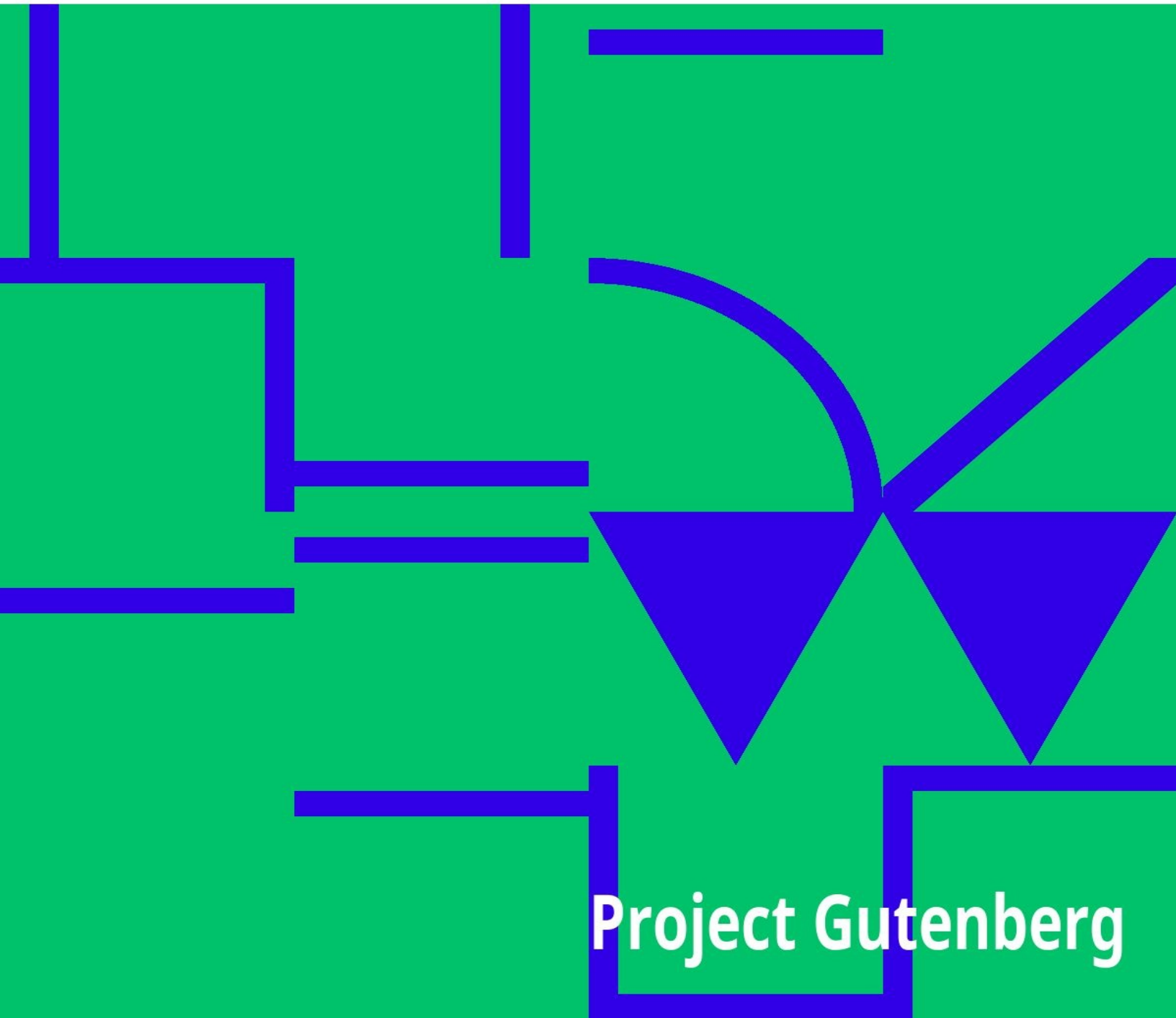
The Princess Elopes

Harold MacGrath



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Princess Hildegarde (Gretchen) playing the piano.

[Frontispiece: Princess Hildegarde (Gretchen) playing the piano.]

THE PRINCESS ELOPES

BY

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TO MY WIFE

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THE PRINCESS ELOPES

I

It is rather difficult in these days for a man who takes such scant interest in foreign affairs—trust a whilom diplomat for that!—to follow the continual geographical disturbances of European surfaces. Thus, I can not distinctly recall the exact location of the Grand Duchy of Barscheit or of the neighboring principality of Doppelkinn. It meets my needs and purposes, however, to say that Berlin and Vienna were easily accessible, and that a three hours' journey would bring you under the shadow of the Carpathian Range, where, in my diplomatic days, I used often to hunt the "bear that walks like a man."

Barscheit was known among her sister states as "the meddler," the "maker of trouble," and the duke as "Old Grumpy"—*Brummbär*. To use a familiar Yankee expression, Barscheit had a finger in every pie. Whenever there was a political broth making, whether in Italy, Germany or Austria, Barscheit would snatch up a ladle and start in. She took care of her own affairs so easily that she had plenty of time to concern herself with the affairs of her neighbors. This is not to advance the opinion that Barscheit was wholly modern; far from it. The fault of Barscheit may be traced back to a certain historical pillar of salt, easily recalled by all those who attended Sunday-school. "Rubbering" is a vulgar phrase, and I disdain to use it.

When a woman looks around it is invariably a portent of trouble; the man forgets his important engagement, and runs amuck, knocking over people, principles and principalities. If Aspasia had not observed Pericles that memorable day; if there had not been an oblique slant to Calypso's eyes as Ulysses passed her way; if the eager Delilah had not offered favorable comment on Samson's ringlets; in fact, if all the women in history and romance had gone about their affairs as they should have done, what uninteresting reading history would be to-day!

Now, this is a story of a woman who looked around, and of a man who did

not keep his appointment on time; out of a grain of sand, a mountain. Of course there might have been other causes, but with these I'm not familiar.

This Duchy of Barscheit is worth looking into. Imagine a country with telegraph and telephone and medieval customs, a country with electric lights, railways, surface-cars, hotel elevators and ancient laws! Something of the customs of the duchy must be told in the passing, though, for my part, I am vigorously against explanatory passages in stories of action. Barscheit bristled with militarism; the little man always imitates the big one, but lacks the big man's excuses. Militarism entered into and overshadowed the civic laws.

There were three things you might do without offense; you might bathe, eat and sleep, only you must not sleep out loud. The citizen of Barscheit was hemmed in by a set of laws which had their birth in the dark dungeons of the Inquisition. They congealed the blood of a man born and bred in a commercial country. If you broke a law, you were relentlessly punished; there was no mercy. In America we make laws and then hide them in dull-looking volumes which the public have neither the time nor the inclination to read. In this duchy of mine it was different; you ran into a law on every corner, in every park, in every public building: little oblong signs, enameled, which told you that you could *not* do something or other—"Forbidden!" The beauty of German laws is that when you learn all the things that you can not do, you begin to find out that the things you can do are not worth a hang in the doing.

As soon as a person learned to read he or she began life by reading these laws. If you could not read, so much the worse for you; you had to pay a guide who charged you almost as much as the full cost of the fine.

The opposition political party in the United States is always howling militarism, without the slightest idea of what militarism really is. One side, please, in Barscheit, when an officer comes along, or take the consequences. If you carelessly bumped into him, you were knocked down. If you objected, you were arrested. If you struck back, ten to one you received a beating with the flat of a saber. And never, never mistake the soldiery for the police; that is to say, never ask an officer to direct you to any place. This is regarded in the light of an insult. The cub-lieutenants do more to keep a passable sidewalk—for the passage of said cub-lieutenants—than all the magistrates put together. How they used to swagger up and down the Königsstrasse, around the Platz, in and out of the restaurants! I remember doing some side-stepping myself, and I was a diplomat,

supposed to be immune from the rank discourtesies of the military. But that was early in my career.

In a year not so remote as not to be readily recalled, the United States packed me off to Barscheit because I had an uncle who was a senator. Some papers were given me, the permission to hang out a shingle reading "American Consul," and the promise of my board and keep. My amusements were to be paid out of my own pocket. Straightway I purchased three horses, found a capable Japanese valet, and selected a cozy house near the barracks, which stood west of the Volksgarten, on a pretty lake. A beautiful road ran around this body of water, and it wasn't long ere the officers began to pass comments on the riding of "that wild American." As I detest what is known as park-riding, you may very well believe that I circled the lake at a clip which must have opened the eyes of the easy-going officers. I grew quite chummy with a few of them; and I may speak of occasions when I did not step off the sidewalk as they came along. A man does more toward gaining the affection of foreigners by giving a good dinner now and then than by international law. I gained considerable fame by my little dinners at Müller's Rathskeller, under the Continental Hotel.

Six months passed, during which I rode, read, drove and dined, the actual labors of the consulate being cared for by a German clerk who knew more about the business than I did.

By this you will observe that diplomacy has degenerated into the gentle art of exciting jaded palates and of scribbling one's name across passports; I know of no better definition. I forget what the largess of my office was.

Presently there were terrible doings. The old reigning grand duke desired peace of mind; and moving determinedly toward this end, he declared in public that his niece, the young and tender Princess Hildegarde, should wed the Prince of Doppelkinn, whose vineyards gave him a fine income. This was finality; the avuncular guardian had waited long enough for his wilful ward to make up her mind as to the selection of a suitable husband; now *he* determined to take a hand in the matter. And you shall see how well he managed it.

It is scarcely necessary for me to state that her Highness had her own ideas of what a husband should be like, gathered, no doubt, from execrable translations from "Ouida" and the gentle Miss Braddon. A girl of twenty usually has a formidable regard for romance, and the princess was fully up to the manner of

her kind. If she could not marry romantically, she refused to marry at all.

I can readily appreciate her uncle's perturbation. I do not know how many princelings she thrust into utter darkness. She would *never* marry a man who wore glasses; this one was too tall, that one too short; and when one happened along who was without visible earmarks or signs of being shop-worn her refusal was based upon just—"Because!"—a weapon as invincible as the fabled spear of Parsifal. She had spurned the addresses of Prince Mischler, laughed at those of the Count of ——— - ——— (the short dash indicates the presence of a hyphen) and General Muerrisch, of the emperor's body-guard, who was, I'm sure, good enough—in his own opinion—for any woman. Every train brought to the capital some suitor with a consonated, hyphenated name and a pedigree as long as a bore's idea of a funny story. But the princess did not care for pedigrees that were squint-eyed or bow-legged. One and all of them she cast aside as unworthy her consideration. Then, like the ancient worm, the duke turned. She should marry Doppelkinn, who, having no wife to do the honors in his castle, was wholly agreeable.

The Prince of Doppelkinn reigned over the neighboring principality. If you stood in the middle of it and were a baseball player, you could throw a stone across the frontier in any direction. But the vineyards were among the finest in Europe. The prince was a widower, and among his own people was affectionately styled "*der Rotnäsig*," which, I believe, designates an illuminated proboscis. When he wasn't fishing for rainbow trout he was sleeping in his cellars. He was often missing at the monthly reviews, but nobody ever worried; they knew where to find him. And besides, he might just as well sleep in his cellars as in his carriage, for he never rode a horse if he could get out of doing so. He was really good-natured and easy-going, so long as no one crossed him severely; and you could tell him a joke once and depend upon his understanding it immediately, which is more than I can say for the duke.

Years and years ago the prince had had a son; but at the tender age of three the boy had run away from the castle confines, and no one ever heard of him again. The enemies of the prince whispered among themselves that the boy had run away to escape compulsory military service, but the boy's age precluded this accusation. The prince advertised, after the fashion of those times, sent out detectives and notified his various brothers; but his trouble went for nothing. Not the slightest trace of the boy could be found. So he was mourned for a season, regretted and then forgotten; the prince adopted the grape-arbor.

I saw the prince once. I do not blame the Princess Hildegarde for her rebellion. The prince was not only old; he was fat and ugly, with little, elephant-like eyes that were always vein-shot, restless and full of mischief. He might have made a good father, but I have nothing to prove this. Those bottles of sparkling Moselle which he failed to dispose of to the American trade he gave to his brother in Barscheit or drank himself. He was sixty-eight years old.

A nephew, three times removed, was waiting for the day when he should wabble around in the prince's shoes. He was a lieutenant in the duke's body-guard, a quick-tempered, heady chap. Well, he never wabbled around in his uncle's shoes, for he never got the chance.

I hadn't been in Barscheit a week before I heard a great deal about the princess. She was a famous horsewoman. This made me extremely anxious to meet her. Yet for nearly six months I never even got so much as a glimpse of her. Half of the six months she was traveling through Austria, and the other half she kept out of my way,—not intentionally; she knew nothing of my existence; simply, fate moved us about blindly. At court, she was invariably indisposed, and at the first court ball she retired before I arrived. I got up at all times, galloped over all roads, but never did I see her. She rode alone, too, part of the time.

The one picture of her which I was lucky enough to see had been taken when she was six, and meant nothing to me in the way of identification. For all I knew I might have passed her on the road. She became to me the Princess in the Invisible Cloak, passing me often and doubtless deriding my efforts to discern her. My curiosity became alarming. I couldn't sleep for the thought of her. Finally we met, but the meeting was a great surprise to us both. This meeting happened during the great hubbub of which I have just written; and at the same time I met another who had great weight in my future affairs.

The princess and I became rather well acquainted. I was not a gentleman, according to her code, but, in the historic words of the drug clerk, I was something just as good. She honored me with a frank, disinterested friendship, which still exists. I have yet among my fading souvenirs of diplomatic service half a dozen notes commanding me to get up at dawn and ride around the lake, something like sixteen miles. She was almost as reckless a rider as myself. She was truly a famous rider, and a woman who sits well on a horse can never be aught but graceful. She was, in fact, youthful and charming, with the most magnificent black eyes I ever beheld in a Teutonic head; witty, besides, and a

songstress of no ordinary talent. If I had been in love with her—which I solemnly vow I was not!—I should have called her beautiful and exhausted my store of complimentary adjectives.

The basic cause of all this turmoil, about which I am to spin my narrative, lay in her education. I hold that a German princess should never be educated save as a German. By this I mean to convey that her education should not go beyond German literature, German history, German veneration of laws, German manners and German passivity and docility. The Princess Hildegarde had been educated in England and France, which simplifies everything, or, I should say, to be exact, complicates everything.

She possessed a healthy contempt for that what-d'-ye-call-it that hedges in a king. Having mingled with English-speaking people, she returned to her native land, her brain filled with the importance of feminine liberty of thought and action. Hence, she became the bramble that prodded the grand duke whichever way he turned. His days were filled with horrors, his nights with mares which did not have box-stalls in his stables.

Never could he anticipate her in anything. On that day he placed guards around the palace she wrote verses or read modern fiction; the moment he relaxed his vigilance she was away on some heart-rending escapade. Didn't she scandalize the nobility by dressing up as a hussar and riding her famous black Mecklenburg cross-country? Hadn't she flirted outrageously with the French attaché and deliberately turned her back on the Russian minister, at the very moment, too, when negotiations were going on between Russia and Barscheit relative to a small piece of land in the Balkans? And, most terrible of all to relate, hadn't she ridden a shining bicycle up the Königsstrasse, in broad daylight, and in bifurcated skirts, besides? I shall never forget the indignation of the press at the time of this last escapade, the stroke of apoplexy which threatened the duke, and the room with the barred window which the princess occupied one whole week.

They burned the offensive bicycle in the courtyard of the palace, ceremoniously, too, and the princess had witnessed this solemn *auto da fé* from her barred window. It is no strain upon the imagination to conjure up the picture of her fine rage, her threatening hands, her compressed lips, her tearless, flashing eyes, as she saw her beautiful new wheel writhe and twist on the blazing fagots. But what the deuce was a poor duke to do with a niece like this?

For a time I feared that the United States and the Grand Duchy of Barscheit would sever diplomatic relations. The bicycle was, unfortunately, of American make, and the manufacturers wrote to me personally that they considered themselves grossly insulted over the action of the duke. Diplomatic notes were exchanged, and I finally prevailed upon the duke to state that he held the wheel harmless and that his anger had been directed solely against his niece. This letter was duly forwarded to the manufacturers, who, after the manner of their kind, carefully altered the phrasing and used it in their magazine advertisements. They were so far appeased that they offered me my selection from the private stock. Happily the duke never read anything but the *Fliegende Blätter* and *Jugend*, and thus war was averted.

Later an automobile agent visited the town—at the secret bidding of her Highness—but he was so unceremoniously hustled over the frontier that his teeth must have rattled like a dancer's castanets. It was a great country for expeditiousness, as you will find, if you do me the honor to follow me to the end.

So the grand duke swore that his niece should wed Doppelkinn, and the princess vowed that she would not. The man who had charge of my horses said that one of the palace maids had recounted to him a dialogue which had taken place between the duke and his niece. As I was anxious to be off on the road I was compelled to listen to his gossip.

THE GRAND DUKE—In two months' time you shall wed the Prince of Doppelkinn.

THE PRINCESS—What! that old red-nose? Never! I shall marry only where I love.

THE GRAND DUKE—Only where you love! (*Sneers*.) One would think, to hear you talk, that you were capable of loving something.

THE PRINCESS—You have yet to learn. I warn you not to force me. I promise to do something scandalous. I will marry one of the people—a man.

THE GRAND DUKE—Bah! (*Swears softly on his way down to the stables*.)

But the princess had in her mind a plan which, had it gone through safely, would have added many grey hairs to the duke's scanty collection. It was a

mighty ingenious plan, too, for a woman to figure out.

In his attitude toward the girl the duke stood alone. Behind his back his ministers wore out their shoes in waiting on the caprices of the girl, while the grand duchess, half-blind and half-deaf, openly worshiped her wilful but wholly adorable niece, and abetted her in all her escapades. So far as the populace was concerned, she was the daughter of the favorite son, dead these eighteen years, and that was enough for them. Whatever she did was right and proper. But the hard-headed duke had the power to say what should be what, and he willed it that the Princess Hildegarde should marry his old comrade in arms, the Prince of Doppelkinn.

II

As I have already remarked, I used frequently to take long rides into the country, and sometimes I did not return till the following day. My clerk was always on duty, and the work never appeared to make him round-shouldered.

I had ridden horses for years, and to throw a leg over a good mount was to me one of the greatest pleasures in the world. I delighted in stopping at the old feudal inns, of studying the stolid German peasant, of drinking from steins uncracked these hundred years, of inspecting ancient armor and gathering trifling romances attached thereto. And often I have had the courage to stop at some quaint, crumbling *Schloss* or castle and ask for a night's lodging for myself and horse. Seldom, if ever, did I meet with a refusal.

I possessed the whimsical habit of picking out strange roads and riding on till night swooped down from the snow-capped mountains. I had a bit of poetry in my system that had never been completely worked out, and I was always imagining that at the very next *Schloss* or inn I was to hit upon some delectable adventure. I was only twenty-eight, and inordinately fond of my Dumas.

I rode in grey whipcord breeches, tan boots, a blue serge coat, white stock, and never a hat or cap till the snow blew. I used to laugh when the peasants asked leave to lend me a cap or to run back and find the one I had presumably

lost.

One night the delectable adventure for which I was always seeking came my way, and I was wholly unprepared for it.

I had taken the south highway: that which seeks the valley beyond the lake. The moon-film lay mistily upon everything: on the far-off lake, on the great upheavals of stone and glacier above me, on the long white road that stretched out before me, ribbon-wise. High up the snow on the mountains resembled huge opals set in amethyst. I was easily twenty-five miles from the city; that is to say, I had been in the saddle some six hours. Nobody but a king's messenger will ride a horse more than five miles an hour. I cast about for a place to spend the night. There was no tavern in sight, and the hovels I had passed during the last hour offered no shelter for my horse. Suddenly, around a bend in the road, I saw the haven I was seeking. It was a rambling, tottering old castle, standing in the center of a cluster of firs; and the tiles of the roofs and the ivy of the towers were shining silver with the heavy fall of dew.

