

merchants clanking down the hill.

BOOK II—OF LOVE AND POLITICS

CHAPTER I—WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LIBRARY

At a quarter before six on the following morning Doctor Gotthold was already at his desk in the library; and with a small cup of black coffee at his elbow, and an eye occasionally wandering to the busts and the long array of many-coloured books, was quietly reviewing the labours of the day before. He was a man of about forty, flaxen-haired, with refined features a little worn, and bright eyes somewhat faded. Early to bed and early to rise, his life was devoted to two things: erudition and Rhine wine. An ancient friendship existed latent between him and Otto; they rarely met, but when they did it was to take up at once the thread of their suspended intimacy. Gotthold, the virgin priest of knowledge, had envied his cousin, for half a day, when he was married; he had never envied him his throne.

Reading was not a popular diversion at the court of Grünewald; and that great, pleasant, sunshiny gallery of books and statues was, in practice, Gotthold's private cabinet. On this particular Wednesday morning,

however, he had not been long about his manuscript when a door opened and

the Prince stepped into the apartment. The doctor watched him as he drew near, receiving, from each of the embayed windows in succession, a flush of morning sun; and Otto looked so gay, and walked so airily, he was so well dressed and brushed and frizzled, so point-device, and of such a sovereign elegance, that the heart of his cousin the recluse was rather moved against him.

‘Good-morning, Gotthold,’ said Otto, dropping in a chair.

‘Good-morning, Otto,’ returned the librarian. ‘You are an early bird. Is this an accident, or do you begin reforming?’

‘It is about time, I fancy,’ answered the Prince.

‘I cannot imagine,’ said the Doctor. ‘I am too sceptical to be an ethical adviser; and as for good resolutions, I believed in them when I was young. They are the colours of hope’s rainbow.’

‘If you come to think of it,’ said Otto, ‘I am not a popular sovereign.’ And with a look he changed his statement to a question.

‘Popular? Well, there I would distinguish,’ answered Gotthold, leaning back and joining the tips of his fingers. ‘There are various kinds of popularity; the bookish, which is perfectly impersonal, as unreal as the nightmare; the politician’s, a mixed variety; and yours, which is the

most personal of all. Women take to you; footmen adore you; it is as natural to like you as to pat a dog; and were you a saw-miller you would be the most popular citizen in Grünewald. As a prince—well, you are in the wrong trade. It is perhaps philosophical to recognise it as you do.’

‘Perhaps philosophical?’ repeated Otto.

‘Yes, perhaps. I would not be dogmatic,’ answered Gotthold.

‘Perhaps philosophical, and certainly not virtuous,’ Otto resumed.

‘Not of a Roman virtue,’ chuckled the recluse.

Otto drew his chair nearer to the table, leaned upon it with his elbow, and looked his cousin squarely in the face. ‘In short,’ he asked, ‘not manly?’

‘Well,’ Gotthold hesitated, ‘not manly, if you will.’ And then, with a laugh, ‘I did not know that you gave yourself out to be manly,’ he added. ‘It was one of the points that I inclined to like about you; inclined, I believe, to admire. The names of virtues exercise a charm on most of us; we must lay claim to all of them, however incompatible; we must all be both daring and prudent; we must all vaunt our pride and go to the stake for our humility. Not so you. Without compromise you were yourself: a pretty sight. I have always said it: none so void of all pretence as Otto.’

'Pretence and effort both!' cried Otto. 'A dead dog in a canal is more alive. And the question, Gotthold, the question that I have to face is this: Can I not, with effort and self-denial, can I not become a tolerable sovereign?'

'Never,' replied Gotthold. 'Dismiss the notion. And besides, dear child, you would not try.'

'Nay, Gotthold, I am not to be put by,' said Otto. 'If I am constitutionally unfit to be a sovereign, what am I doing with this money, with this palace, with these guards? And I—a thief—am to execute the law on others?'

'I admit the difficulty,' said Gotthold.

'Well, can I not try?' continued Otto. 'Am I not bound to try? And with the advice and help of such a man as you—'

'Mel' cried the librarian. 'Now, God forbid!'

Otto, though he was in no very smiling humour, could not forbear to smile. 'Yet I was told last night,' he laughed, 'that with a man like me to impersonate, and a man like you to touch the springs, a very possible government could be composed.'

'Now I wonder in what diseased imagination,' Gotthold said, 'that preposterous monster saw the light of day?'

'It was one of your own trade—a writer: one Roederer,' said Otto.

'Roederer! an ignorant puppy!' cried the librarian.

'You are ungrateful,' said Otto. 'He is one of your professed admirers.'

'Is he?' cried Gotthold, obviously impressed. 'Come, that is a good account of the young man. I must read his stuff again. It is the rather to his credit, as our views are opposite. The east and west are not more opposite. Can I have converted him? But no; the incident belongs to Fairyland.'

'You are not then,' asked the Prince, 'an authoritarian?'

'? God bless me, no!' said Gotthold. 'I am a red, dear child.'

'That brings me then to my next point, and by a natural transition. If I am so clearly unfitted for my post,' the Prince asked; 'if my friends admit it, if my subjects clamour for my downfall, if revolution is preparing at this hour, must I not go forth to meet the inevitable? should I not save these horrors and be done with these absurdities? in a word, should I not abdicate? O, believe me, I feel the ridicule, the vast abuse of language,' he added, wincing, 'but even a principulus like me cannot resign; he must make a great gesture, and come buskined forth, and abdicate.'

‘Ay,’ said Gotthold, ‘or else stay where he is. What gnat has bitten you to-day? Do you not know that you are touching, with lay hands, the very holiest inwards of philosophy, where madness dwells? Ay, Otto, madness; for in the serene temples of the wise, the inmost shrine, which we carefully keep locked, is full of spiders’ webs. All men, all, are fundamentally useless; nature tolerates, she does not need, she does not use them: sterile flowers! All—down to the fellow swinking in a byre, whom fools point out for the exception—all are useless; all weave ropes of sand; or like a child that has breathed on a window, write and obliterate, write and obliterate, idle words! Talk of it no more. That way, I tell you, madness lies.’ The speaker rose from his chair and then sat down again. He laughed a little laugh, and then, changing his tone, resumed: ‘Yes, dear child, we are not here to do battle with giants; we are here to be happy like the flowers, if we can be. It is because you could, that I have always secretly admired you. Cling to that trade; believe me, it is the right one. Be happy, be idle, be airy. To the devil with all casuistry! and leave the state to Gondremark, as heretofore. He does it well enough, they say; and his vanity enjoys the situation.’

‘Gotthold,’ cried Otto, ‘what is this to me? Useless is not the question; I cannot rest at uselessness; I must be useful or I must be noxious—one or other. I grant you the whole thing, prince and principality alike, is pure absurdity, a stroke of satire; and that a banker or the man who keeps an inn has graver duties. But now, when I have washed my hands of it three years, and left all—labour, responsibility, and honour and enjoyment too, if there be any—to

Gondremark and to—Seraphina—’ He hesitated at the name, and Gotthold glanced aside. ‘Well,’ the Prince continued, ‘what has come of it? Taxes, army, cannon—why, it’s like a box of lead soldiers! And the people sick at the folly of it, and fired with the injustice! And war, too—I hear of war—war in this teapot! What a complication of absurdity and disgrace! And when the inevitable end arrives—the revolution—who will be to blame in the sight of God, who will be gibbeted in public opinion? I! Prince Puppet!’

‘I thought you had despised public opinion,’ said Gotthold.

‘I did,’ said Otto sombrely, ‘but now I do not. I am growing old. And then, Gotthold, there is Seraphina. She is loathed in this country that I brought her to and suffered her to spoil. Yes, I gave it her as a plaything, and she has broken it: a fine Prince, an admirable Princess! Even her life—I ask you, Gotthold, is her life safe?’

‘It is safe enough to-day,’ replied the librarian: ‘but since you ask me seriously, I would not answer for to-morrow. She is ill-advised.’

‘And by whom? By this Gondremark, to whom you counsel me to leave my country,’ cried the Prince. ‘Rare advice! The course that I have been following all these years, to come at last to this. O, ill-advised! if that were all! See now, there is no sense in beating about the bush between two men: you know what scandal says of her?’

Gotthold, with pursed lips, silently nodded.

‘Well, come, you are not very cheering as to my conduct as the Prince; have I even done my duty as a husband?’ Otto asked.

‘Nay, nay,’ said Gotthold, earnestly and eagerly, ‘this is another chapter. I am an old celibate, an old monk. I cannot advise you in your marriage.’

‘Nor do I require advice,’ said Otto, rising. ‘All of this must cease.’ And he began to walk to and fro with his hands behind his back.

‘Well, Otto, may God guide you!’ said Gotthold, after a considerable silence. ‘I cannot.’

‘From what does all this spring?’ said the Prince, stopping in his walk. ‘What am I to call it? Diffidence? The fear of ridicule? Inverted vanity? What matter names, if it has brought me to this? I could never bear to be bustling about nothing; I was ashamed of this toy kingdom from the first; I could not tolerate that people should fancy I believed in a thing so patently absurd! I would do nothing that cannot be done smiling. I have a sense of humour, forsooth! I must know better than my Maker. And it was the same thing in my marriage,’ he added more hoarsely. ‘I did not believe this girl could care for me; I must not intrude; I must preserve the foppery of my indifference. What an impotent picture!’

‘Ay, we have the same blood,’ moralised Gotthold. ‘You are drawing, with

fine strokes, the character of the born sceptic.'

'Sceptic?—coward!' cried Otto. 'Coward is the word. A springless, putty-hearted, cowering coward!'

And as the Prince rapped out the words in tones of unusual vigour, a little, stout, old gentleman, opening a door behind Gotthold, received them fairly in the face. With his parrot's beak for a nose, his pursed mouth, his little goggling eyes, he was the picture of formality; and in ordinary circumstances, strutting behind the drum of his corporation, he impressed the beholder with a certain air of frozen dignity and wisdom. But at the smallest contrariety, his trembling hands and disconnected gestures betrayed the weakness at the root. And now, when he was thus surprisingly received in that library of Mittwalden Palace, which was the customary haunt of silence, his hands went up into the air as if he had been shot, and he cried aloud with the scream of an old woman.

'O!' he gasped, recovering, 'Your Highness! I beg ten thousand pardons. But your Highness at such an hour in the library!—a circumstance so unusual as your Highness's presence was a thing I could not be expected to foresee.'

'There is no harm done, Herr Cancellarius,' said Otto.

'I came upon the errand of a moment: some papers I left over-night with the Herr Doctor,' said the Chancellor of Grünewald. 'Herr Doctor, if you will kindly give me them, I will intrude no longer.'

Gotthold unlocked a drawer and handed a bundle of manuscript to the old gentleman, who prepared, with fitting salutations, to take his departure.

‘Herr Greisengesang, since we have met,’ said Otto, ‘let us talk.’

‘I am honoured by his Highness’s commands,’ replied the Chancellor.

‘All has been quiet since I left?’ asked the Prince, resuming his seat.

‘The usual business, your Highness,’ answered Greisengesang; ‘punctual trifles: huge, indeed, if neglected, but trifles when discharged. Your Highness is most zealously obeyed.’

‘Obeyed, Herr Cancellarius?’ returned the Prince. ‘And when have I obliged you with an order? Replaced, let us rather say. But to touch upon these trifles; instance me a few.’

‘The routine of government, from which your Highness has so wisely dissociated his leisure . . . ’ began Greisengesang.

‘We will leave my leisure, sir,’ said Otto. ‘Approach the facts.’

‘The routine of business was proceeded with,’ replied the official, now visibly twittering.

‘It is very strange, Herr Cancellarius, that you should so persistently

avoid my questions,' said the Prince. 'You tempt me to suppose a purpose in your dulness. I have asked you whether all was quiet; do me the pleasure to reply.'

'Perfectly—O, perfectly quiet,' jerked the ancient puppet, with every signal of untruth.

'I make a note of these words,' said the Prince gravely. 'You assure me, your sovereign, that since the date of my departure nothing has occurred of which you owe me an account.'

'I take your Highness, I take the Herr Doctor to witness,' cried Greisengesang, 'that I have had no such expression.'

'Halt!' said the Prince; and then, after a pause: 'Herr Greisengesang, you are an old man, and you served my father before you served me,' he added. 'It consists neither with your dignity nor mine that you should babble excuses and stumble possibly upon untruths. Collect your thoughts; and then categorically inform me of all you have been charged to hide.'

Gotthold, stooping very low over his desk, appeared to have resumed his labours; but his shoulders heaved with subterranean merriment. The Prince waited, drawing his handkerchief quietly through his fingers.

'Your Highness, in this informal manner,' said the old gentleman at last, 'and being unavoidably deprived of documents, it would be difficult, it

would be impossible, to do justice to the somewhat grave occurrences which have transpired.'

'I will not criticise your attitude,' replied the Prince. 'I desire that, between you and me, all should be done gently; for I have not forgotten, my old friend, that you were kind to me from the first, and for a period of years a faithful servant. I will thus dismiss the matters on which you waive immediate inquiry. But you have certain papers actually in your hand. Come, Herr Greisengesang, there is at least one point for which you have authority. Enlighten me on that.'

'On that?' cried the old gentleman. 'O, that is a trifle; a matter, your Highness, of police; a detail of a purely administrative order. These are simply a selection of the papers seized upon the English traveller.'

'Seized?' echoed Otto. 'In what sense? Explain yourself.'

'Sir John Crabtree,' interposed Gotthold, looking up, 'was arrested yesterday evening.'

'It this so, Herr Cancellarius?' demanded Otto sternly.

'It was judged right, your Highness,' protested Greisengesang. 'The decree was in due form, invested with your Highness's authority by procuration. I am but an agent; I had no status to prevent the measure.'

'This man, my guest, has been arrested,' said the Prince. 'On what

grounds, sir? With what colour of pretence?’

The Chancellor stammered.

‘Your Highness will perhaps find the reason in these documents,’ said Gotthold, pointing with the tail of his pen.

Otto thanked his cousin with a look. ‘Give them to me,’ he said, addressing the Chancellor.

But that gentleman visibly hesitated to obey. ‘Baron von Gondremark,’ he said, ‘has made the affair his own. I am in this case a mere messenger; and as such, I am not clothed with any capacity to communicate the documents I carry. Herr Doctor, I am convinced you will not fail to bear me out.’

‘I have heard a great deal of nonsense,’ said Gotthold, ‘and most of it from you; but this beats all.’

‘Come, sir,’ said Otto, rising, ‘the papers. I command.’

Herr Greisengesang instantly gave way.

‘With your Highness’s permission,’ he said, ‘and laying at his feet my most submissive apologies, I will now hasten to attend his further orders in the Chancery.’

‘Herr Cancellarius, do you see this chair?’ said Otto. ‘There is where you shall attend my further orders. O, now, no more!’ he cried, with a gesture, as the old man opened his lips. ‘You have sufficiently marked your zeal to your employer; and I begin to weary of a moderation you abuse.’

The Chancellor moved to the appointed chair and took his seat in silence.

‘And now,’ said Otto, opening the roll, ‘what is all this? it looks like the manuscript of a book.’

‘It is,’ said Gotthold, ‘the manuscript of a book of travels.’

‘You have read it, Doctor Hohenstockwitz?’ asked the Prince.

‘Nay, I but saw the title-page,’ replied Gotthold. ‘But the roll was given to me open, and I heard no word of any secrecy.’

Otto dealt the Chancellor an angry glance.

‘I see,’ he went on. ‘The papers of an author seized at this date of the world’s history, in a state so petty and so ignorant as Grünewald, here is indeed an ignominious folly. Sir,’ to the Chancellor, ‘I marvel to find you in so scurvy an employment. On your conduct to your Prince I will not dwell; but to descend to be a spy! For what else can it be called? To seize the papers of this gentleman, the private papers of a stranger, the toil of a life, perhaps—to open, and to read them. And

what have we to do with books? The Herr Doctor might perhaps be asked for his advice; but we have no index expurgatorius in Grünewald. Had we but that, we should be the most absolute parody and farce upon this tawdry earth.'

Yet, even while Otto spoke, he had continued to unfold the roll; and now, when it lay fully open, his eye rested on the title-page elaborately written in red ink. It ran thus:

MEMOIRS
OF A VISIT TO THE VARIOUS
COURTS OF EUROPE,
BY
SIR JOHN CRABTREE, BARONET.

Below was a list of chapters, each bearing the name of one of the European Courts; and among these the nineteenth and the last upon the list was dedicated to Grünewald.

'Ah! The Court of Grünewald!' said Otto, 'that should be droll reading.' And his curiosity itched for it.

'A methodical dog, this English Baronet,' said Gotthold. 'Each chapter written and finished on the spot. I shall look for his work when it appears.'

'It would be odd, now, just to glance at it,' said Otto, wavering.

Gotthold's brow darkened, and he looked out of window.

But though the Prince understood the reproof, his weakness prevailed. 'I will,' he said, with an uneasy laugh, 'I will, I think, just glance at it.'

So saying, he resumed his seat and spread the traveller's manuscript upon the table.

CHAPTER II—‘ON THE COURT OF GRÜNEWALD,’ BEING A PORTION OF
THE
TRAVELLER’S MANUSCRIPT

It may well be asked (it was thus the English traveller began his nineteenth chapter) why I should have chosen Grünewald out of so many other states equally petty, formal, dull, and corrupt. Accident, indeed, decided, and not I; but I have seen no reason to regret my visit. The spectacle of this small society macerating in its own abuses was not perhaps instructive, but I have found it exceedingly diverting.

The reigning Prince, Otto Johann Friedrich, a young man of imperfect education, questionable valour, and no scintilla of capacity, has fallen into entire public contempt. It was with difficulty that I obtained an interview, for he is frequently absent from a court where his presence is unheeded, and where his only rôle is to be a cloak for the amours of his wife. At last, however, on the third occasion when I visited the palace, I found this sovereign in the exercise of his inglorious function, with the wife on one hand, and the lover on the other. He is not ill-looking; he has hair of a ruddy gold, which naturally curls, and his eyes are dark, a combination which I always regard as the mark of some congenital deficiency, physical or moral; his features are irregular, but pleasing; the nose perhaps a little short, and the mouth a little womanish; his address is excellent, and he can express himself with point. But to pierce below these externals is to come on a vacuity of any sterling

quality, a deliquescence of the moral nature, a frivolity and inconsequence of purpose that mark the nearly perfect fruit of a decadent age. He has a worthless smattering of many subjects, but a grasp of none. 'I soon weary of a pursuit,' he said to me, laughing; it would almost appear as if he took a pride in his incapacity and lack of moral courage. The results of his dilettanteism are to be seen in every field; he is a bad fencer, a second-rate horseman, dancer, shot; he sings—I have heard him—and he sings like a child; he writes intolerable verses in more than doubtful French; he acts like the common amateur; and in short there is no end to the number of the things that he does, and does badly. His one manly taste is for the chase. In sum, he is but a plexus of weaknesses; the singing chambermaid of the stage, tricked out in man's apparel, and mounted on a circus horse. I have seen this poor phantom of a prince riding out alone or with a few huntsmen, disregarded by all, and I have been even grieved for the bearer of so futile and melancholy an existence. The last Merovingians may have looked not otherwise.

The Princess Amalia Seraphina, a daughter of the Grand-Ducal house of Toggenburg-Tannhäuser, would be equally inconsiderable if she were not a cutting instrument in the hands of an ambitious man. She is much younger than the Prince, a girl of two-and-twenty, sick with vanity, superficially clever, and fundamentally a fool. She has a red-brown rolling eye, too large for her face, and with sparks of both levity and ferocity; her forehead is high and narrow, her figure thin and a little stooping. Her manners, her conversation, which she interlards with French, her very tastes and ambitions, are alike assumed; and the assumption is ungracefully apparent: Hoyden playing Cleopatra. I should

judge her to be incapable of truth. In private life a girl of this description embroils the peace of families, walks attended by a troop of scowling swains, and passes, once at least, through the divorce court; it is a common and, except to the cynic, an uninteresting type. On the throne, however, and in the hands of a man like Gondremark, she may become the authoress of serious public evils.

Gondremark, the true ruler of this unfortunate country, is a more complex study. His position in Grünewald, to which he is a foreigner, is eminently false; and that he should maintain it as he does, a very miracle of impudence and dexterity. His speech, his face, his policy, are all double: heads and tails. Which of the two extremes may be his actual design he were a bold man who should offer to decide. Yet I will hazard the guess that he follows both experimentally, and awaits, at the hand of destiny, one of those directing hints of which she is so lavish to the wise.

On the one hand, as Maire du Palais to the incompetent Otto, and using the love-sick Princess for a tool and mouthpiece, he pursues a policy of arbitrary power and territorial aggrandisement. He has called out the whole capable male population of the state to military service; he has bought cannon; he has tempted away promising officers from foreign armies; and he now begins, in his international relations, to assume the swaggering port and the vague, threatful language of a bully. The idea of extending Grünewald may appear absurd, but the little state is advantageously placed, its neighbours are all defenceless; and if at any moment the jealousies of the greater courts should neutralise each other,

an active policy might double the principality both in population and extent. Certainly at least the scheme is entertained in the court of Mittwalden; nor do I myself regard it as entirely desperate. The margravate of Brandenburg has grown from as small beginnings to a formidable power; and though it is late in the day to try adventurous policies, and the age of war seems ended, Fortune, we must not forget, still blindly turns her wheel for men and nations. Concurrently with, and tributary to, these warlike preparations, crushing taxes have been levied, journals have been suppressed, and the country, which three years ago was prosperous and happy, now stagnates in a forced inaction, gold has become a curiosity, and the mills stand idle on the mountain streams.

