

## "THE SON OF STEFAN LORISTAN"

When a party composed of two boys attended by a big soldierly man-servant and accompanied by two distinguished-looking, elderly men, of a marked foreign type, appeared on the platform of Charing Cross Station they attracted a good deal of attention. In fact, the good looks and strong, well-carried body of the handsome lad with the thick black hair would have caused eyes to turn towards him even if he had not seemed to be regarded as so special a charge by those who were with him. But in a country where people are accustomed to seeing a certain manner and certain forms observed in the case of persons--however young--who are set apart by the fortune of rank and distinction, and where the populace also rather enjoys the sight of such demeanor, it was inevitable that more than one quick-sighted looker-on should comment on the fact that this was not an ordinary group of individuals.

"See that fine, big lad over there!" said a workman, whose head, with a pipe in its mouth, stuck out of a third-class smoking carriage window. "He's some sort of a young swell, I'll lay a shillin'! Take a look at him," to his mate inside.

The mate took a look. The pair were of the decent, polytechnic-educated type, and were shrewd at observation.

"Yes, he's some sort of young swell," he summed him up. "But he's not English by a long chalk. He must be a young Turk, or Russian, sent over to be educated. His suite looks like it. All but the ferret-faced chap on crutches. Wonder what he is!"

A good-natured looking guard was passing, and the first man hailed him.

"Have we got any swells traveling with us this morning?" he asked, jerking his head towards the group. "That looks like it. Any one leaving Windsor or Sandringham to cross from Dover to-day?"

The man looked at the group curiously for a moment and then shook his head.

"They do look like something or other," he answered, "but no one knows anything about them. Everybody's safe in Buckingham Palace and Marlborough House this week. No one either going or coming."

No observer, it is true, could have mistaken Lazarus for an ordinary attendant escorting an ordinary charge. If silence had not still been strictly the order, he could not have restrained himself. As it was, he bore himself like a grenadier, and stood by Marco as if across his dead body alone could any one approach the lad.

"Until we reach Melzarr," he had said with passion to the two

gentlemen,--"until I can stand before my Master and behold him embrace his son--behold him--I implore that I may not lose sight of him night or day. On my knees, I implore that I may travel, armed, at his side. I am but his servant, and have no right to occupy a place in the same carriage. But put me anywhere. I will be deaf, dumb, blind to all but himself. Only permit me to be near enough to give my life if it is needed. Let me say to my Master, 'I never left him.'"

"We will find a place for you," the elder man said, "and if you are so anxious, you may sleep across his threshold when we spend the night at a hotel."

"I will not sleep!" said Lazarus. "I will watch. Suppose there should be demons of Maranovitch loose and infuriated in Europe? Who knows!"

"The Maranovitch and Iarovitch who have not already sworn allegiance to King Ivor are dead on battlefields. The remainder are now Fedorovitch and praising God for their King," was the answer Baron Rastka made him.

But Lazarus kept his guard unbroken. When he occupied the next compartment to the one in which Marco traveled, he stood in the corridor throughout the journey. When they descended at any point to change trains, he followed close at the boy's heels, his fierce eyes on every side at once and his hand on the weapon hidden in his broad leather belt. When they stopped to rest in some city, he planted himself in a chair by the bedroom door of his charge, and if he slept he was not

aware that nature had betrayed him into doing so.

If the journey made by the young Bearers of the Sign had been a strange one, this was strange by its very contrast. Throughout that pilgrimage, two uncared-for waifs in worn clothes had traveled from one place to another, sometimes in third- or fourth-class continental railroad carriages, sometimes in jolting diligences, sometimes in peasants' carts, sometimes on foot by side roads and mountain paths, and forest ways. Now, two well-dressed boys in the charge of two men of the class whose orders are obeyed, journeyed in compartments reserved for them, their traveling appurtenances supplying every comfort that luxury could provide.

The Rat had not known that there were people who traveled in such a manner; that wants could be so perfectly foreseen; that railroad officials, porters at stations, the staff of restaurants, could be by magic transformed into active and eager servants. To lean against the upholstered back of a railway carriage and in luxurious ease look through the window at passing beauties, and then to find books at your elbow and excellent meals appearing at regular hours, these unknown perfections made it necessary for him at times to pull himself together and give all his energies to believing that he was quite awake. Awake he was, and with much on his mind "to work out,"--so much, indeed, that on the first day of the journey he had decided to give up the struggle, and wait until fate made clear to him such things as he was to be allowed to understand of the mystery of Stefan Loristan.

