to say. If I had really been careless you would have accomplished the feat just the same. For it was easily accomplished you will admit. 'Tis true I knew you were acting because I expected you to act. All this preamble puzzles you.”

Certainly Maurice's countenance expressed nothing less than perplexity. He stepped back a few paces.

“You have,” continued the Colonel, “perhaps three-quarters of an hour. You will be able to get out of here. You will have to depend on your resources to cross the frontier.”

“Would you just as soon explain to me—”

“It means that a certain young lady, like myself, believes in your innocence.”

“The countess?” Maurice cried eagerly, remembering the look of the night before and the tears which were in it.

“I will not mention any names. Suffice it to say that it was due to her pleading that I consented to play poker—and to let you fall into my arms. Come, to work,” holding out his hands.

First Maurice clasped the hand and wrung it. “Colonel, I do not want you to get into trouble on my account—”

“Go along with you! If you were really important,” in half a banter, “it would be altogether a different matter. As it is, you are more in the way than anything else, only Madame does not see it in that light. Come, at my wrists, and take your handkerchief and tie it over my mouth; make a complete job of it while you're at it.”

“But they'll wonder how I tied you—”

“By the book, the boy is quite willing to sit down and play poker with me till the escort comes! Don't trouble yourself about me; Madame has too much need of me to give me more than a slight rating. Hurry and be off, and remember that Beauvais has promised to push you off the board. Take the near path for the woods and strike northeast. If you run into any sentries it will be your own fault.”

“And the army?”

“The army? Who the devil has said anything about the army?”

“I heard it go past last night.”

“Humph! Keep to the right of the pass. Now, quick, before my conscience speaks above a whisper.”

“I should like to see the countess.”

“You will—if you reach Bleiberg by to-morrow night.”

Maurice needed no further urging, and soon he had the Colonel securely bound and silenced. Next he put on the Colonel's hat and coat, and examined the revolver.

“It was very kind of you to load it, Colonel.”

The Colonel blinked his eyes.

“Au revoir!” said Maurice, as he made for the door. “Vergis mein nicht!” and he was gone.

He crept down the stairs, cautiously entered the court, it was deserted. The moon was up and shining. The gate was locked, but he climbed it without

mishap. Not a sentry was in sight. He followed the path, and swung off into the forest. He was free. Here he took a breathing spell. When he started onward he held the revolver ready. Woe to the sentry who blundered on him! For he was determined to cross the frontier if there was a breath of life in him. Moreover, he must be in Bleiberg within twenty hours.

He was positive that Madame the duchess intended to steal a march, to declare war only when she was within gunshot of Bleiberg. It lay with him to prevent this move. His cup of wrath was full. From now on he was resolved to wage war against Madame on his own account. She had laughed in his face. He pushed on, examining trees, hollows and ditches. Sometimes he put his hand to his ear and listened. There was no sound in the great lonely forest, save for the low murmur of the wind through the sprawling boughs. Shadows danced on the forest floor. Once he turned and shook his clenched fist toward the spot which marked the location of the Red Chateau. He thanked Providence that he was never to see it again. What an adventure to tell at the clubs when he once more regained his Vienna! Would he regain it?

Why did Madame keep Fitzgerald to her strings? He concluded not to bother himself with problems abstract; the main object was to cross the Thalians by a path of his own choosing. When he had covered what he thought to be a quarter of a mile, he mounted a lookout. The highway was about three hundred yards to the left. That was where it should be. He saw no sentries, so he slid down from the tree and resumed his journey. The chestnuts, oaks, and firs were growing thicker and denser. A dead branch cracked with a loud report beneath his feet. With his heart almost in his throat, he lay down and listened. A minute passed; he listened in vain for an answering noise. He got up and went on.

Presently he came upon a cluster of trees which was capable of affording a hiding place for three or four men. He stood still and surveyed it. The moon cast moving shadows on either side of it, but these had no human shape. He laughed silently at his fear, and as he was about to pass the cluster a man stepped out from behind it, his eyes gleaming and his hand extended. He was rather a handsome fellow, but pale and emaciated. He wore a trooper's uniform, and Maurice, swearing softly, concluded that his dash for liberty had come to naught. He, too, held a revolver in his hand, but he dared not raise it. There was a certain expression on the trooper's face which precluded any arguing.

“If you move,” the trooper said, in a mild voice; “if you utter a sound, I'll blow off the top of your cursed head!”

CHAPTER XXIV. THE PRISONER OF THE RED CHATEAU

There the two stood, mottled in the moonshine and shadow, with wild eyes and nostrils distended, the one triumphant, the other raging and impotent. Maurice was growing weary of fortune's discourtesies. He gazed alternately from his own revolver, lying at his feet, to the one in the hand of this unexpected visitant. Only two miles between him and freedom, yet he must turn back. The Colonel had reckoned without Madame, and therefore without reason. This man had probably got around in front of him when he climbed the tree. He turned sullenly and started to walk away, expecting to be followed.

“Halt! Where the devil are you going?”

“Why, back to your cursed chateau!” Maurice answered surlily.

The strange trooper laughed discordantly. “Back to the chateau? I think not. Now, then, right about face—march! Aye, toward the frontier; and if I have to go on alone, so much the worse for you. I've knocked in one man's head; if necessary, I'll blow off the top of yours. You know the way back to Bleiberg, I don't; that is why I want your company. Now march.”

But Maurice did not march; he was filled with curiosity. “Are you a trooper in Madame the duchess's household?” he asked.

“No, curse you!”

“Who are you, then?”

“Come, come; this will not pass. No tricks; you have been following me these twenty minutes.”

“The deuce I have!” exclaimed Maurice, bewildered. “To Bleiberg, is it?”

“And without loss of time. When we cross the Thalians I shall be perfectly willing to parley with you.”

“To Bleiberg, then,” said Maurice. “Since that is my destination, the devil I care how I get there.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you are going to Bleiberg?” surprise mingling with his impatience.

“No place else.”

“Are you a spy?” menacingly.

“No more than you.”

“But that uniform!”

“I fancy yours looks a good deal like it,” Maurice replied testily.

“I confess I never saw you before, and your tongue has a foreign twist,” with growing doubt.

“I am sure I never saw you before, nor want to see you again.”

“What are you doing in that uniform?”

“You have the advantage of me; suppose you begin the introduction?”

“Indeed I have the advantage of you, and propose to maintain it. Who are you and what are you doing here? Answer!”

There was something in the young man's aspect which convinced Maurice that it would be folly to trifle. Besides, he gave to his words an air which distinguishes the man who commands from the man who serves. Maurice briefly acquainted the young man with his name and position.

“And you?” he asked.

“I?” The young man laughed again. It was an unpleasant laugh. “Never mind who I am. Let us go, we are losing time. What is the date?” suddenly.

“The twentieth of September,” answered Maurice.

“My God, a day too late!” The young man had an attack of vertigo, and was obliged to lean against a tree for support. “Are you telling me the truth about yourself?”

“I am. I myself was attempting to dispense with the questionable hospitality of the Red Chateau—good Lord!” striking his forehead.

“What's the matter?”

“Are you the mysterious prisoner of the chateau, the man they have been keeping at the end of the east corridor on the third floor?”

“Yes. And woe to the woman who kept me there! How came you there?”

Maurice, confident that something extraordinary was taking place, related in synopsis his adventures.

“And this cursed Englishman?”

“Will drain a bitter cup. Madame is playing with him.”

“And the king; is he dead?”

“He is dying.” Maurice's wonder grew. What part had this strange young man in this comedy, which was rapidly developing into a tragedy?

“And her Highness—her Royal Highness?” eagerly clutching Maurice by the arm; “and she?”

“She does not murmur, though both her pride and her heart are sore. She has scarcely a dozen friends. Her paralytic father is the theme of ribald jest; and now they laugh at her because the one man who perhaps could have saved the throne has deserted her like a coward. Hang him, I say!”

“What do they say?” The tones were hollow.

“They say he is enamoured of a peasant girl, and dallies with her, forgetting his sacred vows, his promised aid, and perhaps even this, his wedding day.”

“God help him!” was the startling and despairing cry.... He was again seized with the vertigo, and swayed against the tree. For a moment he forgot Maurice, covered his face with his unengaged hand, and sobbed.

Maurice was helpless; he could offer no consolation. This grief he could not understand. He stooped and picked up his revolver and waited.

“I am weak,” said the other man, dashing his hand from his eyes; “I am weak and half starved. It would be better for all concerned if I blew out my brains. The twentieth, the twentieth!” he repeated, dully. “Curse her!” he burst forth; “as there's a God above us, I'll have revenge. Aye, I'll return to the chateau, Madame, that I will, but at the head of ten thousand men!... The twentieth! She will never forgive me; she will think I, too, deserted her!” He broke down again.

“An army!” cried Maurice.

“Aye, and ten thousand men! Come,” taking Maurice by the arm; “come, they may be seeking us. To the frontier. Every hour is precious. To a telegraph office! We shall see if I dally with peasant girls, if I forsake the woman I love!”

“You?” Maurice retreated a step. The silver moonshine became tinged with red.

“I am Prince Frederick, and I love her Highness. I would sacrifice a thousand kingdoms to spare her a moment's sorrow. I have always loved her.”

“What a woman!” Maurice murmured, as the scheme of Madame's flashed through his mind. “What a woman! And she had the audacity to kidnap you, too!”

“And by the most dishonorable device. I and my suite of gentlemen were coming to Bleiberg to make the final arrangements. At Ehrenstein I received a telegram which requested me to visit till the following train a baron who was formerly a comrade of my father. The telegram advised me of his sudden illness, and that he had something important to disclose to me. I bade my gentlemen,

save one, proceed to Bleiberg. My aide and I entered the carriage which was to convey us to the castle. We never reached it. On the road we fell into an ambush, a contrivance of Madame's. I was brought to the chateau. Whatever happened to Hofer, my aide, I do not know. Doubtless he is dead. But Madame shall pay, both in pride and wealth. I will lay waste this duchy of hers, though in the end the emperor crush me. Let us be off."

They stumbled on through the forest. So confused was Maurice that he forgot his usual caution. The supreme confidence of this woman and the flawlessness of her schemes dazed him. So far she had stopped at nothing; where would she end? A Napoleon in petticoats, she was about to appall the confederation. She had suppressed a prince who was heir to a kingdom triple in power and size to the kingdom which she coveted. Madame the duchess was relying on some greater power, else her plans were madness.

As for the prince, he had but one thought: to reach Bleiberg. The confinement, together with mental suffering, anxiety and forced inaction, began to tell on him. Twice he tripped and fell, and Maurice had to return to assist him to his feet. However could they cross the mountains, a feat which needed both courage and extreme physical endurance?

"I am so weak," said the prince, "so pitiably weak! I thought to frighten the woman by starving myself, poor fool that I was!"