On the other hand, in his second capacity of popular tribune, Gondremark is the incarnation of the free lodges, and sits at the centre of an organised conspiracy against the state. To any such movement my sympathies were early acquired, and I would not willingly let fall a word that might embarrass or retard the revolution. But to show that I speak of knowledge, and not as the reporter of mere gossip, I may mention that I have myself been present at a meeting where the details of a republican Constitution were minutely debated and arranged; and I may add that Gondremark was throughout referred to by the speakers as their captain in action and the arbiter of their disputes. He has taught his dupes (for so I must regard them) that his power of resistance to the Princess is limited, and at each fresh stretch of authority persuades them, with specious reasons, to postpone the hour of insurrection. Thus (to give some instances of his astute diplomacy) he salved over the decree enforcing military service, under the plea that to be well drilled and

exercised in arms was even a necessary preparation for revolt. And the other day, when it began to be rumoured abroad that a war was being forced on a reluctant neighbour, the Grand Duke of Gerolstein, and I made sure it would be the signal for an instant rising, I was struck dumb with wonder to find that even this had been prepared and was to be accepted. I went from one to another in the Liberal camp, and all were in the same story, all had been drilled and schooled and fitted out with vacuous argument. 'The lads had better see some real fighting,' they said; 'and besides, it will be as well to capture Gerolstein: we can then extend to our neighbours the blessing of liberty on the same day that we snatch it for ourselves; and the republic will be all the stronger to resist, if the kings of Europe should band themselves together to reduce it.' I know not which of the two I should admire the more: the simplicity of the multitude or the audacity of the adventurer. But such are the subtleties, such the quibbling reasons, with which he blinds and leads this people. How long a course so tortuous can be pursued with safety I am incapable of guessing; not long, one would suppose; and yet this singular man has been treading the mazes for five years, and his favour at court and his popularity among the lodges still endure unbroken.

I have the privilege of slightly knowing him. Heavily and somewhat clumsily built, of a vast, disjointed, rambling frame, he can still pull himself together, and figure, not without admiration, in the saloon or the ball-room. His hue and temperament are plentifully bilious; he has a saturnine eye; his cheek is of a dark blue where he has been shaven. Essentially he is to be numbered among the man-haters, a convinced contemner of his fellows. Yet he is himself of a commonplace ambition

and greedy of applause. In talk, he is remarkable for a thirst of information, loving rather to hear than to communicate; for sound and studious views; and, judging by the extreme short-sightedness of common politicians, for a remarkable provision of events. All this, however, without grace, pleasantry, or charm, heavily set forth, with a dull countenance. In our numerous conversations, although he has always heard me with deference, I have been conscious throughout of a sort of ponderous finessing hard to tolerate. He produces none of the effect of a gentleman; devoid not merely of pleasantry, but of all attention or communicative warmth of bearing. No gentleman, besides, would so parade his amours with the Princess; still less repay the Prince for his long-suffering with a studied insolence of demeanour and the fabrication of insulting nicknames, such as Prince Featherhead, which run from ear to ear and create a laugh throughout the country. Gondremark has thus some of the clumsier characters of the self-made man, combined with an inordinate, almost a besotted, pride of intellect and birth. Heavy, bilious, selfish, inornate, he sits upon this court and country like an incubus.

But it is probable that he preserves softer gifts for necessary purposes. Indeed, it is certain, although he vouchsafed none of it to me, that this cold and stolid politician possesses to a great degree the art of ingratiating, and can be all things to all men. Hence there has probably sprung up the idle legend that in private life he is a gross romping voluptuary. Nothing, at least, can well be more surprising than the terms of his connection with the Princess. Older than her husband,

certainly uglier, and, according to the feeble ideas common among women, in every particular less pleasing, he has not only seized the complete command of all her thought and action, but has imposed on her in public a humiliating part. I do not here refer to the complete sacrifice of every rag of her reputation; for to many women these extremities are in themselves attractive. But there is about the court a certain lady of a dishevelled reputation, a Countess von Rosen, wife or widow of a cloudy count, no longer in her second youth, and already bereft of some of her attractions, who unequivocally occupies the station of the Baron's mistress. I had thought, at first, that she was but a hired accomplice, a mere blind or buffer for the more important sinner. A few hours' acquaintance with Madame von Rosen for ever dispelled the illusion. She is one rather to make than to prevent a scandal, and she values none of those bribes—money, honours, or employment—with which the situation might be gilded. Indeed, as a person frankly bad, she pleased me, in the court of Grünewald, like a piece of nature.

The power of this man over the Princess is, therefore, without bounds. She has sacrificed to the adoration with which he has inspired her not only her marriage vow and every shred of public decency, but that vice of jealousy which is so much dearer to the female sex than either intrinsic honour or outward consideration. Nay, more: a young, although not a very attractive woman, and a princess both by birth and fact, she submits to the triumphant rivalry of one who might be her mother as to years, and who is so manifestly her inferior in station. This is one of the mysteries of the human heart. But the rage of illicit love, when it is

once indulged, appears to grow by feeding; and to a person of the character and temperament of this unfortunate young lady, almost any depth of degradation is within the reach of possibility.

CHAPTER III—THE PRINCE AND THE ENGLISH TRAVELLER

So far Otto read, with waxing indignation; and here his fury overflowed. He tossed the roll upon the table and stood up. 'This man,' he said, 'is a devil. A filthy imagination, an ear greedy of evil, a ponderous malignity of thought and language: I grow like him by the reading! Chancellor, where is this fellow lodged?'

'He was committed to the Flag Tower,' replied Greisengesang, 'in the Gamiani apartment.'

'Lead me to him,' said the Prince; and then, a thought striking him, 'Was it for that,' he asked, 'that I found so many sentries in the garden?'

'Your Highness, I am unaware,' answered Greisengesang, true to his policy. 'The disposition of the guards is a matter distinct from my functions.'

Otto turned upon the old man fiercely, but ere he had time to speak, Gotthold touched him on the arm. He swallowed his wrath with a great effort. 'It is well,' he said, taking the roll. 'Follow me to the Flag Tower.'

The Chancellor gathered himself together, and the two set forward. It was a long and complicated voyage; for the library was in the wing of the

new buildings, and the tower which carried the flag was in the old schloss upon the garden. By a great variety of stairs and corridors, they came out at last upon a patch of gravelled court; the garden peeped through a high grating with a flash of green; tall, old gabled buildings mounted on every side; the Flag Tower climbed, stage after stage, into the blue; and high over all, among the building daws, the yellow flag wavered in the wind. A sentinel at the foot of the tower stairs presented arms; another paced the first landing; and a third was stationed before the door of the extemporised prison.

‘We guard this mud-bag like a jewel,’ Otto sneered.

The Gamiani apartment was so called from an Italian doctor who had imposed on the credulity of a former prince. The rooms were large, airy, pleasant, and looked upon the garden; but the walls were of great thickness (for the tower was old), and the windows were heavily barred. The Prince, followed by the Chancellor, still trotting to keep up with him, brushed swiftly through the little library and the long saloon, and burst like a thunderbolt into the bedroom at the farther end. Sir John was finishing his toilet; a man of fifty, hard, uncompromising, able, with the eye and teeth of physical courage. He was unmoved by the irruption, and bowed with a sort of sneering ease.

‘To what am I to attribute the honour of this visit?’ he asked.

‘You have eaten my bread,’ replied Otto, ‘you have taken my hand, you have been received under my roof. When did I fail you in courtesy? What

have you asked that was not granted as to an honoured guest? And here, sir,' tapping fiercely on the manuscript, 'here is your return.'

'Your Highness has read my papers?' said the Baronet. 'I am honoured indeed. But the sketch is most imperfect. I shall now have much to add. I can say that the Prince, whom I had accused of idleness, is zealous in the department of police, taking upon himself those duties that are most distasteful. I shall be able to relate the burlesque incident of my arrest, and the singular interview with which you honour me at present. For the rest, I have already communicated with my Ambassador at Vienna; and unless you propose to murder me, I shall be at liberty, whether you please or not, within the week. For I hardly fancy the future empire of Grūnewald is yet ripe to go to war with England. I conceive I am a little more than quits. I owe you no explanation; yours has been the wrong. You, if you have studied my writing with intelligence, owe me a large debt of gratitude. And to conclude, as I have not yet finished my toilet, I imagine the courtesy of a turnkey to a prisoner would induce you to withdraw.'

There was some paper on the table, and Otto, sitting down, wrote a passport in the name of Sir John Crabtree.

'Affix the seal, Herr Cancellarius,' he said, in his most princely manner, as he rose.

Greisengesang produced a red portfolio, and affixed the seal in the unpoetic guise of an adhesive stamp; nor did his perturbed and clumsy

movements at all lessen the comedy of the performance. Sir John looked on with a malign enjoyment; and Otto chafed, regretting, when too late, the unnecessary royalty of his command and gesture. But at length the Chancellor had finished his piece of prestidigitation, and, without waiting for an order, had countersigned the passport. Thus regularised, he returned it to Otto with a bow.

‘You will now,’ said the Prince, ‘order one of my own carriages to be prepared; see it, with your own eyes, charged with Sir John’s effects, and have it waiting within the hour behind the Pheasant House. Sir John departs this morning for Vienna.’

The Chancellor took his elaborate departure.

‘Here, sir, is your passport,’ said Otto, turning to the Baronet. ‘I regret it from my heart that you have met inhospitable usage.’

‘Well, there will be no English war,’ returned Sir John.

‘Nay, sir,’ said Otto, ‘you surely owe me your civility. Matters are now changed, and we stand again upon the footing of two gentlemen. It was not I who ordered your arrest; I returned late last night from hunting; and as you cannot blame me for your imprisonment, you may even thank me for your freedom.’

‘And yet you read my papers,’ said the traveller shrewdly.

‘There, sir, I was wrong,’ returned Otto; ‘and for that I ask your pardon. You can scarce refuse it, for your own dignity, to one who is a plexus of weaknesses. Nor was the fault entirely mine. Had the papers been innocent, it would have been at most an indiscretion. Your own guilt is the sting of my offence.’

Sir John regarded Otto with an approving twinkle; then he bowed, but still in silence.

‘Well, sir, as you are now at your entire disposal, I have a favour to beg of your indulgence,’ continued the Prince. ‘I have to request that you will walk with me alone into the garden so soon as your convenience permits.’

‘From the moment that I am a free man,’ Sir John replied, this time with perfect courtesy, ‘I am wholly at your Highness’s command; and if you will excuse a rather summary toilet, I will even follow you, as I am.’

‘I thank you, sir,’ said Otto.

So without more delay, the Prince leading, the pair proceeded down through the echoing stairway of the tower, and out through the grating, into the ample air and sunshine of the morning, and among the terraces and flower-beds of the garden. They crossed the fish-pond, where the carp were leaping as thick as bees; they mounted, one after another, the various flights of stairs, snowed upon, as they went, with April

blossoms, and marching in time to the great orchestra of birds. Nor did Otto pause till they had reached the highest terrace of the garden. Here was a gate into the park, and hard by, under a tuft of laurel, a marble garden seat. Hence they looked down on the green tops of many elm-trees, where the rooks were busy; and, beyond that, upon the palace roof, and the yellow banner flying in the blue. I pray you to be seated, sir,' said Otto.

Sir John complied without a word; and for some seconds Otto walked to and fro before him, plunged in angry thought. The birds were all singing for a wager.

'Sir,' said the Prince at length, turning towards the Englishman, 'you are to me, except by the conventions of society, a perfect stranger. Of your character and wishes I am ignorant. I have never wittingly disoblged you. There is a difference in station, which I desire to waive. I would, if you still think me entitled to so much consideration—I would be regarded simply as a gentleman. Now, sir, I did wrong to glance at these papers, which I here return to you; but if curiosity be undignified, as I am free to own, falsehood is both cowardly and cruel. I opened your roll; and what did I find—what did I find about my wife; Lies!' he broke out. 'They are lies! There are not, so help me God! four words of truth in your intolerable libel! You are a man; you are old, and might be the girl's father; you are a gentleman; you are a scholar, and have learned refinement; and you rake together all this vulgar scandal, and propose to print it in a public book! Such is your chivalry! But, thank God, sir, she has still a husband. You say, sir,

in that paper in your hand, that I am a bad fencer; I have to request from you a lesson in the art. The park is close behind; yonder is the Pheasant House, where you will find your carriage; should I fall, you know, sir—you have written it in your paper—how little my movements are regarded; I am in the custom of disappearing; it will be one more disappearance; and long before it has awakened a remark, you may be safe across the border.'

'You will observe,' said Sir John, 'that what you ask is impossible.'

'And if I struck you?' cried the Prince, with a sudden menacing flash.

'It would be a cowardly blow,' returned the Baronet, unmoved, 'for it would make no change. I cannot draw upon a reigning sovereign.'

'And it is this man, to whom you dare not offer satisfaction, that you choose to insult!' cried Otto.

'Pardon me,' said the traveller, 'you are unjust. It is because you are a reigning sovereign that I cannot fight with you; and it is for the same reason that I have a right to criticise your action and your wife. You are in everything a public creature; you belong to the public, body and bone. You have with you the law, the muskets of the army, and the eyes of spies. We, on our side, have but one weapon—truth.'

'Truth!' echoed the Prince, with a gesture.

There was another silence.

‘Your Highness,’ said Sir John at last, ‘you must not expect grapes from a thistle. I am old and a cynic. Nobody cares a rush for me; and on the whole, after the present interview, I scarce know anybody that I like better than yourself. You see, I have changed my mind, and have the uncommon virtue to avow the change. I tear up this stuff before you, here in your own garden; I ask your pardon, I ask the pardon of the Princess; and I give you my word of honour as a gentleman and an old man, that when my book of travels shall appear it shall not contain so much as the name of Grūnewald. And yet it was a racy chapter! But had your Highness only read about the other courts! I am a carrion crow; but it is not my fault, after all, that the world is such a nauseous kennel.’

‘Sir,’ said Otto, ‘is the eye not jaundiced?’

‘Nay,’ cried the traveller, ‘very likely. I am one who goes sniffing; I am no poet. I believe in a better future for the world; or, at all accounts, I do most potently disbelieve in the present. Rotten eggs is the burthen of my song. But indeed, your Highness, when I meet with any merit, I do not think that I am slow to recognise it. This is a day that I shall still recall with gratitude, for I have found a sovereign with some manly virtues; and for once—old courtier and old radical as I am—it is from the heart and quite sincerely that I can request the honour of kissing your Highness’s hand?’

‘Nay, sir,’ said Otto, ‘to my heart!’

And the Englishman, taken at unawares, was clasped for a moment in the Prince's arms.

'And now, sir,' added Otto, 'there is the Pheasant House; close behind it you will find my carriage, which I pray you to accept. God speed you to Vienna!'

'In the impetuosity of youth,' replied Sir John, 'your Highness has overlooked one circumstance. I am still fasting.'

'Well, sir,' said Otto, smiling, 'you are your own master; you may go or stay. But I warn you, your friend may prove less powerful than your enemies. The Prince, indeed, is thoroughly on your side; he has all the will to help; but to whom do I speak?—you know better than I do, he is not alone in Grünewald.'

'There is a deal in position,' returned the traveller, gravely nodding.

'Gondremark loves to temporise; his policy is below ground, and he fears all open courses; and now that I have seen you act with so much spirit, I will cheerfully risk myself on your protection. Who knows? You may be yet the better man.'

'Do you indeed believe so?' cried the Prince. 'You put life into my heart!'

'I will give up sketching portraits,' said the Baronet. 'I am a blind

owl; I had misread you strangely. And yet remember this; a sprint is one thing, and to run all day another. For I still mistrust your constitution; the short nose, the hair and eyes of several complexions; no, they are diagnostic; and I must end, I see, as I began.'

'I am still a singing chambermaid?' said Otto.

'Nay, your Highness, I pray you to forget what I had written,' said Sir John; 'I am not like Pilate; and the chapter is no more. Bury it, if you love me.'

CHAPTER IV—WHILE THE PRINCE IS IN THE ANTE-ROOM . . .

Greatly comforted by the exploits of the morning, the Prince turned towards the Princess's ante-room, bent on a more difficult enterprise. The curtains rose before him, the usher called his name, and he entered the room with an exaggeration of his usual mincing and airy dignity. There were about a score of persons waiting, principally ladies; it was one of the few societies in Grünewald where Otto knew himself to be popular; and while a maid of honour made her exit by a side door to announce his arrival to the Princess, he moved round the apartment, collecting homage and bestowing compliments with friendly grace. Had this been the sum of his duties, he had been an admirable monarch. Lady after lady was impartially honoured by his attention.

'Madam,' he said to one, 'how does this happen? I find you daily more adorable.'

'And your Highness daily browner,' replied the lady. 'We began equal; O, there I will be bold: we have both beautiful complexions. But while I study mine, your Highness tans himself.'

'A perfect negro, madam; and what so fitly—being beauty's slave?' said Otto.—'Madame Grafinski, when is our next play? I have just heard that I am a bad actor.'

'O ciel!' cried Madame Grafinski. 'Who could venture? What a bear!'

'An excellent man, I can assure you,' returned Otto.

'O, never! O, is it possible!' fluted the lady. 'Your Highness plays like an angel.'

'You must be right, madam; who could speak falsely and yet look so charming?' said the Prince. 'But this gentleman, it seems, would have preferred me playing like an actor.'

A sort of hum, a falsetto, feminine cooing, greeted the tiny sally; and Otto expanded like a peacock. This warm atmosphere of women and flattery and idle chatter pleased him to the marrow.

'Madame von Eisenthal, your coiffure is delicious,' he remarked.

'Every one was saying so,' said one.

'If I have pleased Prince Charming?' And Madame von Eisenthal swept him a deep curtsy with a killing glance of adoration.

'It is new?' he asked. 'Vienna fashion.'

'Mint new,' replied the lady, 'for your Highness's return. I felt young this morning; it was a premonition. But why, Prince, do you ever leave us?'

'For the pleasure of the return,' said Otto. 'I am like a dog; I must bury my bone, and then come back to great upon it.'

'O, a bone! Fie, what a comparison! You have brought back the manners of the wood,' returned the lady.

'Madam, it is what the dog has dearest,' said the Prince. 'But I observe Madame von Rosen.'

And Otto, leaving the group to which he had been piping, stepped towards the embrasure of a window where a lady stood.

The Countess von Rosen had hitherto been silent, and a thought depressed, but on the approach of Otto she began to brighten. She was tall, slim as a nymph, and of a very airy carriage; and her face, which was already beautiful in repose, lightened and changed, flashed into smiles, and glowed with lovely colour at the touch of animation. She was a good vocalist; and, even in speech, her voice commanded a great range of changes, the low notes rich with tenor quality, the upper ringing, on the brink of laughter, into music. A gem of many facets and variable hues of fire; a woman who withheld the better portion of her beauty, and then, in a caressing second, flashed it like a weapon full on the beholder; now merely a tall figure and a sallow handsome face, with the evidences of a reckless temper; anon opening like a flower to life and colour, mirth and tenderness:—Madame von Rosen had always a dagger in reserve for the despatch of ill-assured admirers. She met Otto with the dart of tender

gaiety.

'You have come to me at last, Prince Cruel,' she said. 'Butterfly!

Well, and am I not to kiss your hand?' she added.

'Madam, it is I who must kiss yours.' And Otto bowed and kissed it.

'You deny me every indulgence,' she said, smiling.

'And now what news in Court?' inquired the Prince. 'I come to you for my gazette.'

'Ditch-water!' she replied. 'The world is all asleep, grown grey in slumber; I do not remember any waking movement since quite an eternity; and the last thing in the nature of a sensation was the last time my governess was allowed to box my ears. But yet I do myself and your unfortunate enchanted palace some injustice. Here is the last—O positively!' And she told him the story from behind her fan, with many glances, many cunning strokes of the narrator's art. The others had drawn away, for it was understood that Madame von Rosen was in favour with the Prince. None the less, however, did the Countess lower her voice at times to within a semitone of whispering; and the pair leaned together over the narrative.

'Do you know,' said Otto, laughing, 'you are the only entertaining woman on this earth!'

'O, you have found out so much,' she cried.

'Yes, madam, I grow wiser with advancing years,' he returned.

'Years,' she repeated. 'Do you name the traitors? I do not believe in years; the calendar is a delusion.'

'You must be right, madam,' replied the Prince. 'For six years that we have been good friends, I have observed you to grow younger.'

'Flatterer!' cried she, and then with a change, 'But why should I say so,' she added, 'when I protest I think the same? A week ago I had a council with my father director, the glass; and the glass replied, "Not yet!" I confess my face in this way once a month. O! a very solemn moment. Do you know what I shall do when the mirror answers, "Now"?''

'I cannot guess,' said he.

'No more can I,' returned the Countess. 'There is such a choice! Suicide, gambling, a nunnery, a volume of memoirs, or politics—the last, I am afraid.'

'It is a dull trade,' said Otto.

'Nay,' she replied, 'it is a trade I rather like. It is, after all, first cousin to gossip, which no one can deny to be amusing. For instance, if I were to tell you that the Princess and the Baron rode out

together daily to inspect the cannon, it is either a piece of politics or scandal, as I turn my phrase. I am the alchemist that makes the transmutation. They have been everywhere together since you left,' she continued, brightening as she saw Otto darken; 'that is a poor snippet of malicious gossip—and they were everywhere cheered—and with that addition all becomes political intelligence.'

'Let us change the subject,' said Otto.

'I was about to propose it,' she replied, 'or rather to pursue the politics. Do you know? this war is popular—popular to the length of cheering Princess Seraphina.'

'All things, madam, are possible,' said the Prince; and this among others, that we may be going into war, but I give you my word of honour I do not know with whom.'

'And you put up with it?' she cried. 'I have no pretensions to morality; and I confess I have always abominated the lamb, and nourished a romantic feeling for the wolf. O, be done with lambiness! Let us see there is a prince, for I am weary of the distaff.'

