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Author: John R. Carling

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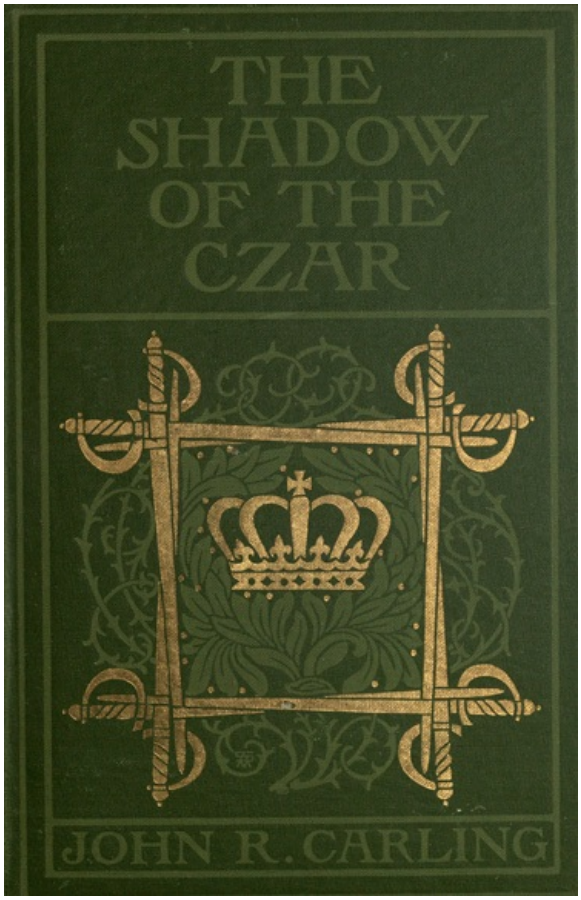

THE CORONATION DUEL.

The
Shadow of the Czar

By

John R. Carling

Illustrated

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THE SHADOW OF THE CZAR

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PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I

THE MEETING IN THE FOREST

Paul Cressingham, captain in Her Britannic Majesty's army, had seen some active service, and

was therefore not unused to sleeping on the ground at night wrapt in his military cloak. Nevertheless he had a civilian weakness, if not for luxury, at least for comfort, and much preferred a four-poster, whenever the same was procurable.

At the time, however, when this story opens it seemed likely that if he slept at all, his slumbers would have to be *à la belle étoile*, for he found himself late at night wandering in a deep pine-forest of Dalmatia.

Paul's regiment—the Twenty-fourth Kentish—had its headquarters at Corfu; for his were the days when the United States of the Ionian Isles formed a dependency of the British Crown. His uncle, Colonel Graysteel, was commander-in-chief of the forces stationed there,—a fact which stood Paul in good, or possibly in bad, stead, for thereby he was enabled to obtain more relaxation than is consonant with the traditions of the War Office, his furloughs being extremely numerous, and spent chiefly in exploring odd corners of the Adriatic.

Colonel Graysteel growled occasionally at his nephew's negligences. Having no children of his own, he had adopted Paul as his heir. On parade there was no finer figure than Paul's,—tall, 2
athletic, soldierly. With hair of a golden shade and having a tendency to curl, with soft hazel eyes that could look stern, however, at times, and with graceful drooping moustache, he was first favorite with the ladies of the English colony at Corfu, especially as his elegance in waltzing was the despair of all his brother-officers. He was an excellent shot, a deadly swordsman, a dashing rider, a youth of spirit and bravery. To one of this character much must be forgiven, and the old colonel forgave accordingly.

Nevertheless when Paul one fine morning walked into his uncle's villa at breakfast-time and requested furlough for no other reason than a wish to explore the wilds of Dalmatia, there was a slight outbreak of wrath on the part of the commander-in-chief.

"Another leave of absence? I don't believe you've put in three months' service this year."

"Four months, five days," corrected the other amiably.

"The Commissioner's beginning to notice your vagaries."

"Hang the Commissioner," replied the young man, irreverently. "Let him give me something worthy of doing, and I'll do it. Get up a war, say against Austria or Turkey, the latter preferred; show me the enemy and you'll find me to the fore. But this playing at soldiers; this marching and counter-marching; this inspection of kit, and attendance at parade,—I'm growing wearied of it. I'm rusting here,—I, whose motto is 'Action.' Am I to remain for ever in these cursed malarial isles, a mere drilling machine?"

"The drillings pay when comes the day," retorted the colonel, so surprised at this betrayal into rhyme that he repeated it. "And what's this new craze of yours for Dalmatia? Wild outlandish place! Nobody ever goes there."

"Precisely my reason for visiting it," returned Paul, lunging with his sabre-point at a mosquito 3
that had just settled on a panel of the wall. "Why go where everybody goes? My tastes run in the direction of the odd, the romantic, the wild, the—anything that's opposed to the common round of existence. I fancy I shall find it in Dalmatia."

"You'll find yourself in the hands of banditti. That's where you'll be. The mountains swarm with them. And I'm damned if I'll pay your ransom," cried the colonel with returning wrath, as he recalled the liberality and frequency with which Paul drew upon his purse. "Remember the case of young Lennox, and the severed ear sent to his father in an envelope. Ten thousand florins! That's what the old chap had to pay to get his son out of the clutches of the infernal scoundrels, and never a thaler has he been able to recover from the Austrian Government. And now you would run yourself and me into a similar noose!"

"Banditti won't fix my ransom at so high a rate. Besides," added Paul, critically contemplating the Damascene inlaying of his sabre, "they've first got to take me."

"Well, if they'll fix it at what you're worth," said his uncle, grimly, "I shall not object to the payment."

Ultimately Paul obtained the desired furlough by resorting to his usual threat; he would sell his commission, buy a string of camels, and spend the rest of his life in trying to discover the sources of the Nile.

Thus it came to pass that a few days after this interview young Captain Cressingham embarked on board the Austrian Lloyd's steamer *Metternich*, bound for Zara, the clean, well-built capital of Dalmatia, directing his voyage to this city in order to renew old memories with some former college-chums, who were about to pass their summer holiday in its neighborhood.

Finding that he had anticipated the arrival of his friends by a few days, Paul resolved to spend the interval in taking a pedestrian tour southward as far as Sebenico: and accordingly he set off, 4
without either companion or servant, and wearing his uniform, partly because as a soldier he was proud of it, partly because experience had taught him that in these eastern regions a uniform inspires respect in the minds of innkeepers, if not in those of banditti.

He passed the first night of this journey at a wayside hostelry.

At sunrise he resumed his course, walking amid picturesque scenery—on the right the sparkling sea, on the left glorious pine-clad mountains.

Late in the afternoon Paul, who had followed the post-road, reached a point where it entered a magnificent forest. As this wild-wood was just the sort of place where banditti might be expected to lurk, Paul's first impulse was to turn aside, and to take the more circuitous way along the sea-beach.

"You fear!" a secret voice seemed to whisper: and the reproach decided his route. Not even in his own eyes would he be a coward.

This choice of a road was but a small matter, one might think; yet it was to form the turning-point of his life.

He walked forward at a quick pace, and, with an eye to a challenge from some outlaw of the forest, he kept his hand constantly upon the butt of his revolver.

He did not meet with a bandit, however, but with a bear—the first he had ever seen in a wild, free state.

The creature came shambling from the wood on one side of the road a few yards in front of him, and there it stood, with its eyes fixed upon the wayfarer, as if questioning the right of man to invade these solitudes.

"An adventure at last!" murmured Paul, tingling with excitement. "*Ursus Styriacus* from his size. Now to emulate Hereward the Wake."

As previously stated Paul was an excellent shot, and inasmuch as his revolver was six-chambered 5
he had little fear as to the result of the encounter.

The killing of a bear is the easiest thing in the world, at least according to the theory set forth by a hunter whom Paul had met the previous evening at the hostelry.

"If you fire at Bruin while he is on all-fours, you waste powder and shot, for his tough shaggy sides are almost impervious to bullets. You must face him at close quarters, and when he rises on his hind legs to welcome you with that hug which is his characteristic, then is the time to aim at the vital parts. If the shots fail to take effect, and you find yourself in his embrace, you simply draw your knife, give the necessary stab, and the thing is done."

The plan seems beautifully simple.

Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, Paul did not have the opportunity of reducing the theory to practice; for, as he slowly advanced, revolver in hand, and with his eye alert to every movement of the bear, the latter ambled off again into the wood.

Resolving to give chase, Paul turned aside from the road. He would shoot that bear, bring back some fellows from the inn to flay the animal, and present the skin to his uncle.

But Colonel Graysteel was not destined to decorate his smoking-room with a trophy of his nephew's valor, for though Paul followed hard upon his quarry, its rate of progress surpassed his own. In a few moments it had passed from view, and all the shouting and random firing on the part of Paul failed to provoke the return of the animal.

"Talk no more to me of the spirit of bears," he muttered, as he put up his weapon.

Paul turned to resume his journey in some vexation of spirit—a feeling which did not diminish as
he began to realize that he had lost his bearings. All around him rose the lofty pines, obscuring 6
his view of the road from which he had been diverted by the chase of the bear. There was nothing to indicate the way. He carried an ordnance-map of the district, and the forest was marked large upon it, but he was unable to tell what particular point of the map corresponded with his own position at that moment. Moreover, he was without a compass; and, to add to his difficulty, the sun had set.

Seek as he would he could not find the road. Now and again he shouted at the top of his voice, even at the risk of attracting the notice of persons less friendly than charcoal-burners or wood-cutters, but his cries met with no response. The silence and solitude of the leafy vistas around were more suggestive of the primeval back-woods of the New World than of an European forest.

For several hours he walked, or rather stumbled along, in the darkness, wandering this way or that, as blind fancy directed, and haunted by the reflection that Bruin might return with one of his *confrères*, eager to dine off a too venturesome tourist.

He had given himself up as hopelessly lost, when he came to a spot where the foliage above his head suddenly lifted, revealing a sky of the darkest blue set with glittering stars. This sky extending in a broad band far to the left and far to the right proclaimed the welcome fact that he had hit upon the road again.

He looked at his watch, and found that it was close upon midnight. That infernal Bruin had delayed his journey by six hours.

Even now he had no idea which way to turn for Sebenico, till his eyes, roaming over as much of the sky as was contained within his circle of vision, caught the sign of Ursa Major.

"Poetic justice!" he smiled. "Misled by the earthly bear, guided by the heavenly." Knowing that Sebenico lay to the south, he accordingly set his face in that direction with intent, on reaching the first milestone, to ascertain from his ordnance-map the position of the nearest village or inn. 7

He stepped forward briskly, and keeping a sharp lookout soon came upon a milestone glimmering white upon one side of the road. Kneeling down he struck a match—like the revolver, a recent invention in 1845—and by the faint glow learned that he was thirty miles from Zara.

Taking out his map, together with the "Tourist's Manual for Dalmatia," he proceeded to make a study of both by the brief and unsatisfactory illuminations afforded by a succession of lucifers.

"After to-night," he muttered, "I shall always carry a small lantern with me; likewise a compass."

Now while Paul was kneeling there, intent upon book and map, he received the greatest surprise of his life.

"Which way does Zara lie?"

The question was spoken in Italian—the common language of Dalmatia—by a voice so soft and musical that the like had never been heard by Paul.

When he had risen to his feet he stood mute with astonishment, a passage from "Christabel" floating through his mind,—

> "I guess 't was frightful there to see
> A lady so richly clad as she—
> Beautiful exceedingly!"

For, in truth, it *was* a lady that Paul saw standing before him at midnight hour beneath the light of the stars in the depth of the Dalmatian forest; and, like the lady of the poem, she was both richly dressed and marvellously beautiful—lovely as the soft beauty of a southern night; with raven hair, and dusky eyes that seemed the mirrors of a sweet melancholy. She wore a long Dalmatian capote with the hood drawn over her head. The capote being partly open revealed a costume of the richest silk. Decorated with curious gold brocade, and with a wealth of chain-work and gems, this dress, though it might have been pronounced bizarre by the more sober taste of Western ladies, harmonized in Paul's judgment with the wild oriental beauty of the wearer. 8

"Pardon me if I have startled you. Which way does Zara lie?"

And the astounded Paul, usually full of assurance in the presence of women, could do nothing on the present occasion but simply stammer forth, while pointing to the north,—

"That is the road to Zara."

"I thank you, signor."

With a stately inclination of her head she drew her capote more closely around her, and walked away in the direction indicated by Paul as quietly and confidently as if the lonely forest-road were the Boulevard des Italiens, and the distant Zara a pretty toy-shop a few yards ahead!

Different people, different customs. Was it the habit of young Dalmatian women to take solitary midnight walks through bear-haunted forests?

Recovering from his surprise Paul hastened after her.

"Signorina, you cannot walk alone to Zara."

"And why cannot I walk alone to Zara?" said the young lady, facing Paul and assuming a hauteur that had a somewhat chilling effect upon his gallantry.

"Perils beset you—banditti, for example."

"With native Dalmatians the person of a woman is held sacred. No one, not even a robber, will do me hurt."

Subsequent inquiry on the part of Paul proved that the lady had spoken correctly. Indeed he learned that if a stranger travelling in this region were to place himself under the escort of a woman, he would be free from molestation. 9

This high standard of chivalry, curious among a people otherwise barbarous, explained the lady's confidence and fearlessness in approaching him.

"But, signorina," remonstrated Paul, "the way is so long. Zara is thirty miles off. And you would walk that distance on foot! Consider the fatigue."

"I can sit and rest, and when tired can sleep for a time on the ground as I did last night. I *must* reach Zara," she added, with a shiver as of fear.

Her dress of jewels gave proof of her wealth, her voice and manner of refinement. It was amazing, then, to hear her talk of sleeping *al fresco* on the turf like a gipsy or a soldier.

"I thank you, signor, but I do not require an escort." So saying she walked away again with the dignity of a princess, while Paul in his bewilderment gazed after her retreating figure.

"Here's a mystery, forsooth! Who is she? What is she? What lovely eyes! And what a witching face! Now how should a fellow act in a case like this? Ought I not to follow her?"

Paul had no wish to force his protection upon a young woman averse to it, but the circumstances seemed to justify him in exercising some sort of surveillance over her, for though the Dalmatians might be such paladins as she had represented, there were dangers other than those arising from the malevolence of human beings—bears, for example. If harm should befall her, then his would be the blame for permitting her to go on her way alone. But as she was opposed to his presence he shrank from walking by her side. She might insist upon his retiring, and refusal or obedience would be equally distasteful to him. His course was clear; the protection must be exercised from a distance, and without her knowledge.

Accordingly he followed in the wake of the young woman, screening himself from a possible backward glance on her part by keeping within the covert of the trees that skirted the roadside, and stepping out from time to time to note her progress.

Her slow and halting pace gave clear indication that she was worn with travelling, and half-an-hour had not passed when Paul observed her swaying to one side as if about to fall. Too tired to proceed farther, she turned to a grassy mound beside the road and sat down, resting her brow upon her hand, the very picture of languor and despondency.

The sight of her helplessness moved Paul strangely. No longer concealing himself, he walked boldly forward in the centre of the road that she might observe his coming.

"Signor, you are following me," she said, with a touch of reproach in her voice.

"I plead guilty."

"Wishing to protect me from imaginary perils?"

"Imaginary! You may be safe from men, but have you made a truce with the beasts? A huge bear crossed this road a few hours ago."

The lady gave a start of fear. Paul saw his advantage and pursued it.

"Signorina, I am an Englishman—a military officer, as you see," he remarked, putting aside his cloak and revealing his handsome uniform of dark blue adorned with silver facings. "I do not ask who or whence you are; but whether you be princess or peasant, I cannot let you go on your way alone and unprotected."

She did not reply, and Paul continued in a somewhat firmer tone,—

"You do wrong to repel me. You are too exhausted to walk farther without aid."

"You speak the truth," she murmured. "I am faint. I have eaten nothing for twelve hours."

Her tone went to Paul's heart, the more so as he had nothing to offer her in the shape of food, for he had long ago consumed his last morsel.

"You must think it strange," said the lady, after a brief pause, "for a woman to be wandering in this hour in such a spot."

"I do not press for confidences—only for permission to conduct you to a place of safety."

"But learn the risk you run by so doing. It was not from churlishness that I refused your escort just now. Signor, I will be frank with you, believing that you will not betray me. I have escaped from a convent, where I was forcibly detained, and I fear pursuit by the Austrian gendarmerie. Hence, by aiding me, you may come into collision with the authorities. Why should I bring trouble upon you? Now you understand my desire for Zara. I hope to find there some English vessel. Once beneath its flag I shall be safe."

"You fear pursuit? Then you require an arm for your defence. So long as I can handle sword and pistol no one shall carry you off against your will. Signorina, you must come with me."

"And where would you take me?" she asked in a tone that showed she was yielding.

"Not far from here, according to my guide-book, is a path leading down to the sea. On the shore, which is distant about a mile, stands a building, old but tenanted, and called Castel Nuovo. This is the nearest human habitation," continued Paul. "Before meeting you I had intended to try my fortune there. Now, suppose we go together? As the Dalmatians are such respecters of women they will not refuse you hospitality. Rest at this castle for the night, and to-morrow you shall find an easier way of reaching Zara than journeying thither on foot."

The young lady was not long in coming to a decision. A roof, food, and a bed, and these distant but a mile, offered a more attractive prospect than supperless repose on the dank turf of the dark bear-haunted wild-wood. She rose to her feet, looked intently at Paul, and read in his clear eyes the glance of a good conscience.

"Take me with you," she said, with the simplicity of a child.

Paul bowed, and offered his arm, which she accepted. The touch of her little hand thrilled him with a strange pleasure.

CHAPTER II

THE CASTLE BY THE SEA

Walking onward a few paces they came to the path mentioned in the guide-book. 13

Few words were spoken, for Paul, knowing that his fair companion was tired, famished, and sleepy, purposely refrained from conversation.

Once, however, the silence was broken, when the lady timidly ventured to ask his name, which being given, he in turn requested the like favor from her.

"I have been taught to call myself Barbara," was her answer, which Paul could not but think was a somewhat odd way of expressing herself.

Barbara! If he had not thought it a pretty name before, he certainly thought it such now.

"And Barbara," he murmured, more to himself than to his companion, "means 'strange.'"

"I fear you will find my character correspondent."

"But you have a second name?" smiled Paul.

"Presumably, but I am in ignorance respecting it, for my parentage is unknown to me. Indeed, signor, it is true," she added sadly. "I am a mystery to myself."

Her statement filled Paul with wonder, but though desirous of learning her history he recognized that the time was scarcely yet ripe to press for confidences.

The path traversed by them formed a gradual descent, in parts so steep that Barbara would often have slipped but for Paul's strong arm. The murmur of the sea was now heard; a faint breeze blew coldly; finally emerging from the wood, they found themselves on an open grassy space shelving down to the beach. 14

There, distant about a hundred yards, stood the building that they sought—Castel Nuovo.

The retention of the epithet "Nuovo" was perhaps intended as a joke on the part of the Dalmatians. Like the rest of earthly things the castle must once have been new, but that once, judging by appearances, was a long time ago. The greater part of the edifice was in ruins, the stars glimmering through the vacant window spaces and through the gaps that yawned in the ivy-mantled walls.

A massive, square built tower perched on a rock that overhung the sea, seemed the portion likeliest to be tenanted, if tenanted at all, for signs of human presence were wanting. Neither light nor sound came from it.

Silent and ghostly in the cold starlight rose the gray tower, the sea splashing with melancholy murmur at the foot of the crag.

The brief notice contained in the guide-book—"Castel Nuovo, an old mansion, residence of the Marquis Orsino"—did not suggest a place like this, a place seeming to be desolated by the curse of some past tragedy; and as Paul contemplated the scene, a feeling of misgiving stole over him, —a misgiving which found reflection in Barbara's face.

Seating his companion upon a fallen column, Paul went forward to reconnoitre. Crossing the grass-grown pavement of what had once been a stately loggia, he mounted the mossy fractured steps leading to the door of the tower. On the lintel was sculptured, "Marino Faliero, 1348"—proof that the castle dated from the days when the Venetians held sway in Dalmatia.

No sooner had Paul rapped upon the massive oaken door than a terrible din arose from within. His summons had startled into wakefulness a menagerie of dogs, and these, judging by their deep bass, brutes of the largest size. 15

A casement high above the portal opened immediately, and an old man's voice cried,—

"Is that you, Master?"

The question was spoken in Romaic, a language with which Paul had become familiar by reason of his residence in Corfu.

He directed his eyes upward, but the speaker was invisible. Familiar perhaps with the attacks of banditti, he was too cautious to expose his person as a target for a pistol-shot.

Stepping back, the better to be heard, and speaking in Romaic, the better to be understood, Paul explained his object in knocking, withholding the fact, however, that the lady with him had escaped from a convent, lest it should dispose the old man to decline so dangerous a fugitive.

"You cannot stay here," was the answer, when Paul had finished speaking.

"I will pay you, and that handsomely, for the trouble we give."

"It's not a question of money. This house is not mine, and I cannot open it to whom I will. I have received strict orders from the Master to admit no one during his absence. If he should return

and find me entertaining strangers, I should suffer."

"Your master, whoever he may be, never meant that you should turn away at midnight a young lady exhausted by a twelve hours' wandering in the forest without food. I ask not for myself, but for her. It is but for a single night."

"A single hour would be too long."

Paul stood dismayed by the old man's churlishness. He pictured Barbara's look of distress on announcing that he had brought her on a bootless errand.

"You a Greek," he cried, "to refuse hospitality to an Englishman, whose uncle fought for Greece —" 16

This appeal wrought a remarkable change in the old man.

"What do you say you are?"

"An Englishman, nephew of Colonel Graysteel, commandant of the British forces at Corfu, and—"

"An Englishman! Why the devil didn't you say so before? I took you for a damned Austrian. And you are the nephew of old 'Fighting Graysteel'? I was with him at Missolonghi. Wait. I'll be down in a moment. Hi, Jacintha, Jacintha," he added, addressing some one within. "Get up, or I'll throw something at your head."

The old man withdrew from the casement, and Paul concluded that he was coming downstairs, for the baying of the dogs gradually ceased; there were sounds suggestive of the idea that he was kicking them into some place of safety.

"Jacintha?" thought Paul. "The old fellow's wife, daughter, or servant? Whoever she may be, I am glad for the young lady's sake that a woman lives here."

Footsteps were now audible in the passage. A little panel in the upper part of the door slid aside revealing an iron grating, behind which appeared a man's face set in a square of light.

"No tricks with me. Now, mylordos, if you are what you say you are, speak to me in English, for though I don't talk the language myself I understand it when spoken by others."

"Open the door, and give me some supper—" began Paul.

"Ah! you're an Englishman, all over," interrupted the other with a dry chuckle. "The first thing he thinks of is his belly."

And the inmate, apparently satisfied with this credential of nationality, swung open the great iron-studded door and revealed himself.

He was a little man, and though past seventy years of age, his form had lost little of the elasticity and strength of youth. His thin curved nose was extremely suggestive of the beak of an eagle, a resemblance increased by his bright piercing eyes. His hair was white and flowing, and his moustaches were of such a length that he had tied them together at the back of his head. 17

His attire was gorgeous in the extreme, and he was evidently very proud of the fact. He wore an open jacket that was a perfect marvel of silk, velvet, and rows of silver buttons; a white fustanella or kilt glittering with embroidery of gold; and gaiters and slippers rich with the same decoration. Altogether he was one of the strangest creatures that Paul had ever beheld.

In one hand he carried a yataghan, and in the other a lighted lamp, and he bowed low with theatrical grace.

"Since you are an Englishman, enter. Welcome, ten thousand welcomes," he cried, waving his sparkling yataghan around, as if inviting Paul to take entire possession of the castle. "Every Englishman is my brother, for did not your countrymen fight for the liberation of Greece? Can we ever forget Navarino? You see before you the friend, the companion-in-arms of General Church and Lord Cochrane. You must have heard your uncle talk of me,—Lambro the Turcophage, with whose name Ottoman mothers still frighten their children, by telling them how Lambro, whenever food ran short in the camp, never hesitated to roast and eat his Turkish prisoners. Ah!" Like a ghoul he smacked his lips at the memory of those repasts. "Yes, to me, and to men like me, Greece owes the freedom that she now enjoys. I should be great to-day, and hold high office under King Otho: but what am I? What you see. The custodian of an old ruin. This is national gratitude, mylordos. It is thus that Hellas rewards those who have shed their blood for her."

Paul immediately recognized in the speaker one of the class called Palicars, men who had fought for the independence of Greece in the twenties; in their youth half soldiers and half brigands, but always full of patriotism and bold as lions against the Turk; in old age too often apt to be garrulous, boastful, vain. 18

Muttering some words of gratitude for the proffered hospitality, Paul immediately flew off for Barbara, whom he found asleep. In a state of weariness she had rested her arm on a stone balustrade, pillowed her cheek on her sleeve, and without intending it had fallen asleep in that attitude.

"Fie, signorina," said Paul with chiding smile, as he gently roused her. "Sleeping in the open air! Do you court malaria? Come, there is better rest for you in yon tower, where you will not be the

only lady. Our host is a somewhat queer character, but—'any port in a storm,' as our English proverb has it."

He assisted her to rise, and helped her across the dilapidated loggia, and up the steps to the entrance of the hall where Lambro stood waiting to receive them.

But no sooner had the old Palicar obtained a clear view of Barbara than his eyes almost started from their sockets. His shaking hand dropped the lamp, and the hall was plunged into sudden darkness. With the ejaculation of "Kyrie eleison" the warrior, who was wont to boast that he had fought in a hundred battles, fled at the sight of a young maiden's face.

At the end of the corridor he recovered himself, and shouted, "Jacintha, Jacintha, come down."

"What is the matter?" said a voice at his elbow.

"Matter enough," replied Lambro, grasping the woman's shoulders and whispering in her ear. "The dead have returned to life. Walk to the door, pick up the lamp, re-light it, and look at the lady that the Englishman has brought with him."

Jacintha did as bidden. The lamp, re-kindled, showed her as a little fair-haired woman of subdued demeanor, her face retaining traces of former good looks. 19

She cast one glance at Barbara, and immediately gave a strange gasp.

"In God's name," she murmured, "who are you?"

"A hard question," returned Barbara, with a touch of bitterness in her voice, "seeing that I myself cannot answer it."

This reply seemed to enhance Jacintha's fear. She stood mutely staring at Barbara, who began to feel something of resentment at the woman's strange manner.

"I will depart if you wish it," she said, turning away with quiet dignity, though her heart sank within her at the thought of passing the night out of doors.

"Oh! no, no. Pardon me, my lady, if I seem rude," replied Jacintha, assuming an humble manner, and stepping forward as if to intercept Barbara's departure. "Do not go. We shall be glad if you will stay. Stay here as long as you will—at least—that is—till—till—"

"Till the Master returns," chimed in Lambro, "and then—well, it's his rule to have no strangers here."

He had apparently plucked up his courage, for he had come forward to the entrance again, where he and Jacintha stood staring curiously, first at Barbara, then at each other.

"You seem to know me," said Barbara, "though I do not think that you can ever have seen me before to-night."

Receiving no reply, she glanced at Paul as if seeking an explanation from him, who had none to give, for he was as much perplexed as Barbara herself to account for the singular behavior of this couple.

"At first sight of you," began Lambro, "we thought—But no matter what we thought; we see now we were wrong."—He cast at the woman a glance which Paul interpreted as a warning for her to be reticent, and continued: "Now, Jacintha, show our guests the way upstairs. The nephew of the man who fought for Greece shall have no cause to complain of our hospitality." 20

"A queer couple," whispered Paul to Barbara, "but trustworthy, I believe. I think you will be safe here."

Barbara, almost ready to sink to the ground with fatigue, had no other course than to accept the shelter of Castel Nuovo, however strange her entertainers; and accordingly still resting upon Paul's arm, she followed Jacintha up the staircase, while Lambro, having locked the door, brought up the rear.

"Your wife?" Paul asked of him and referring to Jacintha.

"She answers the purpose," replied Lambro. "We've done without a priest so far. She's mine because I bought her. Five hundred beshliks she cost me in the slave-mart of Janina. A deal of money, a great deal of money," continued the old fellow, wincing as if he had had a tooth drawn. "I'm doubtful whether I've had the value of it. I could have bought a lovely young Circassian at the price. But since she was warranted to be a splendid nurse and an excellent cook, I took her as a helpmeet for my old age."

Paul trusted that Barbara did not understand Romaic, for the old Palicar's society was not exactly of the sort that a matronly duenna would have chosen as suitable for a young maiden.

The interior of Castel Nuovo formed a pleasant and striking contrast with its dilapidated exterior. The apartment to which the visitors were conducted was stamped with an air of wealth and dignity,—lofty, composed of dark oak, and furnished with stained-glass casements, blazoned in their centre with the Winged Lion of St. Mark. The roof was richly fretted; the pictures painted on the panelling of the walls were in a fine state of preservation. On the wide tesselated hearth beneath a beautifully carved mantelpiece were pine logs disposed as for a fire. To these Jacintha 21

applied a match, and soon a blaze sprang up, so bright as to render any other light superfluous.

"The Master's dining-hall," remarked Lambro.

"Let me help you, my lady," said Jacintha, observing Barbara embarrassed with the fastenings of her capote.

She assisted in untying the hood, and having removed the cloak, seated Barbara in a comfortable arm-chair by the fire.

Despite the Romaic costume worn by Jacintha, and the golden coins twisted in her hair, Paul had no difficulty in fixing her nationality.

"You are an Englishwoman?" he said, with a smile.

"Yes, sir, I am," was her reply, accompanied by a submissive little curtsey.

A few words on her part sufficed to give her history. Nurse in the service of an English doctor at Constantinople, she had, when returning home, been captured by Turkish pirates, and carried to Janina for sale, where she was purchased by Lambro, and brought to Castel Nuovo. Paul's ears tingled at the thought of an Englishwoman being sold in an Albanian slave-mart. He wondered whether she knew that she was now living in a free country. Her real name was Winifred Power, but Lambro would persist in calling her Jacintha.

It so happened that Paul was well acquainted with her native town, inasmuch as his school-days had been passed in its neighborhood. His allusions to places with which both were familiar drew tears to the woman's eyes.

"Ah! do not talk of home," she said. "Every week I can see from the windows here the steamer from Trieste on its way to England; a few days' sail only, and yet as impossible for me to reach as the stars."

"You're better off here," growled the old Greek. "I bought you, and by God I'll keep you. You are not to leave me till I—I—die—" He winced as if not liking the prospect presented by the last word. 22
—"You have promised as much. I have treated you better than any Turk would. You live in a castle with fine dresses and plenty to eat and drink; and when I'm a—gone you'll have my savings, and can then go back to England. What more do you want?"

"Shall I be permitted to leave here after your death?" asked Jacintha, darting a strange look upon Lambro, who frowned, and said,—

"Who is to prevent you? What nonsense you talk! Why don't you ask our guests what they'll have for supper?"

"What would my lady like?" inquired Jacintha turning to Barbara, and enumerating the contents of her larder.

"You are very good," smiled Barbara. "Anything will do for me."

"Except, of course, roast Turk," said Paul, turning to Lambro. "We must draw the line at that."

The Turcophage grinned and withdrew in company with Jacintha; and as they called no servant to their aid, Paul concluded, and rightly, that these two were the sole tenants of the castle.

Paul had now a better opportunity than heretofore for observing his fair companion as she sat by the hearth, the bright firelight playing over her silken attire with its shimmer of chain-work and jewels. Her figure was beautifully shaped; her features were of pure, classic type, as clear and delicate as if sculptured from alabaster. There was something peculiarly noble in the pose of her head, which disposed Paul to the belief that when the mystery of her origin became solved, it would be found that she was of high birth.

She had spread out her hands to the fire, and with her face upturned to Paul, she said with charming *naïveté*,— 23

"I am so glad that you insisted upon me accompanying you, for this is certainly more cheerful than the dark forest."

The light of gratitude sparkling in her soft dusky eyes completely captivated Paul. He began to think that it would be a pleasant thing if she would always smile so upon him, and upon none other.

"Our new friends," he remarked, "are evidently expecting visitors, and those—two in number—to judge from the cutlery." He pointed to the dining-table and its snowy cloth set with Majolica-ware, cut-glass, and silver. "The Master and his wife I presume. Unpleasant for us if they should arrive to-night, and should object to the proceedings of their hospitable seneschal."

Lambro and his partner now entered, bringing in a repast.

Barbara and Paul drew to the table. The humble Jacintha acted as waitress and seemed to take pleasure in the office.

Though Barbara ate but sparingly, her companion amply atoned for any deficiencies on her part; and when Lambro, going down to the castle cellar, returned with a bottle of delicious

maraschino, and a box containing cigars of ambrosial flavor, Paul's satisfaction was complete.

Lambro having called for his chibouque, perched himself upon a chair and sat cross-legged upon it in oriental fashion, while Jacintha at his command took a live coal from the fire by aid of the tongs, and applied it to the bowl of his pipe. Then the old Palicar puffed away in placid contentment while Jacintha went off to prepare a room for Barbara.

"Those cigars," Lambro presently remarked, addressing Paul, "have never paid Austrian duty. Whence do I procure them? From the sea,—my constant friend. A toast, a toast," he cried, raising his glass of maraschino. "Here's to the storm-fiend, and may he never cease to send us rich flotsam and jetsam. The dress I wear," he added, patting his gay costume with pride, "comes from the body of a drowned compatriot. If the signorina requires a new dress we can supply her with one as rich as that she now has. No, I am not a wrecker," he continued, as if in answer to Paul's suspicions. "I simply take the gifts the waves send me, and they send them pretty frequently on this wild rocky coast. Sometimes it is a Turkish vessel that goes to pieces on the reef out yonder," he went on, nodding in the direction of the sea. "Jacintha and I can hear their cries, but we are unable to help them. I would not help them if I could," he exclaimed with a fierce flash of energy, and taking the pipe from his mouth. "Are not the Turks the enemies of Greece? When I hear their shrieks rising above the sound of the storm—A-a-h!" He finished the sentence with a smack of his lips.

It would be impossible to imagine any being more weird than this little Greek, as he sat there cross-legged, tricked out in the finery of the dead, his eye glittering wildly, and his moustaches tied at the back of his head.

Paul deemed it advisable on Barbara's account to give a different turn to the conversation.

"This must have been a grand old castle when entire," he said. "The property, is it not, of the Italian Marquis Orsino?"

"Not so," replied Lambro, with a shake of his head. "The marquis sold it seven years ago to my present Master—"

"My guide-book is evidently not up to date."

"Though," added Lambro, "the sale was kept a secret."

"Why so?"

"All the Master's ways are secret."

"May one ask his name?"

"He has forbidden me to reveal it."

Paul, though conscious that he was treading on delicate ground, could not repress his further curiosity.

"Where does he live when not here?"

"He has never told me."

"What is his nationality?"

"That is equally a mystery to me."

Paul's interest in the Master increased, and as Lambro did not seem to resent his questioning, he continued,—

"How often does he visit this place?"

"It may be once only in the year, it may be twice or thrice."

"I gather from your first words when I knocked at the door, and also from the previous state of this table, that you are expecting him at the present time?"

"Expecting him!" echoed Lambro. "I am always expecting him. He never gives warning of his coming, either by letter or messenger. A loud knock of the door, and there he is! He may arrive to-night, he may not arrive for six months. But present or absent the larder must always be full, and the dining-room and the bedroom ready for his immediate reception. A hard man is the Master."

"And how long do his visits last?"

"That depends upon the mood of his companion."

"His companion? Do you mean his wife?"

"His wife?" repeated Lambro, with a peculiar laugh. "The Master is a bachelor and will always remain such. He is a member of a peculiar brotherhood pledged to the repudiation of women."

"What is the object of his visits?"

But Lambro was not disposed to be more communicative.

"Captain Cressingham," he said with a deprecatory shake of his head, "you must not ask me to betray my Master's secrets." 26

Paul accepted the rebuke with a good grace.

"You speak truth. I have no right to pry into his affairs. I apologize."

Secrecy is always suspicious. Lambro's reticence served but to whet Paul's curiosity. A weird interest began to gather around the unknown owner of Castel Nuovo, who was so studious of concealing his identity, who without previous warning came and vanished at irregular intervals on errands that necessitated a reserve in speaking of them.

At this point Jacintha reappeared carrying a lighted lamp.

"Would my lady like to retire now?"

Yes, my lady would, and arose for that purpose. Paul held the door as she passed forth.

"Good night, signorina."

She returned the valediction, accompanying it with a graceful inclination of her head, and a grateful smile that said as plainly as words could say, "But for you I should now be without bed."

The room to which Jacintha conducted Barbara was intended as a lady's bedchamber, as the toilet accessories sufficiently proved. A princess could not have found fault with its dainty tasteful appointments. And, surprising to relate, not a particle of dust was visible anywhere; the place was clean, swept, and garnished as if prepared that very day for the reception of a visitor.

"You are not giving up your own room to me, I hope?" said Barbara.

"Oh, no, my lady. I do not sleep here."

Barbara stared hard at the speaker. Seeing that the "Master," according to Lambro's statement, was a foe to womankind, it was singular, to say the least of it, that Castel Nuovo should contain a chamber of this description.

Tired as Barbara was, her curiosity would not let her rest, and she wandered about the room 27
asking a variety of questions. Had this been a bridal-chamber, or a death-chamber, or both? Had the mysterious "Master," mourning the loss of a wife or a daughter, given command that this apartment should be attended to every day, preserved in the same order as that in which it was when last occupied? Barbara could extract nothing from the reticent Jacintha, who seemed troubled by her visitor's catechism.

In her course round the apartment Barbara's quick eyes detected a circular piece of violet-colored sealing-wax adhering to one of the walls. She inquired how it came there, but Jacintha professed ignorance. Attracted by an indefinable feeling, Barbara asked that the lamp might be brought near. The wax was situated at a point just where a horizontal band of carving that formed the upper border of a panel touched upon the smooth plain oak above. A closer inspection showed that the wax bore the image of a paschal lamb,—an image, tiny indeed, yet perfectly clear. The wax had been stamped with a seal. Why? Children might perhaps find pleasure in fixing a piece of wax upon a wall and in stamping it with a seal, but as there were no children at Castel Nuovo this explanation would not suffice. If it were the work of adults what was its purport? Jacintha averred that it was not her doing; she could not say whose it was or assign any reason for its origin.

"Can you not put me in another room?"

"The other rooms are somewhat damp. Why, my lady, what do you fear?" she asked in reproachful surprise.

A hard question. It was impossible to link this piece of wax with any harm to herself, so Barbara turned away. The dainty little bed invited her to repose. Why trouble further?

When at last Barbara with a delicious sense of relief had slipped her tired and aching limbs 28
beneath the sheets, Jacintha brought to the bedside a glass containing a dark-colored liquid.

"Only quinine, my lady."

In a moment Barbara was sitting up in manifest fear, her eyes large and ghost-like.

"You don't think I have caught malaria?"

"It is best to take precautions," replied Jacintha, evasively.

"Fever? I have been dreading that," exclaimed Barbara, clasping her hands. "And I must be at Zara to-morrow. If I linger here I shall be caught by—Give me the quinine; give me double, treble the ordinary draught, if it will act as an antidote."

Barbara, after taking the potion, fell asleep almost immediately, and Jacintha returned to the dining-hall, where in answer to her eager questioning Paul gave an account of the meeting in the forest and related all he knew concerning Barbara, which, in truth, was not very much.

"And now tell me, Jacintha," he said, when he had finished, "why did you start so on first seeing the signorina?"

Jacintha seemed absolutely terror-stricken at this question. The old Palicar who had been drinking somewhat freely of the maraschino turned upon his consort with a fierce frown, drew his yataghan and shook it furiously at her.

"If ever you let that matter out—you know what I mean—by God, I'll cut your throat. Be off, woman! Go to bed; and remember what I say."

And Jacintha, who evidently stood thoroughly in awe of the fiery little Greek, withdrew without a word.

"Captain Cressingham," continued Lambro in a quieter tone, "you may believe me or not, as you will, but it is a fact that Jacintha and myself have never seen the signorina till to-night." 29

"Nor her portrait?"

"Nor her portrait."

Something in his manner convinced Paul that the old Palicar was speaking the truth, which only made the matter more perplexing. Despite the repudiation there was evidently some mystery connected with Barbara, a mystery known to Lambro and his consort. Paul intuitively felt that the Palicar's reticence could never be overcome, but he was not without hope of extracting the secret from Jacintha if he should have an opportunity of speaking with her alone.

"Paul Cressingham," he murmured, when he found himself left in the dining-hall for the night, "you came to Dalmatia in quest of the strange, the romantic, the wild. I am beginning to think you have found them." He drew his chair to the fire, composed himself for sleep, and dreamed of Barbara till morning gleamed through the casement.

CHAPTER III

FEVER AND CONVALESCENCE

Of the four occupants of Castel Nuovo the first to awaken in the morning was Jacintha, who, after dressing, proceeded immediately to Barbara's room. Having tapped at the door, first softly, then loudly, and receiving no answer, she ventured to enter. 30

Barbara was awake, and talking to herself in a very odd manner.

She took no notice of the approach of Jacintha, and the latter perceived at once that her forebodings were realized.

Barbara, her dark hair lying in disorder on her pillow, a bright color burning in her cheek, the light of reason quenched in her eye, was in a high state of fever. She was not speaking in Italian, the language used by her the previous evening, but in another tongue altogether strange to Jacintha.

The latter returned quickly to her own room to make it known to Lambro, who had just struggled into his finery.

"What else could be expected after sleeping at night in a damp forest?" was his comment. "Fever! and she in that very chamber, too! By God, if the Master should return and find her there!"

"Come and listen to her. She is talking in a strange language: she looks at me with piteous eyes as if making some request. Perhaps you can understand her."

The old Palicar followed her to Barbara's chamber. His roving life in the Balkan Peninsula had given him a knowledge, more or less imperfect, of all the languages spoken from the Danube to Maina, but he failed to identify the speech of Barbara with any one of these. 31

"It's not Romaic, nor Turkish, nor Albanian, nor—"

"Listen!" said Jacintha, in a startled voice.

Amid the plaintive flow of unintelligible sound there came at irregular intervals a recurrence of the same three syllables.

"*Rav-en-na!*" murmured Jacintha with white lips.

"She's thinking of Ravenna on the other side of the sea," said Lambro, indicating the direction with his hand. "Wishes to go there perhaps."

"No, no. Have you forgotten? Ravenna! That's what the last one said when she raved. 'O Ravenna, what have you done?' were her words."

Lambro stared dubiously at Jacintha. Then the eyes of both turned simultaneously to the violet sealing-wax on the wall, as if that had some connection with the name.

"I don't like this," muttered the old Palicar, turning away uneasily. "There's something eerie about it. How has the signorina got hold of that name?"

Leaving Jacintha there he proceeded with subdued mien to the dining-hall, and aroused Paul from slumber with the question,—

"Have you ever had the malaria?"

"Can any one live in your cursed Greek climate, and not take it?" said Paul, somewhat resenting the rough shaking he had received.

"Then you run no risk of taking it again by staying here."

Paul was wide awake now, and sprang instantly to his feet.

"You mean that the signorina has caught the fever?"

"That is so. She'll not see Zara for some weeks—if indeed at all. You have done a nice thing for me, Captain Cressingham, for she cannot be removed now. And what will the Master say if he should return and find a fever-stricken person in his house? His was wise advice, after all. 'Admit no strangers in my absence, Lambro.' I have broken his orders, and this is the result." 32

It may have been selfish on the part of Paul, but his thoughts were too much set on Barbara to permit of commiseration for Lambro's position. Never had he been attracted by any maiden as he had been by Barbara, and now to learn that she was in a dangerous fever filled him with a feeling akin to horror.

"Where does the nearest doctor live? I must fetch him at once."

"She's a dead woman if you do. Leave her to Jacintha, and she may recover; trust her to a Dalmatian doctor, and she'll certainly die."

With which assurance Lambro retired grumbling terribly, for inasmuch as all Jacintha's attention would be required by the patient, he foresaw that for the next month he would have to prepare his own meals, and likewise those of Paul, should the latter choose to remain at Castel Nuovo; and if there was aught that the old Palicar disliked it was work, even of the lightest sort.

In descending the stairs Paul was met by Jacintha.

"There is no use in disguising the truth," she said in answer to his eager questioning. "The signorina is in a very dangerous state. But leave her to me, and she shall recover. I was a nurse at Constantinople, remember; and in the matter of fever I know what to do as well as a doctor, perhaps better than any you will find in this uncivilized region."

Impressed somehow by Jacintha's faith in her own powers Paul felt that Barbara could not be in better hands.

"And you will remain at Castel Nuovo till she recovers?"

Paul gladly assented to this proposal.

"I know that she is a stranger to you," continued Jacintha, "but still she came here under your guidance and protection, and therefore in some measure you are responsible for her safety. Yes, I say, safety. Captain Cressingham," she added, with a strange earnestness, "your presence here is necessary. The signorina is in peril. If the Master should return and find—" 33

She broke off abruptly, perceiving Lambro at the foot of the staircase.

"Now, Jacintha, attend to your patient. I'll see to the captain's breakfast."

And awed by the cold glittering eye of her partner, Jacintha became mute and glided away.

That day, and the few days that followed, formed the most unhappy time that Paul had ever known, for the fair maiden whom he loved lay in the mystic borderland betwixt life and death.

He haunted the corridor leading to her bedroom, either sitting silent in the recess of an embrasured window, or walking to and fro with noiseless tread, eagerly questioning Jacintha whenever she appeared. She began to pity this young Englishman with his haggard looks, so much so that she always returned favorable answers, even when the waters of the dark river had almost closed over the head of her patient.

Mindful of Barbara's escape from a convent, Paul would not wander more than a few yards from the castle, fearful lest the ecclesiastical authorities or the Austrian gendarmes should make their appearance during his absence, to say nothing of the return of the mysterious Master, whose presence was equally to be guarded against, if Jacintha had spoken truly.

Paul's refusal to accompany Lambro for a sail on the sea or on a tramp through the woods with his dogs provoked that worthy's contempt. A fine soldierly fellow like Paul to be fretting over a thing of a girl, when a Circassian equally lovely could be bought in the neighboring province of Albania for five hundred beshliks, with the additional advantage of selling the damsel again when she had ceased to please. It was absurd! 34

At last one day Jacintha was able to announce that Barbara had passed the crisis. The relief to Paul's overwrought mind was so great that he almost felt as if he himself, and not Barbara, had

been the sufferer.

"And you will be glad to learn, Captain Cressingham," said the nurse, with a smile that had a hidden meaning in it, "that the illness has left no disfiguring traces on her beauty."

She was still too weak for conversation, and Jacintha averred that some days must elapse before she could let him see the patient.

In the meantime, however, Paul did not fail to remind her daily of his existence.

Near by lived a charcoal-burner accustomed to call at the castle for the purpose of bringing Jacintha her stock of provisions from the market-town.

Making use of this man Paul every day procured the loveliest of flowers, in addition to fruits and other delicacies, and these, accompanied by wishes for her welfare, he would send up to the patient through the medium of the faithful Jacintha, who in turn brought back Barbara's expressions of gratitude.

The period of Barbara's convalescence was a somewhat dull time for Paul, self-debarred as he was from quitting the vicinity of the castle.

He tried to take an interest in Lambro's companionship, despite his indefinable suspicion of the old Palicar, but he soon grew tired of hearing the same stories, for there was but one theme upon which the Greek would converse, namely, the Hellenic War of Independence,—a war in which, though history be strangely silent on the matter, Lambro had taken the leading part, at least, according to his own account. 35

Occasionally the vain old man, forgetful that his strength and skill were departing, would invite Paul to a fencing-bout; if defeated, he grew angry; but when Paul, in the exercise of a little *finesse*, permitted himself to be worsted, then Lambro, suspecting the trick played upon him, grew more angry still; so that there was no pleasing him. In short, he was a somewhat trying individual to live with, and Paul was never sorry when he saw him setting off for a long tramp by the shore or through the woods, attended by his twelve mastiffs, brutes big and ferocious, but esteemed by Paul because they were such, since they would prove excellent auxiliaries against any foe who should approach the castle with intent to carry off Barbara, and that such abduction might be attempted was a fear ever present to his mind.

Indeed, it was quite within the range of probability that any day a serious fray might occur, for heedless as to what the Austrian law might be in the matter of maidens who escaped from convents, Paul was determined that Barbara should not be surrendered to the authorities without opposition on his part; while Lambro, though disposed to look upon the fair fugitive somewhat in the light of an encumbrance, was nevertheless fierce in declaring, with a fine scorn of consequences, that he would shoot the first gendarme who should attempt to cross *his* threshold; and Paul had little doubt that the fiery old Klepht would keep his word.

Still, this was not quite the sort of recreation that Paul wanted.

"Have you no books here?" he asked of Lambro one day.

"Would you turn caloyer or papa? No? Then, what can you want with books?"

"Your classic ancestors would not have asked that question. To read, of course."

"Bah! the best use you can put books to is to twist them into cartridges. That's what we did with them in the war." In Lambro's opinion there had only been one war worthy of the name. "Did you ever hear of the siege of ——?" 36

"But as to the books now?" gently murmured Paul, who did not wish to hear anything about the siege of ——.

"Books? Yes, there are some here in the topmost room of the castle; but you cannot get at them, for that room is the Master's study; and on his departure he always locks the door, and takes the key with him."

Paul, with his head full of suspicion against the Master, could discern nothing but a sinister caution in his practice of keeping the study-door locked during his absence. Accordingly on the following day when Lambro was out of the way, and Jacintha occupied with her patient, Paul ascended the staircase leading to the upper portion of the tower. On the topmost landing of all he came upon a stout door of oak securely locked. This without doubt was the entrance of the study spoken of by Lambro. A pendant on the other side of the key-hole prevented Paul from obtaining the slightest glimpse of the interior.

Not only had the Master left this door locked, but he had likewise taken precautions to prevent any one during his absence from entering without his knowledge, for the hinges of the door were sealed with violet-colored wax bearing the impress of a paschal lamb.

The care thus taken to screen the room from espionage increased Paul's suspicions. Then he turned away, becoming suddenly conscious that to pry thus upon the affairs of a stranger was conduct unworthy of a soldier and a gentleman; and yet a secret voice seemed to whisper that he was justified in his proceeding, when he recalled Jacintha's strange remark that the return of the Master threatened Barbara's safety.

"Jacintha," said he, when next he saw that person, "what secret is contained in that locked room at the top of the tower, for," he added, proceeding beyond his knowledge, "I am convinced that there is some mystery connected with it." 37

That he was correct in his surmise was sufficiently evinced by the look of fear that came over Jacintha's face.

"You must ask Lambro."

"He will not tell me."

"And I dare not."

"Why?"

"Lambro would kill me if I should reveal the secret. You yourself heard his threat. I have taken a solemn oath upon the Holy Sacrament itself to preserve silence. Do not speak of this matter again, I pray you," she continued, with pain in her voice, "for, indeed, Captain Cressingham, it is no concern of yours."

And then, as if desirous of reverting to a more pleasing topic, she added,—

"I have good news for you. The signorina is now strong enough to rise and be dressed. To-morrow you shall see her."

This intelligence was more acceptable to Paul than the baton of a general. He had very little sleep that night for thinking of Barbara.

Next day at noon, Barbara having been dressed by Jacintha, was assisted by the same faithful attendant to an adjoining sitting-room, and comfortably installed in a big arm-chair placed beside an open casement which commanded a view of the sea.

How quick was the turn of her head towards the door when Paul's step sounded there! How bright her smile as she offered him her slender hand. How sweet the color that played over her cheek while she thanked him for the presents that he had sent up to her! A white rose graced her dusky hair, the flower being, as Paul noticed with secret pleasure, his gift of the previous day.

Jacintha had withdrawn on Paul's entrance. Wise creature, Jacintha! It is not every woman who will recognize herself as *de trop* when youth and maiden meet. 38

"I am glad to see you recovering, signorina."

"I am still very weak. I tremble to think what would have become of me had I lain down in that wood. The fever would certainly have carried me off. I owe my life to you."

"No—to Jacintha."

"And to Jacintha, who will not take any reward from me."

After this there was a silence. Paul found his usual flow of language gone. He longed to be brilliant; he was conscious of seeming stupid.

"It is six weeks since our meeting in the woods," he observed, for want of a better remark.

"And you were going to Sebenico, then. Have you remained at Castel Nuovo all this time on my account?"

"I desire to keep my promise of seeing you safely to Zara."

Barbara murmured her gratitude, adding,—

"But am I not putting you to great inconvenience?"

"No, signorina, no. These are my holidays. I am on a long furlough. My time is my own, or rather it is at your disposal."

Barbara's eyes drooped beneath Paul's gaze. Why should this handsome young captain interest himself so on her behalf?

"Jacintha tells me that you have never quitted the vicinity of the castle."

"True. It has been my desire to guard against a surprise on the part of your pursuers."

Barbara's face lost its bright expression for a moment.

"My pursuers!" she murmured. "My pursuers! The thought of them haunted me while I lay ill. I dreaded lest I should be carried off in my helpless state. But as six weeks have elapsed I think I may regard the pursuit—if pursuit there were—as over. But tell me, Captain Cressingham,"—how prettily the name fell from her lips!—"what would you have done if my pursuers had appeared?" 39

"Fought," replied Paul laconically.

"But supposing they had been a dozen in number?"

"No matter. Lambro loves a fight, so do I. Castel Nuovo was built to stand a siege. The door is of massive oak; the lower windows are barred; there are abundant loopholes convenient for taking

shots at the enemy. And besides there are the twelve mastiffs, each of which is capable of tackling a man. Trust us, signorina, we should have made a good defence."

It was pleasant to be near such towers of strength as Paul and Lambro, who appeared to regard Austrian gendarmerie with contempt. Then her pleasure became lost in surprise. Was this Englishman really willing to undergo such perils on her behalf? Ay, those, and much more, Barbara, to gain your smiles.

"I am fortunate in my friends," she said, "but rather than expose them to such hazard I think I should prefer to give myself up."

She was a sweet and interesting patient, and the charm of her face and figure was enhanced by the toilette in which Jacintha had arrayed her,—a dress all soft and white and foamy with silk muslin. A silver rope girdle was tied at one side and fell in two long, graceful tassels. Delicate antique lace fringed the slender wrists. Paul's quick eye observed that a small portion of the lace was torn off from the right sleeve. He wondered why the defect had not been repaired. A trifling circumstance, but one destined to recur with peculiar force at a later date.

This was not the costume she had worn on the night of her first meeting with him. Whence, then, did it come? Barbara seemed to divine his thoughts. 40

"I see you are observing my dress," she remarked. "It is a gift from Jacintha, drawn from an old chest in her wardrobe. It might have been expressly made for me, for it fits to a nicety without requiring the least alteration. Made for another, and yet suiting me to perfection. Is not that a singular coincidence?"

The fit of the dress did not strike Paul so much as the costliness of the material. He could not account for Jacintha's possession of such attire except on the supposition that it formed part of the flotsam and jetsam which supplied Lambro with his finery.

Again Barbara seemed to read his thoughts.

"No, it is not a gift of the sea; Jacintha assured me of that; otherwise I would not wear it. I have no liking for the clothing of the drowned." And then displaying a pair of pretty satin shoes, she added: "And these, too, are Jacintha's gift, and they fit as if my feet had been measured for them."

She turned to the open casement and surveyed the scene without.

"Ah! if I could but get into the air outside I should recover the sooner."

"Then come down to-morrow, and sit outside on the terrace."

"I am too weak to walk."

"No matter. I will carry you," replied Paul, boldly.

"I shall have to get Jacintha's leave first," said Barbara, half-pleased, half-reluctant. "Jacintha is an ideal nurse. She will have her commands obeyed, and will not yield to the whims of her patient."

When Jacintha appeared, her consent was readily obtained, and as she averred that Barbara had talked enough for one day, Paul was compelled to take his leave.

He spent the rest of the day in recalling Barbara's words. The interview, though delightful, contained one element of disappointment: Barbara had said nothing as to her previous history. 41 Paul had hesitated to question her on the matter, leaving her to take the initiative. Time would doubtless bring increasing confidence on her part.

On the following day he redeemed his promise of carrying her into the open air. An exquisite sense of pleasure filled him as he felt the clasp of Barbara's arm around his neck and noted the sweet color that mantled her cheek. From her chamber he bore her down the staircase and out to a dismantled marble terrace, where he seated her in a lounge, which had been placed there by Jacintha. Above her rose a stately terebinth, whose light-green foliage, crimsoned with clusters of delicate flowers, cast a circle of shade around.

It was the height of summer, and the day, though hot, was not oppressive; the atmosphere being tempered by the air flowing from the Dalmatian highlands that rose behind them, peak above peak, in dark wooded glory.

Facing them was the smooth Adriatic almost as blue as the heaven it reflected. Far off in the summer haze picturesque feluccas, with their white lateen sails, glided to and fro with slow dream-like motion.

Sea, sky, and mountains combined to form a scene of enchanting beauty, rendered still more enchanting to Paul by the presence of Barbara, to whom Jacintha had imparted an additional charm by adorning her with the graceful *pezzotto*, or muslin scarf, which, pinned on the head and falling over the arms and shoulders, permitted the beautiful face and hair of the wearer to be seen through it.

"Have you ever noticed, Captain Cressingham, how trifles annoy when one is in a state of illness? And I am annoyed by a trifle, one so absurd that I feel ashamed to mention it."

Paul urged her, nevertheless, to describe the annoyance.

"What torments me is a piece of sealing-wax on a panel in my bedroom. Reposing the other night, with my eyes turned towards it, I was seized by a singular fancy. The wax seemed to be receding 42
through the wall, drawing me after it. Reason told me that this could not be so, that the wax was immovably fixed to the panel, and that I was in bed; yet all the same, there was the circle of wax gliding onward with never-ending motion through the realm of air, and myself floating along in its wake like a disembodied spirit. This sensation occurs every night. My mind is kept perpetually on the rack following that piece of wax through the infinity of space, ever lured onward by the hope of arriving at some goal. But that goal perpetually evades me, and therein is the torment."

"Having had the malaria myself," observed Paul, "I can testify that such queer notions do occur. What is the color of this wax?" he added, having little doubt as to what the answer would be.

"It is of a violet hue, and bears the impress of a lamb carrying a banner. I cannot go back to that chamber again," continued Barbara, "or I shall be driven mad, for the annoyance is depriving me of all sleep. I must change my room, even though my good nurse is opposed to it."

But Jacintha did not offer any opposition when Paul made known her patient's desire for a different sleeping-room; without any demur she immediately set about preparing another chamber.

That same night, when all was still in the castle, Paul, taking a revolver and a lamp, sought the room vacated by Barbara. He quickly discovered the piece of stamped wax, and saw that it corresponded precisely with the seal upon the door of the mysterious study.

Extinguishing his lamp, he sat down on a chair beside the panel, determined to watch there during the night to ascertain, if possible, whether there was any ground for Barbara's strange fancy.

It was a long and dreary vigil, and when the gray light of dawn stole in through the casement, 43
and nothing had occurred to excite suspicion, he was fain to question the wisdom of his action.

That day Paul again carried Barbara downstairs to breathe the pure air of the sunlit terrace.

"My sleep last night was sweet and sound," she remarked. "With my new bedroom, and with this glorious air, I shall soon be well again."

She looked so radiant that Paul refrained from mentioning his nocturnal vigil. Though full of indefinable suspicion himself, he had no wish to alarm her mind; and he had laid both on Lambro and Jacintha an injunction to maintain silence respecting the locked room.

Barbara's strength gradually returned. In a day or two she was able to stand, and, leaning upon Paul's arm, she walked to and fro in the immediate vicinity of the castle. These promenades were soon lengthened into rambles along the seashore or through the fragrant pine woods, Paul being her constant companion. She had taken his arm at first from weakness; she now continued to do so from habit.

As his knowledge of Barbara increased Paul discovered that she had received an extraordinary education, her course of study having been as remarkable for what it omitted as for what it contained. While knowing very little of poetry, painting, music, needle-work, and other accomplishments usually included in the feminine curriculum, she was nevertheless well versed in mathematics, logic, and "the dismal science," to wit, political economy. Classic antiquity was almost a sealed book to her, but modern history and current continental politics she had at her finger-tips, and her knowledge of royal and noble genealogies with all their ramifications might have put a herald to the blush. She could give the biographies, and the characteristic foibles, of all the leading statesmen of Europe; was mistress of several modern languages, notably Polish or 44
Russian, and—most puzzling circumstance of all—she was quite *au fait* with the mysteries and subtleties of Catholic theology.

As she could scarcely have passed her twentieth year, it seemed to Paul that Barbara, in view of her extensive acquirements, must have commenced her studies so soon as she had quitted her cradle.

Her intellectual training appeared more adapted to the acquirements of a ruler, a statesman, or an ambassador than to those of an ordinary young lady; and Paul puzzled himself to account for the aims of those who had directed her education, for Barbara herself volunteered no information on the matter, and still maintained an attitude of reticence as to her past life.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEALED CHAMBER

When, amid the most enchanting scenery to be found in Europe, and at a time when all the 45

charms of summer are poured upon the earth, a handsome young captain is brought into companionship with a youthful woman, whose intellect charms even more than her beauty; and when the pair dwell isolated from the rest of the world with nothing to divert attention from each other, it requires no prophet to predict the result.

Barbara was now out of her convalescent stage; and, therefore, neither she nor Paul had any valid excuse for remaining longer at Castel Nuovo; nevertheless they continued to postpone indefinitely the day of departure.

Paul completely ignored the regiment at Corfu, and the good uncle, who was doubtless fuming at his nephew's protracted absence; and Barbara on her part seemed to have forgotten her pursuers from the convent, and her desire for the protection of the British flag.

Enwrapped in each other, yielding to the delicious spirit of *dolce far niente*, the pair were leading an idyllian life.

To Lambro and Jacintha the scenery around was as it had always been, but to Paul and Barbara, mountains, sea, air, sky, had become steeped in hues of divine beauty; each succeeding day seemed happier than the preceding.

They entertained a dreamy notion that their life at Castel Nuovo would not last forever, but its end they put far from their thoughts. The golden present was all in all. Why anticipate pain? *Vogue la galère.* 46

Lambro offered no opposition to their stay, though the thought of the Master's return gave him some uneasiness at times, and he said as much to Jacintha.

"I wish he would come," was her reply. "I should like to see his face when he sets eyes upon the signorina."

"He'll think as we did, that she has risen from the dead," returned Lambro.

"Well, she has a protector in Captain Cressingham, who will know how to deal with the Master, should he appear."

"Humph! there'll be the devil to pay ere long," growled Lambro. That Jacintha was not married to the old Greek troubled Barbara very little, if at all. Jacintha had brought her back to life; Jacintha was as good as gold; Barbara, figuratively speaking, would have turned and rent any one who should have ventured to assail the reputation of Jacintha.

For, thanks to new influences, Barbara's character was undergoing development. The stateliness and gravity that had marked her bearing on the first night of her coming to Castel Nuovo were yielding to a more buoyant and girlish spirit.

Close to the castle a semicircle of dark rocks, with a sandy base, over which the tide flowed, formed an ideal bathing place. Every morning Barbara would seek this spot attended by Jacintha.

"Wouldn't Abbess Teresa and the nuns be scandalized if they saw me now?" she would remark as she returned to breakfast, laughing and wringing out her dark wet locks like some lovely Nereid.

She was a maiden formed for gayety. In previous days her natural disposition had evidently been kept under restraint. She was now revelling in the sunshine of a new and sweet liberty, and Jacintha could scarcely believe her own eyes, when one day, attracted by the sounds of sweet laughter and of ringing steel proceeding from an adjoining apartment, she peeped in and 47 discovered the cause of it all to be Barbara, who was receiving her first lesson in fencing from Paul, while Lambro looked on with sombre approval.

"What next, I wonder?" thought Jacintha.

Barbara illumined the dark and melancholy castle like a sunbeam. Even Lambro relaxed something of his moroseness in her presence, and had begun to doubt whether five hundred beshliks could procure in the mart of Janina a maiden in all respects like Barbara. She had taken to Lambro much more than Paul had, who could not overcome his secret distrust of the old Palicar.

But then Lambro was a hero in Barbara's eyes, because he had fought for the freedom of a conquered race, and she herself, as it subsequently transpired, was the daughter of a conquered race.

When the day's strolling with Paul was over, and the evening meal finished, she would invite the old Greek to fight his battles over again. Sitting on a low stool at his feet, and resting her elbows on her lap and her chin on her hands, her hair sometimes falling in dusky waves around her fair throat, she would betray such interest in Lambro's reminiscences that the foolish Paul was often moved to jealousy.

"And by deeds such as these," she murmured on one occasion, "was the freedom of Hellas won. Why should not Poland achieve what Greece has achieved?"

"So, signorina, you are of Polish blood?" smiled Paul.

"And am proud of my nationality."

"I would for your sake that your people were free."

"They *will* be free again," she answered, a beautiful heroic look transfiguring her face with a new light. "Oh! Kosciusko," she cried, with an outburst of patriotism that quite surprised Paul, "why did you say '*Finis Poloniæ*'? Because *you* said it, men have come to believe it. No, no, it is not true. The greenstone sceptre of Poland may lie in the treasury of the Kremlin broken in halves, 48
but the spirit of the Polish people is not broken. Would that I had been born a man that I might shoulder musket and fight for fatherland! The Princess Radzivil fought on horseback against the Russians, and why may not I?" And then raising her wine-glass aloft, she added, "Confusion to the Czar!"

"Amen," said Lambro, responsive to the toast. "We had to assassinate old Capo d'Istria because he was too much under Russian influence. Ah! how we danced the Romaïka the night he died!"

This remark of Lambro created a diversion, for Barbara, who had never seen the Greek national dance, asked him to describe it.

The old Palicar did more than describe,—he acted it. Kicking his embroidered slippers into the air he went through all the flings and evolutions of the Romaïka with an agility surprising for one so aged, at the same time chanting an appropriate ballad.

"Ah! who could leap higher than Lambro in his youth?" he cried, when he had finished his performance.

Barbara thanked him, and observed, with a pretty air of command, that as Lambro had done something to entertain them it was now Paul's turn to do the like.

And Paul began by singing the first song that entered his head and that happened to be "The Mistletoe Bough," at that time not so hackneyed a ballad as now, and probably never before heard in the hall of a Dalmatian castle. At any rate it was new to his hearers, and Barbara in particular seemed much interested by it.

"Is there any truth in it?" she asked at its conclusion.

"Supposed to be founded on fact," returned Paul, proceeding to relate the story of the fair lady of Modena.

"Ginevra, if she had lived at Castel Nuovo," observed Barbara, "might have found a better place
of concealment than an oaken chest. Now," she added, prompted by a playful impulse, "give me a 49
clear start of one minute, and without going outside the castle I will undertake to hide where no one shall find me."

She sprang up, and with laughing eyes and graceful step danced from the apartment.

"She is still a girl, you see," smiled Paul.

Entering into the fun of the thing they allowed a full minute to elapse, and then set off to find her.

They went through the castle from roof to basement, exploring every place capable of affording concealment. But Barbara was invisible; she had vanished as if completely melted to air.

Half-an-hour had passed in this search. Then they went again through the building loudly calling her by name, and, proclaiming themselves beaten, they invited her to come forth from her hiding place.

Their appeal met with no response. They stared dubiously at one another. The affair had begun to lose its humorous side. The death-like silence, Barbara's invisibility, the gray twilight now stealing through the castle, caused it to assume a somewhat ghostly aspect.

"She must have gone outside," said Lambro.

"She promised to keep within the building," observed Paul.

For the third time they explored the castle, ending their search on the highest landing of the staircase. Here they paused before the locked door of the mysterious study.

"She is perhaps concealed here," suggested Paul.

"Impossible," returned Lambro, pointing to the wax. "The Master's seal is unbroken."

"There is an entrance to this room leading from the chamber in which the signorina first slept," remarked Paul quietly.

This statement was pure conjecture on his part, but its truth was instantly made evident by
Lambro's manner. He turned so savagely upon Jacintha that Paul thought he was going to strike 50
her.

"So you couldn't keep your tongue quiet?"

"You err," said Paul, hastening to vindicate the woman. "Jacintha has told me nothing. It is simply a guess of mine, and—"

He broke off abruptly and placed his ear to the door.

"By heaven, there is some one in this room. I can detect a sound within. Signorina, are you here?" he cried, rapping upon the panels.

The dusk of the landing was suddenly illumined by a light that came and went in a moment. Merely a flash of summer lightning.

It was accompanied by something startling within. A faint cry of "Oh!"—plainly the voice of Barbara; a dull thud as of the fall of a human body, and then a significant stillness.

With a soldier's promptitude Paul flung himself against the door, bruising his shoulders by the violence of the impact.

"You'll never force that door," said Lambro. "It's too strong. We must go downstairs. The signorina must have got in here through the secret panel in the bedroom."

Paul darted down the staircase, and in a moment more was within the bedchamber. He saw what had escaped his eye in the three previous explorations, namely, that the circular piece of violet-colored wax was traversed by a horizontal fracture, clearly caused by the moving of the panel. Lambro, who had followed close upon Paul, touched a certain spring hidden within some ornamental carving of the wall, and the panel glided off laterally, revealing a narrow corridor behind.

"To the left," said Lambro. "There's a staircase a few feet off. At the top of that another to the right. Mount that and you'll see the Master's room before you." 51

It was strange that the old Palicar did not follow Paul up the staircase, but so it was. He remained in the bedroom by the open panel with his hand to his ear in the attitude of listening.

"Oh, if she has discovered—it!" said Jacintha, with clasped hands.

"Well, what if she has? It was not our doing, nor the Master's for the matter of that."

"When I heard the signorina fall just now it brought the heart to my mouth. It reminded me of that other fall—you know whose. And in the same room, too! If—"

"Hold your tongue! How can I listen while you keep chattering?"

Paul, following the directions given by Lambro, had ascended the two staircases, and passing through a square opening in a panelled wall similar to that which he had just quitted, found himself in the mysterious study.

Barbara lay upon the floor in a seeming swoon.

Paul cast one swift glance around the apartment, but failed to discern anything in its present state calculated to inspire fear.

Kneeling by Barbara's side he raised her to a sitting posture, and passing his left arm around her rested her head upon his shoulder.

"Dearest Barbara, what has frightened you?" he asked, observing that her eyes were opening. It was the first time he had addressed her by her Christian name; the word had escaped him quite involuntarily. "What has frightened you?" he repeated.

"That!" she said.

Like a timid child she clung to him, and indicating as the cause of her fear the life-size portrait of a man hanging upon the wall,—a portrait scarcely discernible in the dim light.

"Take me away," she murmured faintly. "There is something strange in the atmosphere of this room, something that I can't understand, something that makes me fear. Take me away." 52

As she seemed unable of herself to rise, Paul raised her light form in his arms and carried her down the secret stairway, through the bedchamber, past the wondering Lambro and his consort, back again into the dining-hall whence she had first set out.

She neither blushed nor resisted at finding herself in his arms, apparently not giving the matter a thought. Her fear overpowered every other emotion.

"Lambro," she asked, when somewhat revived by a stimulant administered by Jacintha. "There is a man's portrait on the wall of that room. Whose?"

"The Master's."

"The Master's?" she echoed in a tone of dismay. "Have I been living all this time in the house of my enemy?"

"You know the Master, then?" inquired Paul of Barbara. "What is his name?"

"Cardinal Ravenna."

"The Master *is* a cardinal, I believe," said Lambro. "Ravenna? Humph! I have heard him called that by—by some; but it's not the name he usually bears when here."

"You serve a very bad master, Lambro," said Barbara reproachfully.