Lady Chloe sniffed her kind, whinnied, and broke into a trot. She knew sooner than I that there was life beyond the turn. We rode up to the gate, and I dismounted and stretched myself. I tried the gate. The lock hung loose, like a paralytic hand. Evidently those inside had nothing to fear from those outside. I grasped an iron bar and pushed in the gate, Chloe following knowingly at my heels. I could feel the crumbling rust on my gloves. Chloe whinnied again, and there came an answering whinny from somewhere in the rear of the castle. Somebody must be inside, I reasoned.

There were lights in the left wing, but this part of the castle was surrounded by an empty moat, damp and weedy. This was not to be entered save by a ladder. There was a great central door, however, which had a modern appearance. The approach was a broad graveled walk. I tied Lady Chloe to a tree, knotted the bridle-reins above her neck to prevent her from putting her restless feet into them, and proceeded toward the door.

Of all the nights this was the one on which my usually lively imagination reposed. I was hungry and tired, and I dare say my little mare was. I wasn't looking for an adventure; I didn't want any adventure; I wanted nothing in the world but a meal and a bed. But for the chill of the night air—the breath of the mountain is cold at night—I should have been perfectly willing to sleep in the

open. Down drawbridge, up portcullis!

I boldly climbed the steps and groped around for the knocker. It was broken and useless, like the lock on the gate. And never a bell could I find. I swore softly and became impatient. People in Barscheit did not usually live in this slovenly fashion. What sort of place was this?

Suddenly I grew erect, every fiber in my body tense and expectant.

A voice, lifted in song! A great penetrating yet silkily mellow voice; a soprano; heavenly, not to say ghostly, coming as it did from the heart of this gloomy ruin of stone and iron. The jewel song from *Faust*, too! How the voice rose, fell, soared again with intoxicating waves of sound! What permeating sweetness! I stood there, a solitary listener, as far as I knew, bewildered, my heart beating hard and fast. I forgot my hunger.

Had I stumbled upon one of my dreams at last? Had Romance suddenly relented, as a coquette sometimes relents? For a space I knew not what to do. Then, with a shrug—I have never been accused of lacking courage—I tried once more, by the aid of a match, to locate a bell. There was absolutely nothing; and the beating of my riding-crop on the panels of that huge door would have been as noisy as a feather. I grasped the knob and turned it impatiently. Behold! the door opened without sound, and I stepped into the hallway, which was velvet black.

The wonderful voice went on. I paused, with hands outstretched. Supposing I bumped into something! I took a step forward, another and another; I swung my crop in a half-circle; all was vacancy, I took another step, this time in the direction of the voice—and started back with a smothered curse. Bang-ang! I had run into a suit of old armor, the shield of which had clattered to the stone floor. As I have observed, I am not a coward, but I had all I could do to keep my legs—which were stirrup-weary, anyhow—from knocking under me!

Silence!

The song died. All over that great rambling structure not even the reassuring chirp of a cricket! I stood perfectly still. What the deuce should I do? Turn back? As I formed this question in my mind a draft of wind slammed the door shut. I was in for it, sure enough; I was positive that I could never find that door again. There was nothing to do but wait, and wait with straining ears. Here were

mysterious inhabitants.—they might be revolutionists, conspirators, counterfeiters.

Heaven knows how long I waited.

Soon I heard a laugh, light, infectious, fearless! Then I heard a voice, soft and pleading.

"Don't go; in mercy's name, don't go, Gretchen! You may be killed!"

English! I had actually heard a voice speak my native tongue.

"Nonsense, Betty! I am not afraid of any ghost that ever walked, rode or floated."

"Ghost? It may be a burglar!"

"Or Steinbock! We shall find nothing."

Indeed!

"Nothing but a rat, bungling about in the armor." The laughter came again. "You are not *afraid*, Betty?"

"Only cautious. But how can you laugh? A rat?" cried a voice rather anxiously. "Why, they are as big as dogs!"

"But arrant cowards."

So! one of these voices spoke English as its birthright; the other spoke with an accent, that is to say, by adoption. Into what had I fallen? Whither had my hunger brought me? I was soon to learn.

There came a faint thread of light on one side of the hall, such as may be likened to that which filters under a door-sill. Presently this was followed by the sound of jangling brass rings. A heavy velvet portière—which I, being in darkness, had not discovered—slipped back. My glance, rather blinded, was first directed toward the flame of the candle. Then I lowered it—and surrendered for ever and for ever!

I beheld two faces in profile, as it were, one side in darkness, the other tinted and glowing like ancient ivory. I honestly confess to you that in all my wanderings—and they have been frequent and many—I never saw such an enchanting picture or two more exquisite faces. One peered forth with hesitant bravery; the other—she who held the candle—with cold, tranquil inquiry.

All my fears, such as they were, left me instantly. Besides, I was not without a certain amount of gallantry and humor. I stepped squarely into the light and bowed.

"Ladies, I am indeed not a ghost, but I promise you that I shall be if I am not offered something to eat at once!"

Tableau!

"What are you doing here?" asked she with the candle, her midnight eyes drawing down her brows into a frown of displeasure.

I bowed. "To begin with, I find a gate unlocked, and being curious, I open it; then I find a door unlatched, and I enter. Under these unusual circumstances I am forced to ask the same question of you: what are you doing here in this ruined castle? If it isn't ruined, it is deserted, which amounts to the same thing." This *was* impertinent, especially on the part of a self-invited guest.

"That is my affair, sir. I have a right here, now and at all times." Her voice was cold and authoritative. "There is an inn six miles farther down the road; this is a private residence. Certainly you can not remain here over night."

"Six miles?" I echoed dismally. "Madam, if I have seemed impertinent, pardon me. I have been in the saddle six hours. I have ridden nearly thirty miles since noon. I am dead with fatigue. At least give me time to rest a bit before taking up the way again, I admit that the manner of my entrance was informal; but how was I to know? There was not even a knocker on the door by which to make known my presence to you." The truth is, I did not want to go at once. No one likes to stumble into an adventure—enchanting as this promised to be—and immediately pop out of it. An idea came to me, serviceable rather than brilliant. "I am an American. My German is poor. I speak no French. I have lost my way, it would seem; I am hungry and tired. To ride six miles farther now is a physical impossibility; and I am very fond of my horse."

"He says he is hungry, Gretchen," said the English girl, dropping easily into the French language as a vehicle of speech. (I was a wretch, I know, but I simply could not help telling that lie; I didn't want to go; and they *might* be conspirators.) "Besides," went on the girl, "he looks like a gentleman."

"We can not always tell a gentleman in the candle-light," replied Gretchen, eying me critically and shrewdly and suspiciously.

As for me, I gazed from one to the ether, inquiringly, after the manner of one who hears a tongue not understandable.

"He's rather nice," was the English girl's comment; "and his eyes strike me as being too steady to be dishonest."

I had the decency to burn in the ears. I had taken the step, so now I could not draw back. I sincerely hoped that they would not exchange any embarrassing confidences. When alone women converse upon many peculiar topics; and conversing in a tongue which they supposed to be unknown to me, these two were virtually alone.

"But, my dear child," the other returned argumentatively, "we can not offer hospitality to a strange man this night of all nights. Think of what is to be accomplished."

(So something was to be accomplished? I was right, then, in deceiving them. To accomplish something on a night like this, far from habitation, had all the air of a conspiracy.)

"Feed him and his horse, and I'll undertake to get rid of him before that detestable Steinbock comes. Besides, he might prove a valuable witness in drawing up the papers."

(Papers?)

"I never thought of that. It will not do to trust Steinbock wholly." Gretchen turned her searching eyes once more upon me. I confess that I had some difficulty in steadying my own. There are some persons to whom one can not lie successfully; one of them stood before me. But I rather fancy I passed through the ordeal with at least half a victory. "Will you go your way after an hour's rest?" she asked, speaking in the familiar tongue.

"I promise." It was easy to make this promise. I wasn't a diplomat for nothing. I knew how to hang on, to dodge under, to go about.

"Follow me," Gretchen commanded briefly.

(Who was she? What was going on?)

We passed through the gloomy salon. A damp, musty odor struck my sense of smell. I was positive that the castle was uninhabited, save for this night. Three candles burned on the mantel, giving to the gloom a mysterious, palpitating effect. The room beyond was the dining-room, richly paneled in wine-colored mahogany. This was better; it was cheerful. A log crackled in the fireplace. There were plenty of candles. There was a piano, too. This belonged to the castle; a heavy tarpaulin covering lay heaped at one side. There was a mahogany sideboard that would have sent a collector of antiques into raptures, and a table upon which lay the remains of a fine supper. My mouth watered. I counted over the good things: roast pheasant, pink ham, a sea-food salad, asparagus, white bread and unsalted butter, an alcohol-burner over which hung a tea-pot, and besides all this there was a pint of La Rose which was but half-emptied. Have you ever been in the saddle half a day? If you have, you will readily appreciate the appetite that was warring with my curiosity.

"Eat," bade she who was called Gretchen, shortly.

"And my horse?"

"Where is it?"

"Tied to a tree by the gate."

She struck a Chinese gong. From the kitchen appeared an elderly servitor who looked to me more fitted to handle a saber than a carving-knife; at least, the scar on his cheek impressed me with this idea. (I found out later that he was an old soldier, who lived alone in the castle as caretaker.)

"Take this gentleman's horse to the stables and feed him," said Gretchen. "You will find the animal by the gate."

With a questioning glance at me the old fellow bowed and made off.

I sat down, and the two women brought the various plates and placed them within reach. Their beautiful hands flashed before my eyes and now and then a sleeve brushed my shoulder.

"Thank you," I murmured. "I will eat first, and then make my apologies."

This remark caught the fancy of Gretchen. She laughed. It was the same laughter I had heard while standing in the great hall.

"Will you drink tea, or would you prefer to finish this Bordeaux?" she asked pleasantly.

"The wine, if you please; otherwise the effect of the meal and the long hours in the wind will produce sleepiness. And it would be frightfully discourteous on my part to fall asleep in my chair. I am very hard to awake."

The English girl poured out the wine and passed the goblet to me. I touched my lips to the glass, and bent my head politely. Then I resolutely proceeded to attack the pheasant and ham. I must prove to these women that at least I was honest in regard to my hunger. I succeeded in causing a formidable portion of the food to disappear.

And then I noticed that neither of the young women seated herself while I ate. I understood. There was no hostility in this action; nothing but formality. They declined to sit in the presence of an unwelcome stranger, thus denying his equality from a social point of view. I readily accepted this decision on their part. They didn't know who I was. They stood together by the fireplace and carried on a conversation in low tones.

How shall I describe them? The elder of the two, the one who seemed to possess all the authority, could not have been more than twenty. Her figure was rather matured, yet it was delicate. Her hair was tawny, her skin olive in shade and richly tinted at the cheek-bones. Her eyes, half framed by thick, black-arching brows, reminded me of woodland pools in the dusk of evening,—depths unknown, cool, refreshing in repose. The chin was resolute, the mouth was large but shapely and brilliant, the nose possessed the delicate nostrils characteristic of all sensitive beings—that is to say, thoroughbreds; altogether a confusing, bewildering beauty. At one moment I believed her to be Latin, at the next I was positive that she was Teutonic. I could not discover a single weak point, unless impulsiveness shall be called weakness; this sign of impulsiveness was visible in

the lips.

The other—well, I couldn't help it. It was *Kismet*, fate, the turn in the road, what you will. I fell heels over head in love with her at once. She was charming, exquisite, one of those delicate creatures who always appear in enchantments; a Bouguereau child grown into womanhood, made to fit the protecting frame of a man's arms. Love steals into the heart when we least expect him; and before we are aware, the sly little god has unpacked his trunk and taken possession!

Eyes she had as blue as the Aegean Sea on windy days, blue as the cloud-winnowed sky of a winter's twilight, blue as sapphires—Irish eyes! Her hair was as dark and silken as a plume from the wings of night. (Did I not say that I had some poetry in my system?) The shape of her mouth—Never mind; I can recall only the mad desire to kiss it. A graceful figure, a proud head, a slender hand, a foot so small that I wondered if it really poised, balanced or supported her young body. Tender she must be, and loving, enclitical rather than erect like her authoritative companion. She was adorable.

All this inventory of feminine charms was taken by furtive glances, sometimes caught—or were they taking an inventory of myself? Presently my appetite became singularly submissive. Hunger often is satisfied by the feeding of the eyes. I dropped my napkin on the table and pushed back my chair. My hostesses ceased conversing.

"Ladies," said I courteously, "I offer you my sincere apologies for this innocent intrusion." I looked at my watch. "I believe that you gave me an hour's respite. So, then, I have thirty minutes to my account."

The women gazed at each other. One laughed, and the other smiled; it was the English girl who laughed this time. I liked the sound of it better than any I had yet heard.

(Pardon another parenthesis. I hope you haven't begun to think that *I* am the hero of this comedy. Let it be furthest from your thoughts. I am only a passive bystander.)

"I sincerely trust that your hunger is appeased," said the one who had smiled.

"It is, thank you." I absently fumbled in my coat pockets, then guiltily dropped my hands. What a terrible thing habit is!

"You may smoke," said the Bouguereau child who was grown into womanhood. Wasn't that fine of her? And wasn't it rather observant, too? I learned later that she had a brother who was fond of tobacco. To her eyes my movement was a familiar one.

"With your kind permission," said I gratefully. I hadn't had a smoke in four hours.

I owned a single good cigar, the last of my importation. I lighted it and blew forth a snowy billow of heavenly aroma. I know something about human nature, even the feminine side of it. A presentable young man with a roll of aromatic tobacco seldom falls to win the confidence of those about him. With that cloud of smoke the raw edge of formality smoothed down.

"Had you any particular destination?" asked Gretchen.

"None at all. The road took my fancy, and I simply followed it."

"Ah! that is one of the pleasures of riding—to go wherever the inclination bids. I ride."

We were getting on famously.

"Do you take long journeys?" I inquired.

"Often. It is the most exhilarating of sports," said the Enchantment. "The scenery changes; there are so many things that charm and engage your interest: the mountains, the waterways, the old ruins. Have you ever whistled to the horses afield and watched them come galloping down to the wall? It is fine. In England—" But her mouth closed suddenly. She was talking to a stranger.

I love enthusiasm in a woman. It colors her cheeks and makes her eyes sparkle, I grew a bit bolder.

"I heard a wonderful voice as I approached the castle," said I.

Gretchen shrugged.

"I haven't heard its equal outside Berlin or Paris," I went on.

"Paris?" said Gretchen, laying a neat little trap for me into which my conceit was soon to tumble me. "Paris is a marvelous city."

"There is no city to equal it. Inasmuch as we three shall never meet again, will you not do me the honor to repeat that jewel song from *Faust*?" My audacity did not impress her in the least.

"You can scarcely expect me to give a supper to a stranger and then sing for him, besides," said Gretchen, a chill again stealing into her tones. "These Americans!" she observed to her companion in French.

I laid aside my cigar, approached the piano, and sat down. I struck a few chords and found the instrument to be in remarkably good order. I played a Chopin *Polonaise*, I tinkled Grieg's *Papillon*, then I ceased.

"That is to pay for my supper," I explained.

Next I played *Le Courier*, and when I had finished that I turned again, rising.

"That is to pay for my horse's supper," I said.

Gretchen's good humor returned.

"Whoever you are, sir," her tone no longer repellent, "you are amusing. Pray, tell us whom we have the honor to entertain?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea who my hostess is,"—evasively.

"It is quite out of the question. You are the intruder."

"Call me Mr. Intruder, then," said I.

It was, you will agree, a novel adventure. I was beginning to enjoy it hugely.

"Who do you suppose this fellow is?" Gretchen asked.

"He says he is an American, and I believe he is. What Americans are in Barscheit?"

"I know of none at all. What shall we do to get rid of him?"

All this was carried on with unstudied rudeness. They were women of high and noble quality; and as I was an interloper, I could take no exception to a conversation in a language I had stated I did not understand. If they were rude, I had acted in a manner unbecoming a gentleman. Still, I was somewhat on the defensive. I took out my watch. My hour was up.

"I regret that I must be off," I said ruefully. "It is much pleasanter here than on the road."

"I can not ask you to remain here. You will find the inn a very comfortable place for the night," was Gretchen's suggestion.

"Before I go, may I ask in what manner I might serve as a witness?" Ere the words had fully crossed my lips I recognized that my smartness had caused me to commit an unpardonable blunder for a man who wished to show up well in an adventure of this sort. (But fate had a hand in it, as presently you shall see.)

Gretchen laughed, but the sound was harsh and metallic. She turned to her companion, who was staring at me with startled eyes.

"What did I tell you? You can not tell a gentleman in the candle-light." To me she said:

"I thought as much. You have heard *Faust* in Paris, but you know nothing of the French language. You claimed to be a gentleman, yet you have permitted us to converse in French."

"Was it polite of you to use it?" I asked. "All this," with a wave of the hand, "appears mysterious. This is not a residence one would expect to find inhabited —and by two charming women!" I bowed. "Your presence here is even less satisfactorily explained than mine. If I denied the knowledge of French it was because I wasn't sure of my surroundings. It was done in self-defense rather than in the desire to play a trick. And in this language you speak of witnesses, of papers, of the coming of a man you do not trust. It looks very much like a conspiracy." I gathered up my gloves and riding-crop. I believed that I had extricated myself rather well.

"This is my castle," said Gretchen, gently shaking off the warning hand of her companion. "If I desire to occupy it for a night, who shall gainsay me? If I leave the latches down, that is due to the fact that I have no one to fear. Now, sir, you

have eaten the bread of my table, and I demand to know who you are. If you do not tell me at once, I shall be forced to confine you here till I am ready to leave."

"Confine me!"—nonplussed. This was more than I had reckoned on.

"Yes." She reached out to strike the gong. (I can not be blamed for surrendering so tamely. I didn't know that the old servitor was the only man around.)

"I am the American consul at Barscheit."

The two women drew together instinctively, as if one desired to protect the other from some unknown calamity. What the deuce was it all about? All at once Gretchen thrust aside her friend and approached. The table was between us, and she rested her hands upon it. Our glances met and clashed.

"Did the duke send you here?" she demanded repellently.

"The duke?" I was getting deeper than ever. "The duke?"

"Yes. I am the Princess Hildegarde."

III

The Princess Hildegarde of Barscheit! My gloves and riding-crop slipped from my nerveless fingers to the floor. A numbing, wilting sensation wrinkled my spine. The Princess Hildegarde of Barscheit! She stood opposite me, the woman—ought I not to say girl?—for whom I had been seeking, after a fashion, all these months! The beautiful madcap who took the duchy by the ears, every now and then, and tweaked them! The princess herself, here in this lonely old castle into which I had so carelessly stumbled! Romance, enchantment! Oddly enough, the picture of her riding a bicycle flashed through my brain, and this was followed by another, equally engaging, of the hussar who rode cross-country, to the horror of the conservative element at court.

"The Princess Hildegarde!" I murmured stupidly.

"Yes. I have asked you a question, sir. Or shall I put the question in French?"—ironically. "Was it the duke who sent you here?"

There was a look in her superb eyes which told me that it would have been to her infinite pleasure to run a sword through my black and villainous heart. Presently I recovered. With forced calm I stooped and collected my gloves and crop.