'Madam,' said Otto, 'I thought you were of that faction.'

'I should be of yours, mon Prince, if you had one,' she retorted. 'Is it true that you have no ambition? There was a man once in England whom

they call the kingmaker. Do you know,' she added, 'I fancy I could make a prince?'

'Some day, madam,' said Otto, 'I may ask you to help make a farmer.'

'Is that a riddle?' asked the Countess.

'It is,' replied the Prince, 'and a very good one too.'

'Tit for tat. I will ask you another,' she returned. 'Where is Gondremark?'

'The Prime Minister? In the prime-ministry, no doubt,' said Otto.

'Precisely,' said the Countess; and she pointed with her fan to the door of the Princess's apartments. 'You and I, mon Prince, are in the ante-room. You think me unkind,' she added. 'Try me and you will see. Set me a task, put me a question; there is no enormity I am not capable of doing to oblige you, and no secret that I am not ready to betray.'

'Nay, madam, but I respect my friend too much,' he answered, kissing her hand. 'I would rather remain ignorant of all. We fraternise like foemen soldiers at the outposts, but let each be true to his own army.'

'Ah,' she cried, 'if all men were generous like you, it would be worth while to be a woman!' Yet, judging by her looks, his generosity, if anything, had disappointed her; she seemed to seek a remedy, and, having

found it, brightened once more. 'And now,' she said, 'may I dismiss my sovereign? This is rebellion and a cas pendable; but what am I to do? My bear is jealous!'

'Madam, enough!' cried Otto. 'Ahasuerus reaches you the sceptre; more, he will obey you in all points. I should have been a dog to come to whistling.'

And so the Prince departed, and fluttered round Grafinski and von Eisenthal. But the Countess knew the use of her offensive weapons, and had left a pleasant arrow in the Prince's heart. That Gondremark was jealous—here was an agreeable revenge! And Madame von Rosen, as the occasion of the jealousy, appeared to him in a new light.

CHAPTER V—. . . GONDREMARK IS IN MY LADY'S CHAMBER

The Countess von Rosen spoke the truth. The great Prime Minister of Grünewald was already closeted with Seraphina. The toilet was over; and the Princess, tastefully arrayed, sat face to face with a tall mirror. Sir John's description was unkindly true, true in terms and yet a libel, a misogynistic masterpiece. Her forehead was perhaps too high, but it became her; her figure somewhat stooped, but every detail was formed and finished like a gem; her hand, her foot, her ear, the set of her comely head, were all dainty and accordant; if she was not beautiful, she was vivid, changeful, coloured, and pretty with a thousand various prettinesses; and her eyes, if they indeed rolled too consciously, yet rolled to purpose. They were her most attractive feature, yet they continually bore eloquent false witness to her thoughts; for while she herself, in the depths of her immature, unsoftened heart, was given altogether to manlike ambition and the desire of power, the eyes were by turns bold, inviting, fiery, melting, and artful, like the eyes of a rapacious siren. And artful, in a sense, she was. Chafing that she was not a man, and could not shine by action, she had conceived a woman's part, of answerable domination; she sought to subjugate for by-ends, to rain influence and be fancy free; and, while she loved not man, loved to see man obey her. It is a common girl's ambition. Such was perhaps that lady of the glove, who sent her lover to the lions. But the snare is laid alike for male and female, and the world most artfully contrived.

Near her, in a low chair, Gondremark had arranged his limbs into a cat-like attitude, high-shouldered, stooping, and submiss. The formidable blue jowl of the man, and the dull bilious eye, set perhaps a higher value on his evident desire to please. His face was marked by capacity, temper, and a kind of bold, piratical dishonesty which it would be calumnious to call deceit. His manners, as he smiled upon the Princess, were over-fine, yet hardly elegant.

‘Possibly,’ said the Baron, ‘I should now proceed to take my leave. I must not keep my sovereign in the ante-room. Let us come at once to a decision.’

‘It cannot, cannot be put off?’ she asked.

‘It is impossible,’ answered Gondremark. ‘Your Highness sees it for herself. In the earlier stages, we might imitate the serpent; but for the ultimatum, there is no choice but to be bold like lions. Had the Prince chosen to remain away, it had been better; but we have gone too far forward to delay.’

‘What can have brought him?’ she cried. ‘To-day of all days?’

‘The marplot, madam, has the instinct of his nature,’ returned Gondremark. ‘But you exaggerate the peril. Think, madam, how far we have prospered, and against what odds! Shall a Featherhead?—but no!’ And he blew upon his fingers lightly with a laugh.

‘Featherhead,’ she replied, ‘is still the Prince of Grünewald.’

‘On your sufferance only, and so long as you shall please to be indulgent,’ said the Baron. ‘There are rights of nature; power to the powerful is the law. If he shall think to cross your destiny—well, you have heard of the brazen and the earthen pot.’

‘Do you call me pot? You are ungallant, Baron,’ laughed the Princess.

‘Before we are done with your glory, I shall have called you by many different titles,’ he replied.

The girl flushed with pleasure. ‘But Frédéric is still the Prince, monsieur le flatteur,’ she said. ‘You do not propose a revolution?—you of all men?’

‘Dear madam, when it is already made!’ he cried. ‘The Prince reigns indeed in the almanac; but my Princess reigns and rules.’ And he looked at her with a fond admiration that made the heart of Seraphina swell. Looking on her huge slave, she drank the intoxicating joys of power. Meanwhile he continued, with that sort of massive archness that so ill became him, ‘She has but one fault; there is but one danger in the great career that I foresee for her. May I name it? may I be so irreverent? It is in herself—her heart is soft.’

‘Her courage is faint, Baron,’ said the Princess. ‘Suppose we have judged ill, suppose we were defeated?’

'Defeated, madam?' returned the Baron, with a touch of ill-humour. 'Is the dog defeated by the hare? Our troops are all cantoned along the frontier; in five hours the vanguard of five thousand bayonets shall be hammering on the gates of Brandenau; and in all Gerolstein there are not fifteen hundred men who can manoeuvre. It is as simple as a sum. There can be no resistance.'

'It is no great exploit,' she said. 'Is that what you call glory? It is like beating a child.'

'The courage, madam, is diplomatic,' he replied. 'We take a grave step; we fix the eyes of Europe, for the first time, on Grünewald; and in the negotiations of the next three months, mark me, we stand or fall. It is there, madam, that I shall have to depend upon your counsels,' he added, almost gloomily. 'If I had not seen you at work, if I did not know the fertility of your mind, I own I should tremble for the consequence. But it is in this field that men must recognise their inability. All the great negotiators, when they have not been women, have had women at their elbows. Madame de Pompadour was ill served; she had not found her Gondremark; but what a mighty politician! Catherine de' Medici, too, what justice of sight, what readiness of means, what elasticity against defeat! But alas! madam, her Featherheads were her own children; and she had that one touch of vulgarity, that one trait of the good-wife, that she suffered family ties and affections to confine her liberty.'

These singular views of history, strictly ad usum Seraphinæ, did not weave their usual soothing spell over the Princess. It was plain that she had taken a momentary distaste to her own resolutions; for she continued to oppose her counsellor, looking upon him out of half-closed eyes and with the shadow of a sneer upon her lips. 'What boys men are!' she said; 'what lovers of big words! Courage, indeed! If you had to scour pans, Herr Von Gondremark, you would call it, I suppose, Domestic Courage?'

'I would, madam,' said the Baron stoutly, 'if I scoured them well. I would put a good name upon a virtue; you will not overdo it: they are not so enchanting in themselves.'

'Well, but let me see,' she said. 'I wish to understand your courage. Why we asked leave, like children! Our grannie in Berlin, our uncle in Vienna, the whole family, have patted us on the head and sent us forward. Courage? I wonder when I hear you!'

'My Princess is unlike herself,' returned the Baron. 'She has forgotten where the peril lies. True, we have received encouragement on every hand; but my Princess knows too well on what untenable conditions; and she knows besides how, in the publicity of the diet, these whispered conferences are forgotten and disowned. The danger is very real'—he raged inwardly at having to blow the very coal he had been quenching—'none the less real in that it is not precisely military, but for that reason the easier to be faced. Had we to count upon your troops, although I share your Highness's expectations of the conduct of

Alvenau, we cannot forget that he has not been proved in chief command. But where negotiation is concerned, the conduct lies with us; and with your help, I laugh at danger.'

'It may be so,' said Seraphina, sighing. 'It is elsewhere that I see danger. The people, these abominable people—suppose they should instantly rebel? What a figure we should make in the eyes of Europe to have undertaken an invasion while my own throne was tottering to its fall!'

'Nay, madam,' said Gondremark, smiling, 'here you are beneath yourself. What is it that feeds their discontent? What but the taxes? Once we have seized Gerolstein, the taxes are remitted, the sons return covered with renown, the houses are adorned with pillage, each tastes his little share of military glory, and behold us once again a happy family! "Ay," they will say, in each other's long ears, "the Princess knew what she was about; she was in the right of it; she has a head upon her shoulders; and here we are, you see, better off than before." But why should I say all this? It is what my Princess pointed out to me herself; it was by these reasons that she converted me to this adventure.'

'I think, Herr von Gondremark,' said Seraphina, somewhat tartly, 'you often attribute your own sagacity to your Princess.'

For a second Gondremark staggered under the shrewdness of the attack; the next, he had perfectly recovered. 'Do I?' he said. 'It is very possible. I have observed a similar tendency in your Highness.'

It was so openly spoken, and appeared so just, that Seraphina breathed again. Her vanity had been alarmed, and the greatness of the relief improved her spirits. 'Well,' she said, 'all this is little to the purpose. We are keeping Frédéric without, and I am still ignorant of our line of battle. Come, co-admiral, let us consult. . . . How am I to receive him now? And what are we to do if he should appear at the council?'

'Now,' he answered. 'I shall leave him to my Princess for just now! I have seen her at work. Send him off to his theatricals! But in all gentleness,' he added. 'Would it, for instance, would it displease my sovereign to affect a headache?'

'Never!' said she. 'The woman who can manage, like the man who can fight, must never shrink from an encounter. The knight must not disgrace his weapons.'

'Then let me pray my belle dame sans merci,' he returned, 'to affect the only virtue that she lacks. Be pitiful to the poor young man; affect an interest in his hunting; be weary of politics; find in his society, as it were, a grateful repose from dry considerations. Does my Princess authorise the line of battle?'

'Well, that is a trifle,' answered Seraphina. 'The council—there is the point.'

'The council?' cried Gondremark. 'Permit me, madam.' And he rose and proceeded to flutter about the room, counterfeiting Otto both in voice and gesture not unhappily. 'What is there to-day, Herr von Gondremark? Ah, Herr Cancellarius, a new wig! You cannot deceive me; I know every wig in Grünewald; I have the sovereign's eye. What are these papers about? O, I see. O, certainly. Surely, surely. I wager none of you remarked that wig. By all means. I know nothing about that. Dear me, are there as many as all that? Well, you can sign them; you have the procuration. You see, Herr Cancellarius, I knew your wig. And so,' concluded Gondremark, resuming his own voice, 'our sovereign, by the particular grace of God, enlightens and supports his privy councillors.'

But when the Baron turned to Seraphina for approval, he found her frozen. 'You are pleased to be witty, Herr von Gondremark,' she said, 'and have perhaps forgotten where you are. But these rehearsals are apt to be misleading. Your master, the Prince of Grünewald, is sometimes more exacting.'

Gondremark cursed her in his soul. Of all injured vanities, that of the reprov'd buffoon is the most savage; and when grave issues are involved, these petty stabs become unbearable. But Gondremark was a man of iron; he showed nothing; he did not even, like the common trickster, retreat because he had presumed, but held to his point bravely. 'Madam,' he said, 'if, as you say, he prove exacting, we must take the bull by the horns.'

'We shall see,' she said, and she arranged her skirt like one about to

rise. Temper, scorn, disgust, all the more acrid feelings, became her like jewels; and she now looked her best.

‘Pray God they quarrel,’ thought Gondremark. ‘The damned minx may fail me yet, unless they quarrel. It is time to let him in. Zz—fight, dogs!’ Consequent on these reflections, he bent a stiff knee and chivalrously kissed the Princess’s hand. ‘My Princess,’ he said, ‘must now dismiss her servant. I have much to arrange against the hour of council.’

‘Go,’ she said, and rose.

And as Gondremark tripped out of a private door, she touched a bell, and gave the order to admit the Prince.

CHAPTER VI—THE PRINCE DELIVERS A LECTURE ON MARRIAGE, WITH PRACTICAL

ILLUSTRATIONS OF DIVORCE

With what a world of excellent intentions Otto entered his wife's cabinet! how fatherly, how tender! how morally affecting were the words he had prepared! Nor was Seraphina unamiably inclined. Her usual fear of Otto as a marplot in her great designs was now swallowed up in a passing distrust of the designs themselves. For Gondremark, besides, she had conceived an angry horror. In her heart she did not like the Baron. Behind his impudent servility, behind the devotion which, with indelicate delicacy, he still forced on her attention, she divined the grossness of his nature. So a man may be proud of having tamed a bear, and yet sicken at his captive's odour. And above all, she had certain jealous intimations that the man was false and the deception double. True, she falsely trifled with his love; but he, perhaps, was only trifling with her vanity. The insolence of his late mimicry, and the odium of her own position as she sat and watched it, lay besides like a load upon her conscience. She met Otto almost with a sense of guilt, and yet she welcomed him as a deliverer from ugly things.

But the wheels of an interview are at the mercy of a thousand ruts; and even at Otto's entrance, the first jolt occurred. Gondremark, he saw, was gone; but there was the chair drawn close for consultation; and it pained him not only that this man had been received, but that he should

depart with such an air of secrecy. Struggling with this twinge, it was somewhat sharply that he dismissed the attendant who had brought him in.

'You make yourself at home, chez moi,' she said, a little ruffled both by his tone of command and by the glance he had thrown upon the chair.

'Madam,' replied Otto, 'I am here so seldom that I have almost the rights of a stranger.'

'You choose your own associates, Frédéric,' she said.

'I am here to speak of it,' he returned. 'It is now four years since we were married; and these four years, Seraphina, have not perhaps been happy either for you or for me. I am well aware I was unsuitable to be your husband. I was not young, I had no ambition, I was a trifler; and you despised me, I dare not say unjustly. But to do justice on both sides, you must bear in mind how I have acted. When I found it amused you to play the part of Princess on this little stage, did I not immediately resign to you my box of toys, this Grünewald? And when I found I was distasteful as a husband, could any husband have been less intrusive? You will tell me that I have no feelings, no preference, and thus no credit; that I go before the wind; that all this was in my character. And indeed, one thing is true, that it is easy, too easy, to leave things undone. But Seraphina, I begin to learn it is not always wise. If I were too old and too uncongenial for your husband, I should still have remembered that I was the Prince of that country to which you came, a visitor and a child. In that relation also there were duties,

and these duties I have not performed.'

To claim the advantage of superior age is to give sure offence. 'Duty!' laughed Seraphina, 'and on your lips, Frédéric! You make me laugh. What fancy is this? Go, flirt with the maids and be a prince in Dresden china, as you look. Enjoy yourself, mon enfant, and leave duty and the state to us.'

The plural grated on the Prince. 'I have enjoyed myself too much,' he said, 'since enjoyment is the word. And yet there were much to say upon the other side. You must suppose me desperately fond of hunting. But indeed there were days when I found a great deal of interest in what it was courtesy to call my government. And I have always had some claim to taste; I could tell live happiness from dull routine; and between hunting, and the throne of Austria, and your society, my choice had never wavered, had the choice been mine. You were a girl, a bud, when you were given me—'

'Heavens!' she cried, 'is this to be a love-scene?'

'I am never ridiculous,' he said; 'it is my only merit; and you may be certain this shall be a scene of marriage à la mode. But when I remember the beginning, it is bare courtesy to speak in sorrow. Be just, madam: you would think me strangely uncivil to recall these days without the decency of a regret. Be yet a little juster, and own, if only in complaisance, that you yourself regret that past.'

'I have nothing to regret,' said the Princess. 'You surprise me. I thought you were so happy.'

'Happy and happy, there are so many hundred ways,' said Otto. 'A man may

be happy in revolt; he may be happy in sleep; wine, change, and travel make him happy; virtue, they say, will do the like—I have not tried; and they say also that in old, quiet, and habitual marriages there is yet another happiness. Happy, yes; I am happy if you like; but I will tell you frankly, I was happier when I brought you home.'

'Well,' said the Princess, not without constraint, 'it seems you changed your mind.'

'Not I,' returned Otto, 'I never changed. Do you remember, Seraphina, on our way home, when you saw the roses in the lane, and I got out and plucked them? It was a narrow lane between great trees; the sunset at the end was all gold, and the rooks were flying overhead. There were nine, nine red roses; you gave me a kiss for each, and I told myself that every rose and every kiss should stand for a year of love. Well, in eighteen months there was an end. But do you fancy, Seraphina, that my heart has altered?'

'I am sure I cannot tell,' she said, like an automaton.

'It has not,' the Prince continued. 'There is nothing ridiculous, even from a husband, in a love that owns itself unhappy and that asks no more.'

I built on sand; pardon me, I do not breathe a reproach—I built, I suppose, upon my own infirmities; but I put my heart in the building, and it still lies among the ruins.’

‘How very poetical!’ she said, with a little choking laugh, unknown relentings, unfamiliar softnesses, moving within her. ‘What would you be at?’ she added, hardening her voice.

‘I would be at this,’ he answered; ‘and hard it is to say. I would be at this:—Seraphina, I am your husband after all, and a poor fool that loves you. Understand,’ he cried almost fiercely, ‘I am no suppliant husband; what your love refuses I would scorn to receive from your pity. I do not ask, I would not take it. And for jealousy, what ground have I? A dog-in-the-manger jealousy is a thing the dogs may laugh at. But at least, in the world’s eye, I am still your husband; and I ask you if you treat me fairly? I keep to myself, I leave you free, I have given you in everything your will. What do you in return? I find, Seraphina, that you have been too thoughtless. But between persons such as we are, in our conspicuous station, particular care and a particular courtesy are owing. Scandal is perhaps not easy to avoid; but it is hard to bear.’

‘Scandal!’ she cried, with a deep breath. ‘Scandal! It is for this you have been driving!’

‘I have tried to tell you how I feel,’ he replied. ‘I have told you that I love you—love you in vain—a bitter thing for a husband; I have laid myself open that I might speak without offence. And now that I have

begun, I will go on and finish.'

'I demand it,' she said. 'What is this about?'

Otto flushed crimson. 'I have to say what I would fain not,' he answered. 'I counsel you to see less of Gondremark.'

'Of Gondremark? And why?' she asked.

'Your intimacy is the ground of scandal, madam,' said Otto, firmly enough—'of a scandal that is agony to me, and would be crushing to your parents if they knew it.'

'You are the first to bring me word of it,' said she. 'I thank you.'

'You have perhaps cause,' he replied. 'Perhaps I am the only one among your friends—'

'O, leave my friends alone,' she interrupted. 'My friends are of a different stamp. You have come to me here and made a parade of sentiment. When have I last seen you? I have governed your kingdom for you in the meanwhile, and there I got no help. At last, when I am weary with a man's work, and you are weary of your playthings, you return to make me a scene of conjugal reproaches—the grocer and his wife! The positions are too much reversed; and you should understand, at least, that I cannot at the same time do your work of government and behave myself like a little girl. Scandal is the atmosphere in which we live,

we princes; it is what a prince should know. You play an odious part.
Do you believe this rumour?’

‘Madam, should I be here?’ said Otto.

‘It is what I want to know!’ she cried, the tempest of her scorn
increasing. ‘Suppose you did—I say, suppose you did believe it?’

‘I should make it my business to suppose the contrary,’ he answered.

‘I thought so. O, you are made of baseness!’ said she.

‘Madam,’ he cried, roused at last, ‘enough of this. You wilfully
misunderstand my attitude; you outwear my patience. In the name of your
parents, in my own name, I summon you to be more circumspect.’

‘Is this a request, monsieur mon mari?’ she demanded.

‘Madam, if I chose, I might command,’ said Otto.

‘You might, sir, as the law stands, make me prisoner,’ returned
Seraphina. ‘Short of that you will gain nothing.’

‘You will continue as before?’ he asked.

‘Precisely as before,’ said she. ‘As soon as this comedy is over, I
shall request the Freiherr von Gondremark to visit me. Do you

understand?’ she added, rising. ‘For my part, I have done.’

‘I will then ask the favour of your hand, madam,’ said Otto, palpitating in every pulse with anger. ‘I have to request that you will visit in my society another part of my poor house. And reassure yourself—it will not take long—and it is the last obligation that you shall have the chance to lay me under.’

‘The last?’ she cried. ‘Most joyfully?’

She offered her hand, and he took it; on each side with an elaborate affectation, each inwardly incandescent. He led her out by the private door, following where Gondremark had passed; they threaded a corridor or two, little frequented, looking on a court, until they came at last into the Prince’s suite. The first room was an armoury, hung all about with the weapons of various countries, and looking forth on the front terrace.

‘Have you brought me here to slay me?’ she inquired.

‘I have brought you, madam, only to pass on,’ replied Otto.

Next they came to a library, where an old chamberlain sat half asleep.

He rose and bowed before the princely couple, asking for orders.

‘You will attend us here,’ said Otto.

The next stage was a gallery of pictures, where Seraphina’s portrait hung

conspicuous, dressed for the chase, red roses in her hair, as Otto, in the first months of marriage, had directed. He pointed to it without a word; she raised her eyebrows in silence; and they passed still forward into a matted corridor where four doors opened. One led to Otto's bedroom; one was the private door to Seraphina's. And here, for the first time, Otto left her hand, and stepping forward, shot the bolt.