The old Palicar shrugged his shoulders in lieu of a reply.

Paul here recalled Lambro's remark to the effect that the Master belonged to a peculiar

brotherhood pledged to the repudiation of women. This misogyny was now explained. But why should the abode of a Roman ecclesiastic contain a lady's bedchamber kept in a state of preparation for an occupant? Paul glanced at Jacintha as if seeking an explanation from her, but the old Greek had set a warning eye upon his partner, and under that glittering terror Jacintha became mute. 53

"You have broken the Master's seal," grumbled Lambro, turning to Barbara. "He will learn that some one has been in that room. What excuse am I to make to him?"

"How did you discover the secret panel?" asked Paul of Barbara, and paying but scant respect to the Palicar's complaint.

"By accident," she replied. "Sleeping or waking that violet wax has exercised a fascination over me. Yesterday, attracted by an indefinable impulse, I stole into the bedchamber. Conjecturing that the panel might be a movable one, I began to search for the spring. Fortune favored my endeavors; I discovered the hidden corridor, but did not venture within. To-day when I heard you relate the story of Ginevra, I thought it would be a piece of fun to hide behind the panel and get you to search for me. While standing there in concealment the impulse came upon me to go forward and explore. I ascended the two staircases, and entered the upper room by a panel which I found open. Till that moment curiosity had been my only feeling, but as soon as I entered the gray twilight of that room I found myself trembling; the place seemed like a haunted chamber. And yet frightened though I was I could not retreat. Some strange power drew me on to the centre of the apartment, and there I stood looking around for—I know not what. I could hear your far-off cries, but I hesitated to answer lest the sound of my voice should call forth something terrible from this silent chamber.

"Then suddenly the sight of a lady's portrait hanging on the wall impelled me forward and almost made me forget my fears. The portrait was so like me that at first I thought it must be mine, but I know it cannot be."

"Why not?" asked Paul. 54

"Because I have never sat to an artist, and, moreover, the lady is wearing a dress such as I have never worn. She carries a sceptre in her hand and on her head is a diadem. Who ever saw me with sceptre and diadem? No; the portrait is not mine. Whose can it be? Do you know, Lambro?"

The old Palicar shook his head, but Paul felt that little reliance could be placed on his denial.

"In a distant corner," continued Barbara, "was another portrait, less easy to examine since it hung in the shadows. As I was moving forward a sudden gleam illumined the dusky chamber, bringing every line of the portrait into clear relief. I recognized the face of my enemy, Cardinal Ravenna; he seemed to be smiling at me with wicked satisfaction. Such fear and trembling took hold of me that I fainted."

"And that is all you have seen?" said Lambro, with evident relief, a feeling in which Jacintha seemed to share.

"What else was there to see, then?" asked Paul, fixing a significant look on the Palicar, who remained mute to the question.

"And this place, you say, belongs to Cardinal Ravenna?" said Barbara. "I must leave to-morrow."

"Oh! my lady, so soon?" cried Jacintha sorrowfully, for she had become very fond of Barbara.

"If the cardinal should appear he will take me back to the convent."

"By whose authority?" asked Paul, hotly.

"He is my guardian."

"That may be, but he shall not restore you to the convent against your will. You have not taken the vows of a nun?"

"No. I was placed in the convent to be educated merely."

"And you do not wish to return?" 55

"After enjoying freedom? Oh! no, no."

"Then you shall not return," said Paul, decisively.

"Still I must leave here. I cannot stay longer under this roof."

"True, but do not act hastily. Where are you going? What are your plans? Take a day for reflection. That brief delay will not make much difference. It is not likely that the cardinal will appear to-morrow, and if he should, what matters? For my own part I should very much like to come face to face with the man who proposes to immure you within the walls of a nunnery. He would not find me honey-tongued, though such a course may seem ungrateful after having so long enjoyed the shelter of his roof. Fear him not, signorina. Remain at least another day. Remember that to-morrow was fixed for our sail to Isola Sacra."

Barbara was persuaded by these words. One day, as Paul had said, would not make much difference.

"And I fainted at sight of a picture!" she said, with self-reproachful smile. "I, who have talked of shouldering a musket, and of fighting for Poland."

"We all have our fears at times. I ran away from my first battle," observed Lambro, without stating from how many others he had run.

Now that her fears were vanishing, Barbara began to review the sequel of her recent adventure. She had waked from a swoon to find herself in the arms of Paul, and with the words "dearest Barbara" falling upon her ear. The significance of the expression did not appeal to her at the time, but now the recalling of it caused her heart to palpitate. Her color came and went. She scarcely dared raise her eyes to meet his gaze. Silence and shyness marked her as their own for the remainder of the evening.

That night, when the other inmates of the castle were sleeping, Paul, with lighted lamp, stole off to the bedchamber containing the secret panel, and began to explore the hidden passage and staircase leading to the mysterious study. Roof, walls, and flooring were of black oak thick with dust. Every angle had a festoon of cobwebs. On turning the corner of the staircase Paul made his first discovery. For some purpose or other a very long nail had been fixed in the baluster, and not having been driven far into the wood, it projected in such a manner that unobservant persons brushing hastily by would run the risk of tearing their clothing. 56

Some such accident had happened, for from the head of this nail there hung a tiny shred of flimsy fabric, which, upon examination by the light of the lamp, Paul found to be a fragment of delicate lace,—lace of a color, texture, and pattern that he had seen in the charming white costume with the silver rope-girdle which Jacintha had bestowed upon Barbara.

This fragment of lace had not become detached while Barbara herself was turning the staircase, inasmuch as during her recent adventure she had been wearing a different dress.

Scrutinizing everywhere, Paul was attracted by a faint sparkle coming from the dust in a corner of the staircase, the cause of which proved to be a little article of gold, obviously a seal. It was circular in shape, and the band encircling the stone was inscribed with the motto, "*Esse quam videri*." The stone itself forming the seal was a lovely sapphire bearing the image of a double-headed eagle, beautifully and delicately engraved.

"The royal arms of Poland, as I live!" muttered Paul. His surprise was naturally very great, but since speculation as to how the thing came to be there would have been mere waste of time, he pocketed the treasure-trove and passed on to the mysterious apartment. This he found differed in no way from an ordinary study. It was well lighted and well carpeted. There were numerous shelves with books thereon. There were chairs, a table, and an escritoire. There were oil-paintings on the walls. There was really nothing to alarm one in the aspect of the apartment. Paul did not feel anything of the strange sensation spoken of by Barbara, and therefore he felt compelled to ascribe that part of her experience to the imagination of a timid maiden. The room was locked and sealed from intrusion: *ergo*, her argument was there must be something fearful in it. 57

Paul turned his attention to the portraits on the wall, and began with that of the Master who was represented in the scarlet robes of a cardinal. It was a handsome face upon which Paul gazed,—a face full of intellectual power, with nothing of the mystic visionary about it; the face of a man of action, a man of ambition, an ecclesiastical statesman of the type of Richelieu or Mazarin. Paul waved the lamp to and fro, trying to educe the wicked expression that had frightened Barbara. True, the countenance was a cold and haughty character, but he could not honestly affirm that there was anything sinister in it. Barbara's fancy was probably due to her hostile feelings.

He next surveyed the picture of the young lady,—a maiden robed in jewelled attire with pearl necklace, diadem, and sceptre. The resemblance to Barbara was indeed so marvellous that Paul at first was disposed to believe that she was the person here represented, and that the symbols of high rank were decorative fancies of the artist.

A closer study of the portrait, however, made him think otherwise. True, every feature corresponded with Barbara's; hair and eyes were of the same color. The difference was in the expression. This girl had mischievous eyes, an arch smile, a radiant look. It was clearly the face of one leading a happy, unclouded life, whereas even in Barbara's smile there was always a tinge of melancholy, as if her mind were shadowed by the memory of some secret sorrow. 58

Who was this youthful lady with the smiling eyes? If she resembled Barbara in face, why not in the height and shape of her figure? Ah! here without doubt was the original wearer of that soft, silky dress which had required no alteration to suit Barbara. The young lady had perhaps left it as a parting gift to Jacintha for services rendered by the latter.

She had doubtless come to Castel Nuovo under the charge of Cardinal Ravenna. Singular that the bedchamber in which Barbara had slept should have been previously occupied by a lady her exact counterpart in face and figure! Was the bedroom that was kept in a constant state of readiness intended for her use?

He understood now the cause of the amazement on the part of Lambro and Jacintha when they first beheld Barbara; they were doubtless startled by her extraordinary resemblance to their previous guest.

That this lady had traversed the corridor leading to the cardinal's study was proved by the lace

fragment of her dress adhering to the nail of the staircase, though it was difficult to assign a reason for this proceeding. A secret amour was the first idea that suggested itself. But then, a girl with so lovely a face would never lack youthful and handsome lovers; it was not likely, therefore, that she would be guilty of an intrigue with an ecclesiastic old enough to be her father.

The mystery was bewildering, especially when the diadem and sceptre were taken into consideration. Lambro and his consort could explain it, but only by breaking the oath imposed upon them by the cardinal,—an oath taken, if Jacintha's words were true, upon the Holy Sacrament itself. It must be a weighty secret to require such safeguarding; nay, more, it was a secret that threatened Jacintha's own life, as shown by her remark to Lambro: "Shall I be permitted to leave here after your death?" 59

Musing on all this, Paul turned from the portraits to examine the rest of the apartment, without discovering anything of consequence, till, being near the hearth, he happened to glance downwards. For a moment he stood as still as a statue; then he stooped and held the lamp low.

On the polished oak flooring was a dark stain.

CHAPTER V

THE RETURN OF THE "MASTER"

The "Isola Sacra" mentioned by Paul as an inducement for Barbara to prolong her stay, was a small, uninhabited island facing Castel Nuovo at the distance of about three miles. 60

The island had often attracted the curiosity of Barbara, and Paul had promised that he would row her over to it whenever she felt disposed.

The day named by her for the excursion had come, and accordingly after breakfast Paul and Barbara descended to the beach, where they found Lambro getting his sailing-boat ready for their use. Jacintha followed with a luncheon-basket on her arm.

"It's no use putting up the sail," remarked the old Greek. "There's not a breath of wind stirring. You'll have to row."

Barbara sat by the tiller, where a silken cushion had been placed for her accommodation. Paul taking the oars pushed off, giving a smile to Jacintha and a nod to Lambro.

"At what hour must we expect you back?" asked Jacintha.

"Not till evening," replied Paul, who set out with the intention of spending the day upon the island, and of returning in romantic style beneath the light of the stars.

It was a morning of soft sunlight, lovely and still,—"the very bridal of the earth and sky." The heaven was one deep, living blue, and the sea so smooth that the mountain peaks, the cliffs, and the towers of the castle were reflected on the azure surface of the water as in a mirror. 61

"It seems," sighed Barbara to herself, "that my last day here is to be the fairest."

In happy, dreamy silence she leaned back in her seat, holding the cords of the tiller, and watching Paul as he manipulated the oars. Each sweep of his arm lifted the boat half out of the water, for he was no novice at rowing, being the captain of the Britannic Aquatic Club at Corfu.

Barbara had never known any pleasure equal to that of Paul's companionship; and now this pleasure was about to end—unless—unless. And then the questions that had robbed her of sleep during the night began again their work of torture. Why had he called her "dearest Barbara"? Was it a mere transitory outburst of affection on his part, evoked by her helpless state? Would he place her on shipboard at Zara, and, leaving her to go on her way alone, return to Corfu? The thought alarmed her; she grew faint at the idea of a future without Paul.

She contrived to mask her emotion beneath a calm exterior, and as Paul caught her smiles, he little thought how her heart was pulsating to the very tune of love. She even volunteered to take one of the oars.

"What? and but just recovered from a fever! Besides, you will blister your fingers."

But Barbara was not to be dissuaded. She took the oar, and, never having held one before, behaved like a true novice. She failed to keep time with her partner, and her oar either did not strike the water, or striking, deluged the boat with spray, till Paul began to consider whether it would not be wise to suspend the luncheon-basket from the masthead. Strange how man will tolerate in woman blundering such as he would not tolerate for a moment in his fellowman! Barbara's incompetence at the oar was delightful in Paul's eyes.

"I'd better give it up," she cried laughingly. "Our boat is performing such extraordinary gyrations that the steamer from Zara, which I can see in the distance, will be coming up to ascertain the 62

cause."

So Paul resumed possession of the oar, and rowing onward in gallant style, reached the island, and ran the boat in upon the sands of a little bay.

Isola Sacra was not more than two miles in length, and about one in breadth; nevertheless, within its limited space there was considerable diversity. There were cliffs rising vertically from the water; there were strips of yellow sand by the sea; there were woods, and a silver-flashing stream. And most attractive sight of all, the remains of a Grecian temple crowning the summit of a small eminence, the marble columns glowing brilliantly white against a background of dark cypresses.

Towards this edifice they slowly made their way.

"To whom was this temple raised?" asked Barbara, as they stood within the ruin.

"It was the shrine of Eros."

The Temple of Love! What more appropriate place could there be for an avowal?

"The god of love," she murmured softly. "And his altar and shrine are fallen!"

"But not his worship," replied Paul. "That is eternal."

Barbara averted her eyes, and trembled with a sweet feeling.

They sat down on a fallen column beneath the shadow cast by a graceful palm. Before them lay the bay they had just crossed,—a blue semicircular mirror, the Illyrian mountains forming a picturesque background.

Paul and Barbara sat drinking in the deep beauty of the scene. In the boat their conversation had been lively and unrestrained, but now a silence lay on both.

Barbara was the first to speak.

"I think," she murmured dreamily, gazing at the sky, "that the loveliest part of heaven must be above this isle." 63

Paul glanced at her inquiringly, not quite comprehending her remark.

"The Arabian poets," she continued, "assert that the fairest spot on earth is situated beneath the fairest spot in heaven, the earthly, as it were, being a reflex of the heavenly."

"A pretty idea!" said Paul. "With me, however, the fairest place on earth is not a fixed, but a moveable point."

"Yes?" said Barbara inquiringly.

"To me the fairest place is wherever you happen to be. Do I make myself clear, dearest Barbara, or shall I say more?"

Barbara tried to speak, but the words would not come. There was no need for speech, however. A light that would have made the plainest features beautiful stole over her face. She placed her little hand within his, and by that act Paul knew that she was his for ever.

He drew her to his embrace, where she reclined supremely happy and yet afraid to raise her eyes to his.

"Barbara," he whispered, "you have never yet told me the story of your life. Will you not do so now?"

There was nothing Barbara would not have done to please Paul. She was silent for a few moments, as if collecting her thoughts, and then, still within the circle of his arms, she began in a voice as low and silvery as if coming from dreamland.

"If I have been truly told, I was born at Warsaw in 1826, and shall therefore be nineteen years of age next month.

"My parents I never knew; indeed I am even ignorant of their names and station in life. I had been adopted in infancy by a noble Polish lady, the Countess Lorenska,—a youthful widow, who, although kindness itself, was always mute to any remark relative to my parentage, though, as you may guess, the question as to my origin troubled me but little in those early days. 64

"The Countess Lorenska was very rich, her mansion at Warsaw a palace, and the ladies and gentlemen who attended her salons vied with each other in caressing and spoiling me. I had all that wealth could supply, including learned masters, under whose tuition I began that course of instruction which you have characterized as peculiar for a woman.

"My adoptive mother, herself well educated, superintended my studies, but the lesson she seemed chiefly desirous of inculcating is contained in almost the first sentence I was taught to utter,—'I will always love Poland and the Catholic Church. I will never cease to oppose Russia and the Greek Faith.' This vow was part of my prayers morning and evening, and such is the force of habit that I still continue to say it.

"As you may suppose, Polish history formed part, and a very important part, of my curriculum.

My blood glowed as I listened to the story of my country's wrongs. But indeed I did not require the voice of past history to teach me patriotism. What was happening all round was sufficient. I was between five and six years of age when the uprising at Warsaw took place, and the unjust and terrible reprisals exacted by the conquering Russians have left an impression upon my mind which no length of time can ever efface.

"The war passed, and an era of tranquillity, or rather of torpor, followed.

"Among those who frequented the assemblies held by the Countess Lorenska—assemblies that partook more of a political than of a social character—was a young priest of Italian origin, named Pasqual Ravenna, who exercised considerable influence over the mind of my adoptive mother, inasmuch as he was her father-confessor.

"One night during a brilliant entertainment I stole out of the *salle de danse* into the moonlit 65
gardens without, in order to avoid waltzing with a silly fellow who was my special aversion. I secreted myself in a quiet arbor. On the other side of the shrubbery two persons were slowly pacing to and fro, and earnestly conversing. I recognized the voices of Countess Lorenska and Father Ravenna. I had no wish to hear what they were saying; indeed, I was too much pre-occupied with my would-be partner, whom I could see through the leaves vainly trying to find me, to pay much attention to them, but still fragments of their dialogue reached my ears.

"'She must be removed,' Ravenna was saying; 'she is too near'—I did not catch the word—'to be safe. He often visits Warsaw. If she should be seen and recognized by him, our plan would be frustrated. Besides, she is growing. We must take care that she forms no love-attachment.'

"The countess laughed.

"'How absurd! She is too young for such notions.'

"'She is only twelve, 'tis true, but she is more advanced physically and mentally than most girls of fifteen. She will be safer in a convent till—till—her restoration,' he added, as if hesitating for the choice of a word.

"'If you say so, it must be so,' said the countess with a sigh, 'though it will almost break my heart to part with her. Your instructions have been carried out to the very letter. She will always be a devout Catholic, and patriotically Polish.'

"'So far—good,' replied Ravenna.

"They both moved off at this point, and not till then did it dawn upon me that they were speaking of myself.

"Next morning I was summoned by the countess, whom I found seated with Father Ravenna.

"'Barbara,' she said, 'you are going to live in a convent for the next six years, where you will
continue the studies you have begun here. Father Ravenna will conduct you to the convent. And 66
do not forget that if I should die he will be your guardian, and you must obey his commandments, however strange they may appear.'

"I cried very much on parting from my adoptive mother.

"'Courage! It is for the good of Poland,' said the countess, as she folded me in a last embrace.

"I failed to understand how Poland could be benefited by poor simple me, still less how my six years' residence in a convent was to accomplish that end.

"Under the conduct of Ravenna I travelled southward by easy stages. I began to forget my grief in the novelty of the scenes that succeeded each other. We entered Dalmatia, the country growing in grandeur and wildness with every mile of our journey.

"At last we reached our destination,—the Convent of the Holy Sacrament, situated in an isolated valley amid the loftiest peaks of the Dinaric Alps,—and here Ravenna left me after a long conference with the abbess.

"My life in the convent was a very pleasant one. Being the youngest person in the establishment, I became a sort of pet with the nuns. Though I took part in the devotional services of the convent, I did not wear the religious habit, nor did I partake of the food of the other inmates. My fare was more delicate than theirs; I wore costly dresses; I had my own dining-chamber with a nun to wait upon me. In short, if I had been a princess they could not have paid me more deference and attention.

"My studies were mainly directed by three monks from a neighboring establishment, one of whom, so the nuns asserted, had been a leading statesman of Austria, who, for some offence, had been ordered by the Kaiser to retire to a monastery; be that as it may, his was a mind well stored with political knowledge, and Metternich himself could not have taught me more of the secrets of contemporary history. 67

"My second year's residence in the convent was saddened by the tidings of the Countess Lorenska's death,—to me a calamity in more ways than one, for it made Father Ravenna my guardian, and him I had always viewed with secret dislike, if not with fear.

"Now that I was growing older and more thoughtful, the question as to my parentage began to

trouble me. Who was I? why kept ignorant of my origin? why put to this course of study? The abbess Teresa averred that all would ultimately be made clear by my guardian Ravenna, who would remove me from the convent as soon as I was eighteen.

"On the eve of my eighteenth birthday Ravenna appeared, no longer a simple priest. His scarlet robes and the title 'Your Eminence,' addressed to him by the abbess, showed that he had risen to the dignity of a cardinal.

"He held an interview with me in the quietude of my own apartment. He had not seen me for six years, remember, and of course during that time I had grown from girlhood into womanhood.

"I noticed that as soon as he had set eyes on me he gave a start. I am certain that he murmured 'How like'! During the whole of the interview he walked to and fro, seemingly intent on studying my face and figure, now in one light, now in another, conduct which very much embarrassed me.

"'Know, my daughter,' he began, 'that your father, supposed by you to be dead, is really living.'

"You can imagine my surprise at this statement.

"'Then why does he not acknowledge me?'

"'He has lived under the belief that you died as soon as born.'

"'He knows differently now?'

"'I have informed him of his error.'

"'And he has sent you to bring me to him?' I cried joyfully. 68

"'Alas! there's a difficulty at present in the way of your meeting each other. Accustomed for eighteen years to regard you as dead, he listens with scepticism to the story that you are living. Nay, more, he avers the statement to be a conspiracy on my part."

"'A conspiracy!' I repeated wonderingly.

"'He has another daughter by a second wife, your half-sister, of whom he has grown passionately fond. You, as the elder, stand in the light of her interests; whatever she thought herself entitled to now devolves upon you. For this reason he seeks to deny your relationship to him.'

"'They wrong me by such thoughts,' I cried. 'I ask not for wealth, but for affection.'

"'Tut, tut,' returned the cardinal. 'We have clear proofs of your filiation and legitimacy. We shall compel him to acknowledge you. You shall not be deprived of your rights.'

"'How came my father to think me dead?'

"'I believe I am responsible for that error,' he said, with a smile that told me some interested motive lay at the root of his deception.

"I was unable to control my indignation.

"'You!' I cried. 'A holy cardinal the author of a falsehood that has separated a father from his daughter for eighteen years, and that will perhaps keep them apart forever! I honor my father for his present distrust of you. If you lied to him in my infancy, what wonder that he should deem you to be lying now?'

"The cardinal waved his hand deprecatingly. 'The end sanctifies the means, and my end is a noble one.'

"Curiosity overcame my anger. Despite my aversion to the cardinal, I could not refrain from plying him with questions; the names of my father and my sister; their station in life; their abode, and the like. 69

"But Cardinal Ravenna remained inflexibly uncommunicative. It was in vain that I knelt before him, and with tears entreated that he would let me see my father and sister face to face.

"'My presence may move them,' I said.

"'Your presence, my daughter, would create confusion,' he said coldly. 'Leave to me the task of winning for you a splendid heritage. Till then you must remain in this convent.'

"And with that Ravenna took his departure.

"The new knowledge imparted by the cardinal contributed rather to embitter than to cheer my life. It was not a pleasant reflection that somewhere in the world I had both father and sister who had never seen me, and who, apparently, had no desire to see me.

"For this state of affairs the cardinal, according to his own statement, was responsible, and I hated him for it. He cared nothing for the feelings of parent and child; his only object in bringing the two together was to advance his own interests; he would exact a price both from the father and from the new daughter.

"I resolved to cast off the self-constituted guardianship of Cardinal Ravenna. I would quit the convent, and, making my way to Warsaw, endeavor to discover the friends of my girlhood.

"But when I conferred with Abbess Teresa she told me kindly, yet firmly, that this could not be; the cardinal had left strict orders that I must be detained till his return.

"From that time my freedom ceased. The walks which I had been accustomed to take outside the convent in the company of two attendant nuns were stopped. The cloister gardens were open to me; once I had deemed them spacious, now they seemed very narrow. Though treated kindly in other ways I knew myself to be a prisoner watched by innumerable eyes. 70

"The cardinal came not to release me. And thus eight months passed,—the most melancholy time I had ever known.

"At last the porter, Bulgar, with whom I had always been a favorite, listened to my pleading, and one dark night, by preconcerted arrangement with me, he left the convent-gate unlocked, and I stole forth.

"But my flight might soon be intercepted. A few miles to the north of the convent, on the Bosnian frontier, is a fortress garrisoned by Austrian troops. I remembered that once when a poor nun longing for her freedom again, had run away, the Abbess had obtained aid from this fortress. The commandant sent out a troop, which, scouring the country around, returned with the fugitive after a three days' search. Devoted to the cardinal's interests, Abbess Teresa would certainly make a similar requisition in my case.

"Still I had the advantage of several hours' start, and, trusting to heaven for aid, I fled onward through the darkness. Zara, sixty miles to the northwest, was the haven of my desires. For two days I journeyed on foot, sleeping the first night in the woods.

"At the end of the second day—but you know the rest.

"O Paul," she murmured, with a soft pressure of her arms, "whom have I in the world but you? And to think that I at first repulsed you when you met me that night in the wood!"

And here Barbara, having finished her story, looked up at Paul.

"Why so grave?" she asked, with a smile that masked a certain misgiving on her part.

"In the very act of asking you to be my wife, Barbara, I feel compelled to pause. Your story is so suggestive. Supposing you should prove to be a rich heiress, or a peeress, or," he continued, his mind reverting to the portrait of the lady with the diadem, "shall we ascend higher, and say a princess?—you will make a mesalliance by marrying one who has nothing but a cloak and a sword." 71

"Dreams, Paul, dreams."

"Nay, the interest taken in you by the cardinal proves that you are a person either of rank or wealth, or possibly both."

"I place no faith in the cardinal's story. Doubtless, there does exist somewhere a rich Polish noble, whose infant daughter was lost or stolen away eighteen or nineteen years ago, but I do not believe that I am she, though Ravenna would have me play the rôle of the missing heiress. But even if I were an empress—"

Here Barbara paused in her utterance.

"Yes; if you were an empress—?"

"Cannot you guess the rest?"

"You would be my wife. Is that so, Barbara?"

"Yes, Paul," she replied, simply. "None but you."

Paul raised her beautiful face upward to his own, and looked down into the light of her dark eyes.

"Barbara, I have loved you from the first moment of seeing you."

Barbara could not truthfully say that her love had begun so early. The knowledge of it had come upon her perhaps a month ago.

"I wish I had known it. A month ago!" he added ruefully. "Just think of the kisses I have missed!"

"Nothing prevents you, Paul, from repairing lost opportunities."

Who could have resisted the witchery of those lips raised so temptingly at that moment? Not Paul, certainly.

The dusk of twilight was stealing over the island. The stars were beginning to glimmer through the violet air above. 72

"It is time to return," said Paul, leading Barbara towards the boat.

"The mantilla!" she exclaimed, suddenly stopping short in her walk. "I left it in the ruins. I must go back for it, since it is Jacintha's. And my diamond brooch is fastened to it."

"You are tired, Barbara. Remain here. I will fetch it."

"Do not be long."

"Can you not bear a parting of five minutes?" he asked with a smile.

"One minute is too long, Paul."

Seating Barbara upon a fragment of rock, Paul hastened over the grassy upland in the direction of the classic ruin, which was distant about a quarter of a mile from the shore.

At the edge of a small wood that intervened between himself and the temple, he paused for a moment to listen to Barbara, who was singing in a sweet plaintive voice the hymn to the Virgin accustomed to be sung in her convent at vesper hour.

"Fading, still fading, the last beam is shining.
Ave Maria! day is declining:
Safety and innocence fly with the light:
Temptation and danger walk forth with the night:
From the fall of the shade till the matin shall chime
Shield us from peril, and save us from crime.
Ave Maria, audi nos!"

She formed a pretty picture as she sat there alone by the dusky-blue sea in the faint starlight, her dainty white-robed figure clearly outlined against the black rock.

"I'm the luckiest mortal living," muttered Paul. "By heaven! won't the fellows be dumb with surprise and envy when I mount the jetty-stairs at Corfu with Barbara upon my arm! And as for uncle, always an admirer of the ladies, he'll fairly worship her." 73

He pictured Colonel Graysteel's look of admiration, and caught his whispered aside: "By Jove, Paul, where did you find this lovely vestal? Lucky dog! no wonder you have stayed away so long!"

Barbara had followed Paul with her eyes, and now, on seeing him pause, she waved her hand prettily, while he, like a gallant lover, waved his in turn. Then, eager to despatch his quest and to return to her, he plunged into the wood, and Barbara was lost to view.

On reaching the temple, Paul quickly found the mantilla, but the brooch which should have been attached to it was missing. As the ornament was a valuable one he did not like to return without it, and he therefore began a search in the fading light.

Having spent ten minutes without success, he resolved to quit the task lest Barbara, sitting by the lonely shore, should become nervous at his long delay.

As he rose to his feet he looked upward, and found that the stars were invisible. A white mist like a ghost was floating over the isle.

Snatching up the mantilla, he dashed down through the woodland, and, but for the murmur of the sea, which served to direct his course, he would most certainly have missed his way.

As he drew near to the beach he called upon Barbara by name, but received no answer. This was puzzling, inasmuch as he was near the place where he had left her. Near? He was at the exact spot. There was the crag upon which she had been seated a few minutes previously, but of Barbara herself not a trace was visible.

Vainly did his eyes seek to pierce the veil of mist that hung around; every object more than a few feet distant was hidden from view.

The melancholy lapping of the waves over the sand was the only sound that broke the stillness.

Where was Barbara? Ah! alarmed perhaps by the mist and by his long absence, she had left the shore to seek him, and had missed her way to the ruin. He would go back at once and find her. 74

He had just turned to retrace his steps, when suddenly from out the mist that overhung the sea there came a strange voice,—

"*All ready? Give way, then. To Castel Nuovo!*"

The words were immediately followed by the dip and roll of oars,—sounds that sent a thrill of horror through Paul's heart. In one swift moment he realized what was happening.

The Austrian gendarmerie sent by the convent authorities had come at last! Come? ay, and were going with their purpose accomplished!

Barbara, silent, perhaps because in a swoon, was in the hands of enemies who were carrying her off, and though her captors were but a few yards distant, he was unable to render her any aid. The suddenness, the stillness, the mysteriousness of it all was more appalling than the act of abduction itself.

Half-an-hour had not yet elapsed since Barbara had pressed her glowing lips to his. And now—and now—was ever lover's dream cut short so awfully and abruptly as this?

"Barbara! Barbara!" he cried in agony. "If you are there, speak."

Was he mistaken, or did he really hear his own name pronounced by a voice faintly sounding, as if the speaker's head were muffled within the folds of a cloak?

Following his first impulse, he dashed into the sea towards the point whence came the sound of the oars. Like a madman he leaped and plunged forward through mist and water with the desire of arresting the progress of the receding boat. Vain hope! He did not even obtain a glimpse of the boat, much less come up with it.

Not till the water surged breast-high around him did he pause, and then he stood mechanically 75
listening to the sound of the oar-sweep as it died away in the distance.

Recovering from his stupor he waded back to land, and sought the place where he had left his own boat.

It was gone!

It had either been taken in tow by Barbara's captors, or cast adrift in order to prevent him from giving trouble by following them.

The island had become his prison, inasmuch as he had no way of crossing to the mainland except by swimming, and though he might not have shrunk from a three-mile course in smooth water, the same distance across a sea-channel traversed by currents and covered by a thick fog was a very different matter.

Though every moment of detention diminished his hope of effecting Barbara's rescue, yet here he was, absolutely helpless, dependent for his release upon the chance passing of some fishing-boat.

He did not doubt—he could not doubt—that the abduction of Barbara was the work of Cardinal Ravenna, who had probably been apprised by Abbess Teresa of the flight of his youthful *protégé*. It was not likely that he would restore her to the Convent of the Holy Sacrament; some more secure establishment would be chosen, and, when Barbara was once immured by the authority of a powerful ecclesiastic, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach her. The only consoling feature in this dark affair was that the success of the cardinal's scheme, whatever its character, hung upon Barbara's life; so far she was safe, but the thought of the sufferings to which she might be subjected, in order to extort submission, drove Paul's mind to the verge of frenzy.

At midnight the mist began to lift almost as suddenly as it had come on. The whole blue arch of heaven became revealed. The moon was now at its full, and the cold, pallid light shone over the island with its dark woods, and its ivory-white temple on the hill-top, the fallen shrine of love. 76

Paul mounted this hill and glanced over the sea in all directions; but his hope of seeing some barque in the vicinity of the isle was immediately extinguished. Not a sail was visible.

He had brought to the island a pair of field-glasses, and these he now directed over the channel that separated him from the Dalmatian mainland. The light was insufficient for the taking of distant observations; nevertheless, he came to the conclusion that a tiny light visible at a certain point on the coast marked the position of Castel Nuovo; and, aware that Barbara's captors must long ere this have reached their destination, this light became an object of deep interest. Without any reason whatever to guide him, he took up the belief that it marked the room in which she was detained for the night, and impressed by this fancy, he kept his eyes fixed upon it as wistfully as if it were the face of Barbara herself.

Suddenly the light vanished.

A very simple occurrence, and yet Paul had no sooner noted it than there came over him a trembling and a horror as great as if the extinction of that light had likewise involved the extinction of Barbara.

His mind was either playing him strange tricks, or else his hearing had become more than ordinarily acute. Sounds on the opposite coast seemed close at hand,—sounds of an eerie character.

The deep silence of the night was first broken by the fitful ringing of church bells; immediately afterwards came a series of reverberations which Paul could compare only with the rattling echoes produced by the discharge of artillery among lofty hills; and next there floated over the sea a prolonged cry like the wild shriek of some captured town. 77

Then all was still again.

What had happened along that moonlit coast?

Night waned. Morning dawned with all the fair golden glory of that southern clime.

On the shore of Isola Sacra stood a man, his gaze fixed eastward as it had been fixed ever since the growing light had enabled him to perceive distant objects with any degree of distinctness.

The British regiment at Corfu would have failed to recognize their captain in this man with his wild air, blood-shot eyes, and haggard face staring continually over the sea.

For the twentieth time his shaking hands raised the field-glasses.

Whenever he turned the binoculars to that point of coast where Castel Nuovo should have been, he found that Castel Nuovo was not there. Focus the glasses as he would, he could not detect a trace of the edifice. The blue sea seemed to be rolling over the site!

In like manner other landmarks along the coast had disappeared, notably a white lighthouse a few miles to the north of Castel Nuovo. The mountains, too, seemed to present an outline differing from that of the previous day.

Then the truth in all its ghastliness broke upon Paul, and, strong man though he was, he dropped upon the sands as one dead.

The explanation was simple and terrible.

During the night an earthquake had devastated the coast of Dalmatia; towns had been laid in ruins; scores of people had perished; and, among a crowd of minor catastrophes enumerated by the "Zara Times" of that week, was the complete submergence of a picturesque edifice, erected in the fourteenth century by the Doge Marino Faliero, and known by the name of Castel Nuovo!

THE STORY

CHAPTER I

TWO YEARS AFTERWARDS

"Here's to the Princess of Czernova!" cried Noel Trevisa,—a dark-eyed, handsome young fellow,—raising his glass as he spoke. "Have you seen her yet, Paul?"

Captain Cressingham, or to use the new name assumed by him on the death of a relative, Captain Woodville, smiled at the enthusiasm with which his friend proposed the toast.

"I entered Slavowitz only last evening," he replied, "and have already been asked that question six times. It seems to be the first one put to a visitor."

"And when you have seen her you will cease to wonder at the pride of the Czernovese in their princess. Natalie Lilieska is more than beautiful,—she is Beauty's self."

This interchange took place on an elevated balcony of the Hôtel de Varsovie, the principal establishment of its kind in Slavowitz, the picturesque capital of the old Polish principality of Czernova.

Between Paul and his companion stood a marble-topped table decorated with a bottle of Chartreuse and a box of cigars, and in the quiet enjoyment of these luxuries the two Englishmen yielded themselves to lazy abandon in the soft sunshine of a spring morning, watching the gay current of Czernovese life as it flowed along the boulevard beneath their feet.

Two years had elapsed since the night when Barbara had been carried off to perish, as Paul believed, in the engulfing of Castel Nuovo.

A fishing-barque passing by next morning had taken Paul from the island; its arrival was timely, for the vessel had scarcely gone half-a-mile when the sea became violently agitated, and Isola Sacra itself disappeared beneath the waves. The frightened fishermen, perceiving that the force of the earthquake was not yet spent, refused to put in on the Dalmatian coast, believing it to be safer on water than on land. For four-and-twenty hours they kept out on the deep, disembarking only when they deemed the peril past.

The moment Paul touched land he made his way to the vicinity of Castel Nuovo, and found its site covered by the sea. Must he believe that the last resting-place of Barbara was fathoms deep below these waves? He rowed to and fro over the spot, peering through the singularly transparent water, and sometimes fancying that he could discern the ghostly outline of towers and battlements.

Had Barbara really been lodged at Castel Nuovo during the night of the earthquake, or at some other place?

Inquiries carried on by him within a wide area around Castel Nuovo yielded no tidings as to the missing maiden. Barbara, Jacintha, Lambro, were like the shadows of a past dream.

Blank despair settled upon Paul. Life seemed scarcely worth living.

Then came news that the British troops stationed at Corfu had been ordered to India to suppress a rising among the hill-tribes of the frontier.

Paul, whose first impulse had been to resign his commission, now decided to accompany his regiment lest his retirement on the eve of war should be attributed to a spirit of cowardice. The fierce thrill of fighting might help to drown the memory of Barbara—for a time. And since life 80
without her was hard to bear, he cherished the hope that an Afghan spear might give him the death he desired.

On his arrival at Corfu, Paul learned that, owing to the death of a wealthy aunt, he was now master of considerable landed property in Kent, subject to the condition that he should assume his relative's name of Woodville. Paul mechanically acquiesced, and was henceforth gazetted as "Captain Woodville."

"Cressingham or Woodville, what matters?" he said. "Soon to be a little dust, I hope."

This legal formality over, he hurried off to India.

In the campaign that followed he did not die; on the contrary, he lived to gain a brilliant reputation,—a reputation destined, though he foresaw it not, to stand him in good stead during a political crisis of the future.

In a small border-fortress he found himself one of a garrison of four hundred men besieged by an Afghan force twenty times its own number.

It was winter, and the mountain-passes were filled with snow.

Weeks must elapse ere relief could come. Scantily provided with artillery, their provisions running out, sleepless from incessant attacks, the heroic little band kept grimly to the work.

Early in the siege the major in command, with two or three officers, yielding to a spirit of fear strange in English soldiers, proposed in council an unconditional surrender.

"We were sent here," said Paul, darkly and haughtily, "to hold the fortress, not to cede it. If you do not know your duty, Major, there are those who will teach it you. I will shoot the first man that talks again of surrender, be he commandant or be he private."

And without delay Paul took strong measures. He put his own superior, together with the 81
recreant officers, under arrest, and he himself took the command. Upon this there arose from the garrison, when informed of what had taken place, a ringing British cheer that startled the enemy in their distant entrenchments.

Paul henceforth was the soul of the fight,—at the head of every sortie, charging the enemy regardless of their number. The garrison attributed his conduct to sheer devilry; it was, in truth, the despairing mood of a man bent on finding death.

Ever amid the clash of arms he seemed to see before him the beautiful face of her whom he had lost, and scarcely conscious of the fact, he would cry "Barbara! Barbara!" to the bewilderment of his men. The wild Afghans shrank back in dismay whenever the "Feringhee devil" turned his dripping sabre in their direction, deeming the "bar-bar-a" uttered by him to be a magic spell capable of dealing death around.

When at last the long-desired relief came, and the story of the heroic defence of Tajapore became known to the world, Paul found that he had unintentionally become a famous person.

At the end of his second year in India Paul made a remarkable discovery.

Up till that time he had entertained the belief that Cardinal Ravenna had perished in the Dalmatian earthquake, though strange as it may appear, he had not thought of putting his opinion to the proof by ascertaining whether the Sacred College had actually lost a member in the year '45. However, being in the club-room at Poonah one day, he happened to be glancing over a continental newspaper, when his eye was caught by the following paragraph,—

"The Pope has been pleased to appoint Cardinal Ravenna to the archiepiscopal see of Slavowitz."

Paul laid down the paper trembling with new hope. If the cardinal had survived the earthquake, 82
why should not Barbara likewise? Could it be that she was really alive?

Till that moment Paul had been ignorant of the name of Slavowitz, but a reference to a dictionary of geography informed him that it was the capital of Czernova, the latter being a small independent state on the borders of Austria and Russia.

He resolved to set off immediately for this principality, for the purpose of interviewing the dark-dealing cardinal in whose breast was contained the secret of Barbara's history.

Two years' assiduous attention to duty easily earned for Paul a long furlough. He quitted India, arrived at Alexandria, and took ship for Constantinople; thence travelling post-haste day and night he threaded the passes of the Balkans, crossed the Danube, traversed the forests of the Carpathians, and finally arrived at Slavowitz late at night, where he was much disappointed to learn that the new archbishop was absent from his see, having gone on a journey to Rome, his return, however, being daily expected.

Paul determined to await his coming.

On this, his first morning at Slavowitz, while gazing from the balcony of his hotel, he caught sight of an old college chum in the person of Noel Trevisa.

Paul immediately cried to him by name, and in a moment more the two friends were sitting together renewing old memories; and great were Trevisa's surprise and admiration on learning that the Captain Woodville whose name had become familiar to all Europe, was the same as his old friend, Paul Cressingham.

"And what has brought you to this city?" inquired Paul, when the other had drunk his toast to the fair ruler of Czernova.

"This city is my adopted home. Formerly professor of English at the university of Slavowitz, I am now private secretary to the loveliest princess in Europe, and occupy a suite of apartments in the palace." 83

"Accept my congratulations. How did you, a foreigner here, obtain the post?"

"Thaddeus the Good—"

"Who is he?"

"Was, my dear fellow—'was' is the word, inasmuch as he is no more—the late Prince of Czernova, her Highness's father. He died six months ago."

"I understand. Proceed."

"Prince Thaddeus, about two years ago, offered me the post of tutor to his daughter Natalie. I was to instruct her in English Literature and English Constitutional History. Naturally I did not refuse so charming a student. When a few months later her secretary resigned through ill-health, the princess installed me in his place, where I am proud to be. I wish I could persuade you too, Paul, to take service under her Highness."

"What! Accept command in a toy army destined never to smell powder! All thanks to you, Noel, but I prefer to remain with the old Twenty-fourth."

"That's a pity, for the princess is very desirous of officering her army with men experienced in warfare. And of all nationalities she seems to prefer the English. On her return from Dalmatia—"

"From where?" interrupted Paul, sharply.

"From Dalmatia. Why shouldn't she go there?" retorted Trevisa, aggressively.

"Why not, indeed? And how long is it since she returned from Dalmatia?"

"About two years."

"Ha! proceed."

Paul's strange manner led Trevisa to wonder whether his head had not become affected by his two years' residence in the tropics. 84

"Well, as I was about to say, after her return from Dalmatia, one of the first acts of the princess was to appoint a new uniform for her body-guard. Accordingly sketches of the various costumes worn in the different European armies were laid before her. You, my dear Paul, ought to feel honored by her selection."

"Why so?"

"Because the uniform she chose is one so like your own that for my part I fail to detect the difference. As you walk through the streets of Slavowitz you will certainly be taken for one of her *corps du garde*, known as the Blue Legion."

A strange suspicion entered Paul's mind.

"How old is the Princess Natalie?"

"She celebrated her nineteenth birthday last week."

"Barbara, if she were living, would be twenty-one by this time," murmured Paul to himself; and then aloud he added: "And you say that the princess is very beautiful?"

"Be thyself the judge," smiled Trevisa. "Within a quarter of an hour from now she will pass along this boulevard on her way to the Mazeppa Gardens. From the balcony here you will have a good view of her."

"Haven't you her portrait upon you?"

"At present I have with me no other likeness than this."

And here Trevisa drew forth a gold-piece, bright as if fresh from the mint.

"The new coinage, issued this week. Reverse—the double-headed eagle, the ancient arms of Poland. Obverse—the profile of the princess with the legend '*Natalia, Princeps Czern. Amat. Patr.*' 'Natalie, Princess of Czernova, Lover of her Country.' Did the goddess Athene carry a more dainty head than this?"

Paul took the coin, glanced at the obverse, and then sat in a state wavering between belief and unbelief.

Was this golden disc really stamped with the head of Barbara? So it seemed to Paul. At any rate, if her profile had been engraved on metal with due regard to fidelity, it would have differed little or nothing from that on the coin. 85

Then a new idea seized him, and one more consonant with probability. Was this the profile of the maiden whose portrait he had seen in the cardinal's secret study at Castel Nuovo—the maiden with the laughing eyes, the sceptre and the diadem?

"A graceful head, a very graceful head," he remarked, returning the coin. "I should like to hear more of the fair lady."

"As many questions as you please."

"First, where did the Princess Natalie pass her childhood and youth?"

"Here in the city of Slavowitz and its vicinity. Of course she has had her travels like the rest of us, and has visited different European countries, but, speaking generally, she was reared and educated in the Vistula Palace, whose towers you can see rising behind yon cathedral spire."

Clearly not Barbara, for Barbara had spent her earlier years at Warsaw, her later in the Illyrian Convent of the Holy Sacrament.

"And what of her visit to Dalmatia?"

"That was undertaken two and a half years ago; at that time she was in a delicate state of health, and the physicians recommended a tour around the Adriatic. She travelled incognito with a slender suite under the care of Cardinal Ravenna."

"Who took her, among other places," thought Paul, "to Castel Nuovo, as is proved by the fragment of lace in the secret corridor."

"This tour was productive of singular results," continued Trevisa, musingly.

"In what way?" 86

"Well, it was to have lasted three months, but it was extended to six; and when the princess returned she was an altered being; I do not mean in appearance, I refer to her character."

Light began to dawn upon Paul. The Princess Natalie had not returned to Czernova; instead there had come her living image—Barbara!

"What remarkable development had the princess's character undergone?"

"Beforetime she was a gay and vivacious maiden. She returned grave and sedate. This change was attributed to the earthquake."

"The earthquake?"

"Yes. Don't you remember the great upheaval on the Dalmatian littoral two years ago?"

"Ah! I remember something of the sort, now I come to think of it."

"Well, the terrible scenes witnessed by Princess Natalie, together with her own nearness to death, seem to have sobered her from girlhood into womanhood. From that time she began to take a keen interest in state affairs, which she had previously regarded as boredom."

"Barbara was keenly interested in politics," thought Paul.

"Beforetime her predilections, if she had any, were in favor of Russia. She returned divested of her Muscovite sympathies."

"Barbara was decidedly an anti-Muscovite," thought Paul.

"But the greatest change—"

"Yes, the greatest change—?" repeated Paul, observing that the other had stopped short in his utterance with the air of one about to be betrayed into an imprudent statement.

As Trevisa did not reply, Paul drew a bow at a venture.

"The princess was reared in the Greek faith, I am given to understand? Humph! what was Prince Thaddeus thinking of when he placed his daughter under the tutelage of Cardinal Ravenna? One can guess the result. The princess went away a Greek, and came back a Catholic. Is it not so?" 87

"Hush!" muttered Trevisa, glancing around in some trepidation. "Yes, that is so. You have hit on a state secret, communicated only to her cabinet, and to me—her secretary. But, Paul, breathe not a word of this to any one, for the knowledge of it would shake her throne, and—"

He paused. There was a sudden commotion in the street below. Pedestrians had stopped in their walk, and were crowding to the edge of the pavement with their faces all set in one direction, whence came the distant sound of cheering and of clapping hands. The applause rolled in *crescendo* along the boulevards, advancing nearer each moment to the two friends.

"Here comes the princess!" cried Trevisa, springing to his feet. Paul felt his heart beating as it had never beat before when he turned his eyes towards the approaching cavalcade.

First came a detachment of Polish uhlans, their burnished lances glittering in the morning sunshine, and the points decorated with black pennons that fluttered in the breeze.

The handsome regimentals of this *corps du garde*, the Blue Legion, promptly drew from Paul the remark,—

"Why, their uniform is the same as the Twenty-fourth Kentish!"

"A remark previously made by me," observed Trevisa, drily. "You are singularly forgetful, Paul."

On came the lancers at a swinging trot, followed by an open landau containing the princess.

A moment more and this carriage was abreast of the hotel, and as if fortune were favoring Paul, the vehicle was brought to a sudden stand-still opposite the balcony on which he stood. 88

The equipage was a dainty one, lined with pale blue silk, the arms of Poland gleaming in gold from the polished sable panel. The fine black horses, with coats like shining satin, were decked in silver harness.

But Paul saw nothing of this equipage; his eyes were set upon its occupant.

There, seated in graceful state, with silken sunshade poised above her head, and responsive to the plaudits of the people by sweet smiles and a courteous bending of her head, was—the youthful and beautiful Barbara!

The supreme joy of realizing that she was actually living so affected Paul that for a moment the whole street—Barbara, soldiers, people, buildings—became a confused swimming vision. A sound like the murmur of many waters filled his ears.

With difficulty he controlled his first impulse to descend the hotel steps, crying "Barbara! Barbara!" It set his teeth on edge afterwards when he recalled how near he had come to making a fool of himself. No, his first interview with her must not take place in the open street before a wondering, gaping throng.

Fearing lest she should glance upwards and recognize him, Paul drew aside behind a screen of aloes that decorated the balcony, and continued to watch.

Yes, it was truly Barbara. The convent-fugitive who had strolled with him through the pine-woods of Dalmatia, the Polish maiden whom he had held in his arms had become a real princess with a court, ministers, and an army at her command. The wonderment of it all! And though she had spent nearly a third of her life in a convent, yet there she sat with the air of one born in the purple. It was amazing, nay, charming, to mark the dignity and the ease with which she carried herself in her new state. 89

The landau of the princess had been stopped before the Hôtel de Varsovie in order to enable her to address two pedestrians, who, judging from the respect paid to them by the crowd, were persons of distinction in the little world of Czernova.

The first was an elderly, silver-haired man of fine presence, and distinguished by a stately, old-fashioned courtesy.

"Count Radzivil," replied Trevisa, in answer to Paul's question. "The prime minister of Czernova, brother of the celebrated Michael, who commanded the Polish insurgents of '30."

As the premier was old enough to be Barbara's grandfather, Paul could afford to view him with composure; but the case was very different with the other individual.

He was a man of lofty stature, and of broad, massive build, with a dark, handsome face set off with black eyes and a black beard. The sunbeams toyed with the silver eagle upon his helmet. His splendid uniform glittered with gold lace, stars, and orders. He carried himself erect, his left hand resting upon the hilt of his sabre; and it was clear that both in his own opinion, and also in the opinion of the crowd, he was a very grand personage indeed.

"Who's His Serene Tallness?"

"John the Strong, Duke of Bora, commander of the Czernovese army, a member of the cabinet, and the heir-apparent to the crown. He is first cousin to the princess, and likewise a near kinsman of the Czar."

Envy and misgiving stole over Paul as he contrasted his own inferior rank with that of the imperially-connected Bora. Barbara was bending forward in her carriage, laughing pleasantly, and apparently holding an animated conversation with the duke. One might almost have thought that she was exerting all her arts to please him.

Paul surveyed him more attentively, and quickly gauged his character,—an individual naturally sullen, of a somewhat slow intellect, yet not without ambition; a man upon whom the graces and restraints of polite life lay but lightly; a little provocation, and the savage would soon be in evidence. What could Barbara find in this man to interest her? 90

"Bora seems on excellent terms with the princess," said Paul.

"Naturally, seeing that he is to marry her."

"What?"

Paul's intonation was so sharp that Trevisa turned to survey him.

"Why, Paul, how white you're grown!"

"Merely a pang from an old wound. But your princess; she can't entertain any real love for *that* fellow."

"Love was never fashionable at courts," smiled Trevisa. His words jarred upon Paul. If Barbara had become such that she could marry without any love on her side, then her nature must have sadly changed from what it was in the old sweet days at Castel Nuovo.

"It is a *mariage de convenance*," continued Trevisa, "tending to secure her position on the throne, and—but see, she is about to set off again."

The princess, having finished her conversation, drew off her right glove and extended her fair jewelled hand to the duke with a smile and graciousness of manner that roused all the jealousy in Paul's nature.

"She has forgotten me," he murmured bitterly. "Well, of course, she thinks me dead; but even if she knew otherwise, it is not likely that she will pay much regard to me now. And yet what were her words to me on the day that we were parted? 'If I were an empress, Paul, I would be your wife.' Humph! we shall see."

Bora raised the delicate hand to his lips amid the applause of the crowd, who seemed to regard the incident as a very pretty tableau. 91

Count Radzivil lifted his hat with courtly grace, and the next moment the landau was gliding smoothly along the Boulevard de Cracovie, followed by a detachment of cavalry similar in equipments to that which had preceded it.

Paul was left a victim to perplexing thoughts.

What had become of the real Princess Natalie, and why had Barbara assumed the name, title, and sceptre of the daughter of Thaddeus, personating the character with such art and tact as apparently to defy detection, since Trevisa, though long resident in Czernova, had no suspicion of the substitution that had taken place?

Had Barbara a just title to the throne? Recalling her air as she sat in the landau, Paul felt that he could not associate the appropriation of another's heritage with that winsome and dignified presence. No, difficult though it was to explain her conduct, he would believe anything rather than that she was a conscious and willing usurper.

CHAPTER II

CZERNOVESE POLITICS

"Well," said Trevisa, puzzled by Paul's long silence, "what think you of this fair vestal throned in the east?" 92

"My wonder is how you, her private secretary, compelled by your office to attend her daily, have avoided falling in love with her."

"By steeling my heart and playing the philosopher. Princesses are not for common mortals like myself. Give me blue blood and a title, and I might aspire. The sovereign of Czernova must not marry a commoner, on pain of forfeiture of the crown. Her consort must be one of royal or noble birth."

"Ah! is that the law?" asked Paul, with affected carelessness.

"So runneth the statute of Czernova," replied the secretary.

"*The sovereign must not marry a commoner!*" Why had he come to Czernova? Better to have remained in ignorance of her fate, than, on finding her, to learn that she could never be his.

"You said," he remarked, after an interval of silence, "that the marriage of the princess with the duke will secure the stability of her throne. In what way?"

"The explanation will require a long lecture on Czernovese politics. You will esteem me a bore."

"Not at all. Go on."

"To begin then. This principality of Czernova represents the last fragment of the ancient kingdom of Poland; it is one of the old palatinates, and the Lilieskis were its palatines. 93

"On the fall of Poland, in 1795, Czernova formed part of the share allotted to Russia, and received

exceptional treatment from that power, the reason being that the Lilieski of that day, a handsome young fellow, was one of the favorites of the Empress Catherine. She not only permitted him to retain his palatinate, but even created him Prince, and set her hand and seal to a new constitution framed by Lilieski himself, which conferred upon Czernova all the rights of a free and independent state. The Russians of to-day aver that the Empress must have signed the document without reading it, or at least without understanding what she was granting. Be that as it may, the Poles of Czernova, having obtained a Charter of Liberty, have resolutely refused to assent to any modification of its provisions."

"But seeing that Russia is a hundred times the stronger, what has prevented her from annexing Czernova?"

"The rescript of the Congress of Vienna to the effect that 'Czernova shall be governed according to the Charter granted by Catherine II.' The Powers are therefore pledged to maintain the *status quo*.

"So much for the political frame-work. Now for the people.

"The Czernovese consist of diverse elements, but the two chief nationalities are Poles and Muscovites.

"The Poles are the original inhabitants of the country, passionately attached to their liberty, and Catholics to a man. They form a majority in the principality; but for the two past decades there has been a steady influx of immigrants from Russia, which, if continued in the same ratio, will inevitably result in the Russification of Czernova.

"These Muscovites, it need scarcely be said, belong to the Greek Church, the head of which is the Czar; their sympathies are of course pro-Russian, and if the Emperor Nicholas were to prepare to-morrow for annexation very few of them would lift a finger to prevent it. 94

"Here, then, is the crux of the political situation.

"Czernova is occupied by two races alien in blood, language, religion and ideals. They can no more unite than fire with water. In the Diet, Poles and Muscovites form two hostile factions; the debates are acrimonious; swords are sometimes drawn, and the scenes occurring lack none of the fiery picturesqueness that was wont to characterize the old Polish Diet of Warsaw."

"A difficult matter," interjected Paul, "to find a ruler who shall be acceptable to both factions."

"Well, as things are at present," replied Trevisa, emphasizing the last two words, "the Princess Natalie satisfies the requirement. The Poles love her for her nationality; and the Muscovites, if they do not love, are at least disposed to tolerate a ruler whom they believe to be a member of their own Church. It is a guarantee that their own creed will not be persecuted, for you know how intolerantly the Roman Church behaved in old Poland.

"Now it is the princess's secret faith which constitutes the coming peril.

"When the Muscovites learn that she is a Catholic—and the truth cannot remain much longer hidden—it is doubtful whether their loyalty will be able to stand the shock. They may rise in arms and endeavor to seat the Duke of Bora on the throne, who has three recommendations in their eyes; he is of the Greek Church, a Muscovite on the mother's side, and connected, as I have said, with the blood-imperial of Russia.

"Hence, in the opinion of the cabinet, the necessity for the marriage of the princess with the duke; their joint occupation of the throne is the only thing that can keep Pole and Muscovite from cutting each other's throats. A son born of this marriage will tend to unite the interests of both parties." 95

Barbara with a son! And by the duke! The thought set Paul's blood on fire.

"The cabinet of course are united on the question of this marriage?" he asked.

"They mayn't like it, but, as I have said, they feel its necessity. I can name two ministers, however, who, outwardly assenting, are secretly opposing the match."

"And they are—?"

"Cardinal Ravenna and Marshal Zabern."

Ravenna! It was rather surprising to find Barbara including among her ministry the ecclesiastic who had formerly inspired her with aversion. Then Paul's surprise ceased when he reflected that the cardinal was master of her secret history, and would therefore require to be conciliated. An uneasy suspicion began to form in his mind that Barbara was the innocent victim of a Jesuitical conspiracy—that she had been duped into believing herself a princess by ecclesiastics who intended to make use of her as a tool.

"A Latin cardinal," he said. "I can understand that he would oppose the marrying of the princess to a Greek heretic. But Zabern—who is he?"

Trevisa smiled.

"You will not be long in Czernova without learning who Zabern is. He is the Warden of the Charter, the most subtle character in the cabinet, the idol of the Czernovese Poles, whose motto

is 'Trust in God and Zabern—especially Zabern.' Ask the Muscovites who Zabern is, and they will blaspheme and tell you that he is the incarnation of the devil. And as the slaying of the devil would be a holy act, their pious attentions in this respect have compelled the marshal to go about with chain-mail beneath his clothing."

"And Zabern, you say, is opposed to the match? But if the princess has set her mind upon it, how does Zabern propose to play his game?" 96

"His first card is the Pope."

"The Pope?"

"Yes. The princess, being a Catholic, is debarred by the canons of her Church from marrying the duke, inasmuch as he is her first cousin. The papal dispensation is necessary before the union can be celebrated."

"And should the Holy Father refuse to grant it?"

Trevisa's face assumed a very grave expression.

"Then the princess will indeed be in a dilemma. If she marries without papal sanction the union will be deemed null and void by her Catholic subjects. All the Polish clergy will be set against her, and you know what that means. On the other hand, if she submits to the will of the Pope, and dismisses her ducal suitor, she will put herself in grave peril. The coronation takes place within four months from now, and the Muscovites are fully expecting to see the duke seated side by side with her in that ceremony. Disappointment will cause an armed rising on their part, and then—and then—I greatly fear there will be an end to the princess's rule."

"How so? Why should not her adherents prevail?"

"They would, if left to themselves, for they are the more numerous party. But, behind the Muscovite faction, and filling the minds of the ministers with secret fear, looms the colossal shadow of the Czar. If there should be riots, and the Poles should take to burning and killing, the Muscovites will cry to Nicholas to protect his own kith and kin, and then, good-bye to Czernovese liberty. The Czar will have what he has so long sought—a pretext for annexation. Heaven avert such a calamity, but one cannot prophesy a bright future for Czernova unless this marriage takes place."

Trevisa had scarcely finished this exposition of Czernovese politics when he happened to see a lady well known to him entering the hotel. Asking Paul to excuse his absence for a few minutes, he went off to pay his devoirs. 97

Paul, not unwilling to be left alone, sat thinking of Barbara. What would be the state of her feelings when she learned that he was alive? She had accepted his love prior to the knowledge of her high rank. It was not likely that under her changed circumstances she would consider herself bound by her past promises. Granting, however, that she still loved him; granting that the Duke of Bora would be so heroic as to efface himself, marriage was impossible without the forfeiture of that sceptre, which rightfully or wrongfully she now held, and to this sacrifice Paul felt that he could never consent, even if Barbara herself were willing.

His duty was clear. He must live his life apart from her. But before he left Czernova he must have an interview with her. He must see her once more face to face and alone, and he thought of this meeting with feelings of pleasure and pain.

Looking up from this reverie, whom should he see at a little distance but the Duke of Bora, attended by Count Radzivil. The pair were making their way along the balcony of the hotel, apparently with the intention of taking a seat or calling for wine at one of the many little tables spread about.

As the duke drew near, a spirit of latent defiance took possession of Paul. This was the man destined to rob him of Barbara—Barbara who belonged of prior right to himself. It was clearly state-policy that dictated her attitude towards the duke. Paul found it impossible to believe that the delicately-minded and intellectual Barbara could feel any genuine love for this great, clumsy barbarian.

"Let him keep to Natalie, and leave me Barbara. What sort of a lover must he be? Where were his eyes two years ago, that he did not perceive that the returning princess was not his first love? Barbara must have played her part well so to impose upon him. But was he deceived? Does he know the truth, and knowing, make use of it to intimidate Barbara into marrying him?" 98

A thought which did not tend to increase Paul's amiability.

As the duke passed he eyed Paul askance, and then wheeling round with a suddenness that formed a marked contrast with his previous slowness, he exclaimed in a voice of thunder,—

"You have neither stood nor saluted, sir!"

Paul regarded the fierce Bora with a look of calm surprise. What right had this Czernovese grandee to demand a salute from him—an English officer?

"You have neither stood nor saluted, sir!"

"Why should I?"

The duke's black eyes flashed savagely; his face grew as dark as night.

"Are you mad or drunk? Report yourself a prisoner at the Citadel."

"Again I ask, why should I?"

Bora gripped his sword-handle with an air compounded of amazement and fury. A whispered word from Radzivil seemed to exercise a moderating effect upon him.

"Permit me to give my name," said the minister, stepping forward with a courteous bearing. "I am Count Radzivil, premier of Czernova. May I ask a like favor?"

"I am an Englishman, Captain Woodville of the 24th Kentish. May I ask who is this—ah!—gentleman?"

An Englishman! Bora immediately recognized his error. Misled by Paul's uniform he had taken him for one of his own officers. The duke could ill bear ridicule, and if this story got abroad he would be the laughingstock of Czernova.

"Permit me to reveal my dignity," he began stiffly.

"Your—? But proceed, sir." 99

"I am the Duke of Bora, commander-in-chief of the Czernovese army. Your English uniform being so similar to the Czernovese—"

"Pardon me. You mean that the Czernovese is so similar to the English."

"That I not unreasonably took you for a Czernovese officer."

And with a scowl the duke drew aside, deeming that he made a sufficient apology, and Paul, had he chosen, might have boasted that he was the only man who had ever drawn an apology from the duke.

"Woodville? Woodville?" murmured the premier with a musing air. "Surely not the Captain Woodville who conducted the defence of the Afghan fortress of Tajapore?"

"The same," replied Paul modestly.

The duke glanced askance at Paul with a feeling of jealousy, the mean jealousy of the man who had done Nothing, against the man who had done Something.

Paul's breast was without a single decoration. The duke's breast was a glitter of stars and crosses, none of which had been gained by actual service in war. Bora felt the irony of the contrast, and grew more bitter. Radzivil, however, was full of genuine affability.

"Captain Woodville, it gives me great pleasure to meet you," he said, extending his hand. "Had we known of your intention to visit Czernova you should have been met with a guard of honor, and received in a manner worthy of your fame. It was wrong of you to slip privately into Slavowitz. Englishmen are always welcome at the court of the princess. The princess, sir, takes a great interest in English affairs, so much so that some of our free-speaking newspapers (for as you are perhaps aware, we have no censorship of the press in Czernova) have ventured to term her an Anglomaniac; Anglophile would be a more suitable term. At her initiative we have 100
modelled the forms of our Diet upon the lines of your House of Commons. For example, we give three readings to a Bill. The princess has a great admiration for the English. You may not know that she has an Englishman for her private secretary."

"You allude to Trevisa. My friend, count. We studied together at the same university."

"Really now, this is a very interesting coincidence," said Radzivil, tapping his snuff-box pleasantly. "Your grace," he added, turning to the duke, "Captain Woodville is an old friend of Trevisa's."

But Bora affected not to hear. He hated the secretary, and as a corollary, all who were the friends of the secretary.

"Trevisa is an admirable acquisition," continued the premier, "and has done us good service in many ways. Your grace remembers that important cipher despatch which fell into our hands some time ago. It baffled the experts. But Trevisa succeeded in unravelling it. He is the author of a work on cryptography, I believe, though I am ashamed to say I haven't yet read it. The princess has no more loyal servant than Trevisa. He is more Czernovese than the Czernovese themselves, and will take a pride in describing to you the resources of our little state. We may not count for much among the Great Powers, but we are a good deal stronger than most people suppose."

"'*Esse quam videri*,'" smiled Paul.

"Your grace, Captain Woodville honors you. He is quoting the motto of the ducal House of Bora."

Now this little Latin sentence was the same as that inscribed on the golden band of the seal which Paul had found in the secret corridor of Castel Nuovo.

He happened at that moment to be wearing the signet affixed to his watch-chain, and scarcely

knowing that he did so, he drew it forth and looked at it. 101

The duke, attentive to Paul's action, caught sight of the sparkling sapphire. He started, took a step forward—another—a third—his eyes all the time resting upon the gem.

"How came you possessed of that seal?"

There was something so peculiarly aggressive in the duke's manner that an angry retort trembled on Paul's lips.

"Did you not receive it from a lady?"

Then the truth flashed upon Paul. This signet must have belonged to the duke, inasmuch as it bore his motto. An historic heirloom, it had been given by him to the Princess Natalie, and had been lost by her in the secret passage where Paul had found it. No wonder that Bora was incensed at its re-appearance in this fashion! Jealousy caused him to draw an altogether erroneous conclusion, and unfortunately it was impossible for Paul to set him right without entering into the particulars of his sojourn at Castel Nuovo.

"A lady gave you that ring."

"There your grace errs."

"That's a lie," cried Bora savagely.

"Softly, your grace," remonstrated Radzivil, glancing nervously around. "Let us have no scandal in public." With difficulty Paul restrained his anger.

"Your grace's language is extremely offensive, but I am willing to make all allowances. I do not wish to quarrel with you. This seal was not given to me by a lady. I found it, and you claim it as yours. I am quite willing to restore it."

Bora took Paul's self-restraint for cowardice.

"You found it? Where? When? Under what circumstances?"

"Those are questions that I must decline to answer."

"You refuse?"

"Most certainly." 102

"Then you shall fight me."

Paul, thoroughly roused by the duke's arrogant manner, was not at all averse to accepting this challenge.

Then he thought of Barbara. The affair could not be hidden. She would learn that his first act on coming into Czernova was to fight a duel with her future consort. He would thus appear in her eyes as a brawling swashbuckler presuming on her affection to protect him from the consequences of his acts.

"No, your grace, I shall not fight," he replied quietly.

"Finding it easier to meet Afghans than a Czernovese," sneered Bora. "Have you ever noticed, Radzivil, how brave these English are against all the savage races of the world,—how reluctant to face the European? If you will not fight I cannot, of course, compel you. But I can at least brand you as a coward."

And lifting the cane that he carried he brought it down heavily across Paul's cheek.

"Your grace!" exclaimed Radzivil, and filled with disgust and anger he walked away to the far end of the balcony.

The bronze had faded from Paul's face leaving it deadly white save for a livid stripe on the left cheek.

"Will you fight me now?" said the duke with a sneering smile and raising his cane again, "or does your cowardice require a further stimulus?"

"Fight you? Yes, by heaven!" said Paul, with a deep inspiration. "Send your second here without delay to meet mine. I hold no further parley with you. My sword shall speak for me."

A gleam of ferocious joy passed over the duke's face.

"My second shall attend yours within an hour. But first a caution to Radzivil. He hath too talkative a tongue, and this matter must be kept secret."

He turned from Paul, who sat down, the cynosure of many eyes. The loungers on the balcony, the hotel-attendants, the passers-by on the boulevard, had seen the duke's action, and concluded that 103
in his usual sweet fashion he was simply chastising the impertinence of one of his own subordinates.

And as Paul sat there thinking, first of the insult he had received, and then of the fair, graceful head of Barbara pillowed on the breast of this savage, he felt the devil of hatred rising within

him.

"By God, I'll kill him!" he muttered between his set teeth. "I shall be doing Barbara a service. He to marry her, forsooth!"

The Duke of Bora, not at all ashamed of his display of passion, vexed only that Radzivil should have shown such marked disapproval, moved forward to the table where the premier sat with wine before him.

The latter durst offer no more than mild remonstrances, for he occupied a delicate position. It was not polite to make an enemy of one destined to be the Prince Consort of Czernova.

"Your grace, you forget that duelling is forbidden by the law."

"I am the heir-apparent, and above the law," returned Bora haughtily.

"You will not find the princess taking that view of the matter. Remember how earnest she was in advocating the Anti-duelling Act. For one of her own ministers to fly in the face of it is to treat her with contempt. Your grace is acting very unwisely—acting in a manner, pardon me for saying it, that may lead to the forfeiture of her hand."

"Bah! my good Radzivil, be but discreet and she will never hear of it. Remember," he added with a menacing air, "if her Highness becomes cognizant of this affair I shall know who was her informant."

He tossed off a glass of wine, and shot a ferocious glance in Paul's direction. 104

"Who could avoid blazing forth?" he presently remarked. "Do you know, Radzivil, that that sapphire seal was a gift of mine to Natalie? Whenever I have had occasion to refer to it she has looked embarrassed—why?"

"Probably because she lost it, and has not liked to say so; and inasmuch as it is now in the Englishman's hands it is evident that he must have found it."

"The finding of the seal would be a very innocent matter; why, then, does he refuse to state the circumstances?"

Radzivil did not reply, as he might very well have replied, that the mildest-natured individual would have taken umbrage at the duke's insolent manner. He merely remarked,—

"What would your grace infer?"

"That the seal was given to yon fellow by Natalie herself."

"Your grace must be mistaken. This is Captain Woodville's first visit to Czernova. When and where could the princess have seen him?"

"Where? Why not in Dalmatia? Ah! light at last," muttered Bora, grinding his teeth and gripping his sabre-hilt with a murderous look towards the distant Paul.

"Your grace, explain."

"Why did Natalie extend her stay in Dalmatia from three to six months? There is the cause," he added, indicating Paul.

"A secret amour with him at a time when she was affianced to you! You wrong the princess," said Radzivil coldly.

"Wait!" exclaimed the duke, excitement gleaming from his eyes. "Why did she return so melancholy in mood that I almost doubted whether she were the lively Natalie of former days? There is the cause!" he added, again indicating Paul.

"Your grace, this is midsummer madness." 105

"Before that ill-starred tour she was ever ready to marry me; now, she continually defers our nuptials. Why? There is the cause!" with the same gesture as before. "She clothes her *corps du garde* in a new uniform. Why? To do honor to her hero—her lover."

"Her lover?" dissented Radzivil. "And yet she has kept him at a distance for two years?"

"She knows that my sword is sharp, and that I brook no rivals. Who aspires to the princess answers to me. Ha! her desire for an Anti-duelling Act is now explained. The measure is to enable her lover to walk securely in Czernova. She would protect him from my sword. She thinks he may safely venture here now. She has doubtless been corresponding with him since her return from Dalmatia, their common friend, Trevisa, acting as intermediary, being well qualified for such office. To an affianced princess engaged in a clandestine *affaire du cœur*, an adept at cipher-writing is a very useful auxiliary."