"Your Highness, what the deuce has the duke to do with my affairs, or I with his? As an American, you would scarcely expect me to meddle with your private affairs. You are the last person in the world I thought to meet this night. I represent the United States in this country, and though I am inordinately young, I have acquired the habit of attending to my own affairs."

From the angry face in front of me I turned to the dismayed face beyond. There must have been a question in my glance. The young woman drew herself up proudly.

"I am the Honorable Betty Moore."

(The princess' schoolmate in England!)

Her Highness stood biting the knuckle of a forefinger, undecided as to what path of action to enter, to reach a satisfactory end. My very rudeness convinced her more than anything else that I spoke the truth.

"How, then, did you select this particular road?"—still entertaining some doubt.

"It is a highway, free to all. But I have already explained that," I answered quietly. I moved deliberately toward the door, but with a cat-like movement she sprang in front of me. "Well, your Highness?"

"Wait!" she commanded, extending an authoritative arm (lovely too!). "Since you are here, and since you know who I am, you must remain."

"Must?" I repeated, taken aback.

"Must! My presence here ought not to be known to any one. When you witness that which shall take place here to-night, you will understand." Her tone

lost its evenness; it trembled and became a bit wild.

"In what manner may I be of service to your Highness?" I asked pleasantly, laying aside my gloves and crop again. "I can easily give you my word of honor as a gentleman not to report your presence here; but if I am forced to remain, I certainly demand—"

"Desire," she corrected, the old fire in her eyes.

"Thank you. I desire, then, to know the full reason; for I can not be a party to anything which may reflect upon the consulate. For myself, I do not care." What hare-brained escapade was now in the air?

The princess walked over to the mantel and rested her arms upon it, staring wide-eyed into the fire. Several minutes passed. I waited patiently; but, to tell the truth, I was on fire with curiosity. At length my patience was rewarded.

"You have heard that I am to marry the Prince of Doppelkinn?" she began.

I nodded.

"Doubtless you have also heard of my determination not to marry him?" she went on.

Again I nodded.

"Well, I am not going to marry him."

I was seized with the desire to laugh, but dared not. What had all this to do with my detention in the castle?

"Betty," said the princess, turning imploringly to her companion (what a change!), "*you* tell him."

"I?" The Honorable Betty drew back.

(Had they kidnapped old Doppelkinn? I wondered.)

"I can not tell him," cried her Highness miserably, "I simply can not. You must do it, Betty. It is now absolutely necessary that he should know everything;

it is absolutely vital that he be present. Perhaps Heaven has sent him. Do you understand? Now, tell him!"

And, wonders to behold! she who but a few minutes gone had been a princess in everything, cold, seeing, tranquil, she fled from the room. (Decidedly this was growing interesting. What had they done?) Thus, the Honorable Betty Moore and his Excellency, the American consul at Barscheit, were left staring into each other's eyes fully a minute.

"You will, of course, pledge me your word of honor?" She who had recently been timid now became cool and even-pulsed.

"If in pledging it I am asked to do nothing to discredit my office. I am not an independent individual,"—smiling to put her more at ease. (I haven't the least doubt that I would have committed any sort of folly had she required it of me.)

"You have my word, sir, that you will be asked to do nothing dishonorable. On the other hand, you will confer a great favor upon her Highness, who is in deep trouble and is seeking a way to escape it."

"Command me," said I promptly.

"Her Highness is being forced into marriage with a man who is old enough to be her grandfather. She holds him in horror, and will go to any length to make this marriage an impossibility. For my part, I have tried to convince her of the futility of resisting her royal uncle's will." (Sensible little Britisher!) "What she is about to do will be known only to four persons, one of whom is a downright rascal."

"A rascal?" slipped my lips, half-unconsciously. "I trust that I haven't given you that impression," I added eagerly. (A rascal? The plot was thickening to formidable opaqueness.)

"No, no!" she cried hastily, with a flash of summer on her lips. (What is more charming than an English woman with a clear sense of the humorous?) "You haven't given me that impression at all."

"Thank you." My vanity expanded under the genial warmth of this knowledge. It was quite possible that she looked upon me favorably.

"To proceed. There is to be a kind of mock marriage here to-night, and you are to witness it." She watched me sharply.

I frowned.

"Patience! Not literally a mock marriage, but the filling out of a bogus certificate."

"I do not understand at all."

"You have heard of Hermann Steinbock, a cashiered officer?"

"Yes. I understand that he is the rascal to whom you refer."

"Well, this certificate is to be filled out completely. To outwit the duke, her Highness commits—"

"A forgery."

"It is a terrible thing to do, but she has gone too far to withdraw now. She is to become the wife of Hermann Steinbock. She wishes to show the certificate to the duke."

"But the banns have not been made public."

"That does not matter."

"But why detain me?" I was growing restless. It was all folly, and no good would come of it.

"It is necessary that a gentleman should be present. The caretaker is not a gentleman. I have said that Steinbock is a rascal. As I review the events, I begin to look upon your arrival as timely. Steinbock is not a reliable quantity."

"I begin to perceive."

"He is to receive one thousand crowns for his part in the ceremony; then he is to leave the country."

"But the priest's signature, the notary's seal, the iron-clad formalities which attend all these things!" I stammered.

"You will recollect that her Highness is a princess of the blood. Seldom is she refused anything in Barscheit." She went to a small secretary and produced a certificate, duly sealed and signed. There lacked nothing but Steinbock's name.

"But the rascal will boast about it! He may blackmail all of you. He may convince the public that he has really married her Highness."

"I thank not. We have not moved in this blindly. Steinbock we know to have forged the name of the minister of finance. We hold this sword above his head. And if he should speak or boast of it, your word would hold greater weight than his. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, I understand. But I believe that I am genuinely sorry to have blundered into this castle to-night."

"Oh, if you lack courage!"—carelessly.

I laughed. "I am not afraid of twenty Steinbocks."

Her laughter echoed mine. "Come, Mr.—by the way, I believe I do not know your name."

"Warrington—Arthur Warrington."

"That is a very good English name, and a gentleman possessing it will never leave two women in a predicament like this. You will understand that we dare not trust any one at court. Relative to her Highness, the duke succeeds in bribing all."

"But a rascal like Steinbock!"

"I know,"—a bit wearily.

"It is pardonable to say that I believe her Highness has been very foolish."

The girl made a gesture which conceded this fact. "It is too late to retreat, as I have told you. Steinbock is already on the way. We must trust him. But you?"

"After all, what does a consulate amount to?"

This seemed to be answer enough. She extended her hand in a royal fashion. I took it in one of mine, bent and kissed it respectfully. Apparently she had expected the old-fashioned handshake familiar to our common race, for I observed that she started as my lips came into contact with the back of her hand. As for me, when my lips touched the satin flesh I knew that it was all over.

"Your Highness!" she called.

The princess returned. She looked at me with a mixture of fierceness and defiance, humility and supplication. I had always supposed her to be a sort of hobbledehoy; instead, she was one of those rare creatures who possess all the varying moods of the sex. I could readily imagine all the young fellows falling violently in love with her; all the young fellows save one. I glanced furtively at the Honorable Betty.

"He knows all?" asked her Highness, her chin tilted aggressively.

"Everything."

"What must you think of me?" There was that in her Highness' tone which dared me to express any opinion that was not totally complimentary.

"I am not sufficiently well-born to pass an opinion upon your Highness' actions," I replied, with excusable irony.

"Excellent!" she exclaimed. "I have grown weary of sycophants. You are not afraid of me at all."

"Not in the slightest degree," I declared.

"You will not regret what you are about to do. I can make it very pleasant for you in Barscheit—or very unpleasant." But this threatening supplement was made harmless by the accompanying smile.

"May I offer the advice of rather a worldly man?"

"Well?"

"When Steinbock comes bid him go about his business."

The Honorable Betty nodded approvingly, but her Highness shrugged.

"Since you are decided,"—and I bowed. "Now, what time does this fellow put in his appearance?"

Her Highness beamed upon the Honorable Betty. "I like the way he says 'this fellow'; it reassures me. He is due at nine o'clock; that is to say, in half an hour. I will give you these directions. I do not wish Steinbock to know of your presence here. You will hide in the salon, close to the portières, within call. Moreover, I shall have to impose upon you the disagreeable duty of playing the listener. Let nothing escape your ear or your eye. I am not certain of this fellow Steinbock, though I hold a sword above his head."

"But where are your men?" I asked.

She smiled. "There is no one here but Leopold."

"Your Highness to meet Steinbock alone?"

"I have no fear of him; he knows who I am."

"Everything shall be done as you wish." I secretly hoped I might have the opportunity to punch Steinbock's head.

"Thank you." The transition of her moods always left me in wonder. "Play something; it is impossible to talk." She perched herself on the broad arm of the Honorable Betty's chair, and her arm rested lightly but affectionately on her shoulder.

It was something for a man to gain the confidence, in so short a time, of two such women. I felt as brave as Bavard. So I sat down before the piano and played. My two accomplishments are horseback riding and music, and I candidly tell you that I am as reckless at one as at the other. I had a good memory. I played something from Chaminade, as her fancies are always airy and agreeable and unmelancholy. I was attacking *The Flatterer* when her Highness touched my arm.

"Hark!"

We all listened intently. The sound of beating hoofs came distinctly. A single

horseman was galloping along the highway toward the castle. The sound grew nearer and nearer; presently it ceased. I rose quietly.

"It is time I hid myself, for doubtless this rider is the man."

The princess paled for a moment, while her companion nervously plucked at the edges of her handkerchief.

"Go," said the former; "and be watchful."

I then took up my position behind the portières. Truly I had stumbled into an adventure; but how to stumble out again? If the duke got wind of it, it would mean my recall, and I was of a mind, just then, that I was going to be particularly fond of Barscheit.

All was silent. A door closed, and then came the tread of feet. I peered through the portières shortly to see the entrance of two men, one of whom was the old caretaker. His companion was a dark, handsome fellow, of Hungarian gipsy type. There was a devil-may-care air about him that fitted him well. It was Steinbock. He was dressed with scrupulous care, in spite of the fact that he wore riding clothes. It is possible that he recognized the importance of the event. One did not write one's name under a princess' signature every day, even in mockery. There was a half-smile on his face that I did not like.

"Your Highness sees that I am prompt,"—uncovering.

"It is well. Let us proceed at once to conclude the matter in hand," she said.

"Wholly at your service!"

(Hang the fellow's impudence! How dared he use that jovial tone?)

I heard the crackle of parchment. The certificate was being unfolded. (It occurred to me that while she was about it the princess might just as well have forged the rascal's name and wholly dispensed with his services. The whole affair struck me as being ineffective; nothing would come of it. If she tried to make the duke believe that she had married Steinbock, her uncle would probe the matter to the bottom, and in the end cover her with ridicule. But you can not tell a young woman anything, when she is a princess and in the habit of having her own way. It is remarkable how stupid clever women can be at times. The

Honorable Betty understood, but her Highness would not be convinced. Thus she suffered this needless affront. Pardon this parenthesis, but when one talks from behind a curtain the parenthesis is the only available thing.) There was silence. I saw Steinbock poise the pen, then scribble on the parchment. It was done. I stirred restlessly.

"There!" cried Steinbock. His voice did not lack a certain triumph. "And now for the duplicate!"

Her Highness stuffed the document into the bosom of her dress. "There will be no duplicate." The frigidity of her tones would have congealed the blood of an ordinary rascal. But Steinbock was not ordinary.

"But suppose the duke comes to me for verification?" he reasoned.

"You will be on the other side of the frontier. Here are your thousand crowns."

The barb of her contempt penetrated even his thick epidermis. His smile hardened.

"I was once a gentleman; I did not always accept money for aiding in shady transactions."

"Neither your sentiments nor your opinions are required. Now, observe me carefully," continued her Highness. "I shall give you twenty-four hours to cross the frontier in any direction you choose. If after that time you are found in Barscheit, I promise to hand you over to the police."

"It has been a great day," said the rascal, with a laugh. "A thousand crowns!"

I separated the portières an inch. He stood at the side of the piano, upon which he leaned an elbow. He was certainly handsome, much sought after by women of a low class. The princess stood at Steinbock's left and the Honorable Betty at his right, erect, their faces expressing nothing, so forced was the repose.

"I never expected so great an honor. To wed a princess, when that princess is your Highness! Faith, it is fine!"

"You may go at once," interrupted her Highness, her voice rising a key.

"Remember, you have only twenty-four hours between you and prison. You waste valuable time."

"What! you wish to be rid of me so soon? Why, this is the bridal night. One does not part with one's wife at this rate."

Leopold, the caretaker, made a warning gesture.

"Come, Leopold, I must have my jest," laughed Steinbock.

"Within certain bounds," returned the old man phlegmatically. "It is high time you were off. You are foolhardy to match your chances with justice. Prison stares you in the face."

"Bah! Do you believe it?"

"It is a positive fact," added the princess.

"But to leave like this has the pang of death!" Steinbock remonstrated, "What! shall I be off without having even kissed the bride?"

"The bargain is concluded on all sides; you have your thousand crowns."

"But not love's tribute. I must have that. It is worth a thousand crowns. Besides," with a perceptible change in his manner, "shall I forget the contempt with which you have always looked upon me, even in the old days that were fair and prosperous? Scarcely! Opportunity is a thing that can not be permitted to pass thus lightly." Then I observed his nose wrinkle; he was sniffing. "Tobacco! I did not know that you smoked, Leopold."

"Begone!" cried the old fellow, his hands opening and shutting.

"Presently!" With a laugh he sprang toward her Highness, but Leopold was too quick for him.

There was a short struggle, and I saw the valiant old man reel, fall and strike his head on the stone of the hearth. He lay perfectly motionless. So unexpected was this scene to my eyes that for a time I was without any particular sense of movement. I stood like stone. With an evil laugh Steinbock sprang toward her Highness again. Quick as light she snatched up my crop, which lay on the table,

and struck the rascal full across the eyes, again and again and again, following him as he stepped backward. Her defense was magnificent. But, as fate determined to have it, Steinbock finally succeeded in wresting the stick from her grasp. He was wild with pain and chagrin. It was then I awoke to the fact that I was needed.

I rushed out, hot with anger. I caught Steinbock by the collar just in time to prevent his lips from touching her cheek. I flung him to the floor, and knelt upon his chest. I am ashamed to confess it, but I recollect slapping the fellow's face as he struggled under me.

"You scoundrel!" I cried, breathing hard.

"Kill him!" whispered her Highness. She was furious; the blood of her marauding ancestors swept over her cheeks, and if ever I saw murder in a woman's eyes it was at that moment.

"Hush, Hildegarde, hush!" The English girl caught the princess in her arms and drew her back. "Don't let me hear you talk like that. It is all over."

"Get up," I said to Steinbock, as I set him free.

He crawled to his feet. He was very much disordered, and there were livid welts on his face. He shook himself, eying me evilly. There was murder in his eyes, too.

"Empty your pockets of those thousand crowns!"—peremptorily.

"I was certain that I smelled tobacco," he sneered. "It would seem that there are other bridegrooms than myself."

"Those crowns, or I'll break every bone in your body!" I balled my fists. Nothing would have pleased me better at that moment than to pummel the life out of him.

Slowly he drew out the purse. It was one of those limp silk affairs so much affected by our ancestors. He balanced it on his hand. Its ends bulged with gold and bank-notes. Before I was aware of his intention, he swung one end of it in so deft a manner that it struck me squarely between the eyes. With a crash of glass he disappeared through the window. The blow dazed me only for a moment, and

I was hot to be on his tracks. The Honorable Betty stopped me.

"He may shoot you!" she cried. "Don't go!"

Although half through the window, I crawled back, brushing my sleeves. Something warm trickled down my nose.

"You have been cut!" exclaimed her Highness.

"It is nothing. I beg of you to let me follow. It will be all over with that fellow at large."

"Not at all." Her Highness' eyes sparkled wickedly. "He will make for the nearest frontier. He knows now that I shall not hesitate a moment to put his affairs in the hands of the police."

"He will boast of what he has done."

"Not till he has spent those thousand crowns." She crossed the room and knelt at the side of Leopold, dashing some water into his face. Presently he opened his eyes. "He is only stunned. Poor Leopold!"

I helped the old man to his feet, and he rubbed the back of his head grimly. He drew a revolver from his pocket.

"I had forgotten all about it," he said contritely. "Shall I follow him, your Highness?"

"Let him go. It doesn't matter now. Betty, you were right, as you always are. I have played the part of a silly fool. I *would* have my own way in the matter. Well, I have this worthless paper. At least I can frighten the duke, and that is something."

"Oh, my dear, if only you would have listened to my advice!" the other girl said. There was deep discouragement in her tones. "I warned you so often that it would come to this end."

"Let us drop the matter entirely," said her Highness.

I gazed admiringly at her—to see her sink suddenly into a chair and weep abandonedly! Leopold eyed her mournfully, while the English girl rushed to her side and flung her arms around her soothingly.

"I am very unhappy," said the princess, lifting her head and shaking the tears from her eyes. "I am harassed on all sides; I am not allowed any will of my own. I wish I were a peasant!—Thank you, thank you! But for you that wretch would have kissed me." She held out her hand to me, and I bent to one knee as I kissed it. She was worthy to be the wife of the finest fellow in all the world. I was very sorry for her, and thought many uncomplimentary things of the duke.

"I shall not ask you to forget my weakness," she said.

"It is already forgotten, your Highness."

Under such circumstances I met the Princess Hildegarde of Barscheit; and I never betrayed her confidence until this writing, when I have her express permission.

Of Hermann Steinbock I never saw anything more. Thus the only villain passes from the scene. As I have repeatedly remarked, doubtless to your weariness, this is not my story at all; but in parenthesis I may add that between the Honorable Betty Moore and myself there sprang up a friendship which later ripened into something infinitely stronger.

This, then, was the state of affairs when, one month later, Max Scharfenstein

poked his handsome blond head over the frontier of Barscheit; cue (as the dramatist would say), enter hero.

IV

He came straight to the consulate, and I was so glad to see him that I sat him down in front of the sideboard and left orders that I was at home to no one. We had been class-mates and room-mates at college, and two better friends never lived. We spent the whole night in recounting the good old days, sighed a little over the departed ones, and praised or criticized the living. Hadn't they been times, though? The nights we had stolen up to Philadelphia to see the shows, the great Thanksgiving games in New York, the commencements, and all that!

Max had come out of the far West. He was a foundling who had been adopted by a wealthy German ranchman named Scharfenstein, which name Max assumed as his own, it being as good as any. Nobody knew anything about Max's antecedents, but he was so big and handsome and jolly that no one cared a hang. For all that he did not know his parentage, he was a gentleman, something that has to be bred in the bone. Once or twice I remember seeing him angry; in anger he was arrogant, deadly, but calm. He was a god in track-linen, for he was what few big men are, quick and agile. The big fellow who is cat-like in his movements is the most formidable of athletes. One thing that invariably amused me was his inordinate love of uniforms. He would always stop when he saw a soldier or the picture of one, and his love of arms was little short of a mania. He was an expert fencer and a dead shot besides. (Pardon the parenthesis, but I feel it my duty to warn you that nobody fights a duel in this little history, and nobody gets killed.)

On leaving college he went in for medicine, and his appearance in the capital city of Barscheit was due obviously to the great medical college, famous the world over for its nerve specialists. This was Max's first adventure in the land of gutturals. I explained to him, and partly unraveled, the tangle of laws; as to the language, he spoke that, not like a native, but as one.

Max was very fond of the society of women, and at college we used to twit

him about it, for he was always eager to meet a new face, trusting that the new one might be the ideal for which he was searching.

"Well, you old Dutchman," said I, "have you ever found that ideal woman of yours?"

