XXII

THE NIGHT VIGIL

On a hill in the midst of a great Austrian plain, around which high Alps wait watching through the ages stands a venerable fortress, almost more beautiful than anything one has ever seen. Perhaps, if it were not for the great plain flowering broadly about it with its wide-spread beauties of meadow-land, and wood, and dim toned buildings gathered about farms, and its dream of a small ancient city at its feet, it might--though it is to be doubted--seem something less a marvel of medieval picturesqueness. But out of the plain rises the low hill, and surrounding it at a stately distance stands guard the giant majesty of Alps, with shoulders in the clouds and god-like heads above them, looking on--always looking on--sometimes themselves ethereal clouds of snow-whiteness, some times monster bare crags which pierce the blue, and whose unchanging silence seems to know the secret of the everlasting. And on the hill which this august circle holds in its embrace, as though it enclosed a treasure, stands the old, old, towered fortress built as a citadel for the Prince Archbishops, who were kings in their domain in the long past centuries when the splendor and power of ecclesiastical princes was among the greatest upon earth.

And as you approach the town--and as you leave it--and as you walk through its streets, the broad calm empty-looking ones, or the narrow

thoroughfares whose houses seem so near to each other, whether you climb or descend--or cross bridges, or gaze at churches, or step out on your balcony at night to look at the mountains and the moon--always it seems that from some point you can see it gazing down at you--the citadel of Hohen-Salzburg.

It was to Salzburg they went next, because at Salzburg was to be found the man who looked like a hair-dresser and who worked in a barber's shop. Strange as it might seem, to him also must be carried the Sign.

"There may be people who come to him to be shaved--soldiers, or men who know things," The Rat worked it out, "and he can speak to them when he is standing close to them. It will be easy to get near him. You can go and have your hair cut."

The journey from Munich was not a long one, and during the latter part of it they had the wooden-seated third-class carriage to themselves. Even the drowsy old peasant who nodded and slept in one corner got out with his bundles at last. To Marco the mountains were long-known wonders which could never grow old. They had always and always been so old! Surely they had been the first of the world! Surely they had been standing there waiting when it was said "Let there be Light." The Light had known it would find them there. They were so silent, and yet it seemed as if they said some amazing thing--something which would take your breath from you if you could hear it. And they never changed. The clouds changed, they wreathed them, and hid them, and trailed down them,

and poured out storm torrents on them, and thundered against them, and darted forked lightnings round them. But the mountains stood there afterwards as if such things had not been and were not in the world. Winds roared and tore at them, centuries passed over them--centuries of millions of lives, of changing of kingdoms and empires, of battles and world-wide fame which grew and died and passed away; and temples crumbled, and kings' tombs were forgotten, and cities were buried and others built over them after hundreds of years--and perhaps a few stones fell from a mountain side, or a fissure was worn, which the people below could not even see. And that was all. There they stood, and perhaps their secret was that they had been there for ever and ever. That was what the mountains said to Marco, which was why he did not want to talk much, but sat and gazed out of the carriage window.

The Rat had been very silent all the morning. He had been silent when they got up, and he had scarcely spoken when they made their way to the station at Munich and sat waiting for their train. It seemed to Marco that he was thinking so hard that he was like a person who was far away from the place he stood in. His brows were drawn together and his eyes did not seem to see the people who passed by. Usually he saw everything and made shrewd remarks on almost all he saw. But to-day he was somehow otherwise absorbed. He sat in the train with his forehead against the window and stared out. He moved and gasped when he found himself staring at the Alps, but afterwards he was even strangely still. It was not until after the sleepy old peasant had gathered his bundles and got out

at a station that he spoke, and he did it without turning his head.

"You only told me one of the two laws," he said. "What was the other one?"

Marco brought himself back from his dream of reaching the highest mountain-top and seeing clouds float beneath his feet in the sun. He had to come back a long way.

"Are you thinking of that? I wondered what you had been thinking of all the morning," he said.