And they went on again. Maurice was beginning to feel the effect of his wine-bibbing; he had a splitting headache.

"Silence!" he suddenly whispered, sinking and dragging the prince with him.

A hundred yards in advance of them stood a sentinel, his body bent forward and a hand to his ear. Presently he, too, lay down. Five minutes passed. The sentinel rose, and convinced that his ears had tricked him, resumed his lonely patrol. He disappeared toward the west, while the fugitives made off in an easterly direction. Maurice was a soldier again. Every two or three hundred yards he knelt and pressed his ear to the cold, damp earth and waited for a familiar jar. The prince watched these movements with interest.

"You have been a soldier?" he asked.

"Yes. Perhaps we had better strike out for the mountains. The sentry line can not extend as far as this."

But now they could see the drab peaks of the mountains which loomed between the partly dismantled trees. Beyond lay the kingdom. Would they ever reach it? There was only one pass; this they dared not make. Yet if they attempted to cross the mountains in a deserted place, they might very easily get

lost; for in some locations it was fully six miles across the range, and this, with the ups and downs and windings in and out, might lengthen into twenty miles. They struck out toward the mountains, and after half an hour they came upon an unforeseen obstacle. They sat down in despair. This obstacle was the river, not very, wide, but deep, turbulent and impassable.

“We shall have to risk the pass,” said Maurice, gloomily; “though heaven knows how we are to get through it. We have ten shots between us.”

They followed the river. The roar of it deadened all other sounds. For a mile they plodded on, silent, watchful and meditative. The prince thought of his love; Maurice tried to forget his. For him the romance had come to an end, its logical end; and it was now only a question of getting back to the world to which he belonged and remaining there. He recalled a line he had read somewhere: a deep love, gashes into the soul as a scar is hewn upon the body and remains there during the whole life...

“Look!” cried the prince. He pointed toward the west.

Maurice came out of his dream and looked. Some distance west of the pass, perhaps half a mile from where they stood, Maurice saw the twinkle of a hundred campfires. It was Madame's army in bivouac.

“What does this mean?” asked the prince.

“It means that the duchess is on the eve of striking a blow for her crown,” answered Maurice. “And how are we to make the pass, which is probably filled with soldiers? If only we could find a boat! Ah! what would your Highness call this?” He pointed to a thread-like line of bare earth which wended riverward.

“A sheep or cattle path,” said the prince, after a close inspection.

“Then the river is perhaps fordable here!” exclaimed Maurice jubilantly. “At any rate, we'll try it; if it gets too deep, we'll come back.”

He walked to the water's edge, studied the black whirling mass, shrugged and stepped in. The prince came after him, unhesitatingly. Both shivered. The water was intensely cold. But the bed was shallow, and the river never mounted above the waist. However, in midstream it rushed strongly and wildly along, and all but carried them off their feet. They arrived in safety at the opposite shore, weak and cold in body, but warm in spirit. They lay on the grass for several moments, breathing heavily. They might now gain the pass by clambering up the mountain and picking their way down from the other side. It was not possible that Madame's troopers had entered into the kingdom.

“I am giving out,” the prince confessed reluctantly. “Let us make as much

headway as we can while I last.”

They stood up. Now the moon fell upon them both; and they viewed each other with no little curiosity. What the prince saw pleased him, for he possessed a good eye. What Maurice saw was a frank, manly countenance, youthful, almost boyish. The prince did not look to be more than three and twenty, if that; but there was a man's determination in his jaw. This jaw pleased Maurice, for it confided to him that Madame had now something that would cause her worry.

“I put myself in your care,” said the prince, offering his hand. “I am not equal to much. A man can not see his wedding day come and go without him, helpless to prevent it, and not have the desire to sit down and weep and curse. You will see nothing but the unfavorable side of me for the next dozen hours.”

“I'm not altogether amiable myself,” replied Maurice with a short laugh. “Let us get out of the moonlight,” he added; “we are somewhat conspicuous, and besides, we should keep moving; this cold is paralyzing. Is your Highness equal to the climbing?”

“Equal or not, lead the way. If I fall I'll call you.”

And the weary march began again; over boulders, through tangles of tough shrubbery, up steep inclines, around precipices, sometimes enveloped in mists, yet still they kept on. Often the prince fell over ragged stones, but he picked himself up without assistance; though he swore some, Maurice thought none the less of him for that bit of human weakness. The cold was numbing, and neither felt the cuts and bruises.

After two hours of this fatiguing labor they arrived upon a small plateau, about two thousand feet above the valley. The scene was solemn and imposing. The world seemed lying at their feet. The chateau, half hidden in the mist, sparkled like an opal. Maurice scowled at it. To the prince the vision was as reviving as a glass of wine. He threatened it with his fist, and plunged on with renewed vigor. There are few sensations so stimulating as the thought of a complete revenge. The angle of vision presently changed, and the historic pile vanished. Maurice never saw the Red Chateau again.

Little more in the way of mishap befell them; and when the moon had wheeled half way down from the zenith, the kingdom lay below them. A descent of an hour's duration brought them into the pass. Maurice calculated that nearly five hours had passed since he left the chateau; for the blue was fading in the east. The phantom vitality of the prince now forsook him; his legs refused their offices, and he sank upon a boulder, his head in his hands. Maurice was not much better; but the prince had given him the burden of responsibility, and he

was determined to hold up under it.

“If your Highness will remain here,” he said, “I will fetch assistance, for the barrack can not be far off.”

The prince nodded and Maurice tramped away. But the miniature barrack and the quaint stone customs house both were wrapt in gloom and darkness. Maurice investigated. Both buildings were deserted; there was no sign of life about. He broke a window, and entered the customs office. Remembering that Colonel Mollendorf smoked, he searched the inner pocket of his coat. He drew forth a box of wax matches, struck one and looked about. A struggle had taken place. Evidences were strewn on the floor. The telegraph operator's table had been smashed into bits, the instrument twisted out of shape, the jars broken and the wires cut. Like indications of a disturbance were also found in the barrack.

Maurice began to comprehend. Madame's troopers had crossed the frontier, but they had returned again, taking with them the handful of troopers belonging to the king. It was plain that the object of this skirmish had been to destroy communications between Bleiberg and the frontier. Madame desired to effect a complete surprise, to swoop down on the capital before it could bring a large force into the field.

There is an unwritten law that when one country intends to wage war against its neighbor a formal declaration shall be made. But again Madame had forsaken the beaten paths. More than three weeks had passed since the duchy's representative in Bleiberg had been discredited and given his passports. At once the duchess had retaliated by discrediting the king's representative in Brunnstadt. Ordinarily this would have been understood as a mutual declaration of war. Instead, both governments ignored each other, one suspiciously, the other intentionally. All of which is to say, the gage of war had been flung, but neither had stooped to pick it up.

Perhaps Madame expected by this sudden aggressiveness to win her fight with as little loss of blood as possible, which in justice to her was to her credit. Again, a declaration of war openly made might have moved the confederation to veto it by coercion. To win without loss of life would leave the confederation powerless to act. Therefore it will be seen that Madame was not only a daring woman, but a general of no mean ability.

This post was an isolated one; between it and Bleiberg there was not even a village. The main pass from the kingdom into the duchy was about thirty miles east. Here was a small but lively city named Coberg, a railway center, garrisoned by one thousand troops. At this pass Madame's contemplated stroke of war

would have been impossible. The railway ran directly from Coberg to Brunnstadt, fifty miles south of the frontier. A branch of the railway ran from Brunnstadt to a small town seven miles south of the Red Chateau, which accounts for the ease with which Madame's troops had reached the isolated pass. It was now likely that Madame would arrive before Bleiberg ere her enemies dreamed of the stroke. Maurice could see how well the traitorous administration had played into Madame's hands. Here was the one weak spot, and they had allowed it to remain thus weak.

“The kingdom is lost,” thought Maurice. “His Highness and I may as well return to the chateau, for all the good our escape will do us. Hang them all!”

He began to forage, and discovered a bottle full of peach brandy. He drank half the contents, reserving the remainder for the prince. As he lowered the bottle there came a sound which caused him almost to lose hold of the vigorous tonic. The sound he heard was the shrill whinney of a horse. He pocketed the bottle and dashed out to the stables. To his joy several horses stamped restlessly in the stalls. The attacking party had without doubt come on foot. He led out two, saddled and bridled them and returned to the prince, who had fallen asleep. Maurice roused him.

“To Bleiberg, your Highness,” he cried, at the same time offering the bottle, which the prince did not hesitate to empty.

“Ha!” staggering to his feet. “Where are the men?”

Maurice explained the cause of their absence. The prince swore, and climbed with difficulty into the saddle.

“Thank God,” he said, as they galloped away, “we shall be there first.”

“Adieu, Madame!” Maurice cried, airily. He was free.

“To our next meeting, duchess!” The prince, too, was free, but he thirsted for a full revenge.

They had been on the way but a short time when Maurice lifted his arm.

“Look!”

The prince raised his head. It was dawn, yellow and cold and pure.

They fell into silence; sometimes Maurice caught himself counting the beat of the hoofs and the variation of sounds, as when they struck sand or slate, or crossed small wooden bridges. Here and there he saw peasants going into the fields to begin the long, long day of toil. The saddle on which he sat had been the property of a short man, for the stirrups were too high, and the prince's were too low. But neither desired to waste time to adjust them. And so they rode with

dangling legs and bodies sunken in the saddles; mute, as if by agreement.

They had gone perhaps ten miles when they perceived a horse flying toward them, half a mile away. The rider was not yet visible. They felt no alarm, but instinctively they drew together. Nearer and nearer came the lonely horseman, and as the distance lessened into some hundred yards they discerned the flutter of a gown.

“A woman!” exclaimed Maurice. “And alone this time of morning!”

“Eh?” cried the prince; “and heading for the duchy? Let us wait.”

They drew up to the side of the highway. The woman came fearlessly on, her animal's head down and his tail flaring out behind. On, on; abreast of them; as she flew past there was a vision of a pale, determined face, a blond head bared to the chill wind. She heeded not their challenge; it was a question whether or not she heard it. They stood watching her until she and her horse dwindled into a mere moving speck, finally to become lost altogether in a crook of the road.

“I should like to know what that means,” said Maurice.

“It is very strange,” the prince said, musingly. “I have seen that woman before. She is one of the dancers at the opera.”

“Mayhap she has a lover on the other side.”

“Mayhap. Let us be on. There's the sun, and we are a good thirteen miles away!” and the prince slapped the neck of his horse, which bounded forward.

This tiring pace they maintained until they mounted the hill from which they could see the glittering spires of the city, and the Werter See as it flashed back the sunlight.

“Bleiberg!” Maurice waved his hand.

“Thanks to you, that I look on it.”

It was ten o'clock when they passed under the city gates.

“Monsieur, will you go with me to the palace?” asked the prince.