"Bah!"—lighting a pipe. "She will never be found. A horse and a trusty dog for me; those two you may eventually grow to understand. Of course I don't say, if the woman came along—the right one—I mightn't go under, I'm philosopher enough to admit that possibility. I want her tall, hair like corn-silk, eyes like the cornflower, of brilliant intellect, reserved, and dignified, and patient. I want a woman, not humorous, but who understands humor, and I have never heard of one. So, you see, it's all smoke; and I never talk woman these times unless I'm smoking,"—with a gesture which explained that he had given up the idea altogether. "A doctor sees so much of women that he finally sees nothing of woman."

"Oh, if you resort to epigrams, I can see that it's all over."

"All over. I'm so used to being alone that I shouldn't know what to do with a wife." He puffed seriously.

Ah! the futility of our desires, of our castles, of our dreams! The complacency with which we jog along in what we deem to be our own particular groove! I recall a girl friend of my youth who was going to be a celibate, a great reformer, and toward that end was studying for the pulpit. She is now the mother of several children, the most peaceful and unorative woman I know. You see, humanity goes whirring over various side-tracks, thinking them to be the main line, till fate puts its peculiar but happy hand to the switch. Scharfenstein had been plugging away over rusty rails and grass-grown ties—till he came to Barscheit.

"Hope is the wings of the heart," said I, when I thought the pause had grown long enough. "You still hope?"

"In a way. If I recollect, you had an affair once,"—shrewdly.

I smoked on. I wasn't quite ready to speak.

"You were always on the hunt for ideals, too, as I remember; hope you'll find

her."

"Max, my boy, I am solemnly convinced that I have."

"Good Lord, you don't mean to tell me that you are *hooked*?" he cried.

"I see no reason why you should use that particular tone," I answered stiffly.

"Oh, come now; tell me all about it. Who is she, and when's the wedding?"

"I don't know when the wedding's going to be, but I'm mighty sure that I have met the one girl. Max, there never was a girl like her. Witty she is, and wise; as beautiful as a summer's dawn; merry and brave; rides, drives, plays the 'cello, dances like a moon-shadow; and all that,"—with a wave of the hand.

"You've got it bad. Remember how you used to write poetry at college? Who is she, if I may ask?"

"The Honorable Betty Moore, at present the guest of her Highness, the Princess Hildegarde,"—with pardonable pride.

Max whistled. "You're a lucky beggar. One by one we turn traitor to our native land. A Britisher! I never should have believed it of you, of the man whose class declamation was on the fiery subject of patriotism. But is it all on one side?"

"I don't know, Max; sometimes I think so, and then I don't."

"How long have you known her?"

"Little more than a month."

"A month? Everything moves swiftly these days, except European railway cars."

"There's a romance, Max, but another besides her is concerned, and I can not tell you. Some day, when everything quiets down, I'll get you into a corner with a bottle, and you will find it worth while."

"The bottle?"

"Both."

"From rumors I've heard, this princess is a great one for larks; rides bicycles and automobiles, and generally raises the deuce. What sort is she?"

"If you are going to remain in Barscheit, my boy, take a friendly warning. Do not make any foolish attempt to see her. She is more fascinating than a roulette table."

This was a sly dig. Max smiled. A recent letter from him had told of an encounter with the goddess of Monte Carlo. Fortune had been all things but favorable.

"I'm not afraid of your princess; besides, I came here to study."

"And study hard, my boy, study hard. Her Highness is not the only pretty woman in Barscheit. There's a raft of them."

"I'll paddle close to the shore," with a smile.

"By the way, I'll wake you up Thursday."

"How?"—lazily.

"A bout at Müller's Rathskeller. Half a dozen American lads, one of whom is called home. Just fixed up his passports for him. You'll be as welcome as the flowers in the spring. Some of the lads will be in your classes."

"Put me down. It will be like old times. I went to the reunion last June. Everything was in its place but you. Hang it, why can't time always go on as it did then?"

"Time, unlike our watches, never has to go to the jeweler's for repairs," said I owlishly.

Max leaned over, took my bull-terrier by the neck and deposited him on his lap.

"Good pup, Artie—if he's anything like his master. Three years, my boy, since I saw you. And here you are, doing nothing and lallygagging at court with

the nobility. I wish I had had an uncle who was a senator. 'Pull' is everything these days."

"You Dutchman, I won this place on my own merit,"—indignantly.

"Forget it!"—grinning.

"You are impertinent."

"But truthful, always."

And then we smoked a while in silence. The silent friend is the best of the lot. He knows that he hasn't got to talk unless he wants to, and likewise that it is during these lapses of speech that the vine of friendship grows and tightens about the heart. When you sit beside a man and feel that you need not labor to entertain him it's a good sign that you thoroughly understand each other. I was first to speak.

"I don't understand why you should go in for medicine so thoroughly. It can't be money, for heaven knows your father left you a yearly income which alone would be a fortune to me."

"Chivalry shivers these days; the chill of money is on everything. A man must do something—a man who is neither a sloth nor a fool. A man must have something to put his whole heart into; and I despise money as money. I give away the bulk of my income."

"Marry, and then you will not have to," I said flippantly.

"You're a sad dog. Do you know, I've been thinking about epigrams."

"No!"

"Yes. I find that an epigram is produced by the same cause that produces the pearl in the oyster."

"That is to say, a healthy mentality never superinduces an epigram? Fudge!" said I, yanking the pup from his lap on to mine. "According to your diagnosis, your own mind is diseased."

"Have I cracked an epigram?"—with pained surprise.

"Well, you nearly bent one," I compromised. Then we both laughed, and the pup started up and licked my face before I could prevent him.

"Did I ever show you this?"—taking out a locket which was attached to one end of his watch-chain. He passed the trinket to me.

"What is it?" I asked, turning it over and over.

"It's the one slender link that connects me with my babyhood. It wag around my neck when Scharfenstein picked me up. Open it and look at the face inside."

I did so. A woman's face peered up at me. It might have been beautiful but for the troubled eyes and the drooping lips. It was German in type, evidently of high breeding, possessing the subtle lines which distinguish the face of the noble from the peasant's. From the woman's face I glanced at Max's. The eyes were something alike.

"Who do you think it is?" I asked, when I had studied the face sufficiently to satisfy my curiosity.

"I've a sneaking idea that it may be my mother. Scharfenstein found me toddling about in a railroad station, and that locket was the only thing about me that might be used in the matter of identification. You will observe that there is no lettering, not even the jeweler's usual carat-mark to qualify the gold. I recall nothing; life with me dates only from the wide plains and grazing cattle. I was born either in Germany or Austria. That's all I know. And to tell you the honest truth, boy, it's the reason I've placed my woman-ideal so high. So long as I place her over my head I'm not foolish enough to weaken into thinking I can have her. What woman wants a man without a name?"

"You poor old Dutchman, you! You can buy a genealogy with your income. And a woman nowadays marries the man, the man. It's only horses, dogs and cattle that we buy for their pedigrees. Come; you ought to have a strawberry mark on your arm," I suggested lightly; for there were times when Max brooded over the mystery which enveloped his birth.

In reply he rolled up his sleeve and bared a mighty arm. Where the vaccination scar usually is I saw a red patch, like a burn. I leaned over and

examined it. It was a four-pointed scar, with a perfect circle around it. Somehow, it seemed to me that this was not the first time I had seen this peculiar mark. I did not recollect ever seeing it on Max's arm. Where had I seen it, then?

"It looks like a burn," I ventured to suggest.

"It is. I wish I knew what it signifies. Scharfenstein said that it was positively fresh when he found me. He said I cried a good deal and kept telling him that I was Max. Maybe I'm an anarchist and don't know it,"—with half a smile.

"It's a curious scar. Hang me, but I've seen the device somewhere before!"

"You have?"—eagerly. "Where, where?"

"I don't know; possibly I saw it on your arm in the old days."

He sank back in his chair. Silence, during which the smoke thickened and the pup whined softly in his sleep. Out upon the night the cathedral bell boomed the third hour of morning.

"If you don't mind, Artie," said Max, yawning, "I'll turn in. I've been traveling for the past fortnight."

"Take a ride on Dandy in the morning. He'll hold your weight nicely. I can't go with you, as I've a lame ankle."

"I'll be in the saddle at dawn. All I need is a couple of hours between sheets."

As I prodded my pillow into a comfortable wad under my cheek I wondered where I had seen that particular brand. It was a brand. I knew that I had seen it somewhere, but my memory danced away when I endeavored to halter it. Soon I fell asleep, dreaming of somebody who wasn't Max Scharfenstein, by a long shot.

V

That same evening the grand duke's valet knocked on the door leading into the princess' apartments, and when the door opened he gravely announced that his serene Highness desired to speak to the Princess Hildegarde. It was a command. For some reason, known best to herself, the princess chose to obey it.

"Say that I shall be there presently," she said, dismissing the valet.

As she entered her uncle's study—so called because of its dust-laden bookshelves, though the duke sometimes disturbed their contents to steady the leg of an unbalanced chair or table—he laid down his pipe and dismissed his small company of card-players.

"I did not expect to see you so soon," he began. "A woman's curiosity sometimes has its value. It takes little to arouse it, but a great deal to allay it."

"You have not summoned me to make smart speeches, simply because I have been educated up to them?"—truculently.

"No. I have not summoned you to talk smart, a word much in evidence in Barscheit since your return from England. For once I am going to use a woman's prerogative. I have changed my mind."

The Princess Hildegarde trembled with delight. She could put but one meaning to his words.

"The marriage will not take place next month."

"Uncle!"—rapturously.

"Wait a moment,"—grimly. "It shall take place next week."

"I warn you not to force me to the altar," cried the girl, trembling this time with a cold fury.

"My child, you are too young in spirit and too old in mind to be allowed a gateless pasture. In harness you will do very well." He took up his pipe and primed it. It *was* rather embarrassing to look the girl in the eye. "You shall wed Doppelkinn next week."

"You will find it rather embarrassing to drag me to the altar,"—evenly.

"You will not," he replied, "create a scandal of such magnitude. You are untamable, but you are proud."

The girl remained silent. In her heart she knew that he had spoken truly. She could never make a scene in the cathedral. But she was determined never to enter it. She wondered if she should produce the bogus certificate. She decided to wait and see if there were no other loophole of escape. Old *Rotnäsig*? Not if she died!

When these two talked without apparent heat it was with unalterable fixedness of purpose. They were of a common race. The duke was determined that she should wed Doppelkinn; she was equally determined that she should not. The gentleman with the algebraic bump may figure this out to suit himself.

"Have you no pity?"

"My reason overshadows it. You do not suppose that I take any especial pleasure in forcing you? But you leave me no other method."

"I am a young girl, and he is an old man."

"That is immaterial. Besides, the fact has gone abroad. It is now irrevocable."

"I promise to go out and ask the first man I see to marry me!" she declared.

"Pray Heaven, it may be Doppelkinn!" said the duke drolly.

"Oh, do not doubt that I have the courage and the recklessness. I would not care if he were young, but the prince is old enough to be my father."

"You are not obliged to call him husband." The duke possessed a sparkle to-night which was unusual in him. Perhaps he had won some of the state moneys which he had paid out to his ministers' that day. "Let us not waste any time," he added.

"I shall not waste any,"—ominously.

"Order your gown from Vienna, or Paris, or from wherever you will. Don't haggle over the price; let it be a good one; I'm willing to go deep for it."

"You loved my aunt once,"—a broken note in her voice.

"I love her still,"—not unkindly; "but I must have peace in the house. Observe what you have so far accomplished in the matter of creating turmoil." The duke took up a paper.

"My sins?"—contemptuously.

"Let us call them your transgressions. Listen. You have ridden a horse as a man rides it; you have ridden bicycles in public streets; you have stolen away to a masked ball; you ran away from school in Paris and visited Heaven knows whom; you have bribed sentries to let you in when you were out late; you have thrust aside the laws as if they meant nothing; you have trifled with the state papers and caused the body politic to break up a meeting as a consequence of the laughter."

The girl, as she recollected this day to which he referred, laughed long and joyously. He waited patiently till she had done, and I am not sure that his mouth did not twist under his beard. "Foreign education is the cause of all this," he said finally. "Those cursed French and English schools have ruined you. And I was fool enough to send you to them. This is the end."

"Or the beginning,"—rebelliously.

"Doppelkinn is mild and kind."

"Mild and kind! One would think that you were marrying me to a horse! Well, I shall not enter the cathedral."

"How will you avoid it?"—calmly.

"I shall find a way; wait and see." She was determined.

"I shall wait." Then, with a sudden softening, for he loved the girl after his fashion: "I am growing old, my child. If I should die, what would become of you? I have no son; your Uncle Franz, who is but a year or two younger than I am, would reign, and he would not tolerate your madcap ways. You must marry at once. I love you in spite of your wilfulness. But you have shown yourself incapable of loving. Doppelkinn is wealthy. You shall marry him."

"I will run away, uncle,"—decidedly.

"I have notified the frontiers,"—tranquilly. "From now on you will be watched. It is the inevitable, my child, and even I have to bow to that."

She touched the paper in her bosom, but paused.

"Moreover, I have decided," went on the duke, "to send the Honorable Betty Moore back to England."

"Betty?"

"Yes. She is a charming young person, but she is altogether too sympathetic. She abets you in all you do. Her English independence does not conform with my ideas. After the wedding I shall notify her father."

"Everything, everything! My friends, my liberty, the right God gives to every woman—to love whom she will! And you, my uncle, rob me of these things! What if I should tell you that marriage with me is now impossible?"—her lips growing thin.

"I should not be very much surprised."

"Please look at this, then, and you will understand why I can not marry Doppelkinn." She thrust the bogus certificate into his hands.

The duke read it carefully, not a muscle in his face disturbed. Finally he looked up with a terrifying smile.

"Poor, foolish child! What a terrible thing this might have turned out to be!"

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? Do you suppose anything like this could take place without my hearing of it? And such a dishonest unscrupulous rascal! Some day I shall thank the American consul personally for his part in the affair. I was waiting to see when you would produce this. You virtually placed your honor and reputation, which I know to be above reproach, into the keeping of a man who would sell his soul for a thousand crowns."

The girl felt her knees give way, and she sat down. Tears slowly welled up in her eyes and overflowed, blurring everything.

The duke got up and went over to his desk, rummaging among the papers. He returned to the girl with a letter.

"Read that, and learn the treachery of the man you trusted."

The letter was written by Steinbock. In it he disclosed all. It was a venomous, inciting letter. The girl crushed it in her hand.

"Is he dead?" she asked, all the bitterness in her heart surging to her lips.

"To Barscheit,"—briefly. "Now, what shall I do with this?"—tapping the bogus certificate.

"Give it to me," said the girl wearily. She ripped it into halves, into quarters, into infinitesimal squares, and tossed them into the waste-basket. "I am the unhappiest girl in the world."

"I am sorry," replied the grand duke. "It isn't as if I had forced Doppelkinn on you without first letting you have your choice. You have rejected the princes of a dozen wealthy countries. We are not as the common people; we can not marry where we will. I shall announce that the marriage will take place next week."

"Do not send my friend away," she pleaded, apparently tamed.

"I will promise to give the matter thought. Good night."

She turned away without a word and left him. When he roared at her she knew by experience that he was harmless; but this quiet determination meant the exclusion of any further argument. There was no escape unless she ran away. She wept on her pillow that night, not so much at the thought of wedding Doppelkinn as at the fact that Prince Charming had evidently missed the last train and was never coming to wake her up, or, if he did come, it would be when it was too late. How many times had she conjured him up, as she rode in the fresh fairness of the mornings! How manly he was and how his voice thrilled her! Her horse was suddenly to run away, he was to rescue her, and then demand her hand in marriage as a fitting reward. Sometimes he had black hair and eyes, but more often he was big and tall, with yellow hair and the bluest eyes in all the

world.

VI

The princess rose at dawn the following day. She routed out Hans, the head groom, and told him to saddle Artemis, the slim-limbed, seal-brown filly which an English nobleman had given to her. Ten minutes later she was in the saddle, and the heaviness on her heart seemed to rise and vanish like the opal mists on the bosom of the motionless lake. A pale star blinked at her, and the day, flushed like the cheek of a waking infant, began drowsily to creep over the rolling mountains.

How silent all the city was! Only here and there above the chimneys rose a languid film of smoke. The gates of the park shut behind her with a clang, and so for a time she was alone and free. She touched Artemis with a spur, and the filly broke into a canter toward the lake road. The girl's nostrils dilated. Every flower, the thousand resinous saps of the forest, the earth itself, yielded up a cool sweet perfume that was to the mind what a glass of wine is to the blood, exhilaration.

Mottled with pink, and gray, and blue, and gold, the ever-changing hues of the morning, the surface of the lake was as smooth as her mirror and, like it, always reflecting beauty. Fish leaped forth and fell with a sounding splash, and the circles would widen and gradually vanish. A blackbird dipped among the silent rushes; a young fox barked importantly; a hawk flashed by. The mists swam hither and thither mysteriously, growing thinner and fainter as the gold of day grew brighter and clearer. Suddenly—in the words of the old tent-maker—the false morning died, and it was day.

I'm afraid that somewhere among the princess' ancestors there was a troubadour; for she was something of a poet. Indeed, I have already remarked that she wrote verses. The atmospheric change of the morning turned her mind into sentimental channels. How she envied the peasant woman, who might come and go at will, sleep in the open or in the hut, loving or hating with perfect freedom! Ah, Prince Charming, Prince Charming! where were you? Why did you loiter? Perhaps for her there was no Prince Charming. It might be so. She

sighed.

She would never marry Doppelkinn—never. That horrible Steinbock! She was glad, glad that she had struck him, again and again, across his lying eyes and evil mouth. She had believed that she knew the world; it was all yet a mystery; the older she grew the less she understood. Wasn't anybody good? Was everybody to be distrusted? Which way should she turn now? The world was beautiful enough; it was the people in it. Poor Betty! She had her troubles, too; but somehow she refused to confide them. She acted very much as if she were in love.

She gazed at the hawk enviously. How proud and free he was, so high up there, circling and circling. Even the fox was freer than she; the forests were his, and he might go whither he listed. And the fish that leaped in frolic from the water, and the blackbird in the rushes! She could not understand.

She would never marry Doppelkinn—never.

But how should she escape—how? On Wednesday night she would be given her quarterly allowance of a thousand crowns, and on Thursday she must act.… Yes, yes, that was it! How simple! She would slip over into Doppelkinn, where they never would think to search for her. She knew a place in which to hide. From Doppelkinn she would go straight to Dresden and seek the protection of her old governess, who would hide her till the duke came to his senses. If only she had an independent fortune, how she would snap her fingers at them all!

She was distracted by the sound of jangling steel. Artemis had cast a shoe. How annoying! It would take ten minutes to reach old Bauer's smithy, and ten minutes more to put on a shoe. She brought the filly down to a walk.

What was the use of being a princess if one was not allowed to act in a royal fashion? It wasn't so terrible to wear men's clothes, and, besides, they were very comfortable for riding a horse; and as for riding a bicycle in the public streets, hadn't that ugly Italian duchess ridden through the streets of Rome, and in knickerbockers, too? Nobody seemed to mind it there. But in Barscheit it had been little short of a crime. She recalled the flaming fagots and the red-hot wire of her unfortunate wheel. A smile rippled over her face, but it passed quickly. There was nothing left to smile over. They were going to force her to marry a tomb, a man in whom love and courage and joy were as dead things. Woe to

Doppelkinn, though—woe to him! She would lead him a dance, wild and terrible.

If only she were Betty, free to do what she pleased, to go and come at will! She wasn't born to be a princess; she wasn't commonplace enough; she enjoyed life too well. Ah, if only she might live and act like those English cousins of hers with whom she went to school! *They* could ride man-fashion, hunt man-fashion, shoot, play cards and bet at the races man-fashion, and nobody threatened them with Doppelkinns. They might dance, too, till the sun came into the windows and the rouge on their faces cracked. But *she*! (I use the italics to illustrate the decided nods of her pretty head.) Why, every sweet had to be stolen!