He again glared in Paul's direction with such ferocity of countenance that the premier, thinking that he was about to jump up for the purpose of making an onslaught upon Paul, tried to divert the duke's thoughts by turning to another topic, and accordingly snatched at the word "cipher."

"Trevisa, as you say, is an adept at cipher-writing, but at present his knowledge is somewhat at fault."

"To what do you allude?"

"To a cryptographic problem recently set him by Zabern. Four weeks ago a tavern-brawl between some Poles and Muscovites rose so high as to call for the intervention of the night watch, who marched the offenders to the guard-house. The customary search taking place, there was found upon one of the men a Russian passport made out to one Ivan Russakoff, which name the man declared to be his." 106

Radzivil had succeeded admirably in diverting the duke's attention. Anger faded from his face. Paul and the duel seemed to be forgotten in a new interest.

"This Russakoff wore a caftan, in the lining of which was concealed a large sheet of paper folded twice, and covered on both sides, not with words but with rows of numerals.

"In the morning the offenders were released with the exception of Russakoff, who was asked to explain the meaning of the paper. But this he refused to do. He averred that he was an agent travelling for a cloth merchant of Warsaw named Pascovitch; and, as a matter of fact, he carried a portfolio containing specimens of cloth. Inquiries show that there is a cloth merchant of that name at Warsaw, that Russakoff is his agent, and that the tailoring establishments of Slavowitz have considerable dealings with this Pascovitch."

"They let the fellow go after that, I presume?"

"Not so. The matter came to Zabern's ears, and he had the man brought before him.

"'What do these numerals mean?' Zabern asked.

"'They are the secrets of my business,' answered Russakoff.

"'Without doubt,' said the marshal. 'Your business is that of a spy. Your cloth-selling is a mere cloak to conceal your real calling.' Zabern kept him under examination for a long time. Russakoff refused to give the meaning of the mysterious paper; he failed to account for certain portions of his time spent at Slavowitz; and the marshal, convinced that the fellow is a spy in the service of Russia, has removed him for greater security to the Citadel where he now is. The paper has been entrusted to Trevisa for decipherment, and there the matter rests for the present."

"And you say the cipher puzzles Trevisa?"

"He can make no headway with it at all." 107

The duke seemed rather pleased than otherwise at Trevisa's failure.

"Zabern sees a spy in every man who comes from Russia," he sneered.

"Well, we shall soon know the truth. Zabern talks of employing the rack and the thumbscrew to-day."

"That's illegal," said the duke with a frown.

"So's duelling," retorted the premier.

Bora seemed on the point of making an angry reply, but checked himself and said,—

"And this supposed spy was arrested a month ago, you say? If Zabern deems this a matter of such importance, why was not I, a minister, informed of it?"

"The affair falls within Zabern's department, as he is the Minister for Justice. I myself did not hear of it till yesterday, and then it was by accident. And," added the premier, weakly smiling at the acknowledgment that he was not master in his own cabinet, "you know Zabern's way of acting without the knowledge of his colleagues, and the princess's reply to our plaint 'Zabern is privileged.'"

None knew this better than the duke himself, and there passed over his face a dark look, which implied that when he should come to occupy a moiety of the throne there would be a considerable curtailment of Zabern's privileges.

Tossing off the remainder of his wine at one gulp, the duke rose to go, accompanied by Radzivil.

After their departure Paul observed a little book lying on the floor of the balcony near the table where the two men had been sitting, and concluded that it had been unknowingly dropped by one of them. While he was wondering whether to let it lie, or to send it after them by a waiter, Noel Trevisa made his appearance, his long absence suggesting that he had had a very interesting time with his fair lady friend. 108

He noticed the book and, moved by curiosity, picked it up and found it to be a pocket-edition of the poet Æschylus containing the Greek text of the seven plays without translation, note or comment.

While casually turning over the leaves Trevisa suddenly stopped and knitted his brows in perplexity.

"Now who has put himself to all this trouble, and what is the object of it?" he muttered.

"My book, Sir Secretary."

Looking up Trevisa caught the keen black eyes of the duke fixed suspiciously upon him.

"I still keep up my knowledge of the classics, you perceive," remarked Bora, as the book was returned to him.

"You study them very attentively, too, I observe," said the secretary; "it isn't every student that takes to counting the exact number of words in a Greek play."

Bora stared hard at Trevisa as if detecting a hidden meaning in his reply, and then turned away, obviously ill at ease.

Trevisa rejoined Paul, and catching sight of the red line on his friend's cheek he instantly inquired the cause.

"The signature of John the Strong," replied Paul, grimly, proceeding to explain.

In describing the recent fracas Paul, not wishing to refer to Castel Nuovo, suppressed the incident of the seal, making it appear that his non-salute of the duke was the cause of the quarrel.

Trevisa listened with a look of the utmost consternation.

"The damned savage!" he muttered. "Paul, you are rushing to certain death. The duke is mighty with the sabre. There is not his equal in all Czernova."

"Small praise, seeing that Czernova is but small."

"He has already fought thirty duels, seven of which ended fatally for his opponent."

"He won't fight more than his thirty-first. And, Noel, you must be my second." 109

"Dare I? The princess is sternly opposed to duelling. Under the late Prince Thaddeus it was frightfully prevalent; Poles and Muscovites were for ever challenging and fighting each other. After her accession Zabern carried a bill making the duels a penal offence."

"And yet the duke, though aware of this, gives a challenge! Humph! law-maker, law-breaker! And what are the penalties for infringing the law?"

"Imprisonment for principals and seconds alike. If one should fall the survivor is to be put on his trial for murder. You are between the devil and the deep sea, Paul. If the duke should win, you die; if you should win, you die all the same at the hands of the Czernovese law, unless you take to immediate flight."

What a picture was suggested by these last words! The duke lying dead, Barbara in mourning, and himself red-handed, flying from justice! And yet there seemed no way out of the affair consistent with a soldier's honor.

"Listen, Paul, I have the ear of the princess. A word from me as to what is about to happen, and —"

"Would you have the duke point at me as the craven who shirked a fight by creeping behind the skirts of the princess, and begging for protection? Anything but that! But Noel, you must not lose the favor of the princess on my account. Let me find some other second."

"No, Paul, I were no true friend, if I did not stand by you in this affair. Here comes Baron Ostrova, the duke's secretary, and presumably his second, since he has usually acted as such in Bora's *affaires d'honneur*. What instructions, Paul?"

"This evening. At six. Sabres. To the death."

And Paul went on smoking as quietly as if a duel were an everyday event with him.

CHAPTER III

A MENACE FROM THE CZAR

In an ante-chamber of the Vistula Palace sat Count Radzivil, premier of Czernova, in company with Marshal Zabern, the Warden of the Charter; and the Charter being the palladium of Czernovese liberty, the custody of that sacred document carried with it a high distinction, second only to that of the premiership. 110

The two ministers were waiting to communicate to the princess the contents of an important despatch, which had just arrived from the Czernovese ambassador at St. Petersburg; for Czernova, be it known, though but a small state, was nevertheless sufficiently wealthy to maintain an embassy at the three courts with which its interests came most in contact, namely, St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Berlin.

The only other occupants of the apartment were two silent chamberlains, standing like statues before the folding doors of the audience-chamber, each dressed in white pantaloons and silk stockings, and each decorated with the silk wand of office.

Ladislas Zabern was a man of fine soldierly presence, with limbs that seemed carved from oak and soldered with iron. Courage was indelibly stamped upon his face. He was fifty-three years of age, and though his dark hair and moustaches were streaked with gray, he had lost none of the energy of youth.

A sabre-cut marked his left cheek, for he had known fighting from early days. There was a legend current among his admirers—and they numbered every man with Polish blood in his veins—that 111
in childhood he had been taken by his father, a patriotic noble, to the sacramental altar, and made to swear that he would be the life-long enemy of Russia.

Be that as it may, his fiery youth had been spent in vain attempts to procure the emancipation of Poland from the Russian yoke, and, as a result, he had made acquaintance with that indispensable adjunct to Muscovite civilization, Siberia. Chains and hardships, however, had not soured his nature, as the good-humored twinkle in his eye sufficiently proved.

He was the sword and buckler of Czernova, unceasingly vigilant in guarding this last fragment of Poland both against open aggression from without, and also against secret disaffection from within.

The Muscovites of the principality who regarded him as an incarnation of the devil had some shadow of reason on their side; for though Zabern was naturally of a frank and open disposition, the web of political circumstances had forced him to be crafty and subtle.

Czernova, being but a small state, was dependent for its freedom, not upon strength of arms but upon the arts of diplomacy, and in those arts Zabern was without a rival. Prince Metternich and Count Nesselrode came off second-best when they played their game with the Polish patriot.

No man ever wore the mantle of Ananias with more ease and grace, and when rebuked half-playfully, half-seriously by the princess for some brilliant piece of deception, calculated to make the most daring diplomatist stand aghast, he would merely reply: "The truth is, your Highness, each of us was trying to deceive the other; I happened to be the greater liar of the two, and so I succeeded. With two empires like Austria and Russia pressing upon our borders and endeavoring to annex us, it would be folly to act on the lines of the Sermon on the Mount. We'll wait till they 112
set us the example."

It was only natural that, as a refugee from Siberia, he should be an object of hatred to the bureaucracy of St. Petersburg, and extradition having failed to secure his person, recourse was had to darker methods, and Zabern had come to regard attempts upon his life as all in the day's work.

Such was Marshal Zabern, the leading member of the Czernovese ministry, for Radzivil's premiership was purely nominal. None knew better than the count himself that he had been selected by the princess mainly to gild the cabinet with a famous historic name.

Radzivil had been narrating to the marshal the incident of the fracas between Paul and the Duke of Bora.

To the premier's surprise Zabern received the news with an air of grim satisfaction.

"Why, count, this is manna from heaven. Have you told the others?" he added, meaning by that expression the rest of the ministry.

"Yes, and the opinion of one and all is that the princess must be called upon to intervene."

Zabern smiled with the air of one who should say, "A parcel of old women!"

"Count," he said, assuming an authoritative manner, "this duel must take place. The good of the state requires it."

"The cabinet connive at the breaking of the law! Impossible! It is our duty to inform her Highness without delay, unless," added the premier, "unless you can give good reason for acting otherwise."

"Well, I, Zabern, forbid you," laughed the marshal good-humoredly. "Won't that reason suffice you, count?"

Ere the premier could reply, the chiming of a silver bell in the audience-chamber announced that 113
the princess was ready to receive her visitors.

The chamberlains flung wide the open doors.

"Remember," said Zabern, in a somewhat stern whisper, "not a word of this duel to the princess."

And the perplexed Radzivil, always guided by the advice of his colleague, gave a reluctant assent.

The two ministers entered the White Saloon,—a hall so called from its pure white decorations relieved with gold.

At a table sat the fair princess who now bore the name of Natalie, but in earlier days that of

Barbara.

She looked up with a bright smile, and motioned the two councillors to a seat at her table.

Zabern was her favorite minister, and he on his part was ready to sacrifice his life to advance her interests and happiness. It was this sentiment which made him look askance at her intended marriage with the duke. With doubts of its wisdom even as a political expedient, he had no doubts at all as to the private unhappiness that would result from the union of such an ill-assorted pair.

Therefore, he, Zabern, would prevent it; and matters that day seemed to be favoring his design.

"You come at an unusual hour, my lords, presumably, therefore, with important tidings?"

"From the grand liberticide," remarked Zabern.

"Our representative at St. Petersburg," remarked the premier, taking some papers from his despatch-box, "reports that at an ambassadorial ball given at the Winter Palace a few nights ago the Emperor Nicholas walked up to him, and in a severe voice, obviously intended to be heard by the whole assembly, exclaimed: 'Is it true, sir, that the Princess of Czernova has become a convert to the Catholic Faith?'"

"So my secret has transpired at last!" smiled Barbara. "Well, it matters little. It would have become public knowledge soon, inasmuch as my coronation must take place in a Latin cathedral." 114

"Of course the reply of our representative was that he could give no answer till he had received instructions from the princess."

"What said the Czar to this?"

"'We,'" replied Radzivil, reading from the despatch, "'we shall send an envoy to remind the princess that her coronation-oath requires assent to the Greek Faith.' Your Highness, the Czar speaks truly. Czernova must be governed according to its Charter, and as the Charter fixes the words of the coronation-oath, we cannot deviate from them without violating the conditions upon which autonomy was ceded to us. I would that we could send word to deny the truth of your conversion. Cannot," continued the premier, fixing a wistful look upon the face of the young princess, "cannot your Highness be persuaded to return to your early faith?"

"My early faith," murmured Barbara to herself, "has never changed." And then aloud she added, "Why, count, would you have me change my faith as lightly as I change my mantle?"

Zabern, though a Catholic himself, and that mainly because the Czar was a Greek, was nevertheless a politician before all things, and he here intervened with a characteristic suggestion.

"Since your Highness has not yet publicly avowed yourself a Catholic, you are free to deny that you are one. Act diplomatically. Publicly attend the services of the Greek basilica; privately have your own oratory in the palace here. The Pope will doubtless grant you a dispensation to this effect."

"No more such counsel, I pray you," said Barbara, coldly. "I am a Catholic, not a Jesuit."

"Your Highness corrects me with admirable judgment," returned Zabern, who made a point of always agreeing with his sovereign, for by such course he usually contrived to secure his own way in the end. 115

"Our representative proceeds to say," remarked the premier, referring again to his despatch, "that the Czar's words and manner were regarded by all the ambassadors present as a distinct menace to your Highness. 'The annexation of the principality,' and '*Finis Czernovæ*' passed from lip to lip."

"Czernova has survived many similar threats," said Barbara disdainfully.

"It is the contention of the Czar and his ministers," pursued the premier, "that as a Catholic your Highness is precluded from reigning. We would not alarm your Highness unnecessarily, but we cannot disguise the fact that we are approaching a very grave crisis."

"Be it so," replied Barbara, firmly. "My faith is dearer to me than crown or life. I shall not change it to please the Czar."

Radzivil looked the picture of melancholy at this avowal.

"As the Czar has promised to send an envoy," remarked Zabern, "your Highness will, of course, delay your answer till his arrival?"

To this Barbara assented.

"And in the interval," smiled Zabern cynically,—he was never happier than when opposing Russian designs,—"we will set the jurists to work to discover whether they cannot put upon the coronation-oath an interpretation different from that taken by the Czar. We will appeal to the decision of the other Powers; they being interested in opposing Russian aggrandizement will readily lay hold of any ambiguity in the wording of the oath."

After a brief interval of silence the princess, knitting her brows into a frown, said,—

"How comes the Czar to be aware of that which I revealed to my cabinet under pledge of secrecy?" 116

The two ministers interchanged significant looks.

"The statement we are about to make," began Radzivil, "is of so distasteful, so startling a character that we have hitherto withheld it from your Highness, hoping that it might prove false. In vain, however. We can no longer blind ourselves to the fact that there is a traitor in the cabinet."

"A traitor!" ejaculated Barbara.

"Reluctantly we are forced to this conclusion. Secrets discussed in the privacy of our council-chamber have been reported to the ministers of the Czar. The previous letters of our ambassador leave no doubt on this melancholy question."

Here the premier began to read various extracts, all tending to prove his statement.

"One of my own ministers secretly corresponding with the Czar!" murmured Barbara in dismay. "Who is the traitor! Whom do you suspect, my lords?" turning sharply upon her ministers.

"I know not in the least at whom to point the finger," replied the premier.

A smile flickered over Zabern's face, and he murmured to himself, "Blind Radzivil!"

"You suspect some one, marshal?" said Barbara, reading his looks.

"Your Highness, I do, but prefer to verify my suspicions ere stating them. I will say this much, however," continued Zabern, bending forward over the table and speaking in a whisper, "he whom I suspect is not one of the 'Transfigured.'"

The princess seemed somewhat relieved by this last statement.

"My spies are attentive to the traitor's movements," continued Zabern. "Nay, more; I have his emissary under lock and key in the Citadel."

"You refer to the man Russakoff?" asked Radzivil. 117

"Yes. I am convinced that he is the intermediary of this treasonable correspondence, and nothing but her Highness's clemency prevents me from learning the name of his principal."

"My clemency? How?" asked Barbara in surprise.

"The rack would soon make him confess."

"Oh! no, marshal," returned the princess, quickly. "No prisoner shall be put to the torture during my *régime*. I am trying to civilize Czernova. The rack would indeed be a return to barbarism."

"Then we must fall back upon our secretary, Trevisa, and pray the saints that he will unravel that cipher despatch. It may give us the clue we want."

"A traitor in the cabinet!" murmured Barbara. "Russia's arm is long and crafty; when will it be stayed? That desire of our hearts, a war betwixt England and Russia, seems as far off as ever."

"Nearer than men think," returned Zabern. "And strange to say, our capital contains at the present moment an Englishman whose words may have the effect of bringing it about."

"Who is this potent personage?" asked Barbara in surprise.

"A certain Captain Woodville, lately returned from India."

Zabern had been apprised by Radzivil of the duke's suspicion as to a former love-affair between the princess and this English captain, and therefore while speaking he watched Barbara with an eye ready to detect the slightest change in her manner. But the princess showed no confusion of face at the mention of the name "Woodville," and the marshal was forced to the conclusion that the duke was laboring under an error. Or, he murmured to himself, "the princess knows well how to hide her feelings."

"Woodville? Woodville?" repeated Barbara pensively; and then her face brightening, she added, "Surely not the Woodville of Tajapore renown?" 118

"The very same," replied Radzivil. "He is staying at the Hôtel de Varsovie. I had a—a brief conversation with him this morning."

At this moment the premier received from Zabern a look which warned him to say as little as possible concerning that interview.

"The siege of Tajapore!" said the princess. "Ah! that was a noble defence. Would four hundred of our men have done the like, think you, Zabern?" and without waiting for reply she turned to Radzivil and asked: "Did you inquire of Captain Woodville how long he intends to remain in Czernova?"

"His stay will be very brief, I fear," replied Radzivil, thinking of the duel and its probable issue.

"Very long, you mean," said Zabern in a grim whisper to the premier, "for you believe he'll never quit Czernova."

"I should like to see this illustrious Englishman ere he departs. Count, you must arrange for an audience."

And the count, knowing that he was conniving at a breaking of the law which would probably end in the death of this same Englishman, felt extremely uncomfortable, and but for the presence of his colleague, would certainly have revealed the whole truth.

"But how," inquired Barbara, "can Captain Woodville's words bring about an Anglo-Russian War?"

"Why, thus," returned Zabern. "He was interviewed at Alexandria by the correspondent of the English 'Times,' to whom he stated his belief that the artillery officers commanding the Afghans in their attack upon Tajapore were really Europeans in disguise, his opinion being based upon the superior way in which they handled their guns. And of what nationality they were is shown by the fact that Russian words were frequently heard in the heat of the *mêlée*. Captain Woodville has 119
already embodied his views in despatches which are now under the consideration of the British cabinet. We shall soon have a troubling of the diplomatic waters. Lord Palmerston, alarmed at the recent advances made by Russia in Central Asia, is in no mood to be trifled with. He may seize upon the siege of Tajapore as a *casus belli*. If an Anglo-Russian war should come—"

Zabern checked his utterance and tapped the hilt of his sabre significantly.

"Then will come the day of Poland's uprising," said the princess with a heightened color. "My lords, you may withdraw."

The premier of Czernova and the Warden of the Charter rose, bowed, and retired, wending their way in leisurely fashion to the entrance of the palace.

"Marshal," said Radzivil, with a troubled look, "the princess seems to take great interest in this Woodville?"

"So much the more angry will she be with the man who slays him," returned the other, coolly.

"Which is your reason for wishing this duel to take place?" said Radzivil angrily. "You seek to destroy my favorite scheme of uniting the princess and the duke?"

"Precisely; that is my object. Her Highness will certainly be offended at seeing her future consort presuming to set himself above the law. It may cause her affections to become alienated. The duke has walked nicely into my net, as I foresaw he would."

"What net?"

"The Anti-duelling Act," replied Zabern with a cynical smile. "Why was I so earnest in getting the Diet to pass that measure?"

"To please the princess."

"Partly that, but much more because I saw in the measure an opportunity of entangling the duke. Aware of his arrogant disposition, I knew that he, deeming himself above the law, would soon be 120
engaging in another duel. And my plan has succeeded," continued the marshall with a triumphant chuckle. "This day the duke is pledged to a duel with sabres. They fight *à la mort*,—that's the best of it. It's possible they may kill each other; if not, the alternatives are that the Englishman will slay the duke—and may the saints confer that boon upon Czernova!—or—"

"Or, which is far more likely, the duke will slay the Englishman."

"Regrettable that, since the Englishman is a fine fellow, who deserves a better fate. In that case the duke, in accordance with the new enactment, will have to stand his trial for murder."

Radzivil stood aghast. Strange that he had not carried the matter in thought so far as this!

"And if the princess adheres to the spirit and the letter of the law," continued Zabern with imperturbable coolness; "and, as you know, she is an enthusiast for law, she will have to sign the warrant for the execution of her intended consort."

"Good God!" gasped the premier.

"Works out beautifully, doesn't it? I intended it should."

"Oh, this shall not be! The princess must intervene to stop this duel. I will return at once and inform her."

"Hold!" said Zabern, sternly. "Let the duke abide by his folly and lose his bride. If Polish ascendancy is to be maintained in Czernova the duke must go. Fool!" he continued with a savage flash of his eyes, and forcibly detaining the premier by the sleeve. "How long, think you, shall we retain office if Bora once sits upon the throne of the Lilieskis?"

They had now reached the grand entrance of the palace. A trooper moved forward to meet them 121
and stood at the salute, apparently wishful to deliver a message.

"What is it, Nikita?"

"Sire, the spy Russakoff has escaped from the Citadel."

"Damnation! the guards shall swing for this."

CHAPTER IV

THE PRINCESS AND THE CARDINAL

After the departure of her two ministers the Princess Barbara, rising from her seat, passed through an open casement into the sunlit gardens without; the sentinels on the terrace presenting arms as she went by. 122

A broad and noble avenue of linden trees faced her, and here silent and without attendants the fair princess walked, darkly meditating on the treachery latent within her cabinet.

A shadow fell across her path, and, raising her eyes, she saw before her a stately and dignified figure robed in splendid scarlet and dainty lace.

It was Pasqual Ravenna, Cardinal Archbishop of Czernova, an ecclesiastic who vainly sought to hide his Italian origin by Polanizing his name into Ravenski.

He was a man who had passed his fortieth year, but he looked far more youthful; and his clean-shaven, handsome face was as clearly sculptured as a head on an antique medallion.

He was a member of the princess's ministry, a permanent member, in fact, for, by virtue of an antiquated statute both the Roman archbishop and the Greek archpastor were entitled to hold office in the cabinet—an arrangement that did not tend to its harmony. A favor to one was an affront to the other; and the mild and amiable Radzivil was perpetually employed in smoothing the differences between them.

Barbara's avowal to the cabinet of her real faith had been a great triumph for Ravenna over his Greek rival Mosco, and he looked forward to additional triumphs. His desire of bringing all Czernova within the papal fold was known to all men; not so well known, however, was his taste for amorous intrigue, though a physiognomist on studying his countenance would have said that Ravenna, like Cæsar, never permitted pleasure to interfere with ambition. 123

Doffing his red beretta the cardinal bent his knee and raised the princess's hand to his lips. It was clear at a glance that Ravenna was not a *persona grata* with Barbara, for though she did not withdraw her hand her face assumed a cold expression.

With an air of authority he took his place on the left side of the princess, and began to pace to and fro with her beneath the shade of the linden trees.

"Princess, I have returned, as you see, from the Vatican, the bearer of a missive from his Holiness, Pope Pius."

He presented a massive envelope, its seal stamped with the papal keys. But Barbara waved it aside. She had received many such epistles of late, and the novelty was wearing off.

"You know its contents, I presume. Read it for me. What says his Holiness?"

Ravenna broke the seal and unfolded the letter which was a somewhat lengthy one, and written in the choicest Latinity.

"The Holy Father greets you as his dear daughter *in Christo*, and, as you are now firmly established upon the throne"—Barbara could not repress a smile in view of the recent menace of the Czar—"he deems that the time is ripe for the public avowal of your faith."

"At last the Pope and I are at one. This night shall Radzivil make known my faith to the Diet. I ever loathed this garb of secrecy and hypocrisy." 124

"Its assumption was necessary. The saints themselves must bow in the house of Rimmon at times."

"Would that I could drop the other deception and reign in my own name!" murmured Barbara to herself.

"His Holiness," proceeded the cardinal, glancing at the papal missive, "anticipates the happy day when Czernova shall be purified from the malaria of heresy that now taints it."

"And in what way does he suggest that the purificatory process shall begin?" said the princess with a slight frown.

"His Holiness hath ventured in this epistle to briefly indicate the lines of the ecclesiastical policy to be observed within the principality. We must begin by penalizing the schismatic Greeks. The Diet must pass a law to exclude them from holding civil offices."

"And create a rebellion!" murmured Barbara. "These priests! will they never learn wisdom?" And aloud she asked, "And would your Eminence have me exclude the Duke of Bora, my future consort, both from the cabinet and the Diet?"

"Your future consort? Alas, princess, I regret to say that the Pope has again refused to grant you dispensation to marry the duke."

"We shall not ask a third time."

"Your Highness cheerfully accepts his decision?"

"On the contrary, it is my intention to marry without the papal sanction. I must," she added, her expression showing how hateful to her was the thought of such marriage—"I must conciliate my Muscovite subjects."

"Princess, you, as a vassal of the holy Roman suzerain—"

"By your leave, Sir Cardinal," exclaimed Barbara, haughtily, "will you cite the Act by which the Diet consented that Czernova should become a fief of the Papal See?" 125

It was the first time that Barbara had adopted such a tone with Ravenna, who listened, however, without betraying surprise; for he was one of those men whose outward serenity nothing seems to disturb, and therein lay one of the secrets of his power. He clearly recognized that a struggle was impending. The princess, hitherto compliant with his will, was about to make an attempt to shake off his authority.

"Princess, you, as a loyal daughter of the True Church—"

"Daughter! that is a good word. A daughter is not a slave."

"But she owes obedience. You cannot marry the duke, for the Holy Father forbids the union, and no Catholic priest dare perform the ceremony in opposition to the will of Pio Nono."

"There is one brave priest in Czernova upon whose loyalty I can rely."

"You allude to the Abbot Faustus, a lawless ecclesiastic who must learn to discipline his proud soul. If your Highness will glance at this missive, you will note that the Pope has conferred upon me full jurisdiction over the Convent of the Transfiguration."

"A convent whose abbot from old time hath been independent of the see of Slavowitz! You will put Faustus in a dilemma," continued Barbara with a touch of sarcasm in her voice; "he will not know which of the two Infallibilities to follow: Pius II., who granted the convent its privileges, or Pius IX., who abolishes them. I greatly fear that he will follow the old Pope in preference to the new."

Barbara would have repudiated the statement that she was not a true Catholic. Nevertheless it is to be seen that her Catholicism like many other things in Czernova was peculiarly *sui generis*.

"And your Highness supports Faustus in his defiance of the archbishop?" 126

The princess shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"I am aware that your Eminence is extremely anxious to regulate the affairs of that convent, and that Faustus in the exercise of his ancient rights declines to admit you within his walls. It is no concern of mine if an abbot refuse to obey his archbishop."

"Still, a word from the princess would procure his instant submission."

"And that word shall never be spoken."

"The Convent of the Transfiguration must hide strange mysteries behind its walls when the Pope's own nuncio is denied admission."

There was on the part of the princess a sudden start, which the cardinal accepted as confirmatory of his suspicion.

"Princess," he said with a smile, "you are not yet perfect in statecraft, for you have not learned the art of veiling your thoughts. It is as I have long suspected; you have some secret connected with that monastery. Your championing of Abbot Faustus is not altogether disinterested."

"Quit me this theme," said Barbara, with dignity. "I shall not misuse my authority to gratify your ambition by depriving a brave abbot of his ancient privileges. Indeed from this day forth it will be well for each of us to understand the other, inasmuch as you seem strangely disposed to reverse our respective positions, deeming yourself the ruler of Czernova, and myself your minister." She paused for a moment as if to collect her thoughts, and then resumed: "My lord cardinal, under strange circumstances you stole me away in infancy, deluding my father into the belief that I had died. You took charge of my training and education—"

"With a view to your ultimate restoration," said the cardinal, bowing.

"True. You desire to present the Czernovese with a princess who should be a Catholic, and not, as her forefathers had been, a member of the Greek faith—" 127

"A noble aim!"

"A princess who should be a willing tool in the hands of the Latin Church. The first part of your scheme has succeeded. I am a Catholic, and shall never break with the faith of my childhood, for it has grown dear to me, though the thought that you, my lord, belong to the same faith might very well induce me to renounce it. But as to the second part of your scheme—your expectation of finding in me a servile instrument ready to execute every decree of the Papal See is destined to failure. No priest shall dictate to the daughter of Thaddeus. Let the crosier submit to the sceptre. Jesuits by their intolerance contributed to the fall of old Poland. They shall not play their game in Czernova."

The cardinal listened with chiding smile, as if at the waywardness of a pretty child.

"Princess! princess! you forget the tenure by which you hold your crown."

"I hold my crown," said Barbara, with proud flashing eyes, "by right of birth."

"A right that you cannot prove without my witness."

"And therefore you would use your knowledge?"

"To advance in Czernova the interests of the True Church."

"For that I could forgive you. But have you no ulterior aim? Shall I unmask the secret purpose of your heart? Radzivil made an unwise choice in sending you to the Vatican to plead for the dispensation. Were you really urgent on my behalf?"

"As urgent as one may be with a pope."

"Hypocrite!" said the princess, turning upon the cardinal with a blaze of scorn. "Can I not see you now in my mind's eye whispering in the ear of the Pope to withhold the dispensation? And why? The heretical duke must not marry the princess, because the cardinal would have her for his secret mistress. Will you say that I wrong you by this thought?" 128

"Princess, you have rightly divined my secret. It is true that I love you—"

"I would that Zabern could hear you!" said Barbara indignantly. "You, a priest, to talk to your princess of love!"

It was significant that the marshal's name, and not that of Bora, should be the first to rise to her lips.

"A priest? True. Such is my misfortune, since once a priest always a priest. My love for you—"

"Let there be an end of this language," said Barbara with dignity. "It is treason."

"Nay, princess, listen. I have loved you in secret from the day when I set eyes on you in the Dalmatian convent. I have elevated you to a throne partly for the purpose of making you mine, that you might taste the luxury of power, and, tasting, be ready to sacrifice anything, even your own person, rather than lose that power. Aware of my love, you are forming a plan to escape me. If you should be deposed, who succeeds? The Duke of Bora as next of kin. Therefore you think by becoming his wife to retain your rank as princess, and thus to foil my hopes. That motive, rather than a desire to conciliate the Muscovite faction, urges you to this match."

His statement was perhaps correct, for Barbara did not offer any denial to it.

"But be mindful of this: the duke cares less for you than for your crown. At heart he dislikes you, for he finds his solemn dulness an ill match for your bright wit. I have but to whisper to him that your title is invalid, and he will be the first to demand your deposition. It will not be difficult to prove that you are an impostor. The physicians and nurses who attended the infant days of Princess Natalie are still living. The simple baring of your right shoulder would prove that, whoever you may be, you are not that princess. Your assertion that nevertheless you are her elder and half-sister would be laughed to scorn. Who will believe your word, unsupported by evidence, that the late Prince Thaddeus had contracted an early and secret marriage? The whole affair would be regarded as a plot on the part of Cardinal Ravenna formed to advance the interests of his Church. Barbara Lilieska, I acknowledge you to be the lawful Princess of Czernova, but whenever it shall please me I can compel you to step down from your throne." 129

Barbara quivered with indignation. She, a princess with the blood of Polish kings in her veins, and at whose word twenty thousand swords would flash from their scabbards, to be threatened by an Italian ecclesiastic! She turned her head towards the armed sentinels slowly pacing the stately terrace of the palace.

"One moment, princess, ere ordering my arrest. I do not venture upon this avowal without safeguarding myself. Listen! There lives at the present moment upon the other side of the frontier—in what town no matter—an individual devoted to my interests. To him I have entrusted the keeping of three sealed packets. So soon as he shall learn of my arrest he will thus act. One packet he will despatch to the Russian Foreign Minister; the second to the Duke of Bora; and with the third he will hasten to the office of the 'Kolokol' newspaper, whose pro-Russian editor, Lipski, will be but too delighted to print the contents of that packet; its publication will cause a stir in Czernova. There are your guards. Call them. Arrest me. Behead me on the spot if you will. But be sure of this: your own downfall will follow within seven days."

Barbara did not call her guards. She said nothing, did nothing.

"Princess, forgive me for using the language of threats; it is with reluctance that I adopt such a course. But—you recognize my power, and you know my love. Your answer?" 130

"Better the cloister's quiet shade than a throne on such terms."

"It is not the cloister's quiet shade that you will see, but the interior of a Russian fortress. In occupying the throne of Czernova you will be accused of assuming rights the reversion of which belongs to the Czar, inasmuch as he is next heir after the duke. The Czar will see in your usurpation an affront to his dignity. He will demand that you be sent to Russia, there to take your trial. And the cowardly duke will comply. You know how much 'the politician in petticoats' is hated by the Russian ministry, and what justice you are likely to receive at their hands. When the black wall of a Muscovite fortress girdles you round forever," he added in a significant whisper, "when rough soldiers are your jailers, when no cry of yours can penetrate to the outer world, then—then the love of a cardinal even would be a desirable thing."

Barbara could not repress a feeling of horror at the picture suggested by these words.

"If the duke should rule he will rule merely as the vassal of the Czar, and Czernova will become a province of Russia. Therefore, consider well your decision. You ruin not yourself only, but the faithful friends dependent upon you. Zabern, Radzivil, Dorislas, all the ministers whose policy has offended the Czar, will be delivered up to him by the duke. Czernova will be overrun by Cossack soldiery, and placed under martial law. Her young men will be drafted off to serve in the Russian army. The university will be closed, the Catholic Church persecuted. The wailings of Czernova will mount upward to Heaven, but when did Heaven ever listen to the cry of the oppressed? Princess, it is true I require of you a sacrifice, but it is a sacrifice meriting the name of virtue. The fate of a nation hangs upon your answer. How easy for you to save them by conferring happiness upon me!" 131

He could not have employed an argument more adapted to gain his end than an appeal to the welfare of the people whom she loved; nevertheless, it had altogether failed, as he saw by the sovereign scorn that curved her lips.

"You are master of my secret, but not of me. Though I err in bearing the name of Natalie, I am nevertheless the lawful princess of Czernova; and Heaven, being just, will maintain me in my rights. He sets himself a hard task, cardinal, who proposes to fight against the truth. Reveal my story to the duke—to the Diet, to the whole principality—this very day, if you will. I fear you not. I will do nothing to stop you. I will wait to see whether you will be bold enough to play this traitor's game. And when you have done your worst to destroy the princess, and failed, then beware the vengeance of Zabern; for though you fly to the secret recesses of the Vatican, and cling to the holy robe of Pio Nono himself, Zabern will find and slay you. There is my answer both to your threats and to your lust, for call not your desires by the sacred name of love."

The cardinal gave a mock bow.

"Princess, I will not yet draw the sword against you, confident that time and reflection will bring you wisdom. Reign till your coronation-eve, when I will return to this theme."

His cold smile gave little indication of the volcano of passion that was burning within him. The sight of the distant sentinels alone kept him from seizing and holding Barbara within his arms. Brilliant in youth and loveliness she tortured him; and he resolved to torture in turn, since the means of doing so were at his disposal.

"Ere I take my leave," he said, "let me tell you of an event that took place this morning. Nay, princess, do not turn away. The story will interest you as no other story can." 132

Something in Ravenna's manner compelled Barbara to pause and face him again.

"Princess, prepare yourself for a surprise. One whom we both thought dead now proves to be living."

Despite her loathing of the cardinal, Barbara found herself forced to utter one word,—

"Who?"

"One whose supposed demise caused you to say that you would forever carry a dead heart within your breast."

The princess gave a great start, and placed her hand upon her side. With a foreboding of what was to come she stood immovable, mute, scarcely breathing.

"Isola Sacra was certainly submerged. We both saw that. But ere it sank the captive must have escaped, for a young Englishman calling himself Paul Cressingham Woodville put up last evening at the Hôtel de Varsovie."

Barbara was powerless to speak, but the look in her eyes was a language that plainly said, "Is it the same?"

The cardinal understood her silent question.

"The same. For verification I sent to the Police Bureau where strangers register themselves. These little particulars on his *carte de séjour* leave no doubt on the matter."

Here Ravenna drew forth a paper and began reading from it. "'Name: Paul Woodville, formerly Paul Cressingham. Age: twenty-seven. Nationality: English. Residence: Oriel Hall, Kent, England. Religion: Anglican Church. Calling: Captain in the Twenty-fourth Kentish, a cavalry regiment. Object in visiting Czernova: The pleasure of travelling,' Humph! was that the motive that drew him here? Princess, do you mark the name Woodville? Your Dalmatian hero has been distinguishing himself, for he is none other than the Englishman who conducted the defence of Tajapore."

Emotion caused Barbara to sink upon a marble seat. She knew that Ravenna was speaking, but she heard not his words. She was oblivious of everything, but the one overwhelming thought that Paul was alive, and at that very moment within her own city of Slavowitz! 133

Her feelings were eloquently testified by the new and radiant light that came over her face, by her lips parted in an unconscious smile, by her bosom heaving beneath its foam of white lace. Never had the princess looked so lovely in the cardinal's eyes as now. Lost in a delicious daze she was quite forgetful of his presence, as he himself perceived, for two or three questions addressed to her evoked no recognition.

Her pleasure struck a pang to his jealous heart. What would he not have given to be the cause of such transfiguration? But though he could not create such joy, he could extinguish it, and would; and observing that Barbara was awaking from her day-dream, and endeavoring to fix her attention upon him, he proceeded,—

"Captain Woodville—to call him by his new name—saw you this morning from the balcony of the Hôtel de Varsovie. Knowing that you cannot really be Natalie Lilieska he will, of course, conclude that you are an impostor."

How could Paul, ignorant of her true history, come to any other conclusion? The thought sent a sudden chill to her warm feelings.

"These Englishmen pride themselves on their blunt honesty and plain dealing. What will he think when he sees that in the sacred matter of religion you are acting the hypocrite, in secret a Catholic, yet for the sake of self-interest publicly posing as a Greek!"

Yes; it was true. In name and religion she was a living lie. How she must have fallen in Paul's esteem! Her quickly changing expression gave pleasure to the cardinal.

"He saw the duke publicly kiss your hand, and must thus have learned of your betrothal. Inquiries as to Bora's character must cause him to marvel at the taste which selects this Scythian barbarian for your consort." 134

Every word went, as intended, to Barbara's heart. Paul, not knowing that she had believed him dead, must have thought himself forgotten by her. How she longed to see him, to explain the difficulties of her position, to set matters right between them!

Regardless of what court officials might think, she would send an equerry this same day to the Hôtel de Varsovie with a message to the effect that the Princess of Czernova was desirous of an interview with Captain Paul Woodville.

"If it be sweet to learn that the dear friends whom we have long thought dead are alive, how bitter it must be to lose them again, ere we can have the opportunity of seeing them!"

"What do you mean?"

Barbara did not speak these words. The question was put by the eager, fearful look of her eyes.

"It seems that the duke and Captain Woodville—I crave your Highness's pardon, Captain Woodville and the duke—met by chance on the balcony of the Hôtel de Varsovie. A sapphire seal worn by the Englishman attracted the notice of the duke, inasmuch as he recognized it as a former gift of his to the Princess Natalie. The Englishman refused to state how he came by its possession, with the result that there is to be a duel over the matter."

"Mother of God!"

But for her dark arched eyebrows and dusky glowing eyes, the princess's face might have been taken for a piece of white sculpture.

"It is to be no mock contest. They fight with sabres and to the death."

"They shall not fight," gasped Barbara, finding her voice at last. "I shall send a troop to the Ducal Palace to arrest Bora—now—at once." 135

"Too late! princess," answered Ravenna in a mocking voice. "They fight this very day, within an hour from now. The combatants are already on their way to the rendezvous in the Red Forest. The swiftest horse of the Ukraine could not reach the spot in time for you to stay the duel. And granting that you should arrive in time you would be powerless; for, in order to avoid breaking the Czernovese law, Ostrova, the duke's second, has fixed the place of combat on the Russian side of the frontier, where your authority does not extend."

White as the princess's face was it grew whiter still as Ravenna proceeded in a fierce exultant tone,—

"You know the duke's reputation as a *beau sabreur*. Thirty duels, and never a wound has he received in any one of them; that is his record. In the Czernovese army are twenty thousand men, not one of whom, unless he wish for death, dares face the duke's deadly blade. You yourself have witnessed his feats in the *salle d'armes*; you have seen him disarm in swift succession the best fencers among your officers.—Zabern, Dorislas, Miroslav! Who can stand before the duke?"

He paused for a moment, and then, pointing to the sun shimmering through the leaves of the linden-trees, he added,—

"Princess, ere that golden orb has set, your English hero will be lying dead upon the turf, slain by the hand of the man whom you would make your husband."

Barbara heard no more. With a cry of "O Paul, Paul,"—a cry in which love and grief were intermingled,—she slid from her seat, and lay as one dead at the feet of the cardinal.

CHAPTER V

ON THE RUSSIAN FRONTIER

The afternoon was drawing to a close as Paul Woodville and Noel Trevisa made their way to the 136
frontiers of Czernova.

From Slavowitz they had driven in a troika or three-horse car, adopting by preconcerted arrangement a route different from that taken by Bora and his second.

Having put up their vehicle at a roadside hostelry, Trevisa conducted his friend to the place of assignation, the path lying through a series of charming woodland glades, collectively known as the Red Forest.

"Grand pines!" remarked Paul, admiring the erect and stately columns presented by these trees.

"The haunt of wolves in winter," observed Trevisa. "They sometimes devour the Russian sentinels. Who henceforth shall say that a wolf has not its uses?"

Following the beaten track, they came to an extensive clearing.

"The frontier line runs somewhere through this glade. Yes; there is the boundary mark."

Trevisa directed Paul's attention to an upright rectangular block of stone, the sides of which fronted the four cardinal points. On the northern face, deeply cut, were the letters R-U-S-S-I-A, and on the southern face C-Z-E-R-N-O-V-A.

"We are now breathing the air of despotism," remarked Trevisa, as they left the stone in their rear, "and unless we keep a lookout we may experience the effects of it in a shot fired at us by some hidden sentinel." 137

"What? Is it the fashion of Russian sentries to take pot-shots at passing strangers?"

"Occasionally; at least, on this frontier. It is purposely done to provoke hostilities from Czernova. Ah! there's a sentry. I thought we shouldn't advance far without meeting one."

There under the shadow of the trees, about a hundred yards distant, sitting on horseback with lance erect, was a wild-looking Cossack, with Hessian boots, red breeches, and a small red turban-shaped cap. He was chanting the Russian anthem, and his voice, mellowed by the distance, had a strange plaintive effect.

The sight of this equestrian was well calculated to stir reflection in Paul's mind.

Far, far away on the icy shores of Kamchatka other Russian sentinels were keeping watch. The distance between the two frontiers was over six thousand miles as the crow flies.

And this empire, so colossal in extent, the very incarnation of military force, was threatening little Czernova, Barbara's own principality! There was no hope of her emerging victorious from the contest. The very idea was insanity. She would be but as an infant struggling in the hands of a giant. And the nations of Europe would look on unmoved, as they have often looked on and condoned the conquest of the Weak by the Strong. There was none to pity or help her. And as Paul thought of all this his heart grew hot within him. He began to feel something of the spirit that animated the Polish patriots of Czernova.

Suddenly the Cossack sentinel, catching sight of strangers, turned his horse's head in their direction, and lowering his lance, he came on at full speed.

On nearing the two friends he reined in his shaggy steed with such quickness as to throw the animal almost on its haunches. 138

"Your passport, little fathers?"

"Here is the universal passport, in Russia as elsewhere—cash," replied Trevisa, displaying some rouble-notes. "We come no farther, and are here simply to fight a duel."

"A duel! That's against the law of Russia. The guard-house is but half-a-mile distant among those trees yonder," said the Cossack, indicating the direction with his lance. "The captain is a terrible fellow. If he should come this way he'll order your arrest and mine too."

"Not he. He'll be only too pleased to witness a good fight. Besides, we have rouble-notes for him also. He has his price, I dare be sworn, otherwise he would be a novelty among Muscovites."

The Cossack reflected. A duel was a pleasant thing; a *douceur* still more pleasant. Why, then, seek to prevent the fight? He would take his chance of discovery at the hands of his captain. So having first looked cautiously round, he stuffed the rouble-notes into his left boot and made no more opposition.

"Let the Czernovese slay each other," he muttered. "The fewer for our Czar to fight when the talked-of war takes place."

"We are first on the field, it seems," remarked Trevisa, referring to his watch. "Hum! five minutes yet to the appointed time."

Paul having presented the Cossack with a cigar, lighted one himself, and paced leisurely to and fro, seemingly far more at ease than his second.

"This duel is a very serious matter," muttered Trevisa.

"One can die but once."

"Just so. If one could die half-a-dozen times the first death would not matter much. I, however, am not anticipating your death, Paul, but the duke's. You may be doing grave hurt to the princess by killing him." 139

"How so? Have you not said that it would be a good thing if the princess could be released from him?"

"True; but your way of releasing her has its disadvantages. Forget not that the duke is a near kinsman of the Czar, and that at the present time the Czar hath no great love for Czernova. If Bora should fall Nicholas may accuse the Czernovese cabinet of being privy to the death of his kinsman, and with some show of justice, inasmuch as Radzivil, the premier, though cognizant of the coming duel, has taken no steps to prevent it. You perceive my meaning. The Czar might demand an indemnity such as he foreknows that Czernova could not, and would not pay. The result—annexation of the principality."

Paul reflected a moment.

"The duel was to have been *à la mort*, and I came intending to kill or be killed, but your remark has set the matter in a different light. I cannot retire nor apologize without loss of honor, yet it is equally clear that I must do nothing to the hurt of the princess. There's but one way out of the difficulty: I'll so wound him that he shall not be able to use sword-arm for a month."

"If you can do that—well," replied Trevisa, very much doubting, however, Paul's ability to make good his word, for was not John the Strong the most expert swordsman in Czernova?

It was quite thirty minutes after the appointed time when the Duke of Bora made his appearance attended by his second, Baron Ostrova. They brought no surgeon with them, for Ostrova, in arrogant vein, had declared that his principal had never yet required one; and Trevisa, not to be outdone in bravado, had made the same avowal respecting Paul.

While the duke remained at a little distance his second advanced, gracefully raising his hat to Trevisa.

"You are late, baron." 140

"Accept our sincere regret. Our vehicle broke down on the way." Then, adopting a somewhat submissive air, and addressing Paul and Trevisa in common, he said,—

"Can we not terminate this little matter amicably? His grace is willing to apologize for his hasty action of this morning."

To do the duke justice, it was not Paul's sword that he feared, but loss of the princess. During the course of the day he had begun to realize the force of Radzivil's words,—that if the affair should come to the knowledge of the princess it might seriously affect the projected marriage.

He would, therefore, swallow his pride, and for the first time in his career as duellist cry off from the combat by making an apology.

"All's well that ends well!" murmured the delighted Trevisa. "You'll accept the *amende honorable*, Paul?"

But Paul seemed bent on chastising the duke.

"It is pleasant to learn," he said, speaking sufficiently loud for Bora to hear, "that his grace realizes that he has acted like a ruffian. 'Liar' and 'coward' were the epithets he applied to me;

his action, a cane-stroke across my cheek. And now does he deem that simply to express regret will be a sufficient satisfaction for an affront offered to the uniform of the Twenty-fourth? Well, I will accept the apology on this condition," continued Paul, breaking a slender sapling from a tree overhead and leisurely stripping off the foliage, "that the duke's cheek shall receive from this wand a stroke similar to that bestowed upon mine. It will be a convincing token of his repentance."

Ostrova, to whom had been committed the charge of bringing the weapons, smiled satirically, and presented two sheathed sabres to Trevisa.

"Take your choice." 141

Trevisa first measured the blades, and finding them of equal length next proceeded to test their temper; and then, having made his selection, handed the same to Paul, who in the meantime had doffed his coat and vest and now stood ready for the fray.

The victor in thirty duels, humiliated beyond measure at the rejection of his conciliatory address, did not wait for further preliminaries but snatched the remaining sabre from the hand of Ostrova, and with the fury of a lion darting upon his victim, he flew upon Paul as if purposing to lay him *hors de combat* at the first brunt.

But scarcely had the heavy sabres clashed together, sparkling in the rays of the setting sun, when there came the command,—

"Let fall your swords in the name of the law."

The words were spoken in a woman's voice,—a voice that sent a thrill to Paul's heart.

Parrying a thrust from the duke, Paul took a swift backward step, and while maintaining his defensive attitude, contrived to glance sideways.

And there, beautiful and pale, and so close to him that he could see into her eyes, was Barbara, breathless as if from hurrying. From what quarter she had so suddenly sprung none present could tell. Complete absorption in the duel had prevented them from hearing her light footfall upon the turf of the woodland.

Paul forgot his guard. He forgot everything. From sheer surprise his sword dropped to the ground.

He looked at her in silence, striving to learn what were her feelings towards him. She gave no token of recognition. Love on her part, if it existed, was veiled at present in sorrowful reproach. In the light of that look how ignoble seemed his desire for vengeance. His glance fell even as his sword had fallen. He had acted, and knowingly acted, in a way calculated to forfeit her esteem.

A death-like stillness fell upon the circle as they perceived that the fair princess of Czernova, sternly hostile to duelling, was present, a spectator of their misdeed. True, she was but one maiden, but that maiden symbolized in her own person all the power of a state. 142

"Who first proposed this duel? Who issued the challenge?"

"I did, and with reason."

And stalking up to the princess, the Duke of Bora bent his head, and said in a fierce, jealous whisper,—

"Cousin Natalie, how comes yon fellow to be in possession of the seal I gave you?"

The princess stepped backward, and drawing her robe around her with a stately grace, she exclaimed,—

"It ill becomes one of my ministers to be found setting himself above the law. Marshal, conduct your prisoner to the Citadel."

Paul, following the wave of her arm, perceived that she had not come without an escort.

On the Czernovese side of the frontier-stone stood Marshal Zabern with folded arms, outwardly as inscrutable as the sphinx, inwardly delighted at the course taken by events.

Some distance in his rear, drawn up across the woodland path, the narrowness of which did not admit of more than two abreast, was a posse of mounted lancers belonging to the Blue Legion. Fronting these troopers was the vehicle evidently used by the princess in her journey to this spot, —a light, elegant droshky, expressly adapted for swift travelling.

And the Cossack sentinel, likewise noting all this, felt ill at ease. The sound of his bugle would instantly have summoned a party from the Russian guard-house, but as this might have led to the exposure of his own participation in the affair, he refrained from the act, and looked on in silence.

"Marshal, conduct your prisoner to the Citadel." 143

"You would arrest *me*?"

There was an emphasis on the last word which was intended to remind the princess that it behoved her to consider who he was. It was clear to her that relying on his kinship to the Czar,

he set little store by the law of Czernova. His pitying smile cut the constitutionalist princess to the quick.

"You talk bravely, fair cousin, forgetful in whose territory you now stand. I put myself under the protection of this sentry, the representative of the Czar."

The duke was not mending matters in appealing to the Czar for protection against the law of Czernova.

"O silly duke!" murmured Zabern. "How nicely you are playing into my hands! You have lost the princess by that speech."

The Cossack sentinel, now heartily regretting that he had become compromised by an affair in which the great ones of Czernova were involved, nevertheless at the duke's abjuration rode off to the princess.

"What is this?" he cried, with an air of authority. "Prisoner? No arrest can take place here. Little mother, you are standing on Russian ground; therefore—your passport, signed by the Russian consul at Slavowitz."

"Princesses do not carry passports," replied Barbara disdainfully.

"Then the little mother must retire to her own side of the frontier."

Barbara seemed disposed at first to maintain her ground, but wiser thoughts prevailed.

"You do but your duty," she replied.

And with this she retired, and took her station by the side of Zabern.

"Princess, I commend your celerity," smiled the marshal. "I was five years in getting out of Russia,—you have accomplished it in as many seconds." 144

Then lowering his voice to a whisper, he continued,—

"We cannot arrest the duke while he is on Russian ground. Were we to do so, this Cossack would report the matter. In their present mood Russian ministers would gladly seize upon the violation of their territory as a *casus belli*, and we don't want war at present."

"John Lilieski," said the princess, addressing the duke from her own side of the frontier, "you will either return under guard to Slavowitz, or you will not return at all. Take your choice betwixt imprisonment during my pleasure, or perpetual banishment from Czernova."

This decision from one whom he had been accustomed to regard as his affianced bride completely confounded his grace of Bora. His first surprise over, he proceeded to take counsel with his second. Though they spoke in low tones, Paul nevertheless caught a few words.

"They dare not harm you," said Ostrova, "and you will command more interest, more sympathy, more power as a prisoner in the Citadel than as a hanger-on at the Czar's court."

This argument seemed to decide the duke, for he immediately crossed to the Czernovese side.

"Since you make a voluntary surrender of yourself," said the princess, "declare it aloud that the Russian sentry may hear you."

"Of my own free will I enter the Czernovese territory," said Bora, addressing the Cossack.

"Your sword," said Zabern.

Though not as yet deposed from his command of the army, Bora did not doubt that this would follow, and that Zabern would be his successor. Very bitter, indeed, then, was his smile as he handed the sabre over to the marshal.

"I am curious to learn, fair cousin," he sneered, "the punishment you reserve for my opponent, equally guilty with myself of breaking the law." 145

"There is your escort to Slavowitz," said Barbara haughtily, pointing to the posse of uhlans.

And Bora, with a dark glance at Paul, walked in the direction indicated.

"For my part," observed Baron Ostrova airily, "I prefer liberty. I shake the dust of Czernova from my feet."

"Forever," decreed the princess.

"Oh, your Highness, your reign will not last so long as that," replied the other, with a peculiar smile, adding to himself, "Your reign, my lady, is but a question of a few weeks."

Taking off his hat, he dropped it to the ground, and bowed so low over it as almost to touch the turf with his fingers, herein imitating an old custom of the Polish serf when addressing his lord.

"I kiss the feet of the dainty Lady Natalie," he said.

Then, picking up his hat, the Baron walked off to a little distance, where he stood watching the sequel.

Paul longed to thrash the fellow for his insolence, but prudently refrained from creating a disturbance in Russian territory.

"Trevisa," said the princess, "in remembrance of your many services I remit the penalty due by law, but," and there was genuine sorrow in her tone, "you lose your secretaryship."

"Your Highness," stammered Trevisa, his whole manner showing how deeply he felt the loss of his office. "Fine. Imprisonment. Any punishment but that."

"The cipher, your Highness," murmured Zabern. "The cipher letter! We cannot do without Trevisa."

"Let me intercede for him," said Paul, bending his knee.

The princess had last heard that voice in the twilight hour by the dark blue sea on the shore of Isola Sacra. The memory of that event came back with a rush that almost stifled her breath. 146

"His only fault is," pleaded Paul, "that he has been too great a friend."

"To you, but not to our law," she murmured faintly. "My servants must not be law-breakers."

There was a brief interval of silence.

"Your Highness," said Paul, rising to his feet, "I await my sentence."

"You are safe where you stand," she faltered.

Her manner plainly besought him to remain where he was, and thus relieve her from a painful situation.

"I will not take advantage of *that*."

And by a few steps Paul passed from the jurisdiction of the Czar to that of Barbara.

The look in her eyes was like that of a fawn at bay. Love forbade her to punish Paul, and yet, while meting punishment to others, how, without bringing reproach to herself, could she let him go free?

"Your Highness," intervened Trevisa, "my friend Captain Woodville has received extreme provocation from the duke, and when he accepted the challenge, was ignorant of the Czernovese law relating to duelling."

Barbara had heard the whole story from Zabern as she was whirled along in the droshky from Slavowitz to the frontier. She glanced at the weal that disfigured Paul's cheek, and her anger grew hot against the duke. No! come what might, she would not punish Paul.

"I appeal to the marshal," said Trevisa boldly, "whether he would not have taken to the sword under the like provocation."

"Princess," replied Zabern, "Captain Woodville, as a soldier, had no other course than to maintain the honor of his queen's uniform." The foolish Barbara became jealous at the thought that Paul should owe allegiance to a lady other than herself. Lowering his voice to a whisper, Zabern continued, "Your Highness has authority to imprison the duke, inasmuch as he is your own subject; but you will be exceeding that authority if you venture to arrest an English citizen for an offence committed on Russian ground. Let the Russians themselves see to it." 147

The princess flashed a quick glance of interrogation at him.

"What would you imply? That the Russians will demand Captain Woodville's extradition?"

"I clearly foresee that they will try to make political capital out of this affair. Be sure that Baron Ostrova will give them his version of it. Always excepting your Highness and myself," continued Zabern with a grim smile, "there is no one upon whom the Russian Government would more willingly lay hands than the Englishman who prevented them from taking the Afghan fortress of Tajapore."

This reference to Paul's bravery brought a glow of pride to Barbara's cheek. A new tie seemed to unite them. While she was contending with Russian intrigue in one part of the world, he had been contending with it in another.

"Captain Woodville," she said aloud, "the marshal informs me that I have no legal ground for arresting you. And as I have not the authority, so neither have I the wish to punish a soldier whose name has become known throughout Europe."

While speaking, she had drawn nearer to him, and now with a face made more beautiful by the love shining from her eyes, she whispered, "Paul, keep my secret. Come and see me at the palace. Immediately."

Paul's eyes assured her of his ready acquiescence. The princess turned to depart.

"One moment, your Highness," said Paul, humbly kneeling. "If I, the principal in this duel, am innocent, how can Trevisa, my second, be guilty?" 148

"The cases are not the same," replied the princess. "Still," she added with a smile that brought back hope to the heart of the ex-secretary, "still my decision may not be irrevocable."

Taking the proffered arm of Marshal Zabern, the princess returned to her droshky. The cavalcade then set in motion and vanished almost as mysteriously as it had appeared; and Paul was left standing there, with the overwhelming revelation that Barbara's love towards him was unchanged.

CHAPTER VI

KATINA THE PATRIOT

AS Paul and Trevisa emerged from the woodland and turned upon the highroad, there drew near 149
a cloaked figure with steel scabbard clinking against spurs.

"Marshal Zabern!" exclaimed the ex-secretary. "How? Are you not escorting the princess to Slavowitz?"

"I have a little matter to despatch at the hostelry called 'Sobieski's Rest.' Her Highness has therefore condescended to relieve me from escort-duty."

"Your way is our way, for at that inn we left our troika. Marshal Zabern," continued Trevisa, presenting Paul, "my friend—need I mention his name?—Captain Paul Woodville."

"No man whose friendship I desire more," said Zabern, raising his plumed helmet.

He had taken a liking for Paul,—the liking of a brave soldier for a compeer.

"I have always esteemed Englishmen," continued Zabern, "since the day I ran from them at Waterloo."

"You have fought under the great Napoleon, then?" said Paul.

"For a brief space. As a lad of eighteen I took part in the Moscow campaign. When Napoleon sounded the tocsin of war against Russia, who joined him with more enthusiasm than the Poles, eager to avenge their country's wrongs? Did not his emissary, the Abbé de Pradt, promise at 150
Warsaw that his imperial master had determined to expel the Muscovites from Europe, and to replace them with Poles? Trusting to these words, sixty thousand of us marched with the Grand Army upon Moscow. Heavens! shall I ever forget the fierce thrill of joy that pervaded our ranks as we drew rein and gazed upon the golden spires and domes of the city of the Great Enemy, flashing on the far-off horizon. Yes," continued Zabern, his eye kindling at the recollection, "yes, we took their holy city, so-called, and planted the Polish eagles upon the ramparts of the Kremlin, as our fathers had done before us in the glorious days of old."

"And it has been the dream of the marshal's life," smiled Trevisa, "to renew that experience."

"That experience, but not *this*!"

And here the speaker pushed back the sleeve of his right arm, and Paul perceived what he had not noticed before, namely, that Zabern was minus a hand.

"You know the sequel," continued the marshal. "We were compelled to retire, defeated not by superiority in valor, but by famine and the rigor of a Russian winter. And, my God! what a winter that was!" continued Zabern, shivering as if he still felt the effects of the cold. "The frost was so intense that it penetrated flesh, sinew, and bone, rendering the limbs as white and brittle as alabaster. In repelling an attack of Cossacks I aimed a sabre-stroke at a fellow's head, feeling in the next moment a curious sensation at the wrist; and there, lying before me upon the snow, and still grasping the sabre-hilt, was my own hand. It had dropped off at the joint, as you see."

"Good God!" cried Trevisa.

"Eh? well, yes, it was rather awkward, for it was the right hand, you see, and never having accustomed myself to employ the left I was rendered completely useless for the rest of the campaign. However, I have repaired the deficiency, and here is a hand as good as the lost one," 151
continued Zabern, holding up his left hand. "So ended my first experience with the Russians."

"You fought them again?" inquired Paul.

"At many times and in many places. I have aided Georgians in the Caucasus, and Turks on the Danube. And when secret tidings came to me that Poland was preparing to vindicate its freedom against the tyranny of the viceroy Constantine, brother of the present Czar, I hastened to take part in the enterprise. Her Highness's father, Prince Thaddeus, would not permit Czernova to be drawn into the movement; selfishly, as we then thought; wisely, as we now perceive.

"The rising began at Warsaw in a conspiracy to seize the person of the Grand Duke Constantine. I was one of the eighteen appointed for the purpose. At nightfall we set off for the palace, slew the guards, and penetrated to the vice-regal bedchamber. But we were just a few seconds too late. Roused from sleep by the clash of arms, and the shouting, Constantine had sprung from the bed,

thrown a cloak over himself, and fled by a secret staircase communicating with the palace gardens."

"The insurrection failed?"

"For a year we offered a gallant resistance to all the might of Russia. But what can valor effect against numbers? We gained victories, and those great ones; but if we slew ten thousand of the enemy on one day, there was a second ten thousand to replace them on the morrow. We had no such reserves to fall back upon. And then, too, the damned Russians brought the cholera with them, an ally that proved far more fatal than their arms; though, the saints be praised! it carried off the tyrant Constantine. On the taking of Warsaw I became one of a band of prisoners condemned to march in chains four thousand miles over the winter snow to Siberia."

"And you escaped?" 152

"After five years, and have found asylum in Czernova. And here I am to-day, fifty-three years of age, and good for a deal more mischief yet," continued Zabern with a grim twinkle in his eye. "To see me holding the post of minister is gall and wormwood to the Russians; they have required my extradition, but the princess has resolutely refused to grant it."

Such in brief was the history of Zabern, and though his attempts to win freedom for his country were deserving of sympathy, Paul could not avoid a feeling of regret that Barbara should have admitted to her ministry such a firebrand as this patriot, whose undoubted aim was to utilize the resources of Czernova against Russia, should a favorable opportunity occur.

"By the way, Trevisa," said the marshal, turning to the ex-secretary, "you must not let the princess's frown diminish your interest in the cipher letter found upon the spy Russakoff. Read me that riddle, and I will undertake to restore you to favor."

"I fear my restoration will not come upon those terms," said Trevisa, lugubriously. "The cipher is a most baffling one. I should have a clue if you could name the writer."

"How so?"

"The first step in a problem of this sort is to know in what language the document is written; and of this I am ignorant. How, then, can I proceed? The principles of decipherment which an expert applies to one language fail when applied to another. But if I learn who the author is, and I discover that he knows, say, Russian only, the inference is that the document is written in that language; I apply certain principles deduced from a study of Russian, and the result is decipherment. The knowledge that the writer is versed in several languages would, of course, enhance the difficulty; but still, with time and patience success is certain. Have you no clue as to the writer?" 153

Zabern was silent. He glanced at Paul as if wishing him away.

"I will step aside for a moment," said Paul.

"Not so," replied Trevisa. "Marshal, you can trust my friend Captain Woodville as surely as myself."

"Then on my honor as a soldier I believe that the Duke of Bora was either the author or the recipient of that letter."

"The duke!" cried Trevisa in amazement. "You accuse the duke of holding a treasonable correspondence with Russia? Impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

"Is it reasonable that he should seek to subvert the throne of a princess to whom he is affianced?"

Zabern smiled cynically.

"The duke has come to count it no great prize to have but a moiety of the throne, and to be mated withal to a little lady who will take no bidding from him, and therein small blame to her. The princess hath ever been cold to the match, and therefore the duke, doubtful of her affection, has begun to play a double part, or in other words, to intrigue with Russia. 'Dispense with the princess, and reign alone under the suzerainty of the Czar'—that is his secret ambition. What other conclusion can I come to, when I see him tampering with the Czernovese army? On frivolous pretexts he has removed Polish officers from their command, replacing them by such Muscovites as have at heart the interests of the Czar rather than those of the princess. Moreover, we have certain proof that our cabinet contains a member who reveals to Russia our secret counsels. You know the cabinet well, Trevisa; tell me whom to suspect. Radzivil?—absurd! Ravenna? What hath a Roman cardinal to gain by inviting the head of the Greek Church to take possession of Czernova? Dorislas? Then let me fall on my sword's point, so certain am I of never again finding faith among men, if he be traitor. Mosco, the Greek Arch-pastor? Hum! his zeal on 154
behalf of the princess has perhaps diminished somewhat since her conversion to Catholicism, but he is more dullard than villain. Polonaski the Justiciary? I'll mention no more. When we would discover the author of a crime, we naturally fix our suspicions upon the man who has most to gain by the deed. Judged by this test the duke, and the duke alone, is the traitor. *Delendus est Bora!* Czernova will never be sound till he be gone."

There was no reply from Trevisa, who seemed to be lost in deep thought. Then suddenly his eyes

lightened as with some new and surprising idea.

"Marshal," said he emphatically, "you shall have a translation of that letter in the morning."

It took a good deal to surprise the marshal; nevertheless on the present occasion he was quite confounded.

"How? What?" he cried. "You claim to have discovered the key to the cipher, when but a minute ago you professed ignorance of the very language in which the letter is written?"

"The language is Greek," murmured Trevisa, almost breathless at his discovery, and talking more to himself than to his companions. "Yes, yes; I comprehend it all now. The most ingenious cipher ever devised. Nothing but an accident could have revealed the key. You are quite correct, marshal, in your estimate of the duke's character. He is a traitor, and that letter will prove it. I will work at it to-night, and to-morrow morning you shall have the result."

"Good!" replied Zabern, mystified, as was Paul likewise, by the suddenness with which Trevisa had arrived at the solution of a problem that during the past month had baffled his wit.

The shades of twilight were falling as the trio drew near to "Sobieski's Rest," an inn so called because the greatest of the Polish kings had once passed a night there. It was a spacious and 155
picturesque hostelry, composed of a mixture of stone and timber, and shaded by overhanging birch-trees.

Outside the building, and holding two horses by the bridle, stood the trooper Nikita, Zabern's orderly, who had been sent on ahead to await the arrival of the marshal.

Bidding him remain at the entrance, Zabern passed within, and led the two Englishmen to a private apartment wainscotted with oak and decorated with elk-antlers.

"Poland has never been lacking in female beauty," remarked the marshal to Paul, "and I am about to present you to her fairest daughter after the princess. This inn is kept by a friend of mine,—an old companion-in-arms,—Boris Ludovski by name, once a wealthy noble of Warsaw. His zeal in the cause of Polish liberty has reduced him to the position of inn-keeper. Freedom often treats her children hardly. As this is a frontier-inn, and on the main road to Warsaw, it often happens that suspicious characters call here for a drink, and Boris's pretty daughter, Katina, being a maiden who keeps her eyes open, is sometimes enabled to supply the police of Slavowitz with valuable information. Hence my reason for coming here at this present moment, for it is just possible that she can tell me something of the spy Russakoff who escaped from the Citadel to-day. Ah! here is Katina herself."

The person who had entered was a typical Polish belle with fine dark hair and flashing eyes. Trevisa whispered to Paul that she was a descendant of Mazeppa, the famous hetman of the Ukraine; and certainly there was that in her elastic step, her fearless glance, her whole air that marked Katina Ludovska as a true daughter of the steppes, wild and untamable.

She was handsomely attired. Over a snow-white chemisette she wore a close-fitting dark red jacket, laced in front from neckband to waist; a polished black leather belt gleaming with silver 156
bosses; and a dark blue skirt, prettily braided with silver,—a skirt which, swelling out below the waist, imparted a charming outline to her figure. A pair of red leather shoes completed her outward costume.

The marshal saluted her in Polish fashion by kissing her hand, while she in turn pressed her lips to his forehead. She gave the like greeting to Trevisa, who appeared to be well known to her, and this done she cast a glance of inquiry at the third comer.

"Paul?" she said with a pretty pout, after the marshal had introduced him, "why do you bear the same name as a Czar?"

"There is little of the Czar in him, however," remarked Zabern. "Why, Katina, Captain Woodville has fought against Russians in Asia."

"May he live to fight against them in Europe," said Katina; and Paul could see that she was a maiden quivering with patriotism to her finger-tips.

"Amen to that!" replied Zabern; and in an exultant tone he continued, "but I have tidings for you, Katina, tidings. The princess and the duke are riven asunder. She has plucked him from the cabinet, from the command of the army, and better still from her heart. Never shall Bora put wedding-crown upon the brow of the princess. He is of less account now in her eyes than the driven leaf in the wind-swept wood."

Katina expressed her delight by dancing the first steps of a graceful mazurka.

"Joy!" she cried. "I never liked that our fair princess should bide on bolster with a Russ, and a Russ who hath sworn at the drink to harness the Polish nobles to the yoke and with them plough his fields. And so John the Strong has fallen! How came it to pass?"

The marshal explained; and when Katina learned that Paul had been the direct cause of the 157
duke's downfall she no longer withheld the kiss of friendship.

"You have wrought a good deed for Czernova, and I love you for it," she cried impulsively, pressing her lips to his forehead, not once, but twice. And though Katina was not the princess,

Paul was fain to confess that she made a charming substitute.

"Shades of Kosciusko! what have we here?" cried Zabern, walking towards a smoke-begrimed oil-painting that hung upon one of the walls. "Fie, Katina! you, a daughter of Poland, to keep a portrait of the Czar—that Czar too who crushed us at Warsaw sixteen years ago, the haughty, frowning Nicholas!"

"Ah! you Muscovite wolf!" cried Katina, shaking her fist at the picture. "Lying Czar, that broke his coronation-oath to Poland. Where is the constitution you promised us? Grandson of an empress who was a—a—"

Katina suppressed the word that rose to her lips, for it was not a pretty epithet, though justly applicable to the moral character of Catherine II.

"Hold! let the grandmother be!" interposed Zabern. "Remember that Catherine gave to Czernova its Charter of liberty."

"I warrant the old beldam was drunk when she granted it."

"No matter, drunk or sober, it *was* granted. And to-day we have that Charter, signed and sealed, locked in an iron chest, secured in a stone chamber, and guarded by soldiers night and day."

"And to think," said Katina, still on the subject of the portrait, and turning to the two Englishmen as she spoke, "to think that your sweet, youthful queen Victoria should allow herself to be embraced and kissed by this Muscovite bear when he parted from her at Windsor!" 158

"It wouldn't do to attempt the same with our princess,—eh, Katina?"