"I couldn't stop thinking of it. What was the second one?" said The Rat, but he did not turn his head.

"It was called the Law of Earthly Living. It was for every day," said Marco. "It was for the ordering of common things--the small things we think don't matter, as well as the big ones. I always remember that one without any trouble. This was it:

"'Let pass through thy mind, my son, only the image thou wouldst desire to see become a truth. Meditate only upon the wish of thy heart--seeing first that it is such as can wrong 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.'"

Then The Rat turned round. He had a shrewdly reasoning mind.

"That sounds as if you could get anything you wanted, if you think about it long enough and in the right way," he said. "But perhaps it only means that, if you do it, you'll be happy after you're dead. My father used to shout with laughing when he was drunk and talked about things like that and looked at his rags."

He hugged his knees for a few minutes. He was remembering the rags, and the fog-darkened room in the slums, and the loud, hideous laughter.

"What if you want something that will harm somebody else?" he said next. "What if you hate some one and wish you could kill him?"

"That was one of the questions my father asked that night on the ledge. The holy man said people always asked it," Marco answered. "This was the answer:

"'Let him who stretcheth forth his hand to draw the lightning to his brother recall that through his own soul and body will pass the bolt.'"

"Wonder if there's anything in it?" The Rat pondered. "It'd make a chap careful if he believed it! Revenging yourself on a man would be like holding him against a live wire to kill him and getting all the volts through yourself."

A sudden anxiety revealed itself in his face.

"Does your father believe it?" he asked. "Does he?"

"He knows it is true," Marco said.

"I'll own up," The Rat decided after further reflection--"I'll own up I'm glad that there isn't any one left that I've a grudge against. There isn't any one--now."

Then he fell again into silence and did not speak until their journey was at an end. As they arrived early in the day, they had plenty of time to wander about the marvelous little old city. But through the wide streets and through the narrow ones, under the archways into the market gardens, across the bridge and into the square where the "glockenspiel" played its old tinkling tune, everywhere the Citadel looked down and always The Rat walked on in his dream.

They found the hair-dresser's shop in one of the narrow streets. There were no grand shops there, and this particular shop was a modest one. They walked past it once, and then went back. It was a shop so humble that there was nothing remarkable in two common boys going into it to have their hair cut. An old man came forward to receive them. He was evidently glad of their modest patronage. He undertook to attend to The Rat himself, but, having arranged him in a chair, he turned about and

called to some one in the back room.

"Heinrich," he said.

In the slit in Marco's sleeve was the sketch of the man with smooth curled hair, who looked like a hair-dresser. They had found a corner in which to take their final look at it before they turned back to come in. Heinrich, who came forth from the small back room, had smooth curled hair. He looked extremely like a hair-dresser. He had features like those in the sketch--his nose and mouth and chin and figure were like what Marco had drawn and committed to memory. But--

He gave Marco a chair and tied the professional white covering around his neck. Marco leaned back and closed his eyes a moment.

"That is not the man!" he was saying to himself. "He is not the man."

How he knew he was not, he could not have explained, but he felt sure. It was a strong conviction. But for the sudden feeling, nothing would have been easier than to give the Sign. And if he could not give it now, where was the one to whom it must be spoken, and what would be the result if that one could not be found? And if there were two who were so much alike, how could he be sure?

Each owner of each of the pictured faces was a link in a powerful secret chain; and if a link were missed, the chain would be broken. Each time

Heinrich came within the line of his vision, he recorded every feature afresh and compared it with the remembered sketch. Each time the resemblance became more close, but each time some persistent inner conviction repeated, "No; the Sign is not for him!"

It was disturbing, also, to find that The Rat was all at once as restless as he had previously been silent and preoccupied. He moved in his chair, to the great discomfort of the old hair-dresser. He kept turning his head to talk. He asked Marco to translate divers questions he wished him to ask the two men. They were questions about the Citadel--about the Monchsberg--the Residenz--the Glockenspiel--the mountains. He added one query to another and could not sit still.