“If your Highness will excuse me,” said Maurice; “no, I should be in the way; and besides I am dead for want of sleep.”

“I shall never sleep,” grumbled the prince, “till I have humbled that woman. And you? Have you no rankle in your heart? Have you no desire to witness that woman's humiliation?”

“Your Highness, I belong to a foreign country.”

“No matter; be my aide. Come; I offer you a complete revenge for the treatment you have received at Madame's hands. Your government shall never

know.”

Maurice studied the mane of his horse. Suddenly he made a gesture. This gesture consigned to the four winds his diplomatic career. “I accept,” he said. “You will find me at the Continental. I confess that I have no love for this woman. She has robbed me of no little conceit.”

“To the palace, then; to the palace! And this hour to-morrow we, you and I, will drink to her Royal Highness at the Red Chateau. To the palace!”

Up the Strasse they raced, through the lower town to the upper, and down the broad asphalt to the palace gates. The prince rushed his horse to the very bars and shook them in his wild impatience.

“Ho! open, open!” he called.

Several cuirassiers lounged about. At the sight of these two hatless, bedraggled men storming the gates, they ran forward with drawn swords and angry cries. Lieutenant Scharfenstein was among them. At second glance he recognized Maurice, who hailed him.

“Open, Lieutenant,” he cried; “it is his Highness, Prince Frederick!”

The bars came down, the gates swung in.

“Go and sleep,” said the prince to Maurice; “I will send an orderly for you when the time comes.” And with this he dashed up the driveway to the main entrance of the palace, leaped from his horse and disappeared.

Maurice wheeled and drove leisurely to the Continental, leaving the amazed cuirassiers gaping after him. He experienced that exuberance of spirits which always comes with a delightful day dream. He forgot his weariness, his bruises. To mingle directly in the affairs of kings and princes, to be a factor among factors who surround and uphold thrones, seemed so at variance with his republican learning that he was not sure that all this was not one long dream—Fitzgerald and his consols, the meeting with the princess, the adventures at Madame's chateau, the duel with Beauvais, the last night's flight with the prince across the mountains! Yes; he had fallen asleep somewhere and had been whisked away into a kind of fairyland. Every one was in trouble just now, as they always are in certain chapters of fairy tales, but all would end happily, and then—he would wake.

Meanwhile the prince entered the palace and was proceeding up the grand corridor, when a bared sword stayed his progress.

“Monsieur,” said von Mitter, “you have lost your way. You can not enter here.”

“I?” a haughty, threatening expression on his pale face. “Are you sure?”

Von Mitter fell back against the wall and all but lost hold of his saber. “Your Highness?” he gasped, overcome.

“Even so!” said the prince. “The archbishop! the Marshal! Lead me to them at once!”

Von Mitter was too much the soldier not to master his surprise at once. He saluted, clicked his heels and limped toward the throne room. He stopped at the threshold, saluted again, and, in a voice full of quavers, announced:

“His Highness Prince Frederick of Carnavia.”

He stepped aside, and the prince pushed past him into the throne room. At this dramatic entrance there rose from the archbishop, the Marshal, the princess, the Carnavian ambassador, from all the court dignitaries, a cry of wonder and astonishment.

“His Highness!”

“Aye!” cried the prince, brokenly, for his joy at seeing the princess nigh overcame him. “I have been a prisoner of Madame's, who at this moment is marching on Bleiberg with an army four thousand strong!” And stumblingly he related his misadventures.

The Marshal did not wait until he had done, nor did the new Colonel of the cuirassiers; both rushed from the room. The archbishop frowned; while the princess and the court stared at the prince with varying emotions. Before the final word had passed his lips, he approached her Highness, fell on his knee and raised her hand to his lips. He noticed not how cold it was.

“Thank God, Mademoiselle,” he said, “that once more I look into your eyes. And if one wedding day is gone—well, there is yet time for another!” He, rose, and proudly before them all he drew her toward him and kissed her cheek. It was his right; she was, the light of all his dreams, at once his bride-to-be and lady-love. But in his joy and eagerness he did not see how pale she grew at the touch of his lips, nor how the lids of her eyes trembled and fell.

Next the prince recounted Maurice's adventures, how he became connected with those at the chateau, even Fitzgerald's fall from grace. The indignation and surprise which was accorded this recital was unbounded.

The brown eyes of the princess filled. In a moment she had traversed the space of ten years to a rare September noon, when a gray-haired old man had kissed her hand and praised her speech. A young dog stood beside her, ready for a romp in the park. Across the path sat her father, who was smiling, and who

would never smile again. How many times had her girlish fancy pictured the son of that old man! How many times had she dreamed of him—aye, prayed for him! The room grew dark, and she pressed her hand over her heart. To her the future was empty indeed. There was nothing left but the vague perfume of the past, the faint incense of futile, childish dreams. To stand on the very threshold of life, and yet to see no joy beyond! She struggled against the sob which rose, and conquered it.

“To arms, Messieurs, to arms!” cried the prince, feverishly. “To arms!”

The archbishop stepped forward and took the prince's hand in his own.

“God wills all things,” he said, sadly, “and perhaps he has willed that your Highness should come too late!” And that strange, habitual smile was gone—forever. No one could fathom the true significance of this peculiar speech.

“But 'aux armes' was taken up, and spread throughout the city.

CHAPTER XXV. THE FORTUNES OF WAR

War! The whole city was in tumult. The guests were leaving the hotels, the timid were preparing to fly, and shopkeepers were putting up their blinds and hiding their valuables; the parks and cafes were deserted. The railway booking office was crowded, and a babel of tongues quarreled for precedence. The siege of Paris was but yesterday's news, and tourists did not propose to be walled in from the outer world. Some looked upon the scene as a comic opera; others saw the tragedy of men snarling at one another's throats.

Two hundred gendarmes patrolled the streets; for in war time the dregs of a city float to the surface. Above the foreign legations flags rose, offering protection to all those who possessed the right to claim it. Less than four thousand troops had marched from the city that day, but these were the flower of the army, consisting of two thousand foot, six cannon and twelve hundred horse. Europe has always depended largely on the cavalry, which in the past has been a most formidable engine in warfare.

With gay plumes and banners, glittering helmets and flashing cuirasses, they had gone forth to meet Madame and drive her back across the range. They had made a brave picture, especially the royal cuirassiers, who numbered three hundred strong, and who were to fight not only for glory, but for bread. Fifty of them had been left behind to guard the palaces.

In the royal bedchamber the king lay, all unconscious of the fate impending. The brain had ceased to live; only a feeble pulse stirred irregularly. The state physician shook his head, and, from time to time, laid his fingers on the unfeeling wrist. To him it was a matter of a few hours.

But to the girl, whose face lay hidden in the counterpane, close to one of those senseless hands, to her it was a matter of a breaking heart, of eyes which could be no longer urged to tears, the wells having dried up. Dear God, she thought, how cruel it was! Her tried and trusted friend, the one playmate of her childhood, was silently slipping out of her life forever. Ah, what to her were crowns and kingdoms, aye, and even war? Her father dead, what mattered it who reigned? How she prayed that he might live! They would go away together, and live in peace and quiet, undisturbed by the storms of intrigue.... It was not to be; he was dying. She would be the wife of no man; her father, hovering in spirit above her, would read her heart and understand. Dead, he would ask no sacrifice of her.

Henceforth only God would be her king, and she would worship him in some sacred convent.

The old valet, who had served his master from boyhood, stood in the anteroom and fumbled his lips, his faded eyes red with weeping. He was losing the only friend he had. Elsewhere the servants wandered about restlessly, waiting for news from the front, to learn if they, too, were to join in the mad flight from the city. Few servants love masters in adversity. Self-interest is the keynote to their existences.

In the east wing three men were holding a whispered consultation. The faces of two were pale and deep-lined; the face of the third expressed a mixture of condolence and triumph. These three gentlemen were the archbishop, the chancellor and the Austrian ambassador. History has not taken into account what passed between these three men, but subsequent events proved that it signified disaster to one who dreamed of conquest and of power.

Said the ambassador, rising: “After what has been said, his Imperial Majesty will, I can speak authoritatively, further discredit Walmoden; for I have this day received information from a reliable source which precludes any rehabilitation of that prince. My deepest sympathies are with her Highness; his Majesty highly honored her unfortunate father. Permit me to bid you good day, for you know that the matter under my hand needs my immediate attention.”

When he had gone the prelate said: “My friend, our services to the kingdom are nearly over.”

“We are lost!” replied the chancellor. “The king is happy, indeed.”

“I find,” said the prelate, “that we have been lost for ten years. Had this Englishman proved true, it would not have mattered; had Prince Frederick arrived in time, still it would not have mattered. But above all, I was determined that Madame the duchess should not triumph. The end was written ten years ago. How invincible is fate! How incontestible its decrees!”

In the lower town the students were preparing a riot, which was to take place that night. Old Stuler's was thronged. Stuler himself looked on indifferently, even listlessly. He had heard of Kopf's death.

It was half after five of the afternoon. Six miles beyond the Althofen bridge, in all thirteen miles from Bleiberg, a long, low cloud of dust hung over the king's highway. This cloud of dust was caused by the hurried, rhythmic pad-pad of human feet, the striking of hoofs and the wheels of cannon. It marked the progress of an army. To the great surprise of the Marshal, the prince and the staff, they had pushed thus far during the afternoon without seeing a sign of the

enemy. Was Madame asleep? Was she so confident her projects were unknown that she had chosen night as the time of her attack? Night, indeed, when the strength of her forces would be a matter of conjecture to the assaulted, who at the suddenness of her approach would succumb to panic! The prince was jubilant and hopeful. He had no doubt that they would arrive at the pass just as Madame was issuing forth. This meant an easy victory, for once the guns covered the narrow pass, though Madame's army were ten times as strong, its defeat was certain. A small force might hold it in check for hours.

A squadron of cuirassiers had been sent forward to reconnoiter, and as yet none had returned with alarms. The road had many windings, and was billowed frequently with hills, and ran through small forests. Only the vast blue bulk of the mountains remained ever in view.

“We shall drink at the Red Chateau to-night,” said the prince, gaily, to Maurice.

“That we shall,” replied Maurice; “and the best in the cellars.”

Only the Marshal said nothing; he knew what war was. In his youth he had served in Transylvania, and he was not minded to laugh and jest. Then, too, there was injustice on both sides. Poor devil! as his thoughts recurred to the king. Touched for the moment by the wings of ambition, which is at best a white vulture, he had usurped another's throne, and to this end! But he was less answerable than the archbishop, who had urged him.