'It is long, madam,' said he, 'since it was bolted on the other side.'

'One was effectual,' returned the Princess. 'Is this all?'

'Shall I reconduct you?' he asking, bowing.

'I should prefer,' she asked, in ringing tones, 'the conduct of the Freiherr von Gondremark.'

Otto summoned the chamberlain. 'If the Freiherr von Gondremark is in the palace,' he said, 'bid him attend the Princess here.' And when the official had departed, 'Can I do more to serve you, madam?' the Prince asked.

'Thank you, no. I have been much amused,' she answered.

'I have now,' continued Otto, 'given you your liberty complete. This has been for you a miserable marriage.'

'Miserable!' said she.

'It has been made light to you; it shall be lighter still,' continued the Prince. 'But one thing, madam, you must still continue to bear—my father's name, which is now yours. I leave it in your hands. Let me see you, since you will have no advice of mine, apply the more attention of your own to bear it worthily.'

'Herr von Gondremark is long in coming,' she remarked.

'O Seraphina, Seraphina!' he cried. And that was the end of their interview.

She tripped to a window and looked out; and a little after, the chamberlain announced the Freiherr von Gondremark, who entered with something of a wild eye and changed complexion, confounded, as he was, at this unusual summons. The Princess faced round from the window with a pearly smile; nothing but her heightened colour spoke of discomposure.

Otto was pale, but he was otherwise master of himself.

'Herr von Gondremark,' said he, 'oblige me so far: reconduct the Princess to her own apartment.'

The Baron, still all at sea, offered his hand, which was smilingly accepted, and the pair sailed forth through the picture-gallery.

As soon as they were gone, and Otto knew the length and breadth of his

miscarriage, and how he had done the contrary of all that he intended, he stood stupefied. A fiasco so complete and sweeping was laughable, even to himself; and he laughed aloud in his wrath. Upon this mood there followed the sharpest violence of remorse; and to that again, as he recalled his provocation, anger succeeded afresh. So he was tossed in spirit; now bewailing his inconsequence and lack of temper, now flaming up in white-hot indignation and a noble pity for himself.

He paced his apartment like a leopard. There was danger in Otto, for a flash. Like a pistol, he could kill at one moment, and the next he might he kicked aside. But just then, as he walked the long floors in his alternate humours, tearing his handkerchief between his hands, he was strung to his top note, every nerve attent. The pistol, you might say, was charged. And when jealousy from time to time fetched him a lash across the tenderest of his feeling, and sent a string of her fire-pictures glancing before his mind's eye, the contraction of his face was even dangerous. He disregarded jealousy's inventions, yet they stung. In this height of anger, he still preserved his faith in Seraphina's innocence; but the thought of her possible misconduct was the bitterest ingredient in his pot of sorrow.

There came a knock at the door, and the chamberlain brought him a note. He took it and ground it in his hand, continuing his march, continuing his bewildered thoughts; and some minutes had gone by before the circumstance came clearly to his mind. Then he paused and opened it. It was a pencil scratch from Gotthold, thus conceived:

'The council is privately summoned at once.

G. v. H.'

If the council was thus called before the hour, and that privately, it was plain they feared his interference. Feared: here was a sweet thought. Gotthold, too—Gotthold, who had always used and regarded him as a mere peasant lad, had now been at the pains to warn him; Gotthold looked for something at his hands. Well, none should be disappointed; the Prince, too long beshadowed by the uxorious lover, should now return and shine. He summoned his valet, repaired the disorder of his appearance with elaborate care; and then, curled and scented and adorned, Prince Charming in every line, but with a twitching nostril, he set forth unattended for the council.

CHAPTER VII—THE PRINCE DISSOLVES THE COUNCIL

It was as Gotthold wrote. The liberation of Sir John, Greisengesang's uneasy narrative, last of all, the scene between Seraphina and the Prince, had decided the conspirators to take a step of bold timidity. There had been a period of bustle, liveried messengers speeding here and there with notes; and at half-past ten in the morning, about an hour before its usual hour, the council of Grünewald sat around the board.

It was not a large body. At the instance of Gondremark, it had undergone a strict purgation, and was now composed exclusively of tools. Three secretaries sat at a side-table. Seraphina took the head; on her right was the Baron, on her left Greisengesang; below these Grafinski the treasurer, Count Eisenthal, a couple of non-combatants, and, to the surprise of all, Gotthold. He had been named a privy councillor by Otto, merely that he might profit by the salary; and as he was never known to attend a meeting, it had occurred to nobody to cancel his appointment. His present appearance was the more ominous, coming when it did. Gondremark scowled upon him; and the non-combatant on his right, intercepting this black look, edged away from one who was so clearly out of favour.

'The hour presses, your Highness,' said the Baron; 'may we proceed to business?'

'At once,' replied Seraphina.

'Your Highness will pardon me,' said Gotthold; 'but you are still, perhaps, unacquainted with the fact that Prince Otto has returned.'

'The Prince will not attend the council,' replied Seraphina, with a momentary blush. 'The despatches, Herr Cancellarius? There is one for Gerolstein?'

A secretary brought a paper.

'Here, madam,' said Greisengesang. 'Shall I read it?'

'We are all familiar with its terms,' replied Gondremark. 'Your Highness approves?'

'Unhesitatingly,' said Seraphina.

'It may then be held as read,' concluded the Baron. 'Will your Highness sign?'

The Princess did so; Gondremark, Eisenthal, and one of the non-combatants followed suit; and the paper was then passed across the table to the librarian. He proceeded leisurely to read.

'We have no time to spare, Herr Doctor,' cried the Baron brutally. 'If you do not choose to sign on the authority of your sovereign, pass it on.'

Or you may leave the table,' he added, his temper ripping out.

'I decline your invitation, Herr von Gondremark; and my sovereign, as I continue to observe with regret, is still absent from the board,' replied the Doctor calmly; and he resumed the perusal of the paper, the rest chafing and exchanging glances. 'Madame and gentlemen,' he said, at last, 'what I hold in my hand is simply a declaration of war.'

'Simply,' said Seraphina, flashing defiance.

'The sovereign of this country is under the same roof with us,' continued Gotthold, 'and I insist he shall be summoned. It is needless to adduce my reasons; you are all ashamed at heart of this projected treachery.'

The council waved like a sea. There were various outcries.

'You insult the Princess,' thundered Gondremark.

'I maintain my protest,' replied Gotthold.

At the height of this confusion the door was thrown open; an usher announced, 'Gentlemen, the Prince!' and Otto, with his most excellent bearing, entered the apartment. It was like oil upon the troubled waters; every one settled instantly into his place, and Griesengesang, to give himself a countenance, became absorbed in the arrangement of his papers; but in their eagerness to dissemble, one and all neglected to rise.

'Gentlemen,' said the Prince, pausing.

They all got to their feet in a moment; and this reproof still further demoralised the weaker brethren.

The Prince moved slowly towards the lower end of the table; then he paused again, and, fixing his eye on Greisengesang, 'How comes it, Herr Cancellarius,' he asked, 'that I have received no notice of the change of hour?'

'Your Highness,' replied the Chancellor, 'her Highness the Princess . . .'
' and there paused.

'I understood,' said Seraphina, taking him up, 'that you did not purpose to be present.'

Their eyes met for a second, and Seraphina's fell; but her anger only burned the brighter for that private shame.

'And now, gentlemen,' said Otto, taking his chair, 'I pray you to be seated. I have been absent: there are doubtless some arrears; but ere we proceed to business, Herr Grafinski, you will direct four thousand crowns to be sent to me at once. Make a note, if you please,' he added, as the treasurer still stared in wonder.

'Four thousand crowns?' asked Seraphina. 'Pray, for what?'

'Madam,' returned Otto, smiling, 'for my own purposes.'

Gondremark spurred up Grafinski underneath the table.

'If your Highness will indicate the destination . . . ' began the puppet.

'You are not here, sir, to interrogate your Prince,' said Otto.

Grafinski looked for help to his commander; and Gondremark came to his aid, in suave and measured tones.

'Your Highness may reasonably be surprised,' he said; 'and Herr Grafinski, although I am convinced he is clear of the intention of offending, would have perhaps done better to begin with an explanation. The resources of the state are at the present moment entirely swallowed up, or, as we hope to prove, wisely invested. In a month from now, I do not question we shall be able to meet any command your Highness may lay upon us; but at this hour I fear that, even in so small a matter, he must prepare himself for disappointment. Our zeal is no less, although our power may be inadequate.'

'How much, Herr Grafinski, have we in the treasury?' asked Otto.

'Your Highness,' protested the treasurer, 'we have immediate need of every crown.'

'I think, sir, you evade me,' flashed the Prince; and then turning to the side-table, 'Mr. Secretary,' he added, 'bring me, if you please, the treasury docket.'

Herr Grafinski became deadly pale; the Chancellor, expecting his own turn, was probably engaged in prayer; Gondremark was watching like a ponderous cat. Gotthold, on his part, looked on with wonder at his cousin; he was certainly showing spirit, but what, in such a time of gravity, was all this talk of money? and why should he waste his strength upon a personal issue?

'I find,' said Otto, with his finger on the docket, 'that we have 20,000 crowns in case.'

'That is exact, your Highness,' replied the Baron. 'But our liabilities, all of which are happily not liquid, amount to a far larger sum; and at the present point of time it would be morally impossible to divert a single florin. Essentially, the case is empty. We have, already presented, a large note for material of war.'

'Material of war?' exclaimed Otto, with an excellent assumption of surprise. 'But if my memory serves me right, we settled these accounts in January.'

'There have been further orders,' the Baron explained. 'A new park of artillery has been completed; five hundred stand of arms, seven hundred baggage mules—the details are in a special memorandum.—Mr. Secretary

Holtz, the memorandum, if you please.'

'One would think, gentlemen, that we were going to war,' said Otto.

'We are,' said Seraphina.

'War!' cried the Prince, 'and, gentlemen, with whom? The peace of Grünewald has endured for centuries. What aggression, what insult, have we suffered?'

'Here, your Highness,' said Gotthold, 'is the ultimatum. It was in the very article of signature, when your Highness so opportunely entered.'

Otto laid the paper before him; as he read, his fingers played tattoo upon the table. 'Was it proposed,' he inquired, 'to send this paper forth without a knowledge of my pleasure?'

One of the non-combatants, eager to trim, volunteered an answer. 'The Herr Doctor von Hohenstockwitz had just entered his dissent,' he added.

'Give me the rest of this correspondence,' said the Prince. It was handed to him, and he read it patiently from end to end, while the councillors sat foolishly enough looking before them on the table.

The secretaries, in the background, were exchanging glances of delight; a row at the council was for them a rare and welcome feature.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Otto, when he had finished, ‘I have read with pain. This claim upon Obermünsterol is palpably unjust; it has not a tincture, not a show, of justice. There is not in all this ground enough for after-dinner talk, and you propose to force it as a casus belli.’

‘Certainly, your Highness,’ returned Gondremark, too wise to defend the indefensible, ‘the claim on Obermünsterol is simply a pretext.’

‘It is well,’ said the Prince. ‘Herr Cancellarius, take your pen. “The council,” he began to dictate—I withhold all notice of my intervention,’ he said, in parenthesis, and addressing himself more directly to his wife; ‘and I say nothing of the strange suppression by which this business has been smuggled past my knowledge. I am content to be in time—“The council,”’ he resumed, “on a further examination of the facts, and enlightened by the note in the last despatch from Gerolstein, have the pleasure to announce that they are entirely at one, both as to fact and sentiment, with the Grand-Ducal Court of Gerolstein.” You have it? Upon these lines, sir, you will draw up the despatch.’

‘If your Highness will allow me,’ said the Baron, ‘your Highness is so imperfectly acquainted with the internal history of this correspondence, that any interference will be merely hurtful. Such a paper as your Highness proposes would be to stultify the whole previous policy of Grünewald.’

‘The policy of Grünewald!’ cried the Prince. ‘One would suppose you had no sense of humour! Would you fish in a coffee cup?’

‘With deference, your Highness,’ returned the Baron, ‘even in a coffee cup there may be poison. The purpose of this war is not simply territorial enlargement; still less is it a war of glory; for, as your Highness indicates, the state of Grünwald is too small to be ambitious. But the body politic is seriously diseased; republicanism, socialism, many disintegrating ideas are abroad; circle within circle, a really formidable organisation has grown up about your Highness’s throne.’

‘I have heard of it, Herr von Gondremark,’ put in the Prince; ‘but I have reason to be aware that yours is the more authoritative information.’

‘I am honoured by this expression of my Prince’s confidence’ returned Gondremark, unabashed. ‘It is, therefore, with a single eye to these disorders that our present external policy has been shaped. Something was required to divert public attention, to employ the idle, to popularise your Highness’s rule, and, if it were possible, to enable him to reduce the taxes at a blow and to a notable amount. The proposed expedition—for it cannot without hyperbole be called a war—seemed to the council to combine the various characters required; a marked improvement in the public sentiment has followed even upon our preparations; and I cannot doubt that when success shall follow, the effect will surpass even our boldest hopes.’

‘You are very adroit, Herr von Gondremark,’ said Otto. ‘You fill me with admiration. I had not heretofore done justice to your qualities.’

Seraphina looked up with joy, supposing Otto conquered; but Gondremark still waited, armed at every point; he knew how very stubborn is the revolt of a weak character.

‘And the territorial army scheme, to which I was persuaded to consent—was it secretly directed to the same end?’ the Prince asked.

‘I still believe the effect to have been good,’ replied the Baron; ‘discipline and mounting guard are excellent sedatives. But I will avow to your Highness, I was unaware, at the date of that decree, of the magnitude of the revolutionary movement; nor did any of us, I think, imagine that such a territorial army was a part of the republican proposals.’

‘It was?’ asked Otto. ‘Strange! Upon what fancied grounds?’

‘The grounds were indeed fanciful,’ returned the Baron. ‘It was conceived among the leaders that a territorial army, drawn from and returning to the people, would, in the event of any popular uprising, prove lukewarm or unfaithful to the throne.’

‘I see,’ said the Prince. ‘I begin to understand.’

‘His Highness begins to understand?’ repeated Gondremark, with the sweetest politeness. ‘May I beg of him to complete the phrase?’

‘The history of the revolution,’ replied Otto dryly. ‘And now,’ he

added, 'what do you conclude?'

'I conclude, your Highness, with a simple reflection,' said the Baron, accepting the stab without a quiver, 'the war is popular; were the rumour contradicted to-morrow, a considerable disappointment would be felt in many classes; and in the present tension of spirits, the most lukewarm sentiment may be enough to precipitate events. There lies the danger. The revolution hangs imminent; we sit, at this council board, below the sword of Damocles.'

'We must then lay our heads together,' said the Prince, 'and devise some honourable means of safety.'

Up to this moment, since the first note of opposition fell from the librarian, Seraphina had uttered about twenty words. With a somewhat heightened colour, her eyes generally lowered, her foot sometimes nervously tapping on the floor, she had kept her own counsel and commanded her anger like a hero. But at this stage of the engagement she lost control of her impatience.

'Means!' she cried. 'They have been found and prepared before you knew the need for them. Sign the despatch, and let us be done with this delay.'

'Madam, I said "honourable,"' returned Otto, bowing. 'This war is, in my eyes, and by Herr von Gondremark's account, an inadmissible expedient. If we have misgoverned here in Grünewald, are the people of Gerolstein to

bleed and pay for our mis-doings? Never, madam; not while I live. But I attach so much importance to all that I have heard to-day for the first time—and why only to-day, I do not even stop to ask—that I am eager to find some plan that I can follow with credit to myself.’

‘And should you fail?’ she asked.

‘Should I fail, I will then meet the blow half-way,’ replied the Prince.

‘On the first open discontent, I shall convoke the States, and, when it pleases them to bid me, abdicate.’

Seraphina laughed angrily. ‘This is the man for whom we have been labouring!’ she cried. ‘We tell him of change; he will devise the means, he says; and his device is abdication? Sir, have you no shame to come here at the eleventh hour among those who have borne the heat and burthen of the day? Do you not wonder at yourself? I, sir, was here in my place, striving to uphold your dignity alone. I took counsel with the wisest I could find, while you were eating and hunting. I have laid my plans with foresight; they were ripe for action; and then—‘she choked—‘then you return—for a forenoon—to ruin all! To-morrow, you will be once more about your pleasures; you will give us leave once more to think and work for you; and again you will come back, and again you will thwart what you had not the industry or knowledge to conceive. O! it is intolerable. Be modest, sir. Do not presume upon the rank you cannot worthily uphold. I would not issue my commands with so much gusto—it is from no merit in yourself they are obeyed. What are you? What have you

to do in this grave council? Go,' she cried, 'go among your equals? The very people in the streets mock at you for a prince.'

At this surprising outburst the whole council sat aghast.

'Madam,' said the Baron, alarmed out of his caution, 'command yourself.'

'Address yourself to me, sir!' cried the Prince. 'I will not bear these whisperings!'

Seraphina burst into tears.

'Sir,' cried the Baron, rising, 'this lady—'

'Herr von Gondremark,' said the Prince, 'one more observation, and I place you under arrest.'

'Your Highness is the master,' replied Gondremark, bowing.

'Bear it in mind more constantly,' said Otto. 'Herr Cancellarius, bring all the papers to my cabinet. Gentlemen, the council is dissolved.'

And he bowed and left the apartment, followed by Greisengesang and the secretaries, just at the moment when the Princess's ladies, summoned in all haste, entered by another door to help her forth.

CHAPTER VIII—THE PARTY OF WAR TAKES ACTION

Half an hour after, Gondremark was once more closeted with Seraphina.

‘Where is he now?’ she asked, on his arrival.

‘Madam, he is with the Chancellor,’ replied the Baron. ‘Wonder of wonders, he is at work!’

‘Ah,’ she said, ‘he was born to torture me! O what a fall, what a humiliation! Such a scheme to wreck upon so small a trifle! But now all is lost.’

‘Madam,’ said Gondremark, ‘nothing is lost. Something, on the other hand, is found. You have found your senses; you see him as he is—see him as you see everything where your too-good heart is not in question—with the judicial, with the statesman’s eye. So long as he had a right to interfere, the empire that may be was still distant. I have not entered on this course without the plain foresight of its dangers; and even for this I was prepared. But, madam, I knew two things: I knew that you were born to command, that I was born to serve; I knew that by a rare conjuncture, the hand had found the tool; and from the first I was confident, as I am confident to-day, that no hereditary trifler has the power to shatter that alliance.’

'I, born to command!' she said. 'Do you forget my tears?'

'Madam, they were the tears of Alexander,' cried the Baron. 'They touched, they thrilled me; I, forgot myself a moment—even I! But do you suppose that I had not remarked, that I had not admired, your previous bearing? your great self-command? Ay, that was princely!' He paused. 'It was a thing to see. I drank confidence! I tried to imitate your calm. And I was well inspired; in my heart, I think that I was well inspired; that any man, within the reach of argument, had been convinced! But it was not to be; nor, madam, do I regret the failure. Let us be open; let me disclose my heart. I have loved two things, not unworthily: Grünewald and my sovereign!' Here he kissed her hand. 'Either I must resign my ministry, leave the land of my adoption and the queen whom I had chosen to obey—or—' He paused again.

'Alas, Herr von Gondremark, there is no "or,"' said Seraphina.

'Nay, madam, give me time,' he replied. 'When first I saw you, you were still young; not every man would have remarked your powers; but I had not been twice honoured by your conversation ere I had found my mistress. I have, madam, I believe, some genius; and I have much ambition. But the genius is of the serving kind; and to offer a career to my ambition, I had to find one born to rule. This is the base and essence of our union; each had need of the other; each recognised, master and servant, lever and fulcrum, the complement of his endowment. Marriages, they say, are made in heaven: how much more these pure, laborious, intellectual fellowships, born to found empires! Nor is this all. We found each

other ripe, filled with great ideas that took shape and clarified with every word. We grew together—ay, madam, in mind we grew together like twin children. All of my life until we met was petty and groping; was it not—I will flatter myself openly—it was the same with you! Not till then had you those eagle surveys, that wide and hopeful sweep of intuition! Thus we had formed ourselves, and we were ready.’

‘It is true,’ she cried. ‘I feel it. Yours is the genius; your generosity confounds your insight; all I could offer you was the position, was this throne, to be a fulcrum. But I offered it without reserve; I entered at least warmly into all your thoughts; you were sure of me—sure of my support—certain of justice. Tell me, tell me again, that I have helped you.’

‘Nay, madam,’ he said, ‘you made me. In everything you were my inspiration. And as we prepared our policy, weighing every step, how often have I had to admire your perspicacity, your man-like diligence and fortitude! You know that these are not the words of flattery; your conscience echoes them; have you spared a day? have you indulged yourself in any pleasure? Young and beautiful, you have lived a life of high intellectual effort, of irksome intellectual patience with details. Well, you have your reward: with the fall of Brandenau, the throne of your Empire is founded.’

‘What thought have you in your mind?’ she asked. ‘Is not all ruined?’

‘Nay, my Princess, the same thought is in both our minds,’ he said.

‘Herr von Gondremark,’ she replied, ‘by all that I hold sacred, I have none; I do not think at all; I am crushed.’

‘You are looking at the passionate side of a rich nature, misunderstood and recently insulted,’ said the Baron. ‘Look into your intellect, and tell me.’

‘I find nothing, nothing but tumult,’ she replied.

‘You find one word branded, madam,’ returned the Baron: “Abdication!”

‘O!’ she cried. ‘The coward! He leaves me to bear all, and in the hour of trial he stabs me from behind. There is nothing in him, not respect, not love, not courage—his wife, his dignity, his throne, the honour of his father, he forgets them all!’