She would never marry Doppelkinn—never. She would never watch his old nose grow purple at the table. She would run away. And since Prince Charming was nowhere to be seen, it were better to die an old maid.

Presently the smithy came into view, emerging from a cluster of poplars. She rode up to the doors, dismounted and entered. Old Bauer himself was at the bellows, and the weird blue light hissing up from the blown coals discovered another customer. She turned and met his frank glance of admiration. (If she hadn't turned! If his admiration hadn't been entirely frank!) Instantly she sent Bauer a warning glance which that old worthy seemed immediately to understand. The stranger was tall, well-made, handsome, with yellow hair, and eyes as blue as the sky is when the west wind blows.

He raised his cap, and the heart of the girl fluttered. Wherever had this seemly fellow come from?

"Good morning," said the stranger courteously. "I see that you have had the same misfortune as myself."

"You have lost a shoe? Rather annoying, when one doesn't want a single break in the going." She uttered the words carelessly, as if she wasn't at all interested.

The stranger stuffed his cap into a pocket. She was glad that she had chosen the new saddle. The crest and coat of arms had not yet been burned upon the leather nor engraved upon the silver ornaments, and there was no blanket under the English saddle. There might be an adventure; one could not always tell. She must hide her identity. If the stranger knew that she belonged to the House of

Barscheit, possibly he would be frightened and take to his heels.

But the Princess Hildegarde did not know that this stranger never took to his heels; he wasn't that kind. Princess or peasant, it would have been all the same to him. Only his tone might have lost half a key.

Bauer called to his assistant, and the girl stepped out into the road. The stranger followed, as she knew he would. It will be seen that she knew something of men, if only that they possess curiosity.

"What a beautiful place this is!" the stranger ventured, waving his hand toward the still lake and the silent, misty mountains.

"There is no place quite like it," she admitted. "You are a stranger in Barscheit?"—politely. He was young and certainly the best-looking man she had seen in a month of moons. If Doppelkinn, now, were only more after this pattern!

"Yes, this is my first trip to Barscheit." He had a very engaging smile.

"You are from Vienna?"

"No."

"Ah, from Berlin. I was not quite sure of the accent."

"I am a German-American,"—frankly. "I have always spoken the language as if it were my own, which doubtless it is."

"America!" she cried, her interest genuinely aroused. "That is the country where every one does just as he pleases."

"Sometimes." (What beautiful teeth she had, white as skimmed milk!)

"They are free?"

"Nearly always."

"They tell me that women there are all queens."

"We are there, or here, always your humble servants."

He was evidently a gentleman; there was something in his bow that was courtly. "And do the women attend the theaters alone at night?"

"If they desire to."

"Tell me, does the daughter of the president have just as much liberty as her subjects?"

"Even more. Only, there are no subjects in America."

"No subjects? What do they call them, then?"

"Voters."

"And do the women vote?"

"Only at the women's clubs."

She did not quite get this; not that it was too subtle, rather that it was not within her comprehension.

"It is a big country?"

"Ever so big."

"Do you like it?"

"I love every inch of it. I have even fought for it."

"In the Spanish War?"—visibly excited.

"Yes."

"Were you a major or a colonel?"

"Neither; only a private."

"I thought every soldier there was either a colonel or a major."

He looked at her sharply, but her eye was roving. He became suspicious. She might be simple, and then again she mightn't. She was worth studying, anyhow.

"I was a cavalryman, with nothing to do but obey orders and, when ordered, fight. I am visiting the American consul here; he was a school-mate of mine."

"Ah! I thought I recognized the horse."

"You know him?"—quickly.

"Oh,"—casually,—"every one hereabouts has seen the consul on his morning rides. He rides like a centaur, they say; but I have never seen a centaur."

The stranger laughed. She was charming.

"He ought to ride well; I taught him." But the gay smile which followed this statement robbed it of its air of conceit. "You see, I have ridden part of my life on the great plains of the West, and have mounted everything from a wild Indian pony to an English thoroughbred. My name is Max Scharfenstein, and I am here as a medical student, though in my own country I have the right to hang out a physician's shingle."

She drew aimless figures in the dust with her riding-crop. There was no sense in her giving any name. Probably they would never meet again. And yet—

"I am Hildegarde von—von Heideloff," giving her mother's name. He was too nice to frighten away.

The hesitance over the "von" did not strike his usually keen ear. He was too intent on noting the variant expressions on her exquisite face. It was a pity she was dark. What a figure, and how proudly the head rested upon the slender but firm white throat! After all, black eyes, such as these were, might easily rival any blue eyes he had ever seen. (Which goes to prove that a man's ideals are not built as solidly as might be.)

"It is rather unusual," he said, "to see a woman ride so early; but you have the right idea. Everything begins to wake, life, the air, the day. There is something in the dew of the morning that is a better tonic than any doctor can brew."

"Take care! If you have no confidence in your wares, you must not expect your patients to have."

"Oh, I am a doctor of philosophy, also."

"That is to say," she observed, "if you lose your patients, you will accept their loss without a murmur? Very good. May I ask what you have come so far to study?"

"Nerves."

"Is it possible!"—with a smile as fleet as the wind.

He laughed. This was almost like an American girl. How easy it was to talk to her! He tried again to catch her eye, but failed. Then both looked out over the lake, mutually consenting that a pause should ensue. He did not mind the dark hair at all.

"Do you speak English?" she asked abruptly in that tongue, with a full glance to note the effect.

"English is spoken to some extent in the United States," he answered gravely. He did not evince the least surprise at her fluency.

"Do you write to the humorous papers in your country?"

"Only to subscribe for them," said he.

And again they laughed; which was a very good sign that things were going forward tolerably well.

And then the miserable fellow of a smith had to come out and announce that the stranger's horse was ready.

"I'll warrant the shoe," said Bauer.

"You haven't lost any time," said Max, his regret evident to every one.

The girl smiled approvingly. She loved humor in a man, and this one with the yellow hair and blue eyes seemed to possess a fund of the dry sort. All this was very wrong, she knew, but she wasn't going to be the princess this morning; she was going to cast off the shell of artificiality, of etiquette.

"How much will this shoe cost me?" Max asked.

"Half a crown," said Bauer, with a sly glance at the girl to see how she would accept so exorbitant a sum. The princess frowned. "But sometimes," added Bauer hurriedly, "I do it for nothing."

"Bauer, your grandfather was a robber," the girl laughed. "Take heed that you do not follow in his footsteps."

"I am a poor man, your—mm—-Fräulein," he stammered.

"Here's a crown," said Max, tossing a coin which was neatly caught by the grimy hand of the smith.

"Are you very rich?" asked the girl curiously.

"Why?" counter-questioned Max.

"Oh, I am curious to know. Bauer will tell it to every one in Barscheit that you overpay for things, and from now on you will have to figure living on a basis of crowns."

It is worth any price to hear a pretty woman laugh. What a fine beginning for a day!

"May misfortune be kind enough to bring you this way again, Herr!" Bauer cried joyfully, not to say ambiguously.

"Listen to that!" laughed the girl, her eyes shining like the water in the sun. "But he means only to thank your generosity. Now,"—with a severe frown, —"how much do I owe you? Take care; I've only a few pieces of silver in my purse."

"Why, Fräulein, you owe me nothing; I am even in debt to you for this very crown." Which proved that Bauer had had his lesson in courtier-ship.

The assistant soon brought forth the girl's restive filly. Max sprang to her aid. How light her foot was in his palm! (She could easily have mounted alone, such was her skill; but there's the woman of it.)

"I am going toward the Pass," she said, reading the half-veiled appeal in his blue eyes.

"Which way is that?" he asked, swinging into his own saddle.

"That way," nodding toward the south. After all, there could be no harm; in two or three hours their paths would separate for ever.

"Why,"—delightedly,—"I am going that way myself."

Old Bauer watched them till they disappeared around a turn in the road. He returned to his forge, shaking his head as if confronted by a problem too abstruse even for his German mind.

"Well, he's an American, so I will not waste any pity on him. The pity is that she must wed old Red-nose."

It would have been if she had!

So the Princess and Prince Charming rode into the country, and they talked about a thousand and one things. Had she ever been to France? Yes. To England? She had received part of her education there. Did she know the Princess Hildegarde? Slightly. What was she like? She was a madcap, irresponsible, but very much abused. Did she know Mr. Warrington, the American consul? She had seen him on his morning rides. Wasn't it a fine world? It was, indeed.

Once they stopped at a farm. The girl refused to dismount, bidding Max go in and ask for a drink of milk. Max obeyed with alacrity, returning with two foaming goblets of warm milk.

From time to time the princess stifled the "small voice." It was wrong, and yet it wasn't. What worried her was the thought that Betty might take it into her head to follow, and then everything would be spoiled. Every now and then she turned her head and sighed contentedly; the road to rearward was always clear.

"Follow me!" she cried suddenly, even daringly.

A stone wall, three feet high, ran along at their right. The foreground was hard and firm. Pressing the reins on the filly's withers, she made straight for the wall, cleared it, and drew up on the other side. Now, Max hadn't the least idea that the horse under him was a hunter, so I might very well say that he took his life in his hands as he followed her. But Dandy knew his business. He took the wall without effort. A warm glow went over Max when he found that he hadn't

broken his neck. Together they galloped down the field and came back for the return jump. This, too, was made easily. Max's admiration knew no bounds. It was a dangerous pastime in more ways than one.

At eight o'clock they turned toward home, talking about another thousand and one things.

"It has been a delightful ride," suggested Max, with an eye to the future.

"I take this road nearly every morning," said she, looking out upon the water, which was ruffling itself and quarreling along the sandy shores.

Max said nothing, but he at once made up his mind that he would take the same road, provided he could in any reasonable manner get rid of me.

"Did you enjoy the ride?" asked the Honorable Betty, as her Highness came in to breakfast. There were no formalities in the princess' apartments.

"Beautifully!" Her Highness guiltily wondered if there was any logical way to keep Betty in the house for the next few mornings. She sat down and sipped her tea. "The duke talked to me last night. Steinbock played double."

"What!"

"Yes. He sold us to the duke, who patiently waited for me to speak. Betty, I am a fool. But I shall never marry Doppelkinn. That is settled."

"I suppose he will be inviting me to return to England," said Betty shrewdly.

"Not for the present."

"And I have just grown to love the place,"—pathetically. "Mr. Warrington has asked me to ride with him afternoons. His ankle prevents him from taking the long morning jaunts. If it will not interfere with your plans, dear—"

"Accept, by all means," interrupted her Highness. "He is a capital horseman." She smiled mysteriously. Happily her companion was absorbed in thought and did not see this smile.

Max came in at quarter of ten, went to tub, and came down in time for the eggs.

"Have a good ride?" I asked.

"Bully! Beautiful country!" He was enthusiastic.

"How these healthy animals eat!" I thought as I observed him occasionally.

"Wish I could go with you," I said, but half-heartedly.

"I'll get the lay of the land quick enough," he replied.

The rascal! Not a word about the girl that morning, or the next, or until Thursday morning. If only I had known! But Fate knows her business better than I do, and she was handling the affair. But long rides of a morning with a pretty girl are not safe for any bachelor.

Thursday morning he came in late. He dropped something on the table. On inspection I found it to be a woman's handkerchief purse.

"Where the deuce did you get that?" I asked, mighty curious.

"By George! but I've been enjoying the most enchanting adventure; such as you read out of a book. I'm inclined to believe that I shall enjoy my studies in old Barscheit."

"But where did you get this?" If there was a girl around, I wanted to know all about it.

"She dropped it."

"*She* dropped it!" I repeated. "What she? Why, you old tow-head, have you been flirting at this hour of the morning?"

"Handsome as a picture!"

"Ha! the ideal at last,"—ironically. "Blonde, of course."

"Dark as a Spaniard, and rides like Diana." His enthusiasm was not to be lightly passed over.

"Never heard of Diana riding," said I; "always saw her pictured as going afoot."

"Don't be an ass! You know very well what I mean."

"I've no argument to offer, nor any picture to prove my case. You've had an adventure; give it up, every bit of it."

"One of the finest horsewomen I ever saw. Took a wall three feet high the other morning, just to see if I dared follow. Lucky Dandy is a hunter, or I'd have broken my neck."

"Very interesting." Then of a sudden a thought flashed through my head and out again. "Anybody with her?"

"Only myself these three mornings."

"H'm! Did you get as far as names?"

"Yes; I told her mine. Who is Hildegarde von Heideloff?"

"Heideloff?" I was puzzled. My suspicions evaporated. "I can't say that I know any one by that name. Sure it was Heideloff?"

"Do you mean to tell me," with blank astonishment, "that there is a petticoat on horseback in this duchy that you do not know?"

"I don't know any woman by the name of Hildegarde von Heideloff; on my word of honor, Max, I don't."

"Old Bauer, the blacksmith, knew her."

Bauer? All my suspicions returned. "Describe the girl to me."

"Handsome figure, masses of black hair, great black eyes that are full of good fun, a delicate nose, and I might add, a very kissable mouth."

"What! have you kissed her?" I exclaimed.

"No, no! Only, I'd like to."

"H'm! You've made quite a study. She must be visiting some one near-by. There is an old castle three miles west of the smithy. Did she speak English?"

"Yes,"—excitedly.

"That accounts for it. An old English nobleman lives over there during the summer months, and it is not improbable that she is one of his guests." In my heart I knew that her Highness was up to some of her tricks again, but there was no need of her shattering good old Max's heart. Yet I felt bound to say: "Why not look into the purse? There might be something there to prove her identity."

"Look into her purse?"—horrified. "You wouldn't have me peeping into a woman's purse, would you? Suppose there should be a box of rouge? Her cheeks were red."

"Quite likely."

"Or a powder-puff."

"Even more likely."

"Or—"

"Go on."

"Or a love letter."

"I have my doubts," said I.

"Well, if you do not know who she is, I'll find out,"—undismayed.

Doubtless he would; he was a persistent old beggar, was Max.

"Do not let it get serious, my boy," I warned. "You could not marry any one in this country."

"Why not?"

"Have you been regularly baptized? Was your father? Was your grandfather?

Unless you can answer these simplest of questions and prove them, you could not get a license; and no priest or preacher would dare marry you without a license."

"Hang you, who's talking about getting married? All I want to know is, who is Hildegarde von Heideloff, and how am I to return her purse? I shall ask the blacksmith."

"Do so,"—taking up my egg-spoon.

Max slipped the purse into his breast-pocket and sat down.

VII

"The one fault I have to find with European life is the poor quality of tobacco used."

It was eight o'clock, Thursday night, the night of the dinner at Müller's. I was dressing when Max entered, with a miserable cheroot between his teeth.

"They say," he went on, "that in Russia they drink the finest tea in the world, simply because it is brought overland and not by sea. Unfortunately, tobacco—we Americans recognize no leaf as tobacco unless it comes from Cuba—has to cross the sea, and is, in some unaccountable manner, weakened in the transit. There are worse cigars in Germany than in France, and I wouldn't have believed it possible, if I had not gone to the trouble of proving it. Fine country! For a week I've been trying to smoke the German quality of the weed, as a preventive, but I see I must give it up on account of my throat. My boy, I have news for you,"—tossing the cheroot into the grate.

"Fire away," said I, struggling with a collar.

"I have a box of Havanas over at the custom house that I forgot to bail out."

"No!" said I joyfully. A Havana, and one of Scharfenstein's!

"I've an idea that they would go well with the dinner. So, if you don't mind, I'll trot over and get 'em."

"Be sure and get around to Müller, at half-past eight, then," said I.

"I'll be there." He knew where to find the place.

Müller's Rathskeller was the rendezvous of students, officers and all those persons of quality who liked music with their meat. The place was low-ceilinged, but roomy, and the ventilation was excellent, considering. The smoke never got so thick that one couldn't see the way to the door when the students started in to "clean up the place," to use the happy idiom of mine own country. There were marble tables and floors and arches and light, cane-bottomed chairs from Kohn's. It was at once Bohemian and cosmopolitan, and, once inside, it was easy to imagine oneself in Vienna. A Hungarian orchestra occupied an inclosed platform, and every night the wail of the violin and the pom-pom of the wool-tipped hammers on the Hungarian "piano" might be heard.

It was essentially a man's place of entertainment; few women ever had the courage or the inclination to enter. In America it would have been the fashion; but in the capital of Barscheit the women ate in the restaurant above, which was attached to the hotel, and depended upon the Volksgarten band for their evening's diversion.

You had to order your table hours ahead—that is, if you were a civilian. If you were lucky enough to be an officer, you were privileged to take any vacant chair you saw. But Heaven aid you if you attempted to do this not being an officer! In Barscheit there were also many unwritten laws, and you were obliged to observe these with all the fidelity and attention that you gave to the enameled signs. Only the military had the right to request the orchestra to repeat a piece of music. Sometimes the lieutenants, seized with that gay humor known only to cubs, would force the orchestra in Müller's to play the Hungarian war-song till the ears cried out in pain. This was always the case when any Austrians happened to be present. But ordinarily the crowds were good-natured, boisterous, but orderly.

It was here, then, that I had arranged to give my little dinner. The orchestra had agreed—for a liberal tip—to play *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and there was a case of Doppelkinn's sparkling Moselle. I may as well state right here that we

neither heard our national anthem nor drank the vintage. You will soon learn why. I can laugh now, I can treat the whole affair with becoming levity, but at the time I gained several extra grey hairs.

If the princess hadn't turned around, and if Max hadn't wanted that box of Havanas!

When I arrived at Müller's I found my boys in a merry mood. They were singing softly from *Robin Hood* with fine college harmony, and as I entered they swarmed about me like so many young dogs. Truth to tell, none of them was under twenty, and two or three were older than myself. But to them I represented official protection for whatever they might do. I assumed all the dignity I dared. I had kept Scharfenstein's name back as a surprise.

Ellis—for whom I had the passports—immediately struck me as being so nearly like Max that they might easily have been brothers. Ellis was slighter; that was all the difference. I gave him his papers and examined his tickets. All was well; barring accidents, he would be in Dresden the next day.

"You go through Doppelkinn, then?" said I.

"Yes. I have friends in Dresden whom I wish to see before going home."

"Well, good luck to you!"

Then I announced that Max Scharfenstein, an old college comrade, would join us presently. This was greeted with hurrahs. At that time there wasn't an American student who did not recollect Max's great run from the ten-yard line. (But where the deuce *was* Max?) I took a little flag from my pocket and stuck it into the vase of poppies, and the boys clapped their hands. You never realize how beautiful your flag is till you see it in a foreign land. I apologized for Max's absence, explaining the cause, and ordered dinner to be served. We hadn't much time, as Ellis's train departed at ten. It was now a quarter to nine.

We had come to the relishes when a party of four officers took the table nearest us. They hung up their sabers on the wall-pegs, and sat down, ordering a bottle of light wine. Usually there were five chairs to the table, but even if only two were being used no one had the right to withdraw one of the vacant chairs without the most elaborate apologies. This is the law of courtesy in Barscheit. In America it is different; if you see anything you want, take it.

Presently one of the officers—I knew none of them save by sight—rose and approached. He touched the flag insolently and inquired what right it had in a public restaurant in Barscheit. Ordinarily his question would not have been put without some justification. But he knew very well who I was and what my rights were in this instance.

"Herr Lieutenant," said I coldly, though my cheeks were warm enough, "I represent that flag in this country, and I am accredited with certain privileges, as doubtless you are aware. You will do me the courtesy of returning to your own table." I bowed.