"The young gentleman will get an ear snipped," said the old man to Marco. "And it will not be my fault."

"What shall I do?" Marco was thinking. "He is not the man."

He did not give the Sign. He must go away and think it out, though where his thoughts would lead him he did not know. This was a more difficult problem than he had ever dreamed of facing. There was no one to ask advice of. Only himself and The Rat, who was nervously wriggling and twisting in his chair.

"You must sit still," he said to him. "The hair-dresser is afraid you will make him cut you by accident."

"But I want to know who lives at the Residenz?" said The Rat. "These men can tell us things if you ask them."

"It is done now," said the old hair-dresser with a relieved air. "Perhaps the cutting of his hair makes the young gentleman nervous. It is sometimes so."

The Rat stood close to Marco's chair and asked questions until Heinrich also had done his work. Marco could not understand his companion's change of mood. He realized that, if he had wished to give the Sign, he had been allowed no opportunity. He could not have given it. The restless questioning had so directed the older man's attention to his son and Marco that nothing could have been said to Heinrich without his observing it.

"I could not have spoken if he had been the man," Marco said to himself.

Their very exit from the shop seemed a little hurried. When they were fairly in the street, The Rat made a clutch at Marco's arm.

"You didn't give it?" he whispered breathlessly. "I kept talking and talking to prevent you."

Marco tried not to feel breathless, and he tried to speak in a low and level voice with no hint of exclamation in it.

"Why did you say that?" he asked.

The Rat drew closer to him.

"That was not the man!" he whispered. "It doesn't matter how much he looks like him, he isn't the right one."

He was pale and swinging along swiftly as if he were in a hurry.

"Let's get into a quiet place," he said. "Those queer things you've been telling me have got hold of me. How did I know? How could I know--unless it's because I've been trying to work that second law? I've been saying to myself that we should be told the right things to do--for the Game and for your father--and so that I could be the right sort of aide-de-camp. I've been working at it, and, when he came out, I knew he was not the man in spite of his looks. And I couldn't be sure you knew, and I thought, if I kept on talking and interrupting you with silly questions, you could be prevented from speaking."

"There's a place not far away where we can get a look at the mountains. Let's go there and sit down," said Marco. "I knew it was not the right one, too. It's the Help over again."

"Yes, it's the Help--it's the Help--it must be," muttered The Rat, walking fast and with a pale, set face. "It could not be anything else."

They got away from the streets and the people and reached the quiet place where they could see the mountains. There they sat down by the wayside. The Rat took off his cap and wiped his forehead, but it was not only the quick walking which had made it damp.

"The queerness of it gave me a kind of fright," he said. "When he came out and he was near enough for me to see him, a sudden strong feeling came over me. It seemed as if I knew he wasn't the man. Then I said to myself--'but he looks like him'--and I began to get nervous. And then I was sure again--and then I wanted to try to stop you from giving him the Sign. And then it all seemed foolishness--and the next second all the things you had told me rushed back to me at once--and I remembered what I had been thinking ever since--and I said--'Perhaps it's the Law beginning to work,' and the palms of my hands got moist."

Marco was very quiet. He was looking at the farthest and highest peaks and wondering about many things.

"It was the expression of his face that was different," he said. "And his eyes. They are rather smaller than the right man's are. The light in the shop was poor, and it was not until the last time he bent over me that I found out what I had not seen before. His eyes are gray--the other ones are brown."

"Did you see that!" The Rat exclaimed. "Then we're sure! We're safe!"

"We're not safe till we've found the right man," Marco said. "Where is he? Where is he? Where is he?"

He said the words dreamily and quietly, as if he were lost in thought--but also rather as if he expected an answer. And he still looked at the far-off peaks. The Rat, after watching him a moment or so, began to look at them also. They were like a loadstone to him too. There was something stilling about them, and when your eyes had rested upon them a few moments they did not want to move away.

"There must be a ledge up there somewhere," he said at last.

"Let's go up and look for it and sit there and think and think--about finding the right man."