‘Yes,’ pursued the Baron, ‘the word Abdication. I perceive a glimmering there.’

‘I read your fancy,’ she returned. ‘It is mere madness, midsummer madness. Baron, I am more unpopular than he. You know it. They can excuse, they can love, his weakness; but me, they hate.’

‘Such is the gratitude of peoples,’ said the Baron. ‘But we trifle. Here, madam, are my plain thoughts. The man who in the hour of danger speaks of abdication is, for me, a venomous animal. I speak with the

bluntness of gravity, madam; this is no hour for mincing. The coward, in a station of authority, is more dangerous than fire. We dwell on a volcano; if this man can have his way, Grünewald before a week will have been deluged with innocent blood. You know the truth of what I say; we have looked unblenching into this ever-possible catastrophe. To him it is nothing: he will abdicate! Abdicate, just God! and this unhappy country committed to his charge, and the lives of men and the honour of women . . .’ His voice appeared to fail him; in an instant he had conquered his emotion and resumed: ‘But you, madam, conceive more worthily of your responsibilities. I am with you in the thought; and in the face of the horrors that I see impending, I say, and your heart repeats it—we have gone too far to pause. Honour, duty, ay, and the care of our own lives, demand we should proceed.’

She was looking at him, her brow thoughtfully knitted. ‘I feel it,’ she said. ‘But how? He has the power.’

‘The power, madam? The power is in the army,’ he replied; and then hastily, ere she could intervene, ‘we have to save ourselves,’ he went on; ‘I have to save my Princess, she has to save her minister; we have both of us to save this infatuated youth from his own madness. He in the outbreak would be the earliest victim; I see him,’ he cried, ‘torn in pieces; and Grünewald, unhappy Grünewald! Nay, madam, you who have the power must use it; it lies hard upon your conscience.’

‘Show me how!’ she cried. ‘Suppose I were to place him under some

constraint, the revolution would break upon us instantly.'

The Baron feigned defeat. 'It is true,' he said. 'You see more clearly than I do. Yet there should, there must be, some way.' And he waited for his chance.

'No,' she said; 'I told you from the first there is no remedy. Our hopes are lost: lost by one miserable trifler, ignorant, fretful, fitful—who will have disappeared to-morrow, who knows? to his boorish pleasures!'

Any peg would do for Gondremark. 'The thing!' he cried, striking his brow. 'Fool, not to have thought of it! Madam, without perhaps knowing it, you have solved our problem.'

'What do you mean? Speak!' she said.

He appeared to collect himself; and then, with a smile, 'The Prince,' he said, 'must go once more a-hunting.'

'Ay, if he would!' cried she, 'and stay there!'

'And stay there,' echoed the Baron. It was so significantly said, that her face changed; and the schemer, fearful of the sinister ambiguity of his expressions, hastened to explain. 'This time he shall go hunting in a carriage, with a good escort of our foreign lancers. His destination shall be the Felsenburg; it is healthy, the rock is high, the windows are small and barred; it might have been built on purpose. We shall intrust

the captaincy to the Scotsman Gordon; he at least will have no scruple. Who will miss the sovereign? He is gone hunting; he came home on Tuesday, on Thursday he returned; all is usual in that. Meanwhile the war proceeds; our Prince will soon weary of his solitude; and about the time of our triumph, or, if he prove very obstinate, a little later, he shall be released upon a proper understanding, and I see him once more directing his theatricals.'

Seraphina sat gloomy, plunged in thought. 'Yes,' she said suddenly, 'and the despatch? He is now writing it.'

'It cannot pass the council before Friday,' replied Gondremark; 'and as for any private note, the messengers are all at my disposal. They are picked men, madam. I am a person of precaution.'

'It would appear so,' she said, with a flash of her occasional repugnance to the man; and then after a pause, 'Herr von Gondremark,' she added, 'I recoil from this extremity.'

'I share your Highness's repugnance,' answered he. 'But what would you have? We are defenceless, else.'

'I see it, but this is sudden. It is a public crime,' she said, nodding at him with a sort of horror.

'Look but a little deeper,' he returned, 'and whose is the crime?'

'His!' she cried. 'His, before God! And I hold him liable. But still—'

'It is not as if he would be harmed,' submitted Gondremark.

'I know it,' she replied, but it was still unheartily.

And then, as brave men are entitled, by prescriptive right as old as the world's history, to the alliance and the active help of Fortune, the punctual goddess stepped down from the machine. One of the Princess's ladies begged to enter; a man, it appeared, had brought a line for the Freiherr von Gondremark. It proved to be a pencil billet, which the crafty Greisengesang had found the means to scribble and despatch under the very guns of Otto; and the daring of the act bore testimony to the terror of the actor. For Greisengesang had but one influential motive: fear. The note ran thus: 'At the first council, procuration to be withdrawn.—CORN. GREIS.'

So, after three years of exercise, the right of signature was to be stript from Seraphina. It was more than an insult; it was a public disgrace; and she did not pause to consider how she had earned it, but morally bounded under the attack as bounds the wounded tiger.

'Enough,' she said; 'I will sign the order. When shall he leave?'

'It will take me twelve hours to collect my men, and it had best be done at night. To-morrow midnight, if you please?' answered the Baron.

'Excellent,' she said. 'My door is always open to you, Baron. As soon as the order is prepared, bring it me to sign.'

'Madam,' he said, 'alone of all of us you do not risk your head in this adventure. For that reason, and to prevent all hesitation, I venture to propose the order should be in your hand throughout.'

'You are right,' she replied.

He laid a form before her, and she wrote the order in a clear hand, and re-read it. Suddenly a cruel smile came on her face. 'I had forgotten his puppet,' said she. 'They will keep each other company.' And she interlined and initiated the condemnation of Doctor Gotthold.

'Your Highness has more memory than your servant,' said the Baron; and then he, in his turn, carefully perused the fateful paper. 'Good!' said he.

'You will appear in the drawing-room, Baron?' she asked.

'I thought it better,' said he, 'to avoid the possibility of a public affront. Anything that shook my credit might hamper us in the immediate future.'

'You are right,' she said; and she held out her hand as to an old friend and equal.

CHAPTER IX—THE PRICE OF THE RIVER FARM; IN WHICH VAINGLORY
GOES BEFORE A

FALL

The pistol had been practically fired. Under ordinary circumstances the scene at the council table would have entirely exhausted Otto's store both of energy and anger; he would have begun to examine and condemn his conduct, have remembered all that was true, forgotten all that was unjust in Seraphina's onslaught; and by half an hour after would have fallen into that state of mind in which a Catholic flees to the confessional and a sot takes refuge with the bottle. Two matters of detail preserved his spirits. For, first, he had still an infinity of business to transact; and to transact business, for a man of Otto's neglectful and procrastinating habits, is the best anodyne for conscience. All afternoon he was hard at it with the Chancellor, reading, dictating, signing, and despatching papers; and this kept him in a glow of self-approval. But, secondly, his vanity was still alarmed; he had failed to get the money; to-morrow before noon he would have to disappoint old Killian; and in the eyes of that family which counted him so little, and to which he had sought to play the part of the heroic comforter, he must sink lower than at first. To a man of Otto's temper, this was death. He could not accept the situation. And even as he worked, and worked wisely and well, over the hated details of his

principality, he was secretly maturing a plan by which to turn the situation. It was a scheme as pleasing to the man as it was dishonourable in the prince; in which his frivolous nature found and took vengeance for the gravity and burthen of the afternoon. He chuckled as he thought of it: and Greisengesang heard him with wonder, and attributed his lively spirits to the skirmish of the morning.

Led by this idea, the antique courtier ventured to compliment his sovereign on his bearing. It reminded him, he said, of Otto's father.

'What?' asked the Prince, whose thoughts were miles away.

'Your Highness's authority at the board,' explained the flatterer.

'O, that! O yes,' returned Otto; but for all his carelessness, his vanity was delicately tickled, and his mind returned and dwelt approvingly over the details of his victory. 'I quelled them all,' he thought.

When the more pressing matters had been dismissed, it was already late, and Otto kept the Chancellor to dinner, and was entertained with a leash of ancient histories and modern compliments. The Chancellor's career had been based, from the first off-put, on entire subserviency; he had crawled into honours and employments; and his mind was prostitute. The instinct of the creature served him well with Otto. First, he let fall a sneering word or two upon the female intellect; thence he proceeded to a closer engagement; and before the third course he was artfully dissecting

Seraphina's character to her approving husband. Of course no names were used; and of course the identity of that abstract or ideal man, with whom she was currently contrasted, remained an open secret. But this stiff old gentleman had a wonderful instinct for evil, thus to wind his way into man's citadel; thus to harp by the hour on the virtues of his hearer and not once alarm his self-respect. Otto was all roseate, in and out, with flattery and Tokay and an approving conscience. He saw himself in the most attractive colours. If even Greisengesang, he thought, could thus espy the loose stitches in Seraphina's character, and thus disloyally impart them to the opposite camp, he, the discarded husband—the dispossessed Prince—could scarce have erred on the side of severity.

In this excellent frame he bade adieu to the old gentleman, whose voice had proved so musical, and set forth for the drawing-room. Already on the stair, he was seized with some compunction; but when he entered the great gallery and beheld his wife, the Chancellor's abstract flatteries fell from him like rain, and he re-awoke to the poetic facts of life.

She stood a good way off below a shining lustre, her back turned. The bend of her waist overcame him with physical weakness. This was the girl-wife who had lain in his arms and whom he had sworn to cherish; there was she, who was better than success.

It was Seraphina who restored him from the blow. She swam forward and smiled upon her husband with a sweetness that was insultingly artificial. 'Frédéric,' she lisped, 'you are late.' It was a scene of high comedy, such as is proper to unhappy marriages; and her aplomb disgusted him.

There was no etiquette at these small drawing-rooms. People came and went at pleasure. The window embrasures became the roost of happy couples; at the great chimney the talkers mostly congregated, each full-charged with scandal; and down at the farther end the gamblers gambled. It was towards this point that Otto moved, not ostentatiously, but with a gentle insistence, and scattering attentions as he went. Once abreast of the card-table, he placed himself opposite to Madame von Rosen, and, as soon as he had caught her eye, withdrew to the embrasure of a window. There she had speedily joined him.

‘You did well to call me,’ she said, a little wildly. ‘These cards will be my ruin.’

‘Leave them,’ said Otto.

‘I!’ she cried, and laughed; ‘they are my destiny. My only chance was to die of a consumption; now I must die in a garret.’

‘You are bitter to-night,’ said Otto.

‘I have been losing,’ she replied. ‘You do not know what greed is.’

‘I have come, then, in an evil hour,’ said he.

‘Ah, you wish a favour!’ she cried, brightening beautifully.

'Madam,' said he, 'I am about to found my party, and I come to you for a recruit.'

'Done,' said the Countess. 'I am a man again.'

'I may be wrong,' continued Otto, 'but I believe upon my heart you wish me no ill.'

'I wish you so well,' she said, 'that I dare not tell it you.'

'Then if I ask my favour?' quoth the Prince.

'Ask it, mon Prince,' she answered. 'Whatever it is, it is granted.'

'I wish you,' he returned, 'this very night to make the farmer of our talk.'

'Heaven knows your meaning!' she exclaimed. 'I know not, neither care; there are no bounds to my desire to please you. Call him made.'

'I will put it in another way,' returned Otto. 'Did you ever steal?'

'Often!' cried the Countess. 'I have broken all the ten commandments; and if there were more to-morrow, I should not sleep till I had broken these.'

'This is a case of burglary: to say the truth, I thought it would amuse

you,' said the Prince.

'I have no practical experience,' she replied, 'but O! the good-will! I have broken a work-box in my time, and several hearts, my own included. Never a house! But it cannot be difficult; sins are so unromantically easy! What are we to break?'

'Madam, we are to break the treasury,' said Otto and he sketched to her briefly, wittily, with here and there a touch of pathos, the story of his visit to the farm, of his promise to buy it, and of the refusal with which his demand for money had been met that morning at the council; concluding with a few practical words as to the treasury windows, and the helps and hindrances of the proposed exploit.

'They refused you the money,' she said when he had done. 'And you accepted the refusal? Well!'

'They gave their reasons,' replied Otto, colouring. 'They were not such as I could combat; and I am driven to dilapidate the funds of my own country by a theft. It is not dignified; but it is fun.'

'Fun,' she said; 'yes.' And then she remained silently plunged in thought for an appreciable time. 'How much do you require?' she asked at length.

'Three thousand crowns will do,' he answered, 'for I have still some money of my own.'

‘Excellent,’ she said, regaining her levity. ‘I am your true accomplice. And where are we to meet?’

‘You know the Flying Mercury,’ he answered, ‘in the Park? Three pathways intersect; there they have made a seat and raised the statue. The spot is handy and the deity congenial.’

‘Child,’ she said, and tapped him with her fan. ‘But do you know, my Prince, you are an egoist—your handy trysting-place is miles from me. You must give me ample time; I cannot, I think, possibly be there before two. But as the bell beats two, your helper shall arrive: welcome, I trust. Stay—do you bring any one?’ she added. ‘O, it is not for a chaperon—I am not a prude!’

‘I shall bring a groom of mine,’ said Otto. ‘I caught him stealing corn.’

‘His name?’ she asked.

‘I profess I know not. I am not yet intimate with my corn-stealer,’ returned the Prince. ‘It was in a professional capacity—’

‘Like me! Flatterer!’ she cried. ‘But oblige me in one thing. Let me find you waiting at the seat—yes, you shall await me; for on this expedition it shall be no longer Prince and Countess, it shall be the lady and the squire—and your friend the thief shall be no nearer than the

fountain. Do you promise?’

‘Madam, in everything you are to command; you shall be captain, I am but supercargo,’ answered Otto.

‘Well, Heaven bring all safe to port!’ she said. ‘It is not Friday!’

Something in her manner had puzzled Otto, had possibly touched him with suspicion.

‘Is it not strange,’ he remarked, ‘that I should choose my accomplice from the other camp?’

‘Fool!’ she said. ‘But it is your only wisdom that you know your friends.’ And suddenly, in the vantage of the deep window, she caught up his hand and kissed it with a sort of passion. ‘Now go,’ she added, ‘go at once.’

He went, somewhat staggered, doubting in his heart that he was over-bold. For in that moment she had flashed upon him like a jewel; and even through the strong panoply of a previous love he had been conscious of a shock. Next moment he had dismissed the fear.

Both Otto and the Countess retired early from the drawing-room; and the Prince, after an elaborate feint, dismissed his valet, and went forth by the private passage and the back postern in quest of the groom.

Once more the stable was in darkness, once more Otto employed the talismanic knock, and once more the groom appeared and sickened with terror.

‘Good-evening, friend,’ said Otto pleasantly. ‘I want you to bring a corn sack—empty this time—and to accompany me. We shall be gone all night.’

‘Your Highness,’ groaned the man, ‘I have the charge of the small stables. I am here alone.’

‘Come,’ said the Prince, ‘you are no such martinet in duty.’ And then seeing that the man was shaking from head to foot, Otto laid a hand upon his shoulder. ‘If I meant you harm,’ he said, ‘should I be here?’

The fellow became instantly reassured. He got the sack; and Otto led him round by several paths and avenues, conversing pleasantly by the way, and left him at last planted by a certain fountain where a goggle-eyed Triton spouted intermittently into a rippling laver. Thence he proceeded alone to where, in a round clearing, a copy of Gian Bologna’s Mercury stood tiptoe in the twilight of the stars. The night was warm and windless. A shaving of new moon had lately arisen; but it was still too small and too low down in heaven to contend with the immense host of lesser luminaries; and the rough face of the earth was drenched with starlight. Down one of the alleys, which widened as it receded, he could see a part of the lamplit terrace where a sentry silently paced, and beyond that a corner of the town with interlacing street-lights. But all around him the young

trees stood mystically blurred in the dim shine; and in the stock-still quietness the upleaping god appeared alive.

In this dimness and silence of the night, Otto's conscience became suddenly and staringly luminous, like the dial of a city clock. He averted the eyes of his mind, but the finger rapidly travelling, pointed to a series of misdeeds that took his breath away. What was he doing in that place? The money had been wrongly squandered, but that was largely by his own neglect. And he now proposed to embarrass the finances of this country which he had been too idle to govern. And he now proposed to squander the money once again, and this time for a private, if a generous end. And the man whom he had reproved for stealing corn he was now to set stealing treasure. And then there was Madame von Rosen, upon whom he looked down with some of that ill-favoured contempt of the chaste male for the imperfect woman. Because he thought of her as one degraded below scruples, he had picked her out to be still more degraded, and to risk her whole irregular establishment in life by complicity in this dishonourable act. It was uglier than a seduction.

Otto had to walk very briskly and whistle very busily; and when at last he heard steps in the narrowest and darkest of the alleys, it was with a gush of relief that he sprang to meet the Countess. To wrestle alone with one's good angel is so hard! and so precious, at the proper time, is a companion certain to be less virtuous than oneself!

It was a young man who came towards him—a young man of small stature and

a peculiar gait, wearing a wide flapping hat, and carrying, with great weariness, a heavy bag. Otto recoiled; but the young man held up his hand by way of signal, and coming up with a panting run, as if with the last of his endurance, laid the bag upon the ground, threw himself upon the bench, and disclosed the features of Madame von Rosen.

'You, Countess!' cried the Prince.

'No, no,' she panted, 'the Count von Rosen—my young brother. A capital fellow. Let him get his breath.'

'Ah, madam . . . ' said he.

'Call me Count,' she returned, 'respect my incognito.'

'Count be it, then,' he replied. 'And let me implore that gallant gentleman to set forth at once on our enterprise.'

'Sit down beside me here,' she returned, patting the further corner of the bench. 'I will follow you in a moment. O, I am so tired—feel how my heart leaps! Where is your thief?'

'At his post,' replied Otto. 'Shall I introduce him? He seems an excellent companion.'

'No,' she said, 'do not hurry me yet. I must speak to you. Not but I adore your thief; I adore any one who has the spirit to do wrong. I

never cared for virtue till I fell in love with my Prince.’ She laughed musically. ‘And even so, it is not for your virtues,’ she added.

Otto was embarrassed. ‘And now,’ he asked, ‘if you are anyway rested?’

‘Presently, presently. Let me breathe,’ she said, panting a little harder than before.

‘And what has so wearied you?’ he asked. ‘This bag? And why, in the name of eccentricity, a bag? For an empty one, you might have relied on my own foresight; and this one is very far from being empty. My dear Count, with what trash have you come laden? But the shortest method is to see for myself.’ And he put down his hand.

She stopped him at once. ‘Otto,’ she said, ‘no—not that way. I will tell, I will make a clean breast. It is done already. I have robbed the treasury single-handed. There are three thousand two hundred crowns. O, I trust it is enough!’

Her embarrassment was so obvious that the Prince was struck into a muse, gazing in her face, with his hand still outstretched, and she still holding him by the wrist. ‘You!’ he said at last. ‘How?’ And then drawing himself up, ‘O madam,’ he cried, ‘I understand. You must indeed think meanly of the Prince.’

‘Well, then, it was a lie!’ she cried. ‘The money is mine, honestly my own—now yours. This was an unworthy act that you proposed. But I love

your honour, and I swore to myself that I should save it in your teeth. I beg of you to let me save it'—with a sudden lovely change of tone. 'Otto, I beseech you let me save it. Take this dross from your poor friend who loves you!'

'Madam, madam,' babbled Otto, in the extreme of misery, 'I cannot—I must go.'

And he half rose; but she was on the ground before him in an instant, clasping his knees. 'No,' she gasped, 'you shall not go. Do you despise me so entirely? It is dross; I hate it; I should squander it at play and be no richer; it is an investment, it is to save me from ruin. Otto,' she cried, as he again feebly tried to put her from him, 'if you leave me alone in this disgrace, I will die here!' He groaned aloud. 'O,' she said, 'think what I suffer! If you suffer from a piece of delicacy, think what I suffer in my shame! To have my trash refused! You would rather steal, you think of me so basely! You would rather tread my heart in pieces! O, unkind! O my Prince! O Otto! O pity me!' She was still clasping him; then she found his hand and covered it with kisses, and at this his head began to turn. 'O,' she cried again, 'I see it! O what a horror! It is because I am old, because I am no longer beautiful.' And she burst into a storm of sobs.

This was the coup de grâce. Otto had now to comfort and compose her as he could, and before many words, the money was accepted. Between the woman and the weak man such was the inevitable end. Madame von Rosen instantly composed her sobs. She thanked him with a fluttering voice,

and resumed her place upon the bench, at the far end from Otto. 'Now you see,' she said, 'why I bade you keep the thief at distance, and why I came alone. How I trembled for my treasure!'

'Madam,' said Otto, with a tearful whimper in his voice, 'spare me! You are too good, too noble!'

'I wonder to hear you,' she returned. 'You have avoided a great folly. You will be able to meet your good old peasant. You have found an excellent investment for a friend's money. You have preferred essential kindness to an empty scruple; and now you are ashamed of it! You have made your friend happy; and now you mourn as the dove! Come, cheer up. I know it is depressing to have done exactly right; but you need not make a practice of it. Forgive yourself this virtue; come now, look me in the face and smile!'

He did look at her. When a man has been embraced by a woman, he sees her

in a glamour; and at such a time, in the baffling glimmer of the stars, she will look wildly well. The hair is touched with light; the eyes are constellations; the face sketched in shadows—a sketch, you might say, by passion. Otto became consoled for his defeat; he began to take an interest. 'No,' he said, 'I am no ingrate.'

'You promised me fun,' she returned, with a laugh. 'I have given you as good. We have had a stormy scena.'

He laughed in his turn, and the sound of the laughter, in either case, was hardly reassuring.

‘Come, what are you going to give me in exchange,’ she continued, ‘for my excellent declamation?’

