ALADDIN of LONDON

Max Pemberton

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OR

LODESTAR

By

MAX PEMBERTON

Author of "The Hundred Days," "A Gentleman's Gentleman," "Doctor Xavier," "The Lady Evelyn," etc., etc.

Illustrated by FRANK PARKER

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OR

LODESTAR

CHAPTER I

THE HALL BY UNION STREET

The orator was not eloquent; but he had told a human story and all listened with respect. When he paused and looked upward it seemed to many that a light of justice shone upon his haggard face while the tears rolled unwiped down his ragged jerkin. His lank, unkempt hair, caught by the draught from the open doors at the far end of the hall, streamed behind him in grotesque profusion. His hands were clenched and his lips compressed. That which he had told to the sea of questioning faces below him was the story of his life. The name which he had uttered with an oath upon his lips was the name of the man who had deprived him of riches and of liberty. When he essayed to add a woman's name and to speak of the wrongs which had been done her, the power of utterance left him in an instant and he stood there gasping, his eyes toward the light which none but he could see; a prayer of gratitude upon his lips because he had found the man and would repay.

Look down upon this audience and you shall see a heterogeneous assembly such as London alone of the cities can show you. The hall is a crazy building enough, not a hundred yards from the Commercial Road at Whitechapel. The time is the spring of the year 1903—the hour is eight o'clock at night. Ostensibly a meeting to discuss the news which had come that day from the chiefs of the Revolutionaries in Warsaw, the discussion had been diverted, as such discussions invariably are, to a recital of personal wrongs and of individual resolutions—even to mad talk of the conquest of the world and the crowning of King Anarchy. And to this the wild Asiatics and the sad-faced Poles listened alike with rare murmurs and odd contortions of limbs and body. Let Paul Boriskoff of Minsk be the orator and they knew that the red flag would fly. But never before has Boriskoff been seen in tears and the spectacle enchained their attention as no mere rhetoric could have done.

A man's confession, if it be honest, must ever be a profoundly interesting document. Boriskoff, the Pole, did not hold these people spellbound by the vigor of his denunciation or the rhythmic chant of his anger. He had begun in a quiet voice, welcoming the news from Warsaw and the account of the assassination of

the Deputy Governor Lebinsky. From that he passed to the old question, why does authority remain in any city at all? This London that sleeps so securely, does it ever awake to remember the unnumbered hosts which pitch their tents in the courts and alleys of Whitechapel? "Put rifles into the hands of a hundred thousand men who can be found to-night," he had said, "and where is your British Government to-morrow? The police—they would be but as dead leaves under the feet of a mighty multitude. The soldiers! Friends," he put it to them, "do you ever ask yourselves how many soldiers there are in the barracks of London to-night and what would happen to them if the people were armed? I say to you that the house would fall as a house of cards; the rich would flee; the poor would reign. And you who know this for a truth, what do you answer to me? That London harbors you, that London feeds you—aye, with the food of swine in the kennels of the dogs."

Men nodded their heads to this and some of the women tittered behind their ragged shawls. They had heard it all so often—the grand assault by numbers; the rifle shots ringing out in the sleeping streets by Piccadilly; the sack of Park Lane; the flight of the Government; the downfall of what is and the establishment of what might be. If they believed it possible, they had sense enough to remember that a sacked city of amnesty would be the poorest tribute to their own sagacity. At least London did not flog them. Their wives and sisters were not here dragged to the police stations to be brutally lashed at the command of any underling they had offended. Applause for Boriskoff and his sound and fury might be interpreted as a concession to their vanity. "We could do all this," they seemed to say; "if we forbear, let London be grateful." As for Boriskoff, he had talked so many times in such a strain that a sudden change in voice and matter surprised them beyond words. What had happened to him, then? Was the fellow mad when he began to speak of the copper mines and the days of slavery he had spent therein?

A hush fell upon the hall when the demagogue struck this unaccustomed note; rude gas flares shed an ugly yellow glow upon faces which everywhere asked an unspoken question. What had copper mines to do with the news from Warsaw, and what had they to do with this assembly? Presently, however, it came to the people that they were listening to the story of a wrong, that the pages of a human drama were being unfolded before them. In glowing words the speaker painted the miner's life and that of the stokers who kept the furnaces. What a living hell that labor had been. There were six operations in refining the copper, he said, and he had served years of apprenticeship to each of them. Hungry and faint and

weary he had kept watch half the night at the furnace's door and returned to his home at dawn to see white faces half buried in the ragged beds of his house or to hear the child he loved crying for the food he could not bring. And in those night watches the great idea had come to him.

"Friends," he said, "the first conception of the Meltka furnace was mine. The white heat of the night gave it to me; a child's cry, 'thou art my father and thou wilt save me,' was my inspiration. Some of you will have heard that there are smelting works to-day where the sulphurous acid, which copper pyrites supplies when it is roasted, is used for the manufacture of sulphuric acid. That was my discovery. Many have claimed it since, but the Meltka furnace was mine—as God is in heaven it was mine. Why, then, do I stand among you wanting bread, I who should own the riches of kings? My friends, I will tell you. A devil stole my secret from me and has traded it in the markets of the world. I trusted him. I was poor and he was rich. 'Sell for me and share my gains,' I said. His honor would be my protection, I thought, his knowledge my security. Ah, God, what reward had I? He named me to the police and their lashes cut the flesh from my body. I lay three years in the prison at Irkutsk and five at Saghalin. The white faces were turned to the earth they sprang from, my son was heard at the foot of God's throne when they bade me go and set my foot in Poland no more. This I knew even in that island of blood and death. Letters had come to me from my dear wife; the Committee had kept me informed even there at the end of the earth. I knew that my home had perished; that of all my family, my daughter Lois alone remained to me; I knew that the days of the tyranny were numbered and that I, even I, might yet have my work to do. Did they keep me from Poland? I tell you that I lived there three years in spite of them, searching for the man who should answer me. Maxim Gogol, where had he hidden himself? The tale at the mines was that he had gone to America, sold his interest and embarked in new ventures. I wrote to our friends in New York and they knew nothing of such a man. I had search made for him in Berlin, in Vienna and Paris. The years were not too swift for my patience, but the harvest went ungathered. I came to London and bent my neck to this yoke of starvation and eternal night. I have worked sixteen hours a day in the foul holds of ships that I might husband my desire and repay. Friends, ten days ago in London I passed the man I am seeking and knew him for my own. Maxim Gogol may hide from me no more. With these eyes have I seen him—ah, God give me strength to speak of it—with these eyes have I seen him, with these hands have I touched him, with this voice have I accused him. He lives and he is mine—to suffer as I have suffered, to repay as I have paid—until the eternal justice of God shall decide between us both."

There would have been loud applause in any other assembly upon the conclusion of such an impassioned if verbally conventional an harangue; but these Asiatics who heard Paul Boriskoff, who watched the tears stream down his hollowed cheeks and beheld the face uplifted as in ecstasy, had no applause to give him. Had not they also suffered as he had suffered? What wrong of his had not been, in some phase or other, a wrong of theirs? How many of them had lost children well beloved, had known starvation and the sweater's block? Such sympathy as they had to give was rather the cold systematical pity of their order which ever made the individual's cause its own. This unknown Maxim Gogol, if he were indeed in London so much the worse for him. The chosen hand would strike him down when his hour had come—even if it were not the hand of the man he had wronged. In so far as Boriskoff betrayed intense emotion before them, it may be that they despised him. What nation had been made free by tears? How would weeping put bread into the children's mouths? This was the sentiment immediately expressed by a lank-haired Pole who followed the speaker. Let Paul Boriskoff write out his case and the Committee would consider it, he said. If Maxim Gogol were adjudged guilty, let him be punished. For himself he would spare neither man, woman, or child sheltered in the house of the oppressor. A story had been told to them of an unusual order. He did not wholly regret that Paul Boriskoff had not made a fortune, for, had he done so, he would not be a brother among them to-night. Let him be assured of their sympathy. The Committee would hear him when and where he wished.

There were other speakers in a similar mood, but the immediate interest in the dramatic recital quickly evaporated. A little desultory talk was followed by the serving of vodki and of cups of steaming coffee to the women. The younger people at the far end of the hall, who had been admitted to hear the music which should justify the gathering, grew weary of waiting and pushed their way into the street. There they formed little companies to speak, not of the strange entertainment which had been provided for them, but of commonplace affairs—the elder women of infantile sufferings, the girls of the songs they had heard on Saturday at the Aldgate Empire or of the shocking taste in feathers of more favored rivals. But here and there a black-eyed daughter of Poland or a fair-haired Circassian edged away discreetly from the company and was as warily followed by the necessary male. The dirty street caught snatches of music-hall melodies. Windows were opened above and wit exchanged. A voice, that of a young girl evidently, asked what had become of the Hunter, and to this another voice replied immediately, as though greatly satisfied, that Alban Kennedy had gone down toward the High Street with Lois Boriskoff.

"As if you didn't know, Chris. Gawsh, you should 'ave seen her feathers waggin' at the Union jess now. Fawther's took wiv the jumps, I hear, and Alb's gone to the Pav to give her hair. Oh, the fine gentleming—I seed his poor toes through his bloomin' boots this night, s'welp me Gawd I did."

The admission was received with a shout of laughter from the window above, where a red-haired girl leaned pensively upon the rail of a broken balcony. The speaker, in her turn, moved away with a youth who asked her, with much unnecessary emphasis, "what the 'ell she had to do with Albey's feet and why she couldn't leave Chris Denham alone."

"If I ain't 'xactly gawn on Russian taller myself, wot's agen Albey a-doin' of it," he asked authoritatively. "Leave the lidy alone and don't arst no questions. They say as the old man is took with spasms round at the Union. S'welp me if Albey ain't in luck—at his time of life too."

He winked at the girl, who had put her arm boldly round his waist, and marched on with the proud consciousness that his cleverness had not failed to make a just impression. The red-haired girl of the pensive face still gazed dreamily down the court and her head inclined a little toward the earth as though she were listening for the sound of a footstep. Not only the dreamer of dreams in that den of squalor, this Alban Kennedy was her idol to-night as he had been the idol of fifty of her class since he came to live among them. What cared she for his ragged shoes or the frayed collar about his neck? Did not the whole community admit him to be a very aristocrat of aristocrats, a diamond of class in a quarry of ashes, a figure at once mysterious and heroical? And this knight of the East, what irony led him away with that white-faced Pole, Lois Boriskoff? What did he see in her? What was she to him?

The pensive head was withdrawn sadly from the window at last. Silence fell in the dismal court. The Russians who had been breathing fire and vengeance were now eating smoked sturgeon and drinking vodki. A man played the fiddle to them and some danced. After all, life has something else than the story of wrong to tell us sometimes.

CHAPTER II

ALBAN KENNEDY MAKES A PROMISE

The boy and the girl halted together by one of the great lights at the corner of the Commercial Road and there they spoke of the strange confession which had just fallen from Paul Boriskoff's lips. Little Lois, white-faced as a mime at the theatre, her black hair tousled and unkempt, her eyes shining almost with the brightness of fever, declared all her heart to the gentle Alban and implored him for God's sake to take her from London and this pitiful home. He, as discreet as she was rash, pitied her from his heart, but would not admit as much.

"If I could only speak Polish, Lois—but you know I can't," he said. "Bread and salt, that's about what I should get in your country—and perhaps be able to count the nails in the soles of my boots. What's the good of telling me all about it? I saw that your father was angry, but you people are always angry. And, little girl, he does his best for you. Never forget that—he would sooner lose anything on earth than you."

"I don't believe it," said the girl, tossing her head angrily, "what's he care about anything but that ole machine of his which he says they stole from him? Ten hours have I been sewing to-day, Alb, and ten it will be to-morrow. Truth, dear, upon my soul. What's father care so long as the kettle boils and he can read the papers? And you're no better—you'd take me away if you were—right away from here to the gardens where he couldn't find me, and no one but you would ever find me any more. That's what you'd do if you were as I want you to be. But you ain't, Alb—you'll never care for any girl—now will you, Alb, dear?"

She clutched his arm and pressed closely to him, regardless of passers-by so accustomed to love-making on the pavements that neither man nor woman turned a head because of it. Alban Kennedy, however, was frankly ashamed of the whole circumstance, and he pushed the girl away from him as though her very touch offended.

"Look here, Lois, that's nonsense—let's go and see something, let's go into the New Empire for an hour. Your father will be all right when he's had a glass or two of vodki. You know he's always like this when there's been news from

Warsaw. Let's go and hear a turn and then you can tell me what you want me to do."

They walked on a little way, she clinging to his arm timidly and looking up often into his eyes as though for some expression of that affection she hungered for unceasingly. The "Court" had named them for lovers long ago, but the women declared that such an aristocrat as Alban Kennedy would look twice before he put his neck into Paul Boriskoff's matrimonial halter.

"A lot of good the Empire will do me to-night," Lois exclaimed presently. "I feel more like dancing on my own grave than seeing other people do it. What with father's temper and your cold shoulder, Alb—"

"Lois, that's unfair, dear; you know that I am sorry. But what can I do, what can any one do for men who talk such nonsense as those fellows in that hall? 'Seize London and the Government'—you said it was that, didn't you?—well, they're much more likely to get brain fever and wake up in the hospital. That's what I shall tell your father if he asks me. And, Lois, how can you and I talk about anything serious when I haven't a shilling to call my own and your father won't let you out of his sight lest he should want something. It will all be different soon—bad things always are. I shall make a fortune myself some day—I'm certain of it as though I had the money already in the bank. People who make fortunes always know that they are going to do so. I shall make a lot of money and then come back for you—just my little Lois sewing at the window, the same old dirty court, the same ragged fellows talking about sacking London, the same faces everywhere—but Lois unchanged and waiting for me—now isn't it that, dear, won't you be unchanged when I come back for you?"

They stood for an instant in the shadow of a shuttered shop and, leaping up at his question, she lifted warm red lips to his own—and the girl of seventeen and the boy of mature twenty kissed as ardently as lovers newly sworn to eternal devotion.

"I do love you, Alb," she cried, "I shall never love any other man—straight, my dear, though there ain't much use in a-telling you. Oh, Alb, if you meant it, you wouldn't leave me in this awful place; you'd take me away, darling, where I could see the fields and the gardens. I'd come, Alb, as true as death—I'd go this night if you arst me, straight away never to come back—if it were to sleep on the hard road and beg my bread from house to house—I'd go with you, Alb, as heaven hears me, I'd be an honest wife to you and you should never regret the

day. What's to keep us, Alb, dear? Oh, we're fine rich, ain't we, both of us, you with your fifteen shillings from the yard and me with nine and six from the fronts. Gawd's truth, Rothschild ain't nothink to you and me, Alb, when we've the mind to play the great lidy and gentleman. Do you know that I lay abed some nights and try to think as it's a kerridge and pair and you a-sittin' beside of me and nothink round us but the green fields and the blue sky, and nothink never more to do but jess ride on with your hand in mine and the sun to shine upon us. Lord, what a thing it is to wake up then, Alb, and 'ear the caller cryin' five and see my father like a white ghost at the door. And that's wot's got to go on to the end—you know it is; you put me off 'cause you think it'll please me, same as you put Chris Denham off when you danced with her at the Institoot Ball. You won't never love no girl truly, Alb—it isn't in you, my dear. You're born above us and we never shall forget it, not none of us as I'm alive to-night."

She turned away her head to hide the tears gathering in her black eyes, while Alban's only answer to her was a firm pressure upon the little white hand he held in his own and a quicker step upon the crowded pavement. Perhaps he understood that the child spoke the truth, but of this he could not be a wise judge. His father had been a poor East End parson, his mother was the daughter of an obstinate and flinty Sheffield steel factor, who first disowned her for marrying a curate and then went through the bankruptcy court as a protest against American competition. So far Alban knew himself to be an aristocrat—and yet how could he forget that among that very company of Revolutionaries he had so lately quitted there were sons of men whose nobility was older than Russia herself. That he understood so much singled him out immediately as a youth of strange gifts and abnormal insight—but such, indeed, he was, and as such he knew himself to be.

"I won't quarrel with you, Lois, though I see that you wish it, dear," he said presently, "you know I don't care for Chris Denham and what's the good of talking about her. Let's go and cheer up—I'm sure we can do with a bit and that's the plain truth, now isn't it, Lois?"

He squeezed her arm and drew her closer to him. At the Empire they found two gallery seats and watched a Japanese acrobat balance himself upon five hoops and a ladder. A lady in far from immaculate evening dress, who sang of a flowing river which possessed eternal and immutable qualities chiefly concerned with love and locks and unswerving fidelity, appealed to little Lois' sentiment and she looked up at Alb whenever the refrain recurred as much as to say, "That is how I should love you." So many other couples about them were squeezing

hands and cuddling waists that no one took any notice of their affability or thought it odd. A drunken sailor behind them kept asking the company with maudlin reiteration what time the last train left for Plymouth, but beyond crying "hush" nobody rebuked him. In truth, the young people had come there to make love, and when the lights were turned down and the curtain of the biograph revealed, the place seemed paradise itself.

Lois crept very close to Alban during this part of the entertainment, nor did he repulse her. Moments there were undeniably when he had a great tenderness toward her; moments when she lay in his embrace as some pure gift from this haven of darkness and of evil, a fragile helpless figure of a girlhood he idolized. Then, perchance, he loved her as Lois Boriskoff hungered for love, with the supreme devotion, the abject surrender of his manhood.

No meaner taint of passion inspired these outbreaks, nor might the most critical student of character have found them blameworthy. Alban Kennedy's rule of life defied scrutiny. His ignorance was often that of a child, his faith that of a trusting woman—and yet he had traits of strength which would have done no dishonor to those in the highest places. Lois loved him and there were hours when he responded wholly to her love and yet had no more thought of evil in his response than of doing any of those forbidding things against which his dead mother had schooled him so tenderly. Here were two little outcasts from the civilized world—why should they not creep close together for that sympathy and loving kindness which destiny had denied them.

"I darsn't be late to-night, Alb," Lois said when the biograph was over and they had left the hall, "you know how father was. I must go back and get his supper."

"Did he really mean all that about the copper mines and his invention?" Alban asked her in his practical way, and added, "Of course I couldn't understand much of it, but I think it's pretty awful to see a man crying, don't you, Lois?"

"Father does that often," she rejoined, "often when he's alone. I might not be in the world at all, Alb, for all he thinks of me. Some one robbed him, you know, and just lately he thinks he's found the man in London. What's the good of it all—who's goin' to help a poor Pole get his rights back? Oh, yer bloomin' law and order, a lot we sees of you in Thrawl Street, so help me funny. That's what I tell father when he talks about his rights. We'll take ours home with us to Kingdom come and nobody know much about 'em when we get there. A sight of good it is cryin' out for them in this world, Alb—now ain't it, dear?"

Alban was in the habit of taking questions very seriously, and he took this one just as though she had put it in the best of good faith.

"I can't make head or tail of things, Lois," he said stoically, "fact is, I've given up trying. Why does my father die without sixpence after serving God all his life, and another man, who has served the devil, go under worth thousands? That's what puzzles me. And they tell us it will all come right some day, just as we're all going to drive motor-cars when the Socialists get in. Wouldn't I be selling mine cheap to-night if anyone came along and offered me five pounds for it—wouldn't I say 'take it' and jolly glad to get the money. Why, Lois, dear, think what we would do with five pounds."

"Go to Southend for Easter, Alb."

"Buy you a pretty ring and take you to the Crystal Palace."

"Drive a pony to Epping, Alb, and come back in the moonlight."

"Down to Brighton for the Saturday and two in the water together."

"Flash it on 'em in Thrawl Street and make Chris Denham cry."

They laughed together and cuddled joyously at a dream so bewildering. Their united wealth that night was three shillings, of which Alb had two and four pence. What untold possibilities in five pounds, what sunshine and laughter and joy. Ah, that the dark court should be waiting for them, the squalor, the misery, the woe of it. Who can wonder that the shadows so soon engulfed them?

"Kiss me, Alb," she said at the corner, "shall I see you to-morrow night, dear?"

"Outside the Pav at nine. You can tell me how your father took it. Say I hope he'll get his rights. I think he always liked me rather, Lois."

"A sight more than ever he liked me, Alb, and that's truth. Ah, my dear, you'll take me away from here some day, won't you, Alb? You'll take me away where none shall ever know, where I shall see the world and forget what I have been. Kiss me, Alb—I'm that low to-night, dear, I could cry my heart out."

He obeyed her instantly. A voice of human suffering never failed to make an instant appeal to him.

"As true as God's in heaven, if ever I get rich, I'll come first to Lois with the story," he said—and so he bent and kissed her on the lips as gently as though she

had been his little sister.

CHAPTER III

WITHOUT THE GATE

Alban's garret lay within a stone's throw of the tenement occupied by the Boriskoffs; but, in truth, it knew very little of him. They called him "The Hunter," in the courts and alleys round about; and this was as much as to say that his habits were predatory. He loved to roam afar in quest, not of material booty, but of mental sensation. An imagination that was simply wonderful helped him upon his way. He had but to stand at the gate of a palace to become in an instant one of those who peopled it. He could create himself king, or prince, or bishop as the mood took him. If a holiday sent him to the theatre, he was the hero or villain at his choice. In church he would preach well-imagined sermons to spellbound listeners. The streets of the West End were his true world—the gate without the scene of his mental pleasures.

He had no friends among the youths and lads of Thrawl Street and its environment, nor did he seek them. Those who hung about him were soon repelled by his secretive manner and a diffidence which was little more than natural shyness. If he fell now and then into the speech of the alleys, constant association was responsible for the lapse. Sometimes, it is true, an acquaintance would defy the snub and thrust himself stubbornly upon the unwilling wanderer. Alban was never unkind to such as these. He pitied these folk from his very heart; but before them all, he pitied himself.

His favorite walk was to the precincts of Westminster School, where he had spent two short terms before his father died. The influence of this life had never quite passed away. Alban would steal across London by night and stand at the gate of Little Dean's Yard as though wondering still what justice or right of destiny had driven him forth. He would haunt St. Vincent's Square on Saturday afternoons, and, taking his stand among all the little ragged boys who watched the cricket or football, he would, in imagination, become a "pink" delighting the multitude by a century or kicking goals so many that the very Press was startled. In the intervals he revisited the Abbey and tried to remember the service as he had known it when a schoolboy. The sonorous words of Tudor divines remained within his memory, but the heart of them had gone out. What had he to be

thankful for now? Did he not earn his bitter bread by a task so laborious that the very poor might shun it. His father would have made an engineer of him if he had lived—so much had been quite decided. He could tell you the names of lads who had been at Westminster with him and were now at Oxford or Cambridge enjoying those young years which no subsequent fortune can recall. What had he done to the God who ruled the world that these were denied to him? Was he not born a gentleman, as the world understands the term? Had he not worn good clothes, adored a loving mother, been educated in his early days in those vain accomplishments which society demands from its children? And now he was an "East-ender," down at heel and half starved; and there were not three people in all the city who would care a straw whether he lived or died.

This was the lad who went westward that night of the meeting in Union Street, and such were his frequent thoughts. None would have taken him for what he was; few who passed him by would have guessed what his earlier years had been. The old gray check suit, frayed at the edges, close buttoned and shabby, was just such a suit as any loafer out of Union Street might have worn. His hollow cheeks betrayed his poverty. He walked with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his shoulders slightly bent, his eyes roving from face to face as he numbered the wayfarers and speculated upon their fortunes and their future. Two or three friends who hailed him were answered by a quickening of his step and a curt nod of the handsome head. Alb's "curl," a fair flaxen curl upon a broad white forehead, had become a jest in Thrawl Street. "'E throws it at yer," the youths said—and this was no untrue description.

Alban walked swiftly up the Whitechapel Road and was going on by Aldgate Station when the Reverend "Jimmy" Dale, as all the district called the cheery curate of St. Wilfred's Church, slapped him heartily on the shoulder and asked why on earth he wasted the precious hours when he might be in bed and asleep.