There seemed nothing fantastic in this to Marco. To go into some quiet place and sit and think about the thing he wanted to remember or to find out was an old way of his. To be quiet was always the best thing, his father had taught him. It was like listening to something which could speak without words.

"There is a little train which goes up the Gaisberg," he said. "When you are at the top, a world of mountains spreads around you. Lazarus went once and told me. And we can lie out on the grass all night. Let us go, Aide-de-camp."

So they went, each one thinking the same thought, and each boy-mind holding its own vision. Marco was the calmer of the two, because his belief that there was always help to be found was an accustomed one and had ceased to seem to partake of the supernatural. He believed quite simply that it was the working of a law, not the breaking of one, which gave answer and led him in his quests. The Rat, who had known nothing of laws other than those administered by police-courts, was at once awed and fascinated by the suggestion of crossing some borderland of the Unknown. The law of the One had baffled and overthrown him, with its sweeping away of the enmities of passions which created wars and called for armies. But the Law of Earthly Living seemed to offer practical benefits if you could hold on to yourself enough to work it.

"You wouldn't get everything for nothing, as far as I can make out," he had said to Marco. "You'd have to sweep all the rubbish out of your mind--sweep it as if you did it with a broom--and then keep on thinking straight and believing you were going to get things--and working for them--and they'd come."

Then he had laughed a short ugly laugh because he recalled something.

"There was something in the Bible that my father used to jeer about--something about a man getting what he prayed for if he believed it," he said.

"Oh, yes, it's there," said Marco. "That if a man pray believing he shall receive what he asks it shall be given him. All the books say something like it. It's been said so often it makes you believe it."

"He didn't believe it, and I didn't," said The Rat.

"Nobody does--really," answered Marco, as he had done once before. "It's because we don't know."

They went up the Gaisberg in the little train, which pushed and dragged and panted slowly upward with them. It took them with it stubbornly and gradually higher and higher until it had left Salzburg and the Citadel below and had reached the world of mountains which rose and spread and lifted great heads behind each other and beside each other and beyond each other until there seemed no other land on earth but that on mountain sides and backs and shoulders and crowns. And also one felt the absurdity of living upon flat ground, where life must be an insignificant thing.

There were only a few sight-seers in the small carriages, and they were going to look at the view from the summit. They were not in search of a ledge.

The Rat and Marco were. When the little train stopped at the top, they got out with the rest. They wandered about with them over the short grass on the treeless summit and looked out from this viewpoint and the

other. The Rat grew more and more silent, and his silence was not merely a matter of speechlessness but of expression. He looked silent and as if he were no longer aware of the earth. They left the sight-seers at last and wandered away by themselves. They found a ledge where they could sit or lie and where even the world of mountains seemed below them. They had brought some simple food with them, and they laid it behind a jutting bit of rock. When the sight-seers boarded the laboring little train again and were dragged back down the mountain, their night of vigil would begin.

That was what it was to be. A night of stillness on the heights, where they could wait and watch and hold themselves ready to hear any thought which spoke to them.

The Rat was so thrilled that he would not have been surprised if he had heard a voice from the place of the stars. But Marco only believed that in this great stillness and beauty, if he held his boy-soul quiet enough, he should find himself at last thinking of something that would lead him to the place which held what it was best that he should find. The people returned to the train and it set out upon its way down the steepness.

They heard it laboring on its way, as though it was forced to make as much effort to hold itself back as it had made to drag itself upward.

Then they were alone, and it was a loneness such as an eagle might feel

when it held itself poised high in the curve of blue. And they sat and watched. They saw the sun go down and, shade by shade, deepen and make radiant and then draw away with it the last touches of color--rose-gold, rose-purple, and rose-gray.

One mountain-top after another held its blush a few moments and lost it. It took long to gather them all but at length they were gone and the marvel of night fell.

The breath of the forests below was sweet about them, and soundlessness enclosed them which was of unearthly peace. The stars began to show themselves, and presently the two who waited found their faces turned upward to the sky and they both were speaking in whispers.