Occasionally he glanced back at the native troops, the foot, the horse, the artillery, and scowled. From these his glance wandered to the cold, impassive face of General Kronau, who rode at his side, and he rubbed his nose. Kronau had been a favorite of Albrecht's... How would he act? In truth, the Marshal's thoughts were not altogether pleasant. Some of these men surrounding him, exchanging persiflage, might never witness another sunset. For, while the world would look upon this encounter as one looks upon a comedy, for some it would serve as tragedy. Often he lent his ear to the gay banter of the young American, and watched the careless smile on his face. What was he doing here? Why was he risking his life for no cause whatever, an alien, in natural sympathy neither with the kingdom nor with the duchy? A sad, grim smile parted his lips.

“O, the urbanity of the young and the brave!” he murmured.

Maurice felt the old familiar exhilaration—the soldier's exhilaration—quicken the beat of his pulse. He did not ask himself why he was here; he knew why. A delightful flower had sprung up in his heart, and fate had nipped it. Whither this new adventure would lead him he cared not. From now on life for him must be

renewed by continual change and excitement. Since no one depended on him, his life was his to dispose of as he willed. Friends? He laughed. He knew the world too well. He himself was his best friend, for he had always been true to himself.

He might be shot, but he had faced that possibility before. Besides, to-day's experience would be new to him. He had never witnessed a battle in the open, man to man, in bright, resplendent uniforms. A ragged, dusty troop of brown-skinned men in faded blue, with free and easy hats, irregular of formation, no glory, no brilliancy, skirmishing with outlawed white men and cunning Indians, that was the extent of his knowledge by experience. True, these self-same men in dingy blue fought with a daring such as few soldiers living possessed; but they lacked the ideal picturesqueness which made this army so attractive.

The sharp edges of his recent fatigue were not yet dulled, but his cuirass sat lightly upon him, the sound of the dangling saber at his side smote pleasantly his ear, and the black Mecklenberg under him was strong and active. To return to Madame's chateau in the guise of a conqueror was a most engaging thought. She had humbled his self-love, now to humble hers! He no longer bothered himself about Beauvais, whose case he had placed in the hands of the Austrian ambassador.

Gay and debonair he rode that late September afternoon. No man around him had so clear an eye nor so constant a vivacity. Since he had nothing but his life to lose, he had no fear. Let the theater be full of light while the play lasted, and let the curtain fall to a round of huzzas! For a few short hours ago he had kissed a woman's hand and had looked into her sad brown eyes. “Why you do this I do not know, nor shall I ask. Monsieur, my prayers go with you.” Was not that an amulet? His diplomatic career! He fell to whistling.

“Ah! que j'aime les militaires!”

More than once the prince felt the sting of envy in his heart at the sight of this embodiment of supreme nonchalance. It spoke of a healthy salt in the veins, a salt such as kings themselves can not always boast of. A foreigner, a republican? No matter; a gallant man.

“Monsieur,” he said impulsively, “you shall always possess my friendship, once we are well out of this.”

“Thanks, your Highness,” replied Maurice, and laughing; “the after-thought is timely!”

The sun lay close to the western rim of hills; an opal sky encompassed the earth; the air was balmy.

“The French call this St. Martin's summer,” said Maurice. “In my country we

call it Indian summer—ah!” lifting in his stirrups.

The army was approaching a hill, when suddenly a whirlwind of dust rolled over the summit, and immediately a reconnoitering patrol came dashing into view, waving their sabers aloft.... The enemy was less than a mile away, and advancing rapidly.

To anticipate. Madame the duchess had indeed contemplated striking the blow at night. That morning, like the brave Amazon she was, she had pitched her tent in the midst of her army, to marshal and direct its forces. It was her intention to be among the first to enter Bleiberg; for she was a soldier's daughter, and could master the inherent fears of her sex.

That same morning a woman entered the lines and demanded an audience. What passed between her and Madame the duchess others never knew. She had also been apprised of the prisoners' escape, but, confident that they would not be able to make a crossing, she disdained pursuit. The prince had missed his wedding day; he was no longer of use to her. As to the American, he would become lost, and that would be the end of him.

But the Englishman.... He was conscience eternally barking at her heels. The memory of that kiss still rankled in her mind, and not an hour went by in which she did not chide herself for the folly. How to get rid of him perplexed her. Here he was, in the uniform of a Lieutenant-Colonel, ready to go to any lengths at a sign from her. There was something in her heart which she had not yet analyzed. First of all, her crown; as to her heart, there was plenty of time in which to study that peculiar and unstable organ. The possibility of the prince's arriving in Bleiberg before her in no way disturbed her. Whenever her attack was made, failure would not attend it. She broke camp at two o'clock and took the road leisurely toward Bleiberg.

Thus, the two armies faced each other comparatively in the open. A battle hung in the air.

The king's forces came to an abrupt halt. Orderlies dashed to and fro. The artillery came rumbling and creaking to the front, wheeled, the guns unlimbered and ranged so as to enfilade the road. The infantry deployed to right and left while the cavalry swung into position on the flanks. All this was accomplished with the equanimity of dress parade. Maurice could not control his admiration. Madame, he thought, might win her crown, but at a pretty cost.

The Marshal and the staff posted themselves on the right breast of the hill, from whence, by the aid of binoculars, they could see the enemy. From time to time General Kronau nervously smoothed his beard, formed his lips into words,

but did not utter them, and glanced slyly from the corner of his eye at the Marshal, who was intent on the enemy's approach. Maurice was trying with naked eye to pierce the forest and the rolling ground beyond, and waiting for the roar of the guns.

Orders had been issued for the gunners to get the range and commence firing; but as the gunners seemed over long in getting down to work, Maurice gazed around impatiently. The blood rushed into his heart. For this is what he saw: the infantry leaning indolently on their guns, their officers snipping the grasses with their swords; the cuirassiers hidden in the bulk of the native cavalry; artillerymen seated carelessly on the caissons, and the gunners smoking and leaning against the guns. All action was gone, as if by magic; nothing but a strange tableau remained! Moreover, a troop of native cavalry, which, for no apparent reason, had not joined the main body, had closed in on the general staff. Appalled by a sudden thought, Maurice touched the prince, who lowered his glasses and turned his head. Bewilderment widened his eyes, and the flush on his cheeks died away. He, too, saw.

“Devil's name!” the Marshal burst forth, “why don't the blockheads shoot? The enemy—” He stopped, his chin fell, for, as he turned, a single glance explained all to him. The red on his face changed into a sickly purple, and the glasses slipped from his hands and broke into pieces on the stony ground.

“Marshal,” began General Kronau, “I respect your age and valiant services. That is why we have come thirteen miles. You may keep your sword, and also Monsieur the prince. For the present you are prisoners.”

For a moment the Marshal was stupefied. His secret fears had been realized. Suddenly a hoarse oath issued from his lips, he dragged his saber from the scabbard, raised it and made a terrible sweep at the General. But the stroke fell on a dozen intervening blades, and the Marshal's arms were held and forced to his sides.

“Kronau... you?” he roared. “Betrayed! You despicable coward and traitor! You—” But speech forsook him, and he would have fallen from the horse but for those who held his arms.

“Traitor?” echoed Kronau, coolly. “To what and to whom? I am serving my true and legitimate sovereign. I am also serving humanity, since this battle is to be bloodless. It is you who are the traitor. You swore allegiance to the duke, and that allegiance is the inheritance of the daughter. How have you kept your oath?”

But the Marshal was incapable of answer. One looking at him would have said that he was suffering from a stroke of apoplexy.

“I admit,” went on the General, not wholly unembarrassed, “that the part I play is not an agreeable one to me, but it is preferable to the needless loss of human life. The duchess was to have entered Bleiberg at night, to save us this present dishonor, if you persist in calling it such. But his Highness, who is young, and Monseigneur the archbishop, who dreams of Richelieu, made it impossible. No harm is intended to any one.”

The prince, white and shivering as if with ague, broke his sword on the pommel of the saddle and hurled the pieces at Kronau, who permitted them to strike him.

“God's witness,” the prince cried furiously, “but your victory shall be short-lived. I have an army, trusty to the last sword, and you shall feel the length of its arm within forty-eight hours.”

“Perhaps,” said Kronau, shrugging.

“It is already on the way.”

“Your Highness forgets that Carnavia belongs to the confederation, and that the king, your father, dare not send you troops without the consent of the emperor, which, believe me, will never be given;” and he urged his horse down the slope.

The army of the duchess had now gained the open. The advance was composed of cavalry, which came along the road with wings on either side, and with great dash and splendor.

A noisy cheer arose, to be faintly echoed by the oncoming avalanche of white horses and dazzling blue uniforms.

This was the incident upon which Madame the duchess relied.

With rage and chagrin in his heart, Maurice viewed the scene. The knell of the Osians had been struck. He gazed forlornly at the cuirassiers; they at least had come to sell their lives honestly for their bread. Presently the two armies came together; all was confusion and cheers. Kronau approached the leader of the cavalry.... Maurice was greatly disturbed. He leaned toward the prince.

“Your Highness,” he whispered, “I am going to make a dash for the road.”

“Yes, yes!” replied the prince, intuitively. “My God, yes! Warn her to fly, so that she will not be compelled to witness this cursed woman's triumph. Save her that humiliation. Go, and God be with you, my friend! We are all dishonored. The Marshal looks as if he were dying.”

The native troopers, in their eagerness to witness the meeting between Kronau and the former Colonel of the cuirassiers, had pushed forward. A dozen,

however, had hemmed in the Marshal, the prince and Maurice. But these were standing in their stirrups. Maurice gradually brought his horse about so that presently he was facing north. Directly in front of him was an opening. He grasped his saber firmly and pressed the spurs. Quick as he was, two sabers barred his way, but he beat them aside, went diagonally down the hill, over the stone wall and into the road.

While he was maneuvering for this dash, one man had been eying him with satisfaction. As the black horse suddenly sank from view behind the hill, Beauvais, to the astonishment of Kronau, drew his revolver.

“There goes a man,” he cried, “who must not escape. He is so valuable that I shall permit no one but myself to bring him back!” And the splendid white animal under him bounded up the hill and down the other side.

Beauvais had a well-defined purpose in following alone. He was determined that one Maurice Carewe should not bother anyone hereafter; he knew too much.

The white horse and the black faded away in the blur of rising dust.

CHAPTER XXVI. A PAGE FROM TASSO

For a long time Maurice rode with his head almost touching the coal black mane of his gallant Mecklenberg. Twice he glanced back to see who followed, but the volume of dust which rolled after him obscured all behind. He could hear the far-off hammer of hoofs, but this, mingling with the noise of his own horse, confused him as to the number of pursuers. He reasoned that he was well out of range, for there came no report of firearms. The road presently described a semi-circle, passing through a meager orchard. Once beyond this he turned again in the saddle.

“Only one; that is not so bad as it might be. It is one to one.” But a second glance told him who this solitary pursuer was. “The devil!” he laughed—as one of Tasso's heroes might have laughed!—“The devil! how that man loves me!” He was confident that the white horse would never overtake the black.