‘What you will,’ he said.

‘Whatever I will? Upon your honour? Suppose I asked the crown?’ She was flashing upon him, beautiful in triumph.

‘Upon my honour,’ he replied.

‘Shall I ask the crown?’ she continued. ‘Nay; what should I do with it? Grünewald is but a petty state; my ambition swells above it. I shall ask—I find I want nothing,’ she concluded. ‘I will give you something instead. I will give you leave to kiss me—once.’

Otto drew near, and she put up her face; they were both smiling, both on the brink of laughter, all was so innocent and playful; and the Prince, when their lips encountered, was dumbfounded by the sudden convulsion of his being. Both drew instantly apart, and for an appreciable time sat tongue-tied. Otto was indistinctly conscious of a peril in the silence, but could find no words to utter. Suddenly the Countess seemed to awake. ‘As for your wife—’ she began in a clear and steady voice.

The word recalled Otto, with a shudder, from his trance. ‘I will hear

nothing against my wife,' he cried wildly; and then, recovering himself and in a kindlier tone, 'I will tell you my one secret,' he added. 'I love my wife.'

'You should have let me finish,' she returned, smiling. 'Do you suppose I did not mention her on purpose? You know you had lost your head. Well, so had I. Come now, do not be abashed by words,' she added somewhat sharply. 'It is the one thing I despise. If you are not a fool, you will see that I am building fortresses about your virtue. And at any rate, I choose that you shall understand that I am not dying of love for you. It is a very smiling business; no tragedy for me! And now here is what I have to say about your wife; she is not and she never has been Gondremark's mistress. Be sure he would have boasted if she had. Good-night!'

And in a moment she was gone down the alley, and Otto was alone with the bag of money and the flying god.

CHAPTER X—GOTTHOLD'S REVISED OPINION; AND THE FALL
COMPLETED

The Countess left poor Otto with a caress and buffet simultaneously administered. The welcome word about his wife and the virtuous ending of his interview should doubtless have delighted him. But for all that, as he shouldered the bag of money and set forward to rejoin his groom, he was conscious of many aching sensibilities. To have gone wrong and to have been set right makes but a double trial for man's vanity. The discovery of his own weakness and possible unfaith had staggered him to the heart; and to hear, in the same hour, of his wife's fidelity from one who loved her not, increased the bitterness of the surprise.

He was about half-way between the fountain and the Flying Mercury before his thoughts began to be clear; and he was surprised to find them resentful. He paused in a kind of temper, and struck with his hand a little shrub. Thence there arose instantly a cloud of awakened sparrows, which as instantly dispersed and disappeared into the thicket. He looked at them stupidly, and when they were gone continued staring at the stars. 'I am angry. By what right? By none!' he thought; but he was still angry. He cursed Madame von Rosen and instantly repented. Heavy was the money on his shoulders.

When he reached the fountain, he did, out of ill-humour and parade, an

unpardonable act. He gave the money bodily to the dishonest groom. 'Keep this for me,' he said, 'until I call for it to-morrow. It is a great sum, and by that you will judge that I have not condemned you.' And he strode away ruffling, as if he had done something generous. It was a desperate stroke to re-enter at the point of the bayonet into his self-esteem; and, like all such, it was fruitless in the end. He got to bed with the devil, it appeared: kicked and tumbled till the grey of the morning; and then fell inopportunately into a leaden slumber, and awoke to find it ten. To miss the appointment with old Killian after all, had been too tragic a miscarriage: and he hurried with all his might, found the groom (for a wonder) faithful to his trust, and arrived only a few minutes before noon in the guest-chamber of the Morning Star. Killian was there in his Sunday's best and looking very gaunt and rigid; a lawyer from Brandenau stood sentinel over his outspread papers; and the groom and the landlord of the inn were called to serve as witnesses. The obvious deference of that great man, the innkeeper, plainly affected the old farmer with surprise; but it was not until Otto had taken the pen and signed that the truth flashed upon him fully. Then, indeed, he was beside himself.

'His Highness!' he cried, 'His Highness!' and repeated the exclamation till his mind had grappled fairly with the facts. Then he turned to the witnesses. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'you dwell in a country highly favoured by God; for of all generous gentlemen, I will say it on my conscience, this one is the king. I am an old man, and I have seen good and bad, and the year of the great famine; but a more excellent gentleman, no, never.'

‘We know that,’ cried the landlord, ‘we know that well in Grünewald. If we saw more of his Highness we should be the better pleased.’

‘It is the kindest Prince,’ began the groom, and suddenly closed his mouth upon a sob, so that every one turned to gaze upon his emotion—Otto not last; Otto struck with remorse, to see the man so grateful.

Then it was the lawyer’s turn to pay a compliment. ‘I do not know what Providence may hold in store,’ he said, ‘but this day should be a bright one in the annals of your reign. The shouts of armies could not be more eloquent than the emotion on these honest faces.’ And the Brandenau lawyer bowed, skipped, stepped back, and took snuff, with the air of a man who has found and seized an opportunity.

‘Well, young gentleman,’ said Killian, ‘if you will pardon me the plainness of calling you a gentleman, many a good day’s work you have done, I doubt not, but never a better, or one that will be better blessed; and whatever, sir, may be your happiness and triumph in that high sphere to which you have been called, it will be none the worse, sir, for an old man’s blessing!’

The scene had almost assumed the proportions of an ovation; and when the Prince escaped he had but one thought: to go wherever he was most sure of praise. His conduct at the board of council occurred to him as a fair chapter; and this evoked the memory of Gotthold. To Gotthold he would go.

Gotthold was in the library as usual, and laid down his pen, a little angrily, on Otto's entrance. 'Well,' he said, 'here you are.'

'Well,' returned Otto, 'we made a revolution, I believe.'

'It is what I fear,' returned the Doctor.

'How?' said Otto. 'Fear? Fear is the burnt child. I have learned my strength and the weakness of the others; and I now mean to govern.'

Gotthold said nothing, but he looked down and smoothed his chin.

'You disapprove?' cried Otto. 'You are a weather-cock.'

'On the contrary,' replied the Doctor. 'My observation has confirmed my fears. It will not do, Otto, not do.'

'What will not do?' demanded the Prince, with a sickening stab of pain.

'None of it,' answered Gotthold. 'You are unfitted for a life of action; you lack the stamina, the habit, the restraint, the patience. Your wife is greatly better, vastly better; and though she is in bad hands, displays a very different aptitude. She is a woman of affairs; you are—dear boy, you are yourself. I bid you back to your amusements; like a smiling dominie, I give you holidays for life. Yes,' he continued, 'there is a day appointed for all when they shall turn again upon their own philosophy. I had grown to disbelieve impartially in all; and if in

the atlas of the sciences there were two charts I disbelieved in more than all the rest, they were politics and morals. I had a sneaking kindness for your vices; as they were negative, they flattered my philosophy; and I called them almost virtues. Well, Otto, I was wrong; I have forsworn my sceptical philosophy; and I perceive your faults to be unpardonable. You are unfit to be a Prince, unfit to be a husband. And I give you my word, I would rather see a man capably doing evil than blundering about good.'

Otto was still silent, in extreme dudgeon.

Presently the Doctor resumed: 'I will take the smaller matter first: your conduct to your wife. You went, I hear, and had an explanation. That may have been right or wrong; I know not; at least, you had stirred her temper. At the council she insults you; well, you insult her back—a man to a woman, a husband to his wife, in public! Next upon the back of this, you propose—the story runs like wildfire—to recall the power of signature. Can she ever forgive that? a woman—a young woman—ambitious, conscious of talents beyond yours? Never, Otto. And to sum all, at such a crisis in your married life, you get into a window corner with that ogling dame von Rosen. I do not dream that there was any harm; but I do say it was an idle disrespect to your wife. Why, man, the woman is not decent.'

'Gotthold,' said Otto, 'I will hear no evil of the Countess.'

'You will certainly hear no good of her,' returned Gotthold; 'and if you wish your wife to be the pink of nicety, you should clear your court of demi-reputations.'

'The commonplace injustice of a by-word,' Otto cried. 'The partiality of sex. She is a demirep; what then is Gondremark? Were she a man—'

'It would be all one,' retorted Gotthold roughly. 'When I see a man, come to years of wisdom, who speaks in double-meanings and is the braggart of his vices, I spit on the other side. "You, my friend," say I, "are not even a gentleman." Well, she's not even a lady.'

'She is the best friend I have, and I choose that she shall be respected,' Otto said.

'If she is your friend, so much the worse,' replied the Doctor. 'It will not stop there.'

'Ah!' cried Otto, 'there is the charity of virtue! All evil in the spotted fruit. But I can tell you, sir, that you do Madame von Rosen prodigal injustice.'

'You can tell me!' said the Doctor shrewdly. 'Have you, tried? have you been riding the marches?'

The blood came into Otto's face.

‘Ah!’ cried Gotthold, ‘look at your wife and blush! There’s a wife for a man to marry and then lose! She’s a carnation, Otto. The soul is in her eyes.’

‘You have changed your note for Seraphina, I perceive,’ said Otto.

‘Changed it!’ cried the Doctor, with a flush. ‘Why, when was it different? But I own I admired her at the council. When she sat there silent, tapping with her foot, I admired her as I might a hurricane. Were I one of those who venture upon matrimony, there had been the prize to tempt me! She invites, as Mexico invited Cortez; the enterprise is hard, the natives are unfriendly—I believe them cruel too—but the metropolis is paved with gold and the breeze blows out of paradise. Yes, I could desire to be that conqueror. But to philander with von Rosen! never! Senses? I discard them; what are they?—pruritus! Curiosity? Reach me my Anatomy!’

‘To whom do you address yourself?’ cried Otto. ‘Surely you, of all men, know that I love my wife!’

‘O, love!’ cried Gotthold; ‘love is a great word; it is in all the dictionaries. If you had loved, she would have paid you back. What does she ask? A little ardour!’

‘It is hard to love for two,’ replied the Prince.

‘Hard? Why, there’s the touchstone! O, I know my poets!’ cried the

Doctor. 'We are but dust and fire, too and to endure life's scorching; and love, like the shadow of a great rock, should lend shelter and refreshment, not to the lover only, but to his mistress and to the children that reward them; and their very friends should seek repose in the fringes of that peace. Love is not love that cannot build a home. And you call it love to grudge and quarrel and pick faults? You call it love to thwart her to her face, and bandy insults? Love!'

'Gotthold, you are unjust. I was then fighting for my country,' said the Prince.

'Ay, and there's the worst of all,' returned the Doctor. 'You could not even see that you were wrong; that being where they were, retreat was ruin.'

'Why, you supported me!' cried Otto.

'I did. I was a fool like you,' replied Gotthold. 'But now my eyes are open. If you go on as you have started, disgrace this fellow Gondremark, and publish the scandal of your divided house, there will befall a most abominable thing in Grünewald. A revolution, friend—a revolution.'

'You speak strangely for a red,' said Otto.

'A red republican, but not a revolutionary,' returned the Doctor. 'An ugly thing is a Grünewalder drunk! One man alone can save the country from this pass, and that is the double-dealer Gondremark, with whom I

conjure you to make peace. It will not be you; it never can be you:—you, who can do nothing, as your wife said, but trade upon your station—you, who spent the hours in begging money! And in God's name, what for? Why money? What mystery of idiocy was this?

'It was to no ill end. It was to buy a farm,' quoth Otto sulkily.

'To buy a farm!' cried Gotthold. 'Buy a farm!'

'Well, what then?' returned Otto. 'I have bought it, if you come to that.'

Gotthold fairly bounded on his seat. 'And how that?' he cried.

'How?' repeated Otto, startled.

'Ay, verily, how!' returned the Doctor. 'How came you by the money?'

The Prince's countenance darkened. 'That is my affair,' said he.

'You see you are ashamed,' retorted Gotthold. 'And so you bought a farm in the hour of our country's need—doubtless to be ready for the abdication; and I put it that you stole the funds. There are not three ways of getting money: there are but two: to earn and steal. And now, when you have combined Charles the Fifth and Long-fingered Tom, you come

to me to fortify your vanity! But I will clear my mind upon this matter:

until I know the right and wrong of the transaction, I put my hand behind my back. A man may be the pitifullest prince; he must be a spotless gentleman.'

The Prince had gotten to his feet, as pale as paper. Gotthold,' he said, 'you drive me beyond bounds. Beware, sir, beware!'

'Do you threaten me, friend Otto?' asked the Doctor grimly. 'That would be a strange conclusion.'

'When have you ever known me use my power in any private animosity?' cried Otto. 'To any private man your words were an unpardonable insult, but at me you shoot in full security, and I must turn aside to compliment you on your plainness. I must do more than pardon, I must admire, because you have faced this—this formidable monarch, like a Nathan before David. You have uprooted an old kindness, sir, with an unsparing hand. You leave me very bare. My last bond is broken; and though I take Heaven to witness that I sought to do the right, I have this reward: to find myself alone. You say I am no gentleman; yet the sneers have been upon your side; and though I can very well perceive where you have lodged your sympathies, I will forbear the taunt.'

'Otto, are you insane?' cried Gotthold, leaping up. 'Because I ask you how you came by certain moneys, and because you refuse—'

'Herr von Hohenstockwitz, I have ceased to invite your aid in my affairs,' said Otto. 'I have heard all that I desire, and you have

sufficiently trampled on my vanity. It may be that I cannot govern, it may be that I cannot love—you tell me so with every mark of honesty; but God has granted me one virtue, and I can still forgive. I forgive you; even in this hour of passion, I can perceive my faults and your excuses; and if I desire that in future I may be spared your conversation, it is not, sir, from resentment—not resentment—but, by Heaven, because no man on earth could endure to be so rated. You have the satisfaction to see your sovereign weep; and that person whom you have so often taunted with his happiness reduced to the last pitch of solitude and misery. No,—I will hear nothing; I claim the last word, sir, as your Prince; and that last word shall be—forgiveness.’

And with that Otto was gone from the apartment, and Doctor Gotthold was left alone with the most conflicting sentiments of sorrow, remorse, and merriment; walking to and fro before his table, and asking himself, with hands uplifted, which of the pair of them was most to blame for this unhappy rupture. Presently, he took from a cupboard a bottle of Rhine wine and a goblet of the deep Bohemian ruby. The first glass a little warmed and comforted his bosom; with the second he began to look down upon these troubles from a sunny mountain; yet a while, and filled with this false comfort and contemplating life throughout a golden medium, he owned to himself, with a flush, a smile, and a half-pleasurable sigh, that he had been somewhat over plain in dealing with his cousin. ‘He said the truth, too,’ added the penitent librarian, ‘for in my monkish fashion I adore the Princess.’ And then, with a still deepening flush and a certain stealth, although he sat all alone in that great gallery,

he toasted Seraphina to the dregs.

CHAPTER XI—PROVIDENCE VON ROSEN: ACT THE FIRST
SHE BEGUILLES THE BARON

At a sufficiently late hour, or to be more exact, at three in the afternoon, Madame von Rosen issued on the world. She swept downstairs and out across the garden, a black mantilla thrown over her head, and the long train of her black velvet dress ruthlessly sweeping in the dirt.

At the other end of that long garden, and back to back with the villa of the Countess, stood the large mansion where the Prime Minister transacted his affairs and pleasures. This distance, which was enough for decency by the easy canons of Mittwalden, the Countess swiftly traversed, opened a little door with a key, mounted a flight of stairs, and entered unceremoniously into Gondremark's study. It was a large and very high apartment; books all about the walls, papers on the table, papers on the floor; here and there a picture, somewhat scant of drapery; a great fire glowing and flaming in the blue tiled hearth; and the daylight streaming through a cupola above. In the midst of this sat the great Baron Gondremark in his shirt-sleeves, his business for that day fairly at an end, and the hour arrived for relaxation. His expression, his very nature, seemed to have undergone a fundamental change. Gondremark at home appeared the very antipode of Gondremark on duty. He had an air of

massive jollity that well became him; grossness and geniality sat upon his features; and along with his manners, he had laid aside his sly and sinister expression. He lolled there, sunning his bulk before the fire, a noble animal.

‘Hey!’ he cried. ‘At last!’

The Countess stepped into the room in silence, threw herself on a chair, and crossed her legs. In her lace and velvet, with a good display of smooth black stocking and of snowy petticoat, and with the refined profile of her face and slender plumpness of her body, she showed in singular contrast to the big, black, intellectual satyr by the fire.

‘How often do you send for me?’ she cried. ‘It is compromising.’

Gondremark laughed. ‘Speaking of that,’ said he, ‘what in the devil’s name were you about? You were not home till morning.’

‘I was giving alms,’ she said.

The Baron again laughed loud and long, for in his shirt-sleeves he was a very mirthful creature. ‘It is fortunate I am not jealous,’ he remarked.

‘But you know my way: pleasure and liberty go hand in hand. I believe what I believe; it is not much, but I believe it.—But now to business.

Have you not read my letter?’

‘No,’ she said; ‘my head ached.’

'Ah, well! then I have news indeed!' cried Gondremark. 'I was mad to see you all last night and all this morning: for yesterday afternoon I brought my long business to a head; the ship has come home; one more dead lift, and I shall cease to fetch and carry for the Princess Ratafia. Yes, 'tis done. I have the order all in Ratafia's hand; I carry it on my heart. At the hour of twelve to-night, Prince Featherhead is to be taken in his bed and, like the bambino, whipped into a chariot; and by next morning he will command a most romantic prospect from the donjon of the Felsenburg. Farewell, Featherhead! The war goes on, the girl is in my hand; I have long been indispensable, but now I shall be sole. I have long,' he added exultingly, 'long carried this intrigue upon my shoulders, like Samson with the gates of Gaza; now I discharge that burthen.'

She had sprung to her feet a little paler. 'Is this true?' she cried.

'I tell you a fact,' he asseverated. 'The trick is played.'

'I will never believe it,' she said. 'An order in her own hand? I will never believe it, Heinrich.'

'I swear to you,' said he.

'O, what do you care for oaths—or I either? What would you swear by? Wine, women, and song? It is not binding,' she said. She had come quite

close up to him and laid her hand upon his arm. 'As for the order—no, Heinrich, never! I will never believe it. I will die ere I believe it. You have some secret purpose—what, I cannot guess—but not one word of it is true.'

'Shall I show it you?' he asked.

'You cannot,' she answered. 'There is no such thing.'

'Incorrigible Sadducee!' he cried. 'Well, I will convert you; you shall see the order.' He moved to a chair where he had thrown his coat, and then drawing forth and holding out a paper, 'Read,' said he.

She took it greedily, and her eye flashed as she perused it.

'Hey!' cried the Baron, 'there falls a dynasty, and it was I that felled it; and I and you inherit!' He seemed to swell in stature; and next moment, with a laugh, he put his hand forward. 'Give me the dagger,' said he.

But she whisked the paper suddenly behind her back and faced him, lowering. 'No, no,' she said. 'You and I have first a point to settle. Do you suppose me blind? She could never have given that paper but to one man, and that man her lover. Here you stand—her lover, her accomplice, her master—O, I well believe it, for I know your power. But what am I?' she cried; 'I, whom you deceive!'

‘Jealousy!’ cried Gondremark. ‘Anna, I would never have believed it! But I declare to you by all that’s credible that I am not her lover. I might be, I suppose; but I never yet durst risk the declaration. The chit is so unreal; a mincing doll; she will and she will not; there is no counting on her, by God! And hitherto I have had my own way without, and keep the lover in reserve. And I say, Anna,’ he added with severity, ‘you must break yourself of this new fit, my girl; there must be no combustion. I keep the creature under the belief that I adore her; and if she caught a breath of you and me, she is such a fool, prude, and dog in the manger, that she is capable of spoiling all.’

‘All very fine,’ returned the lady. ‘With whom do you pass your days? and which am I to believe, your words or your actions?’

‘Anna, the devil take you, are you blind?’ cried Gondremark. ‘You know me. Am I likely to care for such a preciosa? ’Tis hard that we should have been together for so long, and you should still take me for a troubadour. But if there is one thing that I despise and deprecate, it is all such figures in Berlin wool. Give me a human woman—like myself. You are my mate; you were made for me; you amuse me like the play. And what have I to gain that I should pretend to you? If I do not love you, what use are you to me? Why, none. It is as clear as noonday.’

‘Do you love me, Heinrich?’ she asked, languishing. ‘Do you truly?’

‘I tell you,’ he cried, ‘I love you next after myself. I should be all abroad if I had lost you.’

‘Well, then,’ said she, folding up the paper and putting it calmly in her pocket, ‘I will believe you, and I join the plot. Count upon me. At midnight, did you say? It is Gordon, I see, that you have charged with it. Excellent; he will stick at nothing—’

Gondremark watched her suspiciously. ‘Why do you take the paper?’ he demanded. ‘Give it here.’

‘No,’ she returned; ‘I mean to keep it. It is I who must prepare the stroke; you cannot manage it without me; and to do my best I must possess the paper. Where shall I find Gordon? In his rooms?’ She spoke with a rather feverish self-possession.

‘Anna,’ he said sternly, the black, bilious countenance of his palace rôle taking the place of the more open favour of his hours at home, ‘I ask you for that paper. Once, twice, and thrice.’

‘Heinrich,’ she returned, looking him in the face, ‘take care. I will put up with no dictation.’

Both looked dangerous; and the silence lasted for a measurable interval of time. Then she made haste to have the first word; and with a laugh that rang clear and honest, ‘Do not be a child,’ she said. ‘I wonder at you. If your assurances are true, you can have no reason to mistrust me, nor I to play you false. The difficulty is to get the Prince out of the palace without scandal. His valets are devoted; his chamberlain a slave;

and yet one cry might ruin all.'

'They must be overpowered,' he said, following her to the new ground, 'and disappear along with him.'

