

short flight of stairs.

Marco ran up lightly.

XIV

MARCO DOES NOT ANSWER

By the time he turned the corner of the stairs, the beautiful lady had risen from her seat in the back room and walked into the dining-room at the front. A heavily-built, dark-bearded man was standing inside the door as if waiting for her.

"I could do nothing with him," she said at once, in her soft voice, speaking quite prettily and gently, as if what she said was the most natural thing in the world. "I managed the little trick of the sprained foot really well, and got him into the house. He is an amiable boy with perfect manners, and I thought it might be easy to surprise him into saying more than he knew he was saying. You can generally do that with children and young things. But he either knows nothing or has been trained to hold his tongue. He's not stupid, and he's of a high spirit. I made a pathetic little scene about Samavia, because I saw he could be

worked up. It did work him up. I tried him with the Lost Prince rumor; but, if there is truth in it, he does not or will not know. I tried to make him lose his temper and betray something in defending his father, whom he thinks a god, by the way. But I made a mistake. I saw that. It's a pity. Boys can sometimes be made to tell anything." She spoke very quickly under her breath. The man spoke quickly too.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"I sent him up to the drawing-room to look for a book. He will look for a few minutes. Listen. He's an innocent boy. He sees me only as a gentle angel. Nothing will shake him so much as to hear me tell him the truth suddenly. It will be such a shock to him that perhaps you can do something with him then. He may lose his hold on himself. He's only a boy."

"You're right," said the bearded man. "And when he finds out he is not free to go, it may alarm him and we may get something worth while."

"If we could find out what is true, or what Loristan thinks is true, we should have a clue to work from," she said.

"We have not much time," the man whispered. "We are ordered to Bosnia at once. Before midnight we must be on the way."

"Let us go into the other room. He is coming."

When Marco entered the room, the heavily-built man with the pointed dark beard was standing by the easy-chair.

"I am sorry I could not find the book," he apologized. "I looked on all the tables."

"I shall be obliged to go and search for it myself," said the Lovely Person.

She rose from her chair and stood up smiling. And at her first movement Marco saw that she was not disabled in the least.

"Your foot!" he exclaimed. "It's better?"

"It wasn't hurt," she answered, in her softly pretty voice and with her softly pretty smile. "I only made you think so."

It was part of her plan to spare him nothing of shock in her sudden transformation. Marco felt his breath leave him for a moment.

"I made you believe I was hurt because I wanted you to come into the house with me," she added. "I wished to find out certain things I am sure you know."

"They were things about Samavia," said the man. "Your father knows them,

and you must know something of them at least. It is necessary that we should hear what you can tell us. We shall not allow you to leave the house until you have answered certain questions I shall ask you."

Then Marco began to understand. He had heard his father speak of political spies, men and women who were paid to trace the people that certain governments or political parties desired to have followed and observed. He knew it was their work to search out secrets, to disguise themselves and live among innocent people as if they were merely ordinary neighbors.

They must be spies who were paid to follow his father because he was a Samavian and a patriot. He did not know that they had taken the house two months before, and had accomplished several things during their apparently innocent stay in it. They had discovered Loristan and had learned to know his outgoings and incomings, and also the outgoings and incomings of Lazarus, Marco, and The Rat. But they meant, if possible, to learn other things. If the boy could be startled and terrified into unconscious revelations, it might prove well worth their while to have played this bit of melodrama before they locked the front door behind them and hastily crossed the Channel, leaving their landlord to discover for himself that the house had been vacated.

In Marco's mind strange things were happening. They were spies! But that was not all. The Lovely Person had been right when she said that he would receive a shock. His strong young chest swelled. In all his life,

he had never come face to face with black treachery before. He could not grasp it. This gentle and friendly being with the grateful soft voice and grateful soft eyes had betrayed--betrayed him! It seemed impossible to believe it, and yet the smile on her curved mouth told him that it was true. When he had sprung to help her, she had been playing a trick! When he had been sorry for her pain and had winced at the sound of her low exclamation, she had been deliberately laying a trap to harm him. For a few seconds he was stunned--perhaps, if he had not been his father's son, he might have been stunned only. But he was more. When the first seconds had passed, there arose slowly within him a sense of something like high, remote disdain. It grew in his deep boy's eyes as he gazed directly into the pupils of the long soft dark ones. His body felt as if it were growing taller.

"You are very clever," he said slowly. Then, after a second's pause, he added, "I was too young to know that there was any one so--clever--in the world."

The Lovely Person laughed, but she did not laugh easily. She spoke to her companion.

"A grand seigneur!" she said. "As one looks at him, one half believes it is true."

The man with the beard was looking very angry. His eyes were savage and his dark skin reddened. Marco thought that he looked at him as if he

hated him, and was made fierce by the mere sight of him, for some mysterious reason.