"No. Mild and gracious as she naturally is, I warrant she would flash a dagger before his eyes."

"Since you hate the original so," asked Paul, "why display his portrait?"

"To draw Russian customers, who like to have the face of their little father looking down upon them at the drink. Why should I not levy tribute from the enemy? Their kopeks all go to the good cause. The last visitors to this room were Muscovites; hence that side of the canvas. When Polish patriots come I have a fairer face to show. Behold!"

She turned the picture, and lo! on the back of the canvas was a well-executed portrait of the regnant Princess of Czernova.

"My pretty Janus!" laughed Zabern. "You should have been born a man. What a statesman you would have made! Come, I know your love for the princess. I'll reveal a truth that will make you love her still more. You have always believed her to be of the Greek Church; learn, now, that she is a Catholic."

"Are you not betraying a state secret?" smiled Trevisa.

"No; for the truth is known to all Czernova, or will be in a few hours. That damnable Russophile journal, the 'Kolokol,' came out this afternoon with a long article headed, 'Natalie the Apostate'—an article roundly accusing the princess of Catholicism. Of course the charge is true, and we can't deny it."

"Pity that the truth should first be proclaimed in the columns of a slanderous journal rather than by the princess's ministers from their places in the Diet! How did editor Lipski discover the secret?" asked Trevisa.

"How? Ask the duke," replied Zabern.

"There will be deep murmurings to-night in the Muscovite faubourg." 159

"Which can soon be quelled by a few rounds of grape-shot," commented Zabern, who, like the first Napoleon, was a great believer in the pacificatory virtues of artillery.

"'The princess and Catholicism!'" cried Katina. "Let that be our motto. What matters the defection of the Muscovites, since the Poles will now be doubly loyal."

"Well said, Katina. Pass me the vodka. To the resurrection of Poland!" continued Zabern, raising his glass. "Ah! Katina, when your father Boris and myself first drew breath, we had a motherland. Stanislaus was reigning, and Poland was free. To-day what is she?"

"A lioness in chains of whom the keeper is afraid. One day the lioness will break from her chains, and then woe betide the keeper!"

"You wonder, perhaps, at Katina's patriotism?" whispered Zabern to Paul. "You shall see that she hath good cause for it." And then aloud he added: "What said Czar Nicholas after suppressing the rising of 1830? 'Russia hath a mission to fulfil.' Katina, let the two Englishmen see how holy Russia fulfils her mission. Give them visible proof. You know what I mean."

Paul, entirely ignorant of Zabern's object, wondered why Katina should start, and why she should cast a glance of anguish at the speaker.

"Do you seek to humiliate me, marshal?"

"No, I seek to gain another sword for Poland," said Zabern gravely, with a significant glance at

Paul.

The ordinary woman might very well have hesitated to comply with the marshal's request; but Katina was no ordinary woman. She walked a few paces off, placed the lamp upon the table in a suitable position, and then turning her back upon her visitors she began to unlace her jacket, and to loosen and cast back the white linen beneath. A startling act, truly, and yet performed with a modest air.

Holding the last vesture in position by its neckband, she said in a bitter tone: "The ignorant have sometimes complimented me upon my beautiful figure. See with what justice!" 160

The vesture dropped from her hand, and hung downward from her belt, leaving her form bared to the waist.

The fall of that linen was a revelation!

A sculptor would have been charmed with the fair rounded throat and white neck. But the torso below! It was no wonder that Katina made haste to hide it from view again.

"Her bosom is the same," whispered Zabern, "or rather it is destroyed. The long lash of the knout coils completely round its victim, you know."

"The knout!" cried Paul, thrilling with horror at the thought that such a dreadful instrument should have been applied to the delicate skin of a youthful maiden.

If it had been Zabern's object to win Paul over to the Polish cause he had succeeded. The most eloquent oration against Russian despotism could not have wrought such effect upon him as the bared back of this silent maiden.

"As there is a God in heaven, the nation that does such things must perish. What had she done to be treated thus?"

While Katina was silently replacing her garments the marshal proceeded to whisper her story.

"Katina's parents, who lived at Warsaw, gave shelter to a Polish patriot, and for this offence the whole Ludovski family were banished to the Uralian mines.

"Here Katina's beauty attracted the desires of the governor, Feodor Orloff; and, sending for her he offered to restore her family to liberty, upon what conditions you can guess, when I tell you that Katina's reply was a fierce blow from her open palm.

"The morrow happened to be the emperor's birthday, and Orloff with fiendish malice aforethought had the Polish exiles paraded before him, told them that they would be free from work that day, and in return for this boon required that they should cry 'God save the Czar,' Some refused, and among them the spirited Katina. Here was Orloff's opportunity. For disloyalty to the emperor, Katina was condemned to receive fifteen strokes of the knout. 161

"Have you ever seen a knouting? No? Well, I trust you never will, for it is not a pleasant sight, even though your nerves be of iron. I have been compelled to witness many such scourgings in Siberia, and I tell you that though Dante in his 'Inferno' has imagined many and various tortures for the damned, none of them are equal to the agony that an expert executioner can elicit with a few strokes of the knout.

"You must know that the victim, his wrist and ankles clasped by iron rings, is fixed to a sort of framework set erect in the ground—fixed in such a manner that he can make no movement, literally stretched as an eel's skin is stretched to dry.

"About twenty paces off stands the executioner, with sleeves tucked up, for nothing must embarrass the freedom of his movements. He holds in both hands the instrument of punishment —the knout. This is a thong of thick leather, cut triangularly, an inch in breadth, from nine to twelve feet long, and tapering to a point; this tapering end is fixed to a little wooden shaft about two feet in length.

"At the given signal the executioner advances, his body bent, and dragging the long lash between his legs. When he has arrived within three or four paces of his victim, he suddenly raises the knout above his head: the thong flies into the air, whistles, descends and clasps the naked torso of the sufferer as with a circle of iron. Notwithstanding his state of tension the victim bounds as if under a powerful shock of galvanism, at the same time uttering a shriek that, once heard, can never be forgotten. My God! Even now I often start from sleep with such a cry ringing in my ears. 162

"In drawing back the lash again the executioner has a way of pulling it along the edges of the opened flesh in such a manner as to widen and deepen the wound it has made.

"He retraces his steps and begins again the same manœuvre as many times as the victim is condemned to suffer blows. When the thong envelops the body with its folds the flesh and the muscles are literally cut into segments, as with a razor. The victim, crimson with blood, foams at the mouth and writhes in fearful agonies.

"And so our pretty Katina, nude to the waist—but enough; you have imagination, you can picture the scene."

Katina herself with saddened air had now drawn near again, in her dark eyes a fire that spoke of

a desire for vengeance.

"Katina," said Paul, impulsively, "if this Feodor Orloff be still living tell me where he may be found; I will seek him out, challenge, and slay him."

"No, brave Englishman, no. That vengeance belongs to me. No one must rob me of my due. And," she added with clenched hand and stern look, "the day is coming. Fate is drawing Count Orloff near to Czernova."

"True!" replied Zabern. "He has lately been appointed governor-general of Warsaw, a province bordering on our own."

"And his appointment bodes no good to Czernova," remarked Katina. "Marshal, I have a strange tale for your ears,—a tale I have been waiting the opportunity to relate. What will you say when I tell you that I have this very day seen the executioner who knouted me,—the minion of Orloff?"

"You are dreaming, Katina." 163

"No, marshal, no. It is difficult, I am aware, for the knouted person to see his executioner, but nevertheless I contrived to see the face of mine, and what is more I have seen it again to-day—this afternoon—in the room where we now are. I could not mistake those furtive reddish eyes, that horse-shoe mark on the cheek—"

"Heavens! Katina, what are you saying?" interrupted Zabern, with more excitement than he usually displayed. "That a man with a horse-shoe mark on his cheek has been here this afternoon? Had the fellow a blue caftan, a red beard, a trick of gnawing his finger-nails—?"

"You describe the very man, marshal."

"Russakoff, as I live! Your old executioner and my spy one and the same person! Can it be?—And he was here this afternoon? At what hour did he call?"

"About four o'clock."

"That would be five hours ago," observed Zabern, referring to his watch. "He must have made his way here directly after escaping from the Citadel, bent on crossing the frontier, doubtless. Let me have your story, Katina. Would that you had told it me earlier!"

"This afternoon," Katina began, "I was returning from a walk, and on entering the inn met my sister, Juliska, carrying a tray with two glasses. 'Katina,' she said, 'we have two very suspicious-looking visitors. They have asked for a private apartment and some vodka. Carry this in, and tell me what you think of them.' I took the tray from her hand and walked into this room.

"Two men were sitting here. One had his back to me; facing him was the other whom I recognized in a moment as the man who had knouted me at Orenburg. Why I did not drop the tray in surprise, how I contrived to check my cry, I do not know; I somehow succeeded in repressing my emotion."

"Did not the villain himself recognize you?"

"He did not look at me when I entered; his attention seemed wholly absorbed by the words of his 164
companion. While placing the vodka on the table I kept my head averted from my old enemy, and took a glance at the other man, but I failed to see his face clearly, for his hat was pulled low over his brows, and the collar of his cloak was drawn up almost to his mouth. It was this peculiarity that had excited Juliska's suspicions. The brief glance I had of him disposes me to the belief that he was a man far higher in the social scale than the other."

"'Happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us,'" murmured Zabern. "Why did you not call upon your father and brothers to seize the knouter, and give him a taste of what he had made you suffer?"

"That idea, marshal, was running through my head. After placing the vodka upon the table I withdrew silently and quickly; and while in the act of closing the door I caught a remark uttered by the man who had knouted me."

"Call him Russakoff; 't will be simpler," suggested Zabern.

"Russakoff, then—to please you. 'You will not persuade me to return to Slavowitz,' he was saying. 'I have no wish to fall into Zabern's hands again.' My excitement increased, marshal, at this mention of your name. I resolved to try to learn something of their business before giving orders for their seizure; and, accordingly, since they were seated by the open window, beneath which is an immense leafy laurel, I stole outside and put myself in concealment there in the hope of overhearing their words.

"They conversed in low tones, but now and again, when their voices were raised in evident anger, I caught a few remarks.

"'I wonder that Orloff should employ a fool like you,' said Russakoff's companion; 'one unable to
keep from the vodka, who takes part in a tavern brawl, and gets himself arrested while carrying 165
an important political document! If that letter should be deciphered by the princess's secretary, it will lead to the frustration of a scheme by which the Czar hopes to gain possession of Czernova, legally and quietly, without the employment of military force.'"

"What?" cried Zabern. "Let me hear that again, Katina."

Katina repeated her words.

"Russia to obtain Czernova legally, without employing force! In the devil's name—how?"

Beneath their overhanging brows Zabern's gray eyes gleamed like polished cannon deep-set within embrasures.

Paul was equally startled by Katina's words. Was it possible that the Russian bureaucrats had discovered that the regnant princess was not the real Natalie Lilieska? If they could prove that she had no title to rule, the throne would devolve upon the Duke of Bora, who might of his own free will resign his rights to the Czar Nicholas as the next in succession.

Was this what Russakoff's companion meant when he spoke of a quiet and legal way of obtaining possession of Czernova?

Fear seized Paul as he began to realize that the same result could be attained by assassination. Over the body of Barbara, slain by the dagger of some Muscovite fanatic, the Czar might step to the throne of Czernova! Did the cipher-despatch relate to some such terrible plot?

"Proceed, Katina. Heard you aught else?"

"After some more whispering Russakoff raised his voice. 'No; it's a risky business. Besides, what are four hundred roubles?'—'We will double the sum if the work be done within twelve hours,' replied the other.

"It was quite clear to me that some mischief was afoot, and, though desirous of learning more, I feared that if I waited longer they might rise and depart before I should be able to have them 166
seized. I stole off, summoned my two brothers, but, on entering the room—"

"Fire and brimstone! the birds had flown."

"You are not more vexed than I was, marshal."

"Were their glasses empty?"

"No; full."

"Ah! they had caught sight of you in hiding. A pity you delayed the seizure! You gave chase, I presume?"

"Marshal, we—my father, brothers, Juliska, the servants, myself—ran here and there; we looked in all directions, but failed to discover a trace of them. My father deeming the matter of great importance, immediately sent Juliska to Slavowitz to apprise you of it; but evidently you have not seen her."

"I must have left Slavowitz before she arrived. Katina, you have once more proved yourself a valuable auxiliary to the princess's government. So this spy is employed by one Orloff; and since he was certainly at one time in the service of Count Feodor Orloff, and inasmuch as he comes from Warsaw, and is evidently the agent of one high in authority there, we doubtless do the new governor-general no wrong in crediting him with a plot to overturn the independence of Czernova. If so, there will be a double pleasure in defeating him—eh, Katina? It will please him to learn that it was Ludovski's daughter that foiled his schemes, for I will take care that he shall learn it. My suspicions have become certainties. The duke and Orloff are leagued together for the hurt of the princess, and Russakoff is their intermediary. What is the 'risky business' that Russakoff deems ill-paid by a sum of four hundred roubles, sum to be doubled if the work be done within twelve hours? You are certain those were the words, Katina?"

"Quite certain, marshal."

"And the other man—who is he, I wonder?—was trying to persuade Russakoff to return to the 167
city? Has he returned? If so, my spies shall find him ere the night be past. Trevisa," he continued, turning to the ex-secretary, "you see now the importance of that secret despatch, the necessity for its immediate decipherment. No more delay then. To Slavowitz," cried Zabern, rising abruptly.

Katina instantly flew off to summon the driver of the troika in which Paul and Trevisa had made their journey from Slavowitz. The three men proceeded to the entrance of the inn where they found the trooper Nikita, still holding the two horses, and seeming as if he had not moved an inch from his previous position. Night had fallen, and the stars were twinkling in a dark sky. The bright light from the inn-door streamed pleasantly across the road to the trees on the opposite side.

"Pardon my haste, gentlemen," observed Zabern, "but I should do wrong to tarry longer, when there may be rioting in the capital. The princess's conversion to Romanism and the arrest of the Duke of Bora are matters sufficient to set the Muscovite mind ablaze. I'll ride on ahead; do you follow with all speed."

Katina reappeared at this moment, and the marshal gallantly kissed her hand at parting. The glad light that came into her eyes told Paul a secret.

"As I live," he murmured to himself, "our pretty Katina loves Zabern."

The marshal swung himself into the saddle, and the next moment with his steel scabbard swinging beneath his cloak, he was galloping towards Slavowitz, accompanied by his faithful orderly Nikita.

A minute afterwards the three-horsed car appeared at the inn-door in charge of its istvostchik or driver.

"The troika is ready, my little fathers," he cried.

The two friends took their places in the vehicle, and scarcely had they done so, when there passed into the glow of light, and out again immediately, a man whose tall cylindrical hat and 168
black cassock proclaimed him to be a papa or priest of the Oriental Church.

On perceiving this ecclesiastic the istvostchik made the sign of the cross in Greek fashion, at the same time quitting the troika and saying as he did so: "Pardon me, little fathers, but I dare not drive you to-night."

"What does he mean?" Paul in wonderment asked of Katina.

"The poor fellow is a Muscovite," she explained with a pitying smile, "and Muscovites deem it a bad omen to meet a priest of their own faith when setting out upon a journey."

Katina had spoken truly. All the inducements and bribes on the part of the two friends failed to shake the resolution of the old istvostchik.

"The Muscovites have a curious way of honoring their priesthood," smiled Paul.

"I have a troika," said Katina, "and since I have promised to fetch my sister Juliska home from Slavowitz to-night, why should you not accompany me thither?"

Paul and Trevisa saw no reason, whatever, why they should not accept the services of so fair a charioteer. Katina accordingly gave an order to one of the inn-servants, and then disappeared within the hostelry. She returned almost immediately, looking charming in a handsome mantle trimmed with fur. At the same moment there was brought round from the rear of the premises a second troika, which was certainly a much finer vehicle than the first. It was lined with red leather, and drawn by three spirited ponies.

"Here are steeds worthy of Mazeppa himself," said Katina, offering each a sweetmeat. "The Ukraine hath not their like."

She laid her cheek against the manes of all three in turn. The ponies tossed their heads and pawed the ground, evidently as proud of their young mistress as she was of them. 169

"This is Natalie, and that Stephanie," she continued indicating the two harnessed within the duga or wooden arch. "They are named after the princess and her mother."

"And the third?" inquired Paul.

"Oh! she is for show, and not for use; she prances merely without drawing, and so, being useless, my sister has, of course, called her Katina. Now if your excellencies are ready."

Paul and Trevisa seated themselves in the vehicle and since each declared that he must have Katina beside him, that maiden was laughingly compelled to take her place between them.

"Do not travel to-night, my little masters," said the istvostchik as he watched these preparations. "Ill-fortune will attend you."

Katina gave the reins a scornful shake.

Trevisa laughed pleasantly.

Paul looked grave; to his mind there was something strangely impressive in the quiet dignity of this old man as he stood on the steps of the inn-door, his cap doffed and his eyes raised to the star-lit sky.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT HAPPENED IN RUSSOGRAD

Though Katina was an avowed foe of all Muscovites, she nevertheless possessed a characteristic 170
in common with them,—a passion for furious driving.

With a stamp of her pretty red shoes, and with cries that sounded somewhat wild on the night air, she urged the horses to their full speed. She carried a short-handed whip with a long leathern thong, but she used it only to lash the air.

Amid the tintinnabulation of a peal of silvery bells hung from the duga, the spirited coursers

plunged forward, as if each were holding a race with the other, Katina handling the team with a dexterity that evoked Paul's admiration.

Now where the road was broad she would spread the galloping horses outwards like a fan; and now where its narrowness seemed to preclude all possibility of passage, she would draw them together till they appeared to occupy the space of one, without delaying for a moment her onward rush.

Occasionally she would rise from her seat and bend gracefully forward over the horses in an attitude suggestive of a Grecian charioteer, bidding the two friends with a merry laugh to "Hold fast," and the next moment they would be racing down a steep descent; a sudden splash, a 171
drenching shower of spray, and ere the two friends had time to realize that they were crossing a stream, the ponies would be tugging the troika up the opposite bank.

The marvels performed by this daughter of Mazeppa in guiding her vehicle along the edge of a declivity, or in avoiding some obstacle that suddenly appeared in her path, are past all belief; and though Paul expected every moment to see the troika fall to pieces, the rapid see-saw motion which in some persons causes all the sensations of *mal de mer*, was both novel and pleasant, the rush of air producing an exhilaration of spirits that quickly effaced from his mind the uneasy presentiment caused by the words of the old istvostchik.

"At this pace we ought soon to overtake Marshal Zabern," remarked Paul.

"We are not following the same road," replied Katina. "In journeying to Slavowitz I myself always take this route, though it is more circuitous. I renew my patriotism when in sight of that building."

She had brought the troika to a standstill, and was now pointing to a large monastery that rose in solemn mediæval grandeur at the distance of about a hundred yards from the roadside.

"The Convent of the Transfiguration," said Katina. "On some Czernovese monasteries you will see a crescent beside the cross; it is a sign that the place was once in the hands of the Turks. But the crescent gleams not here," she continued proudly. "The pavement of the Convent of the Transfiguration has never been trodden by the foot of pagan or heretical foe. A strong fortress as well as a monastery, it has often checked the march of Muscovite and Turkish conquest."

A liturgical service was taking place in the convent. The chant of the monks was plainly audible, intermingled with the notes of the organ. 172

"They are supplicating for Poland," said Katina. "They pray for nothing else. Day and night their one cry is, 'How long, O Lord, how long?'"

The voices of the chanting friars produced a singular, nay, a weird impression upon Paul. Paganini himself could not have devised anything more awe-inspiring and unearthly than the refrain that now rose upon the night air.

"Some of the holy brethren," continued Katina, "are men who were once in Siberian mines. And such men! If you thought my back a pitiable sight, Captain Woodville, what would you think if you could see some of the dreadful forms hidden behind those walls?"

Her words, her looks, and above all the wild plaint proceeding from the convent, increased Paul's eerie sensations.

"Come here what hour you will of the twenty-four, you shall never miss the chant of those monks; their prayer never ends."

"A perpetual service? I have heard of such."

"When our fatherland was conquered in '95," continued Katina, "the then abbot of yon convent ordained that from that time forth the brethren should pray for no other thing than the restoration of Poland.

"To this end he drew up a liturgy and divided the whole body of the monks into three parts, directing that each in turn should recite this liturgy, band to succeed band without a moment's break. The convent has never wanted for devout men to consecrate themselves to this service.

"Day and night unceasingly for over fifty years their supplication has been going up to the saints above," said Katina. "Is it not time their prayer was answered?"

She clasped her hands and turned her face to the starlit heaven,—a face made beautifully touching by its earnestness. 173

"Oh! Queen of heaven," she murmured, "look down upon our country. Give us the thing we long for."

For a moment she stood in silent prayer, and then, taking up the reins again, she began to urge the horses forward, as if finding in that act a relief to her overwrought feelings. Once more the troika skimmed along, scarcely seeming to touch the earth, and the majestic convent with mysterious voices faded away in the gloom.

"Abbot Faustus still maintains his attitude of defiance towards the new archbishop," said Trevisa addressing Katina.

"And he will ever maintain it," she replied. "Be sure that Ravenna, anathematize as he may, will never be permitted to enter that convent."

"Your mysterious smile, fair Katina, disposes me to believe that you know the reason of the abbot's defiance."

"I *do* know it," asseverated Katina, "but I must not reveal it. Ask the marshal to make you one of the 'Transfigured,' and you will understand the mystery. Faster, faster, my little doves," she added, shaking the whip over the heads of her team.

Onward flew the horses *ventre à terre*, and within an hour of the time of setting out, there glimmered into view the battled walls of Slavowitz, with its towers, spires, and domes standing out in gray relief against a background of blue sky dimly set with stars.

"Shall I take the Troitzka Gate?" asked Katina.

Trevisa nodded assent.

"'T will save a circuit," he said, "and will serve to show my friend the two sides of Slavowitz. You have seen Cracovia, the fashionable suburb," he added, addressing Paul; "now take a view of Russograd, the Muscovite quarter."

Katina accordingly drove through an arched gateway, where, armed with a long halbert, stood a Polish sentinel, who, at sight of Paul, saluted, mistaking him for an officer of the Blue Legion. 174

As the troika, leaving the city gate behind, rolled forward over the smooth wooden pavement of the main thoroughfare known as the Troitzkoi Prospekt, it became quickly evident that the dwellers in this quarter had become aware both of the princess's Romanist faith and likewise of the duke's arrest,—matters that naturally tended to produce a state of great excitement. Indeed, it looked as if there would be little sleep that night in Russograd; for though the hour was late, all the denizens of the faubourg, men and women alike, were abroad, discussing in shrill tones and with fierce gesticulations this latest phase of Czernovese politics. Russians, Tartars, Cossacks, and representatives of other nationalities, who at ordinary times were ready to cut each other's throats, were now united by the bond of a common religion against "Natalie the Apostate."

"Now the saints confound these Long-beards!" murmured Katina, compelled to exercise great care in steering her course. "Is it Butter-week, that they throng so? Our short route is proving a long one."

Owing partly to the crowded state of the street, and partly to the condition of the wooden pavement, which a recent shower had rendered somewhat slippery, it was impossible for the vehicle to proceed other than at a walking pace, and thus the trio could not fail to overhear the remarks made by some of the throng.

"I saw the duke brought in through the St. Florian Gate," cried a woman, addressing a circle of bystanders.

"They knew better than to bring him in through the Troitzka Gate," observed a man beside her, apparently her husband. His face was disfigured by a long smear of dried blood.

"He was riding with downcast eyes in the centre of a troop," continued the woman. "And when my goodman cried, 'Long live our prince,' one of the troopers struck him across the face with the flat of his sabre, bidding him begone for a traitor. Look at the mark of the sword," she screamed. 175

"Yes," chimed in her husband, "and the princess herself passed by a minute later in her droshky, and drove off to the Palace, not looking one whit troubled by the thought of the duke's imprisonment."

"Troubled, do you say?" cried his wife. "I never saw her looking more glad than she did to-night. And to think that a mere girl should have the power to arrest a big handsome man like our Duke John! We want a full-grown, bearded soldier to rule over us, and not a silly maid."

"Especially a maiden under the thumb of Cardinal Ravenna," interjected a bystander. "We all know why she has imprisoned the duke; because he is a Greek, and loves the Muscovites and the great White Czar."

"And the princess hates the Czar," cried the woman.

"The shoes she wears in her palace are stamped on the sole with the portrait of our little father Nicholas, so that she may tread his image under foot whenever she walks."

This little anecdote, entirely without truth, found ready credence among the haters of the princess.

"She is removing the duke from his command to make way for Zabern. And why Zabern? Because he is a Pole, and a Catholic, and hates the Muscovites."

Amid these observations, and others of a like character, the troika moved, its rate of progress gradually diminishing, until the vehicle was finally brought to a standstill by the immobility of the crowd in front, who either could not, or would not, move out of the way.

"*Na pravo*—to the right!" cried those on the left angrily; while just as angrily those on the right cried,—

"*Na levo*—to the left!"

Unable either to advance or retire, the occupants of the troika remained stationary, the centre of a crowd evidently bent on mischief, a crowd composed mainly of the lower orders,—or, to use the suggestive phrase of the Russians themselves, the "Tshornoi Narod," or "Black People." 176

Russograd was at no time a safe place for the adherents of the princess; but in the present political crisis the sight of one wearing, as they supposed, the uniform of her *corps du garde* raised the fanaticism of the Muscovite mob to a dangerous pitch. The three friends were ill prepared for repelling an attack. Paul was armed with his sabre only; Katina had her savage-looking whip; Trevisa was without weapon of any kind.

Paul's chief fear was for Katina; but the maiden who had bravely endured the knout did not seem at all disconcerted by the circle of scowling faces.

"My little mother, step aside there," she cried, toying with her whip, and gently endeavoring to urge the horses forward. "Now, old soldier, have a care."

"Have a care yourself," exclaimed a harsh voice in front,—the voice of a red-bearded individual in a blue caftan. "Would you ride over me?" he added fiercely, grasping the bridle of one of the horses.

His was a voice which Katina had previously heard that same day in the parlor of her own inn. Springing immediately to her feet, she looked fearlessly around.

"In the name of the princess," she cried, "I call upon all loyal citizens of Russograd to arrest that man and to convey him to the Citadel, for he is an escaped prisoner."

"The more welcome for that!" said the man with the bloody smear.

"In the name of the Czar," cried the spy, "I call upon all loyal citizens of Russograd to arrest that woman, and to convey her to Orenburg, for she is an escaped prisoner, a fugitive from Russian justice. What?" he continued, advancing into the ring of space around the troika, "do you not know Katina Ludovska, the Polish harlot with whom Zabern takes his pleasures?" 177

Quivering with indignation, Katina leaped from the troika, bent on chastising the insulter. One lash from the thong of her whip would have laid open his cheek as effectually as a sabre-stroke; but ere she could carry out her purpose, the more prudent Paul had laid hand upon her belt and swung her lightly back again.

"And do you not recognize this fellow?" continued Russakoff, pointing to Trevisa. "He is the princess's paramour; private secretary is the name used in court circles."

A coarse laugh greeted these words.

"The princess will never marry the duke. Why? Because the secretary has poisoned her mind against him."

The mob grew more menacing in their attitude.

Katina laughed defiantly.

Trevisa glanced around, wondering what had become of the night watch appointed to patrol the streets of Russograd.

Paul, casting about for a way of escape, observed that the crowd facing the horses was but a few ranks deep. If Trevisa and he put on a bold front, while Katina plied her whip vigorously, there was a possibility of breaking through the hostile circle. He whispered this idea to the two, who both nodded assent.

"Be it known to all that the princess has arrested our duke for duelling. And here," continued Russakoff, pointing to Paul, "is the man that fought with him. Before St. Nicholas I speak the truth. I lie not," he added, taking out one of those sacred icons which the Russian usually carries with him, and kissing it as he spoke. "The princess imprisons the duke; she lets this man go free. Men of Russograd, is this justice?"

"No! No!" cried the mob. 178

It was impossible to rescue their beloved duke from the grim Citadel with its massive walls loop-holed with artillery; it was impossible to do hurt to "Natalie the Apostate" in her strong palace, which the foresight of the ministers had surrounded with a military cordon. But here were persons almost as obnoxious as the princess herself, and a hurricane of yells arose from all sides, the women exhibiting more fury than the men.

"Down with the Jesuits!"

"Drag them from the car!"

"Tear them limb from limb!"

"Hurl their bloody heads through the princess's windows!"

As the crowd surged madly forward, Paul sprang to his feet, sabre in hand.

"Now, Katina, now! Ah! the cowards!" he muttered in an agony of rage, as a stone flung by one of the mob caught her on the temple.

Their escape seemed a doubtful matter. On all sides men, and women too, were attempting to clamber into the troika, and dealing blows with fists, sticks, and knives. They yapped and snarled like so many dogs as they were hurled off again by the sturdy Englishmen, Paul standing on the left side and using the flat of his sabre, Trevisa on the right dependent merely upon the weapons supplied by nature, to wit, his fists.

While this contest was being waged Katina, though dizzy from the effects of the stone, bent backwards, and with a strength of wrist marvellous in a slender maiden, she pulled the horses so far back on their haunches as to cause their front hoofs to rise and describe circles in the air. Poised thus she lashed them with a savagery justified only by the occasion, though even in that moment of peril it went to her heart to ill-treat her favorites; and then, with a warning shout, she launched the maddened steeds pell-mell upon the crowd in front, endeavoring also to clear the way by striking out to right and left with her reddened whip. 179

The crowd facing the troika divided like water cleft by the hand, and the vehicle flew forward with nothing to oppose it. A double line of faces seemed to be rushing by; oaths and cries; a jolt, occasioned by the troika bounding over a prostrate body; another, more violent, which left a sickening sensation in the mouth; and the moment afterwards the vehicle, with its bells wildly jangling, was clear of the press and racing down the Troitzkoi Prospekt, the very embodiment of the wind, followed by the yells of the baffled crowd.

"Bravo, Katina!" cried Paul. "You are the princess of charioteers. A narrow shave, that—eh Noel?"

But, on turning to his companion, Paul gave a cry of horror. Trevisa lay helplessly on the seat of the troika, his face as white as china, his teeth set in agony, in his eyes an awful look.

Paul's cry drew Katina's attention to Trevisa. She immediately pulled up the horses.

"Mary, mother of angels!" she cried in a tone of anguish. "He has been stabbed; stabbed in the side!"

And all the womanhood of her nature asserting itself, she gently raised Trevisa's head, and pillowed it upon her breast, regardless of the blood that flowed down her dress.

"It was Russakoff," gasped Trevisa. "Paul," he continued, seizing his friend's wrist. "Remember! it is the furies, the furies of—of—"

The act of speaking brought a rush of blood to his mouth, and ere he could finish the strange utterance, he was gone.

"Jesu Maria, he's dead!" murmured Katina in awe; and then, her mood changing, she added with a wild laugh, "Russakoff has earned his roubles."

The whole affair had happened so quickly that it was almost impossible to believe in its reality, though the dead form of Trevisa lay there before their eyes. For fully half a minute Paul stared helplessly at the silent figure. Amazement—grief—horror kept him mute and motionless; then in a moment these feelings gave way to the wild desire for vengeance. 180

"I'll find the assassin," he muttered, springing from the troika, "and sabre him on the spot, though I die the next moment for it."

"Would you go back among those wolves?" cried Katina. "No, no; they will kill you too." She also sprang from the troika, and held Paul by the wrist. "Indeed you shall not go. Leave the assassin to Zabern. Zabern will find him. And thank heaven, here is the marshal!"

As she spoke the clatter of horse-hoofs was heard, and turning in the direction of the sound, Paul saw a troop of lancers approaching with Zabern at their head.

On nearing the troika the marshal halted his men, saluted Paul with his sword, and then eying the crowd that was still impotently yelling in the distance, he said,—

"In the fiend's name, what possessed you three to drive through Russograd on such a night as this?"

His eye now caught sight of the limp appearance presented by the silent form reclining on the troika. He sprang from his horse with consternation written on his face.

"Good God! don't say that Trevisa is dead!—Trevisa, whom I hoped to see fighting under the banner of the princess! Dead!" he muttered under his breath, "and just as he was on the point of deciphering the secret despatch, too!"

"He is dead," said Paul; "but this is no time for words. The assassin is among yon crowd, and his name is Ivan Russakoff." 181

The name of the spy acted like magic upon Zabern. He shouted some order, and in a moment more ten uhlans trotting forward with couched lances scattered the crowd; the object of these troopers was to secure the Troitzka Gate, and so prevent the assassin from making his escape by this exit. Like precautions were promptly taken with the rest of the city gates. The remainder of his forces Zabern skilfully disposed around the suburb of Russograd, forming them into a cordon

through which no one could break without detection.

Meanwhile, in answer to his summons, fresh detachments of troops arrived together with a numerous corps of police; and to both he briefly explained the object of the muster.

Zabern was well aware that, owing to the hostility with which Polish authority was viewed in this quarter, he would have considerable difficulty in inducing the Muscovites to surrender the spy, whose act in slaying a government official would be certain to enlist their sympathies. Every dweller in Russograd would take a pride in concealing the felon. Hence the marshal was necessitated to make his arrangements with almost the same care as if conducting a siege. For a few hours Russograd was to become subject to martial law,—no new experience for this riotous faubourg.

"Remember, Russakoff must be taken alive; his dead body is of no use to me," said Zabern. "But as to the rest, don't hesitate to shoot if there should be any resistance. Nikita," he added, addressing his orderly, "dismount, and assist Katina in conveying the body to the palace. Captain Woodville, here is a horse at your service. You will accompany us?"

Zabern's elaborate precautions failed to secure the person of the spy.

Though all the streets of Russograd were traversed by the military, and every individual subjected to scrutiny; though private dwelling and public building were explored by keen-eyed police; and though the marshal and his staff formed a sort of inquisitorial tribunal and interrogated and cross-examined during the whole night, yet no one answering to the description of Russakoff could be found. 182

Still the marshal continued the search, encouraged by the statement alike of the sentinels at the city gates as of the members composing the military cordon, that the spy had not passed outwards.

"So, Nariskin," he said at seven next morning, and addressing a patriarchal, long-bearded individual who carried himself with some show of authority, "so, Nariskin, another government official murdered in your ghetto! A pretty guard your night-watch keep!"

Nariskin, chief of the ward council that directed the affairs of Russograd, became voluble in attesting his grief,—his indignation,—his horror, that anything so—so—

"It isn't an oration that I want," said Zabern brusquely, "but the person of Russakoff. You will assemble your council this morning and make two announcements: first, that henceforth Russograd shall cease to do its own policing; that shall be my care. And, secondly, that unless the spy is surrendered before six this evening Russograd shall pay a fine of fifty thousand roubles."

Nariskin protested by Saint Vladimir that there was not so much money in all Russograd, but the marshal turned contemptuously away.

"It's useless," he said to Paul, "to search longer for a fugitive whom a whole people are bent on concealing."

In gloomy mood he gave orders for the withdrawal of the soldiery from Russograd. The military cordon, however, was still maintained, and fresh injunctions were issued to exercise strict supervision over every person passing outwards. 183

Paul accompanied Zabern at his request to the Vistula Palace, and entered the apartments lately tenanted by Trevisa.

Beneath a catafalque of black velvet, surrounded by lighted tapers set in tall silver candlesticks, reposed the body of Trevisa, his hands folded across his breast, and holding within them lilies placed there by Katina.

"A sad fatality!" murmured Zabern, his somewhat grim and hard nature touched by Trevisa's early and mournful ending. "A sad fatality! And partly of my own causing, too!"

"How so?"

"The cipher-despatch which I entrusted to his care has occasioned his death."

"You mean that he was assassinated in order to prevent him from deciphering it?"

"Precisely. The duke hesitates at nothing to conceal his treason."

"What proof have you of his complicity in this affair?"

"Actual proof—none, else would the headsman be now putting edge to his axe. But here are matters that have a suspicious aspect. Not till yester-morn did the duke learn that Russakoff was a prisoner in the Citadel, and that Trevisa was occupied with the document found on the spy. I did my best to keep the affair a secret, but our premier, unthinkingly, revealed it; and, according to him, the duke, on hearing of Russakoff's imprisonment, looked ill at ease. Why, unless the matter concerned him? Subsequently the duke paid a visit to the Citadel—in his official capacity, of course; but, mark the result! Two hours afterwards Russakoff's cell was found empty. How? Great is the power of the rouble-note!"

"Why, then, send the duke to the Citadel, since the itching palm that opened the gate for Russakoff may do the like for Bora?" 184

"I have thought of that, and therefore I have appointed some of my own troopers—fellows whom I can trust—to be the duke's jailers. But to return to the cipher letter," continued Zabern, in a tone of profound dejection. "It still keeps its secret. And Trevisa had just hit on the clue! Did he speak of the matter at all on the way to Slavowitz? Did he give you any hint?"

"None."

But scarcely had Paul given this reply than he started, as he suddenly recalled Trevisa's dying utterance.

"Marshal, I believe he tried to make a communication to me in his last moment. His words were 'Remember the furies!'"

"Passing strange! what meaning can there be in that?"

The two men puzzled themselves to no purpose over the singular saying.

"That cipher letter," said Zabern, reflectively, "was perhaps the last thing in Trevisa's mind. With that sudden intuition which sometimes belongs to the dying, he recognized why he had been assassinated, and tried to give you a clue. 'Remember the furies!' Humph! here's an enigma indeed!"

He paced the apartment gloomily, while Paul, looking down upon the face of his dead friend, breathed a silent prayer for justice upon all who had part in the cruel deed.

"The interpretation of that cipher letter," said Zabern, "would enable us to defeat Russia's secret scheme for the subversion of Czernova; but alas! where shall we look for the interpreter?"

"Give me the letter," said Paul with a sudden impulse, "and let me try my wits upon it. I am not altogether ignorant of cryptography; it was Trevisa's favorite pursuit when we were at college. He sought to interest me in it, and I remember something of his methods." 185

There was at first some hesitancy on the part of Zabern. Was it wise to trust such a weighty matter to one who owed no allegiance to the Czernovese government?

Paul understood the scruples of the other.

"You may trust me; or if not, I will take whatever oath you wish. My sole desire is to serve your beautiful princess."

Zabern's opposition vanished.

"You shall have the letter," he replied. "You defeated Russia's aim in the East; now defeat her aim in the West. But, if you are like me, you must feel the need of a little sleep. There is a bed in the next apartment. Sleep for an hour or two, and rise fresh for the work."

Paul accepted this advice, and retired to the next apartment.

"Shall I call this Fate?" he murmured, as he laid his head on the pillow. "Without any seeking on my part I am now beneath the same roof as Barbara."

CHAPTER VIII

PAUL AND THE PRINCESS

After a brief interval of repose Paul awoke, and had scarcely donned his uniform when a court chamberlain, carrying a silver gilt staff, presented himself with a message to the effect that, "The Princess of Czernova, having learned that the illustrious defender of Tajapore is at the present time within her palace, desires to hold a private interview with him in the White Saloon." 186

The chamberlain went on to say that though court dress or military uniform was *de rigueur* in such interviews, he had been expressly commanded to state that on the present occasion the princess would waive all ceremony.

Having no other attire with him, Paul had of necessity to go to this momentous meeting in his uniform, and accordingly he set off at once with the chamberlain, who on the way ventured to remind him of the etiquette to be observed during the approaching interview: he must stand unless requested to sit; make no observation of his own, but simply reply to the questions addressed him; he must not withdraw till the princess should give the signal, and in withdrawing he must keep his face turned towards her.

All this, and much more, from Silver Staff touched Paul with a sense of humor, when he recalled the sweet and unrestrained intercourse at Castel Nuovo.

On entering the White Saloon Paul perceived Barbara seated at a table, and pencil in hand, ostensibly occupied in annotating state-papers. She wore a dainty dress of white tulle sparkling 187

with silver embroidery over ivory satin.

She was evidently in a state of nervousness. The pencil trembled within her fingers. She did not glance at Paul, but kept her eyes upon the papers before her.

Now that the chamberlain had withdrawn, she was expecting Paul to come forward with the greeting, "Barbara!" Nay, if the truth must be told, she was longing to be folded in his arms, and to hear again the passionate language which he had addressed to her on that memorable day of their parting.

But to her disappointment Paul seemed as formal as a courtier. With his plumed helmet doffed he stood at the distance prescribed by court etiquette waiting for her to speak.

Quick to interpret his secret thought, she saw that he recognized the existence of a wide gulf between them, a gulf that could be crossed only from her side; if there was to be a renewal of love it was for her to take the initiative.

This attitude on his part, though studiously correct, embarrassed her exceedingly.

"I little thought," she began in a low and faltering voice, "when reading of the brave deeds of one Captain Woodville, that the doer of them was known to me. Captain Cressingham," she continued, reverting to the more familiar name, "for two years I have been under the belief that you perished in that Dalmatian earthquake."

"Your Highness, I have been under a similar belief regarding yourself."

"Knowing, as you do," she continued, aimlessly tracing lines on the paper before her, "that I cannot be the real Princess Natalie, you are perhaps of opinion that I have no right to the throne of Czernova?" 188

"Princess—no! I will believe anything rather than that you are an usurper or an impostor."

The energy with which he spoke attested the sincerity of his belief.

Now for the first time since his entrance the princess raised her eyes, and their flash of gratitude thrilled Paul.

"Your faith in me is not misplaced, for I am truly the lawful Princess of Czernova, though a strange necessity has compelled me to assume the name of my sister Natalie. You shall have the story anon, Captain Cressingham," she continued, in a curiously labored voice, as if the choice of words were a difficulty, "we were parted in a very strange way. You will perhaps have guessed that I was carried off by the orders of Cardinal Ravenna, who acted, however, under the authority of my father, Prince Thaddeus.

"They justified the secret abduction on the ground that in my new sphere it would be wise, nay absolutely necessary, to break entirely with the past. But for my own part," added the princess softly, and with the color mantling her cheek, "I do not see the necessity for ignoring all former ties."

"Your Highness has not forgotten the days spent at Castel Nuovo?"

"No, nor that day in Isola Sacra. Captain Cressingham, I am a Lilieska, and the herald will tell you that the motto of the House of Lilieski is '*Keep to troth*.'"

Paul caught his breath at these words, the significance of which was not to be mistaken.

That the lovely convent maiden should care for such an unworthy fellow as himself had been a marvel to him two years previously; but that now, when a princess, and capable of forming a brilliant alliance with king or noble, she should still adhere to him, was more marvellous still.

Barbara, no longer able to endure this state of tension, rose to her feet, and with unsteady step 189
moved towards Paul.

"When the suitor is of inferior rank," she said with a strange catch in her voice, "court etiquette permits a princess to make the first advance in love. Thus, then, do I avail myself of the privilege. Paul," she continued, taking his hands in her own, and striving to look into his averted face, "have you forgotten your words to me on that sunny day in the old Greek temple? Day and night for two years I have never ceased to think of them. Yes, though you may reproach me with the name of Bora, your image has never been absent from my mind. Does my new rank embarrass you? To you I am the same Barbara now as I was then. I long to lay aside my state; to wander again through the pine-woods of Dalmatia; to handle an oar on the blue Adriatic as on that day when we were so cruelly parted. Ah, heaven! how cold, how silent you are! Why do you turn away your eyes? Paul, look at me," she entreated wistfully.

Paul, knowing full well that her attachment to him was certain to create confusion in Czernovese politics, had come fully prepared to sacrifice his own happiness to her interests. But this appeal on her part overcame him. He could not resist the temptation presented by the beautiful face so close to his own. Moved by a sudden impulse, he clasped her passionately in his arms.

"Oh! this cannot be," he murmured a moment afterwards. "It is madness."

"Then let me be mad," she said with a low sweet laugh as she clung to him.

"You are a princess, and I am merely a military officer."

"And where would the princess now be but for the officer who found her wandering in the wild-wood?"

"Princess—Barbara—I love you—"

"I have been waiting for those words, Paul." 190

"I love you—how deeply no words of mine can tell; but when I think of the difference in our rank—"

"But you must not think of it, Paul," she interrupted, still within the circle of his arms, and placing her finger with a witching air on his lip.

"It must be that we part. The law of Czernova forbids our union."

"The Diet shall repeal that law."

"Your ministers, your nobility, your people will never tolerate an untitled Englishman."

"I am ruler in Czernova," she answered proudly. "No one shall dictate to me as to my choice of a consort."

"The Duke of Bora—what of him?" said Paul, with difficulty pronouncing the name that had become doubly hateful to him.

Barbara's eyes drooped. She hid her face on his breast.

"Forgive me, Paul. Do not reproach me with his name. Remember that I thought you dead. I have never forgotten you, nor ceased to love your memory. It was political necessity that drove me to the arms of Bora. On my coming here from Dalmatia in the character of Princess Natalie, I was compelled by the *rôle* I had assumed to receive the addresses of the duke, addresses which I at heart loathed. It had been my intention to break with him ultimately; but of late, since I have been threatened with deposition by Cardinal Ravenna,—yes, deposition," she repeated with flashing eyes,—"I have weakly thought of marrying the duke; for inasmuch as he is the heir-apparent I should thus ensure my rank, if not my power, as princess. But that idea is gone now; I cast it from me forever."

"But why? Is not the necessity for conciliating the duke as great to-day as yesterday?"

"No; for if I should have lost my crown I should have lost the one thing I held most dear; if I lose it now—" 191

She paused in her utterance.

"Yes, if you should lose it now—?"

"Have I not you?" she answered with a soft pressure of her arms. Paul would have deserved instant knouting if he had not kissed the princess for that saying. Then, becoming grave again he said,—

"You say the cardinal threatens you with deposition? Why this hostility on his part?"

"Because I will not dance to his piping."

"And by adhering to me you will increase his hostility, since with him I shall not be a *persona gratissima*."

"He cannot ruin me without ruining himself, and ambition will cause him to pause ere doing that."

"But," said the puzzled Paul, "since you are the daughter of Prince Thaddeus, how is it possible for him to dethrone you, and why is it necessary that you should personate the Princess Natalie?"

All this time Barbara had been standing clasped within Paul's arms; but now, taking him by the hand, she led him to a seat, and sat down beside him.

"The story of my life, as far as it was known to me, I told you at Isola Sacra. Let me now supplement it with details which I have since learned."

The following is a brief outline of Barbara's narration.

The late Prince Thaddeus had in youth contracted a marriage with a young English lady named Hilda Tressilian, who lived in the neighborhood of Warsaw. Thaddeus, aware that his father would be averse to this match, kept it a secret, visiting his wife at intervals. During his absence in Czernova Hilda died suddenly, and was buried ere the prince had time to gaze upon her lifeless form.

On reaching the scene of her death, Thaddeus learned that there had been a daughter still-born, the truth being that the infant was in reality alive, Hilda's servants having been bribed to relate this falsehood by Pasqual Ravenna, at that time a youthful priest of ambitious views. His object 192
was to train the child in the Catholic faith,—Thaddeus was a Greek,—and ultimately to restore her to her rightful dignity as Princess of Czernova; the interests of the Latin Church would be thereby advanced. And for eighteen years Ravenna, while rising from one ecclesiastical dignity to

another, never lost sight of this scheme; and, when he deemed the time ripe, secretly apprised Thaddeus of the existence of Barbara.

That prince, pressed by political necessity, had made a second marriage, the issue of which was an only child, Natalie, born eighteen months after Barbara.

This Natalie, to whom Thaddeus had become passionately attached, was now threatened with exclusion from the throne by the existence of her elder half-sister. Thaddeus, suspecting a plot on the part of the cardinal, refused to acknowledge his resuscitated daughter; and for a time the matter remained in abeyance.

Some months later the Princess Natalie, being in a somewhat delicate state of health, was advised by the court physician to take a tour in the countries around the Adriatic; and Thaddeus, prompted either by fear or by some other motive, permitted Cardinal Ravenna to take charge of the princess. Among other places Dalmatia was visited, and here, while at Castel Nuovo, Natalie died.

"In what way?" asked Paul.

"She committed suicide," replied Barbara, in a whisper of awe.

"You have proof of this?"

"I have my father's word. He had come to Dalmatia purposely to see Natalie, and was in the neighborhood of Castel Nuovo at the time of the tragedy. He was at once sent for. Oh! no, there was nothing suspicious in her death," continued Barbara, observant of the misgiving expressed on Paul's face. "Do you think that my father, who loved Natalie so dearly, would have connived at a crime?" 193

Paul considered it not at all unlikely that Thaddeus had been deceived by the cardinal. He refrained, however, from expressing his doubts.

"In what way did she commit suicide?"

"She stabbed herself before any one could prevent her. My father had the story from Lambro and Jacintha, who, as well as the cardinal, were eye-witnesses of the deed."

Paul was of opinion that the cardinal who had bribed servants to utter the falsehood of Barbara's death would certainly employ the like expedient where his own guilt was concerned.

The more Paul recalled Jacintha's air of terror and her admission as to the mysterious oath taken on the Holy Sacrament, the more he became convinced that Natalie Lilieska had met her death by foul play. But dead princesses tell no tales; and the disappearance of the two witnesses of the deed, Lambro and Jacintha, in the submergence of Castel Nuovo, made it extremely improbable that the charge would ever be brought home to the cardinal.

It was agreed, Barbara continued, that the scandal of Princess Natalie's suicide must be kept secret. Her body, sealed in a leaden coffin, was concealed beneath the flooring of the cardinal's study at Castel Nuovo, to be removed at a convenient opportunity to the princely vault at Slavowitz. That opportunity never came, and the waves of the Adriatic now flowed over the body of the Princess Natalie.

It was clear that unless Thaddeus consented to recognize the convent-maiden as his daughter, the crown of Czernova would devolve upon one whom he personally disliked, namely, upon Bora, though Natalie herself had accepted the duke's addresses with pleasure.

Accordingly, Thaddeus, accompanied by the cardinal, set off for the convent of the Holy Sacrament, to see the daughter whom he had never yet seen. On his arrival, however, he learned 194 with dismay that Barbara had fled the day previously.

Many weeks were spent by the prince and the cardinal in searching for her in the neighboring province and Bosnia. They had been led into this region by a story to the effect that she had been seen journeying in a caravan of gypsies.

Disappointed in their quest, Thaddeus and Ravenna returned to Castel Nuovo, arriving there by a singular chance on the very day that Paul and Barbara had chosen for their excursion to Isola Sacra. They instantly resolved to send over a band of men for the purpose of carrying off Barbara, and of leaving behind on the island the dangerous young Englishman who was unknowingly wooing a princess.

Their plan succeeded.

Fortunately, Barbara and her abductors did not pass that night at Castel Nuovo. In the mist the boat was carried by the current some miles lower down the coast; and captors and captive lodged at an inn which remained unaffected by the earthquake that had devastated the rest of Dalmatia.

Barbara's passion of grief and indignation at being torn from Paul was so violent, that the prince and the cardinal had no other course than to promise that she should have her own way as regarded the young Englishman. But next morning, to the despair of Barbara, the relief of Thaddeus, and the secret joy of Ravenna, it was seen that Isola Sacra had disappeared beneath the waves. It was naturally concluded that Paul had gone down with it.

Grief-stricken at this ending of her love-dream, Barbara was more disposed to return to the convent and assume the veil of a nun than to accept the prospective crown of Czernova; but finally she was persuaded to this latter course by Thaddeus, who, convinced now that Barbara was indeed his daughter, displayed all a father's tenderness. 195

There would be a difficulty, however, in persuading the Czernovese people to accept as the daughter of their prince a maiden of whom they had never before heard.

Now it so happened that the church in which Thaddeus's marriage with Hilda Tressilian had taken place had been subsequently destroyed by fire, and with it the documentary evidence tending to prove Barbara's identity and legitimacy.

Thaddeus was thus unable to establish her relationship to himself. The Diet might be pardoned for refusing to take his bare word as proof. Bora, too, would loudly declare that Barbara was a supposititious child brought forward to deprive him of the throne.

In view, therefore, of her marvellous resemblance to Natalie, it was decided by the prince and the cardinal that Barbara should lose her own identity and should personate the late princess.

This Barbara had done, and with such art and tact that not even Bora suspected the pardonable, if not altogether innocent manœuvre by which she had contrived to secure her rights.

"With the exception of yourself," said Barbara in conclusion, "the cardinal is the sole depositary of my secret, for not even to Zabern, my confidant in most things, have I revealed it. Now you understand the power which the cardinal professes to wield over me, and why he insolently presumes to menace me with deposition. But he shall not succeed. Zabern is my hope. Zabern, crafty and subtle, will find a way of defeating the cardinal's machinations; and then," she murmured, "and then—he shall regret his threat to dethrone the Princess of Czernova."

Barbara, menaced on the one side by the cardinal and on the other by the Czar, had not a very firm hold on her throne, at least in Paul's judgment; and now by her attachment to himself she was still further imperilling her position. But he ceased to argue the matter. Any man with those lovely arms around him might be pardoned for shutting his eyes to the future. 196

"And so your mother was an Englishwoman?" he remarked, seeing in that fact a possible explanation of Barbara's pro-Anglian tastes.

"Yes, I am half English," she replied, "and I am glad for your sake that I am such. You have not told any one of our prior meeting in Dalmatia?"

"I have kept it a secret."

"Let it remain such. And our love, too, must be kept secret,—at least, for a time," she added with a sigh, for she loved open dealing, and the hiding of her real faith, together with the assumption of her sister's name, had never ceased to be a source of pain.

"How happily we sit here," murmured Barbara, "giving no thought to him who is lying dead! You were with Trevisa at the time of his murder; tell me how it happened."

Paul gave an account of Trevisa's death, in itself a sad event, and one rendered still more painful to Barbara by the thought that it had occurred so shortly after his dismissal from his secretaryship. The sorrowful look with which he had received her decision would never fade from her mind. She felt his loss keenly, inasmuch as he had been her friend as well as her amanuensis, and for a long time she sat talking of Trevisa, of his loyalty and his good services.

"I shall require a new secretary," she said. "You, Paul, must fill Trevisa's place. Nay, forgive me for being thus imperious. I speak as if I had the right to your obedience. My commands are for my ministers, not for you." 197

"'See how well it becomes you,' she said, drawing him gently towards a mirror."

She slid playfully upon her knees before him, and put her hands together with a demure air.

"May I have you for my secretary?"

Paul, though sometimes given to day-dreams, had certainly never anticipated the time when a fair princess would be kneeling at his feet. He attempted to raise her.

"I will not rise till you grant my request."

No post could be more acceptable to Paul than this secretaryship, since he would thus live in daily companionship with Barbara; and, moreover, the handling of her correspondence would initiate him into the secrets of that fascinating subject, European diplomacy.

"Are you won over yet?" she asked.

"Who may gainsay a princess?" said Paul. "But are you certain that my appointment will not give offence?"

"I reign over a divided realm. If I appoint a Pole I shall have the Muscovites against me; if I appoint a Muscovite I shall have the Poles against me. Therefore I will choose my secretary from neither party."

"In order to unite both against you," smiled Paul. "But I fear, Barbara, that I am ill-qualified for the post."

"So much the better, Paul, for it will be charming to be your instructress," she replied, delighted that he had accepted the appointment. "What will your sovereign say at losing a brave soldier?"

"The princess is now my sovereign."

"Nay, not your sovereign, Paul, but your equal."

She rose and walked to a buhl table on which rested a golden diadem, and returning with it, she placed it playfully upon his head.

"See how well it becomes you," she said, drawing him gently towards a mirror. "There! every inch a prince."

Paul smiled oddly at his reflection in the glass. He to wear the crown of Czernova! The idea seemed too fantastic to be entertained. For the last four and twenty hours he seemed to have been playing a *rôle* in some romantic opera rather than to have been living in the world of reality.

He put the diadem aside.

"It is not a crown I want, Barbara, but your own sweet self."

"And you have me, Paul," she said, kissing him affectionately. "Nothing but death shall part us. And now," she continued, quitting his arms with reluctance, "we must put on our masks and play our parts, for I am about to summon the chamberlain."

On the appearance of Silver Staff, Barbara said,—

"Call the marshal to our presence."

Zabern was soon found. On entering he glanced keenly at Paul's face as if expecting to gain from it some idea of the character of his long interview with the princess; but Paul, when he chose, could be as inscrutable as Zabern himself, and his face revealed nothing.

"What news of Russakoff?" asked the princess.

"Your Highness, I regret to say that the spy is still at large."

"The ruffians of Russograd, who slew Trevisa because he was an Englishman and loyal to me, shall find that they have gained little by their deed, for I herewith replace him by an Englishman equally as loyal. Marshal, my new secretary."

Zabern bowed and answered like a courtier.

"No appointment could give the cabinet and the Diet greater pleasure," he replied, knowing that he was committing himself to a doubtful statement.

"It is a matter in which the cabinet and the Diet have no concern," replied Barbara with a touch of hauteur in her voice.

"Your Highness, Miroslav is without, charged with a question from the Duke of Bora." 199

"What says that law-breaker?"

"His grace is desirous of learning from the princess how long his detention is to last."

"Till the mark on my secretary's cheek shall have disappeared. If his grace be dissatisfied with our justice, it is open to him to appeal to the law-courts of Czernova, whose sentence he will find considerably less lenient than our own."

"Your Highness, I shall have extreme pleasure in conveying that message to the duke."

CHAPTER IX

A DISPLAY OF SWORDSMANSHIP

On quitting the presence of the princess, Paul and Zabern took their way through the palace gardens, where they were met by two individuals in uniform, whom the marshal introduced to Paul. The more youthful of the two, who had fair hair, blue eyes, and a comely face that seemed to indicate habitual good humor, was Dorislas, and he held the office of Minister of Finance. The other, a somewhat sullen-looking personage, was Miroslav, the governor of the Citadel, "and," added Zabern, "the present guardian of your friend the duke." 200

"Ah! the duke," said Dorislas to the governor. "I marvel, Miroslav, that you have not yet been called upon to defend your Bastille. What are your friends in Russograd thinking of, that they so tamely submit to the duke's imprisonment?"

"The marshal's placards explain the reason. At the first attempt upon the Citadel the duke is to be brought forth upon the battlements, and summarily shot."

"And therefore," commented Zabern, "it is a pity that they do not make the attempt."

"Well, you know the marshal and his ways by this time," laughed Dorislas, addressing Miroslav. "When to-night you see a wild mob with blackened faces advancing upon the Citadel and crying out for the release of the duke, be sure that Zabern is somewhere among them, disguised and playing the part of chief instigator." 201

Zabern and his two friends, so it appeared, were on their way to the *salle d'armes*, which stood in the centre of the palace gardens. In this hall it was their custom, provided that state affairs were not too pressing, to fence daily. Zabern invited Paul to accompany them.

"And the cipher despatch, marshal?" said the new secretary, who, having Barbara's interests at heart, was desirous of beginning work at once.

"A little fencing on your part will quicken both blood and brain."

So Paul acquiesced, somewhat reluctantly, and while he and the governor of the Citadel strode on in front, Zabern, adopting a more tardy pace, followed in the rear conversing with Dorislas.

"Marshal, what is this mystery?" asked the Finance Minister with a significant glance in Paul's direction. "There is a strange rumor that he and the princess were together in Dalmatia, and that she there presented him with a sapphire seal which had been given to her by the duke himself. Within twelve hours of his coming to Czernova he is challenged to a duel by Bora. Her Highness, on hearing of the affair, flies to rescue the Englishman, sends her affianced husband to prison, but permits the other duellist to go free. And now you bring the amazing news that the princess has made this Woodville her secretary. What is the meaning of it all?"

"You had better ask her Highness," said Zabern dryly, and abruptly changing the subject of conversation, he added: "Did anything of importance take place at the Diet last night?"

"What, marshal! haven't you heard?" cried Dorislas, his face expressing the extreme of amazement.

"Heard? I've heard nothing. I was occupied in searching for that assassin Russakoff till seven this morning, since when I have been asleep. What new folly, then, did you and the rest of the ministry perpetrate in my absence?" 202

"You know, of course, that the first order of the evening was the notification to the House of the princess's change of faith. Scarcely had Radzivil risen to make his statement, when he was interrupted by Lipski with a sneering remark to the effect that the premier might spare his words, for the Diet knew very well what he was going to say, and that it would have been more becoming on the part of the princess to have taken the House into her confidence earlier, and not to have waited till her hand had been forced by the article contained in his newspaper, the 'Kolokol.'"

"Damn his insolence! And of course the Muscovite crew howled applause? Was Ravenna in his place?"

"No; the cardinal, having been the chief instrument in the princess's conversion, shrank somewhat from facing the wrathful Muscovites last night. He preferred the opera-house."

"The coward! Would that I had been there!"

"What! at the opera? Yes, it was well worth visiting, because—"

"A truce to your fooling. What happened next?"

"After order had been restored—for, of course, Radzivil's statement provoked a devil of a row—Lipski rose and begged leave to bring in a new bill. Lamenting the increased taxation—and you know, marshal, my Budget is devilishly heavy this year—he introduced a measure for the appropriation of all plate, jewels, and money belonging to the conventual establishments throughout Czernova, such wealth to be devoted to the needs of the state."

"Ha!" cried Zabern. "This is nothing else but an attack upon the princess's faith. 'I have become a Catholic,' she avers. 'Then we will plunder your Church,' is, in effect, the Muscovite answer." 203

"True, marshal; for though the bill affects to treat both creeds, Latin and Greek, alike, yet inasmuch as the Latin convents are numerous and wealthy, while those of the Greek faith are few and comparatively poor—"

"It's a case of 'I'll share my kopek with you, if you'll share your rouble with me,' eh?"

"Just so, marshal. Well, the bill was rushed through its first reading—"

"Fire and brimstone! where, then, was our party with its splendid majority?"

"You forget that Rubini was here last night."

"Who's he?" asked Zabern, whose ignorance of everybody and everything outside the circle of politics was simply astounding.

"Come, marshal, you jest—Rubini, the Italian, the great opera-singer."

"The devil fly away with him! Well?"

"The opera was 'The Bohemian Girl.' Rubini took the part of Thaddeus. It would have brought the tears to your eyes, marshal, to hear him sing, 'When the fair land of Poland was ploughed.'"

"It would—to hear a damnable Italian turning the sorrows of our fatherland into a medium for putting rouble-notes into his pockets. But what has this to do with the Diet?"

"Why, most of those on our side of the House went to hear Rubini."

"Including a simpleton named Dorislas. And so Lipski and his Muscovite crew took advantage of the emptiness of the benches on the Right to spring this new bill upon the Diet. But, sword of St. Michael, didn't Radzivil send Opalinski to the opera-house to summon away the absentee fools?"

"He did, with this result. When Opalinski arrived Rubini was singing, and our whip became so entranced that he quite forgot the errand on which he had come, till—till it was too late. When our fellows came trooping back they were met with derisive laughter from the Left." 204

"The bill had already passed its first reading?"

"Precisely, marshal. But that's not all. Lipski had likewise proposed that, pending the issue of this infernal bill, the precincts of the monasteries shall be patrolled by the military."

"To prevent the monks from removing their treasures."

"That's the object. The Diet passed the resolution. Radzivil, as servant of the House, was obliged to submit, with the result that to-day there is not a monastery in Czernova that has not bayonets moving round it."

"Including the Convent of the Transfiguration?" asked Zabern.

"Including the Convent of the Transfiguration," answered Dorislas.

Zabern muttered some oaths under his breath. Presently, however, he broke into a grim smile.

"Lipski is a shrewder fellow than I gave him credit for. A clever stroke this on his part—to prevent us from entering that monastery by turning our own bayonets against us."

"Marshal," said Dorislas, looking very grave, "if Lipski's measure should pass—"

"If?" repeated Zabern disdainfully. "We will extinguish it on the second reading."

"Which has been fixed for this day month. Lipski boasts that there are surprises in store for ministers, that there will be numerous defections on our side."

"'Boasts'—that is a good word, Dorislas."

"If that bill should become law, commissioners appointed by the Diet will make a round of the monasteries for the purpose of appropriating their wealth; when they come to the Convent of the Transfiguration they will discover—" 205

"What we do not wish them to discover. But as the bill has not the remotest chance of passing, we may preserve a serene mind on the matter."

Dorislas said no more. Though he was of an optimistic nature, it was clear from his grave manner that he did not share in Zabern's hopeful views.

The quartette had now reached the *salle d'armes*. Over the portico hung the banner of the Lilieskis, which Paul reverently saluted, for was he not honoring Barbara by the act?

"That flag," said Zabern, "shall one day float over a wider area than Czernova."

Passing beneath the portico, they entered a fine and spacious hall, decorated in a style that harmonized with its use. Along the walls were suits of armor, and pictures of duels, tournaments, and battles. The oaken panels were hung with swords, muskets, and pistols, so arranged as to form devices, the favorite one being the arms of Poland.

"Whenever a man is mentioned to me for promotion," remarked Zabern, "I always bring him here for a bout. Ten minutes' fencing will give me a better idea of his character than a month's investigation."

Paul, in view of his recent appointment, wondered whether this remark was intended for application to himself.

Among the Czernovese nobles and military officers assembled in this hall was Count Radzivil, occupied in a fencing-bout. In Paul's eyes the sight of the gray-headed premier of seventy parrying and lunging with all the ardor of a boy of seventeen was significant of much. It seemed like a preparation for more serious work in the near future.

What surprised Paul still more was a bevy of youthful ladies fencing with each other at the far end of the hall; and of this number was Katina, engaged in spirited contest with her sister Juliska, 206
a maiden so pretty that a man must have had the insensibility of a stone not to have wished for a kiss.

All ceased their play upon the entering of Zabern, who in a brief and graceful speech introduced Paul to the assembly as the princess's new secretary.

The Englishman who had conducted the famous defence of Tajapore could not fail to be a person of interest,—an interest enhanced by the fact that he had not shrunk from facing in duel the champion swordsman of Czernova.

Curious glances were interchanged, both among the ladies and likewise among the gentlemen, the meaning of which was laughingly explained by Zabern.

"The truth is, Captain Woodville, we are hoping to see a little English sword-play, in order that we may know who is to be congratulated by the princess's intervention yesterday,—yourself or the duke."

Paul modestly professed himself willing to give a display of his skill if any one would come forward to meet him.

"We have here," continued Zabern, "the six best fencers in Czernova after the duke. If you can defeat any of these we shall be able to form some notion as to how he would have fared at your hands."

The six champions in order of merit were adjudged as follows:—Firstly, Zabern, the Warden of the Charter; secondly, Miroslav, the governor of the Citadel; next, Dorislas, the Minister of Finance; then Count Radzivil, the Premier; Brunowski, the President of the Diet, followed; and, lastly, came Nikita the trooper.

"And," whispered Zabern to Paul, "if we were to choose a seventh it would not be a man but a woman, and she none other than Katina."

Paul bowed to the six men, and expressed his readiness to meet in fencing-bout any one of the number, or all in turn; and taking up a fencing-blade, a blunt sabre with its point topped by a button, he stood prepared to make good his words. 207

Across the middle of the hall upon the oaken flooring ran a silver line to which the opposing fencers were required to apply their right foot; they might step over this mark if they chose, but to recede from it by so little as an inch was counted for defeat.

As Paul declined to nominate an antagonist there was a slight argument on the part of the six as to the one who should first respond.

After some hesitation Count Radzivil stepped forward. "I fear I am too highly appraised," he modestly remarked, "when I am placed among the seven best fencers in Czernova."

All drew near to witness the contest. A double ring was immediately formed, the ladies being seated in a circle with the gentlemen standing in their rear, the placing of the chairs having naturally afforded opportunity for some pretty pieces of gallantry.

Paul was secretly conscious that though Zabern with Katina and Juliska might regard him favorably, he did not possess the sympathy of the rest of the persons present, who resented the unaccountable act of their princess in appointing as her secretary one who was not only a foreigner but a complete stranger to the principality. Were there no loyal Czernovese from whom her choice might have been made?

Paul knew, too, that among those who stood around were some who bore the proudest names in Polish history; he himself had neither title nor long genealogy, but if there be an order of nobility founded upon superiority in swordsmanship he determined to show that he was a member of that order, and that it would not be well for any man to put a slight upon him, because of the favor shown him by the princess. 208

On finding himself engaged in a contest with the premier Paul felt some mortification at being pitted against one so aged; but a few moments' play convinced him that Radzivil's arm had lost little of its youthful strength, or of its suppleness and dexterity. Paul, however, was decidedly the superior; and, within the space of five minutes he succeeded in disarming the count, whose blade flying through the air would have struck Katina, had she not adroitly warded it off with her own fencing-foil.

Zabern, who had watched Paul with eyes that had hardly winked once, seemed pleased with the result.

"An accident!" commented Dorislas, really believing the premier to have been the superior of the two.

He himself was the next to engage, and again Zabern watched every motion of Paul with unwinking eyes.

As a swordsman Dorislas excelled Radzivil; but, heated with a desire to vindicate the honor of Czernova, which he conceived had suffered at the hands of the premier, he became rash, was more disposed to attack than to guard, and the second contest terminated in less time than the first by the button of Paul's sabre coming full tilt against the breast of the Finance Minister.

"Fairly pinked!" said Zabern, evidently more pleased than before. "No accident this time."

The expression of surprise and bewilderment on the face of Dorislas at a result so little anticipated by himself was so comically pathetic that the spectators could not refrain from laughter.

"You were a dead man, Dorislas, had that been a real duel," they cried.

Paul was beginning to rise in their esteem.

Miroslav next ventured to try his hand, and once more Zabern became so attentive that one might almost have fancied his own life hung upon the issue.

Profiting by the lesson of Dorislas' rashness the governor of the Citadel commenced in a spirit of coolness and watchfulness,—a spirit that quickly evaporated when he found himself met at every point. He gave more trouble than his predecessors, but in the end Paul succeeded in twisting the weapon from his hand. 209

Zabern's pleasure increased.

"Good luck, not science," cried Miroslav, hotly, "I defy you to repeat that trick, Captain Woodville. I must have a second bout."

This demand was not allowed by Zabern, though Paul himself good-naturedly offered to grant it.

"Miroslav seems in savage mood to-day," whispered a fair lady to the cavalier who was bending over her.

"He suffered a prisoner to escape yesterday," replied her partner, "and as a consequence he had a *mauvais quart d'heure* with the princess this morning. *Hinc illæ lacrimæ.*"

"Captain Woodville ought now to give his arm a rest," cried Katina.

But Paul, perceiving the favorable impression that he was making, expressed his readiness to proceed without delay.

"I am now to be your opponent," said Zabern, taking up a fencing-blade in his left and only hand, "and I warn you, Captain Woodville, to be careful."

This caution was not without its need. Zabern was considered by those best qualified to judge the second swordsman in Czernova, and Paul quickly found that he had met an opponent nearly equal, if not equal, to himself. The marshal had an arm of steel; as a warrior who had faced the charge of bayonets on many a battle-field he was not likely to become nervous in a mock-contest. Cool and wary, after a few preliminary passes designed to test the other's skill, Zabern seemed content to remain for the most part on the defensive, watching his opportunity. Paul, conscious of the marshal's dexterity, was disposed to do the same; and hence this fourth bout appeared 210
somewhat tame when contrasted with the spirited and dashing style of the preceding contests. It promised to prove indefinitely long, till on a sudden Zabern cried,—

"Hold, I have felt enough to know that I am your inferior, and as such, Captain Woodville, I lower my sword to you."

Which he did in graceful fashion, and, oddly enough, seeming to be extremely pleased over this acknowledgment of defeat.

"You would not have to make such confession, marshal," said Paul, "if you could recover the good hand you left behind in Russia."

He turned to glance at his two remaining opponents,—Brunowski and Nikita.

"If the marshal, the best of us all, admits himself beaten," said the President of the Diet, "of what use is it for me to try?"

