

VII

"THE LAMP IS LIGHTED!"

On his way home, Marco thought of nothing but the story he must tell his father, the story the stranger who had been to Samavia had told The Rat's father. He felt that it must be a true story and not merely an invention. The Forgers of the Sword must be real men, and the hidden subterranean caverns stacked through the centuries with arms must be real, too. And if they were real, surely his father was one of those who knew the secret. His thoughts ran very fast. The Rat's boyish invention of the rising was only part of a game, but how natural it would be that sometime--perhaps before long--there would be a real rising! Surely there would be one if the Secret Party had grown so strong, and if many weapons and secret friends in other countries were ready and waiting. During all these years, hidden work and preparation would have been going on continually, even though it was preparation for an unknown day. A party which had lasted so long--which passed its oath on from generation to generation--must be of a deadly determination.

What might it not have made ready in its caverns and secret meeting-places! He longed to reach home and tell his father, at once, all he had heard. He recalled to mind, word for word, all that The Rat had been told, and even all he had added in his game, because--well, because that seemed so real too, so real that it actually might be

useful.

But when he reached No. 7 Philibert Place, he found Loristan and Lazarus very much absorbed in work. The door of the back sitting-room was locked when he first knocked on it, and locked again as soon as he had entered. There were many papers on the table, and they were evidently studying them. Several of them were maps. Some were road maps, some maps of towns and cities, and some of fortifications; but they were all maps of places in Samavia. They were usually kept in a strong box, and when they were taken out to be studied, the door was always kept locked.

Before they had their evening meal, these were all returned to the strong box, which was pushed into a corner and had newspapers piled upon it.

"When he arrives," Marco heard Loristan say to Lazarus, "we can show him clearly what has been planned. He can see for himself."

His father spoke scarcely at all during the meal, and, though it was not the habit of Lazarus to speak at such times unless spoken to, this evening it seemed to Marco that he looked more silent than he had ever seen him look before. They were plainly both thinking anxiously of deeply serious things. The story of the stranger who had been to Samavia must not be told yet. But it was one which would keep.

Loristan did not say anything until Lazarus had removed the things from the table and made the room as neat as possible. While that was being done, he sat with his forehead resting on his hand, as if absorbed in thought. Then he made a gesture to Marco.

"Come here, Comrade," he said.

Marco went to him.

"To-night some one may come to talk with me about grave things," he said. "I think he will come, but I cannot be quite sure. It is important that he should know that, when he comes, he will find me quite alone. He will come at a late hour, and Lazarus will open the door quietly that no one may hear. It is important that no one should see him. Some one must go and walk on the opposite side of the street until he appears. Then the one who goes to give warning must cross the pavement before him and say in a low voice, 'The Lamp is lighted!' and at once turn quietly away."

What boy's heart would not have leaped with joy at the mystery of it! Even a common and dull boy who knew nothing of Samavia would have felt jerky. Marco's voice almost shook with the thrill of his feeling.

"How shall I know him?" he said at once. Without asking at all, he knew he was the "some one" who was to go.

"You have seen him before," Loristan answered. "He is the man who drove in the carriage with the King."

"I shall know him," said Marco. "When shall I go?"

"Not until it is half-past one o'clock. Go to bed and sleep until Lazarus calls you." Then he added, "Look well at his face before you speak. He will probably not be dressed as well as he was when you saw him first."

Marco went up-stairs to his room and went to bed as he was told, but it was hard to go to sleep. The rattle and roaring of the road did not usually keep him awake, because he had lived in the poorer quarter of too many big capital cities not to be accustomed to noise. But to-night it seemed to him that, as he lay and looked out at the lamplight, he heard every bus and cab which went past. He could not help thinking of the people who were in them, and on top of them, and of the people who were hurrying along on the pavement outside the broken iron railings. He was wondering what they would think if they knew that things connected with the battles they read of in the daily papers were going on in one of the shabby houses they scarcely gave a glance to as they went by them. It must be something connected with the war, if a man who was a great diplomat and the companion of kings came in secret to talk alone with a patriot who was a Samavian. Whatever his father was doing was for the good of Samavia, and perhaps the Secret Party knew he was doing it. His heart almost beat aloud under his shirt as he lay on the lumpy

mattress thinking it over. He must indeed look well at the stranger before he even moved toward him. He must be sure he was the right man. The game he had amused himself with so long--the game of trying to remember pictures and people and places clearly and in detail--had been a wonderful training. If he could draw, he knew he could have made a sketch of the keen-eyed, clever, aquiline face with the well-cut and delicately close mouth, which looked as if it had been shut upon secrets always--always. If he could draw, he found himself saying again. He could draw, though perhaps only roughly. He had often amused himself by making sketches of things he wanted to ask questions about. He had even drawn people's faces in his untrained way, and his father had said that he had a crude gift for catching a likeness. Perhaps he could make a sketch of this face which would show his father that he knew and would recognize it.

