

"SILENCE IS STILL THE ORDER"

They were even poorer than usual just now, and the supper Marco and his father sat down to was scant enough. Lazarus stood upright behind his master's chair and served him with strictest ceremony. Their poor lodgings were always kept with a soldierly cleanliness and order. When an object could be polished it was forced to shine, no grain of dust was allowed to lie undisturbed, and this perfection was not attained through the ministrations of a lodging house slavey. Lazarus made himself extremely popular by taking the work of caring for his master's rooms entirely out of the hands of the overburdened maids of all work. He had learned to do many things in his young days in barracks. He carried about with him coarse bits of table-cloths and towels, which he laundered as if they had been the finest linen. He mended, he patched, he darned, and in the hardest fight the poor must face--the fight with dirt and dinginess--he always held his own. They had nothing but dry bread and coffee this evening, but Lazarus had made the coffee and the bread was good.

As Marco ate, he told his father the story of The Rat and his followers. Loristan listened, as the boy had known he would, with the far-off, intently-thinking smile in his dark eyes. It was a look which always fascinated Marco because it meant that he was thinking so many things.

Perhaps he would tell some of them and perhaps he would not. His spell over the boy lay in the fact that to him he seemed like a wonderful book of which one had only glimpses. It was full of pictures and adventures which were true, and one could not help continually making guesses about them. Yes, the feeling that Marco had was that his father's attraction for him was a sort of spell, and that others felt the same thing. When he stood and talked to commoner people, he held his tall body with singular quiet grace which was like power. He never stirred or moved himself as if he were nervous or uncertain. He could hold his hands (he had beautiful slender and strong hands) quite still; he could stand on his fine arched feet without shuffling them. He could sit without any ungrace or restlessness. His mind knew what his body should do, and gave it orders without speaking, and his fine limbs and muscles and nerves obeyed. So he could stand still and at ease and look at the people he was talking to, and they always looked at him and listened to what he said, and somehow, courteous and uncondescending as his manner unfailingly was, it used always to seem to Marco as if he were "giving an audience" as kings gave them.

He had often seen people bow very low when they went away from him, and more than once it had happened that some humble person had stepped out of his presence backward, as people do when retiring before a sovereign. And yet his bearing was the quietest and least assuming in the world.

"And they were talking about Samavia? And he knew the story of the Lost Prince?" he said ponderingly. "Even in that place!"

"He wants to hear about wars--he wants to talk about them," Marco answered. "If he could stand and were old enough, he would go and fight for Samavia himself."

"It is a blood-drenched and sad place now!" said Loristan. "The people are mad when they are not heartbroken and terrified."

Suddenly Marco struck the table with a sounding slap of his boy's hand. He did it before he realized any intention in his own mind.

"Why should either one of the Iarovitch or one of the Maranovitch be king!" he cried. "They were only savage peasants when they first fought for the crown hundreds of years ago. The most savage one got it, and they have been fighting ever since. Only the Fedorovitch were born kings. There is only one man in the world who has the right to the throne--and I don't know whether he is in the world or not. But I believe he is! I do!"

Loristan looked at his hot twelve-year-old face with a reflective curiousness. He saw that the flame which had leaped up in him had leaped without warning--just as a fierce heart-beat might have shaken him.

"You mean--?" he suggested softly.

"Ivor Fedorovitch. King Ivor he ought to be. And the people would obey

him, and the good days would come again."

"It is five hundred years since Ivor Fedorovitch left the good monks."

Loristan still spoke softly.

"But, Father," Marco protested, "even The Rat said what you said--that he was too young to be able to come back while the Maranovitch were in power. And he would have to work and have a home, and perhaps he is as poor as we are. But when he had a son he would call him Ivor and tell him--and his son would call his son Ivor and tell him--and it would go on and on. They could never call their eldest sons anything but Ivor. And what you said about the training would be true. There would always be a king being trained for Samavia, and ready to be called." In the fire of his feelings he sprang from his chair and stood upright. "Why! There may be a king of Samavia in some city now who knows he is king, and, when he reads about the fighting among his people, his blood gets red-hot. They're his own people--his very own! He ought to go to them--he ought to go and tell them who he is! Don't you think he ought, Father?"

"It would not be as easy as it seems to a boy," Loristan answered.

"There are many countries which would have something to say--Russia would have her word, and Austria, and Germany; and England never is silent. But, if he were a strong man and knew how to make strong friends in silence, he might sometime be able to declare himself openly."

"But if he is anywhere, some one--some Samavian--ought to go and look for him. It ought to be a Samavian who is very clever and a patriot--" He stopped at a flash of recognition. "Father!" he cried out. "Father! You--you are the one who could find him if any one in the world could. But perhaps--" and he stopped a moment again because new thoughts rushed through his mind. "Have you ever looked for him?" he asked hesitating.

Perhaps he had asked a stupid question--perhaps his father had always been looking for him, perhaps that was his secret and his work.

But Loristan did not look as if he thought him stupid. Quite the contrary. He kept his handsome eyes fixed on him still in that curious way, as if he were studying him--as if he were much more than twelve years old, and he were deciding to tell him something.

"Comrade at arms," he said, with the smile which always gladdened Marco's heart, "you have kept your oath of allegiance like a man. You were not seven years old when you took it. You are growing older. Silence is still the order, but you are man enough to be told more." He paused and looked down, and then looked up again, speaking in a low tone. "I have not looked for him," he said, "because--I believe I know where he is."

Marco caught his breath.