"Now, my dear fellow, do you really think it is wise? I am here because I have just been to one of those exhibitions of unadorned gluttony they call a City Banquet. Do you know, Alban, that I don't want to hear of food and drink again for a month. It's perfectly terrible to think that men can do such things when I could name five hundred children who will go wanting bread to-morrow."

Alban rejoined in his own blunt way.

"Then why do you go?" was his disconcerting question.

"To beg of them, that's why I go. They are not uncharitable—I will hold to it

anywhere. And, I suppose, from a worldly point of view, it was a very good dinner. Now, let us walk back together, Alban. I want to talk to you very much."

"About what, sir?"

"Oh, about lots of things. Why don't you join the cricket club, Alban?"

"I haven't got the money, sir."

"But surely—five shillings, my dear boy—and only once a year."

"If you haven't got the five shillings, it doesn't make any difference how many times a year it is."

"Well, well, I think I must write to Sir James Hogg about you. He was telling me to-night—"

"If he sent me the money, I'd return it to him. I'm not a beggar, Mr. Dale."

"But are you not very proud, Alban?"

"Would you let anybody give you five shillings—for yourself, Mr. Dale?"

"That would depend how he offered it. In the plate I should certainly consider it acceptable."

"Yes, but sent to you in a letter because you were hard up, you know. I'm certain you wouldn't. No decent fellow would. When I can afford to play cricket, I'll play it. Good night, Mr. Dale. I'm not going back just now."

The curate shook his head protestingly.

"Do you know it is twelve o'clock, Alban?"

"Just the time the fun begins—in the world—over there, sir."

He looked up at the Western sky aglow with that crimson haze which stands for the zenith of London's night. The Reverend "Jimmy" Dale had abandoned long ago the idea of understanding Alban Kennedy. "He will either die in a lunatic asylum or make his fortune," he said to himself—and all subsequent happenings did not alter this dogged opinion. The fellow was either a lunatic or an original. "Jimmy" Dale, who had rowed in the Trinity second boat, did not wholly appreciate either species.

"What is the world to you, Alban—is not sleep better?"

"In a garret, sir, where you cannot breathe?"

"Oh, come, we must all be a little patient in adversity. I saw Mr. Browning at the works yesterday. He tells me that the firm is very pleased with you—you'll get a rise before long, Alban."

"Half a crown for being good. Enough to sole my boots. When I have shops of my own, I'll let the men live to begin with, sir. The shareholders can come afterwards."

"It would never do to preach that at a city dinner."

"Ah, sir, what's preached at a city dinner and what's true in Thrawl Street, Whitechapel, don't ride a tandem together. Ask a hungry man whether he'll have his mutton boiled or roast, and he'll tell you he doesn't care a damn. It's just the same with me—whether I sleep in a cellar or a garret, what's the odds? I'll be going on now, sir. You must feel tired after so much eating."

He turned, but not rudely, and pushing his way adroitly through the throng about the station disappeared in a moment. The curate shook his head and resumed his way moodily eastward, wondering if his momentary lapse from the straight and narrow way of self-sacrificing were indeed a sin. After all, it had been a very good dinner, and a man would be unwise to be influenced by a boy's argument. The Reverend "Jimmy" was a thousand miles from being a hypocrite, as his life's work showed, and this matter of the dinner really troubled him exceedingly. How many of his parishioners could have been fed for such an expenditure? On the other hand, city companies did a very great deal of good, and it would be churlish to object to their members dining together two or three times a year. In the end, he blamed the lad, Alban, for putting such thoughts into his head.

"The fellow's off to sleep in Hyde Park, I suppose," he said to himself, "or in one of his pirate's caves. What a story he could write if he had the talent. What a freak of chance which set him down here amongst us—well born and educated and yet as much a prisoner as the poorest. Some day we shall hear of him—I am convinced of it. We shall hear of Alban Kennedy and claim his acquaintance as wise people do when a man has made a success."

He carried the thought home with him, but laid it aside when he entered the clergy house, dark and stony and cheerless at such an hour. Alban was just

halfway down the Strand by that time and debating whether he should sleep in the "caves," as he called those wonderful subterranean passages under Pall Mall and the Haymarket, or chance the climate upon a bench in Hyde Park. A chilly night of April drove him to the former resolution and he passed on quickly; by the theatres now empty of their audiences; through Trafalgar Square, where the clubs and the hotels were still brilliantly lighted; up dark Cockspur Street; through St. James' Square; and so to an abrupt halt at the door of a great house, open to the night and dismissing its guests.

Alban despised himself for doing it, but he could never resist the temptation of staring through the windows of any mansion where a party happened to be held. The light and life of it all made a sure appeal to him. He could criticise the figures of beautiful women and remain ignorant of the impassable abyss between their sphere and his own. Sometimes, he would try to study the faces thus revealed to him, as in the focus of a vision, and to say, "That woman is utterly vain," or again, "There is a doll who has not the sense of an East End flower girl." In a way he despised their ignorance of life and its terrible comedies and tragedies. Little Lois Boriskoff, he thought, must know more of human nature than any woman in those assemblies where, as the half-penny papers told him, cards and horses and motor-cars were the subjects chiefly talked about. It delighted him to imagine the abduction of one of these society beauties and her forcible detention for a month in Thrawl Street. How she would shudder and fear it all—and yet what human lessons might not she carry back with her. Let them show him a woman who could face such an ordeal unflinchingly and he would fall in love with her himself. The impertinence of his idea never once dawned upon him. He knew that his father's people had been formerly well-to-do and that his mother had often talked of birth and family. "I may be better than some of them after all," he reflected; and this was his armor against humiliation. What did money matter? The fine idealist of twenty, with a few coppers in his pocket, declared stoically that money was really of no consequence at all.

He lingered some five minutes outside the great house in St. James' Square, watching the couples in the rooms above, and particularly interested in one face which appeared in, and disappeared from, a brilliantly lighted alcove twice while he was standing there. A certain grace of girlhood attended this apparition; the dress was rich and costly and exquisitely made; but that which held Alban's closer attention was the fact that the wearer of it unquestionably was a Pole, and not unlike little Lois Boriskoff herself. He would not say, indeed, that the resemblance was striking—it might have been merely that of nationality. When

the girl appeared for the second time, he admitted that the comparison was rather wild. None the less, he liked to think that she resembled Lois and might also have heard the news from Warsaw to-day. Evidently she was the daughter of some rich foreigner in London, for she talked and moved with Continental animation and grace. The type of face had always made a sure appeal to Alban. He liked those broad contrasts of color; the clear, almost white, skin; the bright red lips; the open expressive eyes fringed by deep and eloquent lashes. This unknown was taller than little Lois certainly—she had a maturer figure and altogether a better carriage; but the characteristics of her nationality were as sure—and the boy fell to wondering whether she was also capable of that winsome sentiment and jealous frenzy which dictated many of the seemingly inconsequent acts of the little heroine of Thrawl Street. This he imagined to be quite possible. "They are great as a nation," he thought, "but most of them are mad. I will tell Lois to-morrow that I have seen her sister in St. James' Square. I shouldn't wonder if she knew all about this house and the party—and Boriskoff will, if she doesn't."

He contented himself with this; and the girl having disappeared from the alcove and a footman announced, in a terrible voice, that Lady Smigg's carriage barred the way, he turned from the house and continued upon his way to the "caves." It was then nearly one o'clock, and save for an occasional hansom making a dash to a club door, St. James' Street was deserted. Alban took one swift look up and down, crossed the street at a run and disappeared down the court which led to those amazing "tombs" of which few in London save the night-birds and the builders so much as suspect the existence.

He did not go alone; he was not, as he thought, unwatched. A detective, commissioned by an unknown patron to follow him, crossed the road directly he had disappeared, and saying, "So that's the game," began to wonder if he also might dare the venture.

He, at least, knew well what he was doing and the class of person he would be likely to meet down there in the depths of which even the police were afraid.

CHAPTER IV

THE CAVES

The "labyrinth" beneath the West End of London was rediscovered in our own time when the foundations for the Carlton Hotel and his Majesty's Theatre were laid. It is a network of old cellars, subterranean passages and, it may even be, of disused conduits, extended from the corner of Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, away to the confines of St. James' Park—and, as more daring explorers aver, to the river Thames itself. Here is a very town of tunnels and arches, of odd angled rooms, of veritable caves and depths as dark as Styx. If, in a common way, it be shut by the circumstance of the buildings above to the riff-raff and night-hawks who would frequent it, there are seasons, nevertheless, when the laying of new foundations, the building of hotels and the demolition of ancient streets in the name of "improvement" fling its gates open to the more cunning of the "destitutes," and they flock there as rooks to a field newly sown.

Of these welcome opportunities, the building of the Carlton Hotel is the best remembered within recent times; but the erection of new houses off St. James' Street in the year 1903 brought the ladies and the gentlemen of the road again to its harborage; and they basked there for many weeks in undisputed possession. Molesting none and by none molested, it was an affair neither for the watchmen (whose glances askance earned them many a handsome supper) or for the police who had sufficient to do in the light of the street lamps that they should busy themselves with supposed irregularities where that light was not. The orgies thus became a nightly feature of the vagrant's life. There was no more popular hotel in London than the "Coal Hole," as the wits of the company delighted to style their habitation.

A city below a city! Indeed imagination might call it that. A replica of famous catacombs with horrid faces for your spectres, ghoulish women and unspeakable men groping in the darkness as though, vampire-like, afraid of the light. Why Alban Kennedy visited this place, he himself could not have said. Possibly a certain morbid horror of it attracted him. He had, admittedly, such a passport to the caves as may be the reward of a shabby appearance and a resolute air. The criminal company he met with believed that he also was a criminal. Enjoying

their confidence because he had never excited their suspicion, they permitted him to lie his length before reddened embers and hear tales which fire the blood with every passion of anger and of hate. Here, in these caverns, he had seen men fight as dogs—with teeth and claws and resounding yells; he had heard the screams of a woman and the cries of helpless children. A sufficient sense of prudence compelled him to be but an apathetic spectator of these infamies. The one battle he had fought had been impotent to save the object of his chivalry.

When first he came here, heroic resolutions followed him. He had thrashed a ruffian who struck a woman, and narrowly escaped with his life for doing so. Henceforth he could but assent to a truce which implied mutual toleration; and yet he understood that his presence was not without its influence even on these irredeemables. Men called him "The Hunter," or in mockery "The Dook." He had done small services for one or two of them—even written a begging letter for a rogue who could not write at all, but posed as an "old public school man," fallen upon evil days. Alban was perfectly well aware that this was a shameless imposition, but his ideas of morality as it affected the relations of rich and poor were ever primitive and unstable. "If this old thief gets half a sovereign, what's it matter?" he would argue; "the other man stole his money, I suppose, and can well afford to pay up." Here was a gospel preached every day in Thrawl Street. He had never stopped to ask its truth.

Alban crossed St. James' Street furtively, and climbed, as an athlete should climb, the boarding which defended the entrance to this amazing habitation. A contented watchman, dozing by a comfortable fire, cared little who came or went and rarely bestirred himself to ask the question. There were two entrances to the caves: one cramped and difficult, the other broad and open; and you took your choice of them according to the position of the policeman on the beat. This night, or rather this morning, of the day following upon the meeting in Union Street, discovered Alban driven to the more hazardous way. His quick eye had detected, on the far side of the enclosure, an amiable flirtation between a man of law and a lady of the dusters; and avoiding both discreetly, he slipped into a trench of the newly made foundations and crawled as swiftly through an aperture which this descent revealed.

Here, laid bare by the picks and shovels of twentieth-century Trade Unionism, was a veritable Gothic arch, bricked up to the height of a tall man's waist, but open at the tympanum. Alban hoisted himself to the aperture and, slipping through, his feet discovered the reeking floor of a dank and dripping subway; and guiding himself now by hands outstretched and fingers touching the fungi of

the walls, he went on with confidence until the roof lifted above him and the watch-fires of the confraternity were disclosed. He had come by now into a vast cellar not very far from the Carlton Hotel itself. There were offshoots everywhere, passages more remote, the arches as of crypts, smaller apartments, odd corners which had guarded the casks five hundred years ago. Each of these could show you its little company safe harbored for the night; each had some face from which Master Timidity might well avert his eyes. But Alban went in amongst them as though he had been their friend. They knew his very footstep, the older "lags" would declare.

"All well, Jack?"

"All well, old cove."

"The Panorama come along?"

"Straight art of the coffee shawp, s'help me blind."

"Ship come in?"

"Two tharsand next Toosday—same as usual."

A lanky hawker, lying full length upon a sack, his pipe glowing in the darkness, exchanged these pleasantries with Alban at the entrance. There were fires by here and there in these depths and the smoke was often suffocating. The huddled groups declared all grades of ill-fortune and of crime; from that of the "pauper parson" to the hoariest house-breaker "resting" for a season. Alban's little set, so far as he had a "set" at all, consisted of the sometime curate of a fashionable West End Church, known to the company as the Archbishop of Bloomsbury; the Lady Sarah, a blooming, red-cheeked girl who sold flowers in Regent Street, "the Panorama," an old showman's son who had not a sixpenny piece in his pocket, but whose schemes were invariably about to bring him in "two thousand next Tuesday morning"; and "Betty," a pretty, fair-haired lad, thrown on the streets God knows how or by what callous act of indifferent parentage. Regularly as the clock struck, this quartette would gather in a tiny "chapel" of the cellars and sleep about a fire kindled in a grate which might have baked meats for the Tudors. They spoke of the events of the day with moderation and wise philosophy. It would be different to-morrow. Such was ever their text.

"My lord the Duke is late. Does aught of fortune keep your nobility?"

The ex-parson made way for Alban, grandiloquently offering a niche upon the

bare floor and a view of the reddening embers. The boy "Betty" was already asleep, while the Lady Sarah and "the Panorama" divided a fourpenny pie most faithfully between them. A reeking atmosphere of spirit (but not of water) testified to the general conviviality. A hum of conversation was borne in upon them from the greater cellar—at odd times a rough oath of protest or the mad complainings of a drunkard. For the most part, however, the night promised to be uneventful. Alban had never seen the Lady Sarah more gracious, and as for "the Panorama" he had no doubt whatever that his fortune was made.

"My contract for America's going through and I shall be out there with a show in a month," this wild youth said—and added patronizingly, "When I come back, it will be dinner upstairs, old chaps—and some of the best. Do you suppose that I could forget you? I would as soon forget my father's grave."

They heard him with respect—no one differing from him.

"I shall certainly be pleased to accept your kind invitation," said the Archbishop, "that is, should circumstance—and Providence—enable me to redeem the waistcoat, without which—eh—hem—I understand no visitor would be admitted to those noble precincts."

The Lady Sarah expressed her opinion even more decidedly.

"Don't 'e talk," she said pleasantly, "can't you 'ear the thick 'uns a rattlin' in his mouse-trap. Poor little man and 'im a horphin. Stun me mother if I ain't a goin' ter Jay's termerrer ter buy mournin' in honor of him."

"I presume," continued the Archbishop, "that we shall all be admitted to this entertainment as it were—that is—as the colloquial expression goes—on the nod. It will be enough to mention that we are the proprietor's friends."

"You shall have a season-ticket for life, Archbishop. Just you tell me where you want a church built and I'll see that it's done. Of course I don't mind your chaff—I'm dead in earnest and the money will be there."

"A real contract this time?" Alban suggested kindly.

"A real contract. I saw Philips about it to-day, and he knows a man who is Pierpont Morgan's cousin. We are to open in New York in September and be in San Francisco the following week."

"Rather a long journey, isn't it, old chap?"

"Oh, they do those things out there. I'm told you play Hamlet one night and Othello six hours afterwards, which is really the next night because of the long distances and the differences in the latitudes. Ask the Archbishop. I expect he hasn't forgotten all his geography."

"A Cambridge man," said the Archbishop, loftily, "despises geography. Heat, light, electricity, the pure and the impure mathematics—these are his proper study. I rise superior to the occasion and tell you that San Francisco is a long way from New York. The paper in which I wrapped a ham sandwich yesterday—the advertisement of a shipping company, I may inform you—brings that back to my recollection. San Francisco is the thickness of two slices of stale bread from the seaport you mention. And I believe there are Red Indians in between."

The Lady Sarah murmured lightly the refrain of the old song concerning houses which stood in that annoying position; but Alban had already lighted a cigarette and was watching the girl's face critically.

"You've had some luck to-day, Sarah?"

"A bloomin' prophet and that I won't deny. Gar'n, Dowie."

"But you did have some luck?"

"Sure and certain. What d'ye fink? A bit of a boy, same as 'Betty' 'ere, 'e comes up and says, 'What'll ye take fer the whole bloomin' caravan?' he says, 'for ter send ter a lidy?' 'Gentleman,' I says, 'I'm only a poor girl and a widered muver ter keep, and, gentleman, I can't tike less than two pound fer 'em sure and certain as there's a God in 'eaven, I can't.' 'Well,' says he, 'it's a blarsted swindle but I'll take 'em—and mind you deliver 'em ter the lidy yerself.' 'They shall go this very minute,' says I, 'and, oh, sir, God bless you both and may yer have long life and 'appiness ter-gether.' Strike me dead, wot d'yer think he said next? Why he arst me fer my bloomin' name, same as if I wus a Countess a steepin' art of a moter-kar at the door of Buckingem Peliss. 'What's yer name, girl?' says 'e. 'Sarah Geddes, an it please yer capting,' says I. 'Then send the bally flowers to Sarah Geddes,' says 'e, 'and take precious good care as she gets 'em.' Gawd's truth, yer could 'ave knocked me darn with a 'at pin. I never was took so suddin in all me life."

"I wonder you didn't have your dinner in the Carlton Hotel, Sarah."

"So I would 'a' done if I'd hev bed time ter chinge me dress. You orter know,

Dook, as no lidy ever goes inter them plices in wot she's bin a wearin' afore she cleaned herself. I'ad ter go ter Marlborough 'Ouse ter tell the Prince of Wales, and that's wot kept me."

"Better luck next time, Sarah. So it only ran to a 'fourpenny' between you and 'the Panorama.'"

"You shall all dine with me next week," said the young man in question. "On my honor, I'll give you the best dinner you ever had in your life. As for Sarah here, I'm going to put her in a flower shop in Bond Street."

"Gar'n, silly, what 'ud I do in Bond Street? Much better buy the Archbishop a church."

The erstwhile clergyman did not take the suggestion, in good part.

"I have always doubted my ability to conduct the affairs of a parish methodically," he said, "that is—a little habit—a slight partiality to the drug called morphia is not in my favor. This, I am aware, is a drawback. The world judges my profession very harshly. A man in the city who counts the collection indifferently will certainly become Lord Mayor. The Establishment has no use for him—he is *de trop*, or as we might say, a drop too much. This I recognize in frankly declining our young friend's offer—with grateful thanks."

Sarah, the flower girl, seemed particularly amused by this frank admission. Feeling in the depth of her shawl she produced a capacious flask and a bundle of cigars.

"'Ere, boys," she said, "let's talk 'am and heggs. 'Ere's a drop of the best and five bob's worth of chimney afire, stun me mother if there ain't. I'm sick of talkin' and so's 'the Panerawma.' Light up yer sherbooks and think as you're in Buckingem Peliss. There ain't no 'arm thinkin' anyways."

"I dreamed last night," said the Archbishop very sadly, "that this cellar had become a cottage and that the sun was shining in it."

"I never dream," said "the Panorama," stoically; "put my head on the floor and I won't lift it until the clock strikes ten."

"Then begin now, my dear," exclaimed the Lady Sarah with a sudden tenderness, "put it there now and forget what London is ter you and me."

The words were uttered almost with a womanly tenderness, not without its influence upon the company. Some phrase spoken of Frivolity's mouth had touched this group of outcasts and spoken straight to their hearts. They bandied, pleasantries no more, but lighting the cigars—the Lady Sarah boldly charging a small clay pipe—they fell to an expressive silence, of introspection, it may be, or even of unutterable despair. The woman alone amongst them had not been cast down from a comparative altitude to this very abyss of destitution. For the others life was a vista far behind them; a vista, perchance, of a cottage and the sunshine, as the parson had said; an echo of voices from a forgotten world; the memory of a hand that was cold and of dead faces reproaching them. Such pauses are not infrequent in the conversation of the very poor. Men bend their heads to destiny less willingly than we think. The lowest remembers the rungs of the ladder he has descended.

Alban had lighted one of the cigars and he smoked it stoically, wondering again why the caves attracted him and what there was in this company which should not have made him ashamed of such associations. That he was not ashamed admitted of no question. In very truth, the humanities were conquering him in spite of inherited prejudice. Had the full account of it been written down by a philosopher, such a sage would have said that the girl Sarah stood for a type of womanly pity, of sympathy, and, in its way, of motherhood; qualities which demand no gift of birth for their appeal. The unhappy parson, too, was there not much of good in him, and might he not yet prove a human field worthy to be tilled by a husbandman of souls? His humor was kindly; his disposition gentle; his faults punished none but himself. And for what did "the Panorama" stand if not for the whole gospel of human hope without which no life may be lived at all? Alban had some glimmering of this, but he could not have set down his reasons in so many words. As for the little lad "Betty"—was not the affection they lavished upon him that which manhood ever owes to the weak and helpless. Search London over and you will not find elemental goodness in a shape more worthy than it was to be found in the caves—nor can we forego a moment's reflection upon the cant which ever preaches the vice of the poor and so rarely stops to preach their virtues.

This was the human argument of Alban's association, but the romantic must not be forgotten. More imaginative than most youths of his age, his boyish delight in these grim surroundings was less to him than a real and inspiring sense of the power of contrast they typified. Was he not this very night sleeping beneath some famous London house, it might be below that very temple of the great God

Mammon, the Carlton Hotel? Far above him were the splendid rooms, fair sleepers in robes of lace, tired men who had earned enough that very day perhaps to feed all the hungry children in Thrawl Street for a lifetime and to remain rich men afterwards. Of what were the dreams of such as those—not of sunshine and a cottage as the old parson had dreamed, surely? Not of these nor of the devoted sacrifice of motherhood or of that gentle sympathy which the unfortunate so readily give their fellows. Not this certainly—and yet who should blame them? Alban, at least, had the candor to admit that he would be much as they were if his conditions of life were the same. He never deceived himself, young as he was, with the false platitudes of boastful altruists. "I should enjoy myself if I were rich," he would say—and sigh upon it; for what assumption could be more grotesque?

No, indeed, there could be no sunshine for him to-morrow. Nothing but the shadows of toil; and, in the background, that grim figure of uncertainty which never fails to haunt the lives of the very poor.

CHAPTER V

DISMISSAL

Alban had been a disappointment to his employers, the great engineer of the Isle of Dogs, to whom Charity had apprenticed him in his fourteenth year. Faithful attempts to improve his position in the works were met, as it would seem, by indifference and ingratitude. He did his work mechanically but without enthusiasm. Had he confessed the truth, he would have said, "I was not born to labor with my hands." A sense of inherited superiority, a sure conviction, common to youth, that he would become a leader, of men, conduced to a restlessness and a want of interest which he could not master. He had the desire but not the will to please his employers.

To such a lad these excursions to the West End, these pilgrimages to the shrine of the outcast and the homeless were by way of being a mental debauch. He arose from them in the morning as a man may arise to the remembrance of unjustified excess, which leaves the mind inert and the body weary. His daily task presented itself in a revolting attitude. Why had he been destined to this slavery? Why must he set out to his work at an hour of the chilly morning when the West End was still shuttered and asleep and the very footmen still yawned in their beds? If he had any consolation, it was that the others were often before him in that cunning debauch from the caves which the dawn compelled. The Lady Sarah would be at Covent Garden by four o'clock. The Archbishop, who rarely seemed to sleep at all, went off to the Serpentine for his morning ablutions when the clock struck five. "Betty," the pale-faced infant, disappeared as soon as the sun was up—and often, when Alban awoke in the cellar, he found himself the only tenant of that grim abode. Sometimes, indeed, and this morning following upon the promise to little Lois Boriskoff was such an occasion, he overslept himself altogether and was shut out from the works for the day. This had happened before and had brought frequent reprimands. He feared them and yet had not the will to remember them.

