

## XXVIII

"EXTRA! EXTRA! EXTRA!"

It was raining in London--pouring. It had been raining for two weeks, more or less, generally more. When the train from Dover drew in at Charing Cross, the weather seemed suddenly to have considered that it had so far been too lenient and must express itself much more vigorously. So it had gathered together its resources and poured them forth in a deluge which surprised even Londoners.

The rain so beat against and streamed down the windows of the third-class carriage in which Marco and The Rat sat that they could not see through them.

They had made their homeward journey much more rapidly than they had made the one on which they had been outward bound. It had of course taken them some time to tramp back to the frontier, but there had been no reason for stopping anywhere after they had once reached the railroads. They had been tired sometimes, but they had slept heavily on the wooden seats of the railway carriages. Their one desire was to get home. No. 7 Philibert Place rose before them in its noisy dinginess as the one desirable spot on earth. To Marco it held his father. And it was Loristan alone that The Rat saw when he thought of it. Loristan as he would look when he saw him come into the room with Marco, and stand up

and salute, and say: "I have brought him back, sir. He has carried out every single order you gave him--every single one. So have I." So he had. He had been sent as his companion and attendant, and he had been faithful in every thought. If Marco would have allowed him, he would have waited upon him like a servant, and have been proud of the service. But Marco would never let him forget that they were only two boys and that one was of no more importance than the other. He had secretly even felt this attitude to be a sort of grievance. It would have been more like a game if one of them had been the mere servitor of the other, and if that other had blustered a little, and issued commands, and demanded sacrifices. If the faithful vassal could have been wounded or cast into a dungeon for his young commander's sake, the adventure would have been more complete. But though their journey had been full of wonders and rich with beauties, though the memory of it hung in The Rat's mind like a background of tapestry embroidered in all the hues of the earth with all the splendors of it, there had been no dungeons and no wounds. After the adventure in Munich their unimportant boyishness had not even been observed by such perils as might have threatened them. As The Rat had said, they had "blown like grains of dust" through Europe and had been as nothing. And this was what Loristan had planned, this was what his grave thought had wrought out. If they had been men, they would not have been so safe.

From the time they had left the old priest on the hillside to begin their journey back to the frontier, they both had been given to long silences as they tramped side by side or lay on the moss in the forests.

Now that their work was done, a sort of reaction had set in. There were no more plans to be made and no more uncertainties to contemplate. They were on their way back to No. 7 Philibert Place--Marco to his father, The Rat to the man he worshipped. Each of them was thinking of many things. Marco was full of longing to see his father's face and hear his voice again. He wanted to feel the pressure of his hand on his shoulder--to be sure that he was real and not a dream. This last was because during this homeward journey everything that had happened often seemed to be a dream. It had all been so wonderful--the climber standing looking down at them the morning they awakened on the Gaisburg; the mountaineer shoemaker measuring his foot in the small shop; the old, old woman and her noble lord; the Prince with his face turned upward as he stood on the balcony looking at the moon; the old priest kneeling and weeping for joy; the great cavern with the yellow light upon the crowd of passionate faces; the curtain which fell apart and showed the still eyes and the black hair with the halo about it! Now that they were left behind, they all seemed like things he had dreamed. But he had not dreamed them; he was going back to tell his father about them. And how good it would be to feel his hand on his shoulder!

The Rat gnawed his finger ends a great deal. His thoughts were more wild and feverish than Marco's. They leaped forward in spite of him. It was no use to pull himself up and tell himself that he was a fool. Now that all was over, he had time to be as great a fool as he was inclined to be. But how he longed to reach London and stand face to face with Loristan! The sign was given. The Lamp was lighted. What would happen

next? His crutches were under his arms before the train drew up.

"We're there! We're there!" he cried restlessly to Marco. They had no luggage to delay them. They took their bags and followed the crowd along the platform. The rain was rattling like bullets against the high glassed roof. People turned to look at Marco, seeing the glow of exultant eagerness in his face. They thought he must be some boy coming home for the holidays and going to make a visit at a place he delighted in. The rain was dancing on the pavements when they reached the entrance.

"A cab won't cost much," Marco said, "and it will take us quickly."

They called one and got into it. Each of them had flushed cheeks, and Marco's eyes looked as if he were gazing at something a long way off--gazing at it, and wondering.