The trooper murmured something to the like effect.

"Give me leave," said Paul, "to retire from this silver line and to move about freely, and I will meet my two remaining opponents together."

"That were to take an unfair advantage of a man," said Brunowski, resenting Paul's proposal as a slight upon his swordsmanship.

"Fair or unfair," growled Zabern, "step forward, both of you, and let us see whether Captain Woodville can do it. If you deem his word a boast, prove it to be such."

The ladies, too, curiously eager to witness fresh proofs of Paul's skill, added their voices to Zabern's, and thus adjured the two men came forward and faced Paul.

As plenty of space would be required for the coming bout, the ladies arose, the chairs were removed, and a wide circuit formed.

"A thousand roubles to a hundred that the Englishman succeeds," said Zabern to Dorislas, who 211
seeing confidence written large on the marshal's face, declined the wager.

This fifth contest formed a brilliant finale.

Smarting under what they considered contemptuous disparagement, and eager to punish the vanity of the Englishman, Brunowski and Nikita pressed hard upon Paul. Each was no mean fencer, though much inferior to Zabern, and Paul was quickly compelled to retreat from the silver line upon which he had at first planted himself. The previous work seemed child's play when compared with this. The interchange of cut and thrust was so swift that the eyes of the spectators failed to follow the dazzling motions of the weapons. Despite their endeavors the two men failed to touch Paul, who at last saw his opportunity. With one powerful stroke he shivered Nikita's blade to fragments, and almost simultaneously he planted the button of his sabre upon Brunowski's breast.

The members of the assembly looked at one another in breathless wonder. Among a people who, like the Czernovese, retain much of the spirit of the feudal age, he is most in esteem who is best able to defend himself. In one sense, therefore, Paul was the foremost man in the principality. The resentment previously felt against him had now changed to unalloyed admiration.

"Such swordsmanship was never seen in Czernova," cried Juliska.

"Ten thousand devils!" muttered Zabern to himself. "Why did her Highness intervene in the duel yesterday?"

And then aloud he added,—

"Ladies and lords, we must all admit that his grace of Bora has much reason to be grateful to the

princess."

No one ventured to controvert this statement.

Zabern's eyes twinkled with secret satisfaction.

"Marshal," whispered Juliska. "You have some plan in your head. You have been trying an experiment, I know you have. Come, tell me. Of what are you thinking?" 212

"That the princess's coronation-day will be a very exciting time," replied Zabern, oracularly.

And this was the only answer she could draw from the smiling marshal.

"Beaten! The whole six!" cried Katina in a voice of grief. "Shame upon Czernova! Captain Woodville will have but a poor opinion of us. Let us show, however, that we can shoot if we cannot fence."

With this Katina directed one of the attendants to hang a square white-painted board upon the wall at one end of the hall. Then taking her station at the other end with a supply of loaded revolvers, she proceeded to aim at the distant board, the shots succeeding each other with a rapidity that scarcely left an interval of silence.

The result of this firing was to cause a large oval to appear upon the surface of the board. The revolvers having been reloaded, Katina resumed her shooting. Now within the oval lines and curves began to appear, the whole assuming the outline of a human countenance, and that so well executed as to be clearly recognizable by those acquainted with the original.

"Orloff, the governor-general of Warsaw," cried several voices in unison.

"Czernova will never lack a good tirailleur so long as Katina Ludovska be living," said Zabern, adding in a lower tone, "why have you learned to shoot so well?"

"Can you ask?" she replied in a fierce whisper. "Against the day of my meeting with Orloff. Can any one beat that shooting?" she added aloud, with an invitatory glance at Paul, who smiled a negative.

A shout of applause went up in favor of Katina, who was considered to have redeemed the honor of Czernova.

"Ah! why were you not born a Pole?" said Juliska, addressing Paul. 213

"May I not become one?"

"Then shall you be a better Pole than any of us," said Katina, "for whereas we are such by accident of birth, you will be such by freedom of choice."

"Well said, Katina," observed Zabern. "And never was there one whom I more willingly admit to Czernovese citizenship. But Captain Woodville," he added, thoughtfully, "it will be well if you remain a British subject for a few more days. Why, the sequel will show."

And Paul, believing that Zabern did not speak without good reason, assented to the delay.

There was no more fencing in the *salle d'armes* that day. The members shrank from displaying their inferior powers before such an expert as Paul. The assembly broke up into little groups.

"And how fares our ducal prisoner?" asked Radzivil, addressing the governor of the Citadel.

"In somewhat gloomy mood," answered Miroslav. "He spends his time chiefly in drinking old Rhenish, and in muttering to himself. By the way, he did a very peculiar act immediately after entering the Citadel last evening."

"Ha!" exclaimed Zabern, catching at this. "What was the act?"

"You know, marshal, it is our rule to search all prisoners on their entering,—a routine from which we did not except even his grace."

"And what did you discover?"

"Upon his person—nothing; that is, nothing of consequence. But a few minutes afterwards a soldier caught sight of the remains of a book burning upon a fire that was close by."

"Flung there by the duke?"

"Without doubt. The mystery is how he contrived to do it without our knowledge, inasmuch as there were several persons standing by." 214

"You recovered the book from the flames?"

"We attempted to remove it with the tongs, but the thing fell to pieces; the pages were consumed; nothing but the leather cover remained, and that all charred; upon it we could just discern the title."

"And that was—?"

"'The Plays of Æschylus.' Now why should the duke desire to destroy his copy of the Greek poet?"

"He had a motive, I warrant, and that a powerful one. I wish, Miroslav, you had secured the volume in time. Æschylus, Æschylus," repeated Zabern, thoughtfully. "My classical scholarship has long since evaporated, but if I remember rightly," he added, his countenance suddenly lighting up with a new idea, "Æschylus wrote a play called 'The Furies.'"

"True, marshal," replied Paul. "'The Eumenides' or 'The Furies.'"

Zabern, with excitement gleaming in his face, drew Paul aside.

"The clew to the cipher despatch!" he whispered. "The last words of our friend Trevisa were '*the furies*'!"

CHAPTER X

THE DEED OF MICHAEL THE GUARDSMAN

Accompanied by Zabern, Paul returned to the palace, where he was met by the court chamberlain, who conducted him to a fine suite of apartments, which by the special command of the princess were assigned to the new secretary. 215

Supplied by Zabern with the cipher despatch, and by the court librarian with a copy of the "Eumenides," Paul, having first requested to be left to himself, sat down to work out the cryptographic problem.

The paper given to him by the marshal was covered with rows of numerals, separated from each other by dots.

The first eight numbers were as follows,—

6 . 42 . 50 . 37 . 97 . 39 . 65 . 21

What did these figures represent? Certain words in the Greek play? If the sixth word of the "Eumenides," the forty-second, the fiftieth and so forth, were picked out and placed in immediate sequence, would they yield an intelligible sentence?

He tried this method with the above numbers, but the result did not encourage him to proceed.

It was not likely that the writer of the despatch intended to forward such intelligence as: "Of gods and a name a daughter of an art was seated into an oracle."

On reflection Paul perceived the improbability that the numbers stood for words, inasmuch as the vocabulary of an ancient Greek poet would be insufficient to supply all the terms required by the usages of modern civilization, such, for example, as passport, banknote, or rifle. And to clench the matter, Paul observed that towards the end of the despatch there was the number, .8537. Now the total of words in the "Eumenides" falls considerably short of that sum. 216

But if all the letters that composed the words of the play were numbered in consecutive order from Π the first to ς the last, then, indeed, the sum total would far exceed 8537.

Paul resolved to test this theory, namely, that 6 was intended to mean the sixth letter in the "Eumenides," 42 the forty-second letter, etc.

Great was his delight when he produced the following result,—

. 6 . 42 . 50. 37 . 97 . 39 . 65 . 21 .

ν ι κ ο λ α ο ς

Nicholas, the name of the reigning Czar!

Proceeding in the same fashion, Paul found that the numbers following those which stood for Nicholas yielded the intelligible word *ουναινεται*, "assents."

"To what does Nicholas assent?" murmured Paul.

"Let me endeavor to ascertain, since it is quite clear that the key to the cipher is now in my hands."

Obviously his best course would be to go through the "Eumenides" first, marking, say, every tenth letter with its proper consecutive number. This done, the work of decipherment would take but a few minutes.

Paul started on this most monotonous task,—a task that occupied him more than four hours, from

the necessity imposed upon him of verifying his enumeration from time to time, for a single error in his calculation would have confused the whole issue. And when at last his copy of the "Eumenides" lay ready figured for use, the misgiving seized him that perhaps, after all, his labor had been in vain. 217

"Various readings occur in the manuscripts of the 'Eumenides,'" he muttered. "If the writer of this despatch has used a different edition from mine,—*Dindorf, Lips.* 1827,—well, then, lack-a-day!"

Fortunately, however, the result falsified his misgiving.

Once during his calculations the eager Zabern had entered the apartment with the question, "What progress?"

"Return in two hours, and you shall have the solution."

And the marshal had withdrawn, somewhat doubtful of Paul's ability to make good his promise.

However, before the expiration of the two hours Paul had mastered the contents of the document. It was written in Greek, and, as the marshal's knowledge of that language was extremely limited, Paul spent some time in endeavoring to produce a faithful translation. And his rendering was as follows,—

Nicholas assents. So proceed quickly. Risk of discovery in transmitting document. Therefore burn as soon as seized. When done, report matter. Envoy will follow to demand production.

Lipski's measure approved. Money shall be forwarded by usual route. Let him bribe freely. The success of his bill Russia's justification. Impossible, then, for Europe to oppose annexation.—ORLOFF.

The signature seemed to show that the letter came from the governor-general of Warsaw, the knouter of Katina, but there was nothing to indicate the person for whom it was intended. Paul had little doubt as to the correctness of his decipherment, though the meaning was far from clear to him. 218

Zabern would doubtless be able to understand the allusions, and if the marshal should not soon make his appearance Paul was resolved to go in quest of him.

The night was now far advanced, and, having been at work several hours in a close chamber, Paul was beginning to feel somewhat languid. He therefore walked forward and opened a casement to gain a breath of the fresher air without.

It was dark and cloudy, and as he stood looking forth a mournful wind dashed rain-drops into his face.

The part of the palace in which this apartment was situated formed the extremity of an architectural wing, which was fronted at the distance of about a hundred feet by a second wing equal in length to the first and parallel with it. These two wings formed with the main structure the three sides of a court.

As he casually turned his eyes upon the opposite wing, at the point where it formed an angle with the main building, Paul thought he detected a movement on the part of somebody or something about half-way between the roof and the ground. Straining his eyes to the utmost, he became convinced that what he saw dimly outlined against the gray wall was the figure of a man poised in mid-air; for as Paul could detect no ladder beneath him, he could only come to the conclusion that the fellow was suspended by a rope.

The man made no attempt to ascend or descend, but continued in the one position; and as far as Paul could discern in the darkness his arm was moving to and fro with horizontal motion.

Now just at the place where this man hung there was, as Paul had observed earlier in the evening, a small window, a window crossed by iron bars.

A grated window in a palace suggests the idea that the room thus secured is used for the preservation of things valuable; at any rate this was Paul's idea. He believed that the fellow was quietly removing the iron bars with the view of procuring whatever it was that lay behind them. 219

It was an extremely hazardous enterprise. True, the man was favored by the darkness, and by the noise of wind and rain, but at any moment he was liable to be surprised by the night-watch going its rounds, either in the courtyard below or on the roof above.

Two sentinels paced the very battlements overlooking this court. Earlier in the evening Paul had heard their footsteps overhead and their challenges. Were they asleep? If not, they must be keeping a very lax watch to permit this man to perform such work under their very eyes.

Then the truth flashed upon Paul. The man himself was a soldier, one of the two appointed to patrol this particular part of the roof. The other was his confederate. Both were engaged in some nefarious work. Treason was afoot in the palace!

Rejecting his first impulse, which was to steal quietly downstairs and summon the guard, Paul resolved to tackle the two single-handed. As there was no staircase from his room to the roof, he

determined to mount to the battlements by means of a water-pipe adjacent to his window.

Thrusting a loaded pistol within his breast, he stepped out upon the window-sill, and pulling himself up by the water-pipe silently and quickly, he clambered over the battlements without detection. Keeping within an embrasure, he peered out along the roof. There, a few yards distant, outlined against the sky, was the tall, cloaked figure of a sentinel leaning upon his rifle and with his eyes turned towards the grated window.

Paul, glancing in the same direction, could no longer see the man hanging in mid-air. A faint glow of light stole through the mysterious window. Hence Paul concluded that the fellow was now within the chamber occupied upon the matter that had brought him there. 220

Stealing noiselessly forward, Paul suddenly clapped his hand upon the sentinel's shoulder, and, pointing to the grated window he cried,—

"Do you intend to arrest that villain, or are you his confederate?"

The sentinel instantly turned, with confusion and guilt written upon his face. Misled by the uniform, he took Paul for a Czernovese officer, and as such he was one that must be silenced at all costs, for it was death to be caught thus in the act of treason.

Lowering his bayonetted rifle to the charge, he made a thrust at Paul's body. But Paul, on the watch for this movement, sprang aside, wrested the rifle away, and clubbing it, dealt the fellow a fearful blow on the head. The sentinel staggered back and dropped to the pavement, where he lay senseless and still.

Peering over the battlements to learn whether this action on his part had been observed, Paul was surprised to see a blue light at the chamber-window. The man was flashing a lantern to and fro, an action that lasted for a few seconds.

Recovering from his surprise, Paul sped onward, and reached the battlement to which the rope was attached.

Kneeling within an embrasure and glancing downwards, he perceived a faint cloud of smoke proceeding from the window.

What was taking place within? Was the fellow setting fire to this part of the palace?

It was not in Paul's nature to remain inactive while evil was in progress. He instantly resolved to descend to the chamber for the purpose of putting a stop to what he could not doubt was nefarious work. Grasping the rope with both hands, he swung himself downwards, not neglecting, however, at the same time to keep an eye upon the window. As soon as his feet touched the sill he drew forth his pistol, and without pausing to notice what was happening within the room, without a glance, even, he sent his feet through the space between the bars, a space barely sufficient to admit the passage of his body. 221

The room was in darkness,—this much he was conscious of as he shot forward, and a smell as of smoke hung in the air. Paul fell supine upon the stone flooring, but he was up again in an instant, endeavoring to ascertain through the gloom what strange thing had happened or was happening.

His attention was immediately arrested by a strange voice,—a voice lowered to a whisper that was full of guilty terror.

"Is that you, Peter? What has brought you down? In God's name make no noise. Gabor is on guard in the corridor outside."

"Then let Gabor enter," shouted Paul in a voice of thunder. "Ho! without there! Gabor, Gabor, whoever you may be, here is a prisoner for you."

Directed by the voice, Paul rushed forward through the darkness, and with his left hand he clutched the fellow by the throat, intending to reduce him to submission by pressing the barrel of the pistol to his forehead. The uplifting of the fellow's arm sent the weapon flying from Paul's hand, and next moment the two men were grappling savagely together.

The soldier, for Paul could tell that he was such by the feel of his uniform, was a powerful fellow, and desperation had now doubled his strength. He knew that the chamber-door was strong, and that the key was not in the hands of the sentinels outside; if he could overcome this present antagonist in the interval that must elapse before the key could be procured, there was a possibility of his escaping. He wrestled, therefore, with all the fury of a wild beast. 222

Locked in each other's arms, the two men swayed backwards and forwards, and then fell, rolling over and over.

Paul's cry, together with the noise of the scuffle, had attracted the notice of the guard posted at the end of the corridor leading to this chamber. The shouting of voices and the running of feet were heard on the other side of the door.

"Ho! Lasco, off to the captain for the key. The devil's work is going on within. How have they managed to get inside? Ah, by the window! Melchior, up to the battlement, and cover the window with your rifle. See they escape not! Now, Lasco, dolt! dullard! slowbody! don't stand gaping there. Run for the key. The key, man, the key!"

"The key *is* here!" cried a deep, powerful voice. And above the oaths and gasps of his struggling opponent, Paul could hear Zabern's Hessian boots clattering along the corridor.

"Lasco, quick! Yon lamp! hold it up!" cried the marshal. "Gabor and Melchior, as I open the door, rush in and cover them with your rifles. Now!"

The key rattled in the lock; the massive door swung back upon its hinges, and the two sentinels, eager to learn what was taking place, rushed in with rifles levelled, ready to fire at any one who should offer resistance.

They paused in blank amazement at beholding by the light of the lamp one of their own corps stretched supine and panting, with Paul Woodville above pinning him to the floor by the throat.

"Why, it's Michael!" cried Gabor.

Even in the midst of his excitement Paul observed that Zabern was carrying in his hand a sheet of paper which he recognized as his translation of the cipher despatch.

"In time, thank heaven!" murmured the marshal, from which remark Paul concluded that the mission of the traitor-sentinel was connected in some way with Orloff's letter. 223

"Gabor, Lasco, Melchior, leave us. Close the door; retire to the far end of the corridor, and on your lives stir not from that spot till I call."

The three sentinels retired.

"Good-night to Michael!" whispered Gabor to his two comrades. "We shall never see him again. I know that look in the marshal's eye."

Paul, little the worse for the struggle, released his hold of the soldier and rose to his feet. But it was beyond the power of the other to rise. Fear, inspired by the presence of the dark-frowning Zabern, kept him motionless and mute. He sat the picture of abject terror.

Now that Paul was free to look around, he observed that he was within a vaulted stone chamber, about twenty feet square, and but scantily supplied with furniture. In one part there was a small iron chest fixed to the wall with staples. Paul, by some intuition, divined that Michael's nefarious attempt was directed against the contents of this chest.

Zabern made one swift stride towards the coffer, and seemed relieved at finding it locked.

Turning again, he folded his arms and faced the man with a terrible frown.

"I shall not ask your object in coming here. You and I both know that. So you haven't got it?"

Michael made no reply.

"It is still safe?"

Michael remained mute. He seemed literally frozen with terror.

"Why so silent, fellow? Your tongue wagged ever loudest in the guard-house."

"When I first entered," observed Paul, "smoke hung about the place."

An enthusiastic orator in the Diet had once described Zabern as "the man who had never known fear." The statement, if true at the time of the utterance, was certainly not true now. Fear in all its power fell upon the heart of the marshal as his eye caught sight of a passage in the paper which he held: "Risk of discovery in transmitting document. Therefore burn as soon as seized." 224

"Hell shall seize you, fellow, if you have done so!" he cried. "Did you come provided with a key, then? Where is it?"

Still Michael made no reply. Zabern, following the direction of his eyes, perceived a key lying upon the floor. The marshal placed it within the lock of the chest, turned it, raised the lid, and saw that the coffer contained nothing but a heap of charred parchment. Zabern, his mouth drawn in an agony that showed all his white teeth, rose, and with a dreadful look in his eyes turned slowly round upon the guilty man.

A cry for mercy rang through the chamber as the marshal sprang forward with drawn sabre. His was not a 'prentice hand; he knew exactly where to find the fifth rib. A swift stab,—the fall of a body, and then all was silent, save for the mournful plash of the rain outside.

Paul was shocked by the ferocity of Zabern's action, which had been performed with a quickness that left no time for intervention.

"Without a court-martial!" he said, severely. "We act not so in England."

"I dare not let him live to see those fellows outside again, lest they should learn from him what he has done. Not a hint as to his deed must ever get abroad; for he who knows it holds the destiny of Czernova in the hollow of his hand. Not even to a secret tribunal must the truth be whispered. And, Captain Woodville," continued Zabern, raising his dripping sabre with so menacing an air that Paul immediately stepped backward, and set hand to his own sword-hilt, "if I thought that you could not hold your peace I would slay you, too." 225

"What has he done?" asked Paul, impressed by the marshal's strange manner.

"The blackest deed that could be done against the princess, and one that has destroyed the liberties of a whole people. Your decipherment of the secret despatch has come too late to do us good,—too late. Oh! the bitterness of it, by a few moments only."

"I am still in the dark, marshal."

"On what is the liberty of Czernova based? On the Charter granted to us by Catherine of Russia. And that Charter is now burnt paper. This is the first act in the drama. The next will be, as this despatch shows, the appearance of an envoy from the Czar to demand on what grounds Czernova, formerly a part of Russian Poland, claims to be independent. What answer can we give? What title can we show? Without our Charter we are completely at the mercy of the Czar. His ministers will loudly affirm that such Charter was never granted, that we have obtained autonomy by a lying statement, that all extant copies of the Charter are based upon a mythical document, that its mention in history is no proof of its past existence. 'Let us see the original,' will be their cry. 'Produce the autograph signature of the Empress Catherine.' Now do you understand the crime that this miscreant has wrought?"

The diabolical nature of the plot struck Paul with a feeling akin to horror. His thoughts immediately flew to Barbara, sleeping peacefully at that moment in her distant quarter of the palace, all unconscious of this new peril that threatened her throne. He felt little pity now for the slain wretch lying at his feet.

"Why did he not carry off the document to Russia?"

"The secret despatch assigns the reason. It was more expedient to destroy it as soon as it fell into his hands. The sequel proves the serpentine wisdom of Orloff. Had this fellow concealed the 226
Charter upon his own person it would now be in our keeping again. Oh! I could tear out my eyes for having kept such sorry watch! 'Warden of the Charter' is one of my titles. A pretty warden, truly! Fortunately you and I alone know that Russia's plot has succeeded, for those sentries at the end of the corridor are ignorant of it; in fact they do not even know that the Charter was kept here, in this, the Eagle Tower."

"I fear, marshal, that there are others who know," said Paul, picking up a lantern with a blue glass slide. "This was flashed to and fro at the window,—what else but as a signal to some distant watcher that the Charter is no more?"

The marshal ground his teeth as he recognized the force of Paul's inference.

"Then we may expect the Czar's envoy at an early date," he replied. "This villain," he continued, examining the window, "gained ingress by removing the concrete in which the bars were embedded,—a task which must have occupied two or three nights. What were the patrol on the roof doing to allow of this?"

"He himself was one of the patrol," said Paul, quickly adding, "Ah! that reminds me. There is a second fellow on the battlements whom I knocked senseless with his own rifle."

"Another? By heaven, Captain Woodville, you have done wrong in forgetting him. If he should have escaped with the tidings of what has been done!"

Zabern darted from the chamber, and, rushing past the three sentinels standing at the end of the corridor, he ran up a winding staircase that led to the roof. He was closely followed by Paul. The traitor-sentry was still lying in the place where Paul had left him. Zabern's examination did not last a moment.

"He will never play the traitor again," remarked the marshal. "You have shattered his skull for 227
him. And without a court-martial, too!" he added, dryly.

Having called up Gabor and his two companions, Zabern directed them to inter the two bodies, at the same time enjoining the trio to observe strict secrecy upon the events of that night; after which orders he proceeded to pace moodily to and fro upon the battlements in company with Paul, who, puzzled by one circumstance in the affair, sought enlightenment of the marshal.

"Since Orloff's letter authorizing the plot was not delivered to its intended recipient but fell into your hands, how comes it that the plot has nevertheless been carried out?"

"Two messengers may have been sent, each carrying a similar communication; or it may be that when Russakoff did not return within an assigned time, Orloff, growing alarmed, despatched a second letter, which, alas! has produced the desired result."

"Do you believe that the Czar is really accessory to this plot?"

"Accessory? Why not its author?" queried Zabern, ever ready to see in the Czar the incarnation of wickedness. "There is a Byzantine finesse about this plot which accords very well with the character of Nicholas, who has been styled a 'Greek of the Lower Empire.' But whether accessory or not, be sure that he will avail himself of the weapon with which the action of his subordinates has supplied him. You know who works the plot on this side of the Czernovese border."

"The Duke of Bora?"

"Who but he? And yet I still lack decisive proof of his treason. I fear I acted somewhat too hastily in slaying Michael the guardsman. I should have endeavored first to extract the names of his

principals. I am without hold upon the duke."

Paul here ventured to remind the marshal of Bora's suspicious conduct in burning his copy of the poet Æschylus. 228

"True," replied Zabern, "that the cipher despatch depends for its solution upon 'The Eumenides,' and equally true that the duke burns a book containing this same play. But what of that? 'Mere coincidence,' his defenders would reply. Besides, I dare not bring the duke to trial, either secretly or openly, upon this charge."

"'I dare not' from the marshal!"

"Why, consider. I should have to proclaim to his judges the startling fact that Czernova is now without her Charter, a secret that must be kept concealed from all men; nay, even from the princess herself. Captain Woodville, let not her Highness know of this loss. She has political embarrassments enough already. Why should we spring a new trouble upon her?"

"Count me tongue-tied, marshal, where the princess's peace of mind is concerned."

Zabern continued to pace backwards and forwards, glancing from time to time at the translation of the cipher letter which he still held in his hand, and muttering language, the drift of which was not altogether clear to Paul.

"What is this? Lipski's measure approved because its success would justify Russia in annexing Czernova. Ha! so that's the motive that prompts Lipski's action. His bill is aimed not so much at the Catholic Church of Czernova as at the Convent of the Transfiguration. Some inkling of the interior workings of that monastery has reached him, and he would fain turn the light of publicity upon them. No wonder that Orloff desires this bill to pass, and that he is sending Lipski rouble-notes with which to corrupt the Polish members of the Diet. 'Money shall be forwarded by usual route.' Ha! I'll set a watch on Lipski, and on those who visit him. 'T were no great shame if some of those rouble-notes should find their way to our own Exchequer. Humph! Czernova at present is 229
in a truly critical state. But, no matter," he added, with his face grimly set, "let perils come! They shall find me equal to them. What said Peter the Great: 'It takes three Jews to outwit a Russian'? It will take a good many Russians to outwit a Zabern."

CHAPTER XI

THE ENVOY OF THE CZAR

Next morning Paul by command attended in the White Saloon, where, under the sweet tuition of 230
the princess herself, he was initiated into the duties of his new office. Doubtless his affection for Barbara caused him to infuse into his work an earnestness and an energy which he might not otherwise have felt; however, be that as it may, when in the course of a few days Barbara avowed that he was an ideal secretary, she was uttering no empty compliment.

Those who had ascribed Paul's appointment to love on the part of the princess were somewhat perplexed on observing the demeanor of each towards the other, for, however tender and familiar their intercourse in private, they did not permit their affection to betray itself in public by look, word, or sign, Paul always evincing the modest deference of an inferior, while Barbara maintained towards her new secretary the authoritative dignity of a princess. The quick-witted Zabern was not to be deceived by this acting, but whatever he may have thought of the wisdom of the princess's choice, the prudent marshal kept his own counsel; for, strange as the statement might have sounded to the rest of the Czernovese ministry, Paul's sword, and his alone, would be absolutely indispensable to the security of the princess's crown in a certain contingency of the future, as the marshal, who was a far-seeing man, very well knew.

As regards Cardinal Ravenna that ecclesiastic had smiled sourly to himself on hearing of Paul's 231
appointment to the secretaryship, but he did not deem the time yet ripe to electrify Czernovese with the announcement that their princess was not Natalie Lilieska. Indeed on the third day after the interrupted duel Ravenna had received a summons from Rome to attend an important conclave there. The cardinal much preferred Slavowitz to the Vatican. Barbara's attitude of defiance towards himself, together with the friendship that had so suddenly sprung up betwixt Zabern and Paul, gave him much uneasiness; but as it was not to his interest to disobey the command of Pio Nono the cardinal had departed for Rome, and for a time Barbara was relieved from his menacing presence. But for a time only. He would return, and his return would be the beginning of trouble.

So passed many days during which the Duke of Bora remained a prisoner in the Citadel, though Barbara's action in detaining him there without trial had been the subject of a very pertinent question in the Diet by Lipski, the Muscovite deputy for Russograd, a question to which Zabern had curtly answered that it was a matter which did not concern the honorable deputy; whereupon the said honorable deputy made reply (and it took him two hours to say it) that inasmuch as the duke was a member of the Diet, it did concern both himself and every other

member; and that freedom had come to a pretty pass in Czernova when deputies who gave offence could be arrested by the arbitrary will of an irresponsible maiden, and could even find ministers to defend her action. When Lipski had sat down amid the cheers of his Muscovite supporters, Zabern deprived the tirade of most of its points by showing that the duke had made a voluntary surrender of himself with full knowledge that he would be detained during the princess's pleasure, and that if the duke on reflection had repented of the step he had taken, it was quite open to him to appeal to the law of Czernova, which was more powerful even than the will of the princess. 232

But Bora declined this course, knowing that if he should be tried in a legal way his sentence would be an imprisonment of six months; therefore, though chafing daily and secretly vowing vengeance upon Paul, he deemed it more politic to await the pleasure of the princess.

This debate in the Diet did not cause Barbara to release the duke one day earlier than the time previously fixed by her, for the fair ruler of Czernova could be extremely self-willed when she chose, as those who had opposed her had often found to their cost.

One morning as Paul entered the White Saloon to commence his usual duties, Barbara, with a glance at his face, said,—

"The mark has disappeared from your cheek, Paul, and therefore it is time for the release of Bora, according to my word; unless," she added, deferentially, "unless you are opposed to it."

Though lacking proof, Paul did not doubt that the duke was a traitor; and, moreover, he strongly suspected him of having instigated the assassination of Trevisa; otherwise it mattered little to Paul whether Bora was free man or prisoner.

He offered, however, no opposition to the duke's release, feeling not a little flattered that the princess should have submitted such a question to himself.

An order was accordingly despatched to the governor of the Citadel for the liberation of the duke; and now Barbara braced her mind to meet the fresh trouble that she felt to be in store for her. "For," she murmured to herself with a sigh, "when Bora shall hear from my own lips that he must abandon the idea of marrying me, he is certain to become my enemy." Here, however, Barbara erred in supposing that antagonism from the duke would be a new thing, inasmuch as Bora could hardly become a greater enemy in the future than he had been in the past. That same evening Paul in the quietude of his own compartment received a visit from Zabern, who looked somewhat more grave than usual. 233

"You were quite right in your opinion," he remarked, "that the blue light flashed at the window by Michael the guardsman was a signal to some distant watcher. The loss of our Charter has become known to others. The plot is developing. Whom, think you, we shall have in Slavowitz on the third day from this? Feodor Orloff!"

"Feodor Orloff!"

"None but he. He comes in the sacred character of envoy of the Czar, desiring an audience of the Princess of Czernova. You can guess the object of his coming?"

"To demand a view of the Czernovese Charter!"

"What but that?"

"Marshal, we do wrong in continuing to conceal the truth from the princess. She is of firm and courageous mind, and can bear to hear of the loss. If, after the envoy shall have formulated his demand, she should send for the Charter—what then?"

"But she will not send for it. I have counselled her to resist that, and every other demand made by the envoy. The princess will assume an attitude of graceful refusal. Trust me, she will know how to evade his demands. When it is a matter of diplomatic finesse and word-fencing, she can leave her ministers far behind."

Three days later at noon the Princess Natalie Lilieska—to employ her state-name—prepared to give audience to Count Feodor Orloff, the governor-general of Warsaw, and envoy extraordinary of his Imperial Majesty the Czar, Nicholas the First.

A few minutes previous to this interview a singular scene took place in a private apartment of the palace reserved for the use of Zabern. Just as the marshal was preparing to quit this sanctum to attend the reception of the envoy, the door opened, and Katina Ludovska appeared escorted by a file of troopers. The latter having saluted, withdrew, leaving Katina alone with the marshal. 234

"So my spies have found you at last," he said, with an air of grim satisfaction. "Where have you been hiding for the last two days?"

"It is true, then, that I have been arrested by your orders?" she cried with an angry flash of her eyes.

"Quite true. This apartment must be your abode for the next few days. See how pretty I have made it for you by introducing into it some of the princess's own furniture and hangings! True, the windows are barred, but you will not mind such trifles."

"Why am I here?"

"For the saving of your life. Do you know, Katina, that if you should shoot Orloff, I, as Minister of Justice, would have to see that you were hanged?"

"So you have divined my purpose?" she said, with a bitter smile.

"And must frustrate it. Come, Katina, be sensible. Would you violate the common law of nations? In assassinating the Czar's ambassador you would be playing the very devil with the public safety. Nicholas would have good pretext, then, for annexing Czernova."

"And you would rob me of my vengeance?" she said with a gesture of despair. "What other opportunity shall I ever have? Long ago would I have entered Russia to slay him, but that my face is known to all the police agents there. The moment I set foot over the frontier I should be seized and sent again to Orenburg."

"I sympathize with you, and probably if I were Katina I should be tempted to do even as she would. But I am Zabern, you see, and the princess's government is my first care. Were Orloff in neutral territory you might shoot him without hindrance from me—and glad would I be to hear of 235
his death—but on Czernovese ground—no! We should have to respect the devil himself if he should come in the character of ambassador."

The distant fanfare of trumpets now rose and fell on the air, signal that the envoy had arrived at the entrance of the palace.

The sound seemed to madden Katina.

"Is he come here in pomp, to be graciously received by the princess, to be feasted by her ministers, while I, his victim, scarred with the knout for refusing to become his plaything, am to remain still and do nothing to avenge myself? Your state policy to the winds," she cried passionately. "Stand aside. You shall not stay my hand."

She made as if she would have escaped from the apartment, but Zabern, on the watch for this movement, intercepted her and placed his back against the door.

"Nay, Katina, here you must remain till Orloff shall have quitted Czernova."

She recognized the futility of resistance, and turning away with her face very white, and speaking very slowly, she said,—

"Then if you prevent me from killing Orloff I will kill myself." Her words startled Zabern from his cynical composure. For a moment he hesitated whether to leave her, for Katina looked as if she fully intended to carry out her threat.

"Be it so," he said, coldly. "The guilt will not be mine. Better that maid perish by her own hand than that the liberties of a whole people be destroyed."

With that saying the marshal withdrew and having locked the door upon Katina, he darkly wended his way to the audience chamber.

With a view of rendering due honor to the imperial envoy it had been decided by Barbara that the reception should be attended with considerable pomp.

The Throne Hall was accordingly chosen as the place of interview—a magnificent apartment, its 236
vaulted roof fretted with gold. The frescoes and pictures were adapted to appeal to the patriotism of those present, portraying, as they did, some of the noblest events in Polish history; among them the envoy might have seen more than one Russian defeat by Polish arms.

Ranged round the saloon, with back to the wall, were the finest and loftiest of the princess's uhlans. Clad in gleaming breastplates, and with burnished lances erect, they seemed in their rigidity and silence more like statues than men.

Barbara occupied the throne, a slender gold diadem resting on her dark hair, a purple robe of state looped gracefully over her dainty white attire.

On each side of the throne were her ministers, and the chief of her nobility. Patriots to a man, animated by a spirit of defiance to Russia, ardent for the restoration of Poland, they formed a chivalric band ready to die in defence of their fair princess.

The scene was striking and poetical; and more than once Paul, who was present, received a secret glance from Barbara, as if she would fain invite him to contrast her present state with that of the forlorn maiden wandering in the Dalmatian forest; and truly, it was a marvellous and brilliant contrast.

The emissary of the Czar was a man of giant stature clad in a gorgeous uniform. His countenance gave indications of a harsh and arrogant nature, nor did his countenance belie him; as a matter of fact he had been purposely selected by the Russian ministry in order that his objectionable manners, combined with the catechetical character of his mission might provoke recriminatory language from the young and proud princess, language that might afford Russia pretext for a quarrel with Czernova. Therefore Barbara, warned of this beforehand by Zabern, had determined that the envoy's speech, however provocative, should not tempt her to play the enemy's game. 237

To Paul and Zabern he was an object of secret loathing, both as the knouter of Katina, and also as an accessory to, if not the actual author of, the plot which had resulted in the destruction of the

Czernovese Charter. Hard necessity precluded them from denouncing the hypocrisy of the man who came to demand the production of what he had himself destroyed.

"His grandfather did a noble deed," remarked Zabern in a whisper to Paul.

"What did his grandfather do?"

"He strangled a Czar," replied Zabern, grimly. "What?" he continued, noting Paul's look of surprise, "did you not know that we have here the grandson of Gregory Orloff?"

Unjust as it may be to be influenced by the ill-deeds of a man's grandsire, Paul nevertheless found his aversion to Orloff increasing, that such a creature should be appointed ambassador to stand in the presence of the pure and sweet Barbara! Orloff had removed his leathern gauntlets, and Paul could not avoid glancing from time to time at his large and knotted hands as if they were the same mighty palms that had squeezed out the breath from the windpipe of the unhappy Peter the Third.

With an odd mixture of humility and pride, the envoy knelt before the throne, and having presented his credentials to the princess, he rose again to his full height, and began to speak in a loud voice, and with a sweeping glance that took in the whole assembly.

"Nicholas Paulovitch, Autocrat of all the Russias"—Here the envoy proceeded to enumerate a variety of titles, among which there figured "King of Poland,"—a title which made the more ardent patriots whisper, "For how long?"—"Nicholas Paulovitch, as Head of the Holy Greek Church throughout the world, is interested in learning whether the Princess of Czernova has seceded from that Church." 238

Among Barbara's audience there was only one person who knew that secession was not a term to apply to her conduct. It was hard to be accused of apostasy, but political necessity compelled her to submit to the imputation.

"Though denying the right of the Czar to catechize the ruler of Czernova on such a matter I will, nevertheless, give answer," responded Barbara quietly. "I am not a member of the Greek, but of the Catholic Church."

"His Imperial Majesty would direct your Highness's attention to the Czernovese coronation-oath, the formula prescribed by the Charter."

"How is that oath phrased?" asked Barbara.

"Its precise wording is: 'I swear to maintain the Greek Faith.'"

"And it is my intention to maintain it. The Greek Church shall meet with no interference or oppression from the Catholic princess. Its liberty and privileges shall remain inviolate."

Orloff seemed quite dumfounded at this way of explaining the oath. Recovering from his surprise, he said,—

"That is not the interpretation put upon those words by the Czar. In his view 'maintaining' is synonymous with 'believing.'"

"Not so, count," replied Barbara, firmly. "On this point we have consulted not the forensic authorities of Czernova, who might be suspected of favoring our interest, but the leading jurists and statesmen of Europe, and they are unanimous in the opinion that the coronation-oath does not bind the ruler of Czernova to a personal belief in the faith of the Greek Church, but merely imposes the obligation of maintaining it as an establishment *in statu quo*."

That the Czernovese ministry had been seeking the views of Europe in the matter of the coronation-oath came upon Orloff as a complete surprise. If the princess had spoken truly, the consensus of opinion would seem to show that the argument by which Russia had been hoping to exclude her from the throne was lacking in validity. An appeal by Czernova to the arbitrament of the Powers on this question would enable the principality to sail triumphantly in the teeth of Russian ambition. 239

"I will report your answer to the Czar," replied Orloff, and with mortification plainly visible on his face, he proceeded to his next point.

"The Czar regrets the necessity which compels him to prefer against the state of Czernova a charge of the violation of his own jurisdiction in the matter of his kinsman, the Duke of Bora, who while on Russian ground was summarily arrested by order of the princess."

"Have you proof of this alleged violation of territory?"

"How?" exclaimed Orloff in feigned amazement. "'Proof'? 'Alleged violation'? The sacred word of his Majesty doubted?"

"I can of my own knowledge testify that his grace was on Czernovese ground at the time of his arrest."

"We have our witnesses, Baron Ostrova, the duke's secretary, and a Cossack sentinel."

A murmur of indignation ran through the assembly at the envoy's insolent language.

"And you have the word of a princess," replied Barbara, with dignity, "word purer far than that of twenty Ostrovas or twenty Cossacks. But we have a witness whom even the envoy of the Czar must respect. My lord of Bora, stand forth."

And to the surprise of those, unaware till then of his presence, the Duke of Bora, who had been keeping in the background, came forward and stood before the throne.

However great his sympathy with the envoy's aims, however much embittered with the princess by reason of his imprisonment, he durst not in her presence, and in the presence of other witnesses of his arrest, state anything else but the truth. 240

With a forced smile he bowed to Orloff, his fellow-conspirator.

"As the princess avers," he said, "there has been some error on the part of his Majesty's informants. My arrest took place on the Czernovese side of the frontier."

The envoy grew more disconcerted at this, his second failure to entangle the princess in his political net.

"A twofold offence has been committed in his Majesty's dominions," he continued; "first, in the matter of the duel itself, duelling being contrary to the law of Russia; and, secondly, in the matter of corrupting by bribes a soldier of the Czar, a Cossack sentinel."

"That honest Cossack," said Barbara, sweetly, "whose testimony you would have used against me?"

A smile rippled round the assembly.

Orloff flushed angrily.

"And therefore," he continued, ignoring Barbara's pointed remark, "on the ground that they have broken the law of Russia the Czar requires the extradition of the two offenders, his grace the Duke of Bora, and the Englishman, Captain Paul Woodville."

"The latter at all costs, I presume," said Barbara, caustically.

A second smile went round the assembly; their eyes with one accord turned towards the soldier who had foiled the Russian arms at Tajapore.

"Captain Woodville," continued Barbara, and none but Paul knew what pleasure it gave her thus to act as his champion, "Captain Woodville, though resident in Czernova, has not yet resigned the rights of a British subject, and therefore it will be more prudent on our part to wait till the English ambassador at St. Petersburg shall have notified to us his will in this matter. Till such time the question of the duke's extradition must likewise remain in abeyance." 241

Barbara's finesse in throwing her difficulty upon the broad shoulders of the British representative drew a sour smile from Orloff, who knew full well that that potentate would never sanction the extradition of an English officer on the grounds alleged.

Orloff was not slow to perceive the triumph of the assembly. It was clear to him that so far in the course of his embassy matters between Russia and Czernova would have to remain *in statu quo*, inasmuch as the princess's policy afforded no ground for quarrel. But Orloff had other arrows in his quiver, and he prepared to discharge them.

"The Czar would fain learn the meaning of the device on the new Czernovese coinage."

"What signification does his Majesty himself attach to it?"

"In his view the assumption of the arms of Poland implies a claim to the throne of Poland,—a claim at variance with his own lawful sovereignty over that realm."

"Count, tell us whose arms are those?"

And Barbara here directed Orloff's attention to a part of the roof where hung a faded white banner, its centre embroidered with the figure of a double-headed eagle in black thread, a banner captured in old time from Russia, and therefore no agreeable sight to the eyes of a Muscovite general.

"They are the arms of Russia," replied Orloff sullenly, and wondering why he should be asked the question.

"Yet that double-headed black eagle was the arms of the Greek emperors of Constantinople," said Barbara. "If my armorial device implies an aspiration for the throne of Poland, then must the Czar be credited with an aspiration for the throne of the Sultan. Are the chancelleries of Europe to understand that such is his aim?" 242

Again the assembly smiled. Nicholas's intention of seizing upon "the sick man's inheritance" was strongly suspected at this time, but it would not have been politic on the part of Orloff to affirm it. A scowl stole over his face at this, his fourth defeat.

"As regards the arms of Poland," said Barbara, "I, as a descendant of Polish kings, have every right to use such arms upon my coinage."

"But has Czernova the right to issue a coinage of its own apart from the Russian currency? Is it

permitted by the Charter of Catherine?"

"Marshal, cause a copy of the Charter to be brought."

"Oh! no, your Highness," said Orloff quickly, and interchanging a significant smile with the Duke of Bora, a smile noticed and understood by Zabern, "not a copy. We would see the original document itself."

Barbara stared hard at the speaker, having no suspicion of his sinister purpose in preferring this request.

"You would see the original document?" she repeated. "This is truly a singular demand. As the Charter was signed in duplicate, why not consult your own original, which, if history err not, was deposited in the archives of the Kremlin?"

"We would, if it were there; but seek as we may, we have never been able to find the alleged document!"

"Alleged document?" repeated Barbara, knitting her brows. "Did you say alleged?"

"Yes," retorted Orloff, with an insolent sneer that brought all the blood to Barbara's face, and caused the more fiery portion of the assembly to half-draw their blades. "Yes; for the truth is," he continued, glancing defiantly around, "Czernova never had any such Charter as is commonly alleged. How the first so-called Prince of Czernova contrived to impose upon Russia the fiction of a Charter granted by Catherine is indeed inexplicable; nevertheless the council of the empire has 243
received ample proof that such document has never existed."

Barbara's lifted hand quelled the wrathful murmurs.

"And without such Charter," she said, "it necessarily follows that—will you finish the sentence for me, Count?"

"It follows that Czernova is as much a part of the Czar's dominions as the rest of Russian Poland."

"Proceed a step farther, Count. Say that in reigning over Czernova I have become liable to a charge of treason in having usurped the authority of the Czar."

"His Majesty will permit you to plead ignorance."

"We commend his sweet graciousness. But I can claim the word of the Czar himself that I am the lawful ruler of Czernova, inasmuch as you, his chosen representative, have greeted me with the title of 'Princess' and 'Highness.' If you now deny what you have previously affirmed; if you now declare it to be treason to acknowledge me as princess—then you have caused the Czar to be guilty of treason against the Czar! Truly, Sir Envoy, you conduct your embassy in strange and perplexing fashion, and we would pray you to be more clear of speech. For as touching your allegation that the Charter never had existence, by your own mouth are you contradicted, seeing that you yourself have cited from that Charter the words of the Czernovese coronation oath. Are we now to understand that in your desire to exclude me from the throne, you did not scruple to quote from a mythical document?"

Surely no ambassador can ever have blundered more than Orloff! He was evidently better qualified to bully a regiment or to preside at a knouting than to conduct diplomatic negotiations. Thick-skinned as he was, he felt the sting of Barbara's remarks, and his great face reddened. He had thought to gain an easy victory over a young girl, whereas it was now clear that in this contest of the tongue, the princess was decidedly his superior. Zabern smiled grimly, much 244
regretting that Katina was not present to be a witness of her enemy's humiliation.

"In using the terms 'Princess' and 'Charter,'" said Orloff, "be it understood that my language was provisional."

"And so," said Barbara, with sovereign disdain curving her lips, "it would seem that for fifty years Czernova has been enjoying its freedom by virtue of false statements. Marvellous that during all this time Russia has never once raised her voice in protest! Truly it says but little for the wisdom of her statesmen in thus permitting themselves to be duped for a period of half a century! But we would draw the Czar's attention to a decree of the Congress of Vienna, and worded thus: 'The principality of Czernova shall be governed according to the Charter granted by Catherine the Second; and Russia, Austria, and Prussia are herewith empowered to uphold the provisions of the same.' That Congress must have had reason for believing in the existence of the Charter, else how could they have spoken thus? In the face of that decree is the Czar so ill-counselled as to deny the existence of the historic Czernovese Charter?"

"That is his attitude, and nothing but its production in my presence will set his doubts at rest."

"Marshal Zabern is the Warden of the Charter. He can quickly prove that there is such a document preserved in the Eagle Tower."

"Pardon me, your Highness, not in the Eagle Tower," observed Zabern. "When your Highness appointed me Warden of the Charter, I had the document removed to—to—well, for obvious reasons I prefer to keep its place of deposit a secret. The document you refer to in the iron coffer of the Eagle Tower is a copy merely."

The natural unaffected way in which Zabern spoke almost imposed upon Paul himself. It certainly

imposed upon Orloff. Never did human countenance change so quickly as did that of the envoy at this moment,—the moment of his anticipated triumph. 245

The Charter in the Eagle Tower a transcript merely, and not the great original! Then his plot had resulted only in the destruction of a worthless document. Czernova stood as firm as ever!

Orloff's mortification found a reflection in the face of Bora. Paul marked them both, and never did falsehood give him such pleasure as the falsehood told by Zabern.

"After such testimony on the part of the marshal," observed Barbara, "you will no longer doubt."

"Then I am to understand," said Orloff, "that you refuse to permit the Czar's envoy to inspect the Charter?"

"The Czar exceeds his authority in making such demand," replied Barbara with dignity. "By the decree of the Congress of Vienna, Austria and Prussia are equally concerned in this matter of the Charter. They have not yet called its existence in question. To a joint embassy from the three Powers doubt not that we shall pay due regard."

Barbara's attitude in thus associating the courts of Vienna and Berlin with that of St. Petersburg upon the point at issue was diplomatically correct, as Orloff very well knew. Unless the two other states should act in concert with Russia, the latter had no power to compel Czernova to produce its Charter. And it was quite within the range of probability that Austria and Prussia, from motives of political jealousy, would decline to co-operate in an affair from which Russia alone was to gain.

Therefore, reflecting upon all this, Orloff began to perceive that his plot for the destruction of the Charter, even granting that it had been successfully carried out, was by no means so decisive a blow as he had at first been led to suppose. Czernova might be without its title to autonomy, but this difficulty remained—how were the Czar's ministry to establish the fact? 246

A gleam of cunning suddenly appeared on the face of the envoy. He had solved the problem.

"Is it not a part of the coronation-ritual," he asked, "that the original Charter of Catherine shall be placed upon the altar, and that the ruler of Czernova with hand laid upon it shall swear to maintain its provisions?"

"That is so," responded the princess; "and we especially invite you, Count, to a seat in the chancel in order that you may witness the ceremony, and set your doubts at rest."

"I shall certainly avail myself of the privilege offered me," said Orloff with a peculiar smile, incomprehensible to Barbara, but perfectly understood by at least two persons present.

Fear fell upon Paul, if not upon Zabern. Though it might be easy now to equivocate, and to devise plausible excuses for withholding the Charter from the envoy's view, yet on the great day of the coronation, the day that should be the brightest in Barbara's life, the fatal truth would have to be revealed. How was it possible to replace the vital document that had been destroyed by fire!

"I have discharged my embassy," said Orloff, bowing.

"Count Radzivil," observed Barbara, turning to the premier, "on you devolves the honor of entertaining our guest, Count Feodor Orloff, so long as he shall remain in Czernova."

But the envoy, his asperity not at all softened by the princess's courtesy, bluntly averred his intention of setting out for St. Petersburg within an hour from that time.

"Loyalty to the Czar forbids me to dally in his service."

"The Czar is honored in possessing an envoy so discreet. My lords, we will retire."

Zabern was the first to draw his sabre, and to hold it aloft over the head of Barbara; the rest of her adherents standing in a double line imitated his action, Paul among the number; and thus the fair sovereign, with a smile and a blush, and yet maintaining an air of dignity withal, passed out 247
beneath an arcade of brilliant sword-blades, and amid a saluting cry from her soldiery of "Long live the Princess of Czernova!"

She had gained a diplomatic victory over Russia, but none knew better than Barbara herself that her triumph was merely temporary, and that Russia would return to the charge at the first opportunity.

The assembly broke up. Orloff went back to the Hôtel de Varsovie, and summoning those of his suite who had not attended him to the Vistula Palace, he set off immediately for Russia. The Duke of Bora, with bitterness rankling at his heart, followed the princess to her apartments, determined to hear from her own lips whether it was her intention to break off the marriage to which she had been so long pledged. The ministers sought the palace gardens, where they discussed the envoy's defeat.

"The Czar will not submit to such rebuff," said Radzivil, gloomily. "Yet how could the princess speak and act otherwise if she must maintain her dignity?"

"Aha!" grinned Zabern to Paul, as they remained behind in the Throne Hall. "Did you mark the two traitors—the fall in their faces? They are somewhat doubtful now as to the success of their plot. Orloff is returning to Russia more than half-convinced that the Charter is still intact."

"He has a lingering suspicion, however," remarked Paul. "You have staved off the difficulty—but only for a time. What will happen on the coronation-day when Orloff beholds a charterless altar?"

"Bah! I'll remedy that," replied Zabern, adding as he turned away, "shall I see you at the bal masque this evening?"

"Without doubt," answered Paul; for had not Barbara promised to dance with none but himself, a course she could take without exciting suspicion as to the relationship existing between herself and her secretary, inasmuch as her mask and fancy costume would disguise her identity. "Without doubt," he continued, "for I am young, which is to say, frivolous. But you, marshal, will you be there? I thought you had a soul above music and dancing?" 248

"And such have I. But the masquerade held this evening by command of the princess is something more than a mere *fête*; it is a cloak to cover a certain political enterprise—what, you shall learn when the time comes. Captain Woodville," added Zabern, mysteriously, "at the bal masque of to-night history will be made. Till then, farewell."

With this Zabern turned away, and ascended to the lofty chamber in which he had left Katina.

He opened the door, not without a certain fear that she might have fulfilled her threat of suicide, but to his relief he saw her sitting pensively beside the barred casement. There was a pistol by her side, a weapon which the marshal intuitively felt was a loaded one.

He had expected to be received with reproachful invective, instead of which she met him with a glad light in her eyes. She seemed totally transformed from the vengeful maiden whom he had left an hour previously. Zabern noted the change and wondered.

"Your imprisonment is over, Katina," he said, gently. "Orloff has departed."

"I know it," she replied, "for I have seen him."

"You have seen him," muttered the marshal, glancing suspiciously at the pistol, and doubtful now as to whether it was loaded.

"Yes. In departing Orloff and his suite took their way through the palace gardens and passed within view of this very window. I could have over-reached you, marshal," she continued with a smile, "for, as my pistol is with me," she added, tapping the weapon, "I could easily have brought him down." 249

"But the thought of Czernova stayed your hand?"

"No!" she answered, "no," murmuring the words faintly, as if speaking more to herself than to him, while at the same time the soft color mantled her cheek, "it was the thought rather of him whom I love that kept me from the deed."

"Him whom you love?" repeated Zabern, with a touch of surprise in his voice. "Love? Humph! I am glad to hear that word from you, Katina."

"Why so?" she asked, casting a glance at him, and averting her eyes again immediately, when she observed how steadfastly he was regarding her.

"It shows that you are human if you can be touched by that sentiment," laughed Zabern. "I have been accustomed to think that you were even as myself."

"In what way?"

"Insensible to love. You know that my father led me in childhood to the sacramental altar, and there made me swear to do my best to destroy a great empire. Complete devotion to that patriotic vow—"

"Has extinguished in you every other emotion," murmured Katina.

"True. *Delenda est Muscovia* is written on my heart in letters of fire. Patriotism is the only passion that has ever possessed me. But with youthful maiden it should be different. Because Poland is not free must you, too, steel your heart against natural affection? And so my pretty Katina has a sweetheart? And his name?"

Why Katina should look frightened, and why her face should turn so white, completely mystified Zabern. As she remained silent he repeated his last question.

"His name? No! I cannot tell it; at least—not—not to you; though others know it. Nay," she added, wildly, "even Russakoff, the spy, can taunt me with it in the public street." 250

"Others know it, even Russakoff?" repeated Zabern. "And yet you would keep the name from me? Well, be it so," he added reproachfully. "I should have thought, Katina, that you would have let your old friend, the marshal, be the first to congratulate you."

Strange that Zabern, so quick to divine the plans of his enemies, should be so dull at reading a woman's heart! Yet so it was. He really had not the least idea as to the cause of Katina's agitation. He thought it behoved him to find out. He had nursed her as a child on his knee, and now with the tender familiarity of an old friend he placed his hand beneath her chin, and though she attempted a faint resistance, he succeeded in raising her drooping face to his own. The strange wistful look in her dark eyes that met his for a moment only, and then fell again, was a

complete revelation to the marshal. It told her secret as clearly as if she had spoken it.

"Katina!" he murmured, huskily, quitting his hold of her, and starting back.

Katina herself sank on a seat silently and with averted face, the very picture of confusion.

"What! am I the man?"

If silence gives assent, then Katina had assented.

There was a brief interval of silence. Then the affair seemed to present itself in a humorous light to the marshal, for he began to laugh.

"You love me! Me! the greatest knave in Czernova! a one-handed grim old fellow like myself, twice your age, with an ugly face, made—thanks to the Russians!—still more ugly by sabre-cuts. You have a strange taste, Katina, when there is many a young and handsome Pole willing to make you his bride."

"But none like Zabern," she murmured, yet hardly daring to say the words. 251

Though the marshal looked upon Katina as the fairest maiden in Czernova after the princess, yet the thought of wooing her had never entered his head; but now, while he contemplated her as she trembled like a leaf, looking the more charming in her confusion, the grim old warrior felt within himself a power unfelt till that moment.

"Katina," he said, and never before had she heard his voice sound so gentle,—"Katina, you may kiss me—if you like."

"It is your place to come and kiss me."

Zabern was making a forward movement, but ere he could take the second step Katina was within his arms, and clinging as if she intended never to release her hold. And it was evident that the marshal found his new experiences far more attractive than the business required of him as a minister; for when a minute afterwards a secretary tapped at the door with the announcement that he was bringing state despatches, Zabern, in a loud voice, bade him begone and carry the despatches to the—well, a certain dark gentleman popularly supposed by the Muscovites of Czernova to be a near relation of Zabern himself.

"And have you never before loved any woman?" asked Katina, as she sat on the marshal's knee, and seeming to be quite at home there, too!

"Never; but now I shall love all women for your sake."

"I had rather you did not," said Katina, opening wide her eyes; and then as she nestled closer within his embrace she murmured, "this is more pleasant than to hang for the slaying of Orloff."

"Much more," remarked Zabern. "To shoot him would have been a very inadequate retribution for what he made you suffer. One swift pang, and all would have been over. Now I will point out a better way of avenging yourself—a way that shall cause Orloff to eat out his heart in vexation of 252 spirit."

"But, Ladislas," answered Katina, for she had begun to call the marshal by his Christian name: "Ladislas," she repeated, with a pressure of his arms, "love has extinguished the desire for vengeance."

"Humph! well, vengeance or no vengeance, there is a certain work to be done, and a work, too, that must be kept so secret that I dare not trust any one with the knowledge of it, save you, my second self."

"If it be a task that can be performed by a woman, let me be the one to do it."

"Good! Is not this little hand," said Zabern, raising it to his lips as he spoke, "that can use pistol so well equally skilled in handling the pen?"

"And how can my penmanship serve you?" asked Katina, with wonder in her eyes. "Oh, I see," she continued, with a mock pout, "you wish me to become your secretary, and when I bring despatches to the door, you will tell me to go to Satan, as you did to that poor fellow just now."

"This is how your pen can aid me," said Zabern. "Listen, while I reveal to you a state secret unknown even to the princess and her cabinet."

And here the marshal proceeded to whisper his communication, adding at its close, "Now you understand the work I require of you?"

"O Ladislas, Ladislas," she said, gravely shaking her head at him, "I believe you want to hang me, after all."

"I have hanged men for similar work—true. But this deed is a pardonable one, seeing that it is for the good of the state. 'The end justifies the means'—that's Cardinal Ravenna's maxim; and if a holy churchman adopts that policy, why should not the profane Zabern likewise? The plan I have suggested is the only way of defeating the knavery of Orloff, and of saving Czernova from the 253 power of the Czar. Your hand is more expert and delicate than mine, else would I not set it to this task. I dare not entrust its execution to any other, for it would be hazardous to admit a fourth

person to the secret. The knowledge of it must be confined to Katina, Captain Woodville, and Zabern. You will do this?"

"I will do anything you ask of me," replied Katina, simply.

CHAPTER XII

THE POLISH CONSPIRACY

On the evening of the day that had witnessed the envoy's defeat a masked ball was held, and the halls and gardens of the Vistula Palace were alive with gay revellers. 254

The centre of attraction was the spacious ball-room, where, beneath golden chandeliers that shed a radiance brighter than that of the sun, moved a crowd of Czernova's noblest and fairest.

The picturesque character of the dresses, the glow of color, the perfume of flowers, the gayety of the music, and the rippling laughter of fair masqueraders, formed a scene bewildering and intoxicating to the senses.

Amid this throng moved Paul Woodville in eager quest of the masked Barbara, who had refrained from telling him what costume she would assume. If he were a true lover he ought to be able to penetrate her disguise, she had playfully observed, and if he failed to discover her, why then the want of discernment on his part should bring its own punishment.

As he moved here and there witching glances were cast at him by masked ladies, for as regards figure and dress, few were more qualified than Paul to serve as a cavalier.

He had adopted the old Polish costume. With a four-cornered cap adorned by a waving heron plume, silken "contuschi" that fell in graceful folds around well-shaped limbs clad in tight silk hose, short boots decorated with gold lace, and a curved, diamond-hilted sabre swinging lightly 255 by his side, Paul walked among the men present, the noblest figure of them all; and many whispering inquiries were interchanged as to his identity.

At length Paul caught sight of a graceful figure, robed in the silver-gray habit of a nun, standing solitary by the entrance of a corridor leading from the ball-room.

He watched and saw her with a pretty shake of her head repel in silence the addresses of three cavaliers in succession.

As Paul drew near, the lady suddenly turned her head and flashed a glance at him through the eyelet-holes of her black silk vizard. That glance was sufficient, and in another moment he was by her side.

"Fair lady," he whispered, "why this sad costume?"

"Is it not the garb of innocence?" returned the lady in a low and obviously disguised voice.

"True, but it is also the negation of love."

"And why should I not frown upon love?"

"Because you would be gainsaying the vows you made to me in the old Greek temple."

"Ah, Paul! you have discovered me," she whispered, her lips smiling beneath the lace of her mask. "Now I, in turn, will ask, 'Why this old Polish costume?'"

"I adopted what I thought would most please you."

"And it does please me," she replied with a tender light in her eyes. "And it is suitable to the character of the revelation you shall hear to-night. Come, we will not dance just yet. Take me to the gardens, to the Long Terrace."

Conscious of something odd in her manner, Paul, drawing her arm within his own, conducted Barbara from the brilliant ball-room to the quieter scene without, and on reaching a retired corner of the marble terrace, he seated her beside himself.

It was a lovely midsummer night. The air was pure and temperate, and alive with the plash and 256 sparkle of numerous fountains. The silver orb of the moon, set in a dark-blue sky, and the colored lamps gleaming everywhere among the foliage combined to produce a poetical glamor that might have gladdened the eyes even of Titania herself, the Queen of Fairyland.

"Who could have thought," said Paul, after complimenting Barbara upon the admirable manner in which she had out-manœuvred the Russian envoy, "who could have thought when we first met in that Dalmatian forest that a great empire would one day demand my extradition, and that you would bravely refuse to grant it!"

"And I will not surrender you, Paul. No, not if it should cost me my throne."

How sweet it was to hear such words from this fair princess! She who was a match for the Czar's envoy to set such store by him! This maiden pressing tenderly to his side scarcely seemed to be the same person who that morning had filled a throne with such dignity. Nor was she. Love had entirely transfigured her.

"Paul," she said quietly, "I have told the duke that I cannot marry him."

"How did he take the tidings?"

"He said little, but his face expressed much—"

"Much—?"

"Hatred, then, if you will have the word. Excluded from the cabinet, and from the command of the army, he is not likely to sit down quietly under such dishonoring. And," she added with a sigh, "he is a political force to be reckoned with."

"Sweet princess, give me leave to resume the duel with him, and you shall soon be rid of one whom you seem to fear."

"No, Paul, no," she said, laying her hand affectionately upon his; "promise me that you will not fight with him again." 257

"Does the princess command?"

"No; your Barbara entreats," she said with a soft pressure of her arm. Who could resist such an appeal as this?

"I do not doubt your ability to overcome the duke, for Zabern has told me of your feat in the *salle d'armes*; but you forget that duelling is illegal in Czernova. Would you have me send you to the Citadel? Moreover, if you should slay the duke it would become the aim of every Muscovite fanatic to slay you. As it is, I fear you will carry your life in your hands, when men come to learn that you are the cause of the duke's rejection. Czernova is but semi-civilized, and assassination is the favorite political weapon here. I would, Paul, that you would do even as Zabern."

"And what is Zabern's habit?"

"He wears chain-mail beneath his clothing."

"An uncomfortable arrangement, I should say. For my own part I will rely on my right arm and on my good sword. Fear not for me. But, dearest Barbara, will you not unmask, and let me see your face, if only for a moment?"

She shook her head tantalizingly.

"I would if I dared, but who knows what eyes may be watching me at this moment? There are Russian spies at this masquerade, so Zabern assures me. I must not be recognized in this guise. Ah! who comes here?" Paul felt her arm trembling upon his, as there moved slowly along the moonlit terrace a tall and stately figure robed in a monastic habit. His cassock was identical in its shade of gray with the nun's gown worn by Barbara, and like hers, it was marked on each shoulder with a red cross.

Having reached the place where Barbara sat, the monk paused, surveyed her attentively for a moment, and then spoke,— 258

"May a brother claim a few words from a sister of the same order?"

"How know you that I am of the same order?"

"The 'Transfigured' cannot be hidden from each other."

"Paul," she whispered, "I must speak with this man alone for a short time. Remain here."

The princess arose, and in company with the newcomer paced slowly to and fro along the terrace, repeatedly passing Paul.

This proceeding on the part of Barbara was somewhat strange, but not altogether incomprehensible. Paul had learned that the word "Transfigured" was used by the patriots of Czernova in the sense of one who, from a state of despair as regards Poland, had passed to a state of hope. Its English equivalent was "conspirator." The term naturally associated itself with the Convent of the Transfiguration, and hence Paul concluded that this masked individual was a monk sent from that very mysterious monastery with some important message.

The conversation, of which he did not overhear one word, occupied about fifteen minutes, and ended by the monk passing some papers to the princess, who immediately concealed them upon her person, an action performed so quickly that Paul almost doubted whether it had really taken place.

This transference of documents accomplished, the monk glided quietly away, and the princess returned to the side of Paul.

Ere he had time to question Barbara on the nature of the interview, Paul saw with surprise a second masked friar making his way along the terrace. He was robed so precisely like the other that Paul at first thought it was the same individual; but a nearer view showed that he was of

shorter and more massive build. There could be no doubt that he, too, was bent on having an interview with the princess. 259

Was this sort of thing to last all night?

Barbara guessed his thoughts, and her teeth gleamed in a pretty smile beneath the silken fringe of her vizard.

"Patience, Paul," she whispered. "This is the second and last. There in the distance comes Marshal Zabern, and as I must have no secrets from you he shall act as my interpreter."

On the approach of the monk the same interchange of words took place, evidently a pre-arranged signal, and, as before, Barbara arose and joined in conversation with the new-comer.

A moment afterwards another figure came upon the scene whom, in spite of the mask and black domino, Paul recognized as Zabern.

The marshal sat down by Paul's side and fixed his eyes upon the princess, who, a little distance away, was stooping over the balustrade of the terrace, apparently engaged in the act of writing.

"What think you that the princess is now doing?" asked Zabern.

"One might fancy her to be setting down the name of a cavalier upon her dance-programme, but I suppose such is not the case?"

"Captain Woodville," returned the marshal impressively, "you are witnessing an event destined to change the map of Europe in the near future. The princess is signing a secret treaty with Louis Kossuth, the uncrowned King of Hungary."

Paul's surprise and wonderment can be better imagined than described.

"The princess has signified to me her wish that you should be admitted to the circle of 'The Transfigured;' and convinced as I am of your loyalty to her, I offer no opposition, knowing that if you should not altogether approve of our policy, you will at least keep our secret. It is our custom 260 to exact an oath from initiates—"

"I will vow upon the Four Evangelists—"

"Upon your sword if you must swear at all, as our Polish chevaliers of old when at church they recited the 'Credo.' Our initiatory oath can be dispensed with in your case. Your promise is sufficient. The word of a soldier should be sacred. You pledge yourself to secrecy?"

And when Paul had assented, the marshal continued,—

"Know, then, that Princess Natalie is at the head of a secret enterprise,—'conspiracy' would be the Czar's word,—an enterprise for the liberation of Poland from the Russian yoke. The two monks are agents in this affair. The first is a Pole bringing documents from the headquarters of the patriots at Warsaw. The second is a Hungarian from Buda charged with the secret treaty from Kossuth. The masquerade of to-night was held with a special view to their meeting the princess, no other way being so well suited to divert suspicion; for with spies all around us it behoves us to act with caution. The traitor Bora, at this moment in the ball-room, little knows what is happening only a stone's-throw off."

"But what interest hath Hungary in this affair?"

"Hungary is herself preparing to revolt from the despotic rule of the House of Hapsburg. Next spring she will rise under Louis Kossuth, whose triumph is certain. Hungary will again take her place among the free nations of Europe. We in Czernova sympathize with the Magyars, but as matters are at present we dare not openly aid them with our army. Austria would cry to the Czar, and the Czar, availing himself of the opportunity, would lose no time in annexing Czernova. We are thus necessitated to give our aid in secret. Money is the sinews of war; we therefore lend the Hungarians money on the understanding that they in turn shall aid us when the day of Poland 261 comes."

"And how much are you advancing?"

"One hundred and eighty million roubles; not paper money, mark you, but sterling gold in coinage and plate."

The vastness of the sum—thirty millions in English money—filled Paul with amazement.

"How has Czernova contrived to raise such a large amount?"

"But small part of it comes from Czernova. It represents the free-will offerings of Polish patriots throughout the world for a long course of years. Noble ladies have given their jewellery, the peasant his kopek, ay, often his last kopek, to the good cause."

"And where is this treasure stored?"

"In the Convent of the Transfiguration. Yes," continued Zabern, "we aid Hungary, and Hungary will aid us when the great day of vengeance shall come."

"And when will that be?"

"'Russia's danger is Poland's opportunity,'—that is the Czernovese motto. We are waiting till Russia shall be engaged in war with England."

"Is such war likely to occur?"

"It is a certain event of the near future. In the School of Naval Engineers at Sebastopol," said Zabern, beginning a statement, whose relevancy Paul failed at first to perceive, "is a complete representation of all the forts that line the Bosphorus with their towers and bastions, together with the most minute details respecting the creeks and currents of that famous strait; so that the Russian War Minister sitting at Sebastopol with these models before him could direct the whole plan of an attack upon Constantinople."

"Well?"

"Imperative orders have just been issued from St. Petersburg commanding the naval captains to study these models; lectures upon them are given daily to the naval cadets. Bearing in mind 262
Alexander's saying to Napoleon, '*Il faut avoir les clefs de notre maison dans la poche*,' what inference do you draw?"

"That Russia is preparing to seize the Sultan's dominions?"

"Precisely. Will England permit this?"

"Not while 'Old Pam' is living."

"'Old Pam'?" said Zabern, puzzled till Paul explained. "Ah! your grand Lord Palmerston, the friend of oppressed nationalities! Well, then, we shall soon have an Anglo-Russian war. Your gallant armies and fleets will be seen ere long off the shores of the Baltic and Euxine. My faith in the bravery of your countrymen enables me to prophesy that they will be victorious. And then will come the day of our triumph!"

The patriotic Zabern, whose days from boyhood had been spent in struggling for the freedom of his fatherland, was now fully convinced that success was at hand.

"Yes," he continued, his eye kindling with enthusiasm; "yes, in the hour of Russia's humiliation, when her treasury is exhausted and her armies demoralized by defeat, there will be an upheaval of Poland; no feeble flash-in-the-pan this time, but a grand national uprising, north, south, east, and west. Little Czernova will be to the fore with her army of twenty thousand under Zabern; the Magyars of Hungary will pour across the border with Kossuth at their head; there will be a combination such as will compel Russia to part with the kingdom she wickedly stole fifty years ago. When I was born Poland was free; I shall die seeing her free again. And the princess—"

"Yes, and the princess?" inquired Paul, as Zabern paused in his utterance.

"Will be a princess no longer. The patriots have agreed that Natalie Lilieska, as the sole surviving descendant of the ancient Jagellons, shall be the queen of resuscitated Poland. Queen? ay, and 263
why not empress? Is she not worthy of an imperial crown?"

Paul's head fairly swam at these words. The sweet, fair, dark-haired maiden who loved him, and who clung to him with such touching fidelity, a future queen—empress! He knew that Barbara would never waver in her attachment to him; to what dazzling heights, then, was he destined to rise?

He glanced at the two gray moonlit figures in the distance—the monk and the nun—conspiring for the creation of a kingdom. How romantically impossible seemed this scheme looked at beforehand! and yet how many of the noblest events in history have been previously declared impossible by political prophets!