Big Ben was striking seven when he quitted the cellar and London was awake in earnest. Alban usually spent twopence in the luxury of a "wash and brush up" before he went down to the river; but he hastened on this morning conscious of

his tardiness and troubled at the possible consequences. The bright spring day did little to reassure him. Weather does not mean very much to those who labor in heated atmospheres, who have no profit of the sunshine nor gift of the seasons. Alban thought rather of the fateful clock and of the excuses which might pacify the timekeeper. He had never stooped to the common lies; he would not stoop to them this day. When, at the gate of the works, a heavy jowled man with a red beard asked him what he meant by coming there at such an hour, he answered as frankly that he did not know.

"Been out to supper with the Earl of Barkin, perhaps," the burly man suggested. "Well, young fellow, you go up and see Mr. Tucker. He's particularly desirous of making your acquaintance—that he is. Tell him how his lordship's doin' and don't you forget the ladies."

Alban made no reply, but crossing the open yard he mounted a little flight of stairs and knocked indifferently at the door of the dreaded office thus indicated. An angry voice, bidding him "come in," did not reassure him. He found the deputy manager frank but determined. There could be no doubt whatever of the issue.

"Kennedy," he said quietly, "I hope you understand why I have sent for you."

"For being late, sir. I am very sorry—I overslept myself."

"My boy, if your work was as honest as your tongue, your fortune would be made. I am afraid I must remember what passed at our last meeting. You promised me then—"

"I am quite aware of it, sir. The real truth is that I can't get up. The work here is distasteful to me—but I do my best."

The manager shook his head in a deprecating manner.

"We have given you many chances, Kennedy," he rejoined. "If it rested with me, I would give you another. But it doesn't rest with me—it rests with that necessary person. Example. What would the men say if I treated you as a privileged person? You know that the work could not go on. For the present, at any rate, you are suspended. I must see my directors and take instructions from them. Now, really, Kennedy, don't you think that you have been very foolish?"

"I suppose so, sir. That's what foolish people generally think. It must make a lot of difference to you whether a man comes at six or seven, even if he does a good

deal more work than the early ones. I could do what you ask me to do in three hours a day. That's what puzzles me."

The amiable Mr. Tucker was up in arms in a moment.

"Now, come, I cannot discuss abstract propositions with you. Our hours are from six to six. You do not choose to keep them and, therefore, you must go. When you are a little more practically inclined, I will speak to the directors for you. You may come and tell me so when that is the case."

"I shall never come and tell you so, sir. I wish that I could—but it will never be the truth. The work that I could do for you is now what you want me to do. I am sure it is better for me to go, sir."

"Then you have something in your mind, Kennedy?"

"So many things, sir, that I could fill a book with them. That is why I am foolish. Good-by, Mr. Tucker. I suppose you have all been very kind to me—I don't rightly understand, but I think that you have. So good-by and thank you."

The discreet manager took the outstretched hand and shook it quite limply. There had been a momentary contraction of the brows while he asked himself if astute rivals might not have been tampering with this young fellow and trying to buy the firm's secrets. An instant's reflection, however, reassured him. Alban had no secrets worth the name to sell, and did he possess them, money would not buy them. "Half mad but entirely honest," was Mr. Tucker's comment, "he will either make a fortune or throw himself over London Bridge."

Alban had been quite truthful when he said that he had many things in his mind, but this confession did not mean to signify a possibility of new employment. In honest truth, he had hardly left the gates of the great yard when he realized how hopeless his position was. Of last week's wages but a few shillings remained in his pocket. He knew no one to whom he might offer such services as he had to give. The works had taught him the elements of mechanical engineering, and common sense told him that skilled labor rarely went begging if the laborer were worthy his hire. None the less, the prospect of touting for such employment affrighted him beyond words. He felt that he could not again abase himself for a few paltry shillings a week. The ambition to make of this misfortune a stepping-stone to better things rested on no greater security than his pride and yet it would not be wholly conquered. He spent a long morning by the riverside planning schemes so futile that even the boy's mind rejected them. The old copybook

maxims recurred to him and were treated with derision. He knew that he would never become Lord Mayor of London—after a prosperous career in a dingy office which he had formerly swept out with a housemaid's broom.

The lower reaches of the Thames are a world of themselves; peopled by a nation of aliens; endless in the variety of their life; abounding in weird and beautiful pictures which even the landsman can appreciate. Alban rarely tired of that panorama of swirling waters and drifting hulks and the majestic shapes of resting ships. And upon such a day as this which had made an idler of him, their interest increased tenfold; and to this there was added a wonder which had never come into his life before. For surely, he argued, this great river was the high road to an El Dorado of which he had often dreamed; to that shadowy land of valley and of mountain which his imagination so ardently desired. Let a man find employment upon the deck of one of those splendid ships and henceforth the whole world would be open to him. Alban debated this as a possible career, and as he thought of it the spell of the craving for new sights and scenes afar mastered him to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Who was to forbid him; who had the right to stand between him and his world hunger so irresistibly? When a voice within whispered a girl's name in his ear, he could have laughed aloud for very derision. A fine thing that he should talk of the love of woman or let his plans be influenced for the sake of a pretty face! Why, he would be a beggar himself in a week, it might be without a single copper in his pocket or a roof to shelter him! And he was just the sort of man to live on a woman's earnings—just the one to cast the glove to fortune and of his desperation achieve the final madness. No, no, he must leave London. The city had done with him—he had never been so sure of anything in all his life.

It was an heroic resolution, and shame that hunger should so maltreat it. When twelve o'clock struck and Alban remembered how poor a breakfast he had made, he did not think it necessary to abandon any of his old habits, at least not immediately; and he went, as he usually had done, to the shabby dining-room in Union Street where he and Lois had taken their dinners together for many a month past. Boriskoff's daughter was already at table and waiting for him when he entered; he thought that she was unusually pale and that her expectancy was not that of a common occasion. Was it possible that she also had news to tell him—news as momentous as his own? Alban feared to ask her, and hanging his cap on a peg above their table without a word, he sat down and began to study the greasy menu.

"What's the luck, Alb, dear—why do you look like that?"

Little Lois asked the question, struck by his odd manner and appearance.

He answered her with surprising candor—for the sudden determination came to him that he must tell Lois.

"No luck at all, Lois."

"Why, you don't mean—?"

"I do, and that's straight. There is no further need of my services—"

"You've got the sack?"

"The whole of it, Lois—and now I'm selling it cheap."

The girl laughed aloud, but there were tears in her eyes while she did so. What a day for them both. She was angry almost with him for telling her.

"Why, if father ain't a-gettin' on the prophet line—he said you would, Alb. So help me rummy, I was that angry with him I couldn't hear myself speak. And now it's all come true. Why, Alb, dear—and I wanted to tell you—"

She could not finish the sentence for a sob that almost choked her. The regular customers of the room had turned to stare at the sound of such unwonted hilarity. Dinner was far too serious a business for most of them that laughter should serve it.

"What was your father saying, Lois?"

"That you were going away, dear, and that the sooner I gave up thinking about you the fatter I should be."

"How did he know what was going to happen?"

"Ask me another and don't pay the bill. He's been as queer as white rabbits since yesterday—didn't go to work this morning, but sat all day over a letter he's received. I shall be frightened of father just now. I do really believe he's getting a bit balmy on the crumpet."

"Still talking about the man who stole the furnace?"

"Why, there you've got it. We're going to Buckingham Palace in a donkey cart and pretty quick about it. You'll be ashamed of such fine people, Alb—father says so. So I'm not to speak to you to begin with—not till the dresses come home

from Covent Garden and the horses are pawing the ground for her lidyship. That's the chorus all day—lots of fun when the bricks come home and father with a watch-chain as big as Moses. He knew you were going to get the sack and he warned me against it. 'We can't afford to associate with those people nowadays'—don't yer know—'so mind what you're a-doing, my child.' And I'm minding it all day—I was just minding it when you came in, Alb. Don't you see her lidyship is taking mutton chops? Couldn't descend to nothink less, my dear—not on such a day as this—blimme."

Lois' patter, acquired in the streets, invariably approached the purely vulgar when she was either angry or annoyed—for at other times her nationality saved her from many of its penalties. Alban quite understood that something beyond ordinary must have passed between father and daughter to-day; but this was neither the time nor the place to discuss it.

"We'll meet outside the Pav to-night and have a good talk, Lois," he said; "everybody's listening here. Be there at nine sharp. Who knows, it may be the last time we shall ever meet in London—"

"You're not going away, Alb?"

A look of terror had come into the pretty eyes; the frail figure of the girl trembled as she asked the question.

"Can't say, Lois—how do I know? Suppose I went as a sailor—"

Lois laughed louder than before.

"You—a blueboy! Lord, how you make me laugh. Fancy the aristocrat being ordered about. Oh, my poor funny-bone! Wouldn't you knock the man down that did it—oh, can't I see him."

The idea amused her immensely and she dwelt upon it even in the street outside. Her Alb as Captain Jack—or should it be the cabin-boy. And, of course, he would bring her a parrot from the Brazils and perhaps a monkey.

"An' I'll keep a light in the winder for fear you should be shipwrecked in High Street, Alb, and won't we go hornpiping together. Oh, you silly boy; oh, you dear old Captain Jack—whatever put a sailorman into your mind?"

"The water," said Alban, as stolidly—"it leads to somewhere, Lois. This is the road to nowhere—good God, how tired I am of it."

"And of those who go with you, Alb."

"I am ashamed of myself because of them, Lois."

"You silly boy, Alb—are they ashamed, Alb? Oh, no, no—people who love are never ashamed."

He did not contest the point with her, nor might she linger. Bells were ringing everywhere, syrens were calling the people to work. It was a new thing for Alban Kennedy to be strolling the streets with his hands in his pockets when the clock struck one. And yet there he was become a loafer in an instant, just one of the many thousand who stare up idly at the sky or gaze upon the windows of the shops they may not patronize, or drift on helpless as though a dark stream of life had caught them and nevermore would set them on dry land again. Alban realized all this, and yet the full measure of his disaster was not wholly understood. It was so recent, the consequences yet unfelt, the future, after all, pregnant with the possibilities of change. He knew not at all what he should do, and yet determined that the shame of which he had spoken should never overtake him.

And so determining, he strolled as far as Aldgate Station—and there he met the stranger.

CHAPTER VI

THE STRANGER

There is a great deal of fine philanthropic work done east of Aldgate Station by numbers of self-sacrificing young men just down from the Universities. So, when a slim parson touched Alban upon the arm and begged for a word with him, he concluded immediately that he had attracted the notice of one of these and become the objective of his charity.

"I beg your pardon," he said a little stiffly. The idea of stooping to such assistance had long been revolting to him. He was within an ace of breaking away from the fellow altogether.

"Your name is Alban Kennedy, I think? Will you permit me to have a few words with you?"

Alban looked the parson up and down, and the survey did something to satisfy him. He found himself face to face with a man, it might be of thirty years of age, whose complexion was dark but not unpleasant, whose eyes were frank and open, the possessor, too, of fair brown hair and of a manner not altogether free from a suspicion of that which scoffers call the "wash-hand" basin cult.

"I do not know you, sir."

"Indeed you do not—we are total strangers. My name is Sidney Geary; I am the senior curate of St. Philip's Church at Hampstead. If we could go somewhere and have a few words, I would be very much obliged to you."

Alban hardly knew what to say to him. The manner was not that of a philanthropist desiring him to come to a "pleasant afternoon for the people"; he detected no air of patronage, no vulgar curiosity—indeed, the curate of St. Philip's was almost deferential.

"Well, sir—if you don't mind a coffee shop—"

"The very place. I have always thought that a coffee shop, properly conducted and entirely opposed to the alcoholic principle, is one of the most useful works in the civic economy. Let us go to a coffee shop by all means."

Alban crossed the road and, leading the stranger a little way eastward, turned into a respectable establishment upon the Lockhart plan—almost deserted at such an hour and the very place for a confidential chat.

"Will you have anything, sir?"

The curate looked at the thick cups upon the counter, turned his gaze for an instant upon a splendid pile of sausages, and shuddered a little ominously.

"I suppose the people here have excellent appetites," he reflected sagely. "I myself, unfortunately, have just lunched in Mount Street—but a little coffee—shall we not drink a little coffee?"

"Suppose I order you two doorsteps and a thick 'un?"

"My dear young fellow, what in heaven's name are 'two doorsteps and a thick 'un?'"

Alban smiled a little scornfully.

"Evidently you come from the West. I was only trying you. Shall we have two coffees—large? It isn't so bad as it looks by a long way."

The coffee was brought and set steaming before them. In an interval of silence Alban studied the curate's face as he would have studied a book in which he might read some account of his own fortunes. Why had this man stopped him in the street?

"Your first visit to Aldgate, sir?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Kennedy—many years ago I have recollections of a school treat at a watering-place near the river's mouth—an exceedingly muddy place since become famous, I understand. But I take the children to Eastbourne now."

"They find that a bit slow, don't they? Kids love mud, you know."

"They do—upon my word. A child's love of mud is one of the most incurable things in nature."

"Then why try to cure it?"

"But what are you to do?"

"Wash them, sir,—you can always do that. My father was a parson, you know—"

"Good heavens, a clergyman—and you are come to—that is, you choose to live amidst these dreadful surroundings?"

"I do not choose—death chose for me."

"My poor boy—"

"Not at all, sir. Give a man a good appetite and enough to gratify it, and I don't know that other circumstances count much."

"Trial has made of you an epicurean, I see. Well, well, so much the better. That which I have to offer you will be the more acceptable."

"Employment, sir?"

"Employment—for a considerable term. Good employment, Mr. Kennedy. Employment which will take you into the highest society, educate you, perhaps, open a great career to you—that is what I came to speak of."

The good man had meant to break the news more dramatically; but it flowed on now as a freshet released, while his eyes sparkled and his head wagged as though his whole soul were bursting with it. Alban thought for a moment that he had met one of those pleasant eccentrics who are not less rare in the East End than the West. "This good fellow has escaped out of an asylum," he thought.

"What kind of a job would that be, sir?"

"Your own. Name it and it shall be chosen for you. That is what I am commissioned to say."

"By whom, sir?"

"By my patron and by yours."

"Does he wish to keep his name back?"

"So little that he is waiting for you at his own house now."

"Then why shouldn't we go and see him, sir?"

He put the question fully believing that it would bring the whole ridiculous castle down with a crash, as it were, upon the table before him. Its effect, however, was entirely otherwise. The parson stood up immediately.

"My carriage is waiting," he said; "nothing could possibly suit me better."

Alban, however, remained seated.

"Mr. Geary," he exclaimed, "you have forgotten to tell me something."

"I can think of nothing."

"The conditions of this slap-up job—the high society and all the rest of it! What are the conditions?"

He spoke almost with contempt, and deliberately selected a vulgar expression. It had come to him by this time that some unknown friend had become interested in his career and that this amiable curate desired to make either a schoolmaster or an organist of him. "Old Boriskoff knew I was going to get the sack and little Lois has been chattering," he argued—nor did this line of reasoning at all console him. Sidney Geary, meanwhile, felt as though some one had suddenly applied a slab of melting ice to those grammatical nerves which Cambridge had tended so carefully.

"My dear Mr. Kennedy—not 'slap-up,' I beg of you. If there are any conditions attached to the employment my patron has to offer you, is not he the best person to state them? Come and hear him for yourself. I assure you it will not be waste of time."

"Does he live far from here?"

"At Hampstead Heath—it will take us an hour to drive there."

"And did he send the char à bancs especially for my benefit?"

"Not really—but naturally he did."

"Then I will go with you, sir."

He put on his cap slowly and followed the curate into the street—one of the girls racing after them to say that they had forgotten to pay the bill. "And a pretty sort of clergyman you must be, to be sure," was her reflection—to the curate's blushing annoyance and his quite substantial indignation.

"I find much impertinence in this part of the world," he remarked as they retraced their steps toward the West; "as if the girl did not know that it was an accident."

"We pay for what we eat down here," Alban rejoined dryly; "it's a good plan as you would discover if you tried it, sir."

Mr. Geary looked at the boy for an instant as though in doubt whether he had heard a sophism or a mere impertinence. This important question was not, however, to be decided; for a neat single brougham edged toward the pavement at the moment and a little crowd collected instantly to remark so signal a phenomenon.

"Your carriage, sir?" Alban asked.

"Yes," said the curate, quietly, "my carriage. And now, if you please, we will go and see Mr. Gessner. He is a Pole, Mr. Kennedy, and one of the richest men in London to-day."

CHAPTER VII

THE HOUSE OF THE FIVE GABLES

It was six o'clock as the carriage passed Swiss Cottage station and ten minutes later when they had climbed the stiff hill to the Heath. Alban had not often ridden in a carriage, but he would have found his sensations very difficult to set down. The glossy cushions, the fine ivory and silver fittings, were ornaments to be touched with caressing fingers as one touches the coat of a beautiful animal or the ripe bloom upon fruit. Just to loll back in such a vehicle, to watch the houses and the people and the streets, was an experience he had not hitherto imagined. The smooth motion was a delight to him. He felt that he could continue such a journey to the ends of the earth, resting at his ease, untroubled by those never ended questions upon which poverty insisted.

"Is it far yet, sir—is Mr. Gessner's house a long way off?"

He asked the question as one who desired an affirmative reply. The parson, however, believed that his charge was already wearied; and he said eagerly:

"It is just over there between the trees, my lad. We shall be with our good friend in five minutes now. Perhaps you know that you are on Hampstead Heath?"

"I came here once with little Lois Boriskoff—on a Bank Holiday. It was not like this then. If Mr. Gessner is rich, why does he live in a place where people come to keep Bank Holiday? I should have thought he would have got away from them."

"He is not able to get away. His business takes him into town every day—he goes by motor-car and comes back at night to breathe pure air. Bank Holidays do not occur every day, Mr. Kennedy. Fortunately for some of us they are but four a year."

"Of course you don't like going amongst all those poor people, Mr. Geary. That's natural. I didn't until I had to, and then I found them much the same as the rest. You haven't any poor in Hampstead, I am told."

Mr. Geary fell into the trap all unsuspectingly.

"Thank heaven"—he began, and then checking himself clumsily, he added, "that is to say we are comparatively well off as neighborhoods go. Our people are not idlers, however. Some of the foremost manufacturers in the country live in Hampstead."

"While their work-people starve in Whitechapel. It's an odd world, isn't it, Mr. Geary—and I don't suppose we shall ever know much about it. If I had made a fortune by other people's work, I think I should like some of them to live in Hampstead too. But you see, I'm prejudiced."

Sidney Geary looked at the boy as though he had heard a heresy. To him the gospel of life meant a yearly dole of coals at Christmas and a bout of pleasant "charity organizations" during the winter months. He would as soon have questioned the social position of the Archbishop of Canterbury as have criticised the conduct and the acts of the manufacturers who supported his church so generously.

"I am afraid you have received some pernicious teaching down yonder," he said, with a shake of his abundant locks. "Mr. Gessner, I may tell you, has an abhorrence of socialism. If you wish to please him, avoid the topic."

"But I do not wish to please him—I do not even know him. And I'm not a socialist, sir. If Mr. Gessner had ever lived in Whitechapel; if he had starved in a garret, he would understand me. I don't suppose it matters, though, whether he does or not, for we are hardly likely to discuss such things together."

"My dear lad, he has not sent for you for that, believe me. His conversation will be altogether of a different nature. Let me implore you to remember that he desires to be your benefactor—not your judge. There is no kinder heart, no more worthy gentleman in all London to-day than Richard Gessner. That much I know and my opportunities are unique."

Alban could make no reply to this; nor did he desire one. They had passed the Jack Straw's Castle by this time, and now the carriage entered a small circular drive upon the right-hand side of the road and drew up before a modern red-bricked mansion, by no means ostentatious or externally characteristic of the luxury for which its interior was famed. Just a trim garden surrounded the house and boasted trees sufficient to hide the picturesque gables from the eyes of the curious. There were stables in the northern wing and a great conservatory built out toward the south. Alban had but an instant to glance at the beautiful façade when a young butler opened the door to them and ushered them into a vast hall,

panelled to the ceiling in oak and dimly lighted by Gothic windows of excellent stained glass. Here a silence, amazing in its profundity, permitted the very ticking of the clocks to be heard. All sounds from without, the hoot of the motors, the laughter of children, the grating voices of loafers on the Heath, were instantly shut out. An odor of flowers and fine shrubs permeated the apartment. The air was cool and clear as though it had passed through a lattice of ice.

"Please to wait one moment, Kennedy, and I will go to Mr. Gessner. He expects us and we shall not have long to wait. Is he not in the library, Fellows—ah, I thought he would be there."

The young butler said "Yes, sir;" but Alban perceived that it was in a tone which implied some slight note of contempt. "That fellow," he thought, "would have kicked me into the street if I had called here yesterday—and his father, I suppose, kept a public-house or a fish shop." The reflection flattered his sense of irony; and sitting negligently upon a broad settee, he studied the hall closely, its wonderful panelling, the magnificently carved balustrades, the great organ up there in the gallery—and lastly the portraits. Alban liked subject pictures, and these masterpieces of Sargent and Luke Fildes did not make an instantaneous appeal to him. Indeed, he had cast but a brief glance upon the best of them before his eye fell upon a picture which brought the blood to his cheeks as though a hand had slapped them. It was the portrait of the supposed Polish girl whom he had seen upon the balcony of the house in St. James' Square—last night as he visited the caves.

Alban stared at the picture open-mouthed and so lost in amazement that all other interests of his visit were instantly lost to his memory. A hard dogmatic common-sense could make little of a coincidence so amazing. If he had wished to think that the unknown resembled little Lois Boriskoff—if he had wished so much last night, the portrait, seen in this dim light, flattered his desire amazingly. He knew, however, that the resemblance was chiefly one of nationality; and in the same instant he remembered that he had been brought to the house of a Pole. Was it possible, might he dare to imagine that Paul Boriskoff's friendship had contrived this strange adventure. Some excitement possessed him at the thought, for his spirit had ever been adventurous. He could not but ask himself to whose house had he come then and for what ends? And why did he find a portrait of the Polish girl therein?

Alban's eyes were still fixed upon the picture when the young butler returned to summon him to the library. He was not a little ashamed to be found intent upon

such an occupation, and he rose immediately and followed the man through a small conservatory, aglow with blooms, and so at once into the sanctum where the master of the house awaited him. Perfect in its way as the library was, Alban had no eyes for it in the presence of Richard Gessner whom thus he met for the first time. Here, truly, he might forget even the accident of the portrait. For he stood face to face with a leader among men and he was clever enough to recognize as much immediately.

Richard Gessner was at that time fifty-three years of age. A man of medium height, squarely built and of fine physique, he had the face rather of a substantial German than of the usually somewhat cadaverous Pole. A tousled black beard hid the jowl almost completely; the eyes were very clear and light blue in color; the head massive above the neck but a little low at the forehead. Alban noticed how thin and fragile the white hand seemed as it rested upon a strip of blotting-paper upon the writing-table; the clothes, he thought, were little better than those worn by any foreman in Yarrow's works; the tie was absolutely shabby and the watch-chain nothing better than two lengths of black silk with a seal to keep them together. And yet the mental power, the personal magnetism of Richard Gessner made itself felt almost before he had uttered a single word.

"Will you take a seat, Mr. Kennedy—I am dining in the city to-night and my time is brief. Mr. Geary, I think, has spoken to you of my intentions."

Alban looked the speaker frankly in the face and answered without hesitation:

"He has told me that you wish to employ me, sir."

"That I wish to employ you—yes, it is not good for us to be idle. But he has told you something more than that?"

"Indeed," the curate interrupted, "very much more, Mr. Gessner. I have told Kennedy that you are ready and willing to take an interest, the greatest possible interest, in his future."