He glared at me for a brief period, then turned on his heel. This was the first act in the play. At the fellow's table sat Lieutenant von Störer, Doppelkinn's nephew and heir-presumptive. He was, to speak plainly, a rake, a spendthrift and wholly untrustworthy. He was not ill-looking, however.

My spirits floated between anger and the fear that the officers might ruin the dinner—which they eventually did.

Things went on smoothly for a time. The orchestra was pom-pomming the popular airs from *Faust*. (Where the deuce was that tow-headed Dutchman?) Laughter rose and fell; the clinkle of glass was heard; voices called. And then Max came in, looking as cool as you please, though I could read by his heaving chest that he had been sprinting up back streets. The boys crowded around him, and there was much ado over the laggard.

Unfortunately the waiter had forgotten to bring a chair for his plate. With a genial smile on his face, Max innocently stepped over to the officers' table and plucked forth the vacant chair. For a wonder the officers appeared to give this action no heed, and I was secretly gratified. It was something to be a consul, after all. But I counted my chickens too early.

"Where are the cigars?" I asked as Max sat down complacently.

"Cigars?"—blankly. "Hang me, I've clean forgotten them!" And then, oblivious of the probable storm that was at that moment gathering for a downpour over his luckless head, he told us the reason of his delay.

"There was a crowd around the palace," he began. "It seems that the Princess Hildegarde has run away, and they believe that she has ridden toward the Pass in

a closed carriage. The police are at this very moment scouring the country in that direction. She has eloped."

"Eloped?" we all cried, being more or less familiar with the state of affairs at the palace.

"Good-by to Doppelkinn's *Frau*!"

"Good girl!"

"She has been missing since seven o'clock, when she drove away on the pretense of visiting her father's old steward, who is ill," went on Max, feeling the importance of his news. "They traced her there. From the steward's the carriage was driven south, and that's the last seen of her. There won't be any wedding at the cathedral next Tuesday,"—laughing.

Queries and answers were going crisscross over the table, when I observed with dread that Lieutenant von Störer had risen and was coming our way. He stopped at Max's side. Max looked up to receive Von Störer's glove full on the cheek. It was no gentle stroke. Von Störer at once returned to his table and sat down.

For a moment we were all absolutely without power of motion or of speech, Max's face grew as white as the table-cloth, and the print of the glove glowed red against the white. I was horrified, for I knew his tremendous strength. If he showed fight, Von Störer would calmly saber him. It was the custom. But Max surprised me. He was the coolest among us, but of that quality of coolness which did not reassure me. He took up his story where he had left off and finished it. For his remarkable control I could have taken him in my arms and hugged him.

The officers scowled, while Von Störer bit his mustache nervously. The American had ignored his insult. Presently he rose again and approached. He thrust a card under Max's nose.

"Can you understand that?" he asked contemptuously.

Max took the card, ripped it into quarters and dropped these to the floor. Then, to my terror and the terror of those with me, he tranquilly pulled out a murderous-looking Colt and laid it beside his plate. He went on talking, but none of us heard a word he said. We were fearfully waiting to see him kill some one

or be killed.

No one was killed. The officers hurriedly took down their sabers and made a bee-line for the door of which I have spoken.

Max returned the revolver to his hip-pocket and gave vent to an Homeric laugh.

"You tow-headed Dutchman!" I cried, when I found voice for my words, "what have you done?"

"Done? Why, it looks as if we had all the downs this half," he replied smartly. "Oh, the gun isn't loaded,"—confidentially.

Ellis fumbled in his pockets and produced his passports and tickets. These he shoved over to Max.

"What's this for?" Max asked curiously.

"Ellis," said I, "it is very good of you. Max, take those. Mr. Ellis wishes to save your hide. Take them and get to the station as quickly as you can. And for the love of mercy, do not turn around till you're over in Doppelkinn's vineyards."

"Well, I'm hanged if I understand!" he cried. "I'm a peaceful man. A beggar walks up to me and slaps me in the face for nothing at all, and now I must hike, eh? What the devil have I done now?"

Then, as briefly as I could, I explained the enormity of his offenses. To take a chair from a table, as he had done, was a gross insult; to receive a slap in the face and not to resent it, was another insult; to tear up an opponent's visiting-card, still another; to take out a revolver in Barscheit, unless you were an officer or had a permit, was worse than an insult; it was a crime, punishable by long imprisonment. They could accuse him of being either an anarchist or a socialist-red, coming to Barscheit with the intent to kill the grand duke. The fact that he was ignorant of the laws, or that he, was an alien, would remit not one particle of his punishment and fine; and weeks would pass ere the matter could be arranged between the United States and Barscheit.

"Good Lord!" he gasped; "why didn't you tell me?"

"Why didn't you tell me that you carried a cannon in your pocket? Take Ellis' papers, otherwise you stand pat for a heap of trouble, and I can't help you. Go straight to Dresden, telegraph me, and I'll forward your luggage."

"But I came here to study!" Max argued.

"It will be geology in the form of prison walls," said Ellis quietly. "Don't be foolish, Mr. Scharfenstein; it is not a matter of a man's courage, but of his common sense. Take the tickets and light out. I have lived here for three years, and have seen men killed outright for less than you have done."

"But you don't expect me to leave this place without punching that beggar's head?"—indignantly. "What do you think I'm made of?"

"You'll never get the chance to punch his head," said I. "We are wasting valuable time. Those officers have gone for the police. You have about twenty minutes to make the train. Come, for heaven's sake, come!"

He finally got it into his head that we knew what we were talking about. How we got him to the station I do not remember, but somehow we got him there. He sputtered and fumed and swore, as all brave men will who feel that they are running away in a cowardly fashion. He wasn't convinced, but he thanked Ellis for his kindness and hoped that he wouldn't get into trouble on his (Max's) account.

"Go straight to Dresden; say you've been studying medicine in Barscheit for three years; refer to me by telegraph if there is any question as to your new identity," said I. "You're the only man in the world, Max, that I'd lie for."

He stumbled through the gates, and we saw him open the door of a carriage just as the train began to pull out. A guard tried to stop him, but he was not quite quick enough. We watched the train till it melted away into the blackness beyond the terminus covering; then we, I and my fellow diners, went soberly into the street. Here was a howdy-do! Suddenly Ellis let out a sounding laugh, and, scarcely knowing why, we joined him. It was funny, very funny, for every one but poor old Max! The American spirit is based on the sense of humor, and even in tragic moments is irrepressible.

We did not return to Müller's; each of us stole quietly home to await the advent of the police, for they would rout out every American in town in their

search for the man with the gun. They would first visit the consulate and ascertain what I knew of the affair; when they got through with the rest of the boys Max would be in Doppelkinn. The police were going to be very busy that night: a princess on one hand and an anarchist on the other.

There were terrible times, too, in the palace. Long before we watched Max's train and the vanishing green and red lights at the end of it the grand duke was having troubles of his own. He was pacing wildly up and down in his dressing-room. Clutched in his fist was a crumpled sheet of paper. From time to time he smoothed it out and re-read the contents. Each time he swore like the celebrated man in Flanders.

You forced me and I warned you that I would do something desperate. Do not send for me, for you will never find me till you come to your senses. I have eloped.

Hildegarde.

VIII

Shortly before six o'clock—dinner in the palace was rarely served until half-after eight—the Honorable Betty sat down to her writing-desk in her boudoir, which opened directly into that belonging to the princess, to write a few letters home. A dinner was to be given to the state officials that night, and she knew from experience that after that solemn event was concluded it would be too late for the departing mails. She seemed to have no difficulty in composing her thoughts and transferring them to paper. There were times when she would lean back, nibble the end of her pen and smile in a dreamy, retrospective fashion. No doubt her thoughts were pleasant and agreeable.

She had completed addressing three envelopes, when she heard the door leading into the princess' boudoir open and close. She turned to behold the princess herself.

"Why, Gretchen, where are you going?"—noting the grey walking-dress, the grey hat, the sensible square-toed shoes.

"I am going to visit a sick nurse," replied her Highness, avoiding the other's eye.

"But shall you have time to dress for dinner?"

"That depends. Besides, the official dinners are a great bore." Her Highness came forward, caught the dark head of the English girl between her gloved hands, pressed it against her heart, bent and kissed it. "What a lovely girl you are, Betty! always unruffled, always even-tempered. You will grow old very gracefully."

"I hope so; but I do not want to grow old at all. Can't I go with you?"—eagerly.

"Impossible; etiquette demands your presence here to-night. If I am late my rank and my errand will be my excuse. What jolly times we used to have in that quaint old boarding-school in St. John's Wood! Do you remember how we went to your noble father's country place one Christmas? I went *incognita*. There was a children's party, and two boys had a fisticuff over you. Nobody noticed me

those days. I was happy then." The princess frowned. It might have been the sign of repression of tears. Betty, with her head against the other's bosom, could not see. "I shall be lonely without you; for you can not stay on here for ever. If you could, it would be different. I shall miss you. Somehow you possess the faculty of calming me. I am so easily stirred into a passion; my temper is so surface-wise. Some day, however, I shall come to England and spend a whole month with you. Will not that be fine?"

"How melancholy your voice is!" cried Betty, trying without avail to remove her Highness' hands.

"No, no; I want to hold you just so. Perhaps I am sentimental to-night. I have all the moods, agreeable and disagreeable.… Do you love anybody?"

"Love anybody? What do you mean?"—rising in spite of the protesting hands. "Do I look as if I were in love with anybody?"

They searched each other's eyes.

"Oh, you islanders! Nobody can fathom what is going on in your hearts. You never make any mistakes; you always seem to know which paths to pursue; you are always right, always, always. I'd like to see you commit a folly, Betty; it's a wicked wish, I know, but I honestly wish it. There is certainly more Spanish blood in my veins than German. I am always making mistakes; I never know which path is the right one; I am always wrong. Do you believe it possible for a woman of birth and breeding to fall in love with a man whom she has known only three days?"

"Three days! Are you crazy, Hildegarde?"

"Call me Gretchen!"—imperiously.

"Gretchen, what has come over you?"

"I asked you a question."

"Well,"—-a bit of color stealing into her cheeks,—"it is possible, but very foolish. One ought to know something of a man's character," went on Betty, "before permitting sentiment to enter into one's thoughts."

"That is my own opinion, wise little white owl." Her Highness took her friend in her arms and kissed her, held her at arm's length, drew her to her heart and again kissed her. It was like a farewell. Then she let her go. "If there is anything you need, make yourself at home with my cases." And her Highness was gone.

Betty gazed at the door through which dear Gretchen had passed, gazed thoughtfully and anxiously.

"How oddly she acted! I wonder—" She made as though to run to the door, but stopped, as if ashamed of the doubt which flashed into her mind and out again.

The little clock on the mantel chimed forth the seventh hour, and she rang for her maid. It was time that she began dressing.

(Thus, for the present, I shall leave her. There are several reasons why my imagination should take this step; for, what should I know of a woman's toilet, save in the general mysterious results? However, I feel at liberty to steal into the duke's dressing-room. Here, while I am not positive what happened, at least I can easily bring my imagination to bear upon the picture.)

The duke was rather pleased with himself. He liked to put on his state uniform, with its blue-grey frock, the white doeskin trousers which strapped under the patent-leather boots, the gold braid, the silver saber and the little rope of medals strung across his full, broad breast. It was thus he created awe; it was thus he became truly the sovereign, urbane and majestic.

His valet was buckling on the saber belt, when there came a respectful tap on the door.

"Enter," said the duke, frowning. One can not assert any particular degree of dignity with a valet at one's side.

But it was only a corridor attendant who entered. He approached the duke's valet and presented a letter.

"For his serene Highness." He bowed and backed out, closing the door gently.

At once the valet bowed also and extended the letter to his master. Formality is a fine thing in a palace.

"Ah, a letter," mused the duke, profoundly innocent of the viper which was about to sting him. "My glasses, Gustav; my eye-glasses!"

The valet hurried to the dresser and returned with the duke's state eye-glasses. These the duke perched deliberately upon the end of his noble nose. He opened the letter and read its contents. The valet, watching him slyly, saw him grow pale, then red, and finally purple,—wrath has its rainbow. His hands shook, the glasses slipped from his palpitating nose. And I grieve to relate that his serene Highness swore something marvelous to hear.

"Damnation!" he said, or some such word. "The little fool!" Then, suddenly remembering his dignity and the phrase that no man is a hero to his valet, he pointed to his glasses, at the same time returning the letter to its envelope, this letter which had caused this momentary perturbation. "Call the minister of police. You will find him in the smoking-room off the conservatory. Make all haste!"

The valet flew out of the door, while the duke began pacing up and down the room, muttering and growling, and balling his fists, and jingling his shining medals. He kicked over an inoffensive hassock and his favorite hound, and I don't know how many long-winded German oaths he let go. (It's a mighty hard language to swear in, especially when a man's under high pressure.)

"The silly little fool! And on a night like this! Curse it! This is what comes of mixing Spanish blood with German, of letting her aunt's wishes overrule mine in the matter of education. But she shall be brought back, even if I have to ask the assistance of every sovereign in Europe. This is the end. And I had planned such a pleasant evening at cards!" The duke was not wholly unselfish.

In less than ten minutes' time the valet returned with the minister of police. The duke immediately dismissed the valet.

"Your serene Highness sent for me?" asked the minister, shaking in his boots. There had been four ministers of police in three years.

"Yes. Read this."

The minister took the letter. He read it with bulging eyes. "Good heavens, it must be one of her Highness' jokes!"

"It will be a sorry joke for you if she crosses any of the frontiers."

"But—"

"But!" roared the duke. "Don't you dare bring up that word scandal! Seek her. Turn everybody out,—the army, the police, everybody. When you locate her, telegraph, and have a special engine awaiting me at the station. And if you play a poor game of cards to-night I'll take away your portfolio. Remember, if she passes the frontier, off goes your official head!"

"And the fellow, who is he?"

"The good Lord only knows! That girl! … Witness these grey hairs. Put the rascal in irons; I'll attend to his case when I arrive.… Where is Steinbock?"

"He was arrested this morning in Berlin; I have already applied for his extradition."

"Good! Now, be off with you! Leave no stone unturned. The expense is nothing; I will gladly pay it out of my private purse."

"I'll find her," said the minister grimly. His portfolio hung in the balance.

All at once the duke struck his hands together jubilantly.

"What is it?" asked the minister. "A clue?"

"Nothing, nothing! Be gone; you are wasting time."

The minister of police dashed out of the room as if pursued by a thousand devils. He knew the duke's mood; it was not one to cross or irritate. No sooner was he gone than the duke left his apartments and sought those of his niece. It might be a joke; it would do no harm to find out positively. But the beautiful suite was empty; even her Highness' maid was gone. He then knocked on the door which led into Betty's boudoir, not very gently either.

"Open!" he bellowed.

"Who is it?" demanded a maid's frightened voice.

"The duke! Open instantly!"

"It is quite impossible," said another voice from within. It was calm and firm. "I am dressing."

"I must see you this instant. Open or I shall force the door!"

"Is your serene Highness mad?"

"Will you open this door?"

"You command it?"

"A hundred times, yes!"

"Since you command it." The voice was no longer calm; it was sharp and angry.

The wait seemed an hour to his serene Highness, serene no longer. At length the bolt slipped, and the irate duke shouldered his way in. The tableau which met his gaze embarrassed him for a space. He was even ashamed. The Honorable Betty stood behind a tall-backed chair, an opera cloak thrown hastily over her bare shoulders. Her hair was partly down. A beautiful woman in a rage is a fascinating sight. The duke stared at her irresolutely.

"Will your Highness explain this extraordinary intrusion?" she demanded. "You have literally forced your way into my room while I am dressing. It is utterly outside my understanding."

"I am old enough to be your father."

"That is the weakest excuse you could give me. At your age one's blood ought to be cooled to a certain discretion. My father, if he had had anything important to say, would have remained on the other side of the door. I am not deaf. Your explanation is in order."

The duke had never been talked to so plainly in all his life. For a while he was without voice, but had plenty of color. "It is easily explained," he finally bawled out to her. "Her Highness has eloped!"

The girl stared at him with wide eyes. "Eloped?" she breathed faintly.

"Yes, eloped."

Betty wondered if she heard aright, or if the duke were out of his mind; and then she recollected her conversation with the princess. Her mouth opened as if to speak, but instead she closed her lips tightly. That wilful girl; whatever would become of her!

"Give this letter to your mistress," said the duke to the maid. "I will station myself in the window while she reads it."

He strode over to the window and drew the curtains about him. Below, the night crowds were wandering about the streets; the band was playing in the Volksgarten; carriages were rolling to and from the opera; the fountain in the center of the square sparkled merrily in the glare of the arc lights. But the duke saw none of these things. Rather he saw the telegraphic despatches flying to the four ends of the globe, telling the peoples that he, the Grand Duke of Barscheit, had been outwitted by a girl; that the Princess Hildegarde had eloped with a man who was not the chosen one. In other words, he saw himself laughed at from one end of the continent to the other. (There is something very funny in domestic troubles when they occur in another man's family!) No, the duke saw not the beauty of the night; instead of stars he saw asterisks, that abominable astronomy of the lampoonists. He had never doubted the girl's courage; but to elope! … And *who* the devil had eloped with her? He knew the girl's natural pride; whoever the fellow might be, he could be no less than a gentleman. But who, who?

"Your Highness?" called a quiet (I might say deceptive) voice.

The duke came forth.

"Your Highness will do me the honor to make out my passports to-night. I desire to leave the palace immediately. The affront you have put upon me, even under the circumstances, is wholly unpardonable. You imply that I have had something to do with her Highness' act. You will excuse me to her serene Highness, whom I love and respect. My dignity demands that I leave at once."

A flicker—but only a flicker—of admiration lighted the duke's eyes. It was a plucky little baggage.

"I will issue your passports upon one condition," he said.

"And that condition?"—proudly.

"Tell me everything: Where has she gone, and with whom?"

"I know absolutely nothing."

Silence. The duke gnawed his mustache, while his eyes strove in vain to beat down hers.

"Thank you, I believe you." Then, giving way to his wrath: "You English people, you are all the same! You never understand. I have brought up this girl and surrounded her with every luxury; against my will and reason I have let her become educated in foreign lands; I have given her the utmost freedom; this is how I am repaid."

"You forgot one important thing, your Highness."

"What?"—haughtily.

"Affection. You have never gives her that."

The duke felt himself beaten into silence, and this did not add to his amiability.

"Your passports shall be made out immediately; but I beg of you to reconsider your determination, and to remain here as long as you please. For the sake of appearances, I desire your presence at the dinner-table."

"I shall leave as soon as the dinner is over." This girl's mind seemed immovable.

The duke shrugged. There was no use in beating against this wall. "I wish you knew whither she has gone."

"Frankly, if I knew I should not tell your Highness. My father taught me never to betray a confidence."

"As you will. I beg your pardon for the abruptness of my entrance," he said,

choking down his wrath. He could not allow himself to be out-done in the matter of coolness by this chit of an English girl.

"I grant it you."

The duke then retired, or, I should say, retreated. He wandered aimlessly about the palace, waiting for news and making wretched all those with whom he came in contact. The duchess was not feeling well; a wrangle with her was out of the question; besides, he would make himself hoarse. So he waited and waited, and re-read the princess' letter. At dinner he ate nothing; his replies were curt and surly. The Honorable Betty also ate nothing. She sat, wondering if her maid could pack five trunks in two hours.