On they flew, pursued and pursuer. At length Maurice bit his lip and frowned. The white horse was growing larger; the distance between was lessening, slowly but certainly.

“Good boy!” he said encouragingly to the Mecklenberg. “Good boy!”

Deserted farm houses swept past; hills rose and vanished, but still the white horse crept up, up, up. The distance ere another half mile had gone had diminished to four hundred yards; from four hundred it fell to three hundred, from three hundred to two hundred. The Mecklenburg was doing glorious work, but the marvelous stride of the animal in the rear was matchless. Suddenly Maurice saw a tuft of the red plume on his helmet spring out ahead of him and sail away, and a second later came the report. One, he counted; four more were to follow. Next a stream of fire gassed along his cheek, and something warm trickled down the side of his neck. Two, he counted, his face now pale and set. The third knocked his scabbard into the air.

Quickly he shifted his saber to the left, dropped the reins and drew his own revolver. He understood. He was not to be taken prisoner. Beauvais intended to kill him offhand. Only the dead keep secrets. Maurice flung about and fired three consecutive times. The white horse reared, and the shako of his master fell into the dust, but there was no other result. As Maurice pressed the trigger for the fourth time the revolver was violently wrenched from his hand, and a thousand needles seemed to be quivering in the flesh of his arm and hand.

“My God, what a shot!” he murmured. “I am lost!”

Simultaneous with the fifth and last shot came sensation somewhat like that caused by a sound blow in the middle of the back. Strange, but he felt no pain, neither was there an accompanying numbness. Then he remembered his cuirass, which was of steel an eighth of an inch thick. It had saved his life. The needles began to leave his right hand and arm, and he knew that he had received no injury other than a shock. He passed the saber back to his right hand. He had no difficulty in holding it. Gradually his grip grew strong and steady.

Beauvais was now within twenty yards of Maurice. Had he been less eager and held his fire up to this point, Maurice had been a dead man. The white horse gained every moment. A dull fury grew into life in Maurice's heart. Instead of continuing the race, he brought the Mecklenberg to his haunches and wheeled. He made straight for Beauvais, who was surprised at this change of tactics. In the rush they passed each other and the steel hummed spitefully through space. Both wheeled again.

“Your life or mine!” snarled Maurice. His coolness, however, was proportionate to his rage. For the first time in his life the lust to kill seized him.

“It shall be yours, damn you!” replied Beauvais.

“The Austrian ambassador has your history; kill me or not, you are lost.” Maurice made a sweep at his enemy's head and missed.

Beauvais replied in kind, and it flashed viciously off the point of Maurice's saber. He had only his life to lose, but it had suddenly become precious to him; Beauvais had not only his life, but all that made life worth living. His onslaught was terrible. Besides, he was fighting against odds; he wore no steel protector. Maurice wore his only a moment longer. A cut in the side severed the lacings, and the sagging of the cuirass greatly handicapped him. He pressed the spurs and dashed away, while Beauvais cursed him for a cowardly cur. Maurice, by this maneuver, gained sufficient time to rid himself of the cumbersome steel. What he lost in protection, he gained in lightness and freedom. Shortly Beauvais was at him again. The time for banter had passed; they fought grimly and silently. The end for one was death. Beauvais knew that if his antagonist escaped this time the life he longed for, the power and honor it promised, would never be his. On his side, Maurice was equally determined to live.

The horses plunged and snorted, reared and swayed and bit. Sometimes they carried their masters several yards apart, only to come smashing together again.

The sun was going down, and a clear, white light prevailed. Afar in the field a herd was grazing, but no one would call them to the sheds. Master and mistress

had long since taken flight.

The duel went on. Maurice was growing tired. By and by he began to rely solely on the defense. When they were close, Beauvais played for the point; the moment the space widened he took to the edge. He saw what Maurice felt—the weakening, and he indulged in a cruel smile. They came close; he made as though to give the point. Maurice, thinking to anticipate, reached. Quick as light Beauvais raised his blade and brought it down with crushing force, standing the while in the stirrups. The blow missed Maurice's head by an inch, but it sank so deeply in his left shoulder that it splintered the collar bone and stopped within a hair of the great artery that runs underneath.

The world turned red, then black. When it grew light again Maurice beheld the dripping blade swinging aloft again. Suddenly the black horse snapped at the white, which veered. The stroke which would have split Maurice's skull in twain, fell on the rear of the saddle, and the blade was so firmly imbedded in the wooden molding that Beauvais could not withdraw it at once. Blinded by pain as he was, and fainting, yet Maurice saw his chance. He thrust with all his remaining strength at the brown throat so near him. And the blade went true. The other's body stiffened, his head flew back, his eyes started; he clutched wildly at the steel, but his hands had not the power to reach it. A bloody foam gushed between his lips; his mouth opened; he swayed, and finally tumbled into the road —dead.

As Maurice gazed down at him, between the dead eyes and his own there passed a vision of a dark-skinned girl, who, if still living, dwelt in a lonely convent, thousands of miles away.

Maurice was sensible of but little pain; a pleasant numbness began to steal over him. His sleeve was soaked, his left hand was red, and the blood dripped from his fingers and made round black spots in the dust of the road. A circle of this blackness was widening about the head of the fallen man. Maurice watched it, fascinated... He was dead, and the fact that he was a prince did not matter.

It seemed to Maurice that his own body was transforming into lead, and he vaguely wondered how the horse could bear up such a weight. He was sleepy, too. Dimly it came to him that he also must be dying.... No; he would not die there, beside this man. He still gripped his saber. Indeed, his hand was as if soldered to the wire and leather windings on the hilt. Mollendorf had said that Beauvais was invincible.... Beauvais was dead. Was he, too, dying?... No; he would not die there. The Mecklenberg started forward at a walk; a spur had touched him.

“No!” Maurice cried, throwing off the drowsiness. “My God, I will not die here!... Go, boy!” The Mecklenberg set off, loping easily.

His recent enemy, the great white horse, stood motionless in the center of the road, and followed him with large, inquiring eyes. He turned and looked at the silent huddled mass in the dust at his feet, and whinneyed. But he did not move; a foot still remained in the stirrup.

Soon Maurice remembered an episode of his school days, when, in the spirit of precocious research, he had applied carbolic acid to his arm. It occurred to him that he was now being bathed in that burning fluid. He was recovering from the shock. With returning sense came the increase of pain, pain so tormenting and exquisite that sobs rose in his throat and choked him. Perspiration matted his hair; every breath he took was a knife thrust, and the rise and fall of the horse, gentle as it was, caused the earth to reel and careen heavenward.

Bleiberg; he was to reach Bleiberg. He repeated this thought over and over. Bleiberg, to warn her. Why should he go to Bleiberg to warn her? What was he doing here, he who loved life so well? What had led him into this?... There had been a battle, but neither army had been cognizant of it. He endeavored to move his injured arm, and found it bereft of locomotion. The tendons had been cut. And he could not loosen his grip on the saber which he held in his right hand. The bridle rein swung from side to side.

Rivulets of fire began to run up and down his side; the cords in his neck were stiffening. Still the blood went drip, drip, drip, into the dust. Would he reach Bleiberg, or would he die on the way? God! for a drink of water, cold water. He set his teeth in his lips to neutralize the pain in his arm and shoulder. His lips were numb, and the pressure of his teeth was as nothing. From one moment to the next he expected to drop from the saddle, but somehow he hung on; the spark of life was tenacious. The saber dangled on one side, the scabbard on the other. The blood, drying in places, drew the skin as tight as a drumhead.

On, on, on; up long inclines, down the steeps; he lost all track of time, and the darkness thickened and the stars stood out more clearly.... He could look back on a clean life; true, there were some small stains, but these were human. Strange fancies jostled one another; faces long forgot reappeared; scenes from boyhood rose before him. Home! He had none, save that which was the length and breadth of his native land. On, on, on; the low snuffle of the horse sometimes aroused him from the stupor.

“Why you do this I do not know, nor shall I ask. Monsieur, my prayers go with you!”... She had said that to him, and had given him her hand to kiss; a

princess, one of the chosen and the few. To live long enough to see her again; a final service—and adieu!... Ah, but it had been a good fight, a good fight. No fine phrases; nothing but the lust for blood; a life for a life; a game in which the winner was also like to lose. A gray patch in the white of the road attracted his attention—a bridge.

"Water!" he murmured.

Mottled with the silver of the stars, it ran along through the fields; a brook, shallow and narrow, but water. The perfume of the grasses was sweet; the horse sniffed joyously. He stopped of his own accord. Maurice had strength enough to dismount. The saber slid from his grasp. He staggered down to the water. In kneeling a faintness passed over him; he rolled into the brook and lay there until the water, almost clogging his throat and nostrils, revived him. He crawled to his knees, coughing and choking. The contact of the cold with the burning wound caused a delightful sensation.

"Water!" he said, and splashed it in his face.

The horse had come down from the road. He had not waited for an invitation. He drank thirstily at the side of his master. The water gurgled in his long, black throat.

"Good boy!" Maurice called, and dashed water against his shoulder. "Good boy!" he remembered that the horse in biting the white one had saved his life.

Each handful of the cold liquid caused him to gasp; but soon the fever and fire died out, leaving only the duller pain. When he rose from his knees, however, he found that the world had not yet ceased its wild reeling. He stooped to regain his saber, and fell into the dust; though to him it was not he who fell, but the earth which rose. He struggled to his feet, leaned panting on his saber, and tried to steady himself. He laughed hysterically. He had dismounted, but he knew that he could never climb to the back of the horse; and Bleiberg might yet be miles away. To walk the distance; was it possible? To reach Bleiberg before Madame.... Madame the duchess and her army! He laughed again, but there was a wild strain in his laughter. Ah, God! what a farce it was! One man dead and another dying; the beginning and the end of the war. The comic opera! La Grande Duchesse! And the fool of an Englishman was playing Fritz! He started down the road, his body slouched forward, the saber trailing in the dust....

"Voici le sabre de mon pere!"

The hand of madness had touched him. The Mecklenberg followed at his heels as a dog would have followed his master.

Less than a mile away a yellow haze wavered in the sky. It was the reflection

of the city lights.

Maurice passed under the town gates, the wild song on his lips, his eyes bloodshot, his hair dank about his brow, conscious of nothing but the mad, rollicking rhythm. Nobody molested him; those he met gave him the full width of the road. A strange picture they presented, the man and the troop horse. Some one recognized the trappings of the horse; half an hour later it was known throughout the city that the king's army had been defeated and that Madame was approaching. Students began their depredations. They built bonfires. They raided the office of the official paper, and destroyed the presses and type. Later they marched around the Hohenstaufenplatz, yelling and singing.