'And your whole scheme along with them!' she cried. 'He does not take his servants when he goes a-hunting: a child could read the truth. No, no; the plan is idiotic; it must be Ratafia's. But hear me. You know the Prince worships me?'

'I know,' he said. 'Poor Featherhead, I cross his destiny!'

'Well now,' she continued, 'what if I bring him alone out of the palace, to some quiet corner of the Park—the Flying Mercury, for instance? Gordon can be posted in the thicket; the carriage wait behind the temple; not a cry, not a scuffle, not a footfall; simply, the Prince vanishes!—What do you say? Am I an able ally? Are my beaux yuex of service? Ah, Heinrich, do not lose your Anna!—she has power!'

He struck with his open hand upon the chimney. 'Witch!' he said, 'there is not your match for devilry in Europe. Service! the thing runs on wheels.'

'Kiss me, then, and let me go. I must not miss my Featherhead,' she said.

'Stay, stay,' said the Baron; 'not so fast. I wish, upon my soul, that I

could trust you; but you are, out and in, so whimsical a devil that I dare not. Hang it, Anna, no; it's not possible!

'You doubt me, Heinrich?' she cried.

'Doubt is not the word,' said he. 'I know you. Once you were clear of me with that paper in your pocket, who knows what you would do with it?—not you, at least—nor I. You see,' he added, shaking his head paternally upon the Countess, 'you are as vicious as a monkey.'

'I swear to you,' she cried, 'by my salvation . . . '

'I have no curiosity to hear you swearing,' said the Baron.

'You think that I have no religion? You suppose me destitute of honour. Well,' she said, 'see here: I will not argue, but I tell you once for all: leave me this order, and the Prince shall be arrested—take it from me, and, as certain as I speak, I will upset the coach. Trust me, or fear me: take your choice.' And she offered him the paper.

The Baron, in a great contention of mind, stood irresolute, weighing the two dangers. Once his hand advanced, then dropped. 'Well,' he said, 'since trust is what you call it . . . '

'No more,' she interrupted, 'Do not spoil your attitude. And now since you have behaved like a good sort of fellow in the dark, I will condescend to tell you why. I go to the palace to arrange with Gordon;

but how is Gordon to obey me? And how can I foresee the hours? It may be midnight; ay, and it may be nightfall; all's a chance; and to act, I must be free and hold the strings of the adventure. And now,' she cried, 'your Vivien goes. Dub me your knight!' And she held out her arms and smiled upon him radiant.

'Well,' he said, when he had kissed her, 'every man must have his folly; I thank God mine is no worse. Off with you! I have given a child a squib.'

CHAPTER XII—PROVIDENCE VON ROSEN: ACT THE SECOND
SHE INFORMS THE PRINCE

It was the first impulse of Madame von Rosen to return to her own villa and revise her toilette. Whatever else should come of this adventure, it was her firm design to pay a visit to the Princess. And before that woman, so little beloved, the Countess would appear at no disadvantage. It was the work of minutes. Von Rosen had the captain's eye in matters of the toilette; she was none of those who hang in Fabian helplessness among their finery and, after hours, come forth upon the world as dowdies. A glance, a loosened curl, a studied and admired disorder in the hair, a bit of lace, a touch of colour, a yellow rose in the bosom; and the instant picture was complete.

'That will do,' she said. 'Bid my carriage follow me to the palace. In half an hour it should be there in waiting.'

The night was beginning to fall and the shops to shine with lamps along the tree-beshadowed thorough-fares of Otto's capital, when the Countess started on her high emprise. She was jocund at heart; pleasure and interest had winged her beauty, and she knew it. She paused before the glowing jeweller's; she remarked and praised a costume in the milliner's window; and when she reached the lime-tree walk, with its high, umbrageous arches and stir of passers-by in the dim alleys, she took her place upon a bench and began to dally with the pleasures of the hour. It

was cold, but she did not feel it, being warm within; her thoughts, in that dark corner, shone like the gold and rubies at the jewellers; her ears, which heard the brushing of so many footfalls, transposed it into music.

What was she to do? She held the paper by which all depended. Otto and Gondremark and Ratafia, and the state itself, hung light in her balances, as light as dust; her little finger laid in either scale would set all flying; and she hugged herself upon her huge preponderance, and then laughed aloud to think how giddily it might be used. The vertigo of omnipotence, the disease of Cæsars, shook her reason. 'O the mad world!' she thought, and laughed aloud in exultation.

A child, finger in mouth, had paused a little way from where she sat, and stared with cloudy interest upon this laughing lady. She called it nearer; but the child hung back. Instantly, with that curious passion which you may see any woman in the world display, on the most odd occasions, for a similar end, the Countess bent herself with singleness of mind to overcome this diffidence; and presently, sure enough, the child was seated on her knee, thumbing and glowering at her watch.

'If you had a clay bear and a china monkey,' asked Von Rosen, 'which would you prefer to break?'

'But I have neither,' said the child.

'Well,' she said, 'here is a bright florin, with which you may purchase

both the one and the other; and I shall give it you at once, if you will answer my question. The clay bear or the china monkey—come?’

But the unbreeched soothsayer only stared upon the florin with big eyes; the oracle could not be persuaded to reply; and the Countess kissed him lightly, gave him the florin, set him down upon the path, and resumed her way with swinging and elastic gait.

‘Which shall I break?’ she wondered; and she passed her hand with delight among the careful disarrangement of her locks. ‘Which?’ and she consulted heaven with her bright eyes. ‘Do I love both or neither? A little—passionately—not at all? Both or neither—both, I believe; but at least I will make hay of Ratafia.’

By the time she had passed the iron gates, mounted the drive, and set her foot upon the broad flagged terrace, the night had come completely; the palace front was thick with lighted windows; and along the balustrade, the lamp on every twentieth baluster shone clear. A few withered tracks of sunset, amber and glow-worm green, still lingered in the western sky; and she paused once again to watch them fading.

‘And to think,’ she said, ‘that here am I—destiny embodied, a norn, a fate, a providence—and have no guess upon which side I shall declare myself! What other woman in my place would not be prejudiced, and think herself committed? But, thank Heaven! I was born just!’ Otto’s windows were bright among the rest, and she looked on them with rising tenderness. ‘How does it feel to be deserted?’ she thought. ‘Poor dear

fool! The girl deserves that he should see this order.'

Without more delay, she passed into the palace and asked for an audience of Prince Otto. The Prince, she was told, was in his own apartment, and desired to be private. She sent her name. A man presently returned with word that the Prince tendered his apologies, but could see no one. 'Then I will write,' she said, and scribbled a few lines alleging urgency of life and death. 'Help me, my Prince,' she added; 'none but you can help me.' This time the messenger returned more speedily, and begged the Countess to follow him: the Prince was graciously pleased to receive the Frau Gräfin von Rosen.

Otto sat by the fire in his large armoury, weapons faintly glittering all about him in the changeful light. His face was disfigured by the marks of weeping; he looked sour and sad; nor did he rise to greet his visitor, but bowed, and bade the man begone. That kind of general tenderness which served the Countess for both heart and conscience, sharply smote her at this spectacle of grief and weakness; she began immediately to enter into the spirit of her part; and as soon as they were alone, taking one step forward and with a magnificent gesture—'Up!' she cried.

'Madame von Rosen,' replied Otto dully, 'you have used strong words. You speak of life and death. Pray, madam, who is threatened? Who is there,' he added bitterly, 'so destitute that even Otto of Grünewald can assist him?'

'First learn,' said she, 'the names of the conspirators; the Princess and

the Baron Gondremark. Can you not guess the rest?' And then, as he maintained his silence—'You!' she cried, pointing at him with her finger. 'Tis you they threaten! Your rascal and mine have laid their heads together and condemned you. But they reckoned without you and me. We make a *partie carrée*, Prince, in love and politics. They lead an ace, but we shall trump it. Come, partner, shall I draw my card?'

'Madam,' he said, 'explain yourself. Indeed I fail to comprehend.'

'See, then,' said she; and handed him the order.

He took it, looked upon it with a start; and then, still without speech, he put his hand before his face. She waited for a word in vain.

'What!' she cried, 'do you take the thing down-heartedly? As well seek wine in a milk-pail as love in that girl's heart! Be done with this, and be a man. After the league of the lions, let us have a conspiracy of mice, and pull this piece of machinery to ground. You were brisk enough last night when nothing was at stake and all was frolic. Well, here is better sport; here is life indeed.'

He got to his feet with some alacrity, and his face, which was a little flushed, bore the marks of resolution.

'Madame von Rosen,' said he, 'I am neither unconscious nor ungrateful; this is the true continuation of your friendship; but I see that I must disappoint your expectations. You seem to expect from me some effort of

resistance; but why should I resist? I have not much to gain; and now that I have read this paper, and the last of a fool's paradise is shattered, it would be hyperbolic to speak of loss in the same breath with Otto of Grönewald. I have no party, no policy; no pride, nor anything to be proud of. For what benefit or principle under Heaven do you expect me to contend? Or would you have me bite and scratch like a trapped weasel? No, madam; signify to those who sent you my readiness to go. I would at least avoid a scandal.'

'You go?—of your own will, you go?' she cried.

'I cannot say so much, perhaps,' he answered; 'but I go with good alacrity. I have desired a change some time; behold one offered me! Shall I refuse? Thank God, I am not so destitute of humour as to make a tragedy of such a farce.' He flicked the order on the table. 'You may signify my readiness,' he added grandly.

'Ah,' she said, 'you are more angry than you own.'

'I, madam? angry?' he cried. 'You rave! I have no cause for anger. In every way I have been taught my weakness, my instability, and my unfitness for the world. I am a plexus of weaknesses, an impotent Prince, a doubtful gentleman; and you yourself, indulgent as you are, have twice reproved my levity. And shall I be angry? I may feel the unkindness, but I have sufficient honesty of mind to see the reasons of this coup d'état.'

‘From whom have you got this?’ she cried in wonder. ‘You think you have not behaved well? My Prince, were you not young and handsome, I should detest you for your virtues. You push them to the verge of commonplace. And this ingratitude—’

‘Understand me, Madame von Rosen,’ returned the Prince, flushing a little darker, ‘there can be here no talk of gratitude, none of pride. You are here, by what circumstance I know not, but doubtless led by your kindness, mixed up in what regards my family alone. You have no knowledge what my wife, your sovereign, may have suffered; it is not for you—no, nor for me—to judge. I own myself in fault; and were it otherwise, a man were a very empty boaster who should talk of love and start before a small humiliation. It is in all the copybooks that one should die to please his lady-love; and shall a man not go to prison?’

‘Love? And what has love to do with being sent to gaol?’ exclaimed the Countess, appealing to the walls and roof. ‘Heaven knows I think as much of love as any one; my life would prove it; but I admit no love, at least for a man, that is not equally returned. The rest is moonshine.’

‘I think of love more absolutely, madam, though I am certain no more tenderly, than a lady to whom I am indebted for such kindnesses,’ returned the Prince. ‘But this is unavailing. We are not here to hold a court of troubadours.’

‘Still,’ she replied, ‘there is one thing you forget. If she conspires with Gondremark against your liberty, she may conspire with him against

your honour also.'

'My honour?' he repeated. 'For a woman, you surprise me. If I have failed to gain her love or play my part of husband, what right is left me? or what honour can remain in such a scene of defeat? No honour that I recognise. I am become a stranger. If my wife no longer loves me, I will go to prison, since she wills it; if she love another, where should I be more in place? or whose fault is it but mine? You speak, Madame von Rosen, like too many women, with a man's tongue. Had I myself fallen into temptation (as, Heaven knows, I might) I should have trembled, but still hoped and asked for her forgiveness; and yet mine had been a treason in the teeth of love. But let me tell you, madam,' he pursued, with rising irritation, 'where a husband by futility, facility, and ill-timed humours has outwearied his wife's patience, I will suffer neither man nor woman to misjudge her. She is free; the man has been found wanting.'

'Because she loves you not?' the Countess cried. 'You know she is incapable of such a feeling.'

'Rather, it was I who was born incapable of inspiring it,' said Otto.

Madame von Rosen broke into sudden laughter. 'Fool,' she cried, 'I am in love with you myself!'

'Ah, madam, you are most compassionate,' the Prince retorted, smiling. 'But this is waste debate. I know my purpose. Perhaps, to equal you in

frankness, I know and embrace my advantage. I am not without the spirit of adventure. I am in a false position—so recognised by public acclamation: do you grudge me, then, my issue?’

‘If your mind is made up, why should I dissuade you?’ said the Countess. ‘I own, with a bare face, I am the gainer. Go, you take my heart with you, or more of it than I desire; I shall not sleep at night for thinking of your misery. But do not be afraid; I would not spoil you, you are such a fool and hero.’

‘Alas! madam,’ cried the Prince, ‘and your unlucky money! I did amiss to take it, but you are a wonderful persuader. And I thank God, I can still offer you the fair equivalent.’ He took some papers from the chimney. ‘Here, madam, are the title-deeds,’ he said; ‘where I am going, they can certainly be of no use to me, and I have now no other hope of making up to you your kindness. You made the loan without formality, obeying your kind heart. The parts are somewhat changed; the sun of this Prince of Grünewald is upon the point of setting; and I know you better than to doubt you will once more waive ceremony, and accept the best that he can give you. If I may look for any pleasure in the coming time, it will be to remember that the peasant is secure, and my most generous friend no loser.’

‘Do you not understand my odious position?’ cried the Countess. ‘Dear Prince, it is upon your fall that I begin my fortune.’

‘It was the more like you to tempt me to resistance,’ returned Otto.

'But this cannot alter our relations; and I must, for the last time, lay my commands upon you in the character of Prince.' And with his loftiest dignity, he forced the deeds on her acceptance.

'I hate the very touch of them,' she cried.

There followed upon this a little silence. 'At what time,' resumed Otto, '(if indeed you know) am I to be arrested?'

'Your Highness, when you please!' exclaimed the Countess. 'Or, if you choose to tear that paper, never!'

'I would rather it were done quickly,' said the Prince. 'I shall take but time to leave a letter for the Princess.'

'Well,' said the Countess, 'I have advised you to resist; at the same time, if you intend to be dumb before your shearers, I must say that I ought to set about arranging your arrest. I offered'—she hesitated—'I offered to manage it, intending, my dear friend—intending, upon my soul, to be of use to you. Well, if you will not profit by my goodwill, then be of use to me; and as soon as ever you feel ready, go to the Flying Mercury where we met last night. It will be none the worse for you; and to make it quite plain, it will be better for the rest of us.'

'Dear madam, certainly,' said Otto. 'If I am prepared for the chief evil, I shall not quarrel with details. Go, then, with my best gratitude; and when I have written a few lines of leave-taking, I shall

immediately hasten to keep tryst. To-night I shall not meet so dangerous a cavalier,' he added, with a smiling gallantry.

As soon as Madame von Rosen was gone, he made a great call upon his self-command. He was face to face with a miserable passage where, if it were possible, he desired to carry himself with dignity. As to the main fact, he never swerved or faltered; he had come so heart-sick and so cruelly humiliated from his talk with Gotthold, that he embraced the notion of imprisonment with something bordering on relief. Here was, at least, a step which he thought blameless; here was a way out of his troubles. He sat down to write to Seraphina; and his anger blazed. The tale of his forbearances mounted, in his eyes, to something monstrous; still more monstrous, the coldness, egoism, and cruelty that had required and thus requited them. The pen which he had taken shook in his hand. He was amazed to find his resignation fled, but it was gone beyond his recall. In a few white-hot words, he bade adieu, dubbing desperation by the name of love, and calling his wrath forgiveness; then he cast but one look of leave-taking on the place that had been his for so long and was now to be his no longer; and hurried forth—love's prisoner—or pride's.

He took that private passage which he had trodden so often in less momentous hours. The porter let him out; and the bountiful, cold air of the night and the pure glory of the stars received him on the threshold. He looked round him, breathing deep of earth's plain fragrance; he looked up into the great array of heaven, and was quieted. His little turgid life dwindled to its true proportions; and he saw himself (that great flame-hearted martyr!) stand like a speck under the cool cupola of the

night. Thus he felt his careless injuries already soothed; the live air of out-of-doors, the quiet of the world, as if by their silent music, sobering and dwarfing his emotions.

‘Well, I forgive her,’ he said. ‘If it be of any use to her, I forgive.’

And with brisk steps he crossed the garden, issued upon the Park, and came to the Flying Mercury. A dark figure moved forward from the shadow of the pedestal.

‘I have to ask your pardon, sir,’ a voice observed, ‘but if I am right in taking you for the Prince, I was given to understand that you would be prepared to meet me.’

‘Herr Gordon, I believe?’ said Otto.

‘Herr Oberst Gordon,’ replied that officer. ‘This is rather a ticklish business for a man to be embarked in; and to find that all is to go pleasantly is a great relief to me. The carriage is at hand; shall I have the honour of following your Highness?’

‘Colonel,’ said the Prince, ‘I have now come to that happy moment of my life when I have orders to receive but none to give.’

‘A most philosophical remark,’ returned the Colonel. ‘Begad, a very pertinent remark! it might be Plutarch. I am not a drop’s blood to your Highness, or indeed to any one in this principality; or else I should

dislike my orders. But as it is, and since there is nothing unnatural or unbecoming on my side, and your Highness takes it in good part, I begin to believe we may have a capital time together, sir—a capital time. For a gaoler is only a fellow-captive.'

'May I inquire, Herr Gordon,' asked Otto, 'what led you to accept this dangerous and I would fain hope thankless office?'

'Very natural, I am sure,' replied the officer of fortune. 'My pay is, in the meanwhile, doubled.'

'Well, sir, I will not presume to criticise,' returned the Prince. 'And I perceive the carriage.'

Sure enough, at the intersection of two alleys of the Park, a coach and four, conspicuous by its lanterns, stood in waiting. And a little way off about a score of lancers were drawn up under the shadow of the trees.

CHAPTER XIII—PROVIDENCE VON ROSEN: ACT THE THIRD
SHE ENLIGHTENS SERAPHINA

When Madame von Rosen left the Prince, she hurried straight to Colonel Gordon; and not content with directing the arrangements, she had herself accompanied the soldier of fortune to the Flying Mercury. The Colonel gave her his arm, and the talk between this pair of conspirators ran high and lively. The Countess, indeed, was in a whirl of pleasure and excitement; her tongue stumbled upon laughter, her eyes shone, the colour that was usually wanting now perfected her face. It would have taken little more to bring Gordon to her feet—or so, at least, she believed, disdaining the idea.

Hidden among some lilac bushes, she enjoyed the great decorum of the arrest, and heard the dialogue of the two men die away along the path. Soon after, the rolling of a carriage and the beat of hoofs arose in the still air of the night, and passed speedily farther and fainter into silence. The Prince was gone.

Madame von Rosen consulted her watch. She had still, she thought, time enough for the tit-bit of her evening; and hurrying to the palace, winged by the fear of Gondremark's arrival, she sent her name and a pressing request for a reception to the Princess Seraphina. As the Countess von Rosen unqualified, she was sure to be refused; but as an emissary of the Baron's, for so she chose to style herself, she gained immediate entry.

The Princess sat alone at table, making a feint of dining. Her cheeks were mottled, her eyes heavy; she had neither slept nor eaten; even her dress had been neglected. In short, she was out of health, out of looks, out of heart, and hag-ridden by her conscience. The Countess drew a swift comparison, and shone brighter in beauty.

‘You come, madam, de la part de Monsieur le Baron,’ drawled the Princess. ‘Be seated! What have you to say?’

‘To say?’ repeated Madame von Rosen, ‘O, much to say! Much to say that I would rather not, and much to leave unsaid that I would rather say. For I am like St. Paul, your Highness, and always wish to do the things I should not. Well! to be categorical—that is the word?—I took the Prince your order. He could not credit his senses. “Ah,” he cried “dear Madame von Rosen, it is not possible—it cannot be I must hear it from your lips. My wife is a poor girl misled, she is only silly, she is not cruel.” “Mon Prince,” said I, “a girl—and therefore cruel; youth kills flies.”—He had such pain to understand it!’

‘Madame von Rosen,’ said the Princess, in most steadfast tones, but with a rose of anger in her face, ‘who sent you here, and for what purpose? Tell your errand.’

‘O, madam, I believe you understand me very well,’ returned von Rosen. ‘I have not your philosophy. I wear my heart upon my sleeve, excuse the indecency! It is a very little one,’ she laughed, ‘and I so often change

the sleeve!’

‘Am I to understand the Prince has been arrested?’ asked the Princess, rising.

‘While you sat there dining!’ cried the Countess, still nonchalantly seated.

‘You have discharged your errand,’ was the reply; ‘I will not detain you.’

‘O no, madam,’ said the Countess, ‘with your permission, I have not yet done. I have borne much this evening in your service. I have suffered. I was made to suffer in your service.’ She unfolded her fan as she spoke. Quick as her pulses beat, the fan waved languidly. She betrayed her emotion only by the brightness of her eyes and face, and by the almost insolent triumph with which she looked down upon the Princess. There were old scores of rivalry between them in more than one field; so at least von Rosen felt; and now she was to have her hour of victory in them all.

‘You are no servant, Madame von Rosen, of mine,’ said Seraphina.

‘No, madam, indeed,’ returned the Countess; ‘but we both serve the same person, as you know—or if you do not, then I have the pleasure of informing you. Your conduct is so light—so light,’ she repeated, the fan wavering higher like a butterfly, ‘that perhaps you do not truly

understand.’ The Countess rolled her fan together, laid it in her lap, and rose to a less languorous position. ‘Indeed,’ she continued, ‘I should be sorry to see any young woman in your situation. You began with every advantage—birth, a suitable marriage—quite pretty too—and see what you have come to! My poor girl, to think of it! But there is nothing that does so much harm,’ observed the Countess finely, ‘as giddiness of mind.’ And she once more unfurled the fan, and approvingly fanned herself.