"We've come back!" said The Rat, in an unsteady voice. "We've been--and we've come back!" Then suddenly turning to look at Marco, "Does it ever seem to you as if, perhaps, it--it wasn't true?"

"Yes," Marco answered, "but it was true. And it's done." Then he added after a second or so of silence, just what The Rat had said to himself, "What next?" He said it very low.

The way to Philibert Place was not long. When they turned into the

roaring, untidy road, where the busses and drays and carts struggled past each other with their loads, and the tired-faced people hurried in crowds along the pavement, they looked at them all feeling that they had left their dream far behind indeed. But they were at home.

It was a good thing to see Lazarus open the door and stand waiting before they had time to get out of the cab. Cabs stopped so seldom before houses in Philibert Place that the inmates were always prompt to open their doors. When Lazarus had seen this one stop at the broken iron gate, he had known whom it brought. He had kept an eye on the windows faithfully for many a day--even when he knew that it was too soon, even if all was well, for any travelers to return.

He bore himself with an air more than usually military and his salute when Marco crossed the threshold was formal stateliness itself. But his greeting burst from his heart.

"God be thanked!" he said in his deep growl of joy. "God be thanked!"

When Marco put forth his hand, he bent his grizzled head and kissed it devoutly.

"God be thanked!" he said again.

"My father?" Marco began, "my father is out?" If he had been in the house, he knew he would not have stayed in the back sitting-room.

"Sir," said Lazarus, "will you come with me into his room? You, too, sir," to The Rat. He had never said "sir" to him before.

He opened the door of the familiar room, and the boys entered. The room was empty.

Marco did not speak; neither did The Rat. They both stood still in the middle of the shabby carpet and looked up at the old soldier. Both had suddenly the same feeling that the earth had dropped from beneath their feet. Lazarus saw it and spoke fast and with tremor. He was almost as agitated as they were.

"He left me at your service--at your command"--he began.

"Left you?" said Marco.

"He left us, all three, under orders--to wait," said Lazarus. "The Master has gone."

The Rat felt something hot rush into his eyes. He brushed it away that he might look at Marco's face. The shock had changed it very much. Its glowing eager joy had died out, it had turned paler and his brows were drawn together. For a few seconds he did not speak at all, and, when he did speak, The Rat knew that his voice was steady only because he willed that it should be so.

"If he has gone," he said, "it is because he had a strong reason. It was because he also was under orders."

"He said that you would know that," Lazarus answered. "He was called in such haste that he had not a moment in which to do more than write a few words. He left them for you on his desk there."

Marco walked over to the desk and opened the envelope which was lying there. There were only a few lines on the sheet of paper inside and they had evidently been written in the greatest haste. They were these:

"The Life of my life--for Samavia."

"He was called--to Samavia," Marco said, and the thought sent his blood rushing through his veins. "He has gone to Samavia!"

Lazarus drew his hand roughly across his eyes and his voice shook and sounded hoarse.

"There has been great disaffection in the camps of the Maranovitch," he said. "The remnant of the army has gone mad. Sir, silence is still the order, but who knows--who knows? God alone."

He had not finished speaking before he turned his head as if listening to sounds in the road. They were the kind of sounds which had broken up

The Squad, and sent it rushing down the passage into the street to seize on a newspaper. There was to be heard a commotion of newsboys shouting riotously some startling piece of news which had called out an "Extra."

The Rat heard it first and dashed to the front door. As he opened it a newsboy running by shouted at the topmost power of his lungs the news he had to sell: "Assassination of King Michael Maranovitch by his own soldiers! Assassination of the Maranovitch! Extra! Extra! Extra!"

When The Rat returned with a newspaper, Lazarus interposed between him and Marco with great and respectful ceremony. "Sir," he said to Marco, "I am at your command, but the Master left me with an order which I was to repeat to you. He requested you not to read the newspapers until he himself could see you again."

Both boys fell back.

"Not read the papers!" they exclaimed together.

Lazarus had never before been quite so reverential and ceremonious.

"Your pardon, sir," he said. "I may read them at your orders, and report such things as it is well that you should know. There have been dark tales told and there may be darker ones. He asked that you would not read for yourself. If you meet again--when you meet again"--he corrected himself hastily--"when you meet again, he says you will understand. I am



your servant. I will read and answer all such questions as I can."

The Rat handed him the paper and they returned to the back room together.

"You shall tell us what he would wish us to hear," Marco said.