"Two days before you left Moscow," he said, "three men came to see your father. They looked like peasants. They talked to him for more than an hour. They brought with them a roll of parchment. Is that not true?"

"I know nothing," said Marco.

"Before you went to Moscow, you were in Budapest. You went there from Vienna. You were there for three months, and your father saw many people. Some of them came in the middle of the night."

"I know nothing," said Marco.

"You have spent your life in traveling from one country to another," persisted the man. "You know the European languages as if you were a courier, or the portier in a Viennese hotel. Do you not?"

Marco did not answer.

The Lovely Person began to speak to the man rapidly in Russian.

"A spy and an adventurer Stefan Loristan has always been and always will be," she said. "We know what he is. The police in every capital in Europe know him as a sharper and a vagabond, as well as a spy. And yet,

with all his cleverness, he does not seem to have money. What did he do with the bribe the Maranovitch gave him for betraying what he knew of the old fortress? The boy doesn't even suspect him. Perhaps it's true that he knows nothing. Or perhaps it is true that he has been so ill-treated and flogged from his babyhood that he dare not speak. There is a cowed look in his eyes in spite of his childish swagger. He's been both starved and beaten."

The outburst was well done. She did not look at Marco as she poured forth her words. She spoke with the abruptness and impetuosity of a person whose feelings had got the better of her. If Marco was sensitive about his father, she felt sure that his youth would make his face reveal something if his tongue did not--if he understood Russian, which was one of the things it would be useful to find out, because it was a fact which would verify many other things.

Marco's face disappointed her. No change took place in it, and the blood did not rise to the surface of his skin. He listened with an uninterested air, blank and cold and polite. Let them say what they chose.

The man twisted his pointed beard and shrugged his shoulders.

"We have a good little wine-cellar downstairs," he said. "You are going down into it, and you will probably stay there for some time if you do not make up your mind to answer my questions. You think that nothing can

happen to you in a house in a London street where policemen walk up and down. But you are mistaken. If you yelled now, even if any one chanced to hear you, they would only think you were a lad getting a thrashing he deserved. You can yell as much as you like in the black little wine-cellar, and no one will hear at all. We only took this house for three months, and we shall leave it to-night without mentioning the fact to any one. If we choose to leave you in the wine-cellar, you will wait there until somebody begins to notice that no one goes in and out, and chances to mention it to the landlord--which few people would take the trouble to do. Did you come here from Moscow?"

"I know nothing," said Marco.

"You might remain in the good little black cellar an unpleasantly long time before you were found," the man went on, quite coolly. "Do you remember the peasants who came to see your father two nights before you left?"

"I know nothing," said Marco.

"By the time it was discovered that the house was empty and people came in to make sure, you might be too weak to call out and attract their attention. Did you go to Budapest from Vienna, and were you there for three months?" asked the inquisitor.

"I know nothing," said Marco.

"You are too good for the little black cellar," put in the Lovely Person. "I like you. Don't go into it!"

"I know nothing," Marco answered, but the eyes which were like Loristan's gave her just such a look as Loristan would have given her, and she felt it. It made her uncomfortable.

"I don't believe you were ever ill-treated or beaten," she said. "I tell you, the little black cellar will be a hard thing. Don't go there!"

And this time Marco said nothing, but looked at her still as if he were some great young noble who was very proud.

He knew that every word the bearded man had spoken was true. To cry out would be of no use. If they went away and left him behind them, there was no knowing how many days would pass before the people of the neighborhood would begin to suspect that the place had been deserted, or how long it would be before it occurred to some one to give warning to the owner. And in the meantime, neither his father nor Lazarus nor The Rat would have the faintest reason for guessing where he was. And he would be sitting alone in the dark in the wine-cellar. He did not know in the least what to do about this thing. He only knew that silence was still the order.

"It is a jet-black little hole," the man said. "You might crack your

throat in it, and no one would hear. Did men come to talk with your father in the middle of the night when you were in Vienna?"

"I know nothing," said Marco.

"He won't tell," said the Lovely Person. "I am sorry for this boy."

"He may tell after he has sat in the good little black wine-cellar for a few hours," said the man with the pointed beard. "Come with me!"

He put his powerful hand on Marco's shoulder and pushed him before him. Marco made no struggle. He remembered what his father had said about the game not being a game. It wasn't a game now, but somehow he had a strong haughty feeling of not being afraid.

He was taken through the hallway, toward the rear, and down the commonplace flagged steps which led to the basement. Then he was marched

through a narrow, ill-lighted, flagged passage to a door in the wall.