‘I will no longer permit you to forget yourself,’ cried Seraphina. ‘I think you are mad.’

‘Not mad,’ returned von Rosen. ‘Sane enough to know you dare not break with me to-night, and to profit by the knowledge. I left my poor, pretty Prince Charming crying his eyes out for a wooden doll. My heart is soft; I love my pretty Prince; you will never understand it, but I long to give my Prince his doll, dry his poor eyes, and send him off happy. O, you immature fool!’ the Countess cried, rising to her feet, and pointing at the Princess the closed fan that now began to tremble in her hand. ‘O wooden doll!’ she cried, ‘have you a heart, or blood, of any nature? This is a man, child—a man who loves you. O, it will not happen twice! it is not common; beautiful and clever women look in vain for it. And you, you pitiful schoolgirl, tread this jewel under foot! you, stupid with your vanity! Before you try to govern kingdoms, you should first be able to behave yourself at home; home is the woman’s kingdom.’ She paused and laughed a little, strangely to hear and look upon. ‘I will tell you one of the things,’ she said, ‘that were to stay unspoken. Von

Rosen is a better women than you, my Princess, though you will never have the pain of understanding it; and when I took the Prince your order, and looked upon his face, my soul was melted—O, I am frank—here, within my arms, I offered him repose!’ She advanced a step superbly as she spoke, with outstretched arms; and Seraphina shrank. ‘Do not be alarmed!’ the Countess cried; ‘I am not offering that hermitage to you; in all the world there is but one who wants to, and him you have dismissed! “If it will give her pleasure I should wear the martyr’s crown,” he cried, “I will embrace the thorns.” I tell you—I am quite frank—I put the order in his power and begged him to resist. You, who have betrayed your husband, may betray me to Gondremark; my Prince would betray no one. Understand it plainly,’ she cried, ‘tis of his pure forbearance that you sit there; he had the power—I gave it him—to change the parts; and he refused, and went to prison in your place.’

The Princess spoke with some distress. ‘Your violence shocks me and pains me,’ she began, ‘but I cannot be angry with what at least does honour to the mistaken kindness of your heart: it was right for me to know this. I will condescend to tell you. It was with deep regret that I was driven to this step. I admire in many ways the Prince—I admit his amiability. It was our great misfortune, it was perhaps somewhat of my fault, that we were so unsuited to each other; but I have a regard, a sincere regard, for all his qualities. As a private person I should think as you do. It is difficult, I know, to make allowances for state considerations. I have only with deep reluctance obeyed the call of a superior duty; and so soon as I dare do it for the safety of the state, I promise you the Prince shall be released. Many in my situation would

have resented your freedoms. I am not’—and she looked for a moment rather piteously upon the Countess—‘I am not altogether so inhuman as you think.’

‘And you can put these troubles of the state,’ the Countess cried, ‘to weigh with a man’s love?’

‘Madame von Rosen, these troubles are affairs of life and death to many; to the Prince, and perhaps even to yourself, among the number,’ replied the Princess, with dignity. ‘I have learned, madam, although still so young, in a hard school, that my own feelings must everywhere come last.’

‘O callow innocence!’ exclaimed the other. ‘Is it possible you do not know, or do not suspect, the intrigue in which you move? I find it in my heart to pity you! We are both women after all—poor girl, poor girl!—and who is born a woman is born a fool. And though I hate all women—come, for the common folly, I forgive you. Your Highness’—she dropped a deep stage curtsy and resumed her fan—‘I am going to insult you, to betray one who is called my lover, and if it pleases you to use the power I now put unreservedly into your hands, to ruin my dear self. O what a French comedy! You betray, I betray, they betray. It is now my cue. The letter, yes. Behold the letter, madam, its seal unbroken as I found it by my bed this morning; for I was out of humour, and I get many, too many, of these favours. For your own sake, for the sake of my Prince Charming, for the sake of this great principality that sits so heavy on your conscience, open it and read!’

'Am I to understand,' inquired the Princess, 'that this letter in any way regards me?'

'You see I have not opened it,' replied von Rosen; 'but 'tis mine, and I beg you to experiment.'

'I cannot look at it till you have,' returned Seraphina, very seriously. 'There may be matter there not meant for me to see; it is a private letter.'

The Countess tore it open, glanced it through, and tossed it back; and the Princess, taking up the sheet, recognised the hand of Gondremark, and read with a sickening shock the following lines:—

'Dearest Anna, come at once. Ratafia has done the deed, her husband is to be packed to prison. This puts the minx entirely in my power; le tour est joué; she will now go steady in harness, or I will know the reason why. Come.

HEINRICH.'

'Command yourself, madam,' said the Countess, watching with some alarm the white face of Seraphina. 'It is in vain for you to fight with Gondremark; he has more strings than mere court favour, and could bring you down to-morrow with a word. I would not have betrayed him otherwise; but Heinrich is a man, and plays with all of you like marionnettes. And

now at least you see for what you sacrificed my Prince. Madam, will you take some wine? I have been cruel.'

'Not cruel, madam—salutary,' said Seraphina, with a phantom smile. 'No, I thank you, I require no attentions. The first surprise affected me: will you give me time a little? I must think.'

She took her head between her hands, and contemplated for a while the hurricane confusion of her thoughts.

'This information reaches me,' she said, 'when I have need of it. I would not do as you have done, but yet I thank you. I have been much deceived in Baron Gondremark.'

'O, madam, leave Gondremark, and think upon the Prince!' cried von Rosen.

'You speak once more as a private person,' said the Princess; 'nor do I blame you. But my own thoughts are more distracted. However, as I believe you are truly a friend to my—to the—as I believe,' she said, 'you are a friend to Otto, I shall put the order for his release into your hands this moment. Give me the ink-dish. There!' And she wrote hastily, steadying her arm upon the table, for she trembled like a reed. 'Remember; madam,' she resumed, handing her the order, 'this must not be used nor spoken of at present; till I have seen the Baron, any hurried step—I lose myself in thinking. The suddenness has shaken me.'

'I promise you I will not use it,' said the Countess, 'till you give me

leave, although I wish the Prince could be informed of it, to comfort his poor heart. And O, I had forgotten, he has left a letter. Suffer me, madam, I will bring it you. This is the door, I think?' And she sought to open it.

'The bolt is pushed,' said Seraphina, flushing.

'O! O!' cried the Countess.

A silence fell between them.

'I will get it for myself,' said Seraphina; 'and in the meanwhile I beg you to leave me. I thank you, I am sure, but I shall be obliged if you will leave me.'

The Countess deeply curtsied, and withdrew.

CHAPTER XIV—RELATES THE CAUSE AND OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION

Brave as she was, and brave by intellect, the Princess, when first she was alone, clung to the table for support. The four corners of her universe had fallen. She had never liked nor trusted Gondremark completely; she had still held it possible to find him false to friendship; but from that to finding him devoid of all those public virtues for which she had honoured him, a mere commonplace intriguer, using her for his own ends, the step was wide and the descent giddy. Light and darkness succeeded each other in her brain; now she believed, and now she could not. She turned, blindly groping for the note. But von Rosen, who had not forgotten to take the warrant from the Prince, had remembered to recover her note from the Princess: von Rosen was an old campaigner, whose most violent emotion aroused rather than clouded the vigour of her reason.

The thought recalled to Seraphina the remembrance of the other letter—Otto's. She rose and went speedily, her brain still wheeling, and burst into the Prince's armoury. The old chamberlain was there in waiting; and the sight of another face, prying (or so she felt) on her distress, struck Seraphina into childish anger.

'Go!' she cried; and then, when the old man was already half-way to the door, 'Stay!' she added. 'As soon as Baron Gondremark arrives, let him

attend me here.'

'It shall be so directed,' said the chamberlain.

'There was a letter . . . ' she began, and paused.

'Her Highness,' said the chamberlain, 'will, find a letter on the table.

I had received no orders, or her Highness had been spared this trouble.'

'No, no, no,' she cried. 'I thank you. I desire to be alone.'

And then, when he was gone, she leaped upon the letter. Her mind was still obscured; like the moon upon a night of clouds and wind, her reason shone and was darkened, and she read the words by flashes.

'Seraphina,' the Prince wrote, 'I will write no syllable of reproach.

I have seen your order, and I go. What else is left me? I have wasted my love, and have no more. To say that I forgive you is not needful; at least, we are now separate for ever; by your own act, you free me from my willing bondage: I go free to prison. This is the last that you will hear of me in love or anger. I have gone out of your life; you may breathe easy; you have now rid yourself of the husband who allowed you to desert him, of the Prince who gave you his rights, and of the married lover who made it his pride to defend you in your absence. How you have requited him, your own heart more loudly tells you than my words. There is a day coming when your vain dreams will roll away like clouds, and you will find yourself alone.

Then you will remember

OTTO.'

She read with a great horror on her mind; that day, of which he wrote, was come. She was alone; she had been false, she had been cruel; remorse rolled in upon her; and then with a more piercing note, vanity bounded on the stage of consciousness. She a dupe! she helpless! she to have betrayed herself in seeking to betray her husband! she to have lived these years upon flattery, grossly swallowing the bolus, like a clown with sharpers! she—Seraphina! Her swift mind drank the consequences; she

foresaw the coming fall, her public shame; she saw the odium, disgrace, and folly of her story flaunt through Europe. She recalled the scandal she had so royally braved; and alas! she had now no courage to confront it with. To be thought the mistress of that man: perhaps for that. . . .

She closed her eyes on agonising vistas. Swift as thought she had snatched a bright dagger from the weapons that shone along the wall. Ay, she would escape. From that world-wide theatre of nodding heads and buzzing whisperers, in which she now beheld herself unpitiably martyred, one door stood open. At any cost, through any stress of suffering, that greasy laughter should be stifled. She closed her eyes, breathed a wordless prayer, and pressed the weapon to her bosom.

At the astonishing sharpness of the prick, she gave a cry and awoke to a sense of undeserved escape. A little ruby spot of blood was the reward of that great act of desperation; but the pain had braced her like a

tonic, and her whole design of suicide had passed away.

At the same instant regular feet drew near along the gallery, and she knew the tread of the big Baron, so often gladly welcome, and even now rallying her spirits like a call to battle. She concealed the dagger in the folds of her skirt; and drawing her stature up, she stood firm-footed, radiant with anger, waiting for the foe.

The Baron was announced, and entered. To him, Seraphina was a hated task: like the schoolboy with his Virgil, he had neither will nor leisure to remark her beauties; but when he now beheld her standing illuminated by her passion, new feelings flashed upon him, a frank admiration, a brief sparkle of desire. He noted both with joy; they were means. 'If I have to play the lover,' thought he, for that was his constant preoccupation, 'I believe I can put soul into it.' Meanwhile, with his usual ponderous grace, he bent before the lady.

'I propose,' she said in a strange voice, not known to her till then, 'that we release the Prince and do not prosecute the war.'

'Ah, madam,' he replied, 'tis as I knew it would be! Your heart, I knew, would wound you when we came to this distasteful but most necessary step. Ah, madam, believe me, I am not unworthy to be your ally; I know you have qualities to which I am a stranger, and count them the best weapons in the armoury of our alliance:—the girl in the queen—pity, love, tenderness, laughter; the smile that can reward. I can only command; I

am the frowner. But you! And you have the fortitude to command these comely weaknesses, to tread them down at the call of reason. How often have I not admired it even to yourself! Ay, even to yourself,' he added tenderly, dwelling, it seemed, in memory on hours of more private admiration. 'But now, madam—'

'But now, Herr von Gondremark, the time for these declarations has gone by,' she cried. 'Are you true to me? are you false? Look in your heart and answer: it is your heart I want to know.'

'It has come,' thought Gondremark. 'You, madam!' he cried, starting back—with fear, you would have said, and yet a timid joy. 'You! yourself, you bid me look into my heart?'

'Do you suppose I fear?' she cried, and looked at him with such a heightened colour, such bright eyes, and a smile of so abstruse a meaning, that the Baron discarded his last doubt.

'Ah, madam!' he cried, plumping on his knees. 'Seraphina! Do you permit me? have you divined my secret? It is true—I put my life with joy into your power—I love you, love with ardour, as an equal, as a mistress, as a brother-in-arms, as an adored, desired, sweet-hearted woman. O Bride!' he cried, waxing dithyrambic, 'bride of my reason and my senses, have pity, have pity on my love!'

She heard him with wonder, rage, and then contempt. His words offended her to sickness; his appearance, as he grovelled bulkily upon the floor,

moved her to such laughter as we laugh in nightmares.

‘O shame!’ she cried. ‘Absurd and odious! What would the Countess say?’

That great Baron Gondremark, the excellent politician, remained for some little time upon his knees in a frame of mind which perhaps we are allowed to pity. His vanity, within his iron bosom, bled and raved. If he could have blotted all, if he could have withdrawn part, if he had not called her bride—with a roaring in his ears, he thus regretfully reviewed his declaration. He got to his feet tottering; and then, in that first moment when a dumb agony finds a vent in words, and the tongue betrays the inmost and worst of a man, he permitted himself a retort which, for six weeks to follow, he was to repent at leisure.

‘Ah,’ said he, ‘the Countess? Now I perceive the reason of your Highness’s disorder.’

The lackey-like insolence of the words was driven home by a more insolent manner. There fell upon Seraphina one of those storm-clouds which had already blackened upon her reason; she heard herself cry out; and when the cloud dispersed, flung the blood-stained dagger on the floor, and saw Gondremark reeling back with open mouth and clapping his hand upon the wound. The next moment, with oaths that she had never heard, he leaped at her in savage passion; clutched her as she recoiled; and in the very act, stumbled and drooped. She had scarce time to fear his murderous onslaught ere he fell before her feet.

He rose upon one elbow; she still staring upon him, white with horror.

‘Anna!’ he cried, ‘Anna! Help!’

And then his utterance failed him, and he fell back, to all appearance dead.

Seraphina ran to and fro in the room; she wrung her hands and cried aloud; within she was all one uproar of terror, and conscious of no articulate wish but to awake.

There came a knocking at the door; and she sprang to it and held it, panting like a beast, and with the strength of madness in her arms, till she had pushed the bolt. At this success a certain calm fell upon her reason. She went back and looked upon her victim, the knocking growing louder. O yes, he was dead. She had killed him. He had called upon von Rosen with his latest breath; ah! who would call on Seraphina? She had killed him. She, whose irresolute hand could scarce prick blood from her own bosom, had found strength to cast down that great colossus at a blow.

All this while the knocking was growing more uproarious and more unlike the staid career of life in such a palace. Scandal was at the door, with what a fatal following she dreaded to conceive; and at the same time among the voices that now began to summon her by name, she recognised the

Chancellor’s. He or another, somebody must be the first.

'Is Herr von Greisengesang without?' she called.

'Your Highness—yes!' the old gentleman answered. 'We have heard cries, a fall. Is anything amiss?'

'Nothing,' replied Seraphina 'I desire to speak with you. Send off the rest.' She panted between each phrase; but her mind was clear. She let the looped curtain down upon both sides before she drew the bolt; and, thus secure from any sudden eyeshot from without, admitted the obsequious

Chancellor, and again made fast the door.

Greisengesang clumsily revolved among the wings of the curtain, so that she was clear of it as soon as he.

'My God!' he cried 'The Baron!'

'I have killed him,' she said. 'O, killed him!'

'Dear me,' said the old gentleman, 'this is most unprecedented. Lovers' quarrels,' he added ruefully, 'redintegratio—' and then paused. 'But, my dear madam,' he broke out again, 'in the name of all that is practical, what are we to do? This is exceedingly grave; morally, madam, it is appalling. I take the liberty, your Highness, for one moment, of addressing you as a daughter, a loved although respected daughter; and I must say that I cannot conceal from you that this is morally most questionable. And, O dear me, we have a dead body!'

She had watched him closely; hope fell to contempt; she drew away her skirts from his weakness, and, in the act, her own strength returned to her.

‘See if he be dead,’ she said; not one word of explanation or defence; she had scorned to justify herself before so poor a creature: ‘See if he be dead’ was all.

With the greatest compunction, the Chancellor drew near; and as he did so the wounded Baron rolled his eyes.

‘He lives,’ cried the old courtier, turning effusively to Seraphina.

‘Madam, he still lives.’

‘Help him, then,’ returned the Princess, standing fixed. ‘Bind up his wound.’

‘Madam, I have no means,’ protested the Chancellor.

‘Can you not take your handkerchief, your neck-cloth, anything?’ she cried; and at the same moment, from her light muslin gown she rent off a flounce and tossed it on the floor. ‘Take that,’ she said, and for the first time directly faced Greisengesang.

But the Chancellor held up his hands and turned away his head in agony. The grasp of the falling Baron had torn down the dainty fabric of the

bodice; and—‘O Highness!’ cried Greisengesang, appalled, ‘the terrible disorder of your toilette!’

‘Take up that flounce,’ she said; ‘the man may die.’

Greisengesang turned in a flutter to the Baron, and attempted some innocent and bungling measures. ‘He still breathes,’ he kept saying. ‘All is not yet over; he is not yet gone.’

‘And now,’ said she ‘if that is all you can do, begone and get some porters; he must instantly go home.’

‘Madam,’ cried the Chancellor, ‘if this most melancholy sight were seen in town—O dear, the State would fall!’ he piped.

‘There is a litter in the Palace,’ she replied. ‘It is your part to see him safe. I lay commands upon you. On your life it stands.’

‘I see it, dear Highness,’ he jerked. ‘Clearly I see it. But how? what men? The Prince’s servants—yes. They had a personal affection. They will be true, if any.’

‘O, not them!’ she cried. ‘Take Sabra, my own man.’

‘Sabra! The grand-mason?’ returned the Chancellor, aghast. ‘If he but saw this, he would sound the tocsin—we should all be butchered.’

She measured the depth of her abasement steadily. 'Take whom you must,' she said, 'and bring the litter here.'

Once she was alone she ran to the Baron, and with a sickening heart sought to allay the flux of blood. The touch of the skin of that great charlatan revolted her to the toes; the wound, in her ignorant eyes, looked deathly; yet she contended with her shuddering, and, with more skill at least than the Chancellor's, stanching the welling injury. An eye unprejudiced with hate would have admired the Baron in his swoon; he looked so great and shapely; it was so powerful a machine that lay arrested; and his features, cleared for the moment both of temper and dissimulation, were seen to be so purely modelled. But it was not thus with Seraphina. Her victim, as he lay outspread, twitching a little, his big chest unbarred, fixed her with his ugliness; and her mind flitted for a glimpse to Otto.

Rumours began to sound about the Palace of feet running and of voices raised; the echoes of the great arched staircase were voluble of some confusion; and then the gallery jarred with a quick and heavy tramp. It was the Chancellor, followed by four of Otto's valets and a litter. The servants, when they were admitted, stared at the dishevelled Princess and the wounded man; speech was denied them, but their thoughts were riddled with profanity. Gondremark was bundled in; the curtains of the litter were lowered; the bearers carried it forth, and the Chancellor followed behind with a white face.

Seraphina ran to the window. Pressing her face upon the pane, she could

see the terrace, where the lights contended; thence, the avenue of lamps that joined the Palace and town; and overhead the hollow night and the larger stars. Presently the small procession issued from the Palace, crossed the parade, and began to thread the glittering alley: the swinging couch with its four porters, the much-pondering Chancellor behind. She watched them dwindle with strange thoughts: her eyes fixed upon the scene, her mind still glancing right and left on the overthrow of her life and hopes. There was no one left in whom she might confide; none whose hand was friendly, or on whom she dared to reckon for the barest loyalty. With the fall of Gondremark, her party, her brief popularity, had fallen. So she sat crouched upon the window-seat, her brow to the cool pane; her dress in tatters, barely shielding her; her mind revolving bitter thoughts.

Meanwhile, consequences were fast mounting; and in the deceptive quiet of the night, downfall and red revolt were brewing. The litter had passed forth between the iron gates and entered on the streets of the town. By what flying panic, by what thrill of air communicated, who shall say? but the passing bustle in the Palace had already reached and re-echoed in the region of the burghers. Rumour, with her loud whisper, hissed about the town; men left their homes without knowing why; knots formed along the boulevard; under the rare lamps and the great limes the crowd grew blacker.

And now through the midst of that expectant company, the unusual sight of a closed litter was observed approaching, and trotting hard behind it that great dignitary Cancellarius Greisengesang. Silence looked on as it

went by; and as soon as it was passed, the whispering seethed over like a boiling pot. The knots were sundered; and gradually, one following another, the whole mob began to form into a procession and escort the curtained litter. Soon spokesmen, a little bolder than their mates, began to ply the Chancellor with questions. Never had he more need of that great art of falsehood, by whose exercise he had so richly lived. And yet now he stumbled, the master passion, fear, betraying him. He was pressed; he became incoherent; and then from the jolting litter came a groan. In the instant hubbub and the gathering of the crowd as to a natural signal, the clear-eyed quavering Chancellor heard the catch of the clock before it strikes the hour of doom; and for ten seconds he forgot himself. This shall atone for many sins. He plucked a bearer by the sleeve. 'Bid the Princess flee. All is lost,' he whispered. And the next moment he was babbling for his life among the multitude.

Five minutes later the wild-eyed servant burst into the armoury. 'All is lost!' he cried. 'The Chancellor bids you flee.' And at the same time, looking through the window, Seraphina saw the black rush of the populace begin to invade the lamplit avenue.

'Thank you, Georg,' she said. 'I thank you. Go.' And as the man still lingered, 'I bid you go,' she added. 'Save yourself.'

Down by the private passage, and just some two hours later, Amalia Seraphina, the last Princess, followed Otto Johann Friedrich, the last Prince of Grünewald.