"As touching your secret treasure," remarked Paul, "is there not a bill before the Diet,—a bill to seize all monastic wealth and to convert it to state purposes?"

"At this very moment the Diet is putting its veto upon the measure. To-night was fixed for the second reading. Our Polish adherents are assembled in full force to reject it. After to-night we shall hear no more of Lipski's bill. It would be an ill day for us if it should pass. Ostensibly directed against Czernovese monasteries in general, it is really aimed at the Convent of the Transfiguration. The Czerno-Muscovites have a suspicion that the monks of that establishment do other things besides offering perpetual prayers for Poland, and the suspicion is well founded. If public commissioners enter that monastery they will discover not only our store of gold, but likewise the documents relating to our patriotic conspiracy; and more than these, plans and models of Russian fortresses, supplied by our adherents in the Czar's army, who are not a few. The convent contains arms for one hundred thousand men, gunpowder sufficient to blow up all Czernova, and in addition new military engines. Some of the inmates of that convent devote their 264
time to chemistry and mechanics; and in the coming struggle betwixt Poland and Russia we shall have the first use of inventions destined to revolutionize the old-fashioned methods of warfare. In the light of these inventions the numbers of our enemy will count for little. Now you understand why the Convent of the Transfiguration must be kept from the eyes of prying intruders."

"I likewise grasp the meaning of that passage in Orloff's cipher despatch,—'The success of Lipski's bill is Russia's justification.'"

"I admit the truth of the statement. The secrets of that convent, if brought to the light of day,

would prove that the resources of Czernova are being utilized for the emancipation of Poland. And have we not the right to attempt the recovery of the kingdom stolen from our forefathers? Nevertheless, in the opinion of European statesmen fettered by conventional precedents, our aim would amply justify the Czar in annexing the principality. Therefore Lipski's bill must not pass."

At this juncture Barbara, having finished her interview, returned to the side of Paul; Zabern, desirous of a word with the Hungarian envoy, went forward to intercept his departure.

"So Zabern has told you of our enterprise? What think you, Paul?"

"May the crown of Poland indeed be yours, Barbara. And yet—and yet—the higher you climb the greater the gulf between us."

"You shall rise with me, Paul," she said, placing her hand tenderly within his. "You, who gained fame in India, shall gain a greater fame in the coming war, and then there will be no obstacle to our union. 'Let the princess marry merit and not title,' men will say."

This gave a new aspect to their love-affair,—an aspect which appealed to Paul's dashing and 265
adventurous spirit; like the knights of a bygone age he would fight both for the winning of fame and also for the hand of a lovely princess. If the patriotic conspiracy should end in failure, alas! for Barbara's hopes, but so much the better for his prospect of a final union with her. His good fortune, he trusted, would enable him to emerge safely from the political ruins of Czernova, and with Barbara he would retire to his ancestral hall in Kent, where they would spend the rest of their days in quiet happiness, and recall with melancholy pleasure the time when they had plotted and fought for the crown of Poland.

Zabern, having parted from the Hungarian messenger, sat down on the other side of the princess, and for a long time the trio talked of the conspiracy. Among other matters, Paul learned that Katina was cognizant of the conspiracy, and that all the cabinet likewise were participants, with the exception of the two permanent members—Cardinal Ravenna and Mosco the Greek Archpastor.

"I can understand your Highness's motive in keeping our enterprise concealed from a Muscovite prelate," remarked Zabern; "but with regard to Ravenna is not the case different? He would be extremely useful to us in drawing the Catholic clergy of Poland into the plot."

"Marshal," said Barbara firmly, "I know the cardinal, and I know that he is not to be trusted."

Their attention was diverted at this point by the approach of two masked figures, each habited, like Zabern, in a black domino.

"Radzivil and Dorislas returning from the Diet," observed the marshal. The premier and his colleague recognized the princess and Zabern by their costumes, but glanced inquiringly at Paul, uncertain as to his identity.

"Captain Woodville, my lords," replied Barbara, responsive to their thoughts. 266

Paul drew aside, permitting Radzivil to take a place beside Barbara, a courtesy which the premier gracefully acknowledged.

Dorislas with folded arms leaned in silence against the marble balustrade of the terrace. As far as can be judged of men who are masked and cloaked, both the premier and the finance minister were in a very gloomy mood. Paul intuitively felt that they were the bearers of bad tidings.

"Has your Highness signed the treaty with Kossuth?" began Radzivil.

"An hour ago. The Hungarian envoy has departed with it."

"I fear, princess, that the treaty will have to be rescinded. We are doomed to lose our treasure."

"Say not so, count. The Catholic Poles form the majority in the Diet; why should they desert both their princess and their religion?"

"This evening, as your Highness knows," explained the premier, "there took place the second reading of the Secular Appropriation Bill. During the course of the debate Lipski presented to the House certain statistics appraising the wealth contained in the various monasteries of Czernova. These statistics were, of course, purely imaginary—"

"For," intervened Dorislas, "if he knew the whole truth concerning the Convent of the Transfiguration he would have put the amount at four times his actual estimate."

"Just so," responded Radzivil, a melancholy smile appearing beneath his mask. "Well, he attempted to prove by means of these statistics that the monastic wealth would enable Czernova to be tax-free for the next three years. The House eagerly caught at the bait. All the Muscovite faction voted with Lipski as a matter of course; and many of our side, charmed with the idea of a 267
three years' remission of taxation, likewise cast their suffrages in favor of the bill. The members of our party do not know the reason why the ministry are so anxious to throw the ægis of their protection over the convents, and, of course, we dare not take them into our confidence. The result is, and with extreme regret I announce it to your Highness, that the second reading of the Appropriation Bill has been carried by a majority of eleven."

"Ha!" muttered Zabern to himself. "Orloff's gold is doing its work."

"Was there a full house?" asked Barbara.

"Your Highness, every member of the Opposition was present; and on our side there were but three absentees,—the marshal, the cardinal, and the duke."

"The duke?" said Barbara. "I fear that his vote will be given against us now, which will raise the majority to twelve. The marshal's vote and the cardinal's would reduce it to ten. When does the third reading take place?"

"It has been fixed for this day week."

"Ten votes against us," murmured the princess. "The transference of six votes from the opposite side would place us in a majority of two. My lords, we must win over those six votes, if no more."

"I fail to see how it's to be done," commented Radzivil gloomily.

Silence fell upon the little group. Truly, with the Charter destroyed, and with Lipski's bill on the eve of triumphing, Barbara's throne was in desperate jeopardy.

"Cannot your Highness refuse to sign the bill?" asked Paul.

"By the terms of the Charter," replied Barbara, "the ruler of Czernova is compelled to sign every bill passed by the Diet. In the event of refusal the Diet has the right of calling upon Russia, Austria, and Prussia, to enforce the signature." 268

"And Lipski and his Muscovite crew would not be slow in appealing to them," remarked Dorislas. "And we know what the intervention of the three Powers would mean."

"If I should dissolve the Diet, and order a fresh election—?" began Barbara.

"We should have the same majority against us," replied Radzivil.

"Insert a clause in the bill," suggested Paul, "to the effect that the Convent of the Transfiguration shall be exempted from the operation of the bill."

"Useless," answered the premier, "since that convent is the one particularly aimed at."

"A clause giving her Highness sole power to appoint the Commissioners."

Dorislas grinned.

"I moved that amendment myself, but it was rejected."

"Play Cromwell's game: on the day of the voting station troopers at the doors of the Diet-house to exclude obnoxious members; or the night before carry some off and detain them till the voting is over."

"Unconstitutional," said Barbara. "To secure the rejection of the bill by such methods would be to court the intervention of the three Powers."

"Secretly withdraw the documents and the treasure from the convent."

"With soldiers patrolling the precincts?" said Dorislas. "Lipski, subtle knave that he is, has artfully turned our own bayonets against us. Every one passing out of the convent is carefully searched."

"Bribe the soldiers."

"Lipski is alive to that manœuvre. Day and night his creatures are watching that monastery."

"Let the monks, then, bury the arms and the treasure within their own walls."

"Lipski, who is certain to be appointed one of the Commissioners, will dig up every foot of ground and pull down every brick in his endeavors to discover something of disadvantage to the ministry," returned Dorislas. 269

Paul made no more suggestions; how, indeed, could he, when it passed the wit of the premier himself to devise a plan adequate for defeating the manœuvres of Lipski?

"If the bill should pass," continued Dorislas, "I see but one way out of our difficulty. The monks must contrive to steal out some dark night, leaving a slow match burning in the powder-magazine."

"And we must lose the fruit of years?" said the princess, mournfully.

"Why, your Highness, consider what would happen otherwise. Here, close to the Russian frontier, and commanding the highroad to Warsaw, is an edifice, presumably a monastery, but in reality a fortress and an arsenal. True, Abbot Faustus can destroy the treasonable documents; yet, nevertheless, here will be found, because impossible to be annihilated or concealed, a vast store of gold, rifles for one hundred thousand men, and other war *matériel*. Vain would it be for the Czernovese ministry to put an innocent interpretation upon their attempts to keep the interior workings of this convent from public view. The Czar would be wanting in common sense if he should not see in all this a menace to his own dominions. His ministers, in fact, already have their suspicions, and hence they are more eager than Lipski himself for the passing of the Appropriation Bill."

"I note that the marshal has not yet spoken," smiled Barbara; "sure proof that he is developing some plan. Now, Zabern, your enemies call you 'the Asp of Czernova'; you must maintain your character for serpentine wisdom by extricating us from our dilemma."

"Fear not, your Highness. Lipski shall not triumph. On the third reading I, without resorting to bribery, threats, or violence, will persuade the Diet to reject his bill." 270

"How?" asked Radzivil, who, desirous as he was of seeing the measure defeated, yet nevertheless felt aggrieved that Zabern should propose to do what he himself, the premier, despaired of doing; "how? what is your plan?"

"To reveal it beforehand would ensure its defeat. My plan is one which requires absolute concealment."

"Even from the princess?" said Barbara.

"From the princess most of all," replied Zabern with a peculiar smile.

This statement was naturally productive of great surprise on the part of Barbara.

"We will accept your saying, marshal, though a hard one, and put a check upon our curiosity. You have never yet failed to keep word with me—"

"And shall not fail now, your Highness."

"Then," said Barbara, rising, as there came floating on the air from the ball-room the slow, dreamy music of a Hungarian waltz, "then if Zabern be on the watch, the princess may dance. Captain Woodville, your arm. You were promised a dance. Let me redeem my word. But first, marshal, guard these papers for me. It would be dangerous to let them fall upon the ball-room floor."

And Barbara, having handed to Zabern the documents which she had received from the Polish envoy, moved off towards the ball-room leaning upon the arm of Paul.

This bestowal of favor upon her secretary caused Radzivil and Dorislas to stare suspiciously at each other; but ere they could interchange thought on the matter, their attention was diverted by the sound of many voices coming from the direction contrary to that taken by the princess.

Looking up, the three ministers beheld moving along the terrace towards them a company of masqueraders, ladies and gentlemen, fancifully costumed. All were laughing and talking gayly, being evidently in the best of spirits. 271

"Whom have we here?" muttered Radzivil, eying the throng.

"He who would supplant the princess in the sovereignty," replied Zabern, recognizing the central figure, who was garbed as Peter the Great. "A barbarian aping a barbarian."

"The Duke of Bora?"

"The same, surrounded by his favorites and satellites, all jubilant with the thought that Lipski's bill will triumph, and that the fall of the princess is at hand. Let them laugh. Their gayety will turn to mortification after next week's vote shall have been taken. Let us uncover and tempt the traitor to address us. I am curious to learn what he will say."

As the duke and his friends drew near the trio unmasked. Bora, catching sight of them, stopped in his walk, and then came slowly forward attended by his followers, all intent on enjoying the presumable mortification of the ministers.

"A sad blow this, dear marshal, to the feelings of the princess," began the duke blandly, and lighting a cigar as he spoke. "It's quite certain that the Appropriation Bill will pass."

"Pass? Oh! dear no. Nothing of the sort," replied Zabern in his most cheerful manner.

"We have just been informed that the second reading has been carried by a majority of 'eleven.'"

"The third reading has yet to come."

"Now, Saint Nicholas give you wisdom!" cried Bora, amid the scarcely repressed laughter of his creatures. "Are you clinging to the hope that the men who voted one thing to-night will vote the contrary seven days hence?"

"I *know* that they will," returned Zabern, coolly. 272

"There is certain to be a full House next week—one hundred and twenty members, should Ravenna have returned from Rome in time to take part in the division. Out of that number I venture to prophesy that seventy will be found to reject the bill."

"Giving the ministry a majority of twenty?"

"Giving the ministry a majority of twenty," repeated Zabern.

Bora could only attribute this utterance to mere bravado.

"Marshal, I should like to know with what amount you will back your opinion," he sneered.

"With whatever sum your grace is prepared to back yours."

"I will stake five thousand roubles—" began the duke.

"Oh! your grace, make it more than that," said Zabern affably.

"I will double the amount. I will wager ten thousand roubles that the votes given against the bill will fall short of seventy."

"Let me have that wager in your handwriting, dear duke," said Zabern blandly. "The like sum from me if ministers have not seventy votes on their side, or a clear majority of twenty."

When the written pledges had been interchanged Radzivil spoke, addressing the duke in somewhat indignant tones.

"And do you bet, then, on the success of a measure known to be hateful to the princess?"

Bora shrugged his shoulders.

"This is a bill on which the best of friends may differ, as is shown by the schism among your own Polish adherents. Remember," he added, "there must be no underhand work to secure the passing of this bill, or my wager becomes null and void. There must be no bribery on the part of the ministry." 273

"We leave bribery to Lipski and his principal, Orloff; or shall I put the word in the plural, your grace, and say principals," said Zabern with a meaning smile.

Bora gave a slight start, which did not escape the other's notice.

"You see, dear duke," drawled Zabern airily, "we know all that is going on behind the scenes. Governor Orloff in his palace at Warsaw pulls the strings, and the puppets dance in the Diet of Slavowitz. Next week I shall manipulate the strings, and you shall see the figures dancing to my tune."

The duke began to grow somewhat uneasy under the knowledge displayed by Zabern. In his previous contests with the wily Pole he had always come off second-best. Was Zabern again to triumph over him?

"You talk boldly, marshal," he said with a supercilious smile, "but I think I shall win my roubles."

So saying he passed on with his company.

"Humph!" muttered Radzivil, gloomily, "it's quite clear that, vexed with the princess for excluding him from the cabinet, he will now throw in his lot with the Opposition."

"Therein appearing in his true colors," replied Zabern. "There he walks, a would-be sovereign, attended by a would-be court. *Carpe diem, Bora, carpe diem!* Enjoy your brief span of existence! The 15th of September next will see your end."

"The 15th of September?" repeated Dorislas. "That is the day of the princess's coronation."

"True; and if I rightly forecast the future, Dorislas, the duke will not outlive that day."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FATE OF THE APPROPRIATION BILL

By a singular turn of circumstances the day on which the fate of the Appropriation Bill was to be decided, and possibly with that bill the fate of Czernova itself, was likewise the day appointed for the annual review of the Czernovese army. 274

This marshalling of troops took place in a spacious plain a few miles to the north of Slavowitz, and was presided over by the princess herself.

The muster fell considerably short of that of the previous year, due to the fact that many of the troops were engaged in the duty of keeping guard over the numerous monasteries of Czernova.

Still, in spite of absentee regiments, the review was a fine sight, even in the eyes of Paul, accustomed as he was to much more striking displays. His frequent expressions of admiration gave pleasure to Barbara, who had been somewhat dreading his criticism, anticipating that he, as a tried soldier, might disparage the merits of an army, whose mettle had never yet been tested in actual battle.

A peculiar and significant feature of the scene was the proximity of the Convent of the Transfiguration, which overlooked the place of the review. Barbara's landau was drawn up almost within the shadow of its gray Gothic towers.

The weird chant of the monks, that dirge which had never ceased day or night for fifty years, was clearly audible, mingling with the more stirring and martial sounds without, and contributing to impress Paul with the curious character of Czernovese civilization. 275

The precincts of this convent were patrolled by sentinels whom the Diet had sent thither to prevent any removal of monastic treasures on the part of ecclesiastics who might feel tempted to evade the provisions of the pending bill.

With bayonets flashing in the sunshine, the sentries paced slowly to and fro, their presence grimly reminding the princess that there was a greater than herself in Czernova, to wit, the Diet. That legislature, regardless of her wish in the matter, might that very night pass a measure destined to disclose the secrets of a conspiracy of which she was the head.

Nothing had occurred during the course of the week to lead to the opinion that the Diet would change their views respecting the Appropriation Bill; on the contrary, judging from the tenor of the debates, it seemed probable that the majority in its favor would be increased on the third and final reading.

No wonder then, that, though she smiled pleasantly upon each regiment in the grand march past, winning all hearts by her gracious demeanor, Barbara nevertheless felt a terrible depression of spirit at the thought of the coming night,—a depression which all Zabern's assurances could not remove.

The review being over, the princess and her suite set off for Slavowitz. Paul and Radzivil sat side by side in the same landau with Barbara, while Zabern rode in the rear at the head of a troop of horse.

About a mile from the scene of the review the road for a considerable distance was bordered on each side by thick woods.

As the carriage rolled on, the postilions beheld in the distance two men by the wayside sitting upon the trunk of a fallen tree. They were fellows of rough appearance, seemingly woodmen or charcoal-burners; one, with a black beard, was holding a newspaper in his hand and apparently reading from it, while his companion, a red-bearded individual, seemed to be listening. 276

When the princess's landau was a few yards distant, these two men sprang to their feet with startling quickness, and then it was seen that the red-bearded fellow held a revolver in his hand. Raising the weapon he pointed it at the princess, and took aim so quickly that the postilions had not time to raise a warning cry.

Barbara, though her face was set in the direction of her would-be assassin, saw nothing of his action, being occupied at the time in an animated conversation with the premier.

One shot whizzed its flight clean through the brim of her hat; a second bullet sang past her temple so closely as to scorch her skin with its fiery glow.

Then as if overcome by sudden terror at the boldness of their deed, or possibly fearful lest the advancing cavalry should prevent their escape, the two men turned, without waiting to see whether the shots had taken effect, and plunged into the woodland bordering the roadside just as Zabern's voice was heard thundering the word, "Fire!"

A dozen carbines rang out simultaneously, but the discharge came a second too late.

Paul and Radzivil, sitting with back to the horses, knew nothing of what was passing, till informed by the report of the firearms, and by the sudden change that came over Barbara's face, for the sight of two men running away, one of whom carried a smoking pistol, apprised her of the peril she had escaped.

"Princess, you are not hurt?" cried the premier, looking far more terrified than Barbara herself.

"No," she answered in a faint voice, but with a smile, "they have missed me." 277

"Thank heaven!" said Paul. "Count, remain with the princess while I give chase to the villains."

The startled postilions had reined in their horses, bringing the landau to a standstill. Paul sprang from the vehicle just as Zabern with the guards came galloping up, witnesses of the deed which they had been unable to prevent.

Perceiving that the contiguity of the trees prevented the passage of their horses, the troopers flung themselves from the saddle, and dashed after Paul, who had now disappeared in the woodland. Foremost among them was Zabern with his orderly Nikita.

Plunging along a narrow path thick-set on each side with leafy boscage, Paul caught sight of the two retreating figures a few yards only in front of him. They were running in single file, their running being of a somewhat singular character, and very like the leaping of a kangaroo, the cause of which Paul soon divined.

He had drawn out his pistol, and while still forging ahead he took aim at the rearmost figure, but the shot flew aloft almost perpendicularly, for in the very act of firing he stumbled over some hidden obstacle.

Though dazed by concussion with the hard earth he was instantly on his feet again, observant of

the fact that the two men had now disappeared round a bend in the path. He dashed swiftly onward, but had scarcely taken a dozen steps when he was once more brought to earth by the same sort of contrivance that had caused his previous fall.

The desperadoes had taken precautions to secure their retreat. Strong wires at irregular distances, placed at the necessary height, and concealed by the profusion of weeds and bracken, had been drawn transversely across the path from tree to tree. The contrivers of this device, aware of the exact position of the wires, had cleared them by a series of leaps, and hence their kangaroo-like motions. 278

Those following Paul were tripped up in similar manner by the wires which, spread over a distance of about a hundred yards, retarded the pursuit, and enabled the fugitives to obtain a good start.

At a point a little way beyond the last wire the path branched off in three directions through the wood, and a momentary halt took place on the part of the pursuers, doubtful as to which track they should take, since the fugitives themselves were lost to view.

The quick eye of Zabern detected a bright-colored object lying a few feet away down the left-hand path. It proved to be a red cap, decorated with a paltry leaden medal of the Czar, a cap declared by Nikita to have been worn by the black-bearded individual.

"Then, forward," cried Zabern, taking the lead. "They have fled this way."

The trio set off again, the extreme narrowness of the path compelling them to run in single file. The ground, hard at first, gradually assumed a moist and muddy character. Its appearance brought Zabern to a sudden stop.

"There are no foot-prints here. We are on the wrong track. Back again. The villains must have flung that cap into this path purposely to mislead us."

Chafing at their loss of time, they ran back to the place where the tracks diverged. Other troopers had come up by this time, and while Paul and Zabern and Nikita took the middle track others hastened along the right-hand path.

"They may not have followed the path at all," said Paul, as he hurried along in the rear of Zabern. "They may be lying hidden in the wood."

"True; but we'll post through first, and if we find no trace of them in the road beyond, I'll draw a cordon round the wood through which they shall not be able to break." 279

"Marshal, did you see the face of him who fired?" asked Nikita.

"Not clearly."

"Russakoff the spy, or may I turn Muscovite."

"The red-bearded fellow was not tall enough for Russakoff," answered Paul. "In fact both men struck me as being remarkably short of stature."

"My eyes have not erred."

"Have it so, then," replied Paul, as he stumbled onward. "Let us but lay hands upon the villains, and we shall soon ascertain whether you be right."

A run of a few minutes' duration brought them through the wood to the highway beyond. A quick glance to the right threw Zabern into a paroxysm of rage.

Far off on the white dusty road which stretched onward in a straight line, till it seemed to touch the horizon, three black objects were visible, each moment dwindling in size.

"The villains have escaped us," cried Zabern. "They had horses tethered here with a third man to watch them. See! here are their hoof-marks in the clay. They'll be over the frontier within ten minutes. I warrant they are well provided with Russian passports."

The trio hurried back for horses, but, by the time they had passed them through the wood, the pursuit had become a jest.

Night had fallen over Slavowitz.

Excitement was prevailing both within and without the Diet.

Beneath a glorious starlit sky in the great Zapolyska Square, which fronted the broad and stately flight of steps leading up to the entrance of the Sobieskium or Diet-house, now ablaze with light, was a vast concourse of people, awaiting the stroke of twelve; for at midnight the vote was to be taken on the Secular Appropriation Bill—a measure which had been fiercely debated night after night during the course of five weeks. 280

Poles, Muscovites, and Jews formed the bulk of this throng, but there was a considerable sprinkling of other elements. Tartars, Cossacks, Hungarians, Roumanians, Servians—representatives of all the motley nationalities of Eastern Europe, elbowed and jostled each other,

talking, singing and cursing in a very Babel of tongues.

Diverse, however, as was the crowd, it fell politically into two sharp divisions, the one eager for the passing of the bill, the other eager for its defeat. There was no neutral party in that square.

So high did the spirit of faction run that Zabern's landau on its appearance was overturned by a body of malevolent Muscovites, and the marshal was compelled to lay about him with his sabre till the military came to his rescue.

The indignant Poles retaliated a few minutes later by making an onset upon Lipski, and that deputy escaped only after a severe mauling.

The game once begun was continued by both factions, so that it became almost impossible for the succeeding deputies to reach the Sobieskium, except under police or military escort, or unless attended by a strong circle of their own adherents.

Cheers were given by the hostile sections as their respective favorites were seen safely mounting the steps of the Diet-house beneath the brilliant light of the suspended lamps; the singing of the Polish and the Russian Anthems went on simultaneously all over the square; there were ugly rushes, displays of fisticuffs, scenes of wild disorder, that continued to deepen as the night advanced and the throng increased.

Dorislas, who commanded the mounted cuirassiers drawn up four deep all round the Sobieskium, was obliged to accord the crowd considerable license, lest a too frequent interference on the part 281
of the military should lead to worse mischief.

The tumult and din that filled the Zapolyska Square penetrated the Sobieskium to the distant chamber where the Sejm or Diet sat, the Ministerialists or Poles to the right, the Opposition or Muscovites to the left of the dais, where was the chair, table, and bell of the President Brunowski, he who had been one of Paul's opponents in the *salle d'armes*.

The presidential bell was in constant requisition on this particular night, for the debate had taken an extremely acrimonious turn. The temper of many of the deputies had not been sweetened by the treatment they had received at the hands of the populace.

Lipski boldly accused the ministers of hiring ruffians whose orders were to stop certain members of the Opposition from reaching the Diet-house and thus to prevent them from recording their votes.

Zabern, pointing to his own frayed uniform and to the ugly scratches on his face, replied that though it would be easy to retort with a "*Tu quoque*" he would refrain; that the charge was absurd, for the mob had bestowed their favors impartially upon both sides of the House.

The Duke of Bora sat in the chamber, for though no longer of cabinet rank he was still a member of the Diet, and he gave clear indication of the way in which he intended to vote by vacating his usual seat and taking a place next Lipski himself.

Lesko Lipski, deputy for Russograd, editor of the "Kolokol," an anti-dynastic newspaper, leader of the Opposition, and author of the Secular Appropriation Bill, was, as regards appearance, the very antithesis of the typical Russ. He was slim and beardless, and dressed in the latest Parisian fashion, though his costume at that moment, owing to the playfulness of the mob without, was not quite the same as when it had first left the tailor's hands. He had black beady eyes, and his 282
habit of constantly questioning ministers upon every topic under the sun seemed to have permanently impressed his face with an eager, hungry look.

There was in the air of the chamber that nervous feeling of expectancy which always arises when the issue of a contest is problematical. On the previous evening every member of the Diet, Pole and Muscovite alike, had departed with full conviction that the Appropriation Bill would pass.

The attempted assassination of the princess had given a different turn to the matter by creating a feeling of sympathy for her, a feeling which was likewise extended to her political views. To secure the triumph of a measure known to be hateful to the young princess in the first hours of her joy at escaping the assassin's bullet seemed an unchivalrous proceeding; and those of the Poles who had hitherto regarded the bill with favor now began to reconsider their attitude.

The attempt on the princess's life, deplorable from one standpoint, was from another decidedly advantageous, and the ministry were hopeful that they would capture from the Opposition the minimum six votes necessary to secure the rejection of Lipski's measure.

Half-an-hour before midnight Zabern rose to wind up the debate for the ministerial side.

His rising was the signal for a hostile ebullition from the Muscovite members who dreaded Zabern's oratory. Not that the marshal was particularly eloquent; far from it. He had all a soldier's contempt for speech-making and for the "men of words," as he was wont to term the Czernovese deputies; a military dictatorship was more to his liking than a democratic legislature. Hence his voice was rarely heard in the chamber, but when he did speak it was always to the point, and his plain, blunt way of putting matters had often decided wavering voters, and at that 283
moment there were a good many wavering voters.

At first Zabern was unable to obtain a hearing. Every time he attempted to speak, his words were drowned in a terrible din, occasioned by the clamor of voices, the stamping of feet, and the

banging of desk-lids. Though the Duke of Bora did not join in yet, as he made no attempt to check the tumult, Zabern strongly suspected him of being its secret instigator.

For fully two minutes President Brunowski continued to swing his bell, but without producing any effect upon the Opposition, whose intention was plainly to continue the uproar till midnight, in order to prevent Zabern from addressing the assembly.

Brunowski whispered a few words in the ear of an attendant, who left the chamber and returned almost immediately with a file of gendarmes. In the sudden stillness that followed upon their entrance, Brunowski sternly announced his intention of suspending both from the sitting and from the voting all future disturbers of order, a threat which effectually silenced the Muscovite clamorers, who felt that in the present conjuncture they could not afford to lose a single vote.

The marshal, being free to speak, began by affirming the obligation imposed upon him of making some comment upon the recent attempt to assassinate the princess.

At this statement Lipski rose.

"Mr. President, I must protest. The marshal is not in order. He is evading the subject of the debate, which is the Secular Appropriation Bill."

"The marshal will doubtless show the relevancy of his remarks to the matter under discussion," returned Brunowski. As President of the assembly he tried to be impartial, but he could not always forget that he was a Pole.

"The House will understand presently," continued Zabern, "why the honorable deputy wishes the 284
name of the princess to be kept out of the question. Who is responsible for this day's outrage? Not the wretched dupe, who, happily for Czernova, missed his mark. No! as well blame the bullet, or punish the pistol. Sir," continued Zabern, addressing the President, "the real authors of the act are the persons who by their words and writings have labored to create in Czernova a spirit of hostility to its legitimate ruler. And of those persons," thundered the marshal, looking round upon the assembly, "the deputy for Russograd is the chief."

Lipski was on his feet again in an instant.

"Mr. President, must I sit and hear assassination imputed to me without raising my voice in protest?"

"Certainly not. The marshal must withdraw the charge, or prove it."

"The proof is forthcoming. The two miserable wretches who fired at the princess were seen before the deed seated at the wayside, and strengthening their wicked determination by reading from a certain newspaper. I already see the editor of that journal beginning to look uneasy, for the name of the journal is the 'Kolokol,' and its editor is one Lesko Lipski. The would-be assassins were diligent students of the 'Kolokol;' they evidently regarded its editor as a great political teacher."

"How do you know?" inquired the voice of the duke.

"Well, I judge from this circumstance," answered Zabern, producing a dirty copy of the 'Kolokol' and unfolding it. "Here is the identical paper dropped by the two men in their flight. It contains an article entitled, 'Harmodius the Patriot;' and on the margin of this article pencil-notes have been scrawled, such as 'Good!' 'True!' 'This seems reasonable,' and the like; nay, more, we have here in badly spelled Russian this sentiment: 'Death to the girl-tyrant!'" 285

At this point Zabern held up the journal for the inspection of the assembly.

"Now I need scarcely remind the House that Harmodius was a man of ancient days, who assassinated the ruler of Athens, and was in consequence honored as a splendid patriot by his fellow-citizens. Why does the editor of a journal, supposedly devoted to current politics and affairs of to-day, publish an article on an event that happened twenty-three centuries ago? Simply because he wishes to inculcate the doctrine, that, as it was a fine piece of patriotism to assassinate the ruler of ancient Athens, so would it be an equally fine piece of patriotism to assassinate the ruler of modern Czernova."

"I deny the inference that you draw from that article," cried Lipski.

"Two at least of your readers understand what you mean, and have acted upon your hints. Now, on seeing practical effect given to your teaching, you would cravenly shirk the responsibility for your part in this outrage. Be honest; do not run away from your own words. Perhaps the House will bear with me while I read a few sentences from this 'Killing No Murder' essay."

"You must read the whole of it, or none," said Brunowski, "inasmuch as one passage may be modified by another."

Zabern adopted the President's first alternative, and read the entire article, which, although written in guarded language, with a view of preserving its author from the possibilities of legal indictment, was obviously a plea for the assassination of rulers who have become obnoxious to their subjects.

At the conclusion of the marshal's reading, there was a storm of hisses from the Right. The Left sat in sullen silence.

"It is known to all that on coming to the throne the princess, with one stroke of her pen, abolished the censorship of the press. And this," continued Zabern, pointing to the criminatory article in the "Kolokol,"—"this is how the privilege has been requited! Such, gentlemen of the Diet, such are the sentiments—such is the character of the deputy for Russograd! And yet this teacher of assassination has the effrontery to come forward and solicit the votes of the Poles—the Poles, who, whatever may be their faults, are at least men of honor, and loyal to their princess. Vote for this bill? Not if it were the finest piece of legislation ever devised by the wit of statesmen. Those who can may separate the man from his bill; for my part, the two are identical. Every suffrage cast on the side of Lipski, every vote given in favor of this bill, is a vote in favor of assassination." 286

"No, no," cried the Left. "We are not assassins."

"That statement shall be proved by your votes. Let those who repudiate the work of the assassin, let those who rejoice at the escape of the princess from death, show their sympathy by rejecting a bill which is hurtful to the best feelings of the princess."

And now ensued a dramatic tableau pre-arranged by the wily Zabern. A small door opened upon the right of the presidential chair, and Barbara herself entered the hall of debate, to the utter confounding of the deputies, whose first thought was that she had come to dissolve the Diet.

Brunowski immediately vacated his chair in favor of the princess, who took her place on the dais, but remained standing. Her mien, graceful and bright, offered a pleasing contrast to that of the angry debaters. Even the Muscovites were forced to admit that if beauty of person should entitle one to a crown, their princess would have carried off all the diadems of Europe.

The silence that came over the chamber caused the din of voices in the square to be much more plainly heard. The tumultuous sounds without lent additional excitement to the scene within. 287

The princess glanced slowly around the assembly, and then, as if moved by a sudden idea, she removed her hat,—the same hat that she had worn on her return from the review. In the act of taking it off the light from behind gleamed through a hole in the brim, a mute appeal to the sympathy of the House, the more striking because unintentional.

"Your Highness, do not uncover," cried Brunowski.

"I crave your pardon, Mr. President," replied Barbara, and her utterance sounded like a clear silvery bell after Brunowski's magnificent bass voice, "but I understand that the usages of this House require that only one person shall remain covered."

This was said in reference to Lipski, who, while all the rest of the deputies were standing uncovered, sat with his hat on his head.

Zabern, with his sabre clinking against his spurs, strode across the floor of the House.

"Fellow!" he muttered, grinding his teeth, "if you do not remove your hat, my troopers shall nail it to your pate."

And Lipski, seeing Zabern's savage demeanor, prudently doffed his head-covering.

"Mr. President," said Radzivil, "I move that the deputy for Russograd be suspended from this sitting for treating the person of the princess with contempt."

"Oh, no, Count," observed Barbara. "Let it not be said that we sought to deprive a deputy of his vote."

When the ringing of the President's bell had repressed the cheers evoked by this remark, Barbara proceeded to explain the reason of her appearance.

"Mr. President, Ministers and Deputies," she began, speaking with self-possession and dignity, "it may be said that the princess ought not to intervene in the affairs of the Diet, but should remain quiescent, and simply register the decrees of the majority. But, sir," she added, with a graceful inclination of her head towards Brunowski, "your princess is not an automaton, but a human being with feelings that can be moved. I feel strongly on this bill, and I do not hesitate to say so." 288

She paused for a moment, and then resumed.

"I shall always act with regard to the Constitution. If this bill should pass I shall affix my signature."

Cheers arose from the Left.

"But I trust the House will not let it pass."

Counter-cheers arose from the Right.

"If my sentiments can in any way influence the decision of deputies, I would appeal to them, irrespective of party, to reject this measure."

With this she bowed to the Diet, and withdrew from the chamber, amid enthusiastic cries of "Long live the Princess of Czernova!"

The chivalry of the Poles, if not of the Muscovites, was evoked. The assassin's pistol-shot, the

princess's personal appeal, had produced more effect than all the oratory of the five previous weeks.

As soon as Brunowski had resumed the presidential chair, Zabern again spoke.

"The princess has made it a personal question between herself and Lipski. Well, gentlemen, you have seen the princess, and—you see Lipski," he continued, pointing to that deputy, who looked far from amiable at that moment. "Can any man doubt," he added, with fine scorn, "can any man doubt for whom he shall vote? Let it not be said that—"

Zabern paused. A sound louder than any they had yet heard penetrated to the chamber. A mighty roar was rising from the Zapolyska Square. Twenty thousand voices blending into one proclaimed that the time had come for deciding the great controversy. The iron tongue of the cathedral-clock was booming forth the hour of midnight. 289

"The vote will now be taken," cried Brunowski, amid a scene of indescribable excitement.

"I move that it be taken by secret ballot," exclaimed Zabern.

"I oppose it," said the Duke of Bora.

The President put the question to the assembly, and the proposal for secret ballot was carried by acclamation.

Zabern smiled grimly as he observed the secret glances of rage interchanged between Bora and Lipski. By this manœuvre on his part they were prevented from learning whether those Poles who had secretly taken the gold of Orloff would vote according to promise.

In the Diet of Slavowitz, when voting by ballot, each deputy took from his desk one of a set of discs. These discs were of two colors, white for affirmation, black for negation.

Concealing the disc between the fingers and the palm—carrying it openly was forbidden on pain of forfeiture of the vote—each deputy walked past the presidential table, and placing his hand within the mouth of a large bronze urn, dropped the disc.

As a precaution against the artifice of giving more than one vote, the names of the deputies were marked on the roll as each person passed by, and the number of counters checked by this arrangement.

In prescribed order the deputies quitted their seats, and filed past the table, and for a few moments nothing was heard but the clink of the metallic discs as they fell within the urn. Brunowski took no part in the division, but had the right of a casting-vote.

"One hundred and nineteen members have voted," said the chief clerk, looking up from the register, after the last suffrage had been given.

This was a record division, being the largest that had ever occurred in the history of the Czernovese Diet. Every deputy, with the exception of Cardinal Ravenna, was present and had voted. 290

The great question was how had they voted?

Amid a hush like that in the chamber of the dying when the fatal moment has come, the chief clerk, at a sign from the President, slowly inverted the urn, and poured out the discs upon the red table-cloth.

In their excitement the deputies rose and stood upon seats and desks, craning their necks forward, eager to catch the first glimpse of the black and white counters, eager to learn which of the two was the prevailing color.

To the waiting populace in the Zapolyska Square the time taken in recording the votes and in counting the same seemed unnecessarily long.

A great sensation had been created when the officials of the House reported to those near the doors that the princess herself had appeared in the Diet with an appeal for the rejection of the bill. The story gathered in detail as it passed from mouth to mouth, and men on the outskirts of the crowd told how the princess with tears in her eyes had gone down on her knees before the assembly, and how Zabern, sabre in hand, had stalked up and down the chamber threatening to cut the throats of all who would not vote against the bill.

And when the hour of midnight began to toll, and Dorislas was seen to fling himself from his charger, and hurry up the steps of the Diet-house, for the purpose of recording his vote within the chamber, the interest grew to fever-heat.

Wild work had been going on in the square, but now the knowledge that the great division was taking place had a somewhat quieting effect upon the crowd. All eyes were turned towards the grand entrance, brilliant with light that streamed far out into the darkness, for from this entrance the result was to be proclaimed. 291

Ten minutes after midnight there was a movement at the head of the stairs; the gendarmes

parted, and the white-haired clerk of the House was seen holding in his hand the paper inscribed with the momentous result. Dorislas appeared at the same instant and mounted his charger in readiness for the riot which he knew to be imminent.

Standing at the head of the steps the clerk raised his hand, and at that signal the crowd, which but a moment before had been surging this way and that, became instantly immobile. The square was a sea of upturned faces, each gleaming with painful curiosity. Even the cuirassiers extended along the front wall of the Diet-house forgot for a moment their discipline, and bent sideways in the saddle, eager to hear the result. The stillness of death prevailed. Not a movement. Not a word. Not a breath.

"People of Czernova," said the clerk, speaking in a voice that penetrated to every portion of the square, "in a House of one hundred and nineteen members, thirty-nine have voted for the Secular Appropriation Bill, and eighty against it. The measure therefore stands rejected by a majority of forty-one."

These figures seemed to show that the voting had been conducted strictly on party lines. The Muscovite members of the Diet numbered thirty-eight, or, with the addition of the Duke of Bora, thirty-nine. The tale of the Poles was eighty-one; the vote of the absent Ravenna being deducted, the majority of forty-one was thus accounted for.

The publication of the figures was followed by a moment of bewildering silence. The Poles could not believe in such a victory, nor the Muscovites in such a defeat. Some among the crowd, supposing that the clerk had made an error in his statement, called upon him to read it again.

But now at the side of the clerk appeared the tall figure of Zabern, waving his helmet and greeting his adherents with a triumphant smile. 292

All doubt vanished. Exultant cries of "Slava! slava!" burst from Polish throats. The Muscovites replied by yells of execration. The two factions were intermingled; the triumph of the one evoked the fury of the other, and in a moment more the Zapolyska Square was transformed to pandemonium.

"Forward!" cried Dorislas, waving his sabre. "Clear the square."

And loud above the trampling and the din arose a carillon of bells from the cathedral of St. Stanislas, pealing forth a jubilation over the victory gained by the Latin Church.

Inside the House the excitement was equally great. Pole shook hands with Pole, for it was felt to be a splendid party triumph. The Muscovite members stared sullenly at each other, Lipski himself looking the very incarnation of malignity. More than a score of Polish deputies, after accepting splendid bribes, had betrayed him by voting with Zabern, and he was precluded from making their duplicity known by the fact that the procuration of a deputy's vote by bribery was an offence punishable by perpetual exclusion from the Diet.

Both parties streamed out into the corridors to discuss the event, leaving Brunowski and a dozen members in the chamber to pass the resolution: "That the military be withdrawn from the monasteries."

In a small apartment, adjacent to the hall of debate, sat Barbara, surrounded by her radiant ministers. An ardent politician, she was in her element on such nights as these.

"A two-thirds majority of the House!" she murmured with a glow on her cheek. "Thirty-nine for the bill, and eighty against it. What a triumph!"

"Thank heaven, our secret is safe!" said Radzivil. "Kossuth can have his gold." 293

"Another defeat for Russia!" grinned Zabern. "How Orloff will regret the roubles he has wasted!"

In passing along one of the corridors Zabern encountered the Duke of Bora.

That ex-minister, long a traitor at heart, and a secret sympathizer with the aims of the Opposition, had at last cast off the mask, but on a very inopportune occasion as he now perceived. Hoping to profit by the anticipated defeat of the ministry, and the consequent confusion, if not fall, of the princess, he had crossed to the opposite side of the House, and he had seated himself cheek by jowl with Lipski and his colleagues, only to see them suffer a most crushing defeat. His mortification, already great, was enhanced by Zabern's caustic smile.

"Ah, dear duke, you don't seem quite so cheerful as you did last week on the Long Terrace. Payment within one hour after the division," he continued, exhibiting the duke's written pledge, "was not that our agreement? May I trouble your grace, then, for the sum of ten thousand roubles, since our majority has exceeded twenty? Ten thousand roubles is rather a large amount, but you will doubtless recoup yourself from Orloff's Bribery Fund."

If looks had power to kill, Zabern would certainly have fallen dead beneath Bora's savage glance. Unable, however, to evade the fulfilment of his word, the duke reluctantly wrote out a check for the required amount.

"An unforeseen circumstance has enabled you to win this wager," he said, curtly.

"Yes, it was a very fortunate—ah!—circumstance for us," drawled Zabern, as he walked away with the check in his pocket, "but as to its being unforeseen!—" He finished the sentence with a

short laugh. "Duke of Bora, you must be the biggest fool in Czernova not to suspect the game I've played."

Averse to the noisy demonstrations, friendly or hostile, which her presence in the crowded streets was certain to evoke, Barbara lingered for some time in the Diet-house, conversing with the deputies of both parties, and charming even the rugged hearts of the Muscovites by her gracious and winsome manner. 294

When the streets were reported quiet she drove back to the Vistula Palace, accompanied by Zabern and Paul, the latter of whom from a side gallery had watched the course of the debate.

The trio retired to the White Saloon.

"That pistol-shot has wrought us so much good, marshal," observed Barbara, "that I feel quite capable of forgiving the assassin."

"Then your Highness shall have an opportunity of doing so," replied Zabern, "since he, or rather she, is in the next apartment."

He stamped heavily on the floor thrice. A door opened, and there entered Katina Ludovska with her sister Juliska, not now garbed in male attire, as when awaiting the princess's landau in the forest-road, but dressed each in her own pretty Polish costume.

They advanced with a somewhat timid air and knelt, till requested by the wondering princess to rise. They were not strangers to her, for she had often witnessed their fencing feats in the *salle d'armes*.

"This lady," said Zabern, indicating Katina, "craves pardon for shooting at the princess, without obtaining her Highness's permission, but at the same time she can plead that she was acting under the command of Marshal Zabern."

"Explain," said the princess, haughtily, and with a flash of her eyes that made even the bold Katina quail.

"It was well known to the Diet," began Zabern, cool and unabashed, "that your Highness was opposed to the Appropriation Bill. Six votes only were wanted to secure its rejection. 295

"Now, if at the present crisis some desperado would only oblige us by seeking to kill your Highness, the attempt would create such a feeling of sympathy among the secessionist members of our party that not only would the required six votes be captured, but many more in addition.

"I therefore resolved that such outrage should take place. But the deed must have every appearance of reality. Blank cartridges might suggest a mock attempt, but real bullets, missing your Highness's person by a hair's-breadth only, would disarm all suspicion.

"Accordingly, I made overtures to the finest pistol-shot in Czernova, Katina Ludovska, who consented to the plan.

"Do not accuse me of recklessly hazarding your Highness's life, since I was fully convinced that Katina's hand would not fail, for Juliska of her own accord gave me striking proof of her sister's unerring marksmanship. She bade Katina regard her as the princess, and while Katina stood revolver in hand upon the steps of the inn-door, Juliska rode fearlessly past on horseback six times in succession; and on each occasion Katina sent one shot through the brim of her sister's hat, while the second whizzed close to her temple.

"This experiment convinced me of Katina's ability to do the trick, and success has justified my opinion. A bold liberty on my part, your Highness, but pardonable, considering the object I had in view."

Barbara's first emotion of breathless amazement was followed by a sense of anger, as she recalled the dreadful sensation that came over her when the hot bullet whizzed past her face.

"Remember," pleaded Zabern, cognizant of Barbara's feelings, "remember that your Highness gave me *carte blanche* to do whatsoever I pleased, provided that I could but secure the rejection of the Appropriation Bill." 296

This was true, but who could have guessed that Zabern would have resorted to such a desperate remedy?

"And you could devise no other plan than this for defeating the bill?"

"None, though I racked my brain for a week."

Barbara's anger began to yield to a mournful feeling. It was her belief that no state can flourish long on duplicity. If her chief minister could maintain her in power only by resorting to trickery such as this, then, indeed, the day of her fall could not be far distant.

"It is past," she murmured. "I am scathless, and the bill is rejected; what more should I desire?" And then, addressing Katina and her sister, she said, "You played a very hazardous game as well with your own lives as with mine. Why, marshal, you ordered the guards to fire upon the fugitives!"

"Nikita was in the plot, your Highness, and had taken the precaution to serve out blank

cartridges to your *corps du garde*; so the volley was a harmless one. But I confess my heart was in my mouth when I saw Captain Woodville taking aim with his pistol. Fortunately he tripped up in the very act of firing."

"I little thought that I was taking aim at Mistress Katina," smiled Paul, "and grateful am I that she did not return the shot. And so Nikita was in the plot? Why, the rogue vowed that one of the two was Russakoff!"

"He couldn't resist the temptation of poking a little fun at you," replied Zabern. "Had you looked round, you would have seen him choking with suppressed laughter."

"And I suppose, marshal, that you led the way down the path where the red cap lay—"

"Purposely to give Katina and Juliska more time to escape."

"And I presume, likewise, that it was your hand which annotated the copy of the 'Kolokol' newspaper?" 297

"Precisely. Those marginal remarks were my own invention."

Paul could not refrain from laughter as he recalled the fine air of indignation with which Zabern had pointed out to the Diet the annotations that his own pencil had made.

"Marshal, you lie with admirable grace."

"I have lived five years in Russia, you see."

"But, marshal," remonstrated Barbara, gravely, "you have placed me in a false position, by letting me pose before the Diet as the escaped victim of an assassination plot."

"A splendid way of catching votes," returned Zabern, coolly. "And votes were what we wanted."

"And you have endeavored to connect Lipski with the deed. Is that well devised, marshal?"

"Perfectly," replied the unscrupulous Zabern. "He has in his paper advocated the slaying of rulers; he is therefore a potential, if not an actual, assassin. I have but given the people of Czernova a practical illustration of his teaching. O your Highness, let me show that your consideration for Lipski is somewhat misplaced. You are doubtless aware that to his editorship of the 'Kolokol' he also adds the calling of gunsmith and armorer, and a very convenient calling it is for one who is ill-disposed to the state."

"Be plainer with me, marshal."

"I have long suspected Lipski of treasonable designs, and therefore, observing a few days ago that a private house contiguous to his establishment in the Boulevard de Cracovie was to be let, I instructed one of my spies to rent and occupy the said house, the cellar of which adjoins Lipski's. Last night my agent and I cautiously removed a few bricks from the upper part of the intervening wall, and turned the light of a lantern through the orifice thus made. Your Highness, that vault, which is a lofty and spacious one, contains more rifles than Lipski will ever be able to sell, even if 298 he should live to be a centenarian. They lie stacked up from floor to ceiling. I probably do not overshoot the mark when I say that there cannot be less than ten thousand. The law does not permit any citizen, even a gunsmith, to possess one-twentieth of that number."

"This is a grave matter," said Barbara. "Those arms must be seized."

"Certainly, your Highness; for while it is right for us to store up arms against the Czar, it's a monstrous thing that the Czar's hirelings should be permitted to pile up arms against ourselves. Never let others do to you as you would do to them."

"You have a cynical way of putting things, marshal."

"These arms are designed for the denizens of Russograd. As they are much too poor to purchase their own rifles, there is to be a free distribution—probably on the night of the 14th of September."

"The eve of my coronation," said Barbara, startled by this announcement.

"The same. My spies report that there are whispers among the Muscovites of an armed rising to take place on the coronation day. In fact, they propose to hold a rival coronation in the Greek basilica. You can guess, princess, who is to play the central figure in this unauthorized ceremony."

"A ceremony that shall never take place," said Barbara, with a flash of her eyes.

"True. We'll foil them. With your sanction, princess, I'll make no movement at present in this matter. The longer we delay Lipski's arrest the more the plot will develop, the wider will be the sweep of our net when the cast is made, and the more fishes shall we enclose. Meantime, rest assured that my spy will keep a careful eye upon that secret store of arms." 299

"Be it so, marshal. We leave the matter to your wisdom."

"And your Highness pardons that little affair of the shooting?"

The princess with a smile extended her hand for Zabern to kiss.

"Without your constant vigilance, marshal, the princess were nothing."

CHAPTER XIV

NEARING A CRISIS

A few nights after the defeat of the Appropriation Bill, Paul Woodville at a late hour strolled forth into the gardens of the Vistula Palace, with no design of meeting Barbara, but drawn thither chiefly by the extreme beauty of the moonlight. 300

He sat down in solitude by the margin of a tree-girt lake, watching in an abstracted manner the silvery path of light on its surface, and musing over the strangely romantic turn his life had taken.

A sudden rustling among the foliage put an end to his reverie, and on turning he found Barbara by his side.

She was excited, if not angry. There was a defiant expression upon her face, and a lovely color burned on her cheek. She was habited as if for a journey, for her figure was concealed by a cloak with the hood drawn around her head. Her appearance reminded Paul of their first meeting in the Illyrian forest; and, as if responsive to his thoughts, Barbara's first words recalled that time.

"Paul, do you remember those happy days in Dalmatia? Come and let us renew them."

"I am not quite sure that I understand."

"Let us leave Czernova this night—this hour—now. Take me with you."

For a moment Paul doubted whether he could have heard aright. Then recovering from his surprise, he asked,— 301

"What has happened to make you take this wild resolution?"

"There is no other course left us if we are to be united. Listen!"

She proceeded to explain the cause of her agitation.

It appeared that at a cabinet council held earlier in the evening Barbara had announced what had for some time been suspected, namely, that the projected match between herself and the duke had been dissolved by mutual consent. Thereupon the Greek Archpastor, Mosco, whom Barbara suspected of acting as the mouthpiece of the duke, rose and boldly, yet respectfully, asked the princess to define her attitude towards her secretary, Captain Woodville; he invited her to contradict the growing rumors as to the relationship existing between herself and the Englishman.

Perceiving that other members of the cabinet were in sympathy with Mosco's questioning, Barbara put aside her first impulse, which was haughtily to ignore the subject, and gave answer that it was her firm resolve to make Captain Woodville the Prince-consort of Czernova.

The council were united in maintaining that this could not be.

"Zabern among the number?" asked Paul.

"Zabern spoke not a word—sure sign that he is on your side. He deems it prudent to sacrifice his private opinion to the will of the rest; otherwise Radzivil would call upon him to resign, and Zabern believes that he can do me more good in the cabinet than out of it. They have insisted upon your immediate withdrawal from Czernova. I pledged my word that you should depart this very night; but, Paul," she continued, with a laugh that had something of hysteria in it, "I did not tell them that it was my intention to accompany you. I will never give you up, Paul, never. You are dearer to me than crown or life. Come, we will go away together, and leave Czernova to its own devices." 302

Such was the invitation addressed to Paul by Barbara, whose arms were encircling his neck as with a garland; her lovely face was close to his; her dark eyes radiant with love were looking into his own. Now at last she seemed to belong to him.

Paul, as previously related, had by the death of a relative become the possessor of an ample fortune. How delightful, then, to while away the hours on the sunny shores of the Riviera with Barbara for his bride! What admiration her beauty would elicit from all who saw her! What a halo of romance would surround her personality! The princess who resigned a throne for love, who preferred an untitled Englishman to an imperially connected archduke! He would be the most envied man in Europe. It was a splendid temptation, but he rose superior to it.

"If you have pledged your word for my withdrawal, I must go—and alone," he added.

"You shall not go to please them," she cried passionately.

"Then I will go to please myself."

"Without me? Do you mean that—that we must part forever?"

The anguish of her voice went to Paul's heart. The stately princess that had confronted the Diet was gone, and in her place was a clinging, trembling maiden with eyes full of tears.

"Sweetest Barbara, doubt whatever else you will, but do not doubt my love. It behoves us to part at least for a time. I go, but you must remain. Remember, that, as a princess, you are not your own but your people's. If you desert Czernova you give to the duke the crown for which he is basely plotting. Do not let that traitor succeed. Do not hand over your loyal Poles to the tyranny 303
of Bora. Abdication on your part will mean the final triumph of Russia."

"And that triumph is not far distant," replied Barbara bitterly. "We have received intelligence to-day from our ambassadors at Berlin and Vienna that Prussia and Austria have jointly agreed to withdraw from the responsibility of upholding the integrity of Czernova, leaving the onus of this political duty to Russia. We know what this means. In plain language Kaiser and King will permit the Czar to exercise a free hand in the principality. The long-threatened annexation is at hand."

"Then it is time for me to be going."

"In my hour of peril?"

"I go to save you from this peril, to deliver you from the ever-threatening shadow of the Czar. I have a scheme in mind,—a scheme so daring that it seems madness to attempt it; and yet better to dare and fail than not to dare at all. My plan, if it succeeds, will make Czernova so strong that it will no longer fear the arms of Russia. And then," added Paul hopefully, "and then it may be that in return for such service your ministry will regard me with more favorable eyes."

Love is proverbially blind, and therefore it will not seem matter for wonder that the princess in her passionate attachment to Paul should place more reliance upon his promise than upon the united wisdom of her cabinet. But what his plan was she could not learn; to all her questions he smiled pleasantly and mysteriously; the sooner he set off the sooner would come its realization.

But each time he turned to depart Barbara pleaded so sweetly for delay that he was forced to stay a few minutes longer; and they continued to sit in the moonlight, Paul radiant with the hope of coming success, Barbara puzzled, yet confident in his ability to fulfil his word. They were a long time in parting, and often after saying what they intended as their final farewell they turned 304
again to repeat it.

Paul at length tore himself away, and had not proceeded very far when he was met by Marshal Zabern.

"You are leaving Czernova?"

"Since the cabinet decrees it."

"But you must return."

"When?"

"On the eve of the princess's coronation."

"Why on that day?"

Zabern bent his head and whispered. The communication was such as to cause Paul's eyes to sparkle and his hand to seek the hilt of his sabre.

"Is that the plan of the duke, then?"

"Such is my belief. And you alone, Captain Woodville, can defeat it. You will be there?"

"Can you doubt it? If I be living."

"Good! You will have the laugh of these fools," returned Zabern, referring to his colleagues in the ministry. "They will not deny you the hand of the princess then."

And Paul and Zabern parted on an understanding eminently satisfactory to both.

On the following day the ministry learned with relief that Captain Woodville had quitted Czernova, though none knew, not even Barbara, whither he had betaken himself.

The coronation ceremony was now but two months distant, and Zabern ventured to remind the princess that some of its most important details still awaited settlement.

"The great question is who shall have the high honor of crowning your Highness?"

"Abbot Faustus, for he is a good man," replied Barbara; and, noting Zabern's look of surprise, she added, "He, and none other. The cabinet have had their way in the matter of Captain Woodville; I will have my way in this. Let the council meet again to-day. When this point comes to be 305
discussed, do you, marshal, propose Abbot Faustus for the office, and I will assent."

Though wondering much at her choice, Zabern refrained from comment.

That same evening another cabinet council was held in the Vistula Palace, Barbara again

presiding.

Among the members present was the Archbishop Mosco, or, as he was styled in Slavowitz, the Archpastor, who, as previously stated, had a seat in the cabinet, not by the appointment of the princess, but by virtue of his office as head of the Greek Church in Czernova.

The crowning of the sovereign had hitherto been one of the privileges attaching to his see. Barbara's Latin faith, however, had necessarily deprived him of his prerogative, which would thus seem to devolve by natural right upon the highest ecclesiastic in the Catholic Church of Czernova, or in other words, upon the Cardinal Archbishop Ravenna.

Therefore, when Zabern rose to propose that Abbot Faustus, of the Convent of the Transfiguration, should have the high honor of crowning the princess, there were murmurs of dissent from the council, the majority not deeming the abbot of sufficient dignity for the office.

"The cardinal would regard such appointment as an affront to himself," remarked Radzivil.

"And might seek, in his disappointment, to give us trouble," commented Dorislas. "Being the ecclesiastical superior of Faustus, he might appear in the cathedral and interdict the abbot from crowning the princess, which would be a pretty scandal."

"Ah, well," replied Zabern, carelessly, "we have prisons for disorderly prelates, as well as for law-breaking dukes." 306

"What says her Highness in this matter?" said Radzivil turning to the princess.

"The marshal's nomination meets with my approval," returned Barbara. "My lords, I will not now enter into my reasons. Let it suffice to say that Cardinal Ravenna has made it impossible for me to receive the crown from his hands. Sooner would I resign than do so."

Great wonderment appeared on the faces of the ministers, yet none ventured to ask in what way the cardinal had offended. Opposition to the abbot was immediately withdrawn, for the cabinet, gratified by Barbara's supposed dismissal of Paul, were in a complaisant mood, though they plainly saw trouble looming ahead in thus excluding Ravenna from participating in the coronation.

At this point of the debate Polonaski intervened with a suggestion. He was the Justiciary, and by virtue of his office the highest legal authority in Czernova.

"Since your Highness reigns over Greeks as well as Catholics, would it not be politic to conciliate the former by permitting a Greek prelate to have some share, however small, in your coronation?"

"That is good counsel," replied Barbara. "I trust, my lord," she added, addressing Mosco with a gracious smile, "that you have not viewed with bitterness this setting aside of the ancient privilege attaching to your see? But, indeed, you are welcome to take whatever part you please in my coronation, short of the administration of the Sacrament and of the imposition of the diadem."

Mosco, apparently gratified by this concession, spent a few moments in studying the coronation ritual, a copy of which had been supplied to each member of the cabinet.

"I ask for nothing more," he finally observed, "than for leave to read the Gospel at the beginning of the ceremony."

"It is granted," replied Barbara, wondering why the archpastor should select this, a somewhat humble office, compared with others which were open to him. 307

Mosco's lips curved into a smile, which, though lasting but a moment, did not escape the quick eye of Zabern, who immediately became full of suspicion.

"As I live," he muttered to himself, "our archpastor is a traitor! Have I got rid of Bora only to find that he has left a successor in the cabinet? That smile means mischief. But what mischief can come from the reading of the Gospel?"

An enigma which was not solved till the actual day of the coronation, and those who witnessed the solution were not likely ever to forget it.

That picturesque personage, accustomed to figure at a coronation, namely, the champion, now became a subject of discussion, Mosco himself having introduced the question.

"It is the duty of such champion," he explained in answer to Barbara's interrogation, "to stand before the throne, and, casting down a glove, to defy to mortal combat any one who shall openly challenge the right of the sovereign to rule."

"But why," said the princess, with a pitying smile, "why should we retain a feudal usage out of place in this nineteenth century?"

"It has always formed a part of the coronation ceremonial," protested Mosco. "Your late father, Prince Thaddeus, would not have it omitted when he was crowned."

"And what would happen," asked Radzivil, "if some one malevolently disposed towards the princess should step forward and pick up the glove?"

"We had better consult the Justiciary," smiled Barbara. "He is our authority on all matters of law."

"Your Highness," returned Polonaski, "the ancient statute touching the championing of the sovereign's rights has never been repealed, and therefore still stands good in point of law. Should 308
any one accept the champion's challenge by taking up the gage thrown down, the combat would have to take place."

"With what result?" queried Radzivil. "Will you say that if her champion should fall the princess must resign the throne?"

"According to the law of Czernova," replied the Justiciary.

Zabern leaned back in his seat and caustically whispered in the premier's ear,—

"Count, methinks you were a little premature last night in banishing an excellent swordsman from Czernova."

"I venture to differ from the Justiciary," remarked the princess. "An earlier law is always repealed by a later. Therefore the feudal statute which has been cited is abrogated by the recent Anti-duelling Act. We will therefore omit this pretended championing of our rights as an obsolete, barbarous, and unmeaning ceremony."

The Justiciary did not look as if convinced by Barbara's reasoning. He refrained from further comment, however, and the motion to omit the champion from the ceremonial was unanimously accepted.

Various other matters relative to the solemnity were settled, after which the council broke up, leaving Zabern still troubled by Mosco's smile. A permanent member of the cabinet, the Greek archpastor, equally with the Roman archbishop, could not be removed at will by the princess or the premier, unless guilty of treason, and of this Zabern as yet lacked proof.

"He is playing Bora's game," muttered the marshal. "He is a party to Lipski's plot. I warrant he knows all about the store of arms concealed in that traitor's cellar. Mosco, you shall sit no more as the betrayer of our meetings, for none shall be held. For some time to come Czernova shall be 309
governed by a council of three—the princess, Radzivil, and myself."

But the evil which the Greek archpastor might do was as nothing compared with what the Roman archbishop could effect, and in the course of a few days Barbara found herself facing a peril of which even her confidant Zabern little dreamed.

A week after Paul's departure Cardinal Ravenna returned to Slavowitz, coming from Rome in no good humor. The Sacred College, at the invitation of the Pope, had been spending many days in the discussion of some abstruse doctrine of theology, much to the irritation of Ravenna, whose self-interest required his presence in Czernova.

In the first hour of his return he was made aware that the cabinet, ignoring his superior claims, had deputed Abbot Faustus to crown the princess, and that all men were talking of the event; for inasmuch as it was the current belief that Ravenna was the very person who had converted the princess to the Catholic faith, the Czernovese were naturally not a little mystified by this exclusion of the archbishop from the coronation ceremony.

Ravenna knew full well that this appointment could not have been made without the sanction of Barbara herself, and accordingly on the following morning he repaired to the Vistula Palace, his mortification becoming still further enhanced by the mocking smile of his Greek rival, whom he chanced to pass on the way. Barbara received the cardinal with a chilling mien.

"Is it true, princess," he began with a grave air, "that in the matter of the coronation you have given to the Abbot Faustus, my inferior, the honor which belongs of right to the archbishop?"

"Quite true," responded Barbara, coldly.

"Do you intend, then, with set purpose, to put an affront upon me in the sight of all Czernova?" 310

"None but pure hands shall set the diadem upon my head. Shall I accept the Sacrament from one who has insulted me with words of unhallowed love, repeat prayers uttered by your lips? My lord cardinal," she added in scorn, "have you no conscience?"

Probably not. He was indifferent to the moral precepts of religion, if not at heart wholly atheistic, having adopted the ecclesiastic life merely as a stepping-stone to power.

"Is it likewise true that Zabern purposes at no distant date to introduce into the Diet a bill for the expulsion of Jesuits from Czernova?"

"Your eminence has been correctly informed. We cannot tolerate in the principality those whose aim it is to create an *imperium in imperio*. Besides," added the princess, caustically, "a Jesuit Expulsion Bill will put my Muscovite subjects in a good humor, while not greatly offending the Catholics."

Though maintaining a calm exterior, the cardinal nevertheless listened with secret dismay, for her words were the very death-knell of his ambition. By using the princess as his instrument he had hoped to play the *rôle* of a Richelieu in Czernova, and to be the supreme director of affairs, secular as well as ecclesiastical. By reason of his supposed conversion of a Greek princess he had

obtained a high place in the Pope's favor. He had openly boasted at the Vatican that the Greek heresy would soon vanish from Czernova. But now? The attitude of Barbara and her cabinet showed that he had been building castles in the air.

Was this to be the end of his life's work? Must he write "failure" across the scheme that had occupied his mind for twenty years? It would seem so.

"Is it to be war between us? Good! Thus, then, do I take up the gage flung down by you. On your coronation day, in the sight of all assembled in the cathedral, I shall rise to affirm, ay, and to prove too, that you are not Natalie Lilieska. I shall denounce you as an impostor, as a knowing usurper of the rights of Bora." 311

"And be arrested as an accomplice of the impostor; since, if I fall, you fall with me."

"Not so, princess; for I shall previously have made my terms with Bora. You may count, now, upon having the Pope as your enemy, since you are bent upon persecuting the Society of Jesus. By falsely claiming to be princess you have imposed upon the Holy Father. You admit a heretical prelate to participate in the ceremony of your coronation. You pretend to be a Catholic, yet your ministers have placarded Slavowitz to the effect that the princess will swear at the altar to preserve inviolate the ancient privileges as well of the Greek as of the Latin Church. Such Laodicean policy will not suit Pio Nono. A word in his ear from me will bring against you a bull of excommunication. And, remember, that the subjects of an excommunicated ruler are absolved from their allegiance."

Barbara laughed scornfully.

"We are not living in the time of the Crusades. Excommunication is an obsolete weapon."

"Not so obsolete as you deem, princess. The Poles are loyal, or shall we say superstitious, Catholics. Many of them will obey the Pope rather than yourself. There will be a cleavage in the ranks of your Polish adherents fatal to your interests. Barbara Lilieska, with the Pope and the Catholic clergy of Czernova alienated from you; with dissension among your own adherents; with the duke and his Muscovite faction opposed to you; with the jealous Czar, ready, nay, eager, to march his armies against the usurping princess who had so often thwarted his policy—it will pass the wit of Zabern himself to keep you upon the throne. Dream not of your coronation. You may ride in state to the cathedral, but only to witness the crowning of Bora. From that ceremony you will return not to this Vistula Palace, but to that Citadel in which you once imprisoned the duke. He hates you bitterly since your rejection of him for Captain Woodville. Now he will be able to wreak his vengeance upon you. You will have to drink deep of the cup of humiliation. Are you prepared for this?" 312

Barbara sat, pondering over the difficulties of her position. Then amid her troubled thoughts came the memory of Paul and of his mysterious plan, and she took courage.

The cardinal stood silently drinking in the beauty of her face and figure, loving and hating her in the same moment, hoping against hope that she would change her attitude towards him.

So long did Barbara remain mute that the cardinal began to think that her opposition was weakening, and under this delusion he ventured to renew his proposals of love.

"No more such language, my lord," said the princess, her eyes flashing with indignation, "or I call the guard."

"And thereby precipitate your immediate ruin. The news of my imprisonment would cause my nephew Redwitz of Zamoska to put in evidence the three sealed letters. At present the secrets contained within them are unknown even to him; but in a day more all the world would be talking of the impostor-princess of Czernova. There are still seven weeks left to you; why abbreviate your reign?"

Ravenna had spoken without his accustomed caution in revealing the names Redwitz and Zamoska, which last was a small town in Russia, distant a few miles from the Czernovese border. Though trembling with anger at the cardinal's insolence, which a hard necessity compelled her to tolerate, Barbara did not let the phrase "Redwitz of Zamoska" escape her. The words seemed to afford a ray of hope. If these letters could be seized, and the cardinal arrested on one and the same day, why—then—then— 313

"Barbara Tressilian," said the cardinal quietly, "your aversion to illicit love would seem to combat the theory of heredity."

At this singular utterance the princess gave a palpable start.

"The daughter is more scrupulous than the mother."

These words and the cold sneer accompanying them occasioned in Barbara a fear far greater than that caused by the threat of deposition.

"What devil's lie are you inventing now?" she murmured.

"Your English mother, Hilda Tressilian, was content to be wooed and won without asking the church to consecrate her love."

If it be possible for the human heart to suspend its pulsation, then Barbara's heart did at that

moment.

When at last she spoke it was in a voice breathless with indignation. "Can there be a more base deed than to slander a dead mother in the presence of her daughter?"

"No slander, but the solemn truth do I speak. Your father, Prince Thaddeus, withheld this knowledge from you, from a desire to spare your feelings. When after the Dalmatian earthquake of two years ago, you were wavering between the crown of a princess and the veil of a nun, the knowledge that you were of illegitimate birth might have deterred you from accepting the crown; therefore Prince Thaddeus kept that matter a secret. He invented the story that the church, the scene of his marriage, had been burnt, and the record of the union destroyed; and the more effectually to deceive you he made choice in his fiction of a certain church which had actually been consumed by fire. But the preservation of the edifice would have availed you nothing, for its marriage-book contained no such names as Thaddeus Lilieski and Hilda Tressilian." 314

"It is a question betwixt my father's word and yours. I prefer my father's."

"Naturally, inasmuch as it suits your interests. When on your crowning-day, and before a vast assembly, I rise to deny that you are Natalie Lilieski, will you dare affirm it, knowing, as you do, that you lack a certain birth-mark of that princess? If you aver that you are in reality Barbara Lilieska, the elder daughter of Thaddeus, what answer will you give to those who challenge you to produce the proofs of Thaddeus's early marriage? Barbara Tressilian, you are illegitimate, and as such debarred from reigning. Your beauty has made you many enemies among the proud and envious ladies of Czernova. Those over whom you have queened it will be able to point the finger of scorn at the discrowned princess, branded with the stain of illicit birth."

He marked with secret pleasure the shiver of wounded pride on the part of Barbara, and clenched his remarks with the question,—

"Knowing what I can effect, do you still maintain your defiance of me?"

"I do," responded Barbara, quietly. "Believing myself to be the lawful princess of Czernova, I shall hold to my throne. Girt around with earthly perils, I tranquillize my mind by looking above, confiding in the justice of heaven."

That any one should think of trusting to such a shadowy weapon as the justice of heaven drew a sneer from the atheistic cardinal.

"The history of Poland should have taught you that God is always on the side of the strong." And then, conscious of the futility of further argument, he made a mock bow, and with the words, "Farewell, Princess Lackland," he withdrew from the saloon. 315

Barbara retired to her own private apartments, and was seen no more that day, save by her personal attendants.

Her belief in her legitimacy had rested upon her father's word; but how if he had deceived her? The thought that she might be of illicit birth rankled in her mind, poisoning all her happiness. She clenched her hands in agony, and unable to sit still, paced restlessly to and fro.

The spirit of justice was deep-planted within Barbara's breast; a throne unlawfully held had no attractions for her; if she could be certain that the cardinal's statement were true, then, bitter though the duty might be, she must resign the crown of Czernova to her enemy Bora. But she was not certain, and therein lay the torture. She would have no peace of mind till the question should be settled, and unfortunately the circumstances of the case seemed to preclude the possibility of solving the doubt.