What he realized most clearly was that the fact that the son of Stefan Loristan was being escorted in private state to the country his father had given his life's work to, was never for a moment forgotten. The Baron Rastka and Count Vorversk were of the dignity and courteous reserve which marks men of distinction. Marco was not a mere boy to them, he was the son of Stefan Loristan; and they were Samavians. They watched over him, not as Lazarus did, but with a gravity and forethought which somehow seemed to encircle him with a rampart. Without any air of subservience, they constituted themselves his attendants. His comfort, his pleasure, even his entertainment, were their private care. The Rat felt sure they intended that, if possible, he should enjoy his journey, and that he should not be fatigued by it. They conversed with him as The Rat had not known that men ever conversed with boys,--until he had met Loristan. It was plain that they knew what he would be most interested in, and that they were aware he was as familiar with the history of Samavia as they were themselves. When he showed a disposition to hear of events which had occurred, they were as prompt to follow his lead as they would have been to follow the lead of a man. That, The Rat argued with himself, was because Marco had lived so intimately with his father that his life had been more like a man's than a boy's and had trained him in mature thinking. He was very quiet during the journey, and The Rat knew he was thinking all the time.

The night before they reached Melzarr, they slept at a town some hours distant from the capital. They arrived at midnight and went to a quiet

hotel.

"To-morrow," said Marco, when The Rat had left him for the night,  
"to-morrow, we shall see him! God be thanked!"

"God be thanked!" said The Rat, also. And each saluted the other before they parted.

In the morning, Lazarus came into the bedroom with an air so solemn that it seemed as if the garments he carried in his hands were part of some religious ceremony.

"I am at your command, sir," he said. "And I bring you your uniform."

He carried, in fact, a richly decorated Samavian uniform, and the first thing Marco had seen when he entered was that Lazarus himself was in uniform also. His was the uniform of an officer of the King's Body Guard.

"The Master," he said, "asks that you wear this on your entrance to Melzarr. I have a uniform, also, for your aide-de-camp."

When Rastka and Vorversk appeared, they were in uniforms also. It was a uniform which had a touch of the Orient in its picturesque splendor. A short fur-bordered mantle hung by a jeweled chain from the shoulders, and there was much magnificent embroidery of color and gold.

"Sir, we must drive quickly to the station," Baron Rastka said to Marco. "These people are excitable and patriotic, and His Majesty wishes us to remain incognito, and avoid all chance of public demonstration until we reach the capital." They passed rather hurriedly through the hotel to the carriage which awaited them. The Rat saw that something unusual was happening in the place. Servants were scurrying round corners, and guests were coming out of their rooms and even hanging over the balustrades.

As Marco got into his carriage, he caught sight of a boy about his own age who was peeping from behind a bush. Suddenly he darted away, and they all saw him tearing down the street towards the station as fast as his legs would carry him.

But the horses were faster than he was. The party reached the station, and was escorted quickly to its place in a special saloon-carriage which awaited it. As the train made its way out of the station, Marco saw the boy who had run before them rush on to the platform, waving his arms and shouting something with wild delight. The people who were standing about turned to look at him, and the next instant they had all torn off their caps and thrown them up in the air and were shouting also. But it was not possible to hear what they said.

"We were only just in time," said Vorversk, and Baron Rastka nodded.

The train went swiftly, and stopped only once before they reached Melzarr. This was at a small station, on the platform of which stood peasants with big baskets of garlanded flowers and evergreens. They put them on the train, and soon both Marco and The Rat saw that something unusual was taking place. At one time, a man standing on the narrow outside platform of the carriage was plainly seen to be securing garlands and handing up flags to men who worked on the roof.

"They are doing something with Samavian flags and a lot of flowers and green things!" cried The Rat, in excitement.

"Sir, they are decorating the outside of the carriage," Vorversk said.

"The villagers on the line obtained permission from His Majesty. The son of Stefan Loristan could not be allowed to pass their homes without their doing homage."

"I understand," said Marco, his heart thumping hard against his uniform.

"It is for my father's sake."

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At last, embowered, garlanded, and hung with waving banners, the train drew in at the chief station at Melzarr.

"Sir," said Rastka, as they were entering, "will you stand up that the people may see you? Those on the outskirts of the crowd will have the

merest glimpse, but they will never forget."

Marco stood up. The others grouped themselves behind him. There arose a roar of voices, which ended almost in a shriek of joy which was like the shriek of a tempest. Then there burst forth the blare of brazen instruments playing the National Hymn of Samavia, and mad voices joined in it.

If Marco had not been a strong boy, and long trained in self-control, what he saw and heard might have been almost too much to be borne. When the train had come to a full stop, and the door was thrown open, even Rastka's dignified voice was unsteady as he said, "Sir, lead the way. It is for us to follow."