The banker—for as such Richard Gessner was commonly known—received the interjection a little impatiently and, turning his back slightly, he fixed an earnest look upon Alban's face and watched him critically while he spoke.

"Mr. Kennedy," he said, "I never give my reasons. You enter this house to confer a personal obligation upon me. You will remain in that spirit. I cannot tell you to-night, I may be unable to tell you for many years why you have been chosen

or what are the exact circumstances of our meeting. This, however, I may say—that you are fully entitled to the position I offer you and that it is just and right I should receive you here. You will for the present remain at Hampstead as one of my family. There will be many opportunities of talking over your future—but I wish you first to become accustomed to my ways and to this house, and to trouble your head with no speculations of the kind which I could not assist. I am much in the city, but Mr. Geary will take my place and you can speak to him as you would to me. He is my Major Domo, and needless to say I in him repose the most considerable confidence."

He turned again toward Mr. Geary and seemed anxious to atone for his momentary impatience. The voice in which he spoke was not unpleasant, and he used the English language with an accent which did not offend. Rare lapses into odd and unusual sentences betrayed him occasionally to the keen hearer, but Alban, in his desire to know the man and to understand him, made light of these.

"I am to remain in this house, sir—but why should I remain, what right have I to be here?" he asked very earnestly.

The banker waved the objection away a little petulantly.

"The right of every man who has a career offered to him. Be content with that since I am unable to tell you more."

"But, sir, I cannot be content. Why should I stay here as your guest when I do not know you at all?"

"My lad, have I not said that the obligation is entirely on my side. I am offering you that to which you have every just claim. Children do not usually refuse the asylum which their father's door opens to them. I am willing to take you into this house as a son—would it not be a little ungrateful to argue with me? From what I know of him, Alban Kennedy is not so foolish. Let Mr. Geary show you the house while I am dressing. We shall meet at breakfast and resume this pleasant conversation."

He stood up as he spoke and began to gather his papers together. To Alban the scene was amazingly false and perplexing. He was perfectly aware that this stranger had no real interest in him at all; he felt, indeed, that his presence was almost resented and that he was being received into the house as upon compulsion. All the talk of obligation and favor and justice remained powerless to deceive. The key to the enigma did not lie therein; nor was it to be found in

the churchman's suavity and the fairy tale which he had recited. Had the meeting terminated less abruptly, Alban believed that his own logic would have carried the day and that he would have left the house as he had come to it. But the clever suggestion of haste on the banker's part, his hurried manner and his domineering gestures, left a young lad quite without idea. Such an old strategist as Richard Gessner should have known how to deal with that honest original, Alban Kennedy.

"We will meet at breakfast," the banker repeated; "meanwhile, consider Mr. Geary as your friend and counsellor. He shall by me so be appointed. I have a great work for you to do, Mr. Kennedy, but the education, the books, the knowledge—they must come first. Go now and think about dinner—or perhaps you would like to walk about the grounds a little while. Mr. Geary will show you the way—I leave you in his hands."

He folded the papers up and thrust them quickly in a drawer as he spoke. The interview was plainly at an end. He had welcomed a son as he would have welcomed any stranger who had brought a letter of introduction which decency compelled him to read.

CHAPTER VIII

ALBAN KENNEDY DINES

Silas Geary led the way through the hall and thence to the winter garden. Here the display of plants was quite remarkable and the building one that had cost many thousands of pounds. Designed, as all that Richard Gessner touched, to attract the wonder of the common people and to defy the derision of the connoisseur, this immense garden had been the subject of articles innumberable and of pictures abundant. Vast in size, classic in form, it served many purposes, but chiefly as a gallery for the safe custody of a collection of Oriental china which had no rival in Europe.

"It is our patron's hobby," said the curate, mincingly, as he indicated the treasures of cloisonné and of porcelain; "he does not frivol away his money as so many do, on idle dissipations and ephemeral pleasures. On the contrary, he devotes it to the beautiful objects—"

"Do you call them beautiful, sir?" Alban asked ingenuously. "They seem to me quite ugly. I don't think that if I had money I should spend it on plates and jars which nobody uses. I would much sooner buy a battle ship and give it to the nation." And then he asked, "Did Mr. Gessner put up all this glass to keep out the fresh air? Does he like being in a hot-house? I should have thought a garden would have been better."

Silas Geary could make nothing of such criticism as this.

"My dear lad," he protested, "you are very young and probably don't know what sciatica means. When I was your age, I could have slept upon a board and risen therefrom refreshed. At fifty it is otherwise. We study the barometer then and dust before we sit. This great glass house is Mr. Gessner's winter temple. It is here that he plans and conceives so many of those vast schemes by which the world is astonished."

Alban looked at him curiously.

"Is the world really astonished by rich men?" he asked.

Mr. Geary stood still in amazement at the question.

"Rank and birth rule the nation," he declared vehemently; "it is fit and proper that it should be so. Our aristocracy is rightly recruited from those who have accumulated the wealth necessary to such a position. Riches, Kennedy, mean power. You will know that some day when you are the master of riches."

Alban walked on a little way without saying anything. Then almost as one compelled to reply he exclaimed:

"In the East End, they don't speak of money like that. I suppose it is their ignorance—and after all it is a very great thing to be able to compel other people to starve for you. Some day, I'll take you down to the sweating-shops, Mr. Geary. You'll see a lot of old china there, but I don't think it would be worth much. And all our flowers are for sale—poor devils, we get little enough for supper if we don't sell them."

The curate expressed no profound desire to accept this promising invitation, and desiring to change so thorny a subject entered a delightful old-world garden and invited Alban's attention to a superb view of Harrow and the Welsh Harp. In the hall, to which at last they returned, he spoke of that more substantial reality, dinner.

"I am sorry to say that I have a Dorcas meeting to-night and cannot possibly dine with you," he explained to the astonished lad. "I shall return at nine o'clock, however, to see that all is as Mr. Gessner wishes. The servants have told you, perhaps, that Miss Anna is in the country and does not return until to-morrow. This old house is very dull without her, Kennedy. It is astonishing how much difference a pretty face makes to any house."

"Is that Miss Anna's portrait over the fireplace, sir?"

"You know her, Kennedy?"

"I have seen her once, on the balcony of a house in St. James' Square. That was last night when I was on my way to sleep in a cellar."

"My poor, poor boy, and to-night you will sleep in one of the most beautiful rooms in England. How wonderful is fortune, how amazing—er—how very—is not that seven o'clock by the way? I think that it is, and here is Fellows come to show you your room. You will find that we have done our best for you in the matter of clothes—guesswork, I fear, Kennedy, but still our best. To-morrow

Westman the tailor is to come—I think and hope you will put up with borrowed plumes until he can fit you up. In the meantime, Fellows has charge of your needs. I am sure that he will do his very best for you."

The young butler said that he would—his voice was still raised to a little just dignity, and he, in company with Silas Geary, the housekeeper and the servants' hall had already put the worst construction possible upon Alban's reception into the house. His determination to patronize the "young man" however received an abrupt check when Alban suddenly ordered him to show the way upstairs. "He spoke like a Duke," Fellows said in the kitchen afterwards. "There I was running up the stairs just as though the Guv'ner were behind me. Don't you think that you can come it easy with him—he ain't the sort by a long way. I tell you, I never was so astonished since the Guv'ner raised my wages."

Alban, of course, was sublimely unconscious of this. He had been conducted to an enormous bedroom on the first floor, superbly furnished with old Chippendale and excellent modern Sèvres—and there he had been left to realize for the first time that he was alone and that all which had happened since yesterday was not a dream but a hard invincible truth so full of meaning, so wonderful, so sure that the eyes of his brain did not dare to look at it unflinchingly. Boyishly and with a boy's gesture he had thrown himself upon the bed and hidden his face from the light as though the very atmosphere of this wonder world were insupportable. Good God, that it should have happened to him, Alban Kennedy; that it should have been spoken of as his just right; that he should have been told that he had a claim which none might refute! A hundred guesses afforded no clue to the solution of the mystery. He could not tell himself that he was in some way related to Richard Gessner, the banker; he could not believe that his dead parents had any claim upon this foreigner who received him coldly and yet would hear nothing of his departure. Pride had little share in this, for the issues were momentous. It was sufficient to know that a hand had suddenly drawn him from the abyss, had put him on this pinnacle—beyond all, had placed him in Anna Gessner's home as the first-born, there to embark upon a career whose goal lay beyond the City Beautiful of his dreams.

He rose from the bed at length, and trying to put every thought but that of the moment from his head, he remembered that he was expected to dine alone in the great room below, and to dress himself for such an ordeal in the clothes which the reverend gentleman's wit had provided for him. Courageous in all things, he found himself not a little afraid of all the beautiful objects which he touched, afraid to lift the Sèvres pitcher, afraid to open the long doors of the inlaid

wardrobe, timid before the dazzling mirror—a reluctant guest who, for the time being, would have been thankful to escape to a carpetless floor and glad to wash in a basin of the commonest kind. When this passed, and it was but momentary, the delusion that a trick was being played upon him succeeded to it and he stood to ask himself if he had not been a fool to believe their story at all, a fool thus to be made sport of by one who would relate the circumstance with relish to-morrow. This piece of nonsense, however, was as quick to give way to the somewhat cynical common sense with which, Alban Kennedy had rightly been credited as the other. He turned from it impatiently and began to dress himself. He had last dressed in black clothes and a white waistcoat for a school concert at Westminster when he was quite a little lad—but his youth had taught him the conventions, and he had never forgotten those traditions of what his dead father used to call the "decent life." In his case the experience was but a reversion to the primitive, and he dressed with every satisfaction, delighted to put off the shabby old clothes and no less content with his new appearance as a mirror revealed it to him.

The dining room at "Five Gables" was normally a little dark in the daytime, for it looked upon the drive where ancient trees shaded its lofty latticed windows. At night, however, Richard Gessner's fine silver set off the veritable black oak to perfection, and the room had an air of dignity and richness neither artificial nor offensive. When Alban came down to dinner he perceived that a cover had been set for him at the end of a vast table, and that he was expected to take the absent master's place; nor could he forbear to smile at the solemn exercises performed by Fellows the young butler, and two footmen who were to wait upon him. These rascals, whatever they might say in the kitchen afterwards, served him at the table as though he had been an eldest son of the house. If they had expected that the ragged, shabby fellow, who entered the house so stealthily an hour ago, would provide food for their exquisitely delicate sense of humor, they were wofully disappointed. Alban ate his dinner without uttering a single remark.

And last night it had been supper in the caves! There must be no charge of inconsistency brought against him if a momentary shudder marked this recollection of an experience. A man may bridge a great gulf in a single instant of time. Alban had no less affection for, no less interest to-night in those pitiful lives than yesterday, but he understood that a flood of fortune had carried him for the time being away from them, and that his desire must be to help but not to regret them. Indeed, he could not resist, nor did he wish to resist a great content in this well-being, which overtook him in so subtle a manner. The sermons of the

old days, preached by many a mad fanatic of Union Street, declared that any alliance between the rich and the poor must be false and impossible. Alban believed it to be so. A mere recollection of the shame of poverty could already bring the blood to his cheeks, and yet he would have defended poverty with all the logic of which his clever brain was capable.

So in a depressing silence the long dinner was eaten. Methodically and with velvet steps the footmen put dish after dish before him, the butler filled his rarely lifted glass, the whole ceremony of dining performed. For his own part he would have given much to have escaped after the fish had been served, and to have gone out and explored the garden which had excited Mr. Geary to such poetic thoughts. Not a large eater (for the East End does not dare to cultivate an appetite), he was easily satisfied; and he found the mere length of the menu to be an ordeal which he would gladly have been spared. Why did people want all these dishes, he asked himself. Why, in well-to-do circles, is it considered necessary to serve precisely similar portions of fish and flesh and fowl every night at eight o'clock? Men who work eat when they are disposed. Alban wondered what would happen if such a custom were introduced into the House of the Five Gables. A cynical reverie altogether—from which the butler's purring voice awakened him.

"Will you have your coffee in the Winter Garden, sir? Mr. Gessner always does."

"Cannot I have it in the garden?"

"Oh, yes, if you like, sir. We'll carry out a chair—the seats are very damp at night, sir."

Alban smiled. Was he not sleeping on the reeking floor of the caves but twenty hours ago.

CHAPTER IX

ANNA GESSNER

They set a table in the vestibule overlooking the trim lawn, and thither they carried cigars and coffee. Alban had learned to smoke fiercely—one of the few lessons the East End had taught him thoroughly—and Richard Gessner's cigars had a just reputation among all who frequented the House of the Five Gables—some of these, it must be confessed, coming here for no other particular reason than to smoke them. Alban did not quite understand what it was that differentiated this particular cigar from any he had ever smoked, but he enjoyed it thoroughly and inhaled every whiff of its fragrant bouquet as though it had been a perfume of morning-roses.

A profound stillness, broken at rare intervals by the rustling of young leaves, prevailed in the garden. Night had come down, but it was a night of spring, clear and still and wonderful of stars. Distantly across a black waste of heath and meadow, the spire of Harrow Church stood up as a black point against an azure sky. The waters of the Welsh Harp were as a shimmering lake of silver in the foreground; the lights of Hendon and of Cricklewood spoke of suburban life, but might just as well have conjured up an Italian scene to one who had the wit to imagine it. Alban knew nothing of Italy, he had never set foot out of England in his life, but the peace and the beauty of the picture impressed him strangely, and he wondered that he had so often visited the Caves when such a fairyland stood open to his pleasure. Let it not be hidden that he would have been easily pleased this night. Youth responds quickly to excitements of whatever nature they may be. He was as far from realizing the truth of his position as ever, but the complete change of environment, the penetrating luxury of the great house, the mystery which had carried him there and the promise of the morrow, conspired to elate him and to leave him, in the common phrase, as one who is walking upon air. Even an habitual cynicism stood silent now. What mattered it if he awoke to-morrow to a reality of misunderstanding or of jest? Had not this night opened a vista which nothing hereafter might shut out? And the truth might be as Richard Gessner had promised—a truth of permanence, of the continued possession of this wonderland. Who shall blame him if his heart leaped at the mere contemplation of this possibility?

It would have been about nine o'clock when they carried his coffee to the garden—it was just half-past nine when Anna Gessner returned unexpectedly to the house. Alban heard the bell in the courtyard ring loudly, and upon that the throttled purr of a motor's heavy engine. He had expected Silas Geary, but such a man, he rightly argued, would not come with so much pomp and circumstance, and he stood at once, anxious and not a little abashed. Perhaps some suspicion of the truth had flashed upon him unwittingly. He heard the voice of Fellows the butler raised in some voluble explanation, there were a few words spoken in a pleasing girlish tone, and then, the boudoir behind him flashed its colors suddenly upon his vision, and he beheld Anna Gessner herself—a face he would have recognized in ten thousand, a figure of yesternight that would never be forgotten.

She had cast aside her motor veil, and held it in her hand while she spoke to the butler. A heavy coat bordered and lined with fur stood open to reveal a gray cloth dress; her hair had been blown about by the fresh breezes of the night and covered her forehead in a disorder far from unbecoming. Alban thought that the cold light in the room and the heavy bright panelling against which she stood gave an added pallor to her usually pale face, exaggerating the crimson of her lips and the dark beauty of her eyes. The hand which held the veil appeared to him to be ridiculously small; her attitudes were so entirely graceful that he could not imagine a picture more pleasing. If he remembered that he had likened her to little Lois Boriskoff, he could now admit the preposterous nature of the comparison. True it was that nationality spoke in the contour of the face, in its coloring and its expression, but these elementals were forgotten in the amazing grace of the girl's movements, the dignity of her gestures and the vitality which animated her. Returning to the house unexpectedly, even a lad was shrewd enough to see that she returned also under the stress of an agitation she could conceal from none. Her very questions to the servants were so quick and incoherent that they could not be answered. The letters which the butler put into her hands were torn from the envelopes but were not read. When she opened the boudoir window and so permitted Alban to overhear her hurried words, it was as one who found the atmosphere of a house insupportable and must breathe fresh air at any cost.

"Has my father returned, Fellows?"

"No, miss, he is not expected until late."

"Why did you not send the carriage to the station?"

"Mr. Gessner said that you were coming to-morrow, miss."

She flushed slightly at the retort and made as though to step out into the garden—but hesitating an instant, she said:

"I have had nothing to eat since one o'clock, Fellows. I must have some supper."

"Yes, miss."

"Anything will do—tell cook it does not matter. Has Lord Portcullis called?"

"No, miss—not since yesterday."

"Or Mrs. Melville?"

"This afternoon. She asked for your address, miss—but I did not give it."

"Quite right—I suppose that Captain Forrest did not come?" She turned away as though not wishing to look the man in the face—a gesture which Alban's quick eyes instantly perceived.

Fellows, on the other hand, permitted a smile to lurk for an instant about the corners of his mouth before he said—

"I understood that Captain Forrest was at Brighton, miss."

The girl's face clouded perceptibly, and she loosened her cloak and threw it from her shoulders as though it had become an insupportable burden.

"If he calls to-morrow, I do not wish to see him. Please tell them all—I will not see him."

The butler smiled again, but answered, "Yes, miss."

Anna Gessner herself, still hesitating upon the threshold suddenly remembered another interest and referred to it with no less ardor.

"Oh, that reminds me, Fellows. Has my father spoken again of that dreadful silly business?"

"Concerning the young gentleman, miss?"

She heard him with unutterable contempt.

"The beggar-boy that he wishes to bring to this house. Did he speak of him to-

night?"

Fellows came a step nearer and, hushing his voice, he said, with a servant's love of a dramatic reply:

"Mr. Kennedy is in the garden now, miss—indeed, I think he's sitting near the vestibule."

She looked at him astonished. Ugly passions of disappointment and thwarted desire betrayed themselves in the swift turn and the angry pursing of her lips. Of her father's intentions in bringing this beggar-boy to the house, she knew nothing at all. It seemed to her one of those mad acts for which no sane apology could be offered.

"He is here now, Fellows! Who brought him then?"

"Mr. Geary—at six o'clock."

"Mr. Geary is a hateful busybody—I suppose I must speak to the boy."

"I think that Mr. Gessner would wish it, miss."

She hesitated a brief instant, her annoyance giving battle to her father's well-known desire. Curiosity in the end helped her decision. She must see the object of a charity so eccentric.

"You say that he is in the garden?" she continued, taking two steps across the vestibule.

But this time Alban answered her himself.

"The beggar-boy is here," he said.

He had risen from his chair and the two confronted each other in the aureole of light cast out from the open window. Just twenty-four hours ago, Alban had been sitting by little Lois Boriskoff's side in the second gallery at the Aldgate Empire. To-night he wore a suit of good dress clothes, had dined at a millionaire's table and already recovered much of that polish and confident manner which an English public school rarely fails to bestow. Anna Gessner, in her turn, regarded him as though he were the agent of a trick which had been played upon her. To her amazement a hot flush of anger succeeded. She knew not how to meet him or what excuses to make.

"My father has not told me the truth," she exclaimed presently. "I am sorry that you overheard me—but I said what I meant. If he had told me that you were coming—"

Alban stood before her quite unabashed. He understood the circumstances and delighted in them.

"I am glad that you meant it," he rejoined, "of course, it is in some way true. Those who have no money are always beggars to those who have. Let me say that I don't know at all why I am here, and that I shall go unless I find out. We need not quarrel about it at all."

Anna, however, had recovered her composure. Mistress of herself to a remarkable degree when her passions were not aroused, she suddenly held out her hand to Alban as though she would apologize—but not by the spoken word.

"They have played a trick upon me," she cried. "I shall have it out with Mr. Geary when he comes. Of course I am very sorry. My father said that you were a distant relative, but he tried to frighten me by telling me that you lived in Whitechapel and were working in a factory. I was silly enough to believe it—you would have done so yourself."

"Most certainly—for it is quite true. I have been living in Whitechapel since my mother died, and I worked in a factory until yesterday. If you had come here a few hours back, you would have run away from the beggar-boy or offered him sixpence. I wonder which it would have been."

She would not admit the truth of it, and a little peevishly contested her point.

"I shall never believe it. This is just the kind of thing Mr. Geary would do. He is the most foolish man I have ever known. To leave you all alone here when he brought you as a stranger to our house. I wonder what my father would say to that."

She had drawn her cloak about her white throat again and seated herself near Alban's chair. Imitating her, he sat again and began to talk to her as naturally as though he had known her all her life. Not a trace of vexation at the manner of her reception remained to qualify that rare content he found in her company. Alban had long acquired the sense which judges every word and act by the particular circumstances under which it is spoken. He found it natural that Anna Gessner should resent his presence in the house. He liked her for telling him that it was

so.

"My father says that he is going to make an engineer of you—is that just what you wish, Mr. Kennedy?"

"That's what I don't know," he replied as frankly. "You see, I have always wanted to get on, but how to do so is what beats me. Engineering is a big profession and I'm not sure that I have the gifts. There you have a candid confession. I'm one of those fellows who can do everything up to a certain point, but a certain point isn't good enough nowadays. And a man wants money to get on. I'm sure it's easy enough to make a fortune if you have a decent share of brains and a bigger one capital. I want to make money and yet the East End has taught me to hate money. If Mr. Gessner can convince me that I have any claim upon his patronage, I shall go right into something and see if I cannot come out on top. You, I suppose, don't think much of the dirty professions. You'd like your brother to be a soldier, wouldn't you—or if not that, in the navy. Half the fellows at Westminster wanted to go into the army, just as though killing other people were the chief business in life. Of course, I wouldn't run it down—but what I mean to say is, that I never cared at all about it myself and so I'm not quite the best judge."

His little confession ended somewhat abruptly, for he observed that his words appeared to distress Anna Gessner beyond all reason. For many minutes she remained quite silent. When she spoke her eyes were turned away and her confusion not altogether to be concealed.

"I'm afraid you take your ideas of us from the cheap story-books," she said in a low voice; "women, nowadays, have their own ambitions and think less of men's. My dearest friend is a soldier, but I'm sure he would be a very foolish one if war broke out. They say he worked terribly hard in South Africa, but I don't think he ever killed any one. So you see—I shouldn't ask you to go into the army, and I'm sure my father would not wish it either."

"It would do no good if he did," said Alban as bluntly. "I should only make a fool of myself. Your friend must have told you that you want a pretty good allowance to do upon—and fancy begging from your people when you were twenty-one. Why, in the East End many a lad of nineteen keeps a whole family and doesn't think himself ill-used. Isn't it rot that there should be so much inequality in life, Miss Gessner? I don't suppose, though, that one would think so if one had money."

She smiled at his question, but diverted the subject cleverly.

"Are you very self-willed, Mr. Kennedy?"

"Do you mean that I get what I want—or try to?"

"I mean that you have your own way in everything. If you were in love you would carry the poor thing off by force."

"If I were in love and guessed that she was, I should certainly be outside to time. That's East End, you know, for punctuality."

"You would marry in haste and repent at leisure?"

"It would be yes or no, and that would be the end of it. Girls like a man who compels them—they like to obey, at least when they are young. I don't believe any girl ever loved a coward yet. Do you think so yourself?"

She astonished him by rising suddenly and breaking off the conversation as abruptly.

"God help me, I don't know what I think," she said; and then, with half a laugh to cover it, "Here is Mr. Geary come to take care of you. I will say good-night. We shall meet at breakfast and talk of all this again—if you get up in time."

He made no answer and she disappeared with just a flash of her ample skirts into the boudoir and so to the hall beyond. The curate appeared a minute later, full of apologies and of the Dorcas meeting he had so lately illuminated with his intellectual presence. A mild cigarette and a glass of mineral water found him quite ready for bed.

"There will be so much to speak of to-morrow, my dear boy," he said in that lofty tone which attended his patronage, "there is so much for you to be thankful for to-day. Let us go and dream of it all. The reality must be greater than anything we can imagine."

"I'll tell you in a week's time," said Alban, dryly.

A change had come upon him already. For Anna Gessner had betrayed her secret, and he knew that she had a lover.