He jumped out of bed and went to a table near the window. There was paper and a pencil lying on it. A street lamp exactly opposite threw into the room quite light enough for him to see by. He half knelt by the table and began to draw. He worked for about twenty minutes steadily, and he tore up two or three unsatisfactory sketches. The poor drawing would not matter if he could catch that subtle look which was not slyness but something more dignified and important. It was not difficult to get the marked, aristocratic outline of the features.

A common-looking man with less pronounced profile would have been less easy to draw in one sense. He gave his mind wholly to the recalling of every detail which had photographed itself on his memory through its

trained habit. Gradually he saw that the likeness was becoming clearer. It was not long before it was clear enough to be a striking one. Any one who knew the man would recognize it. He got up, drawing a long and joyful breath.

He did not put on his shoes, but crossed his room as noiselessly as possible, and as noiselessly opened the door. He made no ghost of a sound when he went down the stairs. The woman who kept the lodging-house had gone to bed, and so had the other lodgers and the maid of all work. All the lights were out except the one he saw a glimmer of under the door of his father's room. When he had been a mere baby, he had been taught to make a special sign on the door when he wished to speak to Loristan. He stood still outside the back sitting-room and made it now. It was a low scratching sound--two scratches and a soft tap. Lazarus opened the door and looked troubled.

"It is not yet time, sir," he said very low.

"I know," Marco answered. "But I must show something to my father." Lazarus let him in, and Loristan turned round from his writing-table questioningly.

Marco went forward and laid the sketch down before him.

"Look at it," he said. "I remember him well enough to draw that. I

thought of it all at once--that I could make a sort of picture. Do you think it is like him?" Loristan examined it closely.

"It is very like him," he answered. "You have made me feel entirely safe. Thanks, Comrade. It was a good idea."

There was relief in the grip he gave the boy's hand, and Marco turned away with an exultant feeling. Just as he reached the door, Loristan said to him:

"Make the most of this gift. It is a gift. And it is true your mind has had good training. The more you draw, the better. Draw everything you can."

Neither the street lamps, nor the noises, nor his thoughts kept Marco awake when he went back to bed. But before he settled himself upon his pillow he gave himself certain orders. He had both read, and heard Loristan say, that the mind can control the body when people once find out that it can do so. He had tried experiments himself, and had found out some curious things. One was that if he told himself to remember a certain thing at a certain time, he usually found that he did remember it. Something in his brain seemed to remind him. He had often tried the experiment of telling himself to awaken at a particular hour, and had awakened almost exactly at the moment by the clock.

"I will sleep until one o'clock," he said as he shut his eyes. "Then I

will awaken and feel quite fresh. I shall not be sleepy at all."

He slept as soundly as a boy can sleep. And at one o'clock exactly he awakened, and found the street lamp still throwing its light through the window. He knew it was one o'clock, because there was a cheap little round clock on the table, and he could see the time. He was quite fresh and not at all sleepy. His experiment had succeeded again.

He got up and dressed. Then he went down-stairs as noiselessly as before. He carried his shoes in his hands, as he meant to put them on only when he reached the street. He made his sign at his father's door, and it was Loristan who opened it.

"Shall I go now?" Marco asked.

"Yes. Walk slowly to the other side of the street. Look in every direction. We do not know where he will come from. After you have given him the sign, then come in and go to bed again."

Marco saluted as a soldier would have done on receiving an order.

Then, without a second's delay, he passed noiselessly out of the house.

Loristan turned back into the room and stood silently in the center of it. The long lines of his handsome body looked particularly erect and stately, and his eyes were glowing as if something deeply moved him.

"There grows a man for Samavia," he said to Lazarus, who watched him.

"God be thanked!"

Lazarus's voice was low and hoarse, and he saluted quite reverently.

"Your--sir!" he said. "God save the Prince!"