"The stars look large here," The Rat said.

"Yes," answered Marco. "We are not as high as the Buddhist was, but it seems like the top of the world."

"There is a light on the side of the mountain yonder which is not a star," The Rat whispered.

"It is a light in a hut where the guides take the climbers to rest and to spend the night," answered Marco.

"It is so still," The Rat whispered again after a silence, and Marco

whispered back:

"It is so still."

They had eaten their meal of black bread and cheese after the setting of the sun, and now they lay down on their backs and looked up until the first few stars had multiplied themselves into myriads. They began a little low talk, but the soundlessness was stronger than themselves.

"How am I going to hold on to that second law?" The Rat said restlessly. "'Let pass through thy mind only the image thou wouldst see become a truth.' The things that are passing through my mind are not the things I want to come true. What if we don't find him--don't find the right one, I mean!"

"Lie still--still--and look up at the stars," whispered Marco. "They give you a sure feeling."

There was something in the curious serenity of him which calmed even his aide-de-camp. The Rat lay still and looked--and looked--and thought. And what he thought of was the desire of his heart. The soundlessness enwrapped him and there was no world left. That there was a spark of light in the mountain-climbers' rest-hut was a thing forgotten.

They were only two boys, and they had begun their journey on the earliest train and had been walking about all day and thinking of great

and anxious things.

"It is so still," The Rat whispered again at last.

"It is so still," whispered Marco.

And the mountains rising behind each other and beside each other and beyond each other in the night, and also the myriads of stars which had so multiplied themselves, looking down knew that they were asleep--as sleep the human things which do not watch forever.

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"Some one is smoking," Marco found himself saying in a dream. After which he awakened and found that the smoke was not part of a dream at all. It came from the pipe of a young man who had an alpenstock and who looked as if he had climbed to see the sun rise. He wore the clothes of a climber and a green hat with a tuft at the back. He looked down at the two boys, surprised.

"Good day," he said. "Did you sleep here so that you could see the sun get up?"

"Yes," answered Marco.

"Were you cold?"

"We slept too soundly to know. And we brought our thick coats."

"I slept half-way down the mountains," said the smoker. "I am a guide in these days, but I have not been one long enough to miss a sunrise it is no work to reach. My father and brother think I am mad about such things. They would rather stay in their beds. Oh! he is awake, is he?" turning toward The Rat, who had risen on one elbow and was staring at him. "What is the matter? You look as if you were afraid of me."

Marco did not wait for The Rat to recover his breath and speak.

"I know why he looks at you so," he answered for him. "He is startled. Yesterday we went to a hair-dresser's shop down below there, and we saw a man who was almost exactly like you--only--" he added, looking up, "his eyes were gray and yours are brown."

"He was my twin brother," said the guide, puffing at his pipe cheerfully. "My father thought he could make hair-dressers of us both, and I tried it for four years. But I always wanted to be climbing the mountains and there were not holidays enough. So I cut my hair, and washed the pomade out of it, and broke away. I don't look like a hair-dresser now, do I?"

He did not. Not at all. But Marco knew him. He was the man. There was no one on the mountain-top but themselves, and the sun was just showing a

rim of gold above the farthest and highest giant's shoulders. One need not be afraid to do anything, since there was no one to see or hear. Marco slipped the sketch out of the slit in his sleeve. He looked at it and he looked at the guide, and then he showed it to him.

"That is not your brother. It is you!" he said.

The man's face changed a little--more than any other face had changed when its owner had been spoken to. On a mountain-top as the sun rises one is not afraid.

"The Lamp is lighted," said Marco. "The Lamp is lighted."

"God be thanked!" burst forth the man. And he took off his hat and bared his head. Then the rim behind the mountain's shoulder leaped forth into a golden torrent of splendor.

And The Rat stood up, resting his weight on his crutches in utter silence, and stared and stared.

"That is three!" said Marco.