CHAPTER X

RICHARD GESSNER DEBATES AN ISSUE

Richard Gessner returned to "Five Gables" as the clock of Hampstead Parish Church was striking one. A yawning footman met him in the hall and asked him if he wished for anything. To the man's astonishment, he was ordered to carry brandy and Vichy water to the bedroom immediately.

"To your room, sir?"

"To my room—are you deaf?"

"I beg your pardon, sir. Miss Gessner has returned."

"My daughter—when?"

"After dinner, sir."

"Was there any one with her?"

"I didn't rightly see, sir. Fellows opened the door—he could tell you, sir."

Gessner cast a searching glance upon the man's face And then mounted the great staircase with laborious steps. Passing the door of the room in which Alban slept, he listened intently for a moment as though half of a mind to enter; but abandoning the intention, went on to his apartment and there, when the footman had attended to his requirements, he locked the door and helped himself liberally to the brandy. An observer would have remarked that drops of sweat stood upon his brow and that his hand was shaking.

He had dined with a city company; but had dined as a man who knew little of the dinner or of those who ate it. Ten days ago his energy, his buoyant spirits, and his amazing vitality had astonished even his best friends. To-night these qualities were at their lowest ebb—and he had been so silent, so self-concentrated, so obviously distressed, that even a casual acquaintance had remarked the change. To say that a just Nemesis had overtaken him would be less than the truth. He knew that he stood accused, not by a man, but by a nation. And to a nation he must answer.

He locked the door of his room and, drawing a chair to a little Buhl writing-table, set in the window, he opened a drawer and took therefrom a little bundle of papers, upon which he had spent nine sleepless nights and, apparently, would spend still another. They were odd scraps—now of letters, now of legal documents—the *précis* of a past which could be recited in no court of justice, but might well be told aloud to an unsympathetic world. Had an historian been called upon to deal with such documents, he would have made nothing whatever of them—but Richard Gessner could rewrite the story in every line, could garnish it with passions awakened, fears unnamable, regrets that could not save, despair that would suffer no consolations.

He had stolen Paul Boriskoff's secret from him and thereby had made a fortune. Let it be admitted that the first conception of the new furnace for the refining of copper had come from that white-faced whimpering miner, who could talk of nothing but his nation's wrongs and had no finer ambition in life than to feed his children. He, Richard Gessner, had done what such a fellow never could have done. He had made the furnace commercially possible and had exploited it through the copper mines of the world. Such had been the first rung of that magnificent pecuniary ladder he had afterwards climbed so adroitly. Money he had amassed beneath his grasping hand as at a magician's touch. He regretted, he had always regretted, that misfortune overtook Paul Boriskoff's family—he would have helped them had he been in Poland at the time; but their offences were adjudged to be political; and if the wretched woman suffered harm at the hands of the police, what share had he in it? To this point he charged himself lightly—as men will in justifying themselves before the finger of an hoary accusation. Gessner cared neither for God nor man. His only daughter had been at once his divinity and his religion. Let men call him a rogue, despot, or thief, and he would shrug his shoulders and glance aside at his profit and loss account. But let them call him "fool" and the end of his days surely was at hand.

And so this self-examination to-night troubled itself with no thought of wrongs committed, with no desire to repay, but only with that supreme act of folly, to which the sleeping lad in the room near by was the surest witness. What would the threats of such a pauper as Paul Boriskoff have mattered if the man had stood alone against him? A word to the police, a hundred pounds to a score of ruffians, and he would have been troubled no more. But his quarrel was not with a man but a nation. Perceiving that the friendship of the Russian Government was necessary to many of his mining schemes in the East, he had changed his name as lightly as another would have changed his coat, had cast the garments of a

sham patriotism and emerged an enemy to all that he had hitherto befriended, a foe to Poland, a servant to Russia.

Acting secretly and with a strong man's discretion, no bruit of this odd conversion had been made public, no whisper of it heard in the camp of the Revolutionaries. Many knew Maxim Gogol—none had heard of Richard Gessner. His desire for secrecy was in good accord with the plans of a police he assisted and the bureaucracy he bribed. He lived for a while in Vienna, then at Tiflis—he came at length to England where his daughter had been educated; and there he established himself, ostensibly as a wealthy banker, in reality as the secret director of one of the greatest conspiracies against the liberty of a little nation that the world had ever seen.

Upon such a man, the blow of discovery fell with, stunning force. Gessner had grown so accustomed to the security of this suburban life that he could imagine no circumstance which might disturb it. All that he did for the satisfaction of the Russian Government had been cleverly done by agents and deputies. Entitled by his years to leisure, he had latterly almost abandoned politics for a culture of the arts and the sciences, in some branches of which he was a master. His leisure he gave almost entirely to his daughter. To contrive for her an alliance worthy of his own fortune and of her beauty had become the absorbing passion of his life. He studied the Peerage as other men study a balance-sheet. All sorts and conditions of possible husbands appeared at "Five Gables;" were dined, discussed, and dismissed. The older families despised him and would not be appeased. To crown his vexation, his daughter named a lover for herself. He had twice shown Captain Willy Forrest from the door and twice had the man returned. Anna seemed fascinated by this showy adventurer as by none other who visited them. Gessner, for his part, would sooner have lost the half of his fortune than that she should have married him.

These vexations had been real enough ten days ago; but, to-night, a greater made light of them and now they were almost forgotten. Detection had stalked out of the slums to humble this man in an instant and bring him to his knees. Gessner could have recited to you the most trivial detail attending the reception of Paul Boriskoff's letter and the claim it made upon him—how a secretary had passed it to him with a suggestion that Scotland Yard should know of it; how he had taken up the scrawl idly enough to flush before them all an instant later and to feel his heart sink as in an abyss of unutterable dismay. He had crumpled the dirty paper in his hand, he remembered, and thrown it to the ground—to pick it up immediately and smooth it out as though it were a precious document. To his

secretary he tried to explain that the writer was an odd fanatic who must be humored. Determined at the first blush to face the matter out, to answer and to defy this pauper Pole who had dared to threaten him, he came ultimately to see that discretion would best serve him. Paul Boriskoff had named Kensington Gardens as a rendezvous where matters might be discussed. Gessner was there to the minute—without idea, without hope, seeking only that pity which he himself had never bestowed upon any human being.

Paul Boriskoff did not hurry to the Gardens, so sure was he of the success of his undertaking. The frowsy black coat, in which he made his bow to the millionaire, had not seen the light for many years—his hat was a wide-brimmed eccentricity in soft felt which greatly delighted the nursemaids who passed him by. Gessner would never have recognized, in the hollow-cheeked, pale-faced, humble creature the sturdy young Pole who had come to him nearly a generation ago and had said, "Our fortunes are made; this is my discovery." Believing at the moment that money would buy such a derelict, body and soul, he opened the negotiations firmly and in that lofty tone which suited Throgmorton Street so well. But five minutes had not passed before he understood his mistake and realized that Boriskoff, the lad who had trusted him, and Boriskoff, the Pole who now threatened him, were one and the same after all.

"I remember you perfectly," he said; "it would be idle to say that I do not. You had some claim in the matter of a certain furnace. Yes, I remember that and would willingly admit it. But, my friend, you fell into trouble with the Government, and what could I do then? Was not I also compelled to leave Poland? Did not I change my name for that very reason? How could I repay the debt? Here in England it is different. You make your existence known to me and I respond at once. Speak freely, then, for I shall hear you patiently."

They were seated on a bench beneath a chestnut in full bloom. Distantly, through a vista of giant trunks, the waters of the Round Pond glimmered in the evening light. Children, worn out by the day, sat idle in groups on the benches of the Long Walk or lagged through a fitful game on the open spaces between the trees. Few observed these two men who thus earnestly recalled the drama of their lives; none remarked their odd association, for were not both obviously foreigners, and who shall dictate a fashion to such as they? Indeed, they conversed without any animation of gesture; the one convulsed by fears he did not dare to express, the other by hopes on the threshold of realization.

"I speak freely," said Boriskoff with unaffected candor, "for to do that I have

come here. And first I must set your memory right in a matter that concerns us both. You did not leave Poland to serve your country; you left it to betray us. Spare your words, for the story has been told many times in Warsaw and in London. Shall I give you the list of those who are tortured to-day at Saghalien because of what you did? It would be vain, for if you have any feeling, even that of a dog, they are remembered by you. You betrayed the man who trusted you; you betrayed your country—for what? Shall I say that it was for this asylum in a strange land; for power, for the temptations which all must suffer? No, no. You have had but one desire in all your life, and that is money. So much even I understand. You are ready now to part with a little of that money—so little that it would be as a few grains from the sands of the sea—to save your neck from the rope, to escape the just punishment which is about to fall upon you. Do not believe that you can do so. I hold your secret, but at any hour, at any minute, others may share it with me. Maxim Gogol—for I shall call you by your true name—if one word of this were spoken to the Committee at Warsaw, how long would you have to live? You know the answer to that question. Do not compel me to dwell upon it."

He spoke in a soft purring tone, an echo of a voice, as it were, beneath the rustling leaves; but, none the less, Richard Gessner caught every word as though it had been the voice of an oracle. A very shrewd man, he had feared this knowledge, and fear had brought him to this covert interview. The Pole could betray him and betrayal must mean death—and what a death, reluctant, procrastinating, the hour of it unknown, the manner of it beyond any words terrible. Such had been the end of many who had left Poland as he had done. He had read their story and shuddered even in his imagined security. And now this accusation was spoken, not as a whisper of a voice in the hours of the night, but as the truth of an inevitable day.

And what should he answer? Would it profit him to speak of law; to retort with a threat; to utter the commonplaces concerning Scotland Yard and a vigilant police? He was far too wise even to contemplate such folly. Let him have this man arrested, and what then? Would any country thereafter shelter the informer from the vengeance of the thousands whom no law could arrest? Would any house harbor him against the dagger of the assassin, the swift blow, it might even be the lingering justice of such fanatics as sought to rule Poland. He knew that there was none. Abject assent could be the only reply. He must yield to any humiliation, suffer any extortion rather than speak the word which would be as irrevocable as the penalty it invited.

"I shall not dispute with you, Paul Boriskoff," he said, with a last attempt to save his dignity; "yes, it would be in your power to do me a great injury even in this country which gives you liberty. It is your own affair. You did not come here to threaten me, but to seek a favor. Name it to me and I shall be prepared to answer you. I am not an ungenerous man as some of our countrymen know. Tell me what you wish and I shall know how to act."

Boriskoff's answer astonished him by its impetuosity.

"For myself nothing," he exclaimed contemptuously—and these brief words echoed in Gessner's ears almost as a message of salvation—"for myself nothing, but for my children much. Yes, your money can make even Paul Boriskoff despise himself—but it is for the children's sake. I sell my honor that they may profit by it. I ask for them that which is due to me, but which I have sworn to forego. Maxim Gogol, it is for the children that I ask it. You have done me a great wrong, but they shall profit by it. That is what I am come here to say to-day—that you shall repay, not to me but to my children."

The words appeared to cost him much, as though he had deliberately sacrificed a great vengeance that those he loved might profit. Leaping to the hope of it, and telling himself that this after all was but a question of pounds, shillings, and pence, Gessner answered with an eagerness beyond all bounds ridiculous.

"There could be nothing I would do more willingly. Yes, I remember—you left a daughter in Warsaw and she was not to be discovered by those of us who would have befriended her. Believe me when I say that I will help her very gladly. Anything, my friend, anything that is humbly reasonable—"

Boriskoff did not permit him to finish.

"My daughter will be educated in Germany at your cost," he said curtly. "I would speak first of one who is as a son to me because of her affection for him. There is a young Englishman living in Union Street, the son of a poor clergyman who died in the service of the poor. This lad you will take into your own house and treat as your own son. It is my desire and must be gratified. Remember that he is the son of a gentleman and treat him as such. There will be time enough afterwards to tell you how you must act in the interests of our people at Warsaw. This affair is our own and not of politics at all. As God is in heaven, but for my daughter you, Maxim Gogol, would not be alive this night."

Gessner's heart sank again at the hint of further requests subsequently to come.

The suggestion that he should adopt into his own house a youth of whom he knew nothing seemed in keeping with the circumstances of this dread encounter and the penalty that must be paid for it. After all, it was but a small price to pay for comparative security and the silence of a tongue which could work such ill. Accustomed to deal with men of all natures, honest and simple, clever and foolish, secretive and loquacious, there ran in his mind the desperate idea that he would temporize with Paul Boriskoff and ultimately destroy him. Let the Russian Government be informed of the activity of this Pole and of his intention to visit the Continent of Europe again, and what were Boriskoff's chances? Such were the treacherous thoughts which stood in Gessner's mind while he framed an answer which should avert the final hour of reckoning and give him that opportunity for the counter-stroke which might yet save all.

"Your youth will profit little in my house," he said with some pretense of earnestness. "Had you asked an education abroad for him, that would have been a wiser thing in these days. Frankly, I do not understand your motive, but I am none the less willing to humor it. Let me know something more of the lad, let me have his history and then I shall be able to say what is the best course. I live a very quiet life and my daughter is much away. There is the possibility also that the boy, if he be the son of a clergyman, would do much better at Oxford or at Cambridge than at Hampstead, as you yourself must see. Let us speak of it afterwards. There will be time enough."

"The time is to-day," rejoined Boriskoff, firmly, "Alban Kennedy will live under your roof as your own son. I have considered the matter and am determined upon it. When the time comes for him to marry my daughter, I will inform you of it. Understand, he knows nothing of your story or of mine. He will not hear of me in my absence from England. I leave the burden of this to you. He is a proud lad and will accept no charity. It must be your task to convince him that he has a title to your benevolence. Be wise and act discreetly. Our future requisitions will depend upon your conduct of this affair—and God help you, Maxim Gogol, if you fail in it."

Something of the fanatic, almost of the madman, spoke in this vehement utterance. If Gessner had been utterly at a loss as yet to account for a request so unusual, he now began to perceive in it the instrument of his own humiliation. Would not this stranger be a perpetual witness to the hazard of his life, a son who stood also as a hostage, the living voice of Paul Boriskoff's authority? And what of his own daughter Anna and of the story he must tell her? These facts he realized clearly but had no answer to them. The reluctant assent, wrung from his

unwilling lips, was the promise of a man who stood upon the brink of ruin and must answer as his accusers wished or pay the ultimate penalty. All his common masterfulness, the habit of autocracy, the anger of the bully and the tyrant, trembled before the clear cold eyes of this man he had wronged. He must answer or pay the price, humiliate himself or suffer.

* * * * *

And to-night Alban Kennedy slept beneath his roof; the bargain had been clinched, the word spoken. Twenty thousand pounds had he paid to Paul Boriskoff that morning for the education of his daughter and in part satisfaction of the ancient claim. But the witness of his degradation had come to him and must remain.

Aye, and there the strife of it began. When he put detectives upon the lad's path, had him followed from Union Street to the caves and from the caves to his place of employment, the report came to him that he was interesting himself in a callous ne'er-do-well, the friend of rogues and vagabonds, the companion of sluts, the despair of the firm which employed him. He had expected something of the kind, but the seeming truth dismayed him. In a second interview with Boriskoff he used all his best powers of argument and entreaty to effect a compromise. He would send the lad to the University, have him educated abroad, establish him in chambers—do anything, in fact, but that which the inexorable Pole demanded of him. This he protested with a humility quite foreign to him and an earnestness which revealed the depth of the indignity he suffered; but Boriskoff remained inflexible.

"I am determined upon it," was the harsh retort; "the boy shall be as a link between us. Keep him from this hell in which he has lived and I will set so much to your credit. I warn you that you have a difficult task. Do not fail in it as you value your own safety."

The manner of this reply left Gessner no alternative, and he sent Silas Geary to Whitechapel as we have seen. A less clever man, perhaps, would have fenced alike with the proposal and the threat; but he knew his own countrymen too well for that. Perhaps a hope remained that any kindness shown to this vagrant lad would win back ultimately his ancient freedom. Alone in his room this night, a single light rebutting the darkness, he understood into what an abyss of discovery he had fallen, the price that must be paid, the debt that he owed to forgotten years.

"This man is a devil," he said, "he will rob me shilling by shilling until I am a beggar. Good God! that it should have come to this after twenty years; twenty years which have achieved so much; twenty years of such slavery as few men have known. And I am helpless; and this beggar is here to remind me of my enemies, to tell me that I walk in chains and that their eyes are following me."

He threw himself upon his bed dressed as he was and tried to sleep. The stillness of the house gave fruitful visions, magnifying all his fears and bringing him to an unspeakable terror of the days which must come after. He had many ambitions yet to achieve, great ideas which remained ideas, masterly projects which must bring him both fame and riches, but he would have abandoned them all this night if freedom had been offered him. Years ago, he remembered, Boriskoff, the young miner, had earned his hatred, he knew not why unless it were a truth that men best hate those who have served them best. To-night found that old hatred increased a thousand fold and shaping itself in schemes which he would not even whisper aloud. He had always been looked upon as a man of good courage and that courage prompted him to a hundred mad notions—to swift assassination or to slow intrigue—last of all to self destruction should his aims miscarry. He would kill himself and cheat them after all. Many another in Petersburg had sacrificed his life rather than suffer those years of torture which discovery brought. He knew that he would not shrink even from the irrevocable if he were driven far enough.

A man may take such a resolution as this and yet a great desire of life may remain to thwart it. Gessner found himself debating the issues more calmly as the night wore on, and even asking himself if the presence of a stranger in his house might be so intolerable as he had believed. He had seen little of Alban and that little had not been to the young man's disadvantage. If the youth were not all that report had painted him, if the amenities of the house should civilize him and kindness win his favor, then even he might be an advocate for those to whom he owed such favors. This new phase set Gessner thinking more hopefully than at any time since the beginning of it. He rose from his bed and turning on the lamps began to recall all that the Pole had demanded of him. The terms of the compact were not so very unreasonable, surely, he argued. Let this young Kennedy consent to remain at "Five Gables" and he, Richard Gessner, would answer for the rest. But would he consent to remain—would that wild life of the slums call him back to its freedom and its friendships? He knew not what to think. A great fear came to him, not that the lad would remain but that he would go. Had it been at a reasonable hour, he would have talked to him there and then, for the

hours of that night were beyond all words intolerable. He must see Kennedy and convince him. In the end, unable to support the doubt, he quitted his own room, and crossed the landing, irresolute, trembling, hardly knowing what he did.

* * * * *

It would have been about five o'clock of the morning when he entered Alban's room and discovered him to be still sleeping. A sound of heavy breathing followed by a restless movement had deceived him and he knocked upon the door gently, quite expecting to be answered. When no reply came, he ventured in as one who would not willingly pry upon another but is compelled thereto by curiosity. The room itself should have been in darkness, but Alban had deliberately drawn the heavy curtains back from the windows before he slept, and the wan gray light of dawn struck down upon his tired face as though seeking out him alone of all that slept in the house. A lusty figure of shapely youth, a handsome face which the finger of the World had touched already, these the light revealed. He slept upon his back, his head turned toward the light, his arm outstretched and almost touching the floor.

Gessner stood very still, afraid to wake the sleeper and by him to be thus discovered. No good nationalist at any time, he had always admired that product of a hard-drinking, hard-fighting ancestry, the British boy; and in Alban it seemed to him that he discovered an excellent type. Undoubtedly the lad was both handsome and strong. For his brains, Silas Geary would answer, and he had given evidence of good wit in their brief encounter last night. Gessner drew a step nearer and asked himself again if the detective's reports were true. Was this the friend of vagabonds, the companion of sluts—this clean-limbed, virile fellow with the fair face and the flaxen curls and the head of a thinker and a sage? A judge of men himself, he said that the words were a lie, and then he remembered Boriskoff's account, the story of a father who had died to serve an East End Mission, and of a devoted mother worsted in her youth by those gathering hosts of poverty she had set out so bravely to combat. Could the son of such as these be all that swift espionage would have him? Gessner did not believe it. New hopes, as upon a great freshet of content, came to him to give him comfort. He had no son. Let this lad be the son whom he had desired so ardently. Let them live together, work together in a mutual affection of gratitude and knowledge. Who could prevail against such an alliance? What rancor of Boriskoff's would harm the lad he desired to be the husband of his daughter. Aye, and this was the supreme consolation—that if Alban would consent, he, Gessner, would so earn his devotion and his love that therein he might arm himself against all the world.

But would he consent? How if this old habit of change asserted itself and took him back to the depths? Gessner breathed quickly when he remembered that such might be the end of it. No law could compel the boy, no guardian claim him. Twice already he had expressed in this house his contempt for the riches which should have tempted him. Gessner began to perceive that his fate depended upon a word. It must be "yes" or "no" to-morrow—and while "yes" would save him, the courage of a hundred men would not have faced the utmost possibilities of "no."

This simple truth kept the man to the room as though therein lay all his hopes of salvation. At one time he was upon the point of waking Alban and putting the question to him. Or again, he tried to creep back to the landing, determined, in his own room, to suffer as best he could the hours of uncertainty. Distressed by irresolution he crossed to the window at last and breathed the cool sweet air of morning as one being a stranger to such a scene at such an hour. The sun had risen by this time and all the landscape stood revealed in its morning beams. Not yet had London stirred to the murmur of the coming day—no smoke rose from her forest of chimneys, no haze drifted above the labyrinth. Far below she lay, a maze of empty streets, of shuttered shops, of vast silent buildings—a city of silence, hiding her cares from the glory of the dawn, veiling her sorrow and her suffering, hushing her children to rest, deaf to the morning voices; rich and poor alike turning from the eyes of the day to Mother Sleep upon whose heart is eternal rest. Such a city Gessner beheld while he looked from the window, and the golden beams lighted his pallid face and the sweet air of day called him to deed and resolution. What victories he had won upon that grimy field; what triumphs he had known; what hours of pomp and vanity—what bitter anguish! And now he might rule there no longer. Detection had stalked out of the unknown and touched him upon the shoulder. Somewhere in that labyrinth his enemies were sleeping. But one human being could shield him from them, and he a lad—without home or friends, penniless and a wanderer.

He drew back from the window, saying that the hours of suspense must be brief and that his will should prevail with this lad, at whatever sacrifice. Believing that his old shrewdness would help him, and that in Alban not only the instrument of his salvation but of his vengeance should be found, he would have quitted the room immediately, had not his eye lighted at hazard upon a rough paper, lying upon the floor by the bed, and a pencil which had tumbled from Alban's tired hand. Perceiving that the lad had been drawing, and curious beyond ordinary to know the subject of his picture, he picked the paper up to discover thereon a rude

portrait which he recognized instantly for that of his daughter, Anna. Such a discovery, thrusting into his schemes as it did an idea which hitherto had escaped him, held him for an instant spellbound with wonder. A clever man, accustomed to arrive at conclusions swiftly, the complexity of his thoughts, the strife of arguments now unnerved him utterly. For he perceived both a great possibility and a great danger.

He is "to marry Lois Boriskoff" was the silent reflection—"to marry the daughter. And this—this—good God, the man would never forgive me this!"

The paper tumbled from his hands. Alban, turning upon his pillow, sighed in his sleep. A neighboring church clock struck six; there were workmen going down to the city which must now awake to the labors of the day.

CHAPTER XI

WHIRLWIND

Captain Willy Forrest admitted that he had few virtues, but he never charged himself with the vice of idleness. In town or out of it, his trim man-servant, Abel, would wake him at seven o'clock and see that he had a cup of tea and the morning papers by a quarter-past. Fine physical condition was one of the ambitions of this lithe shapely person, whose father had been a jockey and whose mother had not forgotten to the day of her death the manner in which measurements are taken upon a counter.

Willy Forrest, by dint of perseverance, had really come to believe that these worthy parents never existed but in his imagination. To the world he was the second son of the late Sir John Forrest, Bart., whose first-born, supposed to be in Africa, had remained beyond the pale for many years. Society, which rarely questions pleasant people, took him at his word and opened many doors to him. In short, he was a type of adventurer by no means uncommon, and rarely unsuccessful when there are brains to back the pretensions.