The door was not locked and stood a trifle ajar. His companion pushed it farther open and showed part of a wine-cellar which was so dark that it was only the shelves nearest the door that Marco could faintly see. His captor pushed him in and shut the door. It was as black a hole as he had described. Marco stood still in the midst of darkness like black velvet.

His guard turned the key.

"The peasants who came to your father in Moscow spoke Samavian and were

big men. Do you remember them?" he asked from outside.

"I know nothing," answered Marco.

"You are a young fool," the voice replied. "And I believe you know even more than we thought. Your father will be greatly troubled when you do not come home. I will come back to see you in a few hours, if it is possible. I will tell you, however, that I have had disturbing news which might make it necessary for us to leave the house in a hurry. I might not have time to come down here again before leaving."

Marco stood with his back against a bit of wall and remained silent.

There was stillness for a few minutes, and then there was to be heard the sound of footsteps marching away.

When the last distant echo died all was quite silent, and Marco drew a long breath. Unbelievable as it may appear, it was in one sense almost a breath of relief. In the rush of strange feeling which had swept over him when he found himself facing the astounding situation up-stairs, it had not been easy to realize what his thoughts really were; there were so many of them and they came so fast. How could he quite believe the evidence of his eyes and ears? A few minutes, only a few minutes, had changed his prettily grateful and kindly acquaintance into a subtle and

cunning creature whose love for Samavia had been part of a plot to harm it and to harm his father.

What did she and her companion want to do--what could they do if they knew the things they were trying to force him to tell?

Marco braced his back against the wall stoutly.

"What will it be best to think about first?"

This he said because one of the most absorbingly fascinating things he and his father talked about together was the power of the thoughts which human beings allow to pass through their minds--the strange strength of them. When they talked of this, Marco felt as if he were listening to some marvelous Eastern story of magic which was true. In Loristan's travels, he had visited the far Oriental countries, and he had seen and learned many things which seemed marvels, and they had taught him deep thinking. He had known, and reasoned through days with men who believed that when they desired a thing, clear and exalted thought would bring it to them. He had discovered why they believed this, and had learned to understand their profound arguments.

What he himself believed, he had taught Marco quite simply from his childhood. It was this: he himself--Marco, with the strong boy-body, the thick mat of black hair, and the patched clothes--was the magician. He

held and waved his wand himself--and his wand was his own Thought.
When

special privation or anxiety beset them, it was their rule to say, "What will it be best to think about first?" which was Marco's reason for saying it to himself now as he stood in the darkness which was like black velvet.

He waited a few minutes for the right thing to come to him.

"I will think of the very old hermit who lived on the ledge of the mountains in India and who let my father talk to him through all one night," he said at last. This had been a wonderful story and one of his favorites. Loristan had traveled far to see this ancient Buddhist, and what he had seen and heard during that one night had made changes in his life. The part of the story which came back to Marco now was these words:

"Let pass through thy mind, my son, only the image thou wouldst desire to see a truth. Meditate only upon the wish of thy heart, seeing first that it can injure no man and is not ignoble. Then will it take earthly form and draw near to thee. This is the law of that which creates."

"I am not afraid," Marco said aloud. "I shall not be afraid. In some way I shall get out."

This was the image he wanted most to keep steadily in his mind--that

nothing could make him afraid, and that in some way he would get out of the wine-cellar.

He thought of this for some minutes, and said the words over several times. He felt more like himself when he had done it.

"When my eyes are accustomed to the darkness, I shall see if there is any little glimmer of light anywhere," he said next.

He waited with patience, and it seemed for some time that he saw no glimmer at all. He put out his hands on either side of him, and found that, on the side of the wall against which he stood, there seemed to be no shelves. Perhaps the cellar had been used for other purposes than the storing of wine, and, if that was true, there might be somewhere some opening for ventilation. The air was not bad, but then the door had not been shut tightly when the man opened it.

"I am not afraid," he repeated. "I shall not be afraid. In some way I shall get out."

He would not allow himself to stop and think about his father waiting for his return. He knew that would only rouse his emotions and weaken his courage. He began to feel his way carefully along the wall. It reached farther than he had thought it would.

The cellar was not so very small. He crept round it gradually, and, when

he had crept round it, he made his way across it, keeping his hands extended before him and setting down each foot cautiously. Then he sat down on the stone floor and thought again, and what he thought was of the things the old Buddhist had told his father, and that there was a way out of this place for him, and he should somehow find it, and, before too long a time had passed, be walking in the street again.