"Yes," Loristan answered, after a moment's hesitation,--"when he is found." And he went back to his table smiling his beautiful smile.

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The wonder of silence in the deserted streets of a great city, after midnight has hushed all the roar and tumult to rest, is an almost unbelievable thing. The stillness in the depths of a forest or on a mountain top is not so strange. A few hours ago, the tumult was rushing past; in a few hours more, it will be rushing past again.

But now the street is a naked thing; a distant policeman's tramp on the bare pavement has a hollow and almost fearsome sound. It seemed especially so to Marco as he crossed the road. Had it ever been so empty and deadly silent before? Was it so every night? Perhaps it was, when he was fast asleep on his lumpy mattress with the light from a street lamp streaming into the room. He listened for the step of the policeman on night-watch, because he did not wish to be seen. There was a jutting

wall where he could stand in the shadow while the man passed. A policeman would stop to look questioningly at a boy who walked up and down the pavement at half-past one in the morning. Marco could wait until he had gone by, and then come out into the light and look up and down the road and the cross streets.

He heard his approaching footsteps in a few minutes, and was safely in the shadows before he could be seen. When the policeman passed, he came out and walked slowly down the road, looking on each side, and now and then looking back. At first no one was in sight. Then a late hansom-cab came tinkling along. But the people in it were returning from some festivity, and were laughing and talking, and noticed nothing but their own joking. Then there was silence again, and for a long time, as it seemed to Marco, no one was to be seen. It was not really so long as it appeared, because he was anxious. Then a very early vegetable-wagon on the way from the country to Covent Garden Market came slowly lumbering by with its driver almost asleep on his piles of potatoes and cabbages. After it had passed, there was stillness and emptiness once more, until the policeman showed himself again on his beat, and Marco slipped into the shadow of the wall as he had done before.

When he came out into the light, he had begun to hope that the time would not seem long to his father. It had not really been long, he told himself, it had only seemed so. But his father's anxiousness would be greater than his own could be. Loristan knew all that depended on the coming of this great man who sat side by side with a king in his

carriage and talked to him as if he knew him well.

"It might be something which all Samavia is waiting to know--at least all the Secret Party," Marco thought. "The Secret Party is Samavia,"--he started at the sound of footsteps. "Some one is coming!" he said. "It is a man."

It was a man who was walking up the road on the same side of the pavement as his own. Marco began to walk toward him quietly but rather rapidly. He thought it might be best to appear as if he were some boy sent on a midnight errand--perhaps to call a doctor. Then, if it was a stranger he passed, no suspicion would be aroused. Was this man as tall as the one who had driven with the King? Yes, he was about the same height, but he was too far away to be recognizable otherwise. He drew nearer, and Marco noticed that he also seemed slightly to hasten his footsteps. Marco went on. A little nearer, and he would be able to make sure. Yes, now he was near enough. Yes, this man was the same height and not unlike in figure, but he was much younger. He was not the one who had been in the carriage with His Majesty. He was not more than thirty years old. He began swinging his cane and whistling a music-hall song softly as Marco passed him without changing his pace.

It was after the policeman had walked round his beat and disappeared for the third time, that Marco heard footsteps echoing at some distance down a cross street. After listening to make sure that they were approaching instead of receding in another direction, he placed himself at a point

where he could watch the length of the thoroughfare. Yes, some one was coming. It was a man's figure again. He was able to place himself rather in the shadow so that the person approaching would not see that he was being watched. The solitary walker reached a recognizable distance in about two minutes' time. He was dressed in an ordinary shop-made suit of clothes which was rather shabby and quite unnoticeable in its appearance. His common hat was worn so that it rather shaded his face. But even before he had crossed to Marco's side of the road, the boy had clearly recognized him. It was the man who had driven with the King!

Chance was with Marco. The man crossed at exactly the place which made it easy for the boy to step lightly from behind him, walk a few paces by his side, and then pass directly before him across the pavement, glancing quietly up into his face as he said in a low voice but distinctly, the words "The Lamp is lighted," and without pausing a second walk on his way down the road. He did not slacken his pace or look back until he was some distance away. Then he glanced over his shoulder, and saw that the figure had crossed the street and was inside the railings. It was all right. His father would not be disappointed. The great man had come.

He walked for about ten minutes, and then went home and to bed. But he was obliged to tell himself to go to sleep several times before his eyes closed for the rest of the night.