He was not a particularly evil rascal, and women found him charming. Possessed of a merry face, a horsey manner and a vocabulary which would have delighted a maker of slang dictionaries, he pushed his my everywhere, not hoping for something to turn up, but determined that his own cleverness should contrive that desirable arrival. When he met Anna Gessner at Ascot a year ago, the propitious moment seemed at hand. "The girl is a gambler to her very boots," he told himself, while he reflected that a seat upon the box of such a family coach would certainly make his fortune. Willy Forrest resolved to secure such a seat without a moment's loss of time.

This determination taken, the ardor with which he pursued it was surprising. A cunning fox-like instinct led him to read Anna Gessner's character as few others who had known her. Believing greatly in the gospel of heredity, he perceived that Anna owed much to her father and more to her nationality. "She is selfish and passionate, a little devil in single harness who would be worse in double"—this was his reading of her; to which he added the firm resolution to put the matter to the proof without loss of time.

"I shall weigh in immediately and the weights will be light," he thought. "She likes a bit of a flutter and I'll see that she gets it. There is plenty of corn in the old man's manger, and if it comes to bursting the bag, I will carry home the pieces. There's where I drive the car. She shall play and I will be her pet lamb. Great Jupiter, what a catch!"

The result of this pretty conclusion is next to be seen in a cottage in Hampshire, not far removed from the racing stables of the great John Farrier, who, as all the world knows, is one of the most honest and the most famous trainers in the country. This cottage had Willy Forrest furnished (indirectly at Anna's expense) in a manner worthy of all the artistic catalogues. And hither would Anna come, driving over from her father's country-house near Basingstoke, and caring not a fig what the grooms might think of her.

"Captain Forrest is my trainer," she told the men, bidding them to be secret.

For any other explanation they cared not at all. To run a horse in a great race seemed to them the highest of human achievements, and great was their wonder that this fragile girl should dare it. "She be a rare good 'un and a stayer. Derned if I don't put my last button on Whirlwind." This was the extent of the scandal that she caused.

Anna motored over to "The Nest" some three weeks after Alban had been received at Hampstead, and found Willy Forrest anxiously waiting for her at the gate. She had brought with her one of those obliging dependents who act so cheerfully as unnecessary chaperones, and this "person" she left in the smart car while she entered the cottage and told the owner that he was forgiven. Their quarrel had been vehement and tempestuous while it lasted—and the Captain remembered that she had struck him with her whip.

"I knew you'd come, Anna," he said good-humoredly while he opened the gate for her. "Of course, I don't bear you any grudge. Good Lord, how you went it last time. I might have been a hair-trunk that had let you down at a gate. Eh, what—do you remember it? And the old chin-pot which cost me twenty guineas. Why, you smashed it all to bits with your whip—eh, what? I've laughed till I cried every time I tried to stick it together again. Come right in and let's shake hands. You've got an oddish looking lot in the car—bought her in at the sale, I suppose—eh, what? Well, I'm glad to see you really."

She looked a little downcast, he thought, but prettier than he had ever seen her before. It was quite early in the morning and his table had been set out for

breakfast, with dainty old-fashioned china and a silver kettle singing over a lamp. Anna took her favorite arm-chair, and drawing it close to the table permitted him to give her a cup of tea.

"You wanted to make a cheat of me," she said calmly enough. "Oh, yes, I have heard all about it. There's nothing whatever the matter with Whirlwind. He must win the cup—John Farrier says so. You are the person who does not wish him to win."

Adventurers never blush when they are found out, and Willy Forrest was no exception to the rule.

"Oh, there you are," he cried boisterously, "just the same old kettle-drum and the same old sticks. Do you think I don't know as much about a horse as Farrier? Good Lord, he makes me sick—I'd sooner hear a Salvation Army Band playing 'Jumping Jerusalem' on the trombone than old John Farrier talking honest. Are we running nags to pay the brokers out or to make a bit on our sweet little own—eh, what? Are we white-chokered philanthropists or wee wee baby mites on the nobbly nuggets? Don't you listen to him, Anna. You'll have to sell your boots if you follow old John."

She stirred her tea and sipped it slowly.

"You said Whirlwind was going lame on the near fore-leg, and it isn't true," she exclaimed upon a pause. "What was your object in telling me that?"

"I said it before the grooms and you didn't give me a chance of blowing the smoke away afterwards. You say you are racing to make money and what's the good of hymns and milk? This horse will start at eleven to four on unless you're careful—where's my gold-lined shower bath then? Don't you see that you must put the market back—frighten the backers off and then step in? That's what I was trying to teach you all the time. Give out on the loud trumpet that the horse has gone dickey and leave 'em uncertain for a week whether he's running or sticking. Your money's on through a third party in the 'tween times and your cheeks are as red as roses when the flag goes down."

"And if the horse should not win after you have cheated the people?"

"You'll be some five thousand out of pocket—that's all. Now, Anna, don't let us have any mumble-pie between us. I'm not the dark man of the story-books who lures the beautiful heroine on to play, and you're not the wonderful Princess who

breaks her old pa and marries because he's stony. You can't get overmuch out of the old man and you're going to make the rest at Tattersalls. If you listen to me, you'll make it—but if you don't, if you play the giddy goat with old John Farrier in the pulpit; well, then, the sooner you write cheques the better. That's the plain truth and you may take it or leave it. There are not three honest men racing and Willy Forrest don't join the trinity. We'll do as all the crowd does and leave 'em to take care of themselves. You make a book that they know how to do it. Oh, my stars, don't they—eh, what?"

Anna did not reply immediately to this odd harangue. She knew a good deal about horses, but nothing whatever about the knavery of betting, the shoddy tricks of it and the despicable spirit in which this great game is often played. Something of her father's cunning, inherited and ineradicable, led her to condone the Captain's sporting creed and not to seek understanding. The man's high spirits made a sure appeal to her. She could not comprehend it wholly—but she had to admit that none of all her father's widening circle had ever appealed to her as this nimble-tongued adventurer, who could make her heart quicken every time their hands touched.

"I don't like it," she said anon, "and I don't want anything to do with it. You make Whirlwind win the race and nobody will be hurt. If they bet against the horse, what is that to me? How can I help what they think—and I don't care either if they are so foolish. Didn't you promise me that I should see him gallop this morning? I wouldn't have motored over otherwise. You said that there was to be a Trial—"

"Divine angel, we are at your feet always. Of course, there's a Trial. Am I so foolish as to suppose that you came over to see Willy Forrest—eh, what? Have I lost the funny-bone up above? Farrier is going to gallop the nags in half an hour's time. Your smoke-machine can take us up the hill and there we'll form our own conclusions. You leave the rest to me. It will be a bright sunny morning when they put any salt on Willy Forrest's tail—eh, what?"

She admitted the truth with the first smile he had seen since she entered the cottage. His quick bustling manner, the deference he always paid to her, despite his odd phrases, won upon her good humor and led her to open her heart to him.

"My father is going mad," she said quietly—his startled "eh, what" not preventing her; "we are making our house a home for the destitute, and the first arrived just three weeks ago. Imagine a flaxen-haired image of righteousness,

who draws my portrait on the covers of books and puts feathers in my hat. He is in love with me, Willy, and he is to be my big brother. Yesterday I took him to Ranalegh and heard a discourse upon the beauties of nature and the wonders of the air and the sky. Oh, my dear man—what a purgatory and what an event. We are going to sell our jewels presently and to live in Whitechapel. My father, I must tell you, seems afraid of this beautiful apparition and implores him every day not to go away. I know that he stops because he is inclined to make love to me.

"Whew—so it's only 'inclined' at present?"

"Absolutely as you say. There appear to be two of us. I have been expecting a passionate declaration—but the recollections of a feathered beauty who once lived in a fairy palace, in a wonderland where you dine upon red herrings—she is my hated rival. I am more beautiful, observe—that is conceded, but he cannot understand me. The feathered hat has become my salvation. My great big brother can't get over it—and oh, the simplicity of the child, the youthful verdant confidence, my Willy. Don't you see that the young man thinks I am an angel and is wondering all the time where the wings have gone to."

"Ha, ha—he'd better ask Paquin. Are you serious, Anna?"

"As serious as the Lord High Executioner himself. My father has adopted a youth—and I have a big brother. He has consented to dwell in our house and to spend our savings because he believes that by so doing he is in some way helping me. I don't in the least want his help, but my father is determined that I shall have it. I am not to bestow my young affections upon him—nor, upon the other hand, am I to offend him. Admit that the situation is delightful. Pity a poor maiden in her distress."

Willy Forrest did not like the sound of it at all.

"The old chap must have gone dotty," he remarked presently; "they're often taken this way when they get to a certain age. You'll have to sit tight and see about it, Anna. He isn't too free with the ready as it is—and if you've a boy hanging about, God help you. Why don't you be rude to him? You know the way as well as most—eh, what?"

"I'm positively afraid to. Do you know, my dear man, that if this Perfect Angel left us, strange things would happen. My father says so, and I believe he speaks the truth. There is a mystery—and I hate mysteries."

"Get hold of the feathered lady and hear what she has to say."

"Impossible but brilliant. She has gone to Germany."

"Oh, damn—then he'll be making love to you. I say, Anna, there's not going to be any billing and cooing or anything of that sort. I'm not very exacting, but the way you look at men is just prussic acid to me. If this kid should begin—"

She laughed drolly.

"He is my great big brother," she said—and then jumping up—"let us go and see the horses. You'll be talking nonsense if we don't. And, Willy, I forbid you to talk nonsense."

She turned and faced him in mock anger, and he, responding instantly, caught her in his arms and kissed her ardently.

"What a pair of cherubs," he exclaimed, "what a nest of cooing doves—I say, Anna, I must kill that kid—or shall it be the fatted calf? There'll be murder done somewhere if he stops at Hampstead."

"If it were done, then when it were done—O let me go, Willy, your arms are crushing me."

He released her instantly and, snatching up a cap, set out with her to the downs where the horses were being stripped for the gallop. The morning of early summer was delightfully fragrant—a cool breeze came up from the sea and every breath invigorated. Old John Farrier, mounted on a sturdy cob, met them at the foot of a great grassy slope and complained that it was over late in the day for horses to gallop, but, as he added, "they'll have to do it at Ascot and they may as well do it here." A silent man, old John had once accompanied Willy Forrest to a dinner at the Carlton which Anna gave to a little sporting circle. Then he uttered but one remark, seeming to think some observation necessary, and it fell from his lips in the pause of a social discussion. "I always eat sparrer-grass with my fingers," he had said, and wondered at the general hilarity.

Old John was unusually silent upon this morning of the trial, and when he named the weights at which the horses would gallop, his voice sank to a sepulchral whisper. "The old 'oss is giving six pounds," he said, "he should be beat a length. If it's more, go cautious, miss, and save your money for another day. He hasn't been looking all I should like of him for a long time—that's plain truth; and when a horse isn't looking all I should like of him, 'go easy' say I and keep your

money under the bed."

Anna laughed at the kindly advice, and leaving the car she walked to the summit of the hill and there watched the horses—but three pretty specks they appeared—far down in the hollow. The exhilaration of the great open spaces, the wide unbroken grandeur of the downs, the sweetness of the air, the freshness of the day, brought blood to her pallid cheeks and a sparkle of life to her eyes. How free it all was, how unrestrained, how suggestive of liberty and of a boundless kingdom! And then upon it all the excitements of the gallop, the thunder of hoofs upon the soft turf, the bent figures of the jockeys, the raking strides of the beautiful horses—Anna no longer wondered why sport could so fascinate its devotees. She felt at such a moment that she would have gladly put her whole fortune upon Whirlwind.

"He wins—he wins—he wins," she cried as the three drew near, and Willy Forrest, watching her with cunning eyes, said that the trap was closed indeed and the key in his possession. Whirlwind, a magnificent chestnut four-year-old, came striding up the hill as though the last furlong of the mile and a half he had galloped were his chief delight. He was a winner by a short head as they passed the post, and old John Farrier could not hide his satisfaction.

"He's the best plucked 'un in England to-day, lady, and you may put your wardrobe on him after that. Be quick about it though, for there'll be no odds to speak of when the touts have written to-day's work in the newspapers. Go and telegraph your commissions now. There isn't a minute to lose."

Willy Forrest seconded the proposal eagerly.

"I should back him for five thou," he said as they left the course together, "what's the good of half measures? You might as well play dominoes in a coffee shop. And I can always break the news to your father if you lose."

Anna hardly knew what to say. When she consented finally to risk the money, she did not know that Willy Forrest was the man who laid against her horse, and that if she lost it would be to him.

"The boss is good enough," he told himself, "but the near-off is dicky or I never saw one. She'll lose the money and the old boy will pay up—if I compel her to ask him. That depends on the kid. She couldn't help making eyes at him if her life depended on it. Well—she's going to marry me, and that's the long and short of it. Fancy passing a certainty at my time of life. Do I see it—eh, what?"

And so they went their ways: Anna back to London to the solemn routine of the big house; Willy Forrest to Epsom to try, as he said, "and pick up the nimble with a pencil."

CHAPTER XII

ALBAN SEES LIFE

Alban had been five weeks at Hampstead when he met Willy Forrest for the first time, and was able to gratify his curiosity concerning one whom he believed to be Anna's lover.

The occasion was Richard Gessner's absence in Paris upon a business of great urgency and the immediate appearance of the dashing captain at "Five Gables." True, Anna behaved with great discretion, but, none the less, Alban understood that this man was more to her than others, and he did not fail to judge him with that shrewd scrutiny even youth may command.

Willy Forrest, to give him his due, took an instinctive liking to the new intruder and was not to be put off, however much his attentions were displeasing to Anna. A cunning foresight, added to a fecund imagination and a fine taste for all *chroniques scandaleuses*, led him to determine that Alban Kennedy might yet inherit the bulk of Gessner's fortune and become the plumpest of all possible pigeons. Should this be the case, those who had been the young man's friends in the beginning might well remain so to the end. He resolved instantly to cultivate an acquaintance so desirable, and lost not a moment in the pursuit of his aims.

"My dear chap," he said on the third day of their association, "you are positively growing grass in this place. Do you never go anywhere? Has no one taught you how to amuse yourself?"

Alban replied that everything was so new to him that he desired no other amusement than its enjoyment.

"It was almost years since I saw a tree that was not black," he said; "the water used to drip through the roof of my garret, and there was a family in the room on the opposite side of the landing. I don't think you can understand what this house means to me. Perhaps I don't understand myself. I'm almost afraid to go to sleep at night for fear I should wake up in Union Street and find it all a fairy story. Mr. Gessner says I am to stop with them always—but he might change his mind and then it would be Commercial Road again—if I had the courage to go back there."

Forrest had known evil times himself, and he could honestly appreciate the possibility.

"Stick by the old horse while he sticks by you," was his candid advice. "I expect he's under a pretty stiff obligation to some of your people who are gone, and this is how he's paying it. You take all the corn you can get and put it in your nose-bag. Anna herself tells me that the old man is only happy while you are in the house. Play up to it, old chap, and grease your wheels while the can's going round."

This very worldy advice fell upon ears strikingly deficient in understanding subtleties. Alban could not dislike Forrest, though he tried his best to do so. There was something sympathetic about the fellow, rogue that he was, and even shrewd men admitted his fascination. When the Captain proposed that they should go down to the West End of London and see a little of life together, Alban consented gladly. New experiences set him hungering after those supposed delights which were made so much of in the newspapers. He reflected how very little he really knew of the world and its people.

It was a day of early June when they set off in that very single brougham which had carried Silas Geary to Whitechapel. The Captain, having first ascertained the amount of money in his friend's possession, proposed a light lunch in the restaurant of the Savoy, and there, to do him justice, he was amusing enough.

"People are all giving up houses and living in restaurants nowadays," he said as they sat at table. "I don't blame 'em either. Just think of the number of nags in those big stables, all eating their heads off and smoking your best cigars—eh, what? Why, I kept myself in weeds a few years ago—got 'em for twopence halfpenny from a butler in Curzon Street and never smoked better. You don't want to do that, for you can bottle old Bluebeard's and try 'em on the dog—eh, what? When you marry, don't you take a house. A man who lives in a hotel doesn't seem as though he were married and that's good for the filly. Look at these angels here. Why, half of them sold the family oak tree a generation ago, and Attenborough down the street will tell you what their Tiffanies are worth. They live in hotels because it's cheaper, and they wear French paste because the other is at uncle's. That's the truth, my boy, and all the world knows it."

Alban listened with an odd cynical smile upon his face, but he did not immediately reply. This famous hotel had seemed a cavern of all the wonders when first he entered it, and he would not willingly abandon his illusions. The

beautifully dressed women, the rustling gowns, the chiffon, the lace, the feathers, the diamonds—might he not have thought that they stood for all that pomp and circumstance of life which the East End denounced so vehemently and the West End as persistently demanded? Of the inner lives of these people he knew absolutely nothing. And, after all, he remembered, men and women are much the same whatever the circumstance.

"I like to be in beautiful places," he confessed in his turn, "and this place seems to me very beautiful. Does it really matter to us, Forrest, what the people do or what they are so long as they don't ask us to be the same? Jimmy Dale, a parson in Whitechapel, used to say that a man was just what his conscience made him. I don't see how the fact of living in or out of a hotel would matter anyway—unless you leave your conscience in a cab. The rest is mostly talk, and untrue at that, they say. You yourself know that you don't believe half of it."

"My dear man, what would life be if one were incredulous? How would the newspaper proprietors buy bread and cheese, to say nothing of pâte de foie gras and ninety-two Pommery if the world desired the truth? This crowd is mostly on the brink of a precipice, and a man or a woman goes over every day. Then you have the law report and old Righteousness in a white wig, who has not been found out, to pronounce a judgment. I'd like to wager that not one in three of these people ever did an honest day's work in a lifetime. One half is rank idle—the other half is trying to live on the remainder. Work it out and pass me the wine—and mind you don't get setting up any images for time to knock down—eh, what?"

Alban would not wrangle with him, and for a little while he ate in silence, watching the sparkling throng and listening to such scraps of conversation as floated to him from merry tables. Down in Union Street it had been the fashion to decry idleness and the crimes of the rich—the orators having it that leisure was criminal and ease a heinous sin. Alban had never believed in any such fallacy. "We are all born lazy," he had said, "and few of us would work unless we had to. Vanity is at the bottom of all that we do. If no one were vain, the world would stand still." In the Savoy, his arguments seemed to be justified a hundredfold. A sense of both content and dignity came to him. He began almost to believe that money could ennoble as well as satisfy.

Willy Forrest, of course, knew nothing whatever of thoughts such as these. He was a past master in the art of killing time and he boasted that he rarely knew an "idle hour." His programme for this day seemed altogether beyond criticism.

"We'll look in at the club afterwards and play a game of bridge—you can stand by me and see me win—or perhaps you'd like a side bet. Then we might turn into the park to give the girls a treat—eh, what?—and go on to the New Bridge Club to dress. After that there's the old sporting shanty and a bit of a mill between Neddy Tinker and Marsh Hill. You never saw a fight, I suppose? Man, but your education has been neglected."

Alban smiled and admitted his deficiencies.

"I've seen many a set-to in Commercial Road and taken a hand sometimes. Is it really quite necessary to my education?"

"Absolutely indispensable. You must do everything and be seen everywhere. If I had time, I'd give you the personal history of half the light-weights in this room. Look at that black crow in the corner there. He's a Jew parson from Essex—as rich as bottled beer and always stops here. Last time I rode a welter down his way they told me his favorite text was "Blessed are the poor." He's a pretty figurehead for a bean-feast, isn't he? That chirpy barrister next door has a practice of fifteen thou. The blighter once cross-examined me in a card-sharping case and made me look the biggest damned fool in Europe. Did I rest on my laurels—eh, what? Why, sir, he can't cross a race-course now without having his pocket picked. My doing, my immortal achievement. The little Countess next door used to do stunts at the *Nouveau Cirque*. Lord Saxe-Holt married her when he was hazy and is taming her. That old chap, who eats like a mule, is Lord Whippingham. He hasn't got a sixpence, and if you ask me how he lives—well, there are ways and means foreign to your young and virgin mind. The old geezer used to run after little Betty Sine at the Apollo—but she put an ice down his back at supper here one night and then there were partings. Some day I'll take you to the Blenheim and show you England's aristocracy in arm-chairs—we haven't time to-day and here's the coffee coming. Pay up and be thankful that your new pa isn't overdrawn, and has still a shekel or two in his milk jug. My godfather!—but you are a lucky young man, and so you are beginning to think, I suppose."

Alban did not condescend to answer a question so direct. He was still quite uncertain as to his future, and he would not discuss it with this irresponsible, who had undertaken to be his worldly mentor. When they left the Savoy it was to visit a club in Trafalgar Square and there discover the recumbent figures of aged gentlemen who had lunched not wisely but too well. Of all that he had seen in the kingdoms of money, Alban found this club least to his liking. The darkness

of its great rooms, the insolence of its members toward the servants who waited upon them, the gross idleness, the trivial excitements of the card-room, the secret drinking in remote corners—he had never imagined that men of brains could so abase themselves, and he escaped ultimately to Hyde Park with a measure of thankfulness he would not conceal.

"Why do people go to places like that, Forrest?" he asked as they went. "What enjoyment do they get out of them?"

Willy Forrest, who had taken a "mahogany one" in the club and was getting mighty confidential, answered him as candidly.

"Half of 'em go to get away from their wives, the other half to win money—eh, what?"

"But why do they never speak to each other?"

"Put two game-cocks in a pen and then ask again. It's a club, my boy, and so they think every other man a rogue or a fool."

"And do they pay much for the privilege?"

"That depends on the airs they give themselves. I've been pilled for half the clubs in town and so, I suppose, I'm rather a decent sort of chap. It used to be a kind of hall-mark to get in a good club, but we live at hotels nowadays and don't care a dump for them. That's why half of 'em are on the verge of bankruptcy. Don't you trouble about them, unless you get a filly that bolts. I shall have to give up clubs altogether, I suppose, when I marry Anna—eh, what?"

He laughed at the idea, and Alban remaining silent, he whistled a hansom in a way that would have done credit to a railway porter, and continued affably.

"You knew that I was going to marry Anna, didn't you? She told you on the strict q.t., didn't she? Oh, my stars, how she can talk! I shall buy an ear-trumpet when we're in double harness. But Anna told you, now didn't she?"

"I have only once heard her mention your name—she certainly did not speak of being engaged."

"They never do when the old man bucks—eh, what? Gessner don't like me, and I'd poison him for a shilling. Why shouldn't I marry her? I can ride a horse and point a gun and throw a fly better than most. Can Old Bluebeard go better—eh,

what? The old pot-hook, I'd play him any game you like to name for a pony aside and back myself to the Day of Judgment. And he's the man who talks about bagging a Duke for his girl! Pshaw, Anna would kick the coronet downstairs in three days and the owner after it. You must know that for yourself—she's a little devil to rear and you can't touch her on the curb—eh, what, you've noticed it yourself?"

Alban declared quite frankly that he had noticed nothing whatever. Not for a fortune would he have declared his heart to this man, the hopes, the perplexities, and the self-reproach which had attended ever these early weeks in wonderland. Just as Anna's shrewdness had perceived, so was it the truth that an image of perfect womanhood dazzled his imagination and left him without any clear perception whatever. For little Lois of the slums he had a sterling affection, begotten of long association and of mutual sympathy—but the vision of Anna had been the beatification of his love dream, so to speak, deceiving him by its immense promise and leading him to credit Gessner's daughter with all those qualities of womanhood which stood nearest to his heart's desire. Here was a Lois become instantly more beautiful, more refined, more winning. If he remained true to the little friend of his boyish years, his faith had been obscured for a moment by this superb apparition of a young girl's beauty, enshrined upon the altar of riches and endowed with those qualities which wealth alone could purchase. Anna, indeed, held him for a little while spellbound, and now he listened to Forrest as though a heresy against all women were spoken.