And Marco, erect in the doorway, stood for a moment, looking out upon the roaring, acclaiming, weeping, singing and swaying multitude--and saluted just as he had saluted The Squad, looking just as much a boy, just as much a man, just as much a thrilling young human being.

Then, at the sight of him standing so, it seemed as if the crowd went mad--as the Forgers of the Sword had seemed to go mad on the night in the cavern. The tumult rose and rose, the crowd rocked, and leapt, and, in its frenzy of emotion, threatened to crush itself to death. But for the lines of soldiers, there would have seemed no chance for any one to pass through it alive.

"I am the son of Stefan Loristan," Marco said to himself, in order to hold himself steady. "I am on my way to my father."

Afterward, he was moving through the line of guarding soldiers to the entrance, where two great state-carriages stood; and there, outside, waited even a huger and more frenzied crowd than that left behind. He saluted there again, and again, and again, on all sides. It was what they had seen the Emperor do in Vienna. He was not an Emperor, but he was the son of Stefan Loristan who had brought back the King.

"You must salute, too," he said to The Rat, when they got into the state carriage. "Perhaps my father has told them. It seems as if they knew you."

The Rat had been placed beside him on the carriage seat. He was inwardly shuddering with a rapture of exultation which was almost anguish. The people were looking at him--shouting at him--surely it seemed like it when he looked at the faces nearest in the crowd. Perhaps Loristan--

"Listen!" said Marco suddenly, as the carriage rolled on its way. "They are shouting to us in Samavian, 'The Bearers of the Sign!' That is what they are saying now. 'The Bearers of the Sign.'"

They were being taken to the Palace. That Baron Rastka and Count Vorversk had explained in the train. His Majesty wished to receive them.

Stefan Loristan was there also.

The city had once been noble and majestic. It was somewhat Oriental, as its uniforms and national costumes were. There were domed and pillared structures of white stone and marble, there were great arches, and city gates, and churches. But many of them were half in ruins through war, and neglect, and decay. They passed the half-unroofed cathedral, standing in the sunshine in its great square, still in all its disaster one of the most beautiful structures in Europe. In the exultant crowd were still to be seen haggard faces, men with bandaged limbs and heads or hobbling on sticks and crutches. The richly colored native costumes were most of them worn to rags. But their wearers had the faces of creatures plucked from despair to be lifted to heaven.

"Ivor! Ivor!" they cried; "Ivor! Ivor!" and sobbed with rapture.

The Palace was as wonderful in its way as the white cathedral. The immensely wide steps of marble were guarded by soldiers. The huge square in which it stood was filled with people whom the soldiers held in check.

"I am his son," Marco said to himself, as he descended from the state carriage and began to walk up the steps which seemed so enormously wide that they appeared almost like a street. Up he mounted, step by step, The Rat following him. And as he turned from side to side, to salute those who made deep obeisance as he passed, he began to realize that he

had seen their faces before.

"These who are guarding the steps," he said, quickly under his breath to The Rat, "are the Forgers of the Sword!"

There were rich uniforms everywhere when he entered the palace, and people who bowed almost to the ground as he passed. He was very young to be confronted with such an adoring adulation and royal ceremony; but he hoped it would not last too long, and that after he had knelt to the King and kissed his hand, he would see his father and hear his voice. Just to hear his voice again, and feel his hand on his shoulder!

Through the vaulted corridors, to the wide-opened doors of a magnificent room he was led at last. The end of it seemed a long way off as he entered. There were many richly dressed people who stood in line as he passed up toward the canopied dais. He felt that he had grown pale with the strain of excitement, and he had begun to feel that he must be walking in a dream, as on each side people bowed low and curtsied to the ground.

He realized vaguely that the King himself was standing, awaiting his approach. But as he advanced, each step bearing him nearer to the throne, the light and color about him, the strangeness and magnificence, the wildly joyous acclamation of the populace outside the palace, made him feel rather dazzled, and he did not clearly see any one single face or thing.

"His Majesty awaits you," said a voice behind him which seemed to be Baron Rastka's. "Are you faint, sir? You look pale."

He drew himself together, and lifted his eyes. For one full moment, after he had so lifted them, he stood quite still and straight, looking into the deep beauty of the royal face. Then he knelt and kissed the hands held out to him--kissed them both with a passion of boy love and worship.

The King had the eyes he had longed to see--the King's hands were those he had longed to feel again upon his shoulder--the King was his father! the "Stefan Loristan" who had been the last of those who had waited and labored for Samavia through five hundred years, and who had lived and died kings, though none of them till now had worn a crown!

His father was the King!