The news was soon told. The story was not a long one as exact details had not yet reached London. It was briefly that the head of the Maranovitch party had been put to death by infuriated soldiers of his own army. It was an army drawn chiefly from a peasantry which did not love its leaders, or wish to fight, and suffering and brutal treatment had at last roused it to furious revolt.

"What next?" said Marco.

"If I were a Samavian--" began The Rat and then he stopped.

Lazarus stood biting his lips, but staring stonily at the carpet. Not The Rat alone but Marco also noted a grim change in him. It was grim because it suggested that he was holding himself under an iron control. It was as if while tortured by anxiety he had sworn not to allow himself to look anxious and the resolve set his jaw hard and carved new lines in his rugged face. Each boy thought this in secret, but did not wish to put it into words. If he was anxious, he could only be so for one reason, and each realized what the reason must be. Loristan had gone to

Samavia--to the torn and bleeding country filled with riot and danger. If he had gone, it could only have been because its danger called him and he went to face it at its worst. Lazarus had been left behind to watch over them. Silence was still the order, and what he knew he could not tell them, and perhaps he knew little more than that a great life might be lost.

Because his master was absent, the old soldier seemed to feel that he must comfort himself with a greater ceremonial reverence than he had ever shown before. He held himself within call, and at Marco's orders, as it had been his custom to hold himself with regard to Loristan. The ceremonious service even extended itself to The Rat, who appeared to have taken a new place in his mind. He also seemed now to be a person to be waited upon and replied to with dignity and formal respect.

When the evening meal was served, Lazarus drew out Loristan's chair at the head of the table and stood behind it with a majestic air.

"Sir," he said to Marco, "the Master requested that you take his seat at the table until--while he is not with you."

Marco took the seat in silence.

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At two o'clock in the morning, when the roaring road was still, the

light from the street lamp, shining into the small bedroom, fell on two pale boy faces. The Rat sat up on his sofa bed in the old way with his hands clasped round his knees. Marco lay flat on his hard pillow. Neither of them had been to sleep and yet they had not talked a great deal. Each had secretly guessed a good deal of what the other did not say.

"There is one thing we must remember," Marco had said, early in the night. "We must not be afraid."

"No," answered The Rat, almost fiercely, "we must not be afraid."

"We are tired; we came back expecting to be able to tell it all to him. We have always been looking forward to that. We never thought once that he might be gone. And he was gone. Did you feel as if--" he turned towards the sofa, "as if something had struck you on the chest?"

"Yes," The Rat answered heavily. "Yes."

"We weren't ready," said Marco. "He had never gone before; but we ought to have known he might some day be--called. He went because he was called. He told us to wait. We don't know what we are waiting for, but we know that we must not be afraid. To let ourselves be afraid would be breaking the Law."

"The Law!" groaned The Rat, dropping his head on his hands, "I'd

forgotten about it."

"Let us remember it," said Marco. "This is the time. 'Hate not. Fear not!'" He repeated the last words again and again. "Fear not! Fear not," he said. "Nothing can harm him."

The Rat lifted his head, and looked at the bed sideways.

"Did you think--" he said slowly--"did you ever think that perhaps he knew where the descendant of the Lost Prince was?"

Marco answered even more slowly.

"If any one knew--surely he might. He has known so much," he said.

"Listen to this!" broke forth The Rat. "I believe he has gone to tell the people. If he does--if he could show them--all the country would run mad with joy. It wouldn't be only the Secret Party. All Samavia would rise and follow any flag he chose to raise. They've prayed for the Lost Prince for five hundred years, and if they believed they'd got him once more, they'd fight like madmen for him. But there would not be any one to fight. They'd all want the same thing! If they could see the man with Ivor's blood in his veins, they'd feel he had come back to them--risen from the dead. They'd believe it!"

He beat his fists together in his frenzy of excitement. "It's the time!

It's the time!" he cried. "No man could let such a chance go by! He must tell them--he must. That must be what he's gone for. He knows--he knows--he's always known!" And he threw himself back on his sofa and flung his arms over his face, lying there panting.

"If it is the time," said Marco in a low, strained voice--"if it is, and he knows--he will tell them." And he threw his arms up over his own face and lay quite still.

Neither of them said another word, and the street lamp shone in on them as if it were waiting for something to happen. But nothing happened. In time they were asleep.