"I did not know you were engaged," he said quite frankly. "Anna certainly has never told me. Of course, I congratulate you. She is a very beautiful girl, Forrest."

"That's true, old chap. You might see her in the paddock and pick her at a glance—eh, what? But it's mum at present—not a whistle to the old man until the south wind blows. And don't you tell Anna either. She'd marry somebody else if she thought I was really in love with her—eh, what?"

Alban shrugged his shoulders but had nothing to say. They had now come to the famous Achilles Statue in Hyde Park, and there they walked for half an hour amidst the showily dressed women on the lawn. Willy Forrest was known to many of these and everywhere appeared sure of a familiar welcome. The very men, who would tell you aside that he was a "wrong 'un," nodded affably to him and sometimes stopped to ask him what was going to win the Oaks. He patronized a few pretty girls with condescending recognition and immediately

afterwards would relate to Alban the more intimate and often scandalous stories of their families. At a later moment they espied Anna herself in a superb victoria drawn by two strawberry roans. And to their intense astonishment they perceived that she had the Reverend Silas Geary in the carriage by her side.

"A clever little devil, upon my soul," said the Captain, ecstatically, "to cart that fire-escape round and show him to the crowd. She must have done it to annoy me—eh, what? She thinks I'm not so much an angel as I look and is going to make me good. Oh, my stars—let's get. I shall be saying the catechism if I stop here any longer."

CHAPTER XIII

ALBAN REVISITS UNION STREET

Alban escaped from the Sporting Club at a quarter to eleven, sick of its fetid atmosphere and wearied by its mock brutalities. He made no apologies for quitting Willy Forrest—for, truth to tell, that merry worthy was no longer capable of understanding them. Frequent calls for whisky-and-soda, added to a nice taste for champagne at dinner, left the Captain in that maudlin condition in which a man is first cousin to all the world—at once garrulous and effusive and generally undesirable. Alban had, above all things, a contempt for a drunken man; and leaving Forrest to the care of others of his kind, he went out into the street and made his way slowly eastward.

It was an odd thing to recall; but he had hardly set foot east of the Temple, he remembered, since the day when the bronze gates of Richard Gessner's house first closed upon him and the vision of wonderland burst upon his astonished eyes. The weeks had been those of unending kindness, of gifts showered abundantly, of promises for the future which might well overwhelm him by their generosity. Let him but consent to claim his rights, Gessner had said, and every ambition should be gratified. No other explanation than that of a lagging justice could he obtain—and no other had he come to desire. If he remained at Hampstead, the image of Anna Gessner, of a perfect womanhood as he imagined it, kept him to the house. He did not desire his patron's money; he began to discover how few were his wants and how small the satisfaction of their gratification could be. But the image he worshipped ever—and at its feet all other desires were forgotten.

And now reality had come with its sacrilegious hand, warring upon the vision and bidding him open his eyes and see. It was easy enough to estimate this adventurer Willy Forrest at his true worth, less easy to bind the wounds imagination had received and to set the image once more upon its ancient pedestal. Could he longer credit Anna with those qualities with which his veneration had endowed her? Must there not be heart searchings and rude questionings, the abandonment of the dream and the stern corrections of truth? He knew not what to think. A voice of reproach asked him if he also had not

forgotten. The figure of little Lois Boriskoff stood by him in the shadows, and he feared to speak with her lest she should accuse him.

Let it be said in justice that he had written to Lois twice, and heard but lately that she had left Union Street and gone, none knew whither. His determination to do his utmost for her and her father, to bid them share his prosperity and command him as they would, had been strong with him from the first and delayed only by the amazing circumstances of his inheritance. He did not understand even yet that he had the right to remain at "Five Gables," but this right had so often been insisted upon that he began at last to believe in its reality and to accept the situation as a *chose jugée*. And with the conviction, there came an intense longing to revisit the old scenes—who knows, it may have been but the promptings of a vanity after all.

It was a great thing, indeed, to be walking there in the glare of the lamps and telling himself that fortune and a future awaited him, that the instrument of mighty deeds would be his inheritance, and that the years of his poverty were no more. How cringingly he had walked sometimes in the old days when want had shamed him and wealth looked down upon him with contempt. To-night he might stare the boldest in the face, nurse fabulous desires and know that they would be gratified, peer through the barred windows of the shops and say all he saw was at his command. A sense of might and victory attended his steps. He understood what men mean when they say that money is power and that it rules the world.

He turned eastward, and walking with rapid strides made his way down the Strand and thence by Ludgate Circus to Aldgate and the mean streets he knew so well. It was nearly midnight when he arrived there, and yet he fell in with certain whom he knew and passed them by with a genial nod. His altered appearance, the black overcoat and the scarf which hid his dress clothes, called for many a "Gor blime" or "Strike me dead." Women caught his arm and wrestled with him, roughs tried to push him from the pavement and were amazed at his good humor. In Union Street he first met little red-haired Chris Denham and asked of her the news. She shrank back from him as though afraid, and answered almost in a whisper.

"Lois gone—she went three weeks ago. I thought you'd have know'd it—I thought you was sweet on her, Alban. And now you come here like that—what's happened to you, whatever have you been doing of?"

He told her gaily that he had found new friends.

"But I haven't forgotten the old ones, Chris, and I'm coming down to see you all some day soon. How's your mother—what's she doing now?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders and the glance she turned upon him seemed to say that she would sooner speak on any other subject.

"What should she be doin'—what's any of us doin' but slave our bones off and break our hearts. You've come to see Lois' father, haven't you? Oh, yes, I know how much you want to talk about my mother. The old man's up there in the shop —I saw him as I came by."

Alban stood an instant irresolute. How much he would have liked to offer some assistance to this poor girl, to speak of real pecuniary help and friendship. But he knew the people too well. The utmost delicacy would be necessary.

"Well," he said, "I'm sorry things are not better, Chris. I've had a good Saturday night, you see, and if I can do anything, don't you mind letting me know. We'll talk of it when we have more time. I'm going on to see Boriskoff now, and I doubt that I'll find him out of bed."

She laughed a little wildly, still turning almost pathetic eyes upon him.

"Is it true that it's all off between you and Lois—all the Court says it is. That's why she went away, they say—is it true, Alb, or are they telling lies? I can't believe it myself. You're not the sort to give a girl over—not one that's stood by you as well as Lois. Tell me it ain't true or I shall think the worse of you."

The question staggered him and he could not instantly answer it. Was it true or false? Did he really love little Lois and had he still an intention to marry her? Alban had never looked the situation straight in the face until this moment.

"I never tell secrets," he exclaimed a little lamely, and turning upon his heel, he shut his ears to the hard laugh which greeted him and went on, as a man in a dream, to old Boriskoff's garret. A lamp stood in the window there and the tap of a light hammer informed him that the indefatigable Pole was still at work. In truth, old Paul was bending copper tubing—for a firm which said that he had no equal at the task and paid him a wage which would have been despised by a crossing-sweeper.

Alban entered the garret quietly and was a little startled by the sharp exclamation

which greeted him. He knew nothing, of course, of the part this crafty Pole had played or what his own change of circumstance owed to him. To Alban, Paul Boriskoff was just the same mad revolutionary as before—at once fanatic and dreamer and, before then, the father of Lois who had loved him. If the old fellow had no great welcome for the young Englishman to-night, let that be set down to his sense of neglect and, in some measure, to his daughter's absence.

"Good evening, Mr. Boriskoff, you are working very late to-night."

Alban stood irresolute at the door, watching the quick movements of the shaggy brows and wondered what had happened to old Paul that he should be received so coolly. Had he known what was in the Pole's mind he would have as soon have jumped off London Bridge as have braved the anger of one who judged him so mercilessly in that hour. For Boriskoff had heard the stories which Hampstead had to tell, and he had said, "He will ruin Lois' life and I have put the power to do so in his hands."

"The poor do not choose their hours, Alban Kennedy. Sit down, if you please, and talk to me. I have much to say to you."

He did not rise from his chair, but indicated a rude seat in the corner by the chimney and waited until his unwilling guest had taken it. Alban judged that his own altered appearance and his absence from Union Street must be the cause of his displeasure. He could guess no other reason.

"Do you love my daughter, Alban Kennedy?"

"You know that I do, Paul. Have we not always been good friends? I came to tell you about a piece of great good fortune which has happened to me and to find out why Lois had not written to me. You see for yourself that there is a great change in me. One of the richest men in London considers that I have a claim, to some of his money—through some distant relative, it appears—and I am living at his house almost as his own son."

"Is that why you forget your old friends so quickly?"

"I have never forgotten them. I wrote to Lois twice."

"Did you speak of marriage in your letters?"

The lad's face flushed crimson. He knew that he could not tell Paul Boriskoff the truth.

"I did not speak of marriage—why should I?" he exclaimed; "it was never your wish that we should speak of it until Lois is twenty-one. She will not be that for more than three years—why do you ask me the question to-night?"

"Because you have learned to love another woman."

A dead silence fell in the room. The old man continued to tap gently upon the coil of tube, rapidly assuming a fantastic shape under the masterly touch of a trained hand. A candle flickered by him upon a crazy table where stood a crust of bread and a lump of coarse cheese. Not boastfully had he told Richard Gessner that he would accept nothing for himself. He was even poorer than he had been six weeks ago when he discovered that his old enemy was alive.

You love another woman, Alban Kennedy, and you have wished to forget my daughter.

"You love another woman, Alban Kennedy, and you have wished to forget my daughter."

"You love another woman, Alban Kennedy, and you have wished to forget my daughter. Do not say that it is not the truth, for I read it upon your face. You should be ashamed to come here unless you can deny it. Fortune has been kind to you, but how have you rewarded those for whom she has nothing? I say that you have forgotten them—been ashamed of them as they have now the right to be ashamed of you."

He put his hammer down and looked the lad straight in the face. Upon Alban's part there was an intense desire to confess everything and to tell his old friend of all those distressing doubts and perplexities which had so harassed him since he went to Hampstead. If he could have done so, much would have been spared him in the time to come. But he found it impossible to open his heart to an alien,—nor did he believe Paul Boriskoff capable of appreciating the emotions which now tortured him.

"I have never been ashamed of any of my friends," he exclaimed hotly; "you

know that it is not true, Paul Boriskoff. Where are the letters which I wrote to Lois? Why has she not answered them? If I had been ashamed, would they have been written? Cannot you understand that all which has happened to me has been very distracting. I have seen a new life—a new world, and it is not as our world. Perhaps there is no more happiness in it than in these courts and alleys where we have suffered so much. I cannot tell you truly. It is all too new to me and naturally I feel incapable of judging it. When I came to you to-night it was to speak of our old friendship. Should I have done so if I had forgotten?"

Old Paul heard him with patience, but his anger none the less remained. The shaggy eyebrows were at rest now, but the eyes were never turned from Alban's face.

"You are in love with Anna Gessner," he said quietly; "why do you not tell Lois so?"

"I cannot tell her so—it would not be true. She will always be the same little Lois to me, and when she is twenty-one I will marry her."

"Ha—when she is twenty-one. That seems a long time off to one who is your age. You will marry her, you say—a promise to keep her quiet while you make love to this fine lady who befools you. No, Alban Kennedy, I shall not let Lois imagine any such thing; I shall tell her the truth. She will choose another husband—that is my wish and she will obey it."

"You are doing me a great injustice, Paul Boriskoff. I do not love Anna—perhaps for a moment I thought that I did, but I know now that I was deceiving myself. She is not one who is worthy of being loved. I believed her very different when first I went to Hampstead."

"Tell me no such thing. I am an old man and I know men's hearts. What shall my daughter and her rags be to you now that you have fine clothes upon your back? You are as the others—you have knelt down at the shrine of money and there you worship. This woman in her fine clothes—she is your idol. All your past is forgotten immediately you see her. A great gulf is set between you and us. Think not that I do not know, for there are those who bring me the story every day. You worship Anna Gessner, but you live in a fool's paradise, for the father will forbid you to marry her. I say it and I know. Be honest and speak to my daughter as I have spoken to you to-night."

He raised his hammer as though he would resume his work, and Alban began to

perceive how hopeless an argument would be with him while in such a mood. Not deficient in courage, the lad could not well defend himself from so direct an attack, and he had the honesty to admit as much.

"I shall tell Lois the truth," he said: "she will then judge me and say whether you are right or wrong. I came here to-night to see if I could help you both. You know, Paul Boriskoff, how much I wish to do so. While I have money, it is yours also. Have not Lois and I always been as your children? You cannot forbid me to act as a son should, just because I have come into my inheritance. Let me find you a better home and take you away from this dismal place. Then I shall be doing right to worship money. Will you not let me do so? There is nothing in life half so good as helping those we love—I am sure of it already, and it is only five weeks since I came into my inheritance. Give me the right and let me still call you father."

Old Paul was much affected, but he would not let the lad see as much. Avoiding the question discreetly but not unkindly, he muttered, "No, no, I need no help. I am an old man and what happens to me does not matter." And then turning the subject swiftly, he asked, "Your patron, he has left England, has he not?"

"He has gone to Paris, I believe."

"Did he speak of the business that took him there?"

"He never speaks of business to me. He has asked me once or twice about the poor people down here and I have tried to tell him. Such a fortune as his could redeem thousands of lives, Paul. I have told him that when he spoke to me."

"Such a man will never redeem one life. All the money in the world will never buy him rest. He has eaten his harvest and the fields are bare. Did you mention my name to him?"

"I do not think that I have done so yet."

"Naturally, you would have been a little ashamed to speak of us. It is very rarely that one who becomes rich remembers those who were poor with him. His money only teaches him to judge them. Those who were formerly his friends are now spendthrifts, extravagant folk who should not be injured by assistance. The rich man makes their poverty an excuse for deserting them, and he cloaks his desertion beneath lofty moral sentiments. You are too young to do so, but the same spirit is already leading you. Beware of it, Alban Kennedy, for it will lead

you to destruction."

Alban did not know how to argue with him. He resented the accusation hotly and yet could make no impression of resentment upon the imagined grievance which old Paul nursed almost affectionately. It were better, he thought, to hold his tongue and to let the old man continue.

"Your patron has gone to Paris, you say? Are you sure it is to Paris?"

"How could I be sure. I am telling you what was told to me. He is to be back in a few days' time. It is not to be expected that he would share his plans with me."

"Certainly not—he would tell you nothing. Do you know that he is a Pole, Alban?"

"A Pole? No! Indeed he gives it out that he was born in Germany and is now a naturalized British subject."

"He would do so, but he is a Pole—and because he is a Pole he tells you that he has gone to Paris when the truth is that he is at Berlin all the time."

"But why should he wish to deceive me, Paul—what am I to him?"

"You are one necessary to his salvation—perhaps it is by you alone that he will live. I could see when I first spoke to you how much you were astonished that I knew anything about it, but remember, every Pole in London knows all about his fellow-countrymen, and so it is very natural that I know something of Richard Gessner. You who live in his house can tell me more. See what a gossip I am where my own people are concerned. You have been living in this man's house and you can tell me all about it—his tastes, his books, his friends. There would be many friends coming, of course?"

"Not very many, Paul, and those chiefly city men. They eat a great deal and talk about money. It's all money up there—the rich, the rich, the rich—I wonder how long I shall be able to stand it."

"Oh, money's a thing most people get used to very quickly. They can stand a lot of it, my boy. But are there not foreigners at your house—men of my own country?"

"I have never seen any—once, I think, Mr. Gessner was talking to a stranger in the garden and he looked like a foreigner. You don't think I would spy upon him

Paul?"

"That would be the work of a very ungrateful fellow. None the less, if there are foreigners at Hampstead—I should wish to know of it."

"You—and why?"

"That I may save your kind friend from certain perils which I think are about to menace him. Yes, yes, he has been generous to you and I wish to reward him. He must not know—he must never hear my name in the matter, but should there be strangers at Hampstead let me know immediately—write to me if you cannot come here. Do not delay or you may rue it to the end of your days. Write to me, Alban, and I shall know how to help your friend."

He had spoken under a spell of strong excitement, but his message delivered, he fell again to his old quiet manner; and having exchanged a few commonplaces with the astonished lad plainly intimated that he would be alone. Alban, surprised beyond measure, perceived in his turn that no amount of questioning would help him to a better understanding; and so, in a state of perplexity which defied expression, he said "Good night" and went out into the quiet street.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE ARE STRANGERS IN THE CAVES

It was some time after midnight when Alban reached Broad Street Station and discovered that the last train for Hampstead had left. A certain uneasiness as to what his new friends would think of him did not deter him from his sudden determination to turn westward and seek out his old haunts. He had warned Richard Gessner that no house would ever make a prisoner of him, and this quick desire for liberty now burned in his veins as a fever. It would be good, he thought, to sleep under the stars once more and to imagine himself that same Alban Kennedy who had not known whither to look for bread—could it be but five short weeks ago!

The city was very still as he passed through it and, save for a broken-down motor omnibus with a sleepy conductor for its guardian, Cheapside appeared to be almost destitute of traffic. The great buildings, wherein men sought the gold all day, were now given over to watchmen and the rats, as the bodies of the seekers would one day be given over to the earth whence they sprang. Alban depicted a great army of the servants of money asleep in distant homes, and he could not but ask what happiness they carried there, what capacities for rest and true enjoyment.

Was it true, as he had begun to believe, that the life of pleasure had cares of its own, hardly less supportable than those which crushed the poor to the very earth? Was the daily round of abundance, of lights and music and wine and women—was it but the basest of shams, scarce deceiving those who practised it? His brief experience seemed to answer the question in the affirmative. He wondered if he had known such an hour of true happiness as that which had come to him upon the last night he had spent in the Caves. Honesty said that he had not—and to the Caves he now turned as one who would search out forgotten pleasures.

The building in St. James' Street had made great advance since last he saw it, but he observed to his satisfaction that the entrance to the subterranean passages were not absolutely closed, and he did not doubt that many of the old night-hawks were still in possession. His astonishment, therefore, was considerable

when, upon dropping into the first of the passages, a figure sprang up and clutched him by the throat, while a hand thrust a lantern into his face and a pair of black eyes regarded him with amazed curiosity.

"A slap-up toff, so help me Jimmy! And what may your Royal Highness be doing this way—what brings you to this pretty parlor? Now, speak up, my lad, or it will go queer with you."

Alban knew in an instant—his long experience taught him—that he had fallen into the hands of the police, and his first alarms were very real.

"What right have you to question me?"

"Oh, we'll show our right sharp enough. Now, you be brisk—what's your name and what are you doing here?"

"I am the son of Mr. Richard Gessner of Hampstead and I used to know this place. I came down to have a look at it before the building is finished. If you doubt me, let us go to Mr. Gessner's house together and he will tell you who I am."

It was a proud thing to say and he said it with pride. That thrill of satisfaction which attends a fine declaration of identity came to Alban then as it has done to many a great man in the hour of his vanity. The son of Richard Gessner—yes, his patron would acknowledge him for that! The police themselves admitted the title by almost instant capitulation.

"Well, sir, it's a queer place to come to, I must say, and not very safe either for a gentleman in your position. Why didn't you ask one of us to bring you down? We'd have done it right enough, though not to-night perhaps."

"Then you're out on business?"

"You couldn't have guessed better, sir. We're here with the nets and there will be herrings to salt in the morning. If you care to wait five minutes, you may look into the bundle. Here's two or three of them coming along now and fine music they're making, I must say. Just step aside a minute, sir, while we give a hand. That's a woman's voice and she's not been to the Tabernacle. I shouldn't wonder if it was the flower girl that hobnobs with the parson—oh, by no means, oh dear, no."

He raised his lantern and turned the light of it full on the passage, disclosing a

spectacle which brought a flush of warm blood to Alban's cheeks and filled him with a certain sense of shame he could not defend. For there were three of his old friends, no others than Sarah and the Archbishop of Bloomsbury with the boy "Betty," the latter close in the custody of the police who dragged him headlong, regardless of the girl's shrieks and the ex-clergyman's protests upon their cruelty. For an instant Alban was tempted to flee the place, to deny his old friends and to surrender to a base impulse of his pride; but a better instinct saving him, he intervened boldly and immediately declared himself to the astonished company.

"These people are friends of mine," he said, to the complete bewilderment of the constables, "please to tell me why you are charging them?"

"Gawd Almighty—if it ain't Mr. Kennedy!"—this from the woman.

"Indeed," said the clergyman, with a humility foreign to him, "I am very glad to see you, Alban. Our friend 'Betty' here is accused of theft. I am convinced—I feel assured that the charge is misplaced and that you will be able to help us. Will you not tell these men that you know us and can answer for our honesty?"

The lad "Betty" said nothing at all. His eyes were very wide open, a heavy hand clutched his ragged collar, and the police stood about him as though in possession of a convicted criminal.

"A young lad, sir, that stole a gold match-box from a gentleman and has got it somewhere about him now. Stand up, you young devil—none of your blarney. Where's the box now and what have you done with it?"

"I picked it up and give it to Captain Forrest—so help me Gawd, it's true. Arst him if I didn't."

The sergeant laughed openly at the story.

"He run two of our men from the National Sporting right round Covent Garden and back, sir," he said to Alban. "The gentleman dropped the box and couldn't wait. But we'll see about all that in the morning."

"If you mean Captain Forrest of the Trafalgar Club, I have just left him," interposed Alban, quickly; "this lad has been known to me for some years and I am positively sure he is not a thief. Indeed, I will answer for him anywhere—and if he did pick up the box, I can promise you that Captain Forrest will not prosecute."

He turned to "Betty" and asked him an anxious question.

"Is it true, Betty—did you pick up the box?"

"I picked it up and put it into the gentleman's hand. He couldn't stand straight and he dropped it again. Then a cab runner found it and some one cried 'stop thief.' I was frightened and ran away. That's the truth, Mr. Alban, if I die for it—"

"We must search you, Betty, to satisfy the officers."

"Oh, yes, sir—I'm quite willing to be searched."

He turned out all his pockets there and then, was pinched and pushed and cuffed to no avail. The indignant Sarah shaking her clothes in the sergeant's face dared him to do the same for her and to take the consequences of his curiosity. The Archbishop obligingly offered his pockets, which, as he said, were open at all times to the inspection of his Majesty's authorized servants. A few words aside between Alban and the assembled police, the crisp rustle of a bank-note in the darkness, helped conviction to a final victory. There were other ferrets in that dark warren and bigger game to be had.

"Well, sir," said the sergeant, "if you'll answer for Captain Forrest—and he'll want a lot of answering for to-night—I'll leave the lad in your hands. But don't let me find any of 'em down here again, or it will go hard with them. Now, be off all of you, for we have work to do. And mind you remember what I say."

It was a blessed release and all quitted the place without an instant's delay. Out in the open street, the Archbishop of Bloomsbury took Alban aside and congratulated him upon his good fortune.

"So your old friend Boriskoff has found you a job?" he said, laying a patronizing hand on the lad's stout shoulder. "Well, well, I knew Richard Gessner when I was —er—hem—on duty in Kensington, and in all matters of public charity I certainly found him to be an example. You know, of course, that he is a Pole and that his real name is Maxim Gogol. General Kaulbars told me as much when he was visiting England some years ago. Your friend is a Pole who would find himself singularly inconvenienced if he were called upon to return to Poland. Believe me, how very much astonished I was to hear that you had taken up your residence in his house."

"Then you heard about it—from whom?" Alban asked.

"Oh, 'Betty' followed you, on the day the person who calls himself Willy Forrest, but is really the son of a jockey named Weston, returned from Winchester. We were anxious about you, Alban—we questioned the company into which you had fallen. I may say, indeed, that our hearths were desolate and crape adorned our spears. We thought that you had forgotten us—and what is life when those who should remember prefer to forget."

Alban answered at hazard, for he knew perfectly well what was coming. The boy "Betty," still frightened out of his wits, clung close to the skirts of the homeless Sarah and walked with her, he knew not whither. A drizzle of rain had begun to fall; the streets were shining as desolate rivers of the night—the Caves behind them stood for a house of the enemy which none might enter again. But Alban alone was silent—for his generosity had loosened the pilgrims' tongues, and they spoke as they went of a morrow which should give them bread.