Once a gendarme tried to stop Maurice and inquire into his business. The inquisition was abruptly ended by a cut from the madman's sword. The gendarme took to his legs. Maurice continued, and the Mecklenberg tramped on after him. Into the Konigstrasse they turned. At this time, before the news was known, the street was deserted. Up the center of it the man went, his saber scraping along the asphalt, the horse always following.

Voici le sabre de mon pere! Tu vas le mettre a ton cote! Apres la victoire, j'espere Te revoir en bonne sante.....

The street lamps swayed; sometimes a dozen revolved on one post, and Maurice would stop long enough to laugh. How easy it was to walk! All he had to do was to lift a foot, and the pavement would rise to meet it. The moon, standing high behind him, cast a long, weird shadow, and he staggered after it and cut at it with the saber. It was only when he saw the lights of the royal palace and the great globes on the gate posts that sanity returned. This sanity was of short duration.

“To the palace!” he cried; “to the palace! To warn her!” And he stumbled against the gates, still calling, “To the palace! To the palace!”

The cuirassiers who had been left behind to protect the inmates of the palace, were first aroused by the yelling and singing of the students. They rushed out of the guard room and came running to the gates, which they opened. The body of a man rolled inside. They stopped and examined him; the uniform was theirs. The face they looked into was that of the handsome young foreigner who, that day, had gone forth from the city, a gay and gallant figure, who sat his horse so well that he earned their admiration. What could this mean? And where were the others? Had there been a desperate battle?

“Run back to the guard room, one of you, and fetch some brandy. He lives.” And Lieutenant Scharfenstein took his hand from the insensible man's heart.

Pulsation was there, but weak and intermittent. “Sergeant, take ten men and clear the square. If they refuse to leave, kill! Madame is not yet queen by any means.”

The men scattered. One soon returned with the brandy. Scharfenstein moistened the wounded man's lips and placed his palm under the nose. Shortly Maurice opened his eyes, his half-delirious eyes.

“To the palace!” he said, “to the palace—Ah!” He saw the faces staring down at him. He struggled. Instinctively they all stood back. What seemed incredible to them, he got to his knees, from his knees to his feet, and propped himself against a gate post. “Your life or mine!” he cried. “Come on; a man can die but once!” He lunged, and again they retreated. He laughed. “It was a good fight!” He reeled off toward the palace steps. They did not hinder him, but they followed, expecting each moment to see him fall. But, he fell not. One by one he mounted the steps, steadying himself with the saber. He gained the landing, once more steadied himself, and vanished into the palace.

“He is out of his head!” cried Scharfenstein, rushing up the steps. “God knows what has happened!”

He was in time to see Maurice lurch into the arms of Captain von Mitter, who had barred the way to the private apartments.

“Carewe!... What has happened? God's name, you are soaked in blood!” Von Mitter held Maurice at arm's length. “A battle?”

“Aye, a battle; one man is dead and another soon will be!” A transient lucidity beamed in Maurice's eyes. “We were betrayed by the native troops; they ran to meet Madame.... Marshal Kampf, Prince Frederick, and the cuirassiers are prisoners.... I escaped. Beauvais, gave chase.... Wanted to kill me.... He gave me this. I ran him through the throat.... Knew him in South America.... He's dead! Inform the archbishop and her Highness that Madame is nearing the city. The king—”

“Hush!” said von Mitter, with a finger on his lip; “hush! The king died at six o'clock. God rest his soul!” He crossed himself. “A disgraceful day! Curse the scheming woman, could she not let us bury him in peace? Prince Frederick's father refused to send us aid.”

“I am dying,” said Maurice with a sob. “Let me lie down somewhere; if I fall I am a dead man.” After a pause: “Take me into the throne room. I shall last till Madame comes. Let her find me there.... The brandy!”

Scharfenstein held the flask to the sufferer's lips.

“The throne room?” repeated von Mitter, surprised at this strange request.

“Well, why not? For what is a throne when there is no king to sit on it? You will not die, my friend, though the cut is a nasty one. What is an arm? Life is worth a thousand of them! Quick! help me with him, Max!” for Maurice was reaching blindly toward him.

The three troopers who had followed Scharfenstein came up, and the five of them managed to carry Maurice into the throne room, and deposit him on the cushions at the foot of the dais. There they left him.

“Bad!” said von Mitter, as he came limping out into the corridor. “And he made such a brave show when he left here this afternoon. I have grown to love the fellow. A gallant man. I knew that the native troops were up to something. So did the Colonel. Ach! I would give a year of my life to have seen him and Beauvais. To kill Beauvais, the best saber in the kingdom—it must have been a fight worthy of the legends. A bad day! They will laugh at us. But, patience, the archbishop has something to say before the curtain falls. Poor young man! He will lose his arm, if not his life.”

“But how comes he into all this?” asked Scharfenstein, perplexedly.

“It is not for me or you to question, Max,” said von Mitter, looking down. He had his own opinion, but he was not minded to disclose it.

“What are you going to do?”

“Perform my duty until the end,” sourly. “Go you and help against the students, who have not manliness enough even to respect the dead. The cowardly servants are all gone; save the king's valet. There are only seven of us in all. I will seek the king's physician; the dead are dead, so let us concern ourselves with the living;” and he limped off toward the private apartments.

Scharfenstein hurried away to the square.

In the royal bedchamber a girl murmured over a cold hand. “God pity me; I am all, all alone!”

The archbishop was kneeling at the foot of the bed. In his heart was the bitterness of loss and defeat. His dreams of greatness for this clay! The worldly pomp which was to have attended it! Life was but a warm breath on the mirror of eternity; for one the mirror was clear again.

The square soon grew quiet; the students and the cuirassiers had met for the last time. In the throne room shadows and silence prevailed. Maurice lay upon the cushions, the hilt of the saber still in his hand. Consciousness had returned, a clear, penetrating consciousness. At the foot of the throne, he thought, and, mayhap, close to one not visible to the human eye! What a checkerboard he had

moved upon, and now the checkmate! So long as the pain did not diminish, he was content; a sudden ease was what he dreaded. Life was struggling to retain its hold. He did not wish to die; he was young; there were long years to come; the world was beautiful, and to love was the glory over it all. He wondered if Beauvais still lay in the road where he had left him. Again he could see that red saber swinging high; and he shivered.

Half an hour passed, then came the distant murmur of voices, which expanded into tumult. The victorious army, the brave and gallant army, had entered the city, and was streaming toward the palaces. Huzzas rose amid the blaring of bugles. The timorous came forth and added to the noise. The conquerors trooped into the palace, and Madame the duchess looked with shining eyes at the throne of her forefathers.

CHAPTER XXVII. WORMWOOD AND LEES

Madame, like a statue of expectancy, riveted her gaze on the throne. Hers at last! Her dreams were realized. She was no longer a duchess by patent; she was a queen by right of inheritance; she was now to be a power among the great. The kingdom of her forefathers was hers. She had reached the goal without bloodshed; she had been patient, and this was her reward. The blaze of her ambition dimmed all other stars. Her bosom heaved, triumph flashed in her beautiful eyes, and a smile parted her lips. Her first thought had been to establish headquarters in the parlors of the Continental Hotel, and from there to summon the archbishop, as a conqueror summons the chief of the vanquished. But no; she could not wait; above all things she desired the satisfaction of the eye. The throne of her forefathers!

“Mine!” she murmured.

Over her shoulders peered eager faces, in which greed and pleasure and impassibility were written. One face, however, had on it the dull red of shame. Not until now did the full force of his intended dishonesty come home to the Englishman; not until now did he realize the complete degradation to which his uniform had lowered him. His had been the hand to stay this misfortune, and he had not lifted it. This king had been his father's friend; and he had taken up arms against him. O, he had begun life badly; he was making the end still more dismal. Would this woman ever be his? Her promises were not worth the air that had carried them to his ear. He, the consort of a queen? A cold sweat dampened his forehead. How he loved her! And that kiss.... Queen or not, he would not be her dupe, his would not be a tame surrender.

From the Platz and the Park, where the two armies had bivouacked, came an intermittent cheering. The flames of bonfires were reflected on the windows, throwing out in dull, yellow relief the faces of Madame and her staff.

Between the private apartments of the king and the throne room was a wide sliding door. Suddenly this opened and closed. With his back against it, a pistol in one hand and a saber in the other, stood Captain von Mitter, his face cold and resolute. All eyes were instantly directed toward him.

“Captain,” said Madame, imperiously, “summon to me Monseigneur the archbishop!”

Her command fell on ears of stone. Von Mitter made no sign that he heard her.

“Take care, Monsieur,” she warned; “I am mistress here. If you will not obey me, my officers will.”

“Madame, I acknowledge no mistress save the daughter of the king. No one shall pass this door to announce your presence to Monseigneur.”

This reply was greeted with sundry noises, such as sabers coming from scabbards, clicking of pistol locks, and the moving of feet. Madame put out her hand suggestively, and the noise ceased. Von Mitter smiled disdainfully, but did not stir.

“I warn you, Madame,” he said, “that this is war. I accept all the responsibilities of my position. I know nothing of any surrender or victory. To me you are simply an enemy. I will kill any one who attempts to pass. I should be pleased if General Kronau would make the first step to question my sincerity.”

Kronau's fingers twitched around his revolver, but Madame touched his arm. She could read faces. The young Captain was in earnest. She would temporize.

“Captain, all here are prisoners of war,” she said. “Do not forget that soon there will be benefits for those who serve me.”

He laughed rudely. “I ask no benefits from your hands, Madame. I would rather stand on the corner and beg.” He sent an insolent, contemptuous glance at Kronau, who could not support it. “And now that you have gratified your curiosity, I beg you to withdraw to the street. To-night this palace is a tomb, and woe to those who commit sacrilege.”

“The king?” she said, struck by a thought which caused a red spot to appear on each cheek.

“Is dead. Go and leave us in peace.”

The wine which had tasted so sweet was full of lees, and the cup wormwood. Madame looked down, while her officers moved uneasily and glanced over their shoulders. Kronau brushed his forehead, to find it wet. Madame regretted the surrendering to the impulse. Her haste to triumph was lacking both in dignity and judgment. She had given the king so little place in her thoughts that the shock of his death confused her. And there was something in the calm, fearless contempt of the young soldier which embarrassed her.

“In that case, Captain,” she said, her voice uncertain and constrained, “bid Monseigneur to wait on me at the Continental.”

“Whenever that becomes convenient, Madame, Monseigneur will certainly confer with you and your rascally pack of officers.” He longed for some one to

spring at him; he longed to strike a blow in earnest.

As he leaned against the door he felt it move. He stepped aside. The door rolled back, and her Royal Highness, the archbishop and the chancellor passed in. The princess's eyes were like dim stars, but her fine nostrils palpitated, and her mouth was rigid in disdain. The chancellor looked haggard and dispirited, and he eyed all with the listlessness of a man who has given up hope. The prelate's face was as finely drawn as an ancient cameo, and as immobile. He gazed at Madame with one of those looks which penetrate like acid; and, brave as she was, she found it insupportable. There was a tableau of short duration.