"Father!" He said only that word. He could say no more. He knew he must not ask questions. "Silence is still the order." But as they faced each other in their dingy room at the back of the shabby house on the side of the roaring common road--as Lazarus stood stock-still behind his father's chair and kept his eyes fixed on the empty coffee cups and the dry bread plate, and everything looked as poor as things always did--there was a king of Samavia--an Ivor Fedorovitch with the blood of the Lost Prince in his veins--alive in some town or city this moment! And Marco's own father knew where he was!

He glanced at Lazarus, but, though the old soldier's face looked as expressionless as if it were cut out of wood, Marco realized that he knew this thing and had always known it. He had been a comrade at arms all his life. He continued to stare at the bread plate.

Loristan spoke again and in an even lower voice. "The Samavians who are patriots and thinkers," he said, "formed themselves into a secret party about eighty years ago. They formed it when they had no reason for hope, but they formed it because one of them discovered that an Ivor Fedorovitch was living. He was head forester on a great estate in the Austrian Alps. The nobleman he served had always thought him a mystery because he had the bearing and speech of a man who had not been born a servant, and his methods in caring for the forests and game were those of a man who was educated and had studied his subject. But he never was familiar or assuming, and never professed superiority over any of his fellows. He was a man of great stature, and was extraordinarily brave

and silent. The nobleman who was his master made a sort of companion of him when they hunted together. Once he took him with him when he traveled to Samavia to hunt wild horses. He found that he knew the country strangely well, and that he was familiar with Samavian hunting and customs. Before he returned to Austria, the man obtained permission to go to the mountains alone. He went among the shepherds and made friends among them, asking many questions.

"One night around a forest fire he heard the songs about the Lost Prince which had not been forgotten even after nearly five hundred years had passed. The shepherds and herdsmen talked about Prince Ivor, and told old stories about him, and related the prophecy that he would come back and bring again Samavia's good days. He might come only in the body of one of his descendants, but it would be his spirit which came, because his spirit would never cease to love Samavia. One very old shepherd tottered to his feet and lifted his face to the myriad stars bestrewn like jewels in the blue sky above the forest trees, and he wept and prayed aloud that the great God would send their king to them. And the stranger huntsman stood upright also and lifted his face to the stars. And, though he said no word, the herdsman nearest to him saw tears on his cheeks--great, heavy tears. The next day, the stranger went to the monastery where the order of good monks lived who had taken care of the Lost Prince. When he had left Samavia, the secret society was formed, and the members of it knew that an Ivor Fedorovitch had passed through his ancestors' country as the servant of another man. But the secret society was only a small one, and, though it has been growing ever since

and it has done good deeds and good work in secret, the huntsman died an old man before it was strong enough even to dare to tell Samavia what it knew."

"Had he a son?" cried Marco. "Had he a son?"

"Yes. He had a son. His name was Ivor. And he was trained as I told you. That part I knew to be true, though I should have believed it was true even if I had not known. There has always been a king ready for Samavia--even when he has labored with his hands and served others. Each one took the oath of allegiance."

"As I did?" said Marco, breathless with excitement. When one is twelve years old, to be so near a Lost Prince who might end wars is a thrilling thing.

"The same," answered Loristan.

Marco threw up his hand in salute.

"Here grows a man for Samavia! God be thanked!" he quoted. "And he is somewhere? And you know?"

Loristan bent his head in acquiescence.

"For years much secret work has been done, and the Fedorovitch party has



grown until it is much greater and more powerful than the other parties dream. The larger countries are tired of the constant war and disorder in Samavia. Their interests are disturbed by them, and they are deciding that they must have peace and laws which can be counted on. There have been Samavian patriots who have spent their lives in trying to bring this about by making friends in the most powerful capitals, and working secretly for the future good of their own land. Because Samavia is so small and uninfluential, it has taken a long time but when King Maran and his family were assassinated and the war broke out, there were great powers which began to say that if some king of good blood and reliable characteristics were given the crown, he should be upheld."

"His blood,"--Marco's intensity made his voice drop almost to a whisper,--"his blood has been trained for five hundred years, Father! If it comes true--" though he laughed a little, he was obliged to wink his eyes hard because suddenly he felt tears rush into them, which no boy likes--"the shepherds will have to make a new song--it will have to be a shouting one about a prince going away and a king coming back!"

"They are a devout people and observe many an ancient rite and ceremony. They will chant prayers and burn altar-fires on their mountain sides," Loristan said. "But the end is not yet--the end is not yet. Sometimes it seems that perhaps it is near--but God knows!"

Then there leaped back upon Marco the story he had to tell, but which he had held back for the last--the story of the man who spoke Samavian and

drove in the carriage with the King. He knew now that it might mean some important thing which he could not have before suspected.

"There is something I must tell you," he said.

He had learned to relate incidents in few but clear words when he related them to his father. It had been part of his training. Loristan had said that he might sometime have a story to tell when he had but few moments to tell it in--some story which meant life or death to some one. He told this one quickly and well. He made Loristan see the well-dressed man with the deliberate manner and the keen eyes, and he made him hear his voice when he said, "Tell your father that you are a very well-trained lad."

"I am glad he said that. He is a man who knows what training is," said Loristan. "He is a person who knows what all Europe is doing, and almost all that it will do. He is an ambassador from a powerful and great country. If he saw that you are a well-trained and fine lad, it might--it might even be good for Samavia."

"Would it matter that I was well-trained? Could it matter to Samavia?" Marco cried out.

Loristan paused for a moment--watching him gravely--looking him over--his big, well-built boy's frame, his shabby clothes, and his eagerly burning eyes.

He smiled one of his slow wonderful smiles.

"Yes. It might even matter to Samavia!" he answered.