When Zabern next day sought the presence of the princess, he was struck by her pallid complexion and melancholy air.

"The cabinet," he muttered to himself, mistaking the cause of her sadness, "will have to recall Woodville, or our princess's health will give way. Your Highness," he said aloud, "Dorislas has just proposed a conundrum."

"To what effect?" asked Barbara with a smile.

"'Whether does Cardinal Ravenna live at Slavowitz or at Rome?' I confess I am unable to answer it. It is but forty-eight hours since the cardinal's return, and yet we now hear that he has set off again for Rome, and will not come back till your coronation eve."

"When he will bring with him," observed Barbara, quietly, "a papal bull excommunicating the Princess of Czernova."

"Ha! he'll be well advised not to read it," said Zabern, touching the hilt of his sabre significantly. "I plainly foresaw that our preference for Faustus would make an enemy of Ravenna. And so he 316
hath gone to Rome to solicit a bull of excommunication? And he'll obtain it. Our intended attack on the Jesuits will not please Pio Nono; once their foe, he hath of late become their friend and patron. Excommunication! Thus does the Church reward us for preserving her property, since in fighting for our own Convent of the Transfiguration, we were fighting likewise for all the other monasteries of Czernova; for which service it now appears we are to receive papal curses. Humph! 'Catholicism without the Pope' will soon have to be our cry."

"Marshal," said Barbara, resolving to make Zabern a confidant of her secret history, "did you not

present me with a handsome bow and quiver about six months ago?"

Zabern replied in the affirmative, wondering why the princess should have introduced a matter seemingly irrelevant.

"Have you not felt hurt that I have never once made use of your gifts?"

"The princess has been occupied with more important matters."

"Shall I give you my reason?"

"If your Highness wills."

"The reason is very simple. I have never handled bow and arrow, and it might create suspicion if I should now begin to learn."

"Now your Highness is jesting," said Zabern, puzzled to account for this humor on the part of the princess, because Barbara was not in the habit of jesting; and, moreover, if her remark were intended for a jest, it was somewhat difficult to see the point. "You shoot like Diana herself, or rather, I should say you did, for I must confess that since your Dalmatian tour you seem to have taken a dislike to archery."

"Marshal, I have never in my life taken aim at a target." 317

Zabern was completely dumfounded by the seriousness with which Barbara spoke. On recovering from his surprise, he said, smiling the while, for he did not believe in what he was saying,—

"Then if I am to accept your Highness's statement as true, it must follow as a logical conclusion that the young princess who handled the bow so admirably three years ago is not the same as she who now addresses me."

"Now you have hit upon my secret, marshal. I am not Natalie Lilieska."

"And I am not Ladislas Zabern," laughed the other. He could not tell why the princess spoke thus; he certainly could not believe her.

"Now, Zabern, be serious, for I am serious. Can you not recall when I first came here from Dalmatia, many supposed lapses of memory on my part? Was it not a common saying at that time, 'The princess has grown very forgetful?' Was I ever seen without either my father or Ravenna by my side? The truth is they were secretly instructing me as to the persons whom I met, giving me their names, history, and the like. And yet in spite of many blunders on my part, no one seemed to have any suspicion as to the truth, not even the Duke of Bora. Listen," continued Barbara to the utterly bewildered marshal, "listen while I give you a secret chapter of my biography."

Zabern gave due heed; and though the story was one of the most marvellous and most romantic that had ever come under his notice, either in history or fiction, he was compelled to believe in its truth, for what motive could the princess have in fabricating such story?

But when he was made aware of the sacrifice which the cardinal had demanded of Barbara as the price of his silence, Zabern became first cold with horror, then hot with rage. A saint as regarded his own dealings with women, he viewed with peculiar aversion a priest addicted to illicit amours. 318

"By heaven, your Highness, if I had but known this three hours earlier I would have cut the villain's throat."

"And thereby, in the cardinal's words, have precipitated my immediate ruin. We must act warily. Listen."

And here Barbara proceeded to enlighten the marshal as to Redwitz of Zamoska, the guardian of the three sealed letters; and how on receiving intelligence of his uncle's imprisonment or death, the nephew was to despatch these missives,—one to the Russian Foreign Minister, a second to the Duke of Bora, and a third to the office of the "Kolokol" newspaper.

"A subtle knave!" smiled Zabern.

Himself born with a genius for plotting, the marshal took a keen zest in outwitting the plans of others, and in his view the cardinal's contrivance for safeguarding himself presented some interesting features.

"I fail to see why your Highness should fear the cardinal. You are so like Princess Natalie in face and figure that you can laugh at his threat to expose you on the coronation day. We will ascribe his statement to the malice of a disappointed ecclesiastic."

"Not so," replied Barbara, with a shake of her graceful head. "My sister Natalie had a mole upon her right shoulder, as the physicians who attended her birth, and the nurses and ladies who waited upon her, can prove. I have no such mark. Now, Zabern, never lacking in subtle counsel, you see my peril. Aid me. You defeated Lipski; now defeat the cardinal for me."

"A very easy matter. Why did not your Highness confide in me before?"

"How—easy? In what way do you propose to act?"

"In the first place, are you certain that no one knows your secret besides ourselves, Ravenna, and Captain Woodville? This Redwitz, for example?" 319

"The cardinal asserted that his nephew was ignorant of the contents of the three packets."

"Good! For my own part I do not think it probable that the cardinal would share so valuable a secret with others; his own self-interest would forbid it. Well, now," mused Zabern, "if we lay violent hands upon Ravenna the nephew over the border will send off the letters."

"That has been my fear."

"On the other hand, if I despatch an agent to the house of Redwitz to obtain possession of the letters, and it would be very easy to effect this—"

"Then Redwitz, discovering his loss, would notify the fact to the cardinal, who would thus become apprised of our design."

"True, princess; therefore our plan is obvious. Either the seizure of the papers and the seizure of the cardinal must take place coincidently, or—But leave it to me, your Highness," added Zabern, breaking off somewhat abruptly. "Let the cardinal enjoy his brief span of life at Rome. As soon as he returns he shall be secretly seized in his own palace, instantly gagged to prevent him from revealing anything even to his captors, and conveyed in a covered carriage to the oubliettes of the Citadel. He shall never see daylight again."

Much as the cardinal might deserve such fate, Barbara nevertheless could not repress a shudder.

"Marshal," she said, with a grave look, "it is a dangerous thing to seize, imprison, and execute a cardinal, a prince of the Church, without any pretence at a trial. The Pope—all Europe—will have something to say on the matter."

"Trial? We dare not try him, for then would he make known to the judges and others the very matter we wish to keep secret. Ours is a dangerous game, true; but it would be far more dangerous to let the villain live. Still, there is no need for his arrest; there are other and safer 320
ways. The cardinal may disappear mysteriously, and then Marshal Zabern, the Minister of Justice, will offer a large reward, ay, and will give it, too, to any one who can tell what has become of the missing archbishop. Or," added Zabern, grimly, "he may be found to have committed suicide in his own palace."

Zabern spoke without the least scruple. He was not naturally cruel nor treacherous, but he reflected that the crown of Czernova was at stake, and with it, so he believed, the future liberation of Poland; and where these weighty matters were concerned, the secret removal of a cardinal was but a light thing in his eyes.

But Barbara was distressed. Must she resort to crime, she who had declared to the cardinal that her reliance was upon heaven? For her conscience refused to palliate Zabern's intended deed; the slaying of Ravenna without trial would be murder, and murder wrought to secure a title the validity of which she herself was beginning to question.

Zabern noted her look of pain.

"Your Highness, bestow no pity upon the cardinal; he deserves death, if ever man deserved it. Consider the case of your sister Natalie. Do not believe that she committed suicide. A maiden of seventeen, to whom life was just unfolding fair and bright, heiress to a crown, and affianced to a man whom she loved—heaven forgive her for her choice!—she had every inducement to live. Doubt not that the cardinal had a hand in her death. Give me leave to employ the rack upon him, and I'll soon extract the truth."

"You have my authority for his arrest and conveyance to the oubliettes of the Citadel. Solitary confinement and a deaf jailer, if you will; but murder—no! *Fiat voluntas mea.*"

With that the interview terminated, and Zabern departed to reduce to practice the plan he had formed. 321

Four weeks afterwards he presented to the princess three small packets, each fastened with violet-colored wax, stamped with the image of a paschal lamb, a seal that recalled vividly to her mind the mysterious incidents connected with the cardinal's study at Castel Nuovo.

"There are Ravenna's documentary safeguards," laughed Zabern. "One half of our task is accomplished."

"How have you managed it?" asked Barbara.

"Katina's sister Juliska has been my agent. Going to Zamoska she succeeded in making acquaintance with a maid-servant belonging to the household of this Redwitz, who, it appears, is a Catholic priest. By the offer of a large bribe Juliska persuaded this girl to ask her master's leave to visit a dying brother in a distant part of Russia, the said dying brother being, of course, a mythical personage; in the meantime, the maid averred, her duties could be performed by a friend of hers then resident in Zamoska. The unsuspecting Redwitz gave his consent, and the pretty Juliska took up her residence under the priest's roof in the character of temporary servant.

"Fortunately for our plan one of her duties was to attend to the study of this Redwitz, and, making careful search in his absence, she soon lighted upon these three packets in a secret drawer of an escritoire. Having been provided beforehand with the necessary materials, namely, violet wax and the cardinal's seal, Juliska quickly made up three blank packets outwardly similar in all respects to the originals; and the latter being abstracted from the escritoire were replaced

by the fac-similes."

Barbara, breaking the seals, proceeded to read the contents of the three missives, which were all couched in much the same terms. Each began by affirming that the then regnant Princess of Czernova was not Natalie Lilieska, and various circumstances were adduced in proof of this statement. The document then went on to assert, and the assertion brought the color of shame to Barbara's cheek, that the self-styled Natalie was the illegitimate daughter of the late Prince Thaddeus, and therefore legally debarred from reigning. 322

"Mother of God! can this be true?" murmured Barbara, with anguish at her heart.

The cardinal did not deny his own share in the plot by which Barbara had been raised to the throne, but rather took credit to himself in a matter, which, as he fondly hoped, would tend to advance the interests of the Catholic Church in Czernova. He concluded by stating that he lived in some fear of the princess, who viewed him with dislike, as being the sole depositary of her secret; therefore if he should be arrested, or should be secretly slain, or should mysteriously disappear, men would know to whom the deed should be ascribed.

Barbara, having read the documents, threw them upon the fire, and watched till they were consumed.

"Nothing now remains," remarked Zabern, "but to arrest the cardinal in the first moment of his return."

"There is another who threatens my safety. When, marshal, do you intend to seize Lipski, and his store of arms?"

"Not till the day before the coronation, so please your Highness."

"Where is the advantage in this delay?"

"Why, thus. If we arrest Lipski now we give the enemy opportunities of forming new plans, and of collecting fresh supplies of weapons, whereas a raid on the very eve of the coronation will throw the plotters into a confusion, from which they will not have time to recover."

"But if the arms should be carried forth before the 14th of September?"

"My spies are on the watch; of course if that should occur, I shall have to antedate my raid. Has Radzivil informed your Highness that the Czar is sending his representative to attend your coronation?" 323

"The same ambassador as before, the insolent-tongued Orloff, he who so strangely presumed to doubt the existence of our Charter? Let the court marshal appoint him a seat near the high altar, whence he can view our document at his leisure, nay, handle it, if he will," she added.

"The Charter!" muttered Zabern, grimly, as he withdrew from the presence of Barbara. "The Charter, humph; I'll not add to your present anxieties, princess, by stating the truth. Will that devil of an Orloff suspect my manœuvre?"

As the day assigned for the coronation drew near, the ancient and stately capital of Czernova began to assume a gala aspect. Flags waved in every street. Bright drapery wrought with mottoes decked the walls. Venetian masts and triumphal arches arose. In a word, all things deemed essential to a great state-pageant were in due course of preparation.

For the maintenance of order troops were drafted daily into Slavowitz, until one half at least of the Czernovese army was quartered in various parts of the capital.

The Muscovite populace, disposed at first to be wrathful at the holding of the coronation in a Catholic edifice, moderated their ire somewhat on learning that their own Archpastor Mosco was to take part in the solemnity, while the great cardinal, the object of their hatred, was to be entirely excluded.

Placards containing the words of the amended coronation oath were posted up in public places, that all might see that the princess would pledge herself at the altar to respect the rights both of the Greek and of the Latin churches.

The disaffected, who were hoping for riots on the coronation day, seemed fated to meet with disappointment, owing to the judicious and pacificatory policy of the princess's ministry.

That ministry took courage, and anticipated, nay, were confident, that the great day would pass off without disturbance. 324

Then came a bolt from the blue!

Early on the morning of the day prior to the coronation, Radzivil and Zabern sought the presence of the princess.

"Your Highness," said the premier, "a Russian army of one hundred thousand men is assembling at Zamoska."

Zamoska, distant but six miles from the frontiers of Czernova!

"A Russian army at Zamoska?" repeated Barbara.

"And commanded by the Czar in person," added Radzivil.

"What is the Czar's object in mustering his troops so near our own borders?"

"When the news reached us late last night," said the premier, "your ladies reported that you were in so sweet a sleep that it would be wrong to disturb you. I therefore took upon myself to send an envoy in your name to the Czar to inquire the reason for this massing of troops so close to our frontiers."

"You did quite right, my lord. Has the messenger returned?"

"A few minutes ago. And the explanation given is that the Russian army is gathering at Zamoska for the autumn manœuvres."

"You do not believe this story?" said the princess, turning to Zabern.

"Princess, no. You must nerve yourself to bear the truth. In my opinion the Czar is assembling his forces for the purpose of preventing your Highness's coronation."

"By what right?" exclaimed Barbara, with flashing eyes, and Zabern was glad to see that she who had most reason for fear showed far more spirit than Radzivil; "by what right?"

"By that right ever recognized by the world—the right of the strong," returned Zabern. "By open diplomacy and by secret intrigue, Russia has failed to sap the independence of Czernova; therefore she now resorts to the sword." 325

"And the foe without will be aided by traitors within," murmured the princess.

"If," said Zabern, with a glance of inquiry at Barbara, "if the Russians should enter our territory —?"

"We shall not cry 'quarter.' We shall meet them in arms."

"But, your Highness," remonstrated Radzivil, in a tone of dismay, "what hope have we of defeating them?"

"Very little," replied Barbara, "but what then, Count? Would you have me be as a saint upon cathedral window with folded hands and downcast eyes? Meekly submit to see my realm filched from me? Never! So long as there shall remain to me a man and a musket, so long will I offer resistance."

"Will not your Highness assemble the cabinet and the Diet?" asked the premier.

"And listen to timid, divided, or traitorous counsels? No! Marshal, you are the head of the army; give immediate orders for our troops to proceed to the frontier. Take what steps you deem best for the defence of the principality."

"Shall your Highness delay your coronation?" inquired Radzivil.

"And show Russia that we fear her? No. Let not the ceremony be delayed by so little as one hour. And when the solemnity is over then will I proceed direct from the cathedral to the camp. To arms! To arms! This last fragment of Poland shall not fall without making a valiant stand."

"There spake the spirit of your ancestors, the Jagellons," said Zabern. "Princess, you should have been born a man."

CHAPTER XV

THE EVE OF THE CORONATION

The dusk of a lovely autumnal eve had fallen over Slavowitz. Lights were beginning to twinkle along the boulevards. 326

The preparations for the coronation were complete. The clinking of the carpenter's hammer had ceased; the last bench had been put up; the last flag hung out. The streets had become fairy arcades festooned with flowers and colored lamps.

Crowds of sight-seers were abroad viewing the city decorations.

A numerous throng, composed principally of peasants from the more remote parts of Czernova, and who had never before seen their princess, moved to and fro in front of the Vistula Palace, calling for a sight of their fair ruler; and Barbara, responsive to their desire, appeared at intervals on the balcony smiling her acknowledgments, and occasionally waving a scarf—an action which drew forth rounds of applause.

The gayly decorated capital, brilliant with light, resonant on all sides with song and music, alive with an ever-moving, laughing populace, formed a picture difficult to associate with coming

disaster.

"So hath many a city looked on the eve of its fall," murmured Barbara, as she turned away from the window. "Oh, Paul, why are you not with me? If you have a plan for the salvation of Czernova, now is the time for putting it forth." 327

By means of swift couriers despatched at intervals of every hour the princess was kept informed of the movements that were taking place along the frontier.

Early in the day the Russian army—horse, foot, and artillery—with the Czar Nicholas at its head, had set forward from Zamoska, and was now encamping within a mile of the Czernovese border. East and west for many a furlong stretched the armed line of one hundred thousand men. The Paulovski and Semenovski Guards were there, the most splendid in the imperial service; as well as the Tartar Guards, the Finland Guards, and other regiments drawn from the motley nationalities that compose the vast empire of the Czar. Picturesque Circassians, clad in silver mail, and mounted upon fiery steeds, pranced proudly along to the camping-ground marked out for them, discharging their pistols at the sun in the exuberance of their glee at the prospect of fighting and pillage.

Wild-looking Cossacks riding shaggy ponies were continually galloping up to the frontier-line with defiant cries as if challenging the Czernovese sentinels to fire; after which, with a menacing flourish of their lances they would career back to their own camp.

Russian generals, stately and bearded, could be seen standing on various points of elevated ground, coolly reconnoitring through field-glasses, and studying the topography of Czernova, as if purposing to conduct a campaign in the principality.

Two envoys successively despatched by the princess to the Russian camp to inquire into the meaning of these sinister doings had failed to return. The obvious conclusion was that they had been forcibly detained.

Barbara had resolved at all hazards to defend her throne; and accordingly, while a body of ten thousand troops was retained at Slavowitz for the preservation of order during the coronation, a second division of ten thousand, with Dorislas in command, had made their way to the frontier. 328
Under the personal supervision of Zabern, artillery had been planted upon all the strategic points that commanded the road to Slavowitz.

It was a critical time. The Czernovese army lay encamped within sight of a force whose numerical superiority was as ten to one. On each side of the frontier Polish and Russian sentinels paced not one hundred yards apart; a chance shot from either side might easily bring on hostilities.

The princess's ministry lived in hourly dread of invasion, and though striving to put a bold front upon the matter, were secretly convinced that the sands of Czernovese liberty were fast running out.

In the midst of a melancholy revery, Barbara learned that the Duke of Bora was in the palace, desirous of an interview with her. She was not unprepared for his coming, and stern was her face as she descended to the White Saloon where the duke was in waiting.

At the foot of the staircase she was met by the captain of the palace-guard, who requested the watchword for the night; and taking the proffered tablet, the princess returned it inscribed with the words, "Fatherland and Liberty."

Lifting her eyes she perceived Zabern by her side.

"The duke has come," she whispered.

"All is ready," replied the marshal.

As Barbara entered the White Saloon, the duke bowed with a scarcely disguised smile of triumph. The recent Russian movement, as the princess had secret reason to know, was directed in his interests; with pitying grace he came as a sort of conqueror to make his terms with her.

Great at swordsmanship, Bora was not very shrewd in other matters, and none but a fool would have ventured to play the game that he was playing. 329

"I have come, fair cousin," he began, undeterred by her cold manner, "to remind you of your promise so frequently made—your promise to marry me."

Barbara made no reply, but regarded him with a look of sovereign disdain on her beautiful face.

"It is true," continued Bora, airily, "that you gave what you were pleased to call your final decision some weeks ago; still, the logic of events often compels one to revoke a decision."

"And why do you deem the present a favorable time for renewing your suit? What is this logic of events?"

Bora smiled mysteriously.

"I will say no more than this," he remarked, "that you will certainly live to regret the rejection of my suit."

"You evade my question. Let me then express what is in your mind. My lord, by favor of the Czar,

you expect to reign over Czernova; you seek to usurp my throne. But knowing that so long as I live, your throne would always be insecure, you would make me your wife, not from love, not from generosity or pity, but merely to give validity to your title. Have I not read your cowardly motive aright?"

She had—accurately.

Unaware how much the princess had learned of his secret dealings, the fatuous Bora had come in the full assurance that the approach of a Russian army and the consequent rumors of annexation would have disposed her to welcome his suit as a means of retaining her throne. He now perceived his error. The princess was not so timid a person as he had thought. Her stern manner somewhat alarmed him. He began to regret his imprudence in thus venturing into her presence.

"In short, your grace, marriage with you is the only thing that can save me from deposition. Is not that what you would say?" 330

"You reject my suit? Good! Then let this interview terminate," said Bora, rising as if to depart.

The princess restrained him by a haughty gesture.

"Keep your seat, or I shall call the guard."

The duke obeyed, trembling now for his own safety. Never had he seen the princess looking so angry.

"Why, during the past twelve months, have you insulted me with vows of love, with offers of marriage?"

"Insulted? Why that word?" said the duke, striving to conceal his alarm under an assumption of dignity.

"Because while simulating affection for me you were secretly intriguing with my enemies."

"You have been listening to the aspersions of Zabern."

"I have been listening to the words of Lipski. Ah! you start, my lord, and well you may. You are not yet aware—for the affair was carried out very quietly—that a raid was made this afternoon upon Lipski's premises. His cellars were found to contain a vast store of arms. In the house, too, was a number of Russian agents, among them the spy, Ivan Russakoff. Lipski has made full confession."

"Of what?" muttered the duke, looking thunderstruck at the princess's statement.

"Of many things. Here is one. About a twelve-month ago there was established a new journal entitled the 'Kolokol,' mainly devoted to the libelling of myself and to the stirring-up of civil strife. Before the founding of that newspaper the Muscovites of Russograd were as loyal and law-abiding as the Poles themselves; under the influence of the 'Kolokol,' however, they have become restless, disorderly, inclined to sedition. Was that well done, John Lilieski?"

"What has this to do with me?"

"Much, for though Lipski might be editor, yet he who actually owned the paper, financed it, and secretly controlled its policy was none other than the Duke of Bora." 331

"A fable of Lipski's, invented to please the princess's ministers."

"We will see whether you adhere to that statement in the presence of Lipski, for you shall have the opportunity of facing your accuser. He likewise avers that his measure, the Secular Appropriation Bill, was in reality your work; he simply acted as your mouthpiece in the Diet. The money with which he corrupted the deputies was supplied by you, and came from Orloff, the governor-general of Warsaw."

"A falsehood. I affirm the story to be a falsehood."

"You devised a plot for the destruction of the Czernovese Charter. You wrote to Orloff desiring him to obtain the Czar's sanction for this scheme—a scheme which was, however, happily frustrated," added Barbara, not knowing how widely she erred from the truth.

"Lipski has been terrorized into saying whatever Zabern wishes," muttered the duke, moistening his dry lips with his tongue.

He saw that his treason had become known and proved; and for such treason as his there could be but one punishment—death! He glanced around the apartment, wondering whether her guards were really within call. In his desperation he would not have hesitated at slaying her, if by that deed he could have effected his escape.

Barbara drew forth a handkerchief marked with a dreadful dark stain. Instead of regarding it with a shudder as might have been expected, she pressed it affectionately to her lips.

"The blood of Trevisa," she said solemnly, "of Trevisa, the most faithful and loyal of my servants—slain at your instigation. Russakoff was paid to do the deed by Lipski, but Lipski took his instructions from the Duke of Bora."

"It's a lie."

"Katina Ludovska, though at the time she did not clearly see Lipski's face, has to-day recognized him by his voice, as the man who at the inn—Sobieski's Rest—offered to Russakoff the bribe of four hundred roubles. I have had Lipski brought here purposely to meet you. He is in the palace at the present moment. Your grace, come with me," said the princess, rising and motioning Bora to follow her. "Let me see you meet him with a denial. None more glad than I if you will do this. Come. Dare you?" 332

It seemed not. He shrank back from accompanying the princess to the adjoining ante-room, where sat both his miserable accomplice Lipski and the equally miserable Russakoff, each under the guard of a quaternion of soldiers.

"You virtually admit your guilt in refusing to face your accuser. The muskets found on Lipski's premises have been surreptitiously forwarded by Orloff with your knowledge and approval. To-morrow before break of day those arms were to have been distributed to a Muscovite mob rendered valiant by copious supplies of vodka. At a certain point along the intended route of the coronation procession, barricades were to be thrown up, and when firing and rioting had begun, a message was to be despatched to the camp of the Czar, urging him to come and save the Muscovites from massacre at the hands of the Poles. And the Czar, responsive to the appeal, would come to establish in Czernova what he would call a stable government, its stability to consist in the acceptance of his own suzerainty and in the establishment of his kinsman Bora upon the throne. The deposed princess might marry Bora, if she chose; if not, there is in Ladoga's gray lake an island fortress named Schlusselburg; there let her pass the remainder of her days. Such is the programme you would fain carry out to-morrow. My lord of Bora, you have played a dark game; it is time you received your reward." 333

The princess clapped her hands quickly, and at the sound every door of the White Saloon opened and through each there came marching a file of soldiers, two abreast. With quick silent footfall they advanced over the velvet carpet, and with a thrill of awe the duke perceived that all were carrying their arms reversed as at a funeral.

Deploying in their advance the files so moved as to form a double ring around the princess and the duke, and there they stood, terrible in their rigidity and silence.

The circle gave way and Zabern appeared, a chilling glare in his eye. At a sign from him one soldier with a swift motion pulled the duke's hands behind him, and in a moment more had corded his wrists, while a second pinned upon his breast a piece of white satin in shape like a heart.

At sight of this dreadful fabric designed to direct the aim of a firing party, the duke's courage fled; his knees smote together; he grew white to the very lips.

Only ten miles distant were one hundred thousand men ready to assist him to a throne; for all the aid they could now give him they might as well have been situated in the planet Mars.

"The firing-party awaits you in the quadrangle," said Zabern, as the guards closed up around the duke. "Forward!"

"Have a care what you do, Cousin Natalie," said Bora, scarcely able to speak from fear. "You will have to answer to the Czar for this."

"You speak treason with your last breath," said Barbara. "Answer to the Czar for executing a traitor in my own principality! What jurisdiction hath the Czar in Czernova?"

"Traitor!" cried Zabern, fiercely. "I would stab you with my own hand, though the Czar himself were by. To the quadrangle—forward!" 334

The murmur of the restless populace without penetrated to the interior of the palace, and was heard by the wretched duke. Was he to die with the sound of the coronation-mirth ringing in his ears?

In the ante-chamber Zabern halted his troop and returned to the side of the princess.

"This instrument lacks your Highness's signature," he remarked, presenting her with the warrant for the duke's execution.

"On occasions such as this," murmured Barbara, taking the document, "one is tempted to say with Saint Vladimir, 'Who am I that I should shed blood?'"

"And yet Vladimir shed a good deal, if history speak truth," responded Zabern, "and therefore became he a saint after Russia's own heart. Your Highness, this is no time for pity. It is a question of your life or the duke."

The princess appended a name to the warrant.

"I fear," observed Zabern, with a grave smile, "that the captain of the firing-party will question the authority of that signature."

The princess looked, and to her surprise saw that she had subscribed herself not "Natalie Lilieski," but "Barbara Tressilian!" She had unwittingly written her mother's maiden name.

She did not erase the signature, but proceeded to indite a fresh warrant. She wrote very slowly, pondering as she wrote. What would the real Natalie have thought, said, or done, if she were

living now and saw her elder sister signing the death-warrant of her lover?

With a sigh she handed the document to the marshal, who immediately returned it with a very strange look. And there, staring at her from the paper, were the self-same words as before —"Barbara Tressilian!"

The princess had her superstitious moments, and this was one of them. That she should unintentionally have written the same twice seemed a confirmation of the misgiving that had troubled her for several weeks. 335

"This is the hand of heaven," she murmured, in a tone of awe, and laying down the pen. "Are not the illegitimate always called after their mother? I have written my true name. Marshal," she added in a fearful whisper, "it is Bora who should be on the throne, and I should be the prisoner of the Citadel."

"Your Highness, do not talk thus."

But Barbara paid little heed.

"I am tempted to summon the Diet, even at this late hour, and to reveal to them my secret history, the whole miserable story of my birth."

"You will bring ruin on Czernova if you do. What guarantee have you that the cardinal's story is true?"

"This," replied Barbara, pointing to her signature on the death-warrant.

The marshal shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"And therefore, because you suspect yourself to be of illicit birth, you would tender your diadem to an assassin and a traitor. Then let the Czar himself lay down his power; true, he is the son of the Emperor Paul, but was Paul really the child of Peter III.? Catherine and Soltikoff, the chamberlain, could best answer that question. Princess, you are over-scrupulous. Your title to the throne is founded on a better right than that of the accident of birth. The sovereign rules by the will of the people, and are not the majority on your side? If the princely office were made elective, is there any candidate who would have the least chance of success against yourself? And, *vox populi, vox Dei*. What other sanction do you require?"

"The sanction of my own conscience. And to-morrow—to-morrow," she murmured in a tone of distress, "after taking the Holy Sacrament I must lay my hand upon the Charter—" 336

"Upon a forged document, rather," muttered Zabern, grimly to himself.

"And declare that 'I, Natalie Lilieska, do solemnly vow' to maintain its provisions, knowing that I am not Natalie Lilieska. No, Zabern, I cannot—I will not utter this falsehood."

"Then let the Pope avow himself a liar when in solemn conclave he assumes the style of Pio Nono, and ignores his true name of Giovanni Mastai."

"All men know of the Pope's change of name; there is no attempt at deception; but I claim to be other than I am. If I were certain of illegitimacy I would resign my power this very night."

"I see quite plainly," said Zabern, speaking with more freedom than he had hitherto employed towards the princess, "that if Czernova were handed over to the Czar, and your faithful ministers sent to Siberia, you would be very well content."

As he spoke the marshal drew his sabre.

"Do you bid me break the sword that has been so long used in the Polish cause? Must I retire hence to aid the Hungarians, to obtain that freedom which you would deny to us in Czernova?"

"No, marshal, no; we must not part. I will stand by those who have stood by me. Clinging to the hope that there is no dishonor on my name, I will hold to my crown."

"A wise decision, princess," replied Zabern, considerably relieved by her words. "And now as to the duke's execution."

"What, marshal? Would you have me sign his death-warrant when I am doubtful of my right to rule?—and sign it, too, in the name of one, who, strange as it may seem to us, loved him? No, I cannot sign this document with the name of Natalie."

"But your Highness cannot sign it with any other." 337

"Then I will not sign it at all."

"I greatly fear that your Highness will live to regret this clemency."

"Be it so."

The first glow of Barbara's anger had passed, and she listened to the voice of prudence. Though the duke richly merited death, yet his execution without trial would give the Czar a very convenient pretext for intervening in the affairs of Czernova.

"By shooting the duke I make the Czar the heir to my crown," said Barbara. "By retaining him alive I may be able to make use of his person as a pawn on the political chessboard.

Imprisonment will be the wiser course. Remove the duke to the Citadel."

And inasmuch as the marshal recognized Barbara as his princess, he had of necessity to obey.

When Zabern had seen the duke securely lodged in a cell of the Citadel, he returned to the White Saloon, where Barbara still lingered, wrapt in melancholy thought.

"Your Highness, on entering the palace this note was put into my hands."

Barbara glanced at the missive and saw that it contained the following words: "Marshal, will you accord the bearer of this an interview with the princess?—Paul Woodville."

Barbara's melancholy vanished as if by enchantment. Two months had now elapsed since Paul's departure, and during that time she had received no message from him. Now at last there seemed to be tidings.

"Who is the bearer, marshal?"

"One returned from the dead. A woman calling herself 'Jacintha of Castel Nuovo.' She is in the ante-room at the present moment awaiting your Highness's pleasure."

The mention of the name "Jacintha" almost drew a scream from the princess. She ordered the visitor to be instantly admitted. 338

Barbara's character was not marked by the false pride that is too often the accompaniment of rank and wealth. She welcomed her humble visitor as warmly as she would have welcomed a queen or empress. Jacintha had nursed her back to life, and Barbara, mindful of this service, was delighted to have the opportunity of making some return.

"My lady—your Highness, I should say," began Jacintha, sinking upon her knees, "it is very untimely on my part to visit you on the eve of your coronation, when you are occupied—"

"My dear old nurse," said Barbara, raising Jacintha up with a winning smile, "let me whisper a secret to you. I want to forget my coronation, and your presence will make me forget it. Sit here beside me, and let us talk of the old days at Castel Nuovo."

Zabern would have withdrawn, but the princess bade him stay.

"I had thought," continued Barbara, "that you had perished in that dreadful earthquake. And Lambro? Is he alive?"

"No, my la—your Highness. We were outside the castle at the time of the calamity, for some previous rumblings had alarmed us. When the great shock came Lambro slipped into a fissure that opened beneath his feet. He went down before my very eyes, and the earth closed over him immediately. How I myself escaped I cannot tell, for the ground was opening and closing all around me."

"Poor Lambro!" sighed Barbara, who had always entertained a liking for the old Palicar, not knowing how little he deserved her friendship. "And where have you been living during the two past years?"

Jacintha's story, briefly stated, was as follows. After the earthquake she had made her way to Trieste, and thence by steamer to England. Within a few weeks of her return she had had the good fortune to become housekeeper in one of the ancient halls of Kent. 339

"But now will you not remain with me?" smiled the princess.

"Your Highness will not wish it after you have heard the whole of my story," replied Jacintha, and the strange look which accompanied her words somehow caused all Barbara's gladness to die away.

A few days previously Jacintha's master had bidden her prepare for the coming of one of his friends, Captain Woodville by name. What was her amazement to find in her visitor none other than Captain Cressingham, who on his part was equally astounded at meeting Jacintha. Paul immediately fell to talking of the old days at Castel Nuovo, and, among other matters, he questioned Jacintha closely as to the young lady who had visited the castle under the escort of Cardinal Ravenna. Jacintha learnt from Paul that this lady was in reality the half-sister of Barbara, and that both held the rank of princess. Then it was that Jacintha resolved to tell Paul the true story of Natalie's death.

"Ha!" muttered Zabern, foreseeing that his dark suspicion was about to be verified.

"And Captain Woodville has sent you here to tell it to me likewise—is it not so?" asked Barbara.

"Yes, your Highness. I wanted to put the story into writing, that you might learn it in that way. I wanted Captain Cressingham himself to tell it to you. But no; he said it was better that you should hear it from my lips, and he prevailed upon me to come here."

"Go on, Jacintha," said Barbara encouragingly, for Jacintha seemed very loath to proceed.

"Your Highness, it is no wonder that the earthquake came to swallow up the castle, for wicked doings took place there. But do not blame me for my association with them. I loathed my position there, and would have run away, but for the fear of Lambro and his mastiffs. Now that you are a 340

great princess, you will perhaps punish me when you shall have heard the truth."

"Captain Woodville would not have sent you all the way to Czernova, if he had thought that I should punish you. Tell me the story of my sister's death. You have my word beforehand that no hurt shall happen to you."

And Jacintha with a faltering tongue began a story, the recital of which caused Barbara to thrill with horror.

"O Natalie, my sister! my sister!" she murmured, when Jacintha had finished. "But for the cardinal, you would still be living. His guilty love has driven one sister to suicide, and now, opposed in his wicked desires, he seeks to destroy the other. How can heaven permit this man to live? Bora's guilt is innocence compared with the guilt of Ravenna."

Powerless to allay the princess's grief, Zabern could only watch her in sympathizing silence, and mentally renew his vows of vengeance upon the cardinal. So full was Barbara of this new sorrow that she seemed to have forgotten Paul; at least she made no inquiries about him.

Zabern, however, leading Jacintha aside, quietly questioned her as to the movements of the princess's late secretary. It appeared that Paul had accompanied Jacintha as far as Berlin, and had there put her in a train bound for Czernova; seized with a sudden illness on the way, she had been removed from the carriage at the first stopping-place, and this circumstance had delayed her arrival in Czernova by several days. Paul himself, on parting from her, was going direct to St. Petersburg, a statement which Zabern received with incredulity.

"St. Petersburg? Are you certain?"

Yes, Jacintha was quite certain.

"St. Petersburg," muttered Zabern. "Not three months ago the Russians were demanding his extradition, and now does he venture into the country of his enemies? If his passport is made out 341
in the name of Paul Woodville, he is a doomed man; they will never let the defender of Tajapore depart. This is something I can't understand."

Though closely interrogated by Zabern, Jacintha was unable to throw any light upon the motives that had prompted Paul to visit Russia.

The marshal paced uneasily to and fro.

"Captain Woodville," he murmured, "pledged his solemn word to be in Czernova on the coronation eve; for, forewarned by me, he had reason to believe that the princess's crown depended upon his sword. But he has not yet appeared. His absence has something sinister in it, for it is certain that he would be here if he could. True, his presence in one sense has now become unnecessary, inasmuch as the duke being a prisoner in the Citadel will be unable to appear in the cathedral to-morrow to challenge the princess's rights, and to defy her to mortal combat by deputy. But as Woodville can know nothing of the duke's imprisonment, why does he not hasten to the supposed aid of the princess? I greatly fear that our champion is himself a prisoner."

At this point intimation was given by the chamberlain that one of Zabern's familiars, privileged to enter the palace at all hours, was in the anteroom, desirous of a word with the marshal.

Zabern withdrew from the White Saloon, and returned after a minute's absence with the tidings for which he had been waiting all day.

"Your Highness, my spy appointed to watch the cardinal in his journeying to and fro from Rome reports that his Eminence has just arrived at Slavowitz, bringing with him the papal bull which deposes the Princess of Czernova, and absolves her subjects from their allegiance."

"Say, rather, bringing with him his own death-warrant," cried Barbara, with a blaze of wrath 342
unusual in her.

"Your Highness gives me leave to deal with the cardinal as I please," whispered Zabern, tapping the hilt of his sabre significantly.

Barbara made no reply.

The marshal interpreting her silence as consent, stole quietly from the apartment.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CRIME THAT FAILED

The coronation eve was drawing to a close as Pasqual Ravenna, Cardinal Archbishop of Czernova, 343
sat in the library of his archiepiscopal palace in company with a young priest, Melchior by name.

One of the points which had wounded the pride of Ravenna in time past had been the refusal of Abbot Faustus, of the Convent of the Transfiguration, to submit his monastery to a visit of inspection from the cardinal. Though ecclesiastically the superior, Ravenna was unable to enforce compliance from the sturdy abbot, who claimed to be independent in virtue of an ancient bull granted by Pius the Second. Even a mild admonition from the regnant Pope had failed to produce any effect.

The cardinal had begun to suspect that Faustus's defiance was prompted by other motives than the desire to maintain his independence; there was some secret connected with this monastery, a secret in which the princess herself was involved; and accordingly he had deputed the priest Melchior, whose crafty character well qualified him for the work, to discover, if possible, the mystery that lay hidden behind the walls of the Convent of the Transfiguration.

And now, in the first hour of the cardinal's return from Rome, Melchior had come to report the results of his investigations, results which were highly satisfactory to Ravenna.

"So," he murmured, when the other had unfolded his discoveries, "a conspiracy for the 344
emancipation of Poland, a conspiracy to which Ravenna must not be admitted, such being the express command of the princess. 'The cardinal is not to be trusted.' Ha! The place then is no true monastery but an arsenal, a treasury, and a repository for treasonable documents. This explains the conduct of Faustus in excluding me from his convent. Favored by the princess, he has grown insolent, and would usurp my place at the coronation. To-morrow he will rue his defiance when he sees his monastery in the hands of Russian soldiery. The Czar's army lies conveniently near for the seizure. How did you learn all these details, Melchior?"

"From a kinsman of mine, a monk in this same convent. In a conversation with him I stated my belief that his monastery was utilized as a secret rendezvous for Polish patriots. After some hesitation he admitted as much; and then, won over by my professions of patriotism, he revealed to me the length and breadth of the conspiracy."

"Melchior, you have done well, and shall not go unrewarded."

The priest expressed his gratitude by an ugly smile, and then with a look of cunning he continued,—

"Your Eminence, I have discovered something more. We Czernovese have lost our title to autonomy. The Charter has been destroyed, and the princess's ministers are doing their best to keep the matter a secret."

"Ha! how do you know this?" said Ravenna, surprised beyond measure at the statement.

"The Charter was burnt by two sentinels whose duty it was to guard the Eagle Tower. They were traitors in the pay of Russia. By the waving of a blue lamp they signalled the successful accomplishment of the work to a confederate concealed in the palace grounds, who immediately conveyed the news to Orloff, the governor of Warsaw. This confederate returned to Slavowitz a 345
few weeks ago. He is a Catholic, it seems, regular at confessional. Being troubled with the thing called conscience, and desiring to be absolved from his guilt, he revealed the matter to his father confessor Virgilius, who, in turn—"

"Revealed it to you," interrupted the Cardinal, his surprise yielding to delight, for the news furnished him with another weapon to be used against the princess. "What has become of the two who destroyed the Charter?"

"They have never been seen since the night of the deed. Doubtless they are now in Russia enjoying a pension from the Czar's ministers. Oh! your eminence, there can be no doubt as to the truth of the story. Orloff himself came as envoy to Slavowitz; he boldly declared in the presence of the princess and her ministers that the Czernovese Charter was a myth, and non-existent; and —here is the significant point—her Highness and Zabern did not refute him by producing the Charter, but took refuge in evasions."

"But, Melchior," observed the cardinal with perplexed air, "you must be in error. This evening the iron coffer containing the Charter was conveyed to the Cathedral under a strong guard of soldiers. It plays a part in the coronation-ritual."

Melchior smiled caustically.

"Your eminence, three little circumstances that have happened of late may serve to throw a little light upon what is contained in that coffer. Firstly, within a few days after the destruction of the Charter, Zabern's mistress, Katina Ludovska, made purchase of some parchment at a stationer's in the Rue de Sobieski, and was very critical as to its color, texture, and the like. Secondly, this same Katina was for several days in an apartment of the Vistula Palace occupied in writing. Thirdly, as you are aware, our *Museum Czernovium* contains a collection of historical documents, 346
among them autograph letters of several Czars, and—what is more pertinent to the occasion—an imperial ukase bearing the signature, '*Buit po semu, Ickathrina.*—Be it so, Catherine.' Your Eminence will doubtless remember that our Charter ended with these same words, '*Buit po semu, Ickathrina*.' Now it is a curious circumstance that this imperial ukase should have vanished some weeks ago from its glass case in the Museum; the curator is unable to account for its disappearance, but probably Zabern can."

"You mean—?"

"That any one wishing to imitate the signature of Catherine would find the task facilitated by having this ukase before him. Your Eminence, doubt it not that the document to be laid upon the altar to-morrow is a forgery. Count Orloff in the character of ambassador will be present at the coronation. A word to him—"

"Enough," interrupted Ravenna with an exultant smile. "This shall to the Czar. Here's matter sufficient to depose the princess. Within twenty-four hours the iron hand of Russia will be pressing the principality."

"True. And yet," said Melchior, somewhat puzzled to account for his master's attitude, "and yet when that happens what place will there be for a Roman archbishop?"

"None: and therefore after to-morrow I quit this barbarous principality for Italy, leaving without reluctance, for, you know, I never was a Pole. The Pope has appointed me to the See of Palestrina. You shall accompany me, Melchior, and the first rich benefice that becomes vacant in my diocese shall be yours. Italia, Italia," said the cardinal with a glow of enthusiasm, "where the skies are sunny, the wines delicious, and the women—"

"More yielding than the cold dames of Czernova," smiled Melchior, well acquainted with his master's character. 347

"The hour is late, and much remains to be done," observed Ravenna. "Melchior, you will call upon those of the clergy whom I have named, and request their attendance here at eight in the morning to listen to a rescript from the Pope."

The priest bowed and quitted the apartment.

Left alone, the cardinal drew writing-materials towards himself, and proceeded to indite a letter, a letter intended for the perusal of no less a personage than the Czar Nicholas. The contents of the missive were brief, but exceedingly weighty.

In leisurely fashion, Ravenna went over what he had written, and seemingly satisfied with the composition, he proceeded to fold the paper several times; then selecting—and not without reason as the sequel proved—an extremely small envelope, he enclosed the letter within it.

The night was very warm; and the windows were open to catch every breath of air. These windows overlooked the gardens in the rear of the palace, for the cardinal's library lay remote from the public street.

The sounds of distant revelry floated faintly on the air. The Czernovese were not disposed to retire early on such a festal eve as this. Many, indeed, were spending the night in the streets for the purpose of securing a place of vantage from which to view the coronation procession next day.

Ravenna smiled cynically as he listened to the murmur of the far-off voices.

"The morrow shall see your mirth turned to mourning," he muttered.

The letter accidentally dropped from his hand as he was in the act of affixing his seal of the paschal lamb. He let it lie, while with closed eyes he leaned back in his chair, picturing his triumph of the morrow. In fancy he could see the princess led off, a pale, silent, drooping captive under an escort of Russian soldiers, and the Duke of Bora enthroned in the cathedral amid the shouting of the Czar's legions. 348

"Barbara Lilieska," he said aloud, and with his eyes still closed, "you shall regret your insolence in putting an affront upon me in the sight of Czernova."

"Don't be too sure of that," said an ironical voice.

The one man in Czernova whom the cardinal least desired to see on this particular night was Zabern; and yet it was Zabern who had spoken!

With a sudden start Ravenna opened his eyes to find the marshal standing with folded arms upon the other side of the table. Behind him was his orderly, Nikita. A third man, a trooper named Gabor, was in the act of locking the door of the apartment. Alive to his peril, the cardinal struck repeatedly at a bell upon the table.

"Of no use," remarked Zabern, with an ice-cold smile. "There is no one in the house but your steward, who is keeping watch at the foot of the staircase. He has lately become a spy in my service. He has just dismissed your household, bidding them go forth to view the city decorations. They will not return for an hour at least—ample time for our work."

"What do you want of me?"

"Your life."

Ravenna could not suppose that Zabern had come for anything else; nevertheless, the cool, frank avowal sent the blood to his heart with a rush.

"You would murder me?" he gasped.

"Call it murder if you will. Execution is my term."

"What is my trespass?"

"'Stolen waters are sweet.' Strange text for holy cardinal to address to youthful princess. You comprehend? Do you ask, then, why you should die?"

So all was known to these men. What mercy could he expect? He glanced from one to the other, but saw no pity in their stern, set faces. The trio had come to do a bloody work, and would do it. 349
He strove to keep a cool head; he tried to reason with his would-be assassins.

"You will have to answer for what you do."

"To the saints above—yes; and I am ready. At the bar of God I'll rest my title to heaven on the holy deed I do to-night. To a human tribunal—no, for none shall know that you have been killed by others. Behold!"

Zabern, as he spoke, drew forth a small cut-glass phial, half-full of a liquid resembling distilled water. The silver cap bore the inscription, "The Manna of Saint Nicholas."

"*Aqua Tophania*," continued the marshal. "Ah! you start? You recognize the phial? Yes, it has been taken from a secret drawer of your own cabinet. Why a holy cardinal should have poison in his possession is best known to himself. I can, however, testify to its efficacy, for the condemned criminal upon whom I experimented to-day died within five minutes. Pasqual Ravenna, your servants on their return will find you leaning over the table dead, clutching this empty phial in your hand. To-morrow all Slavowitz will be discussing the suicide of the cardinal archbishop. Your nephew, Redwitz of Zamoska, may send off his three sealed packets, and very much surprised the recipients will be to find nothing within them but blank papers, for the originals have been abstracted, read by the princess, and burnt."

Like one dazed by a heavy blow, Ravenna stared vacantly at the speaker, and then his eye, mechanically sinking lighted upon something white near his feet. It was the letter that he had recently written. The sight of it suddenly quickened his blood and suggested a plan for outwitting his assassins. He was still seated at the table, and with his foot he gently pushed the letter forward till it lay concealed beneath the fringe of the overhanging damask cloth.

Upon the table itself there lay before him a document almost as dangerous as the letter. This was 350
a roll of vellum with papal seals attached. It was beyond him to conceal this document from Zabern, whose face was set upon it with grim satisfaction.

"What have we here?" he cried, stooping over the table, and lifting the vellum. "The papal bull, as I live," he continued, glancing his eye rapidly over the document, and reading snatches from it. "'We, Pio Nono ... do herewith commission our faithful brother in Christ, Pasqual Ravenna'—Angels of light! such names mingled! Christ and Ravenna!—'commission him to pronounce sentence of anathema and excommunication against the so-called Natalie Lilieska,'—so-called, so-called," muttered Zabern, stopping in his reading with a sudden fear, and hardly daring to continue the perusal; "what does that mean?—'in that while claiming to be lawful Princess of Czernova, and a daughter of the True Church, she is an impostor who ...' Oh, devil that you are!" cried Zabern, breaking off, and grinding his teeth in anger, "so you have told that story to the Pope?"

"It is known to all the Vatican," replied Ravenna, hoping that the knowledge of the fact would restrain Zabern from his dreadful purpose. "The Pope will understand why I am murdered, and to whom the deed should be ascribed. You will do well to pause and reflect."

Zabern's face grew terrible in its expression, as he realized the desperate strait to which Barbara was now reduced. If the Pope were master of her secret, not only could he anathematize, but he had likewise the power of deposing her whenever he chose.

"'Pause and reflect'?" said Zabern, repeating Ravenna's words. "Why, this disposes me more than ever to slay you. What motive have I for keeping you alive? So, cardinal," he continued, after a brief pause, "you would have come to the coronation, robed in full canonicals, with the Latin 351
clergy of Czernova at your back, to interdict Abbot Faustus from performing the ceremony, to read the Pope's rescript, and to anathematize the princess with bell, book, and candle. Vain your hopes! This papal bull shall not be read in the cathedral to-morrow, for here is the end of it."

With these words Zabern raised the document to the flame of the candelabrum, and there held it till the vellum had shrivelled to blackened flakes.

"That the Pope should sign his name to such rhodomontade!" he muttered contemptuously. "He threatens us; let him beware of his own downfall. The House of Savoy shall be our avengers. The Sardinian king will never rest till he himself shall reign at Rome."

A prediction destined to be fulfilled.

Zabern, resolving to show cause for the slaying of Ravenna, seated himself in a chair, rested his elbow upon the table, his face upon his hand, and glared across the crimson damask.

"Cardinal, when you told the Pope that story, did you tell him the whole of it? How the Princess Natalie met her death, for example?"

"The Princess Natalie committed suicide at Castel Nuovo."

"True; and so you told her father, Prince Thaddeus, but you did not tell him her reason for the

act. Let us hear it."

Ravenna was silent.

"The truth is that you had become possessed of unhallowed desires towards that fair princess during your tour with her around the shores of the Adriatic. When at Zara you proposed a visit to your place, Castel Nuovo, and the princess, doubting nothing, willingly accompanied you. While there you made certain proposals to her, who was so innocent in mind that she failed to understand you, and wonderingly repeated your words to the housekeeper Jacintha. Full well did 352
Jacintha know your object in bringing that young girl there. For, holy cardinal, Natalie was not the first. You were ever eloquent in persuading youthful widows and maidens to renounce the world and to take the veil. It was your practice to escort your victims to some convent in Dalmatia, and the journey was always broken at Castel Nuovo. When your *protégées* left that place they had good reason for wishing to hide themselves in a convent.

"To such a point of depravity and recklessness had your nature grown that you could not refrain, even where a princess was concerned. At Castel Nuovo there was a secret passage leading from your study to the chamber where Natalie slept. In the silence and darkness of the night you stole down to accomplish your wicked purpose. When I think of the shame and horror of that poor girl's awakening, her imploring words and cries—"

At this point Nikita, thinking of his own youthful daughter, who once upon a time had been almost persuaded by Ravenna to adopt a conventual life, could no longer restrain himself.

"Have at you!" he cried fiercely, drawing his sabre.

The stroke aimed by him at the cardinal's head was intercepted by the sword of the quick-moving Zabern.

"Hold, Nikita. No clumsy work. No betrayal of ourselves. Toffana's hell-drops will do the trick more safely. Put up your weapon."

When the other had somewhat reluctantly obeyed, Zabern resumed,—

"Next morning the wretched princess, rendered completely insane by the thought of her dishonor, staggered through the secret passage, and after invoking the vengeance of heaven upon you, she stabbed herself and so died.

"By some means you prevailed upon Lambro and Jacintha to maintain silence on the part played 353
by you in this tragedy. A message was sent to Prince Thaddeus, who happened at this time to be at Zara. He came; wept over his daughter's suicide; wondered what motive could have prompted the deed, but never suspected the holy cardinal. Pasqual Ravenna, do you deny the truth of this?"

No answer came from the accused.

"Cardinal, such guilt as yours would be ill-atoned for by an after-life of penance in monastic cell, in sackcloth and ashes, with scourgings and with diet of bitter herbs. But, untroubled by the crime, dead to the voice of conscience, you mingle unashamedly with your fellow-men, you aspire to play the statesman—nay, you hesitate not to minister in the holiest rites of religion. Was it not enough for you to have destroyed Natalie, but that you must seek to draw her sister to your arms? And because our princess would remain virtuous and good, you in your black rage would come forward at the coronation to-morrow, and, by lying words—for none know better than yourself that she is the lawful daughter of Thaddeus—you would seek to procure her dethronement. Never slew I man yet, save with regret; now for the first time do I take pleasure in killing a fellow-mortal.

"Pasqual Ravenna, your last hour has come. To-night shall Princess Natalie's dying cry be answered. The maidens whom you have wronged shall be avenged."

Something glittered in Zabern's hand. It was a surgical instrument of steel, designed for forcing open the jaws of persons bent on keeping them shut.

Holding this dreadful instrument, together with the poison-phial, in his left and only hand, Zabern motioned Nikita and Gabor to grip the cardinal by the arms.

"Give me ten minutes, ten minutes only, in the next apartment," gasped Ravenna. 354

"For what purpose?"

"To—pray."

"I fail to see the use," responded Zabern dryly. "Heavens! Nikita, how strangely constituted these churchmen must be to think that a life of guilt may be atoned for by ten minutes of prayer."

"As you yourself hope for mercy at the last day, I beseech you to grant me ten minutes—five, then —in the next room."

Zabern laid the steel and phial upon the table.

"You may have ten minutes' grace, but you will do your praying here."

"That apartment is an oratory," pleaded Ravenna.

"Let him have his wish, marshal," said Gabor.

"And see him escape us?" ejaculated Nikita fiercely.

"I cannot escape. There is no exit from the oratory, secret or open, save by that door. The window is fifty feet from the ground."

Zabern, suspecting that Ravenna was trying to effect his escape, approached the chamber in question, and found it to be an oblong apartment, twenty feet by ten, fitted up as an oratory, and hung with sacred pictures. At the far end, through a casement of stained glass, arrowy beams of tender silvery moonlight slanted upon an altar, surmounted by an ivory crucifix with waxen tapers burning before it. There was an air of solemnity in the place which exercised an influence even upon the stern mind of Zabern.

"Take your ten minutes," he exclaimed, pointing within, "but seek not to escape, for my eye shall be on you the while."

Ravenna rose from his seat; in rising he purposely stumbled and fell, and while so doing he contrived to secure possession of the letter lying beneath the table, and to secrete it within the folds of his cassock. Then with slow and faltering step he moved into the oratory, and taking out his rosary, he knelt with bowed head before the altar. 355

Zabern, standing without, kept the door slightly open in order that he might not lose sight of Ravenna's movements.

Gabor the trooper here put a very pertinent question.

"Marshal, since the Pope and his cardinals know the princess's secret, what do we gain by killing the archbishop?"

"We stop his mouth from proclaiming the secret to-morrow," replied Zabern.

"True. But afterwards—?"

"Afterwards, my good Gabor, no one shall be able to say that our princess is not Natalie Lilieska. Was the real Natalie marked with a mole upon her right shoulder? A friendly physician can soon produce that disfigurement for us upon the fair skin of our princess."

Nikita laughed aloud.

"Is there any one living who can defeat the marshal?" he cried.

"There is one here who will make the attempt," said a voice.

At this the trio stared curiously at one another, for the words came from the oratory, and had plainly been uttered by none other than the cardinal. Recovering from his momentary surprise, Zabern, with sudden misgiving at his heart, flung wide the door.

"Marshal Zabern," said the voice of Ravenna, "as you value the throne of the princess, come not one step farther. Mark well what is in my hand."

The window of the oratory, which before had been shut, was now wide open, and the moonlight fell upon the lofty figure and pale face of the cardinal, who was standing erect on one side of the altar. In his right hand he held a dove, to the neck of which a letter was attached. The sight kept the three men dumb and motionless, for they instantly divined that the bird was a carrier-pigeon. 356

Ravenna's Italian guile had been more than a match for Zabern's subtlety. His object in kneeling before the altar had not been to pray, but to release the dove which had been attached to it by a silken thread—a dove purposely kept for emergencies. What captain of the guard on arresting the archbishop would be so stern-natured as to refuse his prisoner a few minutes' prayer in his private oratory? Ravenna, on releasing the dove, had affixed the letter to its neck, performing the feat so guardedly, that though he had been watched, now by Zabern, and now by Nikita, his movements had not given rise to suspicion.

"Listen," cried Ravenna, raising his left hand warningly. "If you enter I quit my hold of the dove. You observe the letter. Let me tell you what it contains."

"Say on," returned Zabern with affected indifference. "Your ten minutes have not yet expired."

"This evening," began the cardinal, "and just prior to your arrival I penned a letter intended for the Czar's perusal. That letter now hangs from this dove's neck. It contains three statements. Firstly, that the Princess of Czernova is not Natalie Lilieska; secondly, that the Czernovese Charter is a forgery from the hand of Katina Ludovska; thirdly, that the Convent of the Transfiguration contains ample evidence of a conspiracy for the emancipation of Poland. Each of these facts, singly, if known to the Czar, would be sufficient to hurl the princess from her throne. If this dove should fly forth it would be in my nephew's house at Zamoska within thirty minutes; an hour more, and Redwitz would be in the camp of the Czar. Thus, then, do I make my terms. Approach to do me hurt, and I release the dove. Retire from the palace, give me my life, and I swear by all that I hold holy to refrain from endangering the throne of the princess. It is within your power to murder me, but the murder will be dearly purchased, for it will bring utter ruin upon Czernova." 357

"Idle vaunting!" said Zabern. "All know that the carrier-pigeon flieth not in the dark."

"This dove has ere now found its way to Zamoska by moonlight."

That the cardinal spoke truth when he declared that the letter contained the weighty secrets Zabern did not doubt. Therefore to advance with intent to slay would be fatal to the interests of the princess; and yet to retire, leaving Ravenna to his own devices would be equally fatal, for Zabern knew full well that the cardinal's most solemn oath was not to be trusted. So soon as the trio should withdraw, so soon as Ravenna should be released from the fear of their presence, he would laugh at their simplicity, and would carry out his evil work against the princess, ay, and with more determination than ever, embittered as he would be by the attempt made upon his life. It was a terrible dilemma.

The trio stood upon the threshold of the oratory, immovable, irresolute, silent, gazing at the cardinal, who in turn kept his eyes fixed upon them like a prisoner waiting for the verdict of life or death.

"No terms with a Jesuit," muttered Zabern under his breath. "Nikita, you are the best shot. Draw your pistol, and shoot, not the cardinal, but the dove."

As Zabern spoke he moved slightly to one side, in order to screen the movements of his henchman.

Directly afterwards a report rang out, startlingly loud in that small chamber. It was accompanied by a sharp cry of anguish from the cardinal, and by a swift forward rush on the part of his foes, each eager to pounce upon the fallen bird.

But, by a strange mischance, Nikita, who was considered to be second only to Katina herself in the handling of the pistol, had somehow failed to hit a conspicuous object seventeen feet away. 358
The bullet had penetrated the wrist of the cardinal, whose hand had involuntarily relaxed its hold, with the result that the startled dove was now flying forth through the open casement.

With the air of one mad, Zabern pulled Nikita towards the window, and, hurling Ravenna aside, he thrust his own pistol into the trooper's hand.

"Shoot, Nikita, shoot in God's name," he cried, pointing to the dove, whose white form was clearly defined against the dark blue sky. "The fate of all Czernova rests on your aim."

The bird, as if doubtful what direction to take, was moving slowly round in a series of spirals and rising higher and higher each moment. Nikita pointed his weapon, raising it gradually with the ascent of the dove, till, deeming himself certain of his aim, he drew the trigger. A second shot rang out. Both men looked, expecting the instant fall of the dove, but the winged messenger remained unhurt, and apparently having chosen its route, flew off in a straight line, and immediately disappeared over the tree-tops.

"By heaven, you've missed again!" cried Zabern, his dismay being lost for the moment in wonder that Nikita's hand should have so strangely lost its cunning.

"God's curse is on me to-night," said Nikita, flinging the pistol from him. "Who," he added, with a touch of Slavonic superstition, "who can shoot a dove, symbol of the Holy Ghost?"

"Symbol of the holy devil!" cried Zabern. "Where's the cardinal?"

In his eagerness to mark the effect of Nikita's second shot Gabor had likewise pressed forward to the casement, forgetful of Ravenna, who, taking advantage of this negligence, picked himself up from the corner where Zabern had flung him, and ran from the oratory into the library. The 359
wondering police next day traced his course over the carpet by the blood-drops that fell from his shattered wrist.

But in a moment more the avenging Zabern was after him, his sabre gleaming in his hand.

The cardinal had reached the locked door of the library: his unwounded hand had turned the key; his fingers were already upon the door-handle when Zabern, with a laugh of horrid glee, clutched him by the collar of his cassock with the same hand that held the sabre, and pulled him backward upon his knees.

The agony of the situation forced from Ravenna a yell that curdled the blood of the treacherous steward who kept watch at the foot of the staircase, but it had no effect upon Zabern.

"You paid no heed to Natalie's screams, nor will I to yours."

He thought no more now of safeguarding himself by imparting to the murder the appearance of suicide.

"To hell, and say that Zabern sent you."

Foaming with fury, he dealt not one, but many strokes at the kneeling, swaying figure, with its feebly upraised hands. Nikita and Gabor, equally frenzied, joined in the savage work.

The three miserable men wiped their bloody sabres upon the window-curtains, and stared down upon the carpet at something which had once been a man.

The clock-tower of the cathedral now sent forth the sweet and pretty carillon that always heralded the striking of the hour. Then after a solemn interval came the first peal of midnight.

"The princess's coronation day!" said Nikita.

"Humph! will there be any coronation?" muttered Zabern.

"Hark to the shouting!" said Gabor. 360

From every quarter of the capital, from the groups moving to and fro along the route of the intended procession, from spacious square and narrow alley, from the brilliantly illuminated hotel, and from the obscure private dwelling, came the sound of cheering, gradually swelling into one prolonged universal roar. The gala-day had come at last!

Zabern with a grim smile looked towards the north. The heaven in that direction was tinged with a red glow from the thousands of watch-fires in the Czar's camp—that camp towards which the swift-flying dove was now winging its course with the tidings fatal to Czernova. How long would it be ere that huge array came pouring across the border to depose the princess, and to establish the duke upon—

Zabern started.

Ere the shouting of the joyous populace had died away, a new and startling sound was reverberating through the night air. It was the boom of a single cannon, and that at no great distance. Its significance was intuitively divined by Zabern.

"The Citadel-gun!" he cried, recoiling from the window. "By God, the duke has escaped!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE BEGINNING OF THE CORONATION

The morning of Barbara's coronation broke soft and sunny; it seemed almost impossible that 361
anything disastrous could happen on a day so fair.

Prior to setting off for the cathedral the princess entertained her ministers at breakfast. She herself occupied the head of the table, with Radzivil at her right hand and Zabern at the left. Dorislas was absent in command of the ten thousand appointed to guard the frontier.

So far no hostilities had occurred. Successive couriers arriving at intervals of every half-hour continued to report that the Russian forces still preserved their position of the previous afternoon,—a position about a mile distant from the Czernovese border. There was no movement on their part suggestive of coming invasion. The more hopeful of the ministers, therefore, began to pluck up courage, and tried to believe that the Czar's army had really mustered for the customary autumn manœuvres, and not for the purpose of preventing the coronation.

Zabern did not share in these hopeful views; none knew better than he did the magnitude of the peril that overhung Czernova. In reporting the cardinal's death to the princess Zabern had suppressed some details, and hence Barbara was unaware that a dove had flown off to Zamoska bearing a letter, which, if it should reach the Czar's hands, would most assuredly result in her dethronement. From very pity he withheld the fact.

"She will learn it soon enough," he thought. "Why add to evil the anticipation of it?" 362

During the course of the breakfast many comments were made upon the murder of Cardinal Ravenna.

"A terrible and mysterious affair!" said Radzivil, greatly shocked by the tragedy, and completely ignorant as to its authors. "The physicians assert that there are no less than eighteen wounds upon the body."

"Five less than Julius Cæsar received," commented Zabern irrelevantly.

"You offer a reward, I presume, for any information that shall lead to the detection of the assassins?" said the premier to Zabern, who, as Minister for Justice, was head of the department that took cognizance of crime.

"Not a rouble note," replied Zabern bluntly.

"That's contrary to your usual practice."

"Why should I offer a reward when I know who the—ah!—assassins are? There were three of them to the deed."

"You know them? And yet they have not been seized!"

"I have weighty reasons for deferring their arrest."

"Delay may end in their escape."

"The chief assassin cannot escape from me. The police know him and have their eye upon him whenever he walks abroad. I can put my finger upon him as easily as I now lay hand upon this coat," said Zabern smiling, and suiting the action to the word.

Radzivil was about to press for further enlightenment, but Barbara checked him.

"The subject is distressing to me," she said with a look that confirmed her words.

"Your Highness, I crave pardon," said the premier.

Though Barbara fully believed that no one had ever merited death more than Ravenna, yet the deed lay heavy on her mind. Not even the thought of the many maidens, her own sister among the number, sacrificed to the unholy desires of the cardinal, could blind her to the fact that in 363
sending Zabern to slay him she had committed a crime.

No such scruple, however, troubled the conscience of the marshal, whose only regret was that he had not despatched the duke likewise, while it lay in his power to do so.

Ere coming to the breakfast he had witnessed the execution of the deputy Lesko Lipski and the spy Ivan Russakoff with the feeling, however, that it was but sorry justice to shoot the agents, while the more guilty principal was at large.

"You have no tidings of Bora, I presume?" said Barbara turning to the marshal.

"None—so far, your Highness," replied Zabern. "But, oh!" he added with mingled surprise and satisfaction, "here comes one who should be able to explain the mystery of the duke's escape."

All eyes had turned towards a door which had just opened, giving ingress to a file of soldiers; they were under the command of Gabor, and escorted in their midst Miroslav, the governor of the Citadel.

"Your Highness," said Gabor, advancing and saluting, "I came upon the governor in the act of departing from the city. Thinking that you might like to interview him, I took the liberty of arresting him on my own authority."

"You have done well," replied Barbara; and then turning a cold face upon the governor, she said: "What defence have you to make, Miroslav? You received orders to exercise special vigilance over your prisoner, the Duke of Bora, and yet he contrived to escape."

"And with my connivance, so please your Highness."

"Traitor!" said Zabern, starting up, and half drawing his sword, "you have signed your death-warrant."

"Your Highness, hear my story ere condemning me. At eleven o'clock last night I was informed that a man stood at the gate of the Citadel demanding an interview with me. I sent to ascertain 364
his name and business. 'Carry that to your master,' said the stranger, pencilling a few words on a card, and enclosing it within an envelope. On opening the envelope this is what I beheld."

Here Miroslav drew forth a small card, which Gabor conveyed to the princess, who started at sight of the words that were written upon it. She handed the note to Radzivil, whose face immediately expressed the utmost consternation. He tendered the card to Zabern, who in turn passed it to the minister beside him, and thus amid a death-like silence it went the round of the table.

And the words of the note were these,—

You are herewith commanded to release the Duke of Bora. Delay will mean death to you.

NICHOLAS PAULOVITCH
Czar of all the Russias.

"When I saw that signature," continued Miroslav, "I gave orders that the visitor should be instantly admitted. On entering the room he commanded my servant to retire, and then when he had withdrawn the cloak from his face I saw that it was indeed the Emperor Nicholas. 'Have you given command for the release of my kinsman?' were his first words. Vain was it for me to protest that I could receive such an order only from the princess herself. 'I am the suzerain of Czernova, and therefore above the princess,' was his reply."

"Ha!" said Barbara, with a flash of her eyes. "And you acknowledged his suzerainty?"

"Your Highness is great, but the Czar is greater. Who is like the mighty Nicholas?"

"No one on earth, Miroslav; for which fact may the saints be praised!" remarked Zabern.

"Your Highness, I was so awed by the emperor's majestic presence, by his authoritative manner, by the thought of his empire and power that I could not do otherwise than obey him. The marshal 365
himself would have done the like, had he been in my place."

Zabern repudiated the statement with a scornful laugh.

"I brought the duke to the presence of the emperor, and the two withdrew, going I know not where. Fearing your Highness's displeasure, I myself quitted the Citadel, intending to fly from Czernova. I throw myself upon your Highness's mercy."

"It was your duty, Miroslav," returned Barbara, "to retain your prisoner, even at the hazard of your life. In taking orders from a foreign sovereign you have committed an act of treason. Gabor, see that the governor be kept in the palace here till our return from the cathedral. We will then decide as to his punishment."

Gabor saluted, and the troop retired with their prisoner.

"The Czar secretly in our city!" murmured Radzivil, in a tone of dismay. "What is his object?"

"No good to our rule, count," replied Barbara, quietly.

The secret visit of the Czar to Slavowitz, and his act in releasing the Duke of Bora, had so sinister an aspect that the hopeful ones among the ministry returned at a bound to their previous state of doubt. Were they about to witness a coronation or a dethronement? Was the Czar preparing to intervene in the ceremony? Would the solemnity in the cathedral end amid the mockery and the triumph of the Muscovite faction? With a feeling of pity they glanced at their fair young ruler, who for her part showed no sign of fear in this great crisis. They recognized that if she should fall, she would fall with dignity.

The breakfast ended, and Barbara retired to dress for the coming ceremony.

Outside, in the wide extent of ground fronting the Vistula Palace, the long line of the procession was slowly forming under the direction of marshals and heralds.

Part of the procession consisted of a sort of historic pageant; its members, attired in costumes that recalled every period of Polish history, carried trophies and emblems, calculated to stir the patriotic enthusiasm of the populace. 366

In this pageant Katina Ludovska bore part, by far the most charming of the maidens present, clad as she was in a dainty corselet of silvered mail, above a dark-blue satin skirt flowered with gold. Mounted upon a beautiful bay, she bore proudly aloft a famous historic memorial, a standard captured by King Sigismund at the taking of Moscow, its white silken folds distinctly stamped with the impress of a bloody hand, a ghastly testimony to the struggle that had once raged around it.

In riding along the line of the procession, Zabern stopped and addressed a few words to his affianced.

"Not pasteboard and tinsel, I trust?" he said, with a smile, and referring to the sword by her side.

"Real steel," replied Katina, exhibiting the blade.

"Good! 'Tis well to go armed on such a day as this. We shall be fighting for our liberties ere long."

"Death before submission," replied Katina, with a brave light in her eyes that made Zabern love her the more.

The din caused by the marching of soldiers, the neighing of steeds, the rolling of carriage-wheels, the snarling of silver trumpets, the crisp, sharp word of command floated upward to Barbara's ears as she sat undergoing her toilet at the hands of her ladies. She wondered, as she had wondered many times that morning, how it would all end, for assuredly no coronation could ever have been heralded with more sinister auspices than her own.

Partly with a view to picturesque effect, and partly that the populace along the line of route might have a clear and uninterrupted view of their princess, it had been decided that she should proceed to the cathedral mounted upon a white palfrey. 367

Barbara had been somewhat disposed at first to shrink from this exposure to public gaze, but had finally consented to the arrangement, won over by the argument that as the people would assemble for the express purpose of seeing her, it would be a disappointment to them to catch but a glimpse of their ruler through the windows of a state-coach.