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It was not that night, nor the next, nor for many nights that the telling of the story was completed. The people knew that their King and his son were rarely separated from each other; that the Prince's suite of apartments were connected by a private passage with his father's. The two were bound together by an affection of singular strength and meaning, and their love for their people added to their feeling for each

other. In the history of what their past had been, there was a romance which swelled the emotional Samavian heart near to bursting. By mountain fires, in huts, under the stars, in fields and in forests, all that was known of their story was told and retold a thousand times, with sobs of joy and prayer breaking in upon the tale.

But none knew it as it was told in a certain quiet but stately room in the palace, where the man once known only as "Stefan Loristan," but whom history would call the first King Ivor of Samavia, told his share of it to the boy whom Samavians had a strange and superstitious worship for, because he seemed so surely their Lost Prince restored in body and soul--almost the kingly lad in the ancient portrait--some of them half believed when he stood in the sunshine, with the halo about his head.

It was a wonderful and intense story, that of the long wanderings and the close hiding of the dangerous secret. Among all those who had known that a man who was an impassioned patriot was laboring for Samavia, and using all the power of a great mind and the delicate ingenuity of a great genius to gain friends and favor for his unhappy country, there had been but one who had known that Stefan Loristan had a claim to the Samavian throne. He had made no claim, he had sought--not a crown--but the final freedom of the nation for which his love had been a religion.

"Not the crown!" he said to the two young Bearers of the Sign as they sat at his feet like schoolboys--"not a throne. 'The Life of my life--for Samavia.' That was what I worked for--what we have all worked

for. If there had risen a wiser man in Samavia's time of need, it would not have been for me to remind them of their Lost Prince. I could have stood aside. But no man arose. The crucial moment came--and the one man who knew the secret, revealed it. Then--Samavia called, and I answered."

He put his hand on the thick, black hair of his boy's head.

"There was a thing we never spoke of together," he said. "I believed always that your mother died of her bitter fears for me and the unending strain of them. She was very young and loving, and knew that there was no day when we parted that we were sure of seeing each other alive again. When she died, she begged me to promise that your boyhood and youth should not be burdened by the knowledge she had found it so terrible to bear. I should have kept the secret from you, even if she had not so implored me. I had never meant that you should know the truth until you were a man. If I had died, a certain document would have been sent to you which would have left my task in your hands and made my plans clear. You would have known then that you also were a Prince Ivor, who must take up his country's burden and be ready when Samavia called. I tried to help you to train yourself for any task. You never failed me."

"Your Majesty," said The Rat, "I began to work it out, and think it must be true that night when we were with the old woman on the top of the mountain. It was the way she looked at--at His Highness."

"Say 'Marco,'" threw in Prince Ivor. "It's easier. He was my army, Father."

Stefan Loristan's grave eyes melted.

"Say 'Marco,'" he said. "You were his army--and more--when we both needed one. It was you who invented the Game!"

"Thanks, Your Majesty," said The Rat, reddening scarlet. "You do me great honor! But he would never let me wait on him when we were traveling. He said we were nothing but two boys. I suppose that's why it's hard to remember, at first. But my mind went on working until sometimes I was afraid I might let something out at the wrong time. When we went down into the cavern, and I saw the Forgers of the Sword go mad over him--I knew it must be true. But I didn't dare to speak. I knew you meant us to wait; so I waited."

"You are a faithful friend," said the King, "and you have always obeyed orders!"

A great moon was sailing in the sky that night--just such a moon as had sailed among the torn rifts of storm clouds when the Prince at Vienna had come out upon the balcony and the boyish voice had startled him from the darkness of the garden below. The clearer light of this night's splendor drew them out on a balcony also--a broad balcony of white marble which looked like snow. The pure radiance fell upon all they saw

spread before them--the lovely but half-ruined city, the great palace square with its broken statues and arches, the splendid ghost of the unroofed cathedral whose High Altar was bare to the sky.

They stood and looked at it. There was a stillness in which all the world might have ceased breathing.

"What next?" said Prince Ivor, at last speaking quietly and low. "What next, Father?"

"Great things which will come, one by one," said the King, "if we hold ourselves ready."

Prince Ivor turned his face from the lovely, white, broken city, and put his brown hand on his father's arm.

"Upon the ledge that night--" he said, "Father, you remember--?" The King was looking far away, but he bent his head:

"Yes. That will come, too," he said. "Can you repeat it?"

"Yes," said Ivor, "and so can the aide-de-camp. We've said it a hundred times. We believe it's true. 'If the descendant of the Lost Prince is brought back to rule in Samavia, he will teach his people the Law of the One, from his throne. He will teach his son, and that son will teach his son, and he will teach his. And through such as these, the whole world

will learn the Order and the Law."