I had quite a time of it myself that night. As I predicted, I received a visit from the police in regard to Mr. Scharfenstein. I explained the matter the best I knew how, and confessed that he had hurriedly left the city for parts unknown. I did not consider it absolutely essential that I should declare that I had seen him enter a railway carriage for Dresden. Besides this, I had to stand sponsor for the other boys and explain at length that they were in no wise concerned with Mr. Scharfenstein's great offense. The police were courteous and deferential, admitting that Max was the culprit. He had drawn a revolver in a public restaurant; he had broken a grave law. The inspector wrote a dozen telegrams and despatched them from the consulate. I had, at his request, offered him the blanks.

At eleven I received a telephone call from the Continental Hotel. It was a woman's voice, and my heart beat violently as I recognized it. I was requested to come at once to the hotel. I should find her in the ladies' salon. I walked the distance in ten minutes. She told me all that had happened.

"By this time it is all over the city. But it is all nonsense about her Highness' eloping with any one. She is too nobly born to commit such a folly. She has simply run away; and I very much fear that she will be caught. The duke is in a terrible temper. I could not remain in the palace, for the duke suspects that I know where she has gone. I have my passports. The British consul is away hunting. You were the only English-speaking person to whom I could come for aid."

"I am very glad."

"Will it be asking too much of you to aid me in leaving Barscheit to-night? There is a train at one o'clock for Dresden."

"Leave Barscheit?" My heart sank dismally.

"Oh,"—with a smile,—"the world is small and England is even smaller."

"I shall have to give up the consulate,"—gravely.

She laughed. "I shall be in England for something more than a year. Truthfully, I hunger for mine own people. You know what that hunger is."

"Yes. I shall go home as often as possible now. I always stop a few days in London."

"Then I shall expect to see you; perhaps during the holidays. I am determined to leave Barscheit before the duke changes his mind. Heavens, he may put me in prison!"

"I doubt that."

I saw to it that she secured a sleeping-compartment all to herself, took charge of her luggage and carefully examined her papers. Then we had a small supper. I wanted to ask a thousand questions, but my courage lacked the proper key.

"May I have the pleasure of writing to you occasionally?" I finally ventured. "I am sure that you would like a bit of Barscheit gossip from time to time."

"Write to me, by all means. I shall await these letters with great pleasure."

"And answer them?"—growing bolder.

"It is easily seen that you are a diplomat. Yes, I shall answer them. Heigh-ho! I shall miss my rides." What a brave little woman she was!

Finally we started for the station, and I saw her to the gates. We shook hands, and I was sure I felt a very friendly pressure; and then she disappeared. There was altogether a different feeling in my heart as I watched *her* train draw out.

Eh, well, the world is small and England is smaller, even as she had said. It's a mighty fine world, when you get the proper angle of vision.

IX

There was very little light in the compartment into which Max had so successfully dived. Some one had turned down the wicks of the oil lamps which hung suspended between the luggage-racks above, and the gloom was notable rather than subdued. So far as he was concerned he was perfectly contented; his security was all the greater. He pressed his face against the window and peered out. The lights of the city flashed by, and finally grew few and far between, and then came the blackness of the country. It would take an hour and a half to cross the frontier, and there would be no stop this side, for which he was grateful. He swore, mumbling. To have come all this way to study, and then to leg it in this ignominious fashion! It was downright scandalous! Whoever heard of such laws? Of course he had been rather silly in pulling his gun, for even in the United States—where he devoutly wished himself at that moment—it was a misdemeanor to carry concealed weapons. He felt of his cheek. He would return some day, and if it was the last thing he ever did, he would slash that lieutenant's cheeks. The insolent beggar! To be struck and not to strike back! He choked.

Gradually his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, and he cast about.

"The deuce!" he muttered.

He was not alone. Huddled in the far corner was a woman heavily veiled. Young or old, he could not tell. She sat motionless, and appeared to be looking out of the opposite window. Well, so long as she did not bother him he would not bother her. But he would much rather have been alone.

He took out his passport and tried to read it. It was impossible. So he rose, steadied himself, and turned up the wick of one of the lamps.

He did not hear the muffled exclamation which came from the other end.

He dropped back upon the cushion and began to read. So he was George Ellis, an American student in good standing; he was aged twenty-nine, had blue eyes, light hair, was six feet tall, and weighed one hundred and fifty-four pounds. Ha! he had, then, lost thirty pounds in as many minutes? At this rate he wouldn't cast a shadow when he struck Dresden. He had studied three years at the college; but what the deuce had he studied? If they were only asleep at the frontier! He returned the document to his pocket, and as he did so his fingers came into contact with the purse he had picked up in the road that morning—Hildegarde von Heideloff. What meant Fate in crossing *her* path with his? He had been perfectly contented in mind and heart before that first morning ride; and here he was, sighing like a furnace. She had been merely pretty on Monday, on Tuesday she had been handsome, on Wednesday she had been adorable; now she was the most beautiful woman that ever lived. (Ah, the progressive adjective, that litany of love!) Alas! it was quite evident that she had passed out of his life as suddenly and mysteriously as she had entered it. He would keep the purse as a souvenir, and some day, when he was an old man, he would open it.

There is something compelling in the human eye, a magnetism upon which Science has yet to put her cold and unromantic finger. Have you never experienced the sensation that some [Transcriber's note: someone?] was looking at you? Doubtless you have. Well, Max presently turned his glance toward his silent fellow traveler. She had lifted her veil and was staring at him with wondering, fearing eyes. These eyes were somewhat red, as if the little bees of grief had stung them.

"You!" he cried, the blood thumping into his throat. He tossed his hat to the floor and started for her end of the compartment.

She held up a hand as if to ward off his approach. "I can hear perfectly," she said; "it is not needful that you should come any nearer."

He sat down confused. He could not remember when his heart had beaten so irregularly.

"May I ask how you came to enter this compartment?" she asked coldly.

"I jumped in,"—simply. What was to account for this strange attitude?

"So I observe. What I meant was, by what right?"

"It happened to be the only door at hand, and I was in a great hurry." Where was his usual collectedness of thought? He was embarrassed and angry at the knowledge.

"Did you follow me?" Her nostrils were palpitating and the corners of her mouth were drawn aggressively.

"Follow you?" amazed that such an idea should enter into her head. "Why, you are the last person I ever expected to see again. Indeed, you are only a fairy-story; there is, I find, no such person as Hildegarde von Heideloff." Clearly he was recovering.

"I know it,"—candidly. "It was my mother's name, and I saw fit to use it." She really hoped he *hadn't* followed her.

"You had no need to use it, or any name, for that matter. When I gave you my name it was given in good faith. The act did not imply that I desired to know yours."

"But you did!"—imperiously.

"Yes. Curiosity is the brain of our mental anatomy." When Max began to utter tall phrases it was a sign of even-balanced mentality.

"And if I hadn't told you my name, you would have asked for it."

"Not the first day."

"Well, you would have on Tuesday."

"Not a bit of a doubt." He certainly wouldn't show her how much he cared. (What was she doing in this carriage? She had said nothing that morning about traveling.)

"Well, you will admit that under the circumstances I had the right to give any name it pleased me to give."

He came over to her end and sat down. Her protests (half-hearted) he ignored.

"I can not see very well from over there," he explained.

"It is not necessary that you should see; you can hear what I have to say."

"Very well; I'll go back." And he did. He made a fine pretense of looking out of the window. Why should this girl cross his path at this unhappy moment?

There was a pause.

"You are not near so nice as you were this morning," she said presently.

"I can't be nice and sit away over here."

"What made you jump into this compartment, of all others?"

"I wasn't particular what compartment I got into so long as I got into one. As I said, I was in a hurry."

"You said nothing this morning about going away from Barscheit."

"Neither did you."

Another pause. (I take it, from the character of this dialogue, that their morning rides must have been rather interesting.)

"You told me that you were in Barscheit to study nerves,"—wickedly.

"So thought I, up to half-past nine to-night; but it appears that I am not,"—gloomily.

"You are running away, too?"—with suppressed eagerness.

"Running away, too!" he repeated. "Are *you* running away?"

"As fast as ever the train can carry me. I am on the way to Dresden."

"Dresden? It seems that Fate is determined that we shall travel together this day. Dresden is my destination also."

"Let me see your passports,"—extending a firm white hand.

He obeyed docilely, as docilely as though he were married. She gave the paper one angry glance and tossed it back.

"George Ellis; so that is your name?"—scornfully. "You told me that it was Scharfenstein. I did not ask you to tell me your name; you took that service upon yourself." She recalled the duke's declaration that he should have her every movement watched. If this American was watching her, the duke was vastly more astute than she had given him the credit for being. "Are you in the pay of the duke? Come, confess that you have followed me, that you have been watching me for these four days." How bitter the cup of romance tasted to her now! She had been deceived. "Well, you shall never take me from this train save by force. I *will* not go back!"

"I haven't the slightest idea of what you are talking about," he said, mightily discouraged. "I never saw this country till Monday, and never want to see it again."

"From what are you running away then?"—skeptically.

"I am running away from a man who slapped me in the face,"—bitterly; and all his wrongs returned to him.

"Indeed!"—derisively.

"Yes, I!" He thrust out both his great arms miserably. "I'm a healthy-looking individual, am I not, to be running away from anything?"

"Especially after having been a soldier in the Spanish War. Why did you tell me that your name was Scharfenstein?"

"Heaven on earth, it *is* Scharfenstein! I'm simply taking my chance on another man's passports."

"I am unconvinced,"—ungraciously. She was, however, inordinately happy; at the sight of the picture of woe on his face all her trust in him returned. She believed every word he said, but she wanted to know everything.

"Very well; I see that I must tell you everything to get back into your good graces—Fräulein von Heideloff."

"If you *ever* were in my good graces!"

Graphically he recounted the adventure at Müller's. He was a capital story-

teller, and he made a very good impression.

"If it hadn't been for the princess' eloping I should not have been here," he concluded, "for my friend would have had a waiter bring me that chair."

"The princess' eloping!"—aghast.

"Why, yes. It seems that she eloped to-night; so the report came from the palace."

The girl sat tight, as they say; then suddenly she burst into uncontrollable laughter. It was the drollest thing she had ever heard. She saw the duke tearing around the palace, ordering the police hither and thither, sending telegrams, waking his advisers and dragging them from their beds. My! what a hubbub! Suddenly she grew serious.

"Have you the revolver still?"

"Yes."

"Toss it out of the window; quick!"

"But—"

"Do as I say. They will naturally search you at the frontier."

He took out the revolver and gazed regretfully at it, while the girl could not repress a shudder.

"What a horrible-looking thing!"

"I carried it all through the war."

"Throw it away and buy a new one."

"But the associations!"

"They will lock you up as a dangerous person." She let down the window and the cold night air rushed in. "Give it to me." He did so. She flung it far into the night. "There, that is better. Some day you will understand."

"I shall never understand anything in this country—What are *you* running away from?"

"A man with a red nose."

"A red nose? Are they so frightful here as all that?"

"This one is. He wants—to marry me."

"Marry you!"

"Yes; rather remarkable that any man should desire me as a wife, isn't it?"

He saw that she was ironical. Having nothing to say, he said nothing, but looked longingly at the vacant space beside her.

She rested her chin upon the sill of the window and gazed at the stars. A wild rush of the wind beat upon her face, bringing a thousand vague heavy perfumes and a pleasant numbing. How cleverly she had eluded the duke's police! What a brilliant idea it had been to use her private carriage key to steal into the carriage compartment long before the train was made up! It had been some trouble to light the lamps, but in doing so she had avoided the possible dutiful guard. He *had* peered in, but, seeing that the lamps were lighted, concluded that one of his fellows had been the rounds.

The police would watch all those who entered or left the station, but never would they think to search a carriage into which no one had been seen to enter. But oh, what a frightful predicament she was in! All she possessed in the world was a half-crown, scarce enough for her breakfast. And if she did not find her governess at once she would be lost utterly, and in Dresden! She choked back the sob. Why couldn't they let her be? She didn't want to marry any one—that is, just yet. She didn't want her wings clipped, before she had learned what a fine thing it was to fly. She was young.

"Oh!"

"What is it?" she said, turning.

"I have something of yours," answered Max, fumbling in his pocket, grateful for some excuse to break the silence. "You dropped your purse this morning.

Permit me to return it to you. I hadn't the remotest idea how I was going to return it. In truth, I had just made up my mind to keep it as a souvenir."

She literally snatched it from his extended hand.

"My purse! My purse! And I thought it was gone for ever!" hugging it hysterically to her heart. She feverishly tried to unlatch the clasps.

"You need not open it," he said quietly, even proudly, "I had not thought of looking into it, even to prove your identity."

"Pardon! I did not think. I was so crazy to see it again." She laid the purse beside her. "You see," with an hysterical catch in her voice, "all the money I had in the world was in that purse, and I was running away without any money, and only Heaven knows what misfortunes were about to befall me. There were, and are, a thousand crowns in the purse."

"A thousand crowns?"

"In bank-notes. Thank you, thank you! I am so happy!"—clasping her hands. Then, with a smile as warm as the summer's sun, she added: "You may—come and sit close beside me. You may even smoke."

Max grew light-headed. This was as near Heaven as he ever expected to get.

"Open your purse and look into it," he said. "I'm a brute; you are dying to do so."

"May I?"—shyly.

Then it came into Max's mind, with all the brilliancy of a dynamo spark, that this was the one girl in all the world, the ideal he had been searching for; and he wanted to fall at her feet and tell her so.

"Look!" she cried gleefully, holding up the packet of bank-notes.

"I wish," he said boyishly, "that you didn't have any money at all, so I could help you and feel that you depended upon me."

She smiled. How a woman loves this simple kind of flattery! It tells her better

what she may wish to know than a thousand hymns sung in praise of her beauty.

But even as he spoke a chill of horror went over Max. He put his hand hurriedly into his vest-pocket. Fool! Ass! How like a man! In changing his clothes at the consulate he had left his money, and all he had with him was some pocket change.

The girl saw his action and read the sequence in the look of dismay which spread over his face.

"You have no money either?" she cried. She separated the packet of notes into two equal parts. "Here!"

He smiled weakly.

"Take them!"

"No, a thousand times, no! I have a watch, and there's always a pawnbroker handy, even in Europe."

"You offered to help me," she insisted.

"It is not quite the same."

"Take quarter of it."

"No. Don't you understand? I really couldn't."

"One, just one, then!" she pleaded.

An idea came to him. "Very well; I will take one." And when she gave it to him he folded it reverently and put it away.

"I understand!" she cried. "You are just going to keep it; you don't intend to spend it at all. Don't be foolish!"

"I shall notify my friend, when we reach Doppelkinn, that I am without funds, and he will telegraph to Dresden."

"Your friends were very wise in sending you away as they did. Aren't you always getting into trouble?"

"Yes. But I doubt the wisdom of my friends in sending me away as they did,"—with a frank glance into her eyes. How beautiful they were, now that the sparkle of mischief had left them!

She looked away. If only Doppelkinn were young like this! She sighed.

"Can they force one to marry in this country?" he asked abruptly.

"When one is in my circumstances."

He wanted to ask what those circumstances were, but what he said was: "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"You are even more helpless than I am,"—softly. "If you are caught you will be imprisoned. I shall only suffer a temporary loss of liberty; my room will be my dungeon-keep." How big and handsome and strong he looked! What a terrible thing it was to be born in purple! "Tell me about yourself."

His hand strayed absently toward his upper vest-pocket, and then fell to his side. He licked his lips.

"Smoke!" she commanded intuitively. "I said that you might."

"I can talk better when I smoke," he advanced rather lamely. "May I, then?"—gratefully.

"I command it!"

Wasn't it fine to be ordered about in this fashion? If only the train might go on and on and on, thousands of miles! He applied a match to the end of his cigar and leaned back against the cushion.

"Where shall I begin?"

"At the beginning. I'm not one of those novel readers who open a book at random. I do not appreciate effects till I have found out the causes. I want to know everything about you, for you interest me."

He began. He told her that he was a German by birth and blood. He had been born either in Germany or in Austria, he did not know which. He had been found

in Tyrol, in a railway station. A guard had first picked him up, then a kind-hearted man named Scharfenstein had taken him in charge, advertised for his parents and, hearing nothing, had taken him to America with him.

"If they catch you," she interrupted, "do not under any consideration let them know that you were not born in the United States. Your friend the American consul could do nothing for you then."

"Trust me to keep silent, then." He continued: "I have lived a part of my life on the great plains; have ridden horses for days and days at a time. As a deputy sheriff I have arrested desperadoes, have shot and been shot at. Then I went East and entered a great college; went in for athletics, and wore my first dress-suit. Then my foster-parent died, leaving me his fortune. And as I am frugal, possibly because of my German origin, I have more money than I know what to do with." He ceased.

"Go on," she urged.

"When the Spanish War broke out I entered a cavalry regiment as a trooper. I won rank, but surrendered it after the battle of Santiago. And now there are but two things in the world I desire to complete my happiness. I want to know who I am."

"And the other thing?"

"The other thing? I can't tell *you* that!"—hurriedly.

"Ah, I believe I know. You have left some sweetheart back in America." All her interest In his narrative took a strange and unaccountable slump.

"No; I have often admired women, but I have left no sweetheart back in America. If I had I should now feel very uncomfortable."

Somehow she couldn't meet his eyes. She recognized, with vague anger, that she was glad that he had no sweetheart. Ah, well, nobody could rob her of her right to dream, and this was a very pleasant dream.

"The train is slowing down," he said suddenly.

"We are approaching the frontier." She shaded her eyes and searched the

speeding blackness outside.

"How far is it to the capital?" he asked.

"It lies two miles beyond the frontier."

Silence fell upon them, and at length the train stopped with a jerk. In what seemed to them an incredibly short time a guard unlocked the door.

He peered in.

"Here they are, sure enough, your Excellency!" addressing some one in the dark beyond.

An officer from the military household of the Prince of Doppelkinn was instantly framed in the doorway. The girl tried to lower her veil; too late.

"I am sorry to annoy your Highness," he began, "but the grand duke's orders are that you shall follow me to the castle. Lieutenant, bring two men to tie this fellow's hands,"—nodding toward Scharfenstein.

Max stared dumbly at the girl. All the world seemed to have slipped from under his feet.

"Forgive me!" she said, low but impulsively.

"What does it mean?" His heart was very heavy.

"I am the Princess Hildegarde of Barscheit, and your entering this carriage has proved the greatest possible misfortune to you."

He stared helplessly—And everything had been going along so nicely—the dinner he had planned in Dresden, and all that!

"And they believe," the girl went on, "that I have eloped with you to avoid marrying the prince." She turned to the officer in the doorway. "Colonel, on the word of a princess, this gentleman is in no wise concerned. I ran away alone."

Max breathed easier.

"I should be most happy to believe your Highness, but you will honor my

strict observance of orders." He passed a telegram to her.

Search train for Doppelkinn. Princess has eloped. Arrest and hold pair till I arrive on special engine.

Barscheit.

The telegraph is the true arm of the police. The princess sighed pathetically. It was all over.

"Your passports," said the colonel to Max.

Max surrendered his papers. "You need not tie my hands," he said calmly. "I will come peaceably."

The colonel looked inquiringly at the princess.

"He will do as he says."

"Very good. I should regret to shoot him upon so short an acquaintance." The colonel beckoned for them to step forth. "Everything is prepared. There is a carriage for the convenience of your Highness; Herr Ellis shall ride horseback with the troop."

Max often wondered why he did not make a dash for it, or a running fight. What he had gone through that night was worth a good fight.

"Good-by," said the princess, holding out her hand.

Scharfenstein gravely bent his head and kissed it.

"Good-by, Prince Charming!" she whispered, so softly that Max scarcely heard her.

Then she entered the closed carriage and was driven up the dark, tree-enshrouded road that led to the Castle of Doppelkinn.

"What are you going to do with me?" Max asked, as he gathered up the reins

of his mount.