To Radzivil and Zabern had been given the honor of riding side by side with the princess, though the marshal cared much less for the honor than for the opportunity afforded him of exercising guard over her person, since he was not without apprehension that some fanatic Muscovite might attempt her life during her progress through the streets.

The procession was timed to start at ten o'clock, and as the hour drew near Zabern and the premier rode to the entrance of the palace, and there waited the coming of the princess.

The marshal was mounted upon a magnificent black charger, and made a splendid figure, for he wore the old picturesque Polish costume, and sparkled with diamonds from plume to spur.

"And to think," he mused in the interval of waiting, "to think that Captain Woodville has not yet arrived."

"Captain Woodville?" exclaimed the premier with a start. "Surely the princess is not recalling him?"

"No, but I am; and his non-arrival is a grave matter for us. Were the duke still in the Citadel, Woodville's absence might be borne with equanimity. As it is—but here comes the princess. I must defer my explanation."

Punctually at one minute to ten, Barbara appeared at the entrance of the palace, and descending the marble stairs, she mounted her white palfrey with the assistance of Radzivil.

Zabern at the same moment waved his plumed cap, and immediately a salvo of artillery from the roof of the palace proclaimed to the waiting populace that the princess was about to set off. 368

Amid the roll of drums, the crash of music, and the pealing of bells from every steeple in the city, the great brazen gates of the palace gardens were flung wide, and there rode forth the head of the procession, the Blue Legion, their lances flashing brightly in the sunlight.

As they moved out, the sight that met their eyes was sufficient to stir the blood of the most sluggish. The centre of the road was empty, but the sidewalks were literally paved with human heads. Every window, balcony, and roof was alive with spectators. All Czernova was there, every citizen apparently determined to find a place somewhere along the line of route. Resolved to obtain a view somehow of their youthful sovereign, men could be seen clinging in mid-air to steeples, pediments, cornices, wherever foothold could be found. From the ground below to the sky above nothing but human faces.

"Sword of Saint Michael!" muttered Zabern. "A pity all have not been trained to use the rifle. We might, then, make good defence, even against the Czar's one hundred thousand."

As soon as Barbara made her appearance, she was greeted with frenzied cheering. Roar after roar rent the air. Rolling along the boulevard, and mounting upward to the sky, the sound was almost loud enough to be heard in the distant camp of the Czar. So great was the enthusiasm that the troops lining the streets could with difficulty prevent the populace from pressing forward to touch her.

If any dissentients to her rule were present along the line of route, they were careful to dissemble their feelings. But who could dissent from a maiden so sweet and fair? Dressed simply in white silk, she looked every inch a princess. Her dark hair was without covering, save for a slender gold 369 diadem, from which there flowed behind a veil of diaphanous lace.

Tears glistened in eyes that had not been wet for years.

Aged men who had seen the great Kosciusko carried off from the fatal field of Macicowice; veterans who, like Zabern, had marched with Napoleon to the fall of Moscow; fugitives from Siberian mines, with bodies scarred by the iron fetters they had worn; Polish patriots, survivors of the ill-starred rising of '30—all were gathered that day in the Czernovese capital to acclaim one destined, so they believed, to revive the ancient empire of Poland. Many a salute did Zabern give, as from time to time he caught sight among the crowd of the face of some old familiar-in-arms.

Barbara, however, though smiling sweetly upon all around, was inwardly unhappy. A secret voice seemed to whisper, "Deceiver! this tribute of loyalty is offered to Natalie Lilieska, the lawfully born daughter of the Princess Stephanie, and not to the Barbara of doubtful origin."

It was too late now to recede from the *rôle* she had assumed, and so amid shouting multitudes she rode on, her progress from the palace to the cathedral being one continuous scene of triumph, unmarred by anything of a hostile character.

"It is here, then, that we are to look for the Czar's *coup*?" muttered Zabern, as the cavalcade drew in sight of the stately Gothic cathedral of Saint Stanislas, from every tower of which silver-tongued bells were pealing jubilant carillons.

Those in the procession whose duty or privilege it was to enter the cathedral, made their ingress by various doors to their appointed places; the less fortunate remained drawn up in order around the edifice.

As Zabern stood upon the broad flight of steps, carpeted with crimson velvet, and surveyed the vast crowds around, his attention was suddenly arrested by the sight of a horseman at the far end 370 of a boulevard which opened upon the cathedral square. As this avenue was kept clear by the military for the return journey of the princess, there was nothing to impede the rider's progress, and on he came with flying rein and bloody spur.

"A courier! a courier!" cried the people, instinctively divining that he was the bearer of weighty tidings. "What news? What news?"

To their cries, however, the rider remained mute.

"By heaven, it's Nikita!" muttered the marshal.

As the quivering steed drew up at the foot of the cathedral-stairs, Zabern sprang to meet his orderly.

"Now, marshal," said the latter, "play the Roman, and fall on your sword's point, for the end has come."

"A good many men shall fall by this blade ere it reaches my heart," growled Zabern. "What new

trouble do you bring?"

"The chanting of the monks hath ceased; or to be plainer, the Russian standard is floating over the Convent of the Transfiguration."

"Speak you from hearsay merely?"

"I speak of what I have seen."

"The cardinal laughs at us from hell; this is the first result of his letter. The Russian invasion has begun, then? Pretty generalship on the part of Dorislas to let the enemy steal thus upon his rear! And where are the monks, that they have not fired the powder-magazine, and sent themselves and their foes flying into the air? They have sworn an oath to do it rather than let the convent fall into the hands of the enemy. There would not now have been one stone upon another if old Faustus had been there."

"It was when on my way back from the camp of Dorislas that I caught sight of the Muscovite standard on the tower of the convent. I immediately rode near and perceived the bayonets of the 371
Paulovski Guards moving to and fro along the battlements. And who should be in command there but Baron Ostrova, the duke's former secretary—he whom the princess banished from Czernova. I at once galloped back to our camp with the news. Dorislas instantly set off with a thousand men; he has invested the convent; his artillery are ready planted for shelling the place, and he now awaits orders from you."

"'Orders'?" repeated Zabern with contempt. "My orders should be, 'Consider yourself cashiered for incompetence.' How many Russians do you suppose there are in the convent?"

"I cannot state the number, marshal—sufficient evidently to overpower the monks, and to hold the place in case of siege."

"And the rest of the Czar's forces?"

"Are abiding quietly in their camp on the other side of the frontier."

"Gladly would I come, Nikita, to direct operations, but that I dare not leave the side of the princess, for there is more danger to be apprehended here than before the convent. Dorislas shall see me with all speed as soon as the coronation is over. Meantime here are his orders."

And the marshal wrote upon a slip of paper: "Maintain cordon till my arrival. Do nothing unless attacked.—ZABERN."

Taking the note, Nikita rode off, his breakneck pace along the boulevard again exciting the wonder of the populace.

"This holding of the coronation while the foe is on Czernovese ground might seem a jest to some," murmured Zabern; "yet if, as I am hoping, the ceremony should tempt the Czar to come forward personally to oppose the princess's rights, then all may yet be well. Since Nicholas has chosen to make an armed raid upon our territory, let him not complain if he should find himself a prisoner 372
of war. And with the Czar in our hands we shall be masters of the game."

On turning to enter the porch, Zabern was met by the chief court official, to whom had been committed all the arrangements connected with the coronation.

"Marshal, the cathedral is full to overflowing, and yet there are hundreds at the northern porch clamoring for admittance, and all provided with proper orders."

"Very bad arrangement on your part."

"Not so, marshal. The tickets issued did not exceed the seating accommodation."

"Ha!" said Zabern, alive to the significance of this statement; "you mean that there are several hundred persons within who have no right to be there?"

"That is so, marshal. The whole body of the northern transept is filled with men who, I am certain, have gained entrance by means of forged orders. Among these men I recognize many Muscovites, not ruffians from Russograd, but Muscovites of the nobler and wealthier class."

"So!" murmured Zabern. "Their plot of the barricades having been forestalled and thwarted, the enemy are resorting to new manœuvres."

"Some are in uniform, and some in court dress, and hence they are armed with swords. If we should attempt to expel them there will be opposition, tumult, possibly bloodshed. What's to be done?"

"At present, nothing. Let us, if possible, avoid a riot. If they choose to remain orderly, good; but if it be their object to oppose the coronation by armed force, then their blood be upon their own heads."

"And the multitude at the northern porch?"

"Will have to remain there, I fear," replied Zabern, shrugging his shoulders.

He passed from the porch to the interior of the edifice.

The scene within fairly dazzled the eye. The rich dresses of the ladies, the splendid military costumes of the men, formed a picture glowing with color; on all sides were to be seen the sparkle of jewels and the gleam of scarlet and gold. 373

As Zabern slowly made his way towards his allotted seat in the choir, he did not fail to notice certain mocking glances cast at him by the occupants of the northern transept. Mischief was evidently the object of their assembling; but inasmuch as they were inferior in number to the Poles present, and as a word on his part could instantly set in motion the military both inside and outside the cathedral, Zabern viewed this Muscovite gathering without any alarm.

The chancel, elevated considerably above the general level of the cathedral-pavement, was the cynosure of all eyes.

On the altar were the sacramental vessels, the princely regalia, and the document supposed to be the original Czernovese Charter, never publicly exhibited, except at a coronation.

To the left of the altar was an oaken chair in which the princess would sit, till the time came for her to take her place on the throne.

Respectively north and south of the altar, and each vying with the other in splendor of vestment, stood the two ecclesiastics who were to officiate in the ceremony, the Greek Archpastor Mosco, and the mitred Abbot Faustus; the latter a good man, and a stern old patriot, quite capable, as Zabern had said, of blowing himself to fragments, if Polish interests should require such sacrifice.

While Zabern from his place was intently studying the occupants of the northern transept, under the belief that the Czar was concealed somewhere among them, a small door in the left wall of the choir opened, and Barbara entered, bare-headed, and clothed in her coronation-robe,—a vestment of purple velvet, bordered with ermine, and gleaming with pearls. Four ladies attended her as train-bearers. 374

Awed by the solemnity of the occasion, she was very pale, and with the glory of the sunlight illumining her figure as she moved forward with slow and majestic pace, she seemed to her adherents afar off like a fair vision from another world.

According to the prescribed ritual, the first part of the ceremony consisted in reading a chapter from one of the Four Evangelists, a duty which by previous arrangement fell to the lot of Mosco.

As soon, therefore, as Barbara had taken her place in the oaken chair, she glanced at the archpastor as a sign for him to begin.

Now great importance was attached both by the Poles and the Muscovites to this reading of the Gospel. The lection was neither appointed beforehand nor chosen by the ecclesiastic officiating; it was left to the guidance of chance, or rather, as the Czernovese themselves believed, to the will of the Deity. The lector, following a usage of mediæval times, was required to open the holy volume at random and to read the first chapter upon which his eye should happen to light. It was believed that the portion thus hit on would contain something applicable to the person crowned or even prophetic of the character of the reign.

As Mosco with dignified bearing moved to the lectern, he passed close to Zabern, whose quick ear instantly detected a peculiar sound beneath the archpastor's brocaded and jewelled cassock, —a sound which the marshal could liken only to the trail of a steel scabbard.

"As I live the fellow is armed," he muttered. "A holy prelate with a sword beneath his gown! There's treason here."

Zabern's first impulse was to spring up, and tearing off Mosco's gown, to expose him to the assembly as an armed conspirator. 375

It might be, however, that, like himself, the archpastor anticipated that there would be rioting and fighting at the coronation, and hence he had as much right as others to carry arms for his own defence.

Zabern therefore refrained from violence, but his keen eyes were attentive to every movement of Mosco.

On the brazen lectern, which stood upon the edge of the choir, directly facing the assembly, lay a volume of the Four Evangelists, closed and clasped.

Mosco unfastened the clasp, and then evidently wishing to be thought clear of all suspicion of designedly choosing his lection, he turned away his head, and with nimble fingers threw open the volume; and yet in spite of this, Zabern was impressed with the belief that the Greek prelate knew beforehand at what page the book was open. He had not forgotten that this reading of the Gospel had been selected by Mosco himself as his part in the coronation-ceremony, and he recalled the archpastor's peculiar smile at the time of his choosing the office. Was the mystery about to be solved?

Turning his eyes upon the opened volume, Mosco began to read. The lection obtained by this *sors sacra* proved to be the opening chapter of the Fourth Gospel.

With a curious anticipatory interest the assembly listened to the reading, prepared to catch at any verse which might be twisted into some allusion to the princess and her reign.

Mosco, in a magnificent bass voice and with majestic delivery, read through five verses. Then, making a momentary pause, he resumed, changing his tone to one of peculiar emphasis,—

"'*There was a man sent from God whose name was John*—'"

"And there he is!" cried a voice that rang like a clarion all over the cathedral, the voice of Feodor Orloff; "there he is! John, Duke of Bora. People of Czernova, listen to the voice of God." 376

Scarcely had the words been spoken when the Duke of Bora was seen emerging from the northern transept.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREAT WHITE CZAR

The sudden utterance of Count Orloff, combined with the simultaneous appearance of the Duke of Bora, caused an electric thrill to pervade the cathedral. 377

The holy Gospels, appealed to by a method approved by both factions alike, seemed to have given a mandate in favor of the duke, to the confusion of the adherents of the princess. The occupants of the northern aisle, as well as of the northern transept, gave instant proof of the side on which their sympathies lay. They rose to their feet as one man, and ignoring the sacred character of the place, gave vent to tumultuous cries.

"The holy oracles are on our side!"

"They bid us elect a man, and not a woman!"

"A John, and not a Natalie!"

"One sent from God, and not from Rome!"

"Bora, Bora! Give us Bora! The duke is our ruler!"

Their voices immediately became lost in the overwhelming shouts of the Poles, who likewise rose to their feet, and replied by counter-cries.

"The princess! the princess! We will have none but Natalie Lilieska!" There was not a shadow of doubt in Zabern's mind that the assembling of the Muscovites in the northern transept, the apt lection of Mosco, the utterance of Orloff, and the sudden appearing of the duke were all parts of a preconcerted arrangement.

"Holy hireling of the duke!" he said, grinding his teeth and addressing Mosco, "you have done your work. Stand from the choir, or by heaven!" he continued, half unsheathing his sabre, "I'll add a martyr to the Russian calendar." 378

"Thou hast the wisdom of the serpent, marshal, though scarcely the innocence of the dove," sneered the archpastor, who had many an old score to settle with Zabern. "We will see if thy wit can get the better of this situation. No Catholic ruler in Czernova!"

And directing a glance of scarcely disguised hatred towards the princess, he withdrew from the choir and took his station among the Muscovites.

Amid wild excitement the Duke of Bora, his face somewhat pale, continued to advance till he reached the open space fronting the choir, where he stood visible to all in the cathedral.

His outward appearance was sufficiently indicative of the power upon which he relied for support, for he was clad in the grand uniform of a marshal of the Seminovski Guards, and carried on his breast the cross of Saint Andrew, the blue riband of Russia.

At his approach the princess rose from her seat. The two factions perceiving her action, and curious to learn what she would say, ceased their raging.

"Marshal Zabern," cried Barbara in a voice that sounded like music after the raucous clamor of the previous few moments: "I call upon you to re-arrest that escaped prisoner, and to conduct him to the Citadel."

"You threaten me with imprisonment?" exclaimed Bora with a stern air. "It is mine to threaten, and yours to fear. People of Czernova," he continued, turning from the choir to address the assembly, "hear a revelation, strange yet true. She who sits there has no right to the crown, inasmuch as she is not Natalie Lilieska, but an impostor bearing a marvellous resemblance to that princess. The true Natalie died in Dalmatia more than two years ago." 379

The duke's words destroyed Zabern's lingering hope that Ravenna's letter might have miscarried, for how had Bora become possessed of his present knowledge, except through the medium of the cardinal's dove?

"Marshal Zabern," continued the duke, pointing to Barbara, "I call upon you to arrest an impostor who usurps my throne."

"And you may call," replied Zabern.

The duke's statement drew derisive laughter from the Poles; it was too absurd for belief, a malicious invention of a disappointed suitor. At this point Polonaski the Justiciary, who occupied a seat directly fronting the choir, arose and addressed the princess.

"Lady," he began, and showing by that word that he, too, like Mosco, had taken the side of her enemies, "lady, you have heard the duke's accusation. Let this assembly learn from you whether the charge be true."

It was hard for a youthful and spirited princess to be catechised by a minister who had suddenly turned against her.

"Your Highness, do not answer the traitorous gray-beard," said Zabern.

For a moment only did Barbara hesitate.

"It is true that I am not Natalie Lilieska."

An earthquake rocking the cathedral-pavement could not have dismayed the Poles more than had this startling acknowledgment. True it must be, since she herself admitted the impeachment,—an impeachment fatal to her own interests. And if she must cease to be princess, what would become of them under the rule of Bora?

The Muscovites, themselves bewildered with the unforeseen turn taken by events, sat as silent as the Poles.

"Consider well what you say," observed Polonaski with a slight smile of triumph. "You dethrone yourself by that statement."

"Not so," replied Barbara. "So long as I should have lived, the Princess Natalie could not have reigned; inasmuch as I am her elder sister Barbara, and therefore lawfully entitled to the throne." 380

The Poles raised a shout of applause; though somewhat dubious as to the truth of Barbara's statement, they were prepared to welcome it, as well as any other device which might deliver them from the power of the duke.

"Barbara Lilieska," returned the Justiciary, "is a person of whose existence Czernova has hitherto been ignorant. Princess Stephanie, wife of the late Thaddeus, had but one daughter, Natalie."

"I am the daughter of an earlier marriage."

"You bring strange tidings to our ears. It was never known in Czernova that Prince Thaddeus was twice wedded. Have you proof of this former marriage?"

"Yes," replied Barbara, inspired by a sudden thought, "I will cite yourself, Polonaski, as a witness, for at the time of my father's demise you were present with other ministers in the death-chamber. You can testify that Prince Thaddeus handed the diadem to me with the words: 'To you, my daughter lawfully born, do I bequeath this crown, to be held for the weal of Czernova.' Do you mark the words 'lawfully born'? Ill would my sire merit his title of 'The Good' if he died in the utterance of a lie. And what I have received, that will I keep."

The thunders of Polish applause in no way disconcerted the calm and forensic Polonaski.

"The word of the dying prince is not legal proof," he answered. "And, moreover, lady, you yourself, in concealing your own identity and in taking the name of another, have given clear evidence of disbelief in the claim that you now put forward."

"People of Czernova," said the duke, raising his voice, and again addressing the assembly, "I affirm that she who calls herself Barbara Lilieska was not born in lawful wedlock, but is a natural daughter of the late Prince Thaddeus, and as such is debarred from the succession. In the days of old," he continued, "when Czernova was a palatinate, the palatine at his investiture, was always prepared, either in person or by deputy, to defend his rights with the sword, nor was the rite discontinued when the palatines became princes and the investiture a coronation. I invoke the ancient law of the land and claim the ordeal of battle. I demand that the princess, so-called, shall meet me by deputy in single combat. There is my gage," he added, flinging his leathern gauntlet upon the flagstone of the choir. "Let the sword decide between us." 381

A triumphant laugh arose from the Muscovites. Where was the champion who would face the duke's deadly blade? Not even Zabern durst pick up that glove. Willingly would he have sacrificed his life in the cause of the princess, but death in this case would mean her deposition.

"The stars in their courses fight against Czernova," muttered Zabern, clenching his one and only hand. "Long ago, foreseeing this challenge would be given, I provided, as I thought, for the event. And now we must decline the combat, for our swordsman," he added in despair, "our swordsman is absent."

"It is now eleven," remarked Polonaski. The cathedral clock was chiming as he spoke. "The princess must appoint her champion within an hour from the giving of the challenge, the duel itself to take place upon the same day as the challenge. So runs the statute."

The mild and pacific Radzivil had beheld with indignation the casting down of the duke's glove.

"What a return to barbarism is this," he cried, addressing the Justiciary, "to make the crown of Czernova dependent upon the result of a duel! The statute which you cite is five hundred years old. It is obsolete, quite obsolete." 382

"By your favor," replied Polonaski, cool and judicial as ever, "permit me, as the highest legal authority in Czernova, to affirm that as that law is still on the statute-book it is therefore valid and of good effect."

"Your contention is null and void," said Zabern, "inasmuch as the Diet has passed a law against duelling."

"Against ordinary duelling—true; but the recent statute contains no clause against the coronation-combat, which, therefore, stands as part of the law of the land."

"The ex-Justiciary," said Barbara, deposing him from his office by a word, even as he had deposed her by a word, "the ex-Justiciary, as the interpreter of the law, should know that a traitor has no legal standing. The duke has shown himself a traitor to the state, and is therefore not in a position to impugn his sovereign."

"No court of justice has yet proved him to be a traitor," replied the inflexible Polonaski. "We cannot accept the word of even the lawful sovereign as the voice of the law, still less the word of an usurper."

"An usurper and a harlot's daughter," cried the voice of Orloff from amid the Muscovite ranks.

At this a deep murmur of indignation ran through the Polish part of the assembly.

"Men of Czernova," cried a woman's voice, "do you sit thus inactive, letting your princess be opposed and insulted by the Czar's hirelings? Where is the ancient spirit of the Poles fled? Would our forefathers have won this banner if they had shown the timidity that you now show?"

All eyes turned towards the speaker, who was none other than Katina Ludovska. Standing high upon a seat in the centre of the nave, she was plainly visible to all in the cathedral. While speaking she shook out the silken folds of the standard she had carried in the procession, and with her drawn sword pointed to the stamp of the bloody hand. 383

Her action was well understood by the Poles. What their fathers had done they could do. Her gesture was a tacit incentive to rise, to give battle to the Muscovites, and to sweep them from the cathedral. In silver helm and corselet Katina stood aloft, looking like some fair Amazon of ancient days. With eyes starry with patriotic fire, she waved the standard, and began to sing in a firm, sweet voice that penetrated to the most distant part of the cathedral,—

"Boja ro-dzica dziewica
Bojiem wslavisna Marya—"

A wave of emotion thrilled the assembly as these words fell upon their ears.

"The old Polish battle-hymn!" muttered Zabern. "By God, there'll be slaughter now."

It was indeed the famous hymn of Saint Adalbert, the anthem accustomed to be sung in old time by the Poles when moving forward to battle, the pæan that has struck terror to the heart of Muscovite, Tartar, and Turk in those brave days when Poland was the bulwark of Christendom against the barbarism of the East.

The memory of their past glories fired the blood of every patriot in the cathedral to an enthusiasm bordering on frenzy. Moved by a simultaneous impulse, the whole body of Poles sprang to their feet, drew their swords, and began to join in the refrain; and Katina's voice was immediately drowned in one grand outpouring.

The sparkle of a thousand sword-blades waving in the iridescent light cast by richly stained glass, the coloring and splendor of dresses and jewels, the magnificent roll of voices beneath the lofty Gothic arches, the notes of the organ pealing high above the chant—for the organist, catching the fire of patriotism, was pressing the keys of his instrument as he had never pressed them before—were sights and sounds that baffle description. Strong men sang with tears in their eyes, and 384 women fainted with emotion.

Now, as previously stated, the Muscovites occupied the northern aisle and its adjacent transept, a narrow space only separating them from the Poles in the nave. Across this division the two factions glared fiercely at each other; threats were uttered; challenges interchanged; and when the Muscovites in turn began to raise the Russian National Anthem the berserker spirit of the Poles broke forth.

"Down with the Muscovites!"

"Sweep them from the cathedral!"

"The princess forever!"

"No. Duke of Bora!"

Katina herself, skilled in the use of the sword, was the first in the fray, the standard still held in

her hand.

"Take to your guard, knouter of women!" she cried, singling out her old enemy, the ex-governor of Orenburg.

Her example found ready imitators, and in a moment more the clash of steel went ringing down the northern aisle.

Half-a-dozen Muscovites, sword in hand, sprang forward, and facing outwards, formed a protecting circle around the person of the duke, who, for his part, stood with folded arms, a passive and silent spectator of the wild work that was taking place.

Zabern, desirous of defending Katina, drew his sabre and endeavored to force his way through the two opposing lines to the place where the red-handed banner waved like a rallying beacon above the flashing points of steel.

Barbara rose to her feet and gazed with grief upon a scene, the like of which, though rarely witnessed in modern times within the hallowed interior of a cathedral, was familiar enough in the old Byzantine days when the election of a bishop had often to be decided by an appeal to arms. 385

She was in the act of bidding Radzivil summon the military to part the combatants, when a sudden and striking apparition rendered the command unnecessary.

"Down with your arms!"

The voice in which these words were uttered rose like thunder above the *mêlée*, compelling even the two long lines of combatants to pause and turn their eyes towards the speaker. On the edge of the choir, and with hand uplifted, stood a stately figure clothed in a brilliant and imposing uniform, a figure half a head taller at least than the usual height of men, and standing as he did upon the elevated pavement of the choir, his stature seemed more than human.

Though few in the cathedral had ever before seen this personage, yet all recognized in a moment the superb brow, the severe, haughty features, the dark eyes always melancholy, even when the mouth smiled.

"The devil himself at last!" murmured Zabern, a grim joy stealing over his face. "Now have the saints delivered him as a hostage into our hands!"

The stranger's form seemed really to dilate, as, with the voice of one born to command, he again cried,—

"Down with your arms!"

Furious conspirators, advancing to slay, had once been awed and checked by that lofty voice, that majestic presence, which did not fail now to produce a remarkable effect.

"The Czar! the Czar!" cried the Poles.

"The little father! the little father!" cried the Muscovites.

The fighting ceased. The assailants on each side fell back. Slowly the tumult died away in utter silence. The wounded repressed their groans; for wounded there were; many, too, brief as had been the combat; and one man lay dead upon the pavement, slain by the hand of a woman. 386

The Czar, for it was in truth the mighty Nicholas, turned his face slowly round upon all sides. The fiercest of the Poles felt compelled to sheathe his blade and to resume his seat as that terrible eye fell upon him. Who durst continue to assail a Muscovite with the lord of the Muscovites looking on, even though that lord were without a single guard?

It was somewhat mortifying to Barbara's pride that the cessation of the strife should have been caused by the authority of the Czar rather than by her own, since it seemed to place him upon a higher plane than herself. Clearly he had prevented a massacre of her Muscovite subjects, and thus far thanks were due to him. But Barbara was in no mood to offer courtesies to one who had always shown himself a bitter enemy. The very authority now assumed by him was an infringement of her own, and put her instantly upon her mettle.

Among the combatants there was one at least who retained an undaunted mien, namely, Katina. She advanced towards the choir, wiping her reddened blade upon the silken standard, which during the fray had become detached from the staff.

At the edge of the choir Katina knelt.

"Seek not pardon of me," exclaimed the Czar loftily, mistaking her purpose. "You who commenced the fray, you who have slain one of my own subjects!"

"The stars shall fall from heaven ere Katina Ludovska craves pardon of Nicholas Paulovitch," scornfully replied the Polish maiden, ever mindful of the fact that the warrant condemning her to receive the knout was signed with this same name, Nicholas Paulovitch. "Your Highness," she continued, still on her knees, and addressing Barbara, "if through zeal I have wrought amiss in slaying one who traduced the fair name of my princess, of you alone I crave pardon."

"If the name of him whom you have slain be Feodor Orloff," said Barbara, "then have you done a good deed, and you need ask pardon of none." 387

A Russian governor slain in the very presence of the Czar, and the princess justifying the deed! Barbara's ministers sat completely dumfounded by her boldness. There were two sovereigns in the choir, each contending for the mastery; which would prevail?

Turning to the emperor with an air of dignity and self-possession, Barbara said,—

"Let the Czar explain by what right he has set free a traitor imprisoned by my authority."

Such language as this was new to the autocrat, who is credited with the saying, "Let there be no will in Russia but that of the Czar." He glanced with surprise, not unmixed with admiration, at the young girl who faced him so spiritedly.

"What gives you such boldness in the presence of the Czar?"

"The Charter of your ancestress Catherine."

"Catherine, 'tis true, granted to the palatines of Czernova the title of princes, but conferred no independence upon them. The story of the Charter is a myth."

"Your Majesty may see upon the altar here the identical document itself, signed by the hand of the empress."

"That," replied Nicholas, scarcely deigning to turn his eyes in the direction indicated, "that document is a forgery, as Marshal Zabern can prove."

"I plainly see that a little bird has been whispering to him," murmured Zabern to himself.

A scornful repudiation trembled upon Barbara's lips, but it died away when she beheld Zabern's grave look.

"Marshal, is not that the original Charter of Catherine?"

There was something so wistful and pathetic in her expression—an expression which plainly said, "Let me know the worst,"—that Zabern felt he could no longer deceive her. 388

"It is a faithful transcript, so please your Highness."

Barbara understood the significant reply. Zabern, in describing to her the plot formed by Bora and Orloff for the destruction of the Charter, had represented the scheme as resulting in failure. She now perceived that from pity the marshal had kept the terrible truth from her, endeavoring to repair Czernova's loss by means of a forged document. Wrong of him, doubtless, but the fault lay more with those whose wickedness had compelled him to resort to such a policy.

Outwardly Barbara was as firm and as brave as ever, but inwardly she felt that her throne was going, nay, had gone from her. And bitter indeed was it to see the crafty flourishing in their craftiness.

She beckoned Zabern to her side.

"So, marshal," she whispered sadly, but not reproachfully, "you have deceived me."

"With good intent, your Highness."

"Is forgery good?"

"Yes, in this case. Do you blame me, princess, for seeking to maintain the liberties of Czernova?"

"Ill would it become me to blame you, Zabern, especially at such time as this."

She turned from him to listen to the Czar, who seemed to be addressing herself and the assembly in common.

"The marshal," he said, "dare not uphold the genuineness of the document upon the altar. It is now manifest that Czernova can show no valid title to the autonomy it has so long exercised. It is an integral part of the Russian dominion, and to-day we resume our usurped authority. As sovereign-lord of this principality we declare the claim of the present occupant of the throne to be null and void."

"On what ground?" inquired Radzivil. 389

"On the ground alleged by the duke—illicit birth."

Zabern marked Barbara's look of humiliation, and thought it not amiss to give the emperor *quid pro quo*.

"A difficult matter this proving of one's legitimacy," he observed, turning to the assembly as if taking them into his confidence. "I have even known emperors to be in doubt as to the true name of their grandfathers."

This allusion to the frailties of Catherine drew a terrible look from the Czar. He even laid hand upon his sword; but, checking his wrath, he resumed his speech to the assembly.

"And though in the strict view of the law the Duke of Bora be the rightful ruler of this principality, yet we, as suzerain, in the exercise of our clemency will permit the princess so-called to retain her throne, provided she can produce a champion who shall overcome the duke in

armed combat."

"Then the duke's challenge meets with your Majesty's approval?" said Radzivil.

"As suzerain," replied the emperor, "it is my duty to uphold the usages and institutions of the principality; and the Justiciary—"

"Ex-Justiciary," corrected Barbara quietly.

"We will not quarrel as to that. It is enough that the highest legal authority here present has affirmed that the duke's action is in entire assonance with the Czernovese law."

The Czar did not add, as he might have added, that it was almost certain that the duke would gain the crown by this arrangement, which was the reason why he, the Autocrat, had become so suddenly favorable to constitutionalism. It would be more polite to place his kinsman Bora upon the throne under the guise of law, than to install him by force of arms. Europe, then, could not so easily raise a protest.

"If," said Barbara, addressing the emperor, "if duelling be so agreeable to your Majesty, on what 390
ground do you now justify your former demand for the extradition of the duke?"

Nicholas, little accustomed to be catechised or to give reasons for his conduct, frowned and was silent.

Zabern laughed.

"Princess, you demand too much in requiring a Czar to be logical."

"And how," asked Radzivil of the emperor, "how if we should ignore the duke's claim and should proceed with the coronation of the princess?"

The Czar's eyes flashed at this defiance of his authority.

"If you will not uphold your own laws, there is a power upon the frontier that shall compel you to do so."

Ill-starred Barbara! Publicly stigmatized as illegitimate; her principality void of its boasted Charter; her dream of a Polish empire vanished; her own throne of Czernova forfeited to the duke, inasmuch as it meant death to any one who should meet him in combat. And all this occurring in the space of one brief hour upon the day which she had anticipated as the most splendid of her life!

Was this to be the end of her triumphal progress through the shouting crowds of her capital—doomed amid the mocking laughter of the Muscovites to quit the cathedral a discrowned princess, attended by a melancholy train of fallen ministers?

"I am—I AM princess!" she murmured between her set teeth. "They shall not drive me from the throne."

But what booted it to resist? There, a few paces off, and sternly opposed to her, was the master of many legions, the lord of one-seventh of the globe, who had but to give the signal, and one hundred thousand troops would come marching across the border to do his will. She might have
Right on her side, but he had Might, and bitterly did she realize the saying of the old Norse god: 391
"Force rules the world; has ruled it; shall rule it."

Zabern, however, fertile in expedients, was not yet reduced to a state of despair. He had formed the plan of seizing the Czar as a prisoner of war, and of making his release conditional upon the cession of autonomy to Czernova. If Barbara should refuse to sanction this desperate scheme, well then he, Zabern, would act without her, finding a higher authority in the interests of the Czernovese. Much as he revered the princess, if that princess should refuse to be true to herself, it would behove him to put the state before the individual.

He was on the point of communicating his design to Barbara when Polonaski rose to speak.

"The hour is drawing to a close. She who calls herself princess has but five minutes left in which to appoint her champion."

At a sign from the Czar the Duke of Bora stepped forward to renew his challenge.

"Barbara Lilieska," he said amid a solemn hush, "I call upon you either to resign the crown you have usurped, or to defend it at the sword's point. Appoint your champion. My desire is for a man that we may fight together."

"Have, then, your desire!" cried a firm, clear voice.

All eyes were immediately turned towards the speaker who had just entered the cathedral by the western porch,—a young man with face bronzed as if by eastern suns, his handsome, athletic figure arrayed in a dark-blue uniform with silver facings.

"Paul Woodville, by all that's holy!" cried Zabern in an ecstacy of delight.

"The man who defeated me at Tajapore," murmured the Czar darkly.

Amid a scene of wild excitement Paul moved towards the choir, his long cloak hanging gracefully

from his shoulders, his sabre clanking heavily upon the cathedral pavement. 392

Barbara, her heart beating wildly, her lips parted in a smile, half of pride, half of fear, watched him, knowing for what purpose he was advancing.

Paul reached the edge of the choir, and picking up the duke's gauntlet, which had lain untouched for an hour, he tossed it disdainfully against its owner's face.

"Duke of Bora, I will do battle with you to the death on behalf of the princess."

"One moment, young sir," said Polonaski. "You cannot nominate yourself. The appointment rests with the lady. Do you accept this man as your champion?" he added, turning to Barbara.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Barbara. "This must not be."

A minute previously she had been longing to triumph over the Czar; now the princess was lost in the woman. She would rather resign her throne than put Paul's life to such terrible hazard.

The anguish pictured on her face, her clasped hands, her form bent forward, attested the state of her feelings towards the handsome young Englishman. There was not one person in the cathedral ignorant of the cause of her emotion. Her love for Paul, and the reason of his going away, were matters well known to all the Czernovese. His sudden return at this crisis imparted an additional interest to a tableau already thrilling.

"By heaven, your Highness must accept him," whispered Zabern in her ear. "I have tested his swordsmanship in the *salle d'armes* with a view to this very event, and I know that the duke has no chance against him."

Barbara remained silent. A struggle was taking place in her mind. The high spirit that had sustained her during the terrible strain of the last twenty-four hours was beginning to give way. Her crown had never brought her anything but sorrow. Why not resign it, and depart with Paul to 393
his own Kentish home, that home which he had so often described to her,—a fair castellated hall shaded with beech-trees beside a cool lake! Far happier the life of an English lady than that of a princess ruling over a semi-barbarous people.

Polonaski had marked Zabern's triumphant smile at the appearance of Paul, and that smile made him somewhat uneasy, implying as it did a firm belief in Paul's ability to overcome the duke.

"Was not Captain Woodville banished from Czernova?" he asked; "because if so he has no right to be on Czernovese ground."

"Captain Woodville retired from Czernova of his own free will," replied Zabern. "The cabinet signed no decree of banishment against him."

Barbara was still wavering in mind.

"Stick to your throne," growled Zabern.

"To hold it as a vassal of the Czar!" she murmured faintly.

"Fear not. We'll find a way of defeating his claim of suzerainty. What! will you desert the faithful Poles who have so long stood by you? Will your Highness resign your throne to the duke, a traitor and assassin, when you have the opportunity of giving him his final quietus? Who slew Trevisa? Who burnt the Charter? Who has brought the Russian army within our borders? Who but the duke? And now will you let him triumph? Give the word for the duel. Princess, I know, I *know*," he added emphatically, "that Captain Woodville will come off victorious."

At this point the Czar spoke.

"The princess so-called must either appoint a champion or prepare to abdicate."

Despair seized the Poles at the thought of being ruled by Bora,—Bora, who in his cups had been heard to declare that when he should come to power, he would harness the Polish nobles to the 394
yoke, and compel them to plough his fields.

Loud murmurs arose at Barbara's reluctance to accept Paul as her champion.

"Appoint him, your Highness, appoint him," was the cry.

"Let Captain Woodville slay the duke, and receive the hand of the princess as his reward," cried Zabern. "Have I not said?" he added, addressing the assembly.

The cathedral rang with a shout of applause, a shout that doomed the princely marriage statute to the limbo of obsolete things. Zabern had voiced the sentiments of the Poles. Better an untitled Englishman than Bora.

At that moment the first stroke of twelve chimed from the cathedral clock. Barbara's decision, if given after the hour, would be too late. To his dismay Zabern saw that she was on the point of swooning.

"The word, princess, the word!" he cried, almost savagely.

"Barbara, say the word," pleaded Paul gently.

She looked at him, and was unable to resist the wistful, earnest appeal of his eyes.

"I accept—Captain Woodville—as—my—my champion," she gasped. "Oh! what have I done?" she added in the next moment. And as the twelfth stroke of the clock died away, she swayed helplessly forward and sank unconscious into Paul's arms. He surrendered her light form to the care of her attendant ladies, who immediately bore her away from the choir to the sacristy which had served as her robing-room.

"Duke of Bora," cried Zabern, with an exultant smile, "your last hour has come!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE CORONATION DUEL

Those who had come to the cathedral in the expectation of witnessing an interesting ceremony were beginning to find that the reality far surpassed the anticipation. 395

A series of dramatic episodes had occurred in quick succession, but the climax of all was now reached when it became known that the throne of Czernova was to be put to the hazard of a duel, and a duel that was to ensue immediately within the walls of the cathedral itself, an arrangement due to the initiative of Zabern; for, as according to the statute the combat must take place that same day, he had proposed that it should be fought at once upon the open pavement fronting the choir.

"A duel within a cathedral!" exclaimed Radzivil in amazement.

"Why not?" asked Zabern coolly.

"This is a consecrated place. The wilful shedding of blood here is forbidden by the Church."

"Well, let's take the opinion of the Church as expressed in the person of Faustus."

Now, sad to relate, that mitred abbot dearly loved to witness a good fight, for he had been a soldier ere adopting the monastic profession, and the old Adam was still strong within him.

"This cathedral is holy ground," he began.

"Presumably so," replied Zabern.

"And to maintain the princess's throne and the Latin faith is a holy deed." 396

"Without doubt."

"Then let the holy deed take place on holy ground."

"My view of the matter."

"But if the shedding of blood should profane a church—"

"As the timid allege."

"Then is the place already profaned by the blood of Orloff."

"True."

"Therefore this being now common ground the duel can take place without occasion of profanation."

"Faustus, thou reasonest well. Gentlemen, we have heard the voice of the Church. *Fiat voluntas ecclesiæ.* Let the combat take place here, and now."

"Good!" commented Paul, who had listened in silence to this dialogue. "It cannot come too soon."

A remark echoed by the ferocious Bora, confident in his ability to overcome the other.

Paul now found his hands grasped by those of admiring ministers, all of whom were anxious that he should forget how near they had come to banishing him by public edict.

In the midst of their congratulations Paul was approached by a lady-in-waiting, who brought word that the princess desired to speak with him ere the duel should begin.

"Go to your dalliance," sneered Bora, who had overheard the message. "It will be your last."

"If your grace will take counsel of an enemy," replied Paul, "you will seek the ministration of a priest, for you never needed it more."

There was something in Paul's quiet and confident manner, something far removed from boasting, that sent a momentary uneasiness to the hearts of both Bora and of his imperial patron, the Czar.

Paul followed his conductress to the sacristy, where he found Barbara attended by her ladies, who had divested her of her heavy coronation robes. The pure white of her silk dress was not whiter than her face at that moment. 397

At a sign from the princess the attendants withdrew, leaving her alone with Paul.

"What a pity," murmured one, "if so handsome a hero should die!"

Barbara rose to her feet, but so great was her emotion that she would have fallen, had not Paul caught her in his arms, where she reclined, clinging convulsively to him.

"Oh! Paul, Paul," she murmured, and for a long time she could do no more than repeat his name.

The sweetness and the pain at her heart! Was this a meeting or a parting? Her throne, her power, her wealth, her triumphs in the diplomacy and the Diet were all as nothing in comparison with her love of Paul. He was her dearest possession, and yet—and yet—this clasp of his arms might be the last! Within an hour his corpse might be carried out of the cathedral, and the voice of the Czar would proclaim her downfall, and the accession of Bora. And what would life be without Paul?

"Do not weep, Barbara," he cried, tenderly stroking her dark hair. "This day shall prove the brightest of your life."

But Barbara failed to see how this could be. To her it would ever remain as the most wretched, for even if she should triumph over Czar and duke, that would not remove the reproach of illegitimacy publicly cast in her teeth. She shivered at the recollection. Of all the incidents which had happened that day, this—the imputed stain on her birth—had most wounded her pride. Would she ever be able to disprove the charge? But it was not the time to be thinking of this now.

"Oh! Paul," she murmured, "it is selfish, it is wrong of me to hazard your life in this barbarous fashion."

"It is too late to plead now," he answered gravely. "I have publicly accepted the honor—for an honor it is—of acting as the princess's champion, and not even Barbara herself shall dissuade me to withdraw." 398

"But are you certain, quite certain, that you will be victorious?"

"Try me," said Paul grimly.

"How can I let you do this?" she cried in an outburst of anguish. "I will resign my crown. We will go away together to some other land where happiness may be found. Say 'yes' to this. Oh, Paul, don't—*don't* fight. If you should fall—"

"No fear of that, since your throne depends upon the issue."

"My throne!" repeated Barbara bitterly. "What pleasure can it give me now? The Czar has learned that our Charter is no more. He claims Czernova as part of his empire. If I should continue to rule I must rule merely as his vassal. Consider the humiliations to which I shall be subjected. Is it worth while risking your life in order to preserve for me a gilded mockery of power?"

How could Paul smile at the prospect presented by her words? Yet he did, pleasantly and tenderly.

"Sweet princess!" he said, "for princess you are, and princess you shall remain, take courage." He turned her beautiful face upward to his own, and gazed into the depth of her dark eyes, on whose silken lashes the tear-drops glittered. "During my absence I have worked for the good of Czernova. I have splendid tidings for you. Fear no more the machinations of Russia. From this day forth you are firmly seated upon the throne."

The sudden and unaccountable joy that filled Barbara's heart at that moment almost effaced the thought of the coming duel.

"Oh, Paul, what—what do you mean?"

"That I have accomplished my mission. But ere explaining let me first dispose of the duke; otherwise when the great news which is now on its way reaches Slavowitz, he may seek to escape in the train of the Czar, which must not be, for Trevisa's death calls for atonement." 399

Though full of wonder, Barbara succeeded in repressing her curiosity, and said,—

"Paul, you do not wish me to be a witness of this duel? I mean," she added timidly, "if you think that—that—"

"That I shall fight with better success if you are looking on? No, Barbara, it is no sight for your gentle eyes. Remain here till it is over. And do not fear for me," he continued, kissing her tearful face, "I am more than a match for the duke. From boyhood upward to excel in sword-play has been my ambition. Rarely have I let a day pass without exercise. I can see now that Providence has been training my arm for this very event."

His words inspired Barbara with a momentary confidence.

"You will succeed, Paul. Heaven will help you, for you fight in a righteous cause. Oh, are you going? So soon? Why, we have but just met. Not yet—not yet. A minute longer—one more kiss—lest—lest—it should be—the last—O Paul—don't go—no—no—"

He kissed her tenderly, gently removed her clinging arms, and quitted the sacristy.

The Duke of Bora, who was sitting beside his great kinsman, the Czar, scowled as Paul made his appearance in the choir. The dullest imagination could picture the tender interview that had taken place in the sacristy. All knew that Paul had come to the combat with Barbara's kiss dewy on his lips.

"But for yon fellow," muttered Bora, "I might now be the consort of the princess."

"The fair lady loves power," replied the emperor. "She may yet consent when she sees the crown on your brow. See, the herald summons you. Now, Bora, play the man, and you are prince by the law of Czernova itself. All Europe will be unable to dispute the legality of your title." 400

The two duellists did not immediately take to the sword and engage. The coronation-rubric prescribed certain formalities—relics of a mediæval usage—in connection with the championing of the sovereign; and these a herald, dressed in the quaint antique costume of his office, proceeded to carry out.

"Let the champions come forward."

Paul, with a smile serene and high, stepped to the appointed place, namely, the space fronting the choir. Sand had been sprinkled upon the pavement to absorb the blood that might be shed, and to prevent the combatants' feet from slipping.

Bora with a scowling brow faced his opponent.

"Do you, Paul Cressingham Woodville, affirm that she who calls herself Barbara Lilieska is the true and lawful ruler of this principality of Czernova?"

"I do."

"And do you, John Lilieski, affirm that you yourself are the true and lawful ruler of this principality of Czernova?"

"I do."

"And to prove your respective contentions, are you each willing to submit to the ordeal of battle?"

The champions signified their assent.

The herald then proceeded to explain the conditions that were to regulate the combat. Swords of a certain length were to be the weapons used. From beginning to end the duel was to be continuous without any interval for rest or refreshment. Each was to fight till his opponent should be destroyed, for quarter was neither to be given nor accepted, and though the life-blood were being drained from the combatants the wounds were not to be stanched. 401

By a solemn oath repeated after the herald, each champion bound himself to observe these regulations. Hence it was certain that one, possibly both, would not leave the cathedral alive, a fact which imparted a terrible interest to the coming combat.

"No quarter! that's a good rule," remarked Zabern to Katina, who sat beside him. "The craven duke would be begging for his life, and we want no more Boras in Czernova."

"The champions will now take their position for the combat," cried the herald.

The duellist when hard pressed is apt to give way before his opponent. In the present case, however, advance or retreat, save within very narrow limits, was rendered impossible.

Fixed in the stone flooring was a ring of brass designed for raising a slab that covered a stairway leading to a crypt below. The right ankle of each combatant was attached to this same ring by a strong cord six feet in length, thus confining their movements within a circle of four yards in diameter.

These preparations raised the interest of the spectators to a high pitch. A dreadful sensation thrilled the ladies present as they watched the champions during the process of cording; the men, more cool and critical, strove to predict the victor from the physique presented by each of the opponents.

Judged thus, the advantage seemed to be on the side of the duke, whose frame was powerful and massive; Paul was not equal in stature to his antagonist, was of more slender build, and any superiority derivable from his greater activity was somewhat nullified by the restraining cord.

The circumstances attending this combat contributed to render it unique in the annals of Czernovese duelling.

The one champion, Bora, stimulated by the presence of his imperial patron, the mighty Czar, fought to gain a crown; the other, Paul, for the hand of a fair princess. There was a coloring of romance about the affair strongly suggestive of the days of chivalry, and this was enhanced by the quaint character of the ritual employed. 402

Each of the Czernovese factions was confident of the success of its champion. The Muscovites boasted of the duke's thirty duels, from all of which he had emerged victorious without taking a wound. The Poles had no such record to show on behalf of their champion; his brilliant feat in the *salle d'armes* was unknown to them, but they had marked Zabern while Paul was lifting the duke's glove, and they felt that the marshal must have had good cause for the grim joy that had appeared on his face. Moreover, Paul's gallant defence of Tajapore was still fresh in their minds; his triumph over the Czar's policy in the East was an augury of a similar triumph in the West, and contributed to give a piquant zest to the coming duel. At any rate, his cold, flashing eye, compressed lips and resolute mien showed that he was a dangerous opponent.

As soon as Paul had removed his coat and vest the herald placed his hand beneath his shirt.

"To ascertain whether you wear an under-tunic of mail," he explained in answer to Paul's look of surprise.

"Do you deem me a person of so little honor?"

"This scrutiny is so enjoined by the rubric," remarked the herald, as he subjected Bora to the same inspection.

The weapons next occupied the herald's attention.

The duke had come prepared for the contest, and hence his blade was of the length prescribed by the statute; Paul's sword fell short of this by two inches, and though he much preferred to fight with his own weapon, the herald would not permit him to do so.

"My blade is of the requisite length," said Zabern, "and I can warrant it tried steel. Take it; you will make it historic. It has already shed the blood of a cardinal; why not that of a duke? There 403
will be a sort of poetic justice in despatching the princess's two enemies with the same weapon."

"You seem very confident, marshal," sneered Bora.

"Very confident, your grace. You see there's no princess to intervene this time."

The herald having tested the length and flexibility of Zabern's sword returned it to the marshal, saying, as he did so,—

"Pierce your skin with the point."

Zabern instantly pricked the palm of his hand till the blood flowed, while the duke did the like with his own weapon.

The puzzled Paul looked inquiringly at Zabern, who explained that it was an old usage in Czernova, adopted as a precaution against poisoned blades.

The two combatants were now bidden to stand as far apart as the cords would permit, and each after kissing his blade held it vertically aloft, repeating after the herald the following oath,—

"Hear, O ye people, that I have this day neither eaten nor drunk aught, nor have I upon my person either charm or amulet, nor have I practised any enchantment or sorcery, whereby the law of Heaven may be abased, or the law of Satan be exalted. So help me God and His saints!"

Very absurd and mediæval, no doubt, but being a part of the ancient ritual its enunciation was required from each champion.

The news of the coming duel had been announced to the populace without, and their cries of excitement contrasted strangely with the deadly stillness that reigned within the interior of the fane.

Upon that part of the cathedral roof that overlooked the square, a group of soldiers could be seen standing about a flag-staff, at the foot of which were two banners, one white, the other black. The 404
eyes of all the people below were set upon this flag-staff, when it became known that the hoisting of the white standard would signify the triumph of the princess's champion, and the black standard his defeat.

The time for the great contest had now come, and the herald stepped backward a few paces.

"May Heaven defend the right! In the name of God—fight!"

As the blades clashed together the spectators drew a deep breath. The time occupied by the preliminaries, though in reality very brief, had seemed so long that the beginning of the duel came as an actual relief.

A shiver of expectancy ran around the cathedral. Five thousand pairs of eyes were riveted upon the choir, and upon naught else. The loveliest lady present might have sighed in vain for a single glance.

Abbot Faustus had sunk upon his knees by the altar, and was now telling his beads, but though his spiritual eyes might be directed towards heaven, his earthly vision was certainly fixed upon the two combatants, as Katina observed to Zabern.

"Well, he can cite Moses as a precedent," remarked the marshal, as he sat down to watch the fray. Loving a good fight, Zabern viewed the present spectacle with a real sense of enjoyment,

untroubled by any doubt as to the result.

The Czar, with his strong liking for everything military, was likewise in his element. He sat, bent forward, resting the point of his sabre upon the pavement, and his hands upon the hilt, prepared to view the display of swordsmanship with the critical eye of a *maître d'armes*, as confident in the triumph of Bora as Zabern was in that of Paul.

The Duke of Bora, burning to distinguish himself in the presence of the Czar, and apparently 405
desirous of terminating the combat in the shortest space of time possible, made so furious an attack upon Paul that the latter could do no more than remain on the defensive. So weighty was the descent of Bora's blade that Paul's arm tingled at each shock; so swift his tierce that his sabre-point was often swept aside when within an inch only of Paul's breast. In truth the eye could scarcely follow the movement of the blades, which in their rapidity resembled flashes of light, rather than pieces of steel wielded by human hands.

The duke pressed his adversary yet harder, compelling him to recede inch by inch to the end of his tether, a retrogression which, added to the fact that Paul did not return the cut and thrust of his opponent, occasioned grave misgiving in the minds of the Polish spectators.

"Our champion has degenerated since the day he surprised us in the *salle d'armes*," murmured the premier in alarm.

"Bah! my good Radzivil," returned Zabern confidently, "cannot you see that he is letting the duke exhaust himself? Bora is rash in thus pouring out his strength like water. This is too violent to last long. Ah! said I not so? First blood to us!"

The duke had failed to preserve his guard, and as a result Paul's weapon had penetrated his side to the depth of a quarter of an inch, a feat performed with such quickness that though all were watching, few perceived it.

"The duke is wounded."

"He is not."

Doubt vanished with the appearance on Bora's white shirt of a small red disk that began slowly to expand.

Zabern smiled grimly at the bewilderment of the duke, whose air resembled that of a bull in the Spanish arena when first pierced by the dart of the banderillero—the air of amazement as to how the thing could have happened, mingled with incredulity that any one should have ventured to 406
play such a trick upon him.

This was the first wound ever received by him in his character as duellist, and the blow thus given to his prestige stung the duke far more than the mere physical pain caused by the stab. Its occurrence, however, at this stage was timely, for it served to check his fiery conceit and to teach him caution; it behoved him to guard as well as to assail.

Paul's vigilance in detecting an error on his adversary's part raised the spirit of the Poles to a high degree, while the feeling of the Muscovites underwent a corresponding depression.

"Good for the Englishman," cried a Pole.

"He is the duke's match," exclaimed a second.

The combat being now waged with more caution on the part of the duke, there ensued a really brilliant display of swordsmanship, which, interesting to the civilians, was far more so to the military officers present, from whom came subdued murmurs of admiration.

"Humph!" said Zabern, conscious that the duke was now in his best form. "The great Napoleon, with whom I once dined, made remark to me, 'Scratch a Russ, and you will find a Tartar.' In the present instance, however, the scratch seems to have made our Russ more cool."

The Czar, who had overheard these words, so far permitted his curiosity to overcome his dislike of Zabern as to ask coldly,—

"Where did you dine with Napoleon?"

"Beneath the roof of the Kremlin, sire," replied Zabern, with an ironical salute.

The emperor repressed his wrath, and turned again to view the strife.

Every movement of the blades was watched in fear and trembling by the Polish spectators, who felt that it was a fight betwixt liberty and despotism; a mortal thrust on the part of the duke 407
would leave them but a shadow of that freedom which they had enjoyed under the *régime* of the princess.

Many of the ladies present, unable to endure the sight, averted their eyes, and then, impelled by a dreadful curiosity, turned to gaze again. Some looked on with handkerchiefs pressed to their mouths to check the screams which might have disconcerted the combatants. Intense emotion caused a few to swoon away.

The tide seemed to be turning in favor of Paul. He began to press the duke, whose strength was beginning to fail. Mighty in a first onset, he lacked the steady endurance of his adversary.

Suddenly, while bending sideways to avoid a thrust which he had failed to parry, Bora lost his balance and fell. In falling, his sword flew from his hand.

And there he was, resting upon one knee, defenceless, at the mercy of his opponent.

The spirit of chivalry restrained Paul from giving the fatal stroke.

"I cannot slay an unarmed man," he said.

"What folly is this?" cried Zabern, starting up in wrath. "Did he spare Trevisa? Would he spare you if you were now in his place? This is no time for generosity or mercy. The princess's throne is at stake. Strike and spare not."

Bora neither moved nor spoke, awaiting his end in trembling terror. Paul's refusal to strike evoked the long-suppressed feelings of the Poles.

"Kill! kill!"

The lofty arches rang with excited cries. Even tender ladies, carried away by the heat of the moment, added their voices to those of the men. Paul, looking around upon the assembly, saw nothing but a forest of waving hands, and a multitude of fierce-gleaming eyes urging him to the bloody work. 408

"No quarter can be granted," said the herald. "You have each sworn an oath to slay, or be slain."

But inasmuch as Paul was not to be moved from his purpose, there was no other course left than to permit the duke to resume the combat.

"You have given him time to recover himself," grumbled Zabern, as he sat down again. "It is a violation of the rules."

During his discomfiture, Bora had glanced more than once at the Czar, as if supplicating his intervention. But the emperor sat impassive as a statue, ignoring the silent appeal. Relying on the duke's boastful assurances of victory, Nicholas had assented to the policy of the duel as a convenient and constitutional way of deposing the princess. It now seemed that this plan would fail. Then let the duke pay the penalty merited by his presumption. Woe to the man who deceives the Czar! Bora's heart sank within him at sight of the emperor's cold face.

The contest now entered upon its last, its fatal phase.

Equality had disappeared between the two champions; the duel was virtually over; the result known to all present; it was merely a question of time.

And the person most conscious of this was the duke himself. His confident swagger had vanished. He was fighting now, not for glory or a throne, but for dear life itself.

He made no attempt to assail Paul. Why should he? He could do no more than he had done. He had tried again and again to reach his adversary, and with graceful ease Paul had parried each cut and tierce. He could escape death only by some negligence on the part of his opponent, but that opponent was too keen to be caught erring.

Little by little Bora was forced backwards, till at last further retreat was rendered impossible by the cord attached to his ankle; yet farther back he must go if he must avoid that sabre-point, 409
which, swift and deadly as the tongue of a serpent, glittered continually within an inch of his face and breast.

His strength was ebbing fast; his arm had grown completely wearied by the constant parrying; he longed to throw away his weapon and cry for mercy; but for the restraining cord he would have cast himself at the feet of the Czar to implore his intervention. The despair pictured on his face produced a painful feeling among the more sensitive portion of the spectators.

With vision continually blurred by the great drops of sweat that hung from his eyebrows, the duke struggled on, till at last came the end.

Tempted from his defensive Bora made a sudden thrust, and his sabre-point entered a tiny orifice in the ornamental work that formed the cross-guard of Paul's sword. Lunging with wild vehemence, Bora was unable to check his impetus, and the result was that the blade of his weapon instantaneously curved upwards with such force as to snap in two, while at the same moment Paul's sabre, darting forward horizontally, entered the duke's breast, and passed out under his left shoulder.

Bora's arms flew aloft with a convulsive jerk; the fragment of his blade dropped with a ringing sound upon the pavement; he gave a strange gasping sigh, and then his body slid from Paul's blade and lay on the floor in a huddled heap.

"Now, I call that a very pretty fight," remarked Zabern.

A long shout of triumph arose from the Poles, followed a few seconds later by a tremendous roaring from the populace outside, as the white standard flew up the flagstaff, announcing the victory of the princess's champion.

CHAPTER XX

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

As the Czar beheld his champion lying dead, a wave of anger swept over him, suppressed immediately by his stern fortitude. 410

"The word of the Czar is sacred," he cried, rising from his seat and addressing the assembly. "Barbara Lilieska is Princess of Czernova. Let the coronation proceed."

Paul, released from the cord that had confined him to the place of combat, here turned and confronted the emperor.

"Your Majesty," he remarked, with a somewhat cold expression, "ere claiming to exercise suzerainty in Czernova, will do well to await the arrival of your Foreign Minister now on his way hither."

The Czar stared haughtily at Paul, having no idea whatever of his meaning, while Zabern, equally mystified, murmured,—

"In the name of the saints, explain your saying."

Paul whispered a few words into the ear of the marshal, who received the communication with an expression of incredulity.

"It is true," asseverated Paul. "And," he added, "here comes the confirmer of my words."

A slight commotion here took place at the far end of the cathedral, and there entered a man of distinguished presence whom Zabern immediately recognized as the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs. Then the marshal no longer doubted. His face became lighted with an expression of joy, succeeded the next moment by one of trouble. 411

"The Convent of the Transfiguration!" he murmured.

"There is our danger. We are lost if our secret documents fall into the Czar's hands. And how is it to be prevented with a Russian regiment in possession of the monastery?"

The newcomer on entering had thrown a quick glance around, and catching sight of the emperor standing upon the edge of the choir, he at once made his way to the imperial presence.

"Count Nesselrode! you here! How is this?" asked the Czar, perceiving plainly that trouble was in the air.

"A despatch from the Court of St. James's, requiring your Majesty's immediate attention," replied Nesselrode, sinking upon one knee as he presented the document. "On receiving it from the British ambassador, I instantly set off for Zamoska, travelling day and night; and, learning on my arrival there that you would be found in the cathedral of Slavowitz, I have hastened hither. A grave despatch, your Majesty," he added in a lower tone, "a despatch affecting this very principality. Hence my haste to deliver it to you."

The emperor sat down again, broke the seal of the envelope, unfolded the despatch, and proceeded to read it with a darkening countenance.

The only person in the cathedral whose eyes were not set upon the Czar at this particular juncture was Zabern, who was himself occupied in the reading of two very interesting documents which had just been put into his hands.

During the course of the duel there had entered the cathedral the chief of the Police Bureau, who had personally taken upon himself to investigate matters relative to the murder of Cardinal Ravenna. His search in the archiepiscopal palace had resulted in the finding of certain papers, so extraordinary in their character that the police-official felt constrained to hasten at once to Zabern with the news of his discovery. The sight of the duel had kept him dumb and motionless, but as soon as it was over he had hurried to the side of Zabern. 412

"Marshal," he whispered, "what name did the Czar give to our princess?"

"Barbara Lilieska. That is her true name, Casimir."

"Then these papers do not depose her?" said the chief of the police, exhibiting what he had found.

"Depose her?" repeated Zabern, as he ran his delighted eye over the document. "By the soul of Sobieski, you could not have brought a more acceptable gift to her Highness. This will—"

"Marshal, is it true that the princess has not yet been informed of the result of the duel?"

It was Paul who spoke, and he spoke with some warmth.

"Such have been my orders."

"Why do you prolong her suspense?"

"Who more fitting than the victor himself to convey the glad tidings? Go. Carry these papers with you. Tell the princess that they were found in the cardinal's palace!"

Taking the documents from the hand of Zabern, Paul proceeded to the sacristy, where he had left Barbara.

She was alone on her knees in prayer. She had heard the rapturous applause ringing through the cathedral aisles; she had heard the still louder shout from the square, and had trembled, knowing that all was over.

But when moment after moment went by and no one came with tidings, a black pall of horror fell over her. It must be that the duke's sword had prevailed, and that her friends from pity hesitated to come forward with the truth. 413

The door opened, yet she durst not turn her head.

Through the corridor came the solemn roll of the organ, and with it the voices of the white-robed choir: "*Deposuit potentes et exaltavit humiles*."

Why had Faustus ordered the "Magnificat" to be sung? Could it be that—?

"Barbara!"

A delicious feeling of relief thrilled her whole frame as that word fell on her ear.

She looked up from her knees. Yes, it was the living Paul, and not his spirit; Paul smiling tenderly, and apparently unhurt. She tried to speak, but emotion checked her utterance. Paul raised her drooping figure from the ground and girdled her in a grasp of iron.

"My sweet floweret. You must not faint. All is well. Your throne is safe."

"Your life is safe," she faintly articulated, "and that is all I care for."

Then followed a long interval of silence. Their joy was too deep for words. At last Barbara spoke.

"And is Bora really dead?"

"May all enemies of the princess be as the duke is."

"And you? Are you not wounded—hurt?" she asked, holding him at arm's length.

"There is not a scratch upon me."

"And the Czar—?"

"Is taking a lesson in the school of humiliation."

And here Paul proceeded to relate what he had been doing during his absence. He had gone away boldly resolved on making an attempt to persuade the English Foreign Secretary to interest himself on behalf of Czernovese liberty.

With this view, then, Paul, on the very first night of his arrival in London, called at the residence of Viscount Palmerston, and sent in his card. That statesman had no sooner read the notable name "Paul Woodville," than he gave orders that the visitor should be instantly admitted to his presence. 414

He received Paul with great affability, expressing his regret that a young soldier, certain of promotion, should have so strangely quitted the service of a great empire for that of one of the smallest states in Europe.

"You have sadly disappointed the British public," he remarked with a smile. "We were preparing great honors for you in England."

"I desire no other honor, my lord," replied Paul, boldly, "but that England should observe towards my adopted home that faith to which she stands pledged by the Treaty of Vienna."

Now it was a point in Paul's favor that Lord Palmerston had warningly declared from his place in the House of Commons at the close of the session of '46 that "The Governments of Austria, Russia, and Prussia, would recollect that if the Treaty of Vienna was not good on the Vistula, it might be equally invalid on the Rhine and on the Po." Therefore he became immediately attentive when Paul began to hint at an intended violation of this treaty; ever the friend of nationalities striving to be free, he listened with considerable warmth and indignation as his visitor went on to describe the insidious attempts made by Russia to undermine the independence of Czernova.

At this particular date Russia was the *bête noire* of Lord Palmerston, who had long viewed with misgiving the continual advance of that Power in the direction of India. He had learned from the despatches forwarded both by Paul and by other officers, that a considerable body of Russians had joined the Afghans in the attack upon the British garrison at Tajapore; but since it could not be proved that these auxiliaries had acted with the authority, or even with the knowledge of the Czar's ministry, the English cabinet had been obliged to let the matter pass. 415

The affairs of Czernova, however, seemed to afford a favorable opportunity, both for administering a check to Russia's growing spirit of aggression, and also of asserting British authority in the councils of Europe.

Accordingly, when certain of the Continental powers had been sounded as to their views upon the matter, the English ministry, after due deliberation, decided to uphold that clause of the Vienna

Treaty which guaranteed independence to Czernova.

A Queen's messenger carrying the cabinet's decision was despatched to St. Petersburg. Paul himself had accompanied this emissary, and after lingering a day or two by the Neva, had set off for Czernova, so arranging the stages of his journey that he might reach Slavowitz on the eve of the coronation. An unforeseen breakdown on the way had delayed him by twenty-four hours.

"The English ambassador at St. Petersburg," he added, "favored me in confidence with an outline of 'Old Pam's' despatch. Ignoring the Charter altogether, it declares that Czernova shall continue to exercise that independence which it has exercised since 1795."

"But," said Barbara, who had listened in breathless wonder, "to what point is England prepared to go in order to maintain the integrity of Czernova?"

"To the point of the bayonet, if necessary. The present despatch, I am given to understand, contains no threats, but its language, though diplomatically polite, is quite unmistakable. France, too, is with us in this matter; the Porte likewise, and the Kingdom of Sardinia. Therefore, take courage, Barbara. The Czar will not risk a European war for the sake of Czernova."

For a moment the princess gazed at Paul, admiration, pride, and love shining from her eyes. Then with a low, sweet cry of rapture she flung herself into his arms.

"Paul, you have saved Czernova," she said. 416

Paul here ventured to call Barbara's attention to the papers entrusted to him by Zabern.

No sooner did the princess realize the character of the documents than she gave a second cry of delight. The one document was a certificate of marriage between Thaddeus Lilieski, Prince of Czernova, and one Hilda Tressilian; the other a baptismal certificate of an infant, Barbara Lilieska, described as the daughter of the aforesaid Thaddeus and Hilda.

How these documents came into the possession of the cardinal could only be surmised. Probably he had secured them prior to springing his plot upon Thaddeus, conjecturing that the prince, on seeing the claims of his beloved daughter Natalie threatened, would do his best to destroy all proofs of Barbara's relationship to himself. Afterwards, when Thaddeus became anxious to establish the fact that he had another and a legitimate daughter, Ravenna had maintained silence respecting these documents, thinking perhaps that secrecy would be more conducive to his own interests.

Be that as it may, there the documents were, and their genuineness was not called in question by the legal experts, to whose inspection they were afterwards submitted.

Paul, gazing upon Barbara, saw her face "as it had been the face of an angel." No marvel that she was filled with an exquisite sense of joy! She was now free from the imputation of illegitimacy. She could assume her rightful name instead of masquerading under a false guise. The sword of Paul had kept her throne from becoming the prize of the duke; and, thanks to the ægis of Britain, Czernova was safe from the aggression of Russia.

Best and sweetest thought of all, there was now no obstacle to her union with Paul, for who among her ministers would oppose her marriage with the gallant Englishman who had saved the principality? 417

The sound of approaching footsteps caused the princess to withdraw from the arms of Paul; and immediately afterwards Zabern entered the sacristy, followed by Katina and by most of the ministry.

"Princess," said Zabern solemnly, and Barbara observed that there were tears in his eyes; "princess, amid your joy give a thought to the brave men who have died to save our secret."

"What mean you, marshal?"

"Early this morning the Convent of the Transfiguration was seized and occupied by a regiment of the Paulovski Guards."

"By that act, then, the Czar has violated the Treaty of Vienna."

"True; but considering what that convent contained," said Zabern with a melancholy smile, "we shall act wisely in ignoring this raid upon our territory, especially as the Czar has paid the penalty of his act by losing a splendid regiment. Dorislas, who invested the convent, has just sent this message."

Zabern handed the princess a note inscribed with the following words,—

"At noon convent blew up with tremendous explosion. Building and inmates reduced to atoms. Some of our men injured by falling débris, but none killed.—Dorislas."

Barbara's face saddened.

"So the monks kept their vow," she murmured, "and fired the powder-magazine, sacrificing their own lives to save us from discovery."

"Fortunately your Highness has saved Faustus by inviting him here to crown you, and yet the old abbot is grieving because he has not died with the rest of his brethren."

"Though it be harsh to say it," remarked Paul, "the destruction of that monastery is, under the present circumstances, the best thing that could have happened to Czernova. If it could be proved that the principality is the nucleus of Polish conspiracies directed against the Czar's rule, the protecting arm of England will of necessity be withdrawn. This thought troubled me during my interview with Lord Palmerston." 418

"Then we will not abuse the good-will of England," commented the princess. "From henceforth I cease to be a conspirator. My dream of a wider realm is over. I must leave to others the liberation of Poland," she continued with a sigh. "But," she added, knitting her brows, "a conspirator I must be, *nolens volens*; for have I not secretly pledged my written word to assist Kossuth and the Magyars with gold, if not with arms?"

"Your Highness, I am happy to state that the treaty is non-existent," remarked Radzivil. "The Hungarian envoy who carried the treaty, while endeavoring to pass the Austrian frontier in the dark, was detected and chased by the sentinels; knowing that it meant death to be caught with the document upon his person, he, seeing his pursuers gaining upon him—"

"Destroyed the treaty?"

"Effectually, for he *ate* it."

Barbara smiled sadly as she replied, "Kossuth will deem me unjust, but I fear there can be no renewal of the treaty."

"Your Highness," said Radzivil, with a significant glance at Paul, "the first act of to-morrow's Diet shall be the repeal of the princely marriage statute."

"But," whispered Zabern to Katina, "since no such statute bars our way, why should not old Faustus make us one ere the night come?"

Katina blushed and averted her head. But, be it noted, she offered no opposition to the marshal's desire.

"Princess," said Zabern, glancing at his watch, "your coronation has been delayed two hours by the action of the duke and the Czar. Your loyal subjects in the cathedral are beginning to ask whether there is to be any coronation. Let your Highness resume your place in the choir, and receive your lawful crown, thus triumphing in the very presence of the Czar." 419

The party withdrew from the sacristy, and the ladies entered to aid the princess in her robing.

As Paul made his appearance in the choir, he was greeted with a cry which, rolling through the cathedral and penetrating to the sacristy, caused Barbara's cheek to color with pride and pleasure. For that cry was—

"LONG LIVE PAUL, PRINCE OF CZERNOVA!"

THE END

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