“Madame,” said her Royal Highness, with a noble scorn, “what would you say if one desecrated your father's tomb while you were kneeling beside it? What would you say? In yonder room my father lies dead, and your presence here, in whatever role, is an insult. Are you, indeed, a woman? Have you no respect for death and sorrow? Was the bauble so precious to your sight that you could not wait till the last rites were paid to the dead? Is your heart of stone, your mind devoid of pity and of conscience? Are you lacking in magnanimity, which is the disposition of great souls? Ah, Madame, you will never be great, for you have stooped to treachery and deceit. You, a princess! You have purchased with glittering promises that which in time would have been given to you. And you will not fulfill these promises, for honesty has no part in your affair. Shame on you, Madame. By dishonorable means you have gained this room. By dishonorable means you destroyed all those props on which my father leaned. You knew that he had not long to live. Had you come to me as a woman; had you opened your heart to me and confided your desires—Ah, Madame, how gladly would I have listened. Whatever it signifies to you, this throne is nothing to me. Had you come then—but, no! you must come to demand your rights when I am defenseless. You must come with a sword when there is none to defend. Is it possible that in our veins there runs a kindred blood? And yet, Madame, I forgive you. Rule here, if you will; but remember, between you and your crown there will always be the shadow of disgrace. Monsieur,” turning toward Fitzgerald, whose shame was so great that it engulfed him, “your father and mine were friends—I forgive you. Now, Madame, I pray you, go, and leave me with my dead.”

The girlhood of Princess Alexia was gone forever.

To Madame this rebuke was like hot iron on the flesh. It left her without answer. Her proud spirit writhed. Before those innocent eyes her soul lay bare, offering to the gaze an ineffaceable scar. For the first time she saw her schemes in their true light. Had any served her unselfishly? Aye, there was one. And

strangely enough, the first thought which formed in her mind when chaos was passed, was of him.

How would this rebuke affect her in his eyes? What was he to her that she cared for his respect, his opinion, good or bad? What was the meaning of the secret dread? How she hated him for his honesty to her; for now perforce she must look up to him. She had stepped down from the pinnacle of her pride to which she might never again ascend. He had kissed her. How she hated him! And yet... Ah, the wine was flat, tinctured with the bitterness of gall, and her own greed had forced the cup to her lips. She could not remain silent before this girl; she must reply; her shame was too deep to resolve itself into silence.

“Mademoiselle,” she said, “I beg of you to accept my sympathies; but the fortunes of war—”

“Ah, Madame,” interrupted the prelate, lifting his white, attenuated hand, “we will discuss the fortunes of war—later.”

Madame choked back the sudden gust of rage. She glanced covertly at the Englishman. But he, with wide-astonished eyes, was staring at the foot of the throne, from which gradually rose a terrible figure, covered with blood and caked with drying clay. The figure leaned heavily on the hilt of a saber, and swayed unsteadily. He drew all eyes.

“Ha!” he said, with a prolonged, sardonic intonation, “is that you, Madame the duchess? You are talking of war? What! and you, my lord the Englishman? Ha! and war? Look at me, Madame; I have been in a battle, the only one fought to-day. Look at me! Here is the mark of that friend who watched over your interests. But where is he? Eh? Where? Did you pick him up on the way?.... He is dead. For all that he was a rascal, he died like a man... .. as presently I shall die! Princes and kings and thrones; the one die and the other crumble, but truth lives on. And you, Madame, have learned the truth. Shame on your mean and little souls! There was only one honest man among you, and you dishonored him. The Marshal... I do not see him. An honest man dies but once, but a traitor dies a thousand deaths. Kronau... is that your name? It was an honest one once. And the paltry ends you gain!.... The grand duchess of Gerolstein!.... What a comic opera! Not even music to go by! Eh, you,—you Englishman, has Madame made you a Lieutenant?—a Captain?—a General? What a farce! Nobles, you? I laugh at you all for a pack of thieves, who are not content with the purse, but must add honor to the bag. A man is what he makes himself. Medals and clothes, medals and clothes; that is the sum of your nobility!” He laughed, but the laughter choked in his throat, and he staggered a few paces away from the throne.

“Seize him!” cried Madame.

When the men sprang forward to execute this command, Fitzgerald barred the way.

“No,” he said doggedly; “you shall not touch him.”

“Stand aside, Monsieur,” said Madame, determined to vent her rage on some one.

“Madame,” said von Mitter, “I will shoot down the first man who lays a hand on Monsieur Carewe.”

The princess, her heart beating wildly at the sudden knowledge that lay written on the inner vision, a faintness stealing away her sight, leaned back against the prelate.

“He is dying,” she whispered; “he is dying for me!”

Maurice was now in the grasp of the final delirium. “Come on!” he cried; “come on! I will show you how a brave man can die. Come on, Messieurs Medals and Clothes! Aye, who will go out with me?” He raised the saber, and it caught the flickering light as it trailed a circle above his head. He stumbled toward them, sweeping the air with the blade. Suddenly there came a change. He stopped. The wild expression faded from his face; a surprised look came instead. The saber slipped from his fingers and clanged on the floor. He turned and looked at the princess, and that glance conveyed to her the burden of his love. “Mademoiselle....” His knees doubled, he sank, rolled face downward, and a dark stain appeared and widened on the marble floor.

“Go, Madame,” said the prelate. “This palace is indeed a tomb.” He felt the princess grow limp on his arm. “Go.”

“Maurice!” cried Fitzgerald, springing to the side of the fallen man. “My God! Maurice!”

CHAPTER XXVIII. INTO THE HANDS OF AUSTRIA

Madame, surrounded by her staff and courtiers, sat in the main salon of the Continental Hotel, waiting for the archbishop. The false, self-seeking ministers of Leopold's reign crowded around her to pay their respects, to compliment and to flatter her. Already they saw a brilliant court; already they were speculating on their appointments. Offices were plenty; new embassies were to be created, old embassies to be filled anew.

Madame listened to all coldly. There was a canker in her heart, and no one who saw that calm, beautiful face of hers dreamed how deeply the canker was eating. There were two men who held aloof from compliments and flattery. On the face of one rested a moody scowl; on the other, agony and remorse. These two men were Colonel Mollendorf and Lord Fitzgerald. The same thought occupied each mind; the scene in the throne room.

Presently an orderly announced: “Monseigneur the archbishop.”

Madame arose, and all looked expectantly, toward the door.

The old prelate entered, his head high and his step firm. He appeared to see no one but Madame. But this time she met his glance without a tremor.

“Monseigneur,” she began, “I have come into my own at last. But for you and your ambitious schemes, all this would not have come to pass. You robbed my father of his throne and set your puppet there instead. By trickery my father was robbed of his lawful inheritance. By trickery I was compelled to regain it. However, I do not wish to make an enemy of you, Monseigneur. I have here two letters. They come from Rome. In one is your recall, in the other a cardinal's hat. Which do you prefer?”

“Surely not the cardinal's hat,” said the prelate. “Listen to me, Madame, for I have something to say to you which will cause you some reflection. If I had any ambitions, they are gone; if I had any dreams, they have vanished. Madame, some twenty years ago your duchy was created. It was not done to please Albrecht's younger brother, the duke, your father. Albrecht was childless. When your father was given the duchy it was done to exclude forever the house of Auersperg from reigning on this throne. You say that you were tricked; well, and so was I. Unhappily I touched the deeper current too late.

“This poor king, who lies silent in the palace, was not my puppet. I wished to make him great, and bask in his greatness. But in that I failed; because Leopold was a poet and a philosopher, and the greatness of earthly things did not concern him. Leopold and I were dupes of Austria, as you are at this moment, Madame. So long as Leopold reigned peacefully he was not to be disturbed. Had you shown patience and resignation, doubtless to-day you would be a queen. You will never be more than a duchess.

“Madame, you have done exactly as Austria intended you should. There is no longer any kingdom.” There was a subdued triumph in his eyes. “To you,” with a gesture toward the courtiers and office-seekers, “to you I shall say, your own blind self-interest has destroyed you. Madame, you are bearing arms not against this kingdom, but against Austria, since from to-day this land becomes the property of the imperial crown. If you struggle, it will be futilely. For, by this move of yours, Austria will declare that this kingdom is a menace to the tranquility of the confederation. Madame, there is no corner-stone to your edifice. This is what I wished to say to you. I have done. Permit me to withdraw.”

For a moment his auditors were spellbound; then all the emotions of the mind and heart portrayed themselves on the circle of faces. Madame's face alone was inscrutable.

“His Excellency, the Austrian ambassador!” announced the orderly.

The archbishop bowed and left the apartment.

“Your Highness,” began the Austrian, “his Imperial Majesty commands your immediate evacuation of Bleiberg, and that you delay not your departure to the frontier. This kingdom is a crown land. It shall remain so by the consent of the confederation. If you refuse to obey this injunction, an army will enforce the order. Believe me, Madame, this office is distasteful to me, but it was not avoidable. What disposition am I to submit to his Majesty?”

“Monsieur,” she said, “I am without choice in the matter. To pit my forces against the emperor's would be neither politic nor sensible. I submit.” There was not a sign of any emotion, no hint of the terrible wrath which lay below the surface of those politely modulated tones. But it seemed to her as she stood there, the object of all eyes, that some part of her soul had died. Her pride surmounted the humiliation, the pride of a woman and a princess. She would show no weakness to the world.

“Then, Madame,” said the ambassador, suppressing the admiration in his eyes at this evidence of royal nonchalance, “I shall inform his Majesty at once.”

When he had gone, Madame turned coldly to her stricken followers. “Messieurs, the fortunes of war are not on our side. I thank you for your services. Now leave me; I wish to be alone.”

One by one they filed out into the corridors. The orderly was the last to leave, and he closed the door behind him. Madame surveyed the room. All the curtains were drawn. She was alone. She stood idly fingering the papers which lay scattered on the table. Suddenly she lifted her hands above her head and clenched them in a burst of silent rage. A dupe! doubly a dupe! To-morrow the whole world would laugh at her, and she was without means of wreaking vengeance. Presently the woman rose above the princess. She sat down, laid her face on her arms and wept.

Fitzgerald stepped from behind one of the curtains. He had taken refuge there during the archbishop's speech. He had not the strength to witness the final humiliation of the woman he loved. He was gazing out of the window at the troops in the Platz when the door closed.

Madame heard the rustle of the curtain and looked up. She sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing.

“You?” she cried. “You? You have dared to hide that you might witness my weakness and my tears? You....”

“Madame!”

“Go! I hate you!”

“Ah, Madame, we always hate those whom we have wronged. Do not forget that I love you, with a love that passes convention.”

“Monsieur, I am yet a princess. Did you not hear me bid you go?”