It was while he was thinking in this way that he felt a startling thing. It seemed almost as if something touched him. It made him jump, though the touch was so light and soft that it was scarcely a touch at all, in fact he could not be sure that he had not imagined it. He stood up and leaned against the wall again. Perhaps the suddenness of his movement placed him at some angle he had not reached before, or perhaps his eyes had become more completely accustomed to the darkness, for, as he turned his head to listen, he made a discovery: above the door there was a place where the velvet blackness was not so dense. There was something like a slit in the wall, though, as it did not open upon daylight but upon the dark passage, it was not light it admitted so much as a lesser shade of darkness. But even that was better than nothing, and Marco drew another long breath.

"That is only the beginning. I shall find a way out," he said.

"I shall."

He remembered reading a story of a man who, being shut by accident in

a safety vault, passed through such terrors before his release that he believed he had spent two days and nights in the place when he had been there only a few hours.

"His thoughts did that. I must remember. I will sit down again and begin thinking of all the pictures in the cabinet rooms of the Art History Museum in Vienna. It will take some time, and then there are the others," he said.

It was a good plan. While he could keep his mind upon the game which had helped him to pass so many dull hours, he could think of nothing else, as it required close attention--and perhaps, as the day went on, his captors would begin to feel that it was not safe to run the risk of doing a thing as desperate as this would be. They might think better of it before they left the house at least. In any case, he had learned enough from Loristan to realize that only harm could come from letting one's mind run wild.

"A mind is either an engine with broken and flying gear, or a giant power under control," was the thing they knew.

He had walked in imagination through three of the cabinet rooms and was turning mentally into a fourth, when he found himself starting again quite violently. This time it was not at a touch but at a sound. Surely it was a sound. And it was in the cellar with him. But it was the tiniest possible noise, a ghost of a squeak and a suggestion of a

movement. It came from the opposite side of the cellar, the side where the shelves were. He looked across in the darkness saw a light which there could be no mistake about. It was a light, two lights indeed, two round phosphorescent greenish balls. They were two eyes staring at him. And then he heard another sound. Not a squeak this time, but something so homely and comfortable that he actually burst out laughing. It was a cat purring, a nice warm cat! And she was curled up on one of the lower shelves purring to some new-born kittens. He knew there were kittens because it was plain now what the tiny squeak had been, and it was made plainer by the fact that he heard another much more distinct one and then another. They had all been asleep when he had come into the cellar. If the mother had been awake, she had probably been very much afraid. Afterward she had perhaps come down from her shelf to investigate, and had passed close to him. The feeling of relief which came upon him at this queer and simple discovery was wonderful. It was so natural and comfortable an every-day thing that it seemed to make spies and criminals unreal, and only natural things possible. With a mother cat purring away among her kittens, even a dark wine-cellar was not so black. He got up and kneeled by the shelf. The greenish eyes did not shine in an unfriendly way. He could feel that the owner of them was a nice big cat, and he counted four round little balls of kittens. It was a curious delight to stroke the soft fur and talk to the mother cat. She answered with purring, as if she liked the sense of friendly human nearness. Marco laughed to himself.

"It's queer what a difference it makes!" he said. "It is almost like

finding a window."

The mere presence of these harmless living things was companionship. He sat down close to the low shelf and listened to the motherly purring, now and then speaking and putting out his hand to touch the warm fur. The phosphorescent light in the green eyes was a comfort in itself.

"We shall get out of this--both of us," he said. "We shall not be here very long, Puss-cat."

He was not troubled by the fear of being really hungry for some time. He was so used to eating scantily from necessity, and to passing long hours without food during his journeys, that he had proved to himself that fasting is not, after all, such a desperate ordeal as most people imagine. If you begin by expecting to feel famished and by counting the hours between your meals, you will begin to be ravenous. But he knew better.

The time passed slowly; but he had known it would pass slowly, and he had made up his mind not to watch it nor ask himself questions about it. He was not a restless boy, but, like his father, could stand or sit or lie still. Now and then he could hear distant rumblings of carts and vans passing in the street. There was a certain degree of companionship in these also. He kept his place near the cat and his hand where he could occasionally touch her. He could lift his eyes now and then to the place where the dim glimmer of something like light showed itself.

Perhaps the stillness, perhaps the darkness, perhaps the purring of the mother cat, probably all three, caused his thoughts to begin to travel through his mind slowly and more slowly. At last they ceased and he fell asleep. The mother cat purred for some time, and then fell asleep herself.

XV

A SOUND IN A DREAM

Marco slept peacefully for several hours. There was nothing to awaken him during that time. But at the end of it, his sleep was penetrated by a definite sound. He had dreamed of hearing a voice at a distance, and, as he tried in his dream to hear what it said, a brief metallic ringing sound awakened him outright. It was over by the time he was fully conscious, and at once he realized that the voice of his dream had been a real one, and was speaking still. It was the Lovely Person's voice, and she was speaking rapidly, as if she were in the greatest haste. She was speaking through the door.

"You will have to search for it," was all he heard. "I have not a