"That we shall discuss later. Like as not something very unpleasant. For one thing you are passing under a forged passport. You are *not* an American, no matter how well you may speak that language. You are a German."

"There are Germans in the United States, born and bred there, who speak German tolerably well," replied Max easily. He was wondering if it would not be a good scheme to tell a straightforward story and ask to be returned to Barscheit. But that would probably appeal to the officer that he was a coward and was trying to lay the blame on the princess.

"I do not say that I can prove it," went on the colonel; "I simply affirm that you are a German, even to the marrow."

"You have the advantage of the discussion." No; he would confess nothing. If he did he might never see the princess again.… The princess! As far away as yonder stars! It was truly a very disappointing world to live in.

"Now, then, forward!" cried the colonel to his men, and they set off at a sharp trot.

From time to time, as a sudden twist in the road broke the straight line, Max could see the careening lights of the princess' carriage. A princess! And he was a man without a country or a name!

X

The castle of the prince of Doppelkinn rested in the very heart of the celebrated vineyards. Like all German castles I ever saw or heard of, it was a relic of the Middle Ages, with many a crumbling, useless tower and battlement. It stood on the south side of a rugged hill which was gashed by a narrow but turbulent stream, in which lurked the rainbow trout that lured the lazy man from his labors afield. (And who among us shall cast a stone at the lazy man? Not I!) If you are fortunate enough to run about Europe next year, as like as not you will

be mailing home the "Doppelkinn" post-card.

More than once I have wandered about the castle's interior, cavernous and musty, strolled through its galleries of ancient armor, searched its dungeon-keeps, or loitered to soliloquize in the gloomy judgment chamber. How time wars upon custom! In olden times they created pain; now they strive to subdue it.

I might go into a detailed history of the Doppelkinns, only it would be absurd and unnecessary, since it would be inappreciable under the name of Doppelkinn, which happens to be, as doubtless you have already surmised, a name of mine own invention. I could likewise tell you how the ancient dukes of Barscheit fought off the insidious flattery of Napoleon, only it is a far interest, and Barscheit is simply a characteristic, not a name. Some day I may again seek a diplomatic mission, and what government would have for its representative a teller of tales out of school?

It was, then, to continue the fortunes and misfortunes of Max Scharfenstein, close to midnight when the cavalcade crossed the old moat-bridge, which hadn't moved on its hinges within a hundred years. They were not entering by the formal way, which was a flower-bedded, terraced road. It was the rear entrance. The iron doors swung outward with a plaintive moaning, like that of a man roused out of his sleep, and Max found himself in an ancient guard-room, now used as a kind of secondary stable. The men dismounted.

"This way, Herr Ellis," said the colonel, with a mocking bow. He pointed toward a broad stone staircase.

"All I ask," said Max, "is a fair chance to explain my presence here."

"All in due time. Forward! The prince is waiting, and his temper may not be as smooth as usual."

With two troopers in front of him and two behind, Max climbed the steps readily enough. They wouldn't dare kill him, whatever they did. He tried to imagine himself the hero of some Scott or Dumas tale, with a grim cardinal somewhere above, and oubliettes and torture chambers besetting his path. But the absurdity of his imagination, so thoroughly Americanized, evoked a ringing laughter. The troopers eyed him curiously. He might laugh later, but it was scarcely probable. A tramp through a dark corridor and they came to the west

wing of the castle. It was here that the old prince lived, comfortably and luxuriously enough, you may take my word for it.

A door opened, flooding the corridor with light. Max felt himself gently pushed over the threshold. He stood in the great living-room of the modern Doppelkinns. The first person he saw was the princess. She sat on an oriental divan. Her hands were folded; she sat very erect; her chin was tilted ominously; there was so little expression on her pale face that she might have been an incomplete statue. But Max was almost certain that there was just the faintest flicker of a smile in her eyes as she saw him enter. Glorious eyes! (It is a bad sign when a man begins to use the superlative adjectives!)

The other occupant of the room was an old man, fat and bald, with a nose like a russet pear. He was stalking—if it is possible for a short man to stalk—up and down the length of the room, and, judging from the sonorous, rumbling sound, was communing half-aloud. Betweenwhiles he was rubbing his tender nose, carefully and lovingly. When a man's nose resembles a russet pear it generally is tender. Whoever he was, Max saw that he was vastly agitated about something.

This old gentleman was (or supposed he was) the last of his line, the Prince of Doppelkinn, famous for his wines and his love of them. There was, so his subjects said, but one tender spot in the heart of this old man, and that was the memory of the wife of his youth. (How the years, the good and bad, crowd behind us, pressing us on and on!) However, there was always surcease in the cellars—that is, the Doppelkinn cellars.

"Ha!" he roared as he saw the blinking Max. "So this is the fellow!" He made an eloquent gesture. "Your Highness must be complimented upon your good taste. The fellow isn't bad-looking."

"When you listen to reason, Prince," replied the girl calmly, "you will apologize to the gentleman and give him his liberty."

"Oh, he is a gentleman, is he?"

"You might learn from him many of the common rules of courtesy,"—tranquilly.

"Who the devil are you?" the prince demanded of Max.

"I should be afraid to tell you. I hold that I am Max Scharfenstein, but the colonel here declares that my name is Ellis. Who are you?" Max wasn't the least bit frightened. These were not feudal times.

The prince stared at him. The insolent puppy!

"I am the prince."

"Ah, your serene Highness,"—began Max, bowing.

"I am not called 'serene'"—rudely. "The grand duke is 'serene.'"

"Permit me to doubt that," interposed the girl, smiling.

Max laughed aloud, which didn't improve his difficulties any.

"I have asked you who you are!" bawled the prince, his nose turning purple.

"My name is Max Scharfenstein. I am an American. If you will wire the American consulate at Barscheit, you will learn that I have spoken the truth. All this is a mistake. The princess did not elope with me."

"His papers give the name of Ellis," said the colonel, touching his cap.

"Humph! We'll soon find out who he is and what may be done with him. I'll wait for the duke. Take him into the library and lock the door. It's a hundred feet out of the window, and if he wants to break his neck, he may do so. It will save us so much trouble. Take him away; take him away!" his rage boiling to the surface.

The princess shrugged.

"I can't talk to you either," said the prince, turning his glowering eyes upon the girl. "I can't trust myself."

"Oh, do not mind me. I understand that your command of expletives is rather original. Go on; it will be my only opportunity." The princess rocked backward and forward on the divan. Wasn't it funny!

"Lord help me, and I was perfectly willing to marry this girl!" The prince

suddenly calmed down. "What have I ever done to offend you?"

"Nothing," she was forced to admit.

"I was lonely. I wanted youth about. I wanted to hear laughter that came from the heart and not from the mind. I do not see where I am to be blamed. The duke suggested you to me; I believed you to be willing. Why did you not say to me that I was not agreeable? It would have simplified everything."

"I am sorry," she said contritely. When he spoke like this he wasn't so unlovable.

"People say," he went on, "that I spend most of my time in my wine-cellars. Well,"—defiantly,—"what else is there for me to do? I am alone." Max came within his range of vision. "Take him away, I tell you!"

And the colonel hustled Max into the library.

"Don't try the window," he warned, but with rather a pleasant smile. He was only two or three years older than Max. "If you do, you'll break your neck."

"I promise not to try," replied Max. "My neck will serve me many years yet."

"It will not if you have the habit of running away with persons above you in quality. Actions like that are not permissible in Europe." The colonel spoke rather grimly, for all his smile.

The door slammed, there was a grinding of the key in the lock, and Max was alone.

The library at Doppelkinn was all the name implied. The cases were low and ran around the room, and were filled with romance, history, biography, and even poetry. The great circular reading-table was littered with new books, periodicals and illustrated weeklies. Once Doppelkinn had been threatened with a literary turn of mind, but a bad vintage coming along at the same time had effected a permanent cure.

Max slid into a chair and took up a paper, turning the pages at random.—

What was the matter with the room? Certainly it was not close, nor damp, nor chill. What was it? He let the paper fall to the floor, and his eyes roved from one object to another.—Where had he seen that Chinese mask before, and that great silver-faced clock? Somehow, mysterious and strange as it seemed, all this was vaguely familiar to him. Doubtless he had seen a picture of the room somewhere. He rose and wandered about.

In one corner of the bookshelves stood a pile of boy's books and some broken toys with the dust of ages upon them. He picked up a row of painted soldiers, and balanced them thoughtfully on his hand. Then he looked into one of the picture-books. It was a Santa Claus story; some of the pictures were torn and some stuck together, a reminder of sticky, candied hands. He gently replaced the book and the toys, and stared absently into space. How long he stood that way he did not recollect, but he was finally aroused by the sound of slamming doors and new voices. He returned to his chair and waited for the dénouement, which the marrow in his bones told him was about to approach.

It seemed incredible that he, of all persons, should be plucked out of the practical ways of men and thrust into the unreal fantasies of romance. A hubbub in a restaurant, a headlong dash into a carriage compartment, a long ride with a princess, and all within three short hours! It was like some weird dream. And how the deuce would it end?

He gazed at the toys again.

And then the door opened and he was told to come out. The grand duke had arrived.

"This will be the final round-up," he laughed quietly, his thought whimsically traveling back to the great plains and the long rides under the starry night.

XI

The Grand Duke of Barscheit was tall and angular and weather-beaten, and the whites of his eyes bespoke a constitution as sound and hard as his common

sense. As Max entered he was standing at the side of Doppelkinn.

"There he is!" shouted the prince. "Do you know who he is?"

The duke took a rapid inventory. "Never set eyes upon him before." The duke then addressed her Highness. "Hildegarde, who is this fellow? No evasions; I want the truth. I have, in the main, found you truthful."

"I know nothing of him at all," said the princess curtly.

Max wondered where the chill in the room came from.

"He says that his name is Scharfenstein," continued the princess, "and he has proved himself to be a courteous gentleman."

Max found that the room wasn't so chill as it might have been.

"Yet you eloped with him, and were on the way to Dresden," suggested the duke pointedly.

The princess faced them all proudly. "I eloped with no man. That was simply a little prevarication to worry you, my uncle, after the manner in which you have worried me. I was on my way to Dresden, it is true, but only to hide with my old governess. This gentleman jumped into my compartment as the train drew out of the station."

"But you *knew* him!" bawled the prince, waving his arms.

"Do you know him?" asked the duke coldly.

"I met him out riding. He addressed me, and I replied out of common politeness,"—with a sidelong glance at Max, who stood with folded arms, watching her gravely.

The duke threw his hands above his head as if to call Heaven to witness that he was a very much wronged man.

"Arnheim," he said to the young colonel, "go at once for a priest."

"A priest!" echoed the prince.

"Yes; the girl shall marry you to-night," declared his serene Highness.

"Not if I live to be a thousand!" Doppelkinn struck the table with his fist.

The girl smiled at Max.

"What?" cried the duke, all the coldness gone from his tones. "You refuse?" He was thunderstruck.

"Refuse? Of course I refuse!" And the prince thumped the table again. "What do you think I am in my old age,—an ass? If you have any fillies to break, use your own pastures. I'm a vintner." He banged the table yet again. "Why, I wouldn't marry the Princess Hildegarde if she was the last woman on earth!"

"Thank you!" said the princess sweetly.

"You're welcome," said the prince.

"Silence!" bellowed the duke. "Doppelkinn, take care; this is an affront, not one to be lightly ignored. It is international news that you are to wed my niece."

"To-morrow it will be international news that I'm *not*!" The emphasis this time threatened to crack the table-leaf. "I'm not going to risk my liberty with a girl who has no more sense of dignity than she has."

"It is very kind of you," murmured the princess.

"She'd make a fine wife," went on the prince, ignoring the interruption. "No, a thousand times no! Take her away—life's too short; take her away! Let her marry the fellow; he's young and may get over it."

The duke was furious. He looked around for something to strike, and nothing but the table being convenient, he smashed a leaf and sent a vase clattering to the floor. He was stronger than the prince, otherwise there wouldn't have been a table to thwack.

"That's right; go on! Break all the furniture, if it will do you any good; but mark me, you'll foot the bill." The prince began to dance around. "I will not marry the girl. That's as final as I can make it. The sooner you calm down the better."

How the girl's eyes sparkled! She was free. The odious alliance would not take place.

"Who is that?"

Everybody turned and looked at Max. His arm was leveled in the direction of a fine portrait in oil which hung suspended over the fireplace. Max was very pale.

"What's that to you?" snarled the prince. He was what we Yankees call "hopping mad." The vase was worth a hundred crowns, and he never could find a leaf to replace the one just broken.

"I believe I have a right to know who that woman is up there." Max spoke quietly. As a matter of fact he was too weak to speak otherwise.

"A right to know? What do you mean?" demanded the prince fiercely. "It is my wife."

With trembling fingers Max produced his locket.

"Will you look at this?" he asked in a voice that was a bit shaky.

The prince stepped forward and jerked the locket from Max's hand. But the moment he saw the contents his jaw fell and he rocked on his heels unsteadily and staggered back toward the duke for support.

"What's the matter, Prince?" asked the duke anxiously. After all Doppelkinn was an old crony, and mayhap he had been harsh with him.

"Where did you get that?" asked the prince hoarsely.

"I have always worn it," answered Max. "The chain that went with it originally will no longer fit my neck."

"Arnheim! … Duke! … Come and look at this!"—feebly.

"Good Heaven!" cried the duke.

"It is the princess!" said Arnheim in awed tones.

"Where did you get it?" demanded the prince again.

"I was found with it around my neck."

"Duke, what do you think?" asked the agitated prince.

"What do I think?"

"Yes. This was around my son's neck the day he was lost. If this should be! … If it were possible!"

"What?" The duke looked from the prince to the man who had worn the locket. Certainly there wasn't any sign of likeness. But when he looked at the portrait on the wall and then at Max doubt grew in his eyes. They were somewhat alike. He plucked nervously at his beard.

"Prince," said Max, "before Heaven I believe that I may be … your son!

"My son!"

By this time they were all tremendously excited and agitated and white; all save the princess, who was gazing at Max with sudden gladness in her eyes, while over her cheeks there stole the phantom of a rose. If it were true!

"Let me tell you my story," said Max. (It is not necessary for me to repeat it.)

The prince turned helplessly toward the duke, but the duke was equally dazed.

"But we can't accept just a story as proof," the duke said. "It isn't as if he were one of the people. It wouldn't matter then. But it's a future prince. Let us go slow."

"Yes, let us go slow," repeated the prince, brushing his damp forehead.

"Wait a moment!" said Colonel Arnheim, stepping forward. "Only one thing will prove his identity to me; not all the papers in the world can do it."

"What do you know?" cried the prince, bewildered.

"Something I have not dared tell till this moment,"—miserably.

"Curse it, you are keeping us waiting!" The duke kicked about the shattered bits of porcelain.

"I used to play with the—the young prince," began Arnheim. "Your Highness will recollect that I did." Arnheim went over to Max. "Take off your coat." Max did so, wondering. "Roll up your sleeve." Again Max obeyed, and his wonder grew. "See!" cried the colonel in a high, unnatural voice, due to his unusual excitement. "Oh, there can be no doubt! It is your son!"

The duke and the prince bumped against each other in their mad rush to inspect Max's arm. Arnheim's finger rested upon the peculiar scar I have mentioned.

"Lord help us, it's your wine-case brand!" gasped the duke.

"My wine case!" The prince was almost on the verge of tears.

The girl sat perfectly quiet.

"Explain, explain!" said Max.

"Yes, yes! How did this come?—put there?" spluttered the prince.

"Your Highness, we—your son—we were playing in the wine-cellars that day," stammered the unhappy Arnheim. "I saw … the hot iron … I was a boy of no more than five … I branded the prince on the arm. He cried so that I was frightened and ran and hid. When I went to look for him he was gone. Oh, I know; it is your son."

"I'll take your word for it, Colonel!" cried the prince. "I said from the first that he wasn't bad-looking. Didn't I, Princess?" He then turned embarrassedly toward Max and timidly held out his hand. That was as near sentiment as ever the father and the son came, but it was genuine. "Ho, steward! Hans, you rascal, where are you?"

The steward presently entered, shading his eyes.

"Your Highness called?"

"That I did. That's Max come home!"

"Little Max?"

"Little Max. Now, candles, and march yourself to the packing-cellars. Off with you!" The happy old man slapped the duke on the shoulder. "I've an idea, Josef."

"What is it?" asked the duke, also very well pleased with events.

"I'll tell you all about it when we get into the cellar." But the nod toward the girl and the nod toward Max was a liberal education.

"I am pardoned?" said Arnheim.

"Pardoned? My boy, if I had an army I would make you a general!" roared the prince. "Come along, Josef. And you, Arnheim! You troopers, out of here, every one of you, and leave these two young persons alone!"

And out of the various doors the little company departed, leaving the princess and Max alone.

Ah, how everything was changed! thought Max, as he let down his sleeve and buttoned his cuff. A prince! He was a prince; he, Max Scharfenstein, cow-boy, quarter-back, trooper, doctor, was a prince! If it was a dream, he was going to box the ears of the bell-boy who woke him up. But it wasn't a dream; he knew it wasn't. The girl yonder didn't dissolve into mist and disappear; she was living, living. He had now the right to love any one he chose, and he did choose to love this beautiful girl, who, with lowered eyes, was nervously plucking the ends of the pillow tassel. It was all changed for her, too.

"Princess!" he said a bit brokenly.

"I am called Gretchen by my friends,"—with a boldness that only half-disguised her real timidity. What would he do, this big, handsome fellow, who had turned out to be a prince, fairy-tale wise?

"Gretchen? I like that better than Hildegarde; it is less formal. Well, then, Gretchen, I can't explain it, but this new order of things has given me a tremendous backbone." He crossed the room to her side. "You will not wed my —my father?"

"Never in all this world!"—slipping around the table, her eyes dim like the bloom on the grape. She ought not to be afraid of him, but she was.

"But I—"

"You have known me only four days," she whispered faintly. "You can not know your mind."

"Oh, when one is a prince,"—laughing,—"it takes no time at all. I love you. I knew it was going to be when you looked around in old Bauer's smithy."

"Did I look around?"—innocently.

"You certainly did, for I looked around and saw you."

They paused. (There is no pastime quite like it.)

"But they say that I am wild like a young horse." (Love is always finding some argument which he wishes to have knocked under.)

"Not to me,"—ardently. "You may ride a bicycle every day, if you wish."

"I'd rather have an automobile,"—drolly.

"An airship, if money will buy it!"

"They say—my uncle says—that I am not capable of loving anything."

"What do I care what they say? Will you be my wife?"

"Give me a week to think it over."

"No."

(She liked that!)

"A day, then?"

"Not an hour!"

(She liked this still better!)

"Oh!"

"Not half an hour!"

"This is almost as bad as the duke; you are forcing me."

"If you do not answer yes or no at once, I'll go back to Barscheit and trounce that fellow who struck me. I can do it now."

"Well—but only four days—"

"Hours! Think of riding together for ever!"—joyously taking a step nearer.

"I dare not think of it. It is all so like a dream.… Oh!" bursting into tears (what unaccountable beings women are!)—"if you do not love me!"

"Don't I, though!"

Then he started around the table in pursuit of her, in all directions, while, after the manner of her kind, she balked him, rosily, star-eyed. They laughed; and when two young people laugh it is a sign that all goes well with the world. He never would tell just how long it took him to catch her, nor would he tell me what he did when he caught her. Neither would I, had I been in his place!

"Here's!" said the prince.

"It's a great world," added the duke.

"For surprises," supplemented the prince. "Ho, Hans! A fresh candle!"

And the story goes that his serene Highness of Barscheit and his Highness of Doppelkinn were found peacefully asleep in the cellars, long after the sun had rolled over the blue Carpathians.

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