“Why?” in a voice singularly free from agitation. “Because I am the only man who has served you unselfishly? Is that the reason, Madame? You have laughed at me. I love you. You have broken me. I love you. I can never look an honest man in the face again. I love you. Though the shade of my father should rise to accuse me, still would I say that I love you. Madame, will you find another love like mine, the first love of a man who will know no second? Forgive me if I rejoice in your despair, for your despair is my hope. As a queen you would be too far away; but in your misfortune you come so near! Madame, I shall follow you wherever you go to tell you that I love you. You will never be able to shut your ears to my voice; far or near, you will always hear me saying that I love you. Ambition soars but a little way; love has no fetters. Madame, your lips were given to me. Can you forget that?”

“Monsieur, what do you wish?” subdued by the fervor of his tones.

“You! nothing in the world but you.”

“Princesses such as I am do not wed for love. What! you take advantage of my misfortune, the shattering of my dreams, to force your love upon me?”

“Madame,” the pride of his race lighting his eyes, “confess to me that you did not win my love to play with it. If my heart was necessary to your happiness, which lay in these shattered dreams, tell me, and I will go. My love is so great that it does not lack generosity.”

For reply she sorted the papers and extended a blood-stained packet toward him. “Here, Monsieur, are your consols.” But the moment his hand touched them, she made as though to take them back. On the top of the packet was the letter she had written to him, and on which he had written his scornful reply to her. She paled as she saw him unfold it.

“So, Madame, my love was a pastime?” He came close to her, and his look was like an invisible hand bearing down on her. “Madame, I will go.”

“No, no!” she cried, yielding to the impulse which suddenly laid hold of her. “Not you! You shall not misjudge me. No, not you! Those consols were given to me by the woman of your guide, Kopf, who found them no one knows how. They were given to me this morning. That letter..... I did not intend that you should see it. No, Monsieur; you shall not misjudge the woman, however you judge the princess. Forgive me, it was not the woman who sought your love; it was the princess who had need of it.

“I thought it would be but a passing fancy. I did not dream of this end. To-morrow I shall be laughed at, and I cannot defend myself as a man can. I must submit; I must smile and cover my chagrin. O, Monsieur, do not speak to me of love; there is nothing in my heart but rage and bitterness. To stoop as I have stooped, and in vain! I am defeated; I must remain passive; like a whipped child I am driven away. Talk not of love to me. I am without illusion.” She fell to weeping, and to him she was lovelier in her tears than ever in her smiles. For would she have shown this weakness to any but himself, and was it not a sign that he was not wholly indifferent to her?

“Madame, what is it?” he cried, on his knees before her. “What is it? Do you wish a crown? Find me a kingdom, and I will buy it for you. Be mine, and woe to those who dare to laugh! Ah, could I but convince you that love is above crowns and kingdoms, the only glimpse we have on earth of Paradise. There is no boundary to the dreams; no horizons; a vast, beautiful wilderness, and you and I together. There are no storms, no clouds. Ambition, the god of schemes,

finds no entrance. Ah, how I love you! Your face is ever before me, waking or sleeping. All thoughts are merged into one, and that is of you. Self has dropped out of my existence. Forget that you are a princess; remember only that you are a woman, and that I love you."

Love has the key to eloquence. Madame forgot her vanished dreams; the bitterness in her heart subsided. That mysterious, indefinable thrill, which every woman experiences when a boundless love is laid at her feet, passed through her, leaving her sensible to a delicious languor. This man was strong in himself, yet weak before her, and from his weakness she gained a visible strength. Convention was nothing to him; that she was of royal blood was still less. What other man would have dared her wrath as he had done?

Nobility, she thought, was based on the observance of certain laws. Around the central star were lesser stars, from which the central star drew its radiance. Whenever one of these stars deviates from its orbit, the glory of the central star is diminished. To accept the love of the Englishman would be a blow to the pride of Austria. She smiled.

"Monsieur," she said, in a hesitating voice, "Monsieur, I am indeed a woman. You ask me if I can forget that I offered you my lips? No. Nor do I wish to. Why did I permit you to kiss me? I do not know. I could not analyze the impulse if I tried. Monsieur, I am a woman who demands much from those who serve her. I am capricious; my moods vary; I am unfamiliar with sentiment; I hate oftener than I love. Listen. There is a canker in my heart, made there by vanity. When it heals—well—mayhap you will find the woman you desire. Mind you, I make no promises. Follow me, if you will, but have patience; love me if you must, but in silence;" and with a gesture which was not without a certain fondness, she laid her hand upon his head.

CHAPTER XXIX. INTO STILL WATERS AND SILENCE

Into the princess's own chamber they carried Maurice, and laid him on the white bed. Thus would she have it. No young man had ever before entered that sacred chapel of her maiden dreams. Beside the bed was a small prie-dieu; and she knelt upon the cushion and rested her brow against the crucifix. The archbishop covered his eyes, and the state physician bent his head. Chastity and innocence at the feet of God; yet, not even these can hold back the fleeting breath of life. She asked God to forgive her the bitterness in her heart; she prayed for strength to repel the weakness in her limbs. Presently she rose, an angelic sweetness on her face. She looked down at Maurice; there was no sign of life, save in the fitful drawing in of the nether lip. She dampened a cloth and wiped the sweat of agony from the marble brow.

“O, if only he might live!” she cried. “And he will not?”

“No, your Highness,” said the physician. “He has perhaps an hour. Extraordinary vitality alone is the cause of his living so long. He has lost nearly all the blood in his body. It was a frightful wound. He is dying, but he may return to consciousness before the end.”

The archbishop, with somber eyes, contemplated the pale, handsome face, which lay motionless against the pillow. His thoughts flew back to his own youth, to the long years which had filled the gap between. Friends had come and gone, loved ones vanished; and still he stood, like an oak in the heart of a devastated forest, alone. Why had he been spared, and to what end? Ah, how old he was, how very old! To live beyond the allotted time, was not that a punishment for some transgression? His eyes shone through a mist of tears.

The princess, too, contemplated the face of the dying man. How many times had that face accompanied her in her dreams! How familiar she was with every line of it, the lips, that turned inward when they smiled; the certain lock of hair that fell upon the forehead! And yet, she had seen the face in reality less than half a dozen times. Why had it entered so persistently into her dreams? Why had

the flush risen to her cheeks at the thought? At another time she would have refused to listen to the voice which answered; but now, as the object of her thoughts lay dying on her pillow, her mind would not play truant to her heart. Sometimes the approach of love is so imperceptible that it does not provoke analysis. We wake suddenly to find it in our hearts, so strong and splendid that we submit without question.... All, all her dreams had vanished, the latest and the fairest. Across the azure of her youth had come and gone a vague, beautiful flash of love. The door of earthly paradise had opened and closed. That delicate string which vibrates with the joy of living seemed parted; her heart was broken, and her young breast a tomb. With straining eyes she continued to gaze. The invisible arms of her love clasped Maurice to her heart and held him there. Only that day he had stood before her, a delight to the eye; and she had given him her hand to kiss. How bravely he had gone forth from the city! She had followed him with her ardent gaze until he was no longer to be seen. And now he lay dying.... for her.

“Monsieur,” she said, turning to the physician, “I have something to say to Monseigneur.”

The physician bowed and passed into the boudoir, the door of which he closed.

“Father,” she said to the prelate, “I have no secrets from you.” She pointed to Maurice. “I love him. I know not why. He comes from a foreign land; his language nor his people are mine, and yet the thought of him has filled my soul. I have talked to him but four different times; and yet I love him. Why? I can not tell. The mind has no power to rule the impulse of love. Were he to live, perhaps my love would be a sin. Is it not strange, father, that I love him? I have lost parental love; I am losing a love a woman holds priceless above all others. He is dying because of me. He loves me. I read it in his eyes just before he fell. Perhaps it is better for him and for me that he should die, for if he lived I could not live without him. Father, do I sin?”

“No, my child,” and the prelate closed his eyes.

“I have been so lonely,” she said, “so alone. I craved the love of the young. He was so different from any man I had met before. His bright, handsome face seemed constantly with me.”

At this moment Maurice's breast rose and fell in a long sigh. Presently the lids of his eyes rolled upward. Consciousness had returned. His wandering gaze first encountered the sad, austere visage of the prelate.

“Monseigneur?” he said, faintly.

“Do you wish absolution, my son?”

“I am dying...?”

“Yes.”

“I am dying.... God has my account and he will judge it. I am not a Catholic, Monseigneur.” He turned his head. “Your Highness?” He roved about the room with his eyes and discerned the feminine touch in all the appointments.

“Where am I?”

“You are in my room, Monsieur,” she said. Her voice broke, but she met his eyes with a brave smile. “Is there anything we can do for you?”

“Nothing. I am alone. To die.... Well, one time or another. And yet, it is a beautiful world, when we but learn it, full of color and life and love. I am young; I do not wish to die. And now... even in the midst... to go... where? Monseigneur, I am dying; to me princes and kings signify nothing. That is not to say that they ever did. In the presence of death we are all equal. Living, I might not speak; dying... since I have but a little while to stay... I may speak?”

“Yes, my son, speak. Her Highness will listen.”

“It is to her Highness that I wish to speak.”

Her lips quivered and she made no secret of her tears. “What is it you wish to say to me, Monsieur Carewe?” She smoothed his forehead, and the touch of her hand made him forget his pain.

“Ah, I know not how to begin,” he said. “Forgive me if I offend your ears.... I have been foolish even to dream of it, but I could not help it.... When first I saw you in the garden.. the old dog was beside you.... Even then it came to me that my future was linked to the thought of you. I did not know you were so far beyond.... I was very cold, but I dared not let you know it, for fear you would lead me at once to the gate. That night wherever I looked I saw you. I strove to think of some way to serve you, but I could not. I was so obscure. I never thought that you would remember me again; but you did... That afternoon in the carriage... I wanted to tell you then. That rose you dropped... it is still on my heart. I loved you, and to this end. And I am glad to die, for in this short fortnight I have lived.... My mother used to call me Maurice ... to hear a woman repeat it again before I go.”

“Maurice.” She took his hand timidly in hers, and looked at the archbishop.

“Speak to him from your heart, my child,” said the prelate. “It will comfort you both.”

Suddenly she drooped and the tears fell upon the hand in hers. “Maurice,” she

whispered, “you have not loved in vain.” She could utter no more; but she raised her head and looked into his eyes, and he saw the glory of the world in hers.

“Into still waters and silence,” he said softly. “No more pain, nor joy, nor love; silence.... You love me!... Alexia; how often have I repeated that name to myself.... I have not strength to lift your hand to my lips.”

She kissed him on the lips. She felt as if she, too, were dying.

“God guard your Highness,” he said. “It is dark.... I do not see you....”

He tried to raise himself, but he could not. He sank back, settled deeply into the pillow, and smiled. After that he lay very still.

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