CHAPTER XV

A STUDY IN INDIFFERENCE

There are many spurs to a woman's vanity, but declared indifference is surely the sharpest of them all. When Anna Gessner discovered that Alban was not willing to enroll himself in the great band of worshippers who knelt humbly at her golden shrine, she set about converting him with a haste which would have been dangerous but for its transparent dishonesty. In love herself, so far as such a woman could ever be in love at all, with the dashing and brainless jockey who managed her race-horses, she was quite accustomed, none the less, to add the passionate confessions and gold-sick protestations of others to her volume of amatory recollections, and it was not a little amazing that a mere youth should be discovered, so obstinate, so chilly and so indifferent as to remain insensible both to her charms and their value, in what her father had called "pounds sterling."

When Alban first came to "Five Gables," his honesty amused her greatly. She liked to hear him speak of the good which her father's money could do in the slums and alleys he had left. It was a rare entertainment for her to be told of those "dreadful people" who sewed shirts all day and were frequently engaged in the same occupation when midnight came. "I shall call you the Missionary," she had said, and would sit at his feet while he confessed some of the wild hopes which animated him, or justified his desire for that great humanity of the East whose supreme human need was sympathy. Anna herself did not understand a word of it—but she liked to have those clear blue eyes fixed upon her, to hear the soft musical voice and to wonder when this pretty boy would speak of his love for her.

But the weeks passed and no word of love was spoken, and the woman in her began to ask why this should be. She was certain as she could be that her beauty had dazzled the lad when first he came to "Five Gables." She remembered what fervid glances he had turned upon her when first they met, how his eyes had expressed unbounded admiration, nay worship such as was unknown in the circles in which she moved. If this silent adoration flattered her for the moment, honesty played no little part in its success—for though there had been lovers who looked deep into her heart before, the majority carried but liabilities to her

feet and, laying them there, would gladly have exchanged them for her father's cheques to salve their financial wounds. In Alban she had met for the first time a natural English lad who had no secrets to hide from her. "He will worship the ground upon which I walk," she had said in the mood of sundry novelettes borrowed from her maid. And this, in truth, the lad might very well have come to do.

But the weeks passed and Alban remained silent, and the declaration she had desired at first as an amusement now became a vital necessity to her fasting vanity. Believing that their surroundings at Hampstead, the formality, the servants, the splendor of "Five Gables," forbade that little comedy of love for which she hungered, she went off, in her father's absence, to their cottage at Henley, and compelling Alban to follow her, she played Phyllis to his Corydon with an ardor which could not have been surpassed. Aping the schoolgirl, she would wear her hair upon her shoulders, carry her gown shortened, and bare her sleeves to the suns of June. The rose garden became the arbor of her delights. "You shall love me," she said to herself—and in the determination a passion wholly vain and not a little hazardous found its birth and prospered.

For hours together now, she would compel this unconscious slave to row her in the silent reaches or to hide with her in backwaters to which the mob rarely came. Deluding him by the promise that her father was returning shortly from Paris and would come to Henley immediately upon his arrival, she led Alban to forget the days of waiting, petted him as though he had been her lover through the years, invited him a hundred times a day to say, "I love you—you shall be my wife."

In his turn, he remained silent and amazed, tempted sorely by her beauty, not understanding and yet desiring to understand why he could not love her. True, indeed, that the image of another would intervene sometimes—a little figure in rags, wan and pitiful and alone; but the environment in which the vision of the past had moved, the slums, the alleys, the mean streets, these would hedge the picture about and then leave the dreamer averse and shuddering. Not there could liberty be found again. The world must show its fields to the wanderer when again he dared it alone.

Alban remembered one night above all others of this strange seclusion, and that was a night of a woman's humiliation. There had been great bustle all day, the coming of oarsmen and of coaches to Henley, and all the aquatic renaissance which prefaces the great regatta. Their own cottage, lying just above the bridge

with a shady garden extending to the water's edge, was no longer the place apart that it had been. Strangers now anchored a little way from their boat-house and consumed monstrous packets of sandwiches and the contents of abundant bottles. There were house-boats being tugged up and down the river, little groups of rowing men upon the bridge all day, the music of banjos by night, and lanterns glowing in the darkness. Anna watched this pretty scene as one who would really take a young girl's part in it. She simulated an interest in the rowing about which she knew nothing at all—visited the house-boats of such of her friends as had come down for the regatta, and was, in Willy Forrest's words, as "skittish as a two-year-old that had slipped its halter." Forrest had been to and fro from the stable near Winchester on several occasions. "He comes to tell me that I am about to lose a fortune, and I am beginning to hate him," Anna said; and on this occasion she enjoyed that diverting and unaccustomed recreation known as speaking the truth.

There had been such a visit as this upon the morning of the day when Anna spoke intimately to Alban of his future and her own. Her mood now abandoned itself utterly to her purpose. The close intimacy of these quiet days had brought her to the point where a real if momentary passion compelled her to desire this boy's love as she had never desired anything in all her life. To bring him to that declaration she sought so ardently, to feel his kisses upon her lips, to play the young lover's part if it were but for a day, to this folly her vanity had driven her. And now the opportunities for words were not denied. She had spent the afternoon in the backwaters up by Shiplake; there had been a little dinner afterwards with the old crone who served them so usefully as chaperone—a dependent who had eyes but did not see, ears which, as she herself declared, "would think scorn to listen." Amiable dame, she was in bed by nine o'clock, while Alban and Anna were lying in a punt at the water's edge, listening to the music of a distant guitar and watching the twinkling lights far away below the bridge where the boat-houses stand.

A Chinese lantern suspended upon a short boat-hook cast a deep crimson glow upon the faces of those who might well have been young lovers. The river rippled musically against the square bows of their ugly but comfortable craft. But few passed them by and those were also seekers after solitude, with no eyes for their co-religionists in the amatory gospel. Alban, wholly fascinated by the silence and the beauty of the scene, lay at Anna's feet, so full of content that he did not dare to utter his thoughts aloud. The girl caught the tiny wavelets in her outstretched hand and said that Corydon had become blind.

"Do you like Willy Forrest?" she asked, "do you think he is clever, Alban?"—a question, the answer to which would not interest her at all if it did not lead to others. Alban, in his turn, husbanding the secrets, replied evasively:

"Why should I think about him? He is not a friend of mine. You are the one to answer that, Anna. You like him—I have heard you say so."

"Never believe what a girl says. I adore Willy Forrest because he makes me laugh. I am like the poor little white rabbit which is fascinated by the great black wriggly snake. Some day it will swallow me up—perhaps on Thursday—after Ascot. I wish I could tell you. Pandora seems to have dropped everything out of her basket except the winner of the Gold Cup. If Willy Forrest is right, I shall win a fortune. But, of course, he doesn't tell the truth any more than I do."

Alban was silent a little while and then he asked her:

"Do you know much about him, Anna? Did you ever meet his people or anything?"

She looked at him sharply.

"He is the son of Sir John Forrest, who died in India. His brother was lost at sea. What made you ask me?"

He laughed as though it had not been meant.

"You say that he doesn't tell the truth. Suppose it were so about himself. He might be somebody else—not altogether the person he pretends to be. Would it matter if he were? I don't think so, Anna—I would much rather know something about a man himself than about his name."

She sat up in the punt and rested her chin upon the knuckles of her shapely hands. This kind of talk was little to her liking. She had often doubted Willy Forrest, but had never questioned his title to the name he bore.

"Have they ever told you anything about us, Alban?" she continued, "did you ever hear any stories which I should not hear?"

"Only from Captain Forrest himself; he told me that he was engaged to you. That was when I went to the Savoy Hotel."

"All those weeks ago. And you never mentioned it?"

"Was it any business of mine? What right had I to speak to you about it?"

She flushed deeply.

"A secret for a secret," she said. "When you first came to Hampstead, I thought that you liked me a little Alban. Now, I know that you do not. Suppose there were a reason why I let Willy Forrest say that he was engaged to me. Suppose some one else had been unkind when I wished him to be very kind to me. Would you understand then?"

This was in the best spirit of the coquette and yet a great earnestness lay behind it. Posing in that romantic light, the thick red lips pouting, the black eyes shining as with the clear flame of a soul awakened, the head erect as that of a deer which has heard a sound afar, this passionate little actress, half Pole, half Jewess, might well have set a man's heart beating and brought him, suppliant, to her feet. To Alban there returned for a brief instant all that spirit of homage and of awe with which he had first beheld her on the balcony of the house in St. James' Square. The cynic in him laid down his robe and stood before her in the garb of youth spellbound and fascinated. He dared to say to himself, she loves me—it is to me that these words are spoken.

"I cannot understand you, Anna," he exclaimed, tortured by some plague of a sudden memory, held back from a swift embrace he knew not by what instinct. "You say that you only let Willy Forrest call himself engaged to you. Don't you love him then—is it all false that you have told him?"

"It is quite false, Alban—I do not love him as you would understand the meaning of the word. If he says that I am engaged to him, is it true because he says it? There are some men who marry women simply because they are persevering. Willy Forrest would be one of them if I were weak enough. But I do not love him—I shall never love him, Alban."

She bent low and almost whispered the words in his ear. Her hand covered his fingers caressingly. His forehead touched the lace upon her robe and he could hear her heart beating. An impulse almost irresistible came upon him to take her in his arms and hold her there, and find in her embrace that knowledge of the perfect womanhood which had been his dream through the years. He knew not what held him back.

Anna watched him with a hope that was almost as an intoxication of doubt and curiosity. She loved him in that moment with all a young girl's ardor. She

believed that the whole happiness of her life lay in the words he was about to speak.

CHAPTER XVI

THE INTRUDER

A man's voice, calling to them from the lawn, sent them instantly apart as though caught in some guilty confidence. Anna knew that something unwonted had happened and that Willy Forrest had returned.

"What has brought him back?" she exclaimed a little wildly; and then, "Don't go away, Alban, I shall want you. My father would never forgive me if he heard of it. Of course he cannot stop here."

Alban made no reply, but he helped her to the bank and they crossed the lawn together. In the light of the veranda, they recognized Forrest, carrying a motor cap in his hand and wearing a dust coat which almost touched his heels. He had evidently dined and was full of the story of his mishap.

"Hello, Anna, here's a game," he began, "my old fumigator's broke down and I'm on the cold, cold world. Never had such a time in my life. Shoved the thing from Taplow and nothing but petrol to drink—eh, what, can't you see me? I say, Anna, you'll have to put me up to-night. There isn't a billiard table to let in the town, and I can't sleep on the grass—eh, what—you wouldn't put me out to graze, now would you?"

He entered the dining-room with them, and they stood about the table while the argument was continued.

"Billy says the nag—what-d'yer-call-it's gone lame in the off fore-leg. She went down at the distance like a filly that's been hocussed. There were the two of us in the bally dust—and look at my fingers where I burned 'em with matches. After that a parson came along in a gig. I asked him if he had a whisky-and-soda aboard and he didn't quote the Scriptures. We couldn't get the blighter to move, and I ground the handle like Signor Gonedotti of Saffron Hill in the parish of High Holborn. You'd have laughed fit to split if you'd have been there, Anna—and, oh my Sammy, what a thing it is to have a thirst and to bring it home with you. Do I see myself before a mahogany one or do I not—eh, what? Do I dream, do I sleep, or is visions about? You'll put us up, of course, Anna? I've told Billy as much and he's shoving the car into the coach-house now."

He stalked across the room and without waiting to be asked helped himself to a whisky-and-soda. Anna looked quickly at Alban as though to say, "You must help me in this." Twenty-four hours ago she would not have protested at this man's intrusion, but to-night the glamor of the love-dream was still upon her, the idyll of her romance echoed in her ears and would admit no other voice.

"Willy," she said firmly, "you know that you cannot stop. My father would never forgive me. He has absolutely forbidden you the house."

He turned round, the glass still in his hand and the soda from the siphon running in a fountain over the table-cloth.

"Your father! He's in Paris, ain't he? Are we going to telegraph about it? What nonsense you are talking, Anna!"

"I am telling you what I mean. You cannot stop here and you must go to the hotel immediately."

He looked at her quite gravely, cast an ugly glance upon Alban and instantly understood.

"Oh, so that's the game. I've tumbled into the nest and the young birds are at home. Say it again, Anna. You show me the door because this young gentleman doesn't like my company. Is it that or something else? Perhaps I'll take it that the old girl upstairs is going to ask me my intentions. The sweet little Anna Gessner of my youth has got the megrims and is off to Miss Bolt-up-Right to have a good cry together—eh, what, are you going to cry, Anna? Hang me if you wouldn't give the crocodiles six pounds and a beating—eh, what, six pounds and a beating and odds on any day."

He approached her step by step as he spoke, while the girl's face blanched and her fear of him was to be read in every look and gesture. Alban had been but a spectator until this moment, but Anna's distress and the bullying tone in which she had been addressed awakened every combative instinct he possessed, and he thrust himself into the fray with a resolute determination to make an end of it.

"Look here, Forrest," he exclaimed, "we've had about enough of this. You know that you can't stop here—why do you make a fuss about it? Go over to the hotel. There's plenty of room there—they told me so this afternoon."

Forrest laughed at the invitation, but there was more than laughter in his voice when he replied:

"Thank you for your good intentions, my boy. I am very much obliged to your worship. A top-floor attic and a marble bath. Eh, what—you want to put me in a garret? I'll see you the other side of Jordan first. Oh, come, it's a nice game, isn't it? Papa away and little Anna canoodling with the Whitechapel boy. Are we downhearted? No. But I ain't going, old pal, and that's a fact."

He almost fell into an arm-chair and looked upon them with that bland air of patronage which intoxication inspires. Anna, very pale and frightened, was upon the point of summoning the servants; but Alban, wiser in his turn, forbade her to do so.

"You go to bed, Anna," he said quietly, "Captain Forrest and I will have a talk. I'm sure he doesn't expect you to sit up. Eh, Forrest, don't you think that Anna had better go?"

"By all means, old chap. Nothing like bed—I'm going myself in a minute or two. Don't you sit up, Anna. Anywhere's good enough for me. I'll sleep in the greenhouse—eh, what? Your gardener'll find a new specimen in the morning and get fits. Mind he don't prune me, though. I can't afford to lose much at my time of life. You go to bed, Anna, and dream of little Willy. He's going to make your fortune on Thursday—good old Lodestar, some of 'em'll feel the draught, you bet. Don't spoil your complexion on my account, Anna. You go to bed and keep young."

He rambled on, half good-humoredly, wholly determined in his resolution to stay. Anna had never found him obstinate or in opposition to her will before, and blazing cheeks and flashing eyes expressed her resentment at an attitude so changed.

"Alban," she said quietly, "Captain Forrest will not stay. Will you please see that he does not."

She withdrew upon the words and left the two men alone. They listened and heard her mounting the stairs with slow steps. While Forrest was still disposed to treat the matter as a joke, Alban had enough discretion to avoid a scene if it could be avoided. He was quite calm and willing to forget the insult that had been offered to him.

"Why not make an end of it, Forrest?" he said presently. "I'll go to the hotel with you—you know perfectly well that you can get a bed there. What's the good of playing the fool?"

"I was never more serious in my life, old man. Here I am and here I stay. There's no place like home—eh, what? Why should you do stunts about it? What's it to do with you after all? Suppose you think you're master here. Then give us a whisky-and-soda for luck, my boy."

"I shall not give you a whisky-and-soda and I do not consider myself the master here. That has nothing to do with it. You know that Anna wishes you to go, and go you shall. What's to be gained by being obstinate."

Forrest looked at him cunningly.

"Appears that I intrude," he exclaimed with a sudden flash which declared his real purpose, "little Anna Gessner and the boy out of Whitechapel making a match of it together—eh, what? Don't let's have any rotten nonsense, old man. You're gone on the girl and you don't want me here. Say so and be a man. You've played a low card on me and you want to see the hand out. Isn't it that? Say so and be honest if you can."

"It's a lie," retorted Alban, quietly—and then unable to restrain himself he added quickly, "a groom's lie and you know it."

Forrest, sobered in a moment by the accusation, sprang up from his chair as though stung by the lash of a whip.

"What's that," he cried, "what do you say?"

"That you are not the son of Sir John Forrest at all. Your real name is Weston—your father was a jockey and you were born at Royston near Cambridge. That's what I say. Answer it when you like—but not in this house, for you won't have the opportunity. There's the door and that's your road. Now step out before I make you."

He pointed to the open door and drew a little nearer to his slim antagonist. Forrest, a smile still upon his face, stood for an instant irresolute—then recovering himself, he threw the glass he held as though it had been a ball, and the missile, striking Alban upon the forehead, cut him as a knife would have done.

"You puppy, you gutter-snipe—I'll show you who I am. Wipe that off if you can;" and then almost shouting, he cried, "Here, Anna, come down and see what I've done to your little ewe lamb, come down and comfort him—Anna, do you hear?"

He said no more, for Alban had him by the throat, leaping upon him with the ferocity of a wild beast and carrying him headlong to the lawn before the windows. Never in his life had such a paroxysm of anger overtaken the boy or one which mastered him so utterly. Blindly he struck; his blows rained upon the cowering face as though he would beat it out of all recognition. He knew not wholly why he thus acted if not upon some impulse which would avenge the wrongs good women had suffered at the hands of such an impostor as this. When he desisted, the man lay almost insensible upon the grass at his feet—and he, drawing apart, felt the hot tears running down his face and could not restrain them.

For in a measure he felt that his very chivalry had been faithless to one who had loved him well—and in the degradation of that violent scene he recalled the spirit of the melancholy years, the atmosphere of the mean streets, and the figure of little Lois Boriskoff asking both his pity and his love.

CHAPTER XVII

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

Richard Gessner returned to Hampstead on the Friday in Ascot week and upon the following morning Anna and Alban came back from Henley. They said little of their adventures there, save to tell of quiet days upon sunny waters; nor did the shrewdest questioning add one iota to the tale. Indeed, Gessner's habitual curiosity appeared, for the time being, to have deserted him, and they found him affable and good-humored almost to the point of wonder.

It had been a very long time, as Anna declared, since anything of this kind had shed light upon the commonly gloomy atmosphere of "Five Gables." For weeks past Gessner had lived as a man who carried a secret which he dared to confess to none. Night or day made no difference to him. He lived apart, seeing many strangers in his study and rarely visiting the great bank in Lombard Street where so many fortunes lay. To Alban he was the same mysterious, occasionally gracious figure which had first welcomed him to the magnificent hospitality of his house. There were days when he appeared to throw all restraint aside and really to desire this lad's affection as though he had been his own son—other days when he shrank from him, afraid to speak lest he should name him the author of his vast misfortunes. And now, as it were in an instant, he had cast both restraint and fear aside, put on his ancient bonhomie and given full rein to that natural affection of which he was very capable. Even the servants remarked a change so welcome and so manifest.

Let it be written down as foreordained in the story of this unhappy house, that in like measure as the father recovered his self-possession, so, as swiftly, had the daughter journeyed to the confines of tragedy and learned there some of those deeper lessons which the world is ever ready to teach. Anna returned from Henley so greatly changed that her altered appearance rarely escaped remark. Defiant, reckless, almost hysterical, her unnatural gaiety could not cloak her anxiety nor all her artifice disguise it. If she had told the truth, it would have been to admit a position, not only of humiliation but of danger. A whim, by which she would have amused herself, had created a situation from which she could not escape. She loved Alban and had not won his love. The subtle

antagonist against whom she played had turned her weapons adroitly and caught her in the deadly meshes of his fatal net. Not for an instant since she stood upon the lawn at Ascot and witnessed the defeat of her great horse Lodestar had she ceased to tell herself that the world pointed the finger at her and held up her name to scorn. "They say that I cheated them," she would tell herself and that estimate of the common judgment was entirely true.

It had been a great race upon a brilliant day of summer. Alban had accompanied her to the enclosure and feasted his eyes upon that rainbow scene, so amazing in its beauty, so bewildering in its glow of color that it stood, to his untrained imagination, for the whole glory of the world. Of the horses or their meaning he knew nothing at all. This picture of radiant women, laughing, feasting, flirting at the heart of a natural forest; the vast concourse of spectators—the thousand hues of color flashing in the sunshine, the stands, the music, the royal procession, the superbly caparisoned horses, the State carriages—what a spectacle it was, how far surpassing all that he had been led to expect of Money and its kingdom. Let Anna move excitedly amid the throng, laughing with this man, changing wit with another—he was content just to watch the people, to reflect upon their happy lives, it may be to ask himself what justification they had when the children were wanting bread and the great hosts of the destitute lay encamped beyond the pale. Such philosophy, to be sure, had but a short shrift on such a day. The intoxication of the scene quickly ran hot in his veins and he surrendered to it willingly. These were hours to live, precious every one of them—and who would not worship the gold which brought them, who would not turn to it as to the lodestar of desire?

And then the race! Anna had talked of nothing else since they set out in the motor to drive over to the course. Her anger against Willy Forrest appeared to be forgotten for the time being—he, on his part, eying Alban askance, but making no open complaint against him, met her in the paddock and repeated his assurances that Lodestar could not lose.

"They run him down to evens, Anna," he said, "and precious lucky we were to get the price we did. There'll be some howls to-night, but what's that to us? Are we a philanthropic society, do we live to endow the multitude? Not much, by no means, oh dear, no. We live to make an honest bit—and we'll make it to-day if ever we did. You go easy and don't butt in. I've laid all that can be got at the price and the rest's best in your pocket. You'll want a bit for the other races—eh, what? You didn't come here to knit stockings, now did you, Anna?"

She laughed with him and returned to see the race. Her excitement gave her a superb color, heightened her natural beauty and turned many admiring eyes upon her. To Alban she whispered that she was going to make a fortune, and he watched her curiously, almost afraid for himself and for her. When the great thrill passed over the stands and "they're off" echoed almost as a sound of distant thunder, he crept closer to her as though to share the excitement of which she was mistress. The specks upon the green were nothing to him—those dots of color moving swiftly across the scene, how odd to think that they might bring riches or beggary in their train! This he knew to be the stern fact, and when men began to shout hoarsely, to press together and crane their necks, when that very torrent of sound which named the distance arose, he looked again at Anna and saw that she was smiling. "She has won," he said, "she will be happy to-night."

The horses passed the post in a cluster. Alban, unaccustomed to the objects of a race-course, had not an eye so well trained that he could readily distinguish the colors or locate with certainty the position of the "pink—green sleeves—white cap"—the racing jacket of "Count Donato," as Anna was known to the Jockey Club. He could make out nothing more than a kaleidoscope of color changing swiftly upon a verdant arena, this and an unbroken line of people stretching away to the very confines of the woodlands and a rampart wall of stands and boxes and tents. For him there were no niceties of effort and of counter-effort. The jockeys appeared to be so many little monkeys clinging to the necks of wild chargers who rolled in their distress as though to shake off the imps tormenting them. The roar of voices affrighted him—he could not understand that lust of gain which provoked the mad outcry, the sudden forgetfulness of self and dignity and environment, the absolute surrender to the desire of victory. Nor was the succeeding silence less mysterious. It came as the hush in an interval of tempests. The crowd drew back from the railings and moved about as quietly as though nothing of any consequence had happened. Anna herself, smiling still, stood just where she was; but her back was now toward the winning-post and she seemed to have forgotten its existence.

"Do you know," she said very slowly, "my horse has lost."

"What does that mean?" Alban asked with real earnestness.

She laughed again, looking about her a little wildly as though to read something of the story upon other faces.

"What does it mean—oh, lots of things. I wonder if we could get a cup of tea,

Alban—I think I should like one."

He said that he would see and led her across the enclosure toward the marquee. As they went a sybilant sound of hissing arose. The "Alright" had come from the weighing-in room and the people were hissing the winner. Presently, from the far side of the course, a louder outcry could be heard. That which the men in the gray frock-coats were telling each other in whispers was being told also by the mob in stentorian tones. "The horse was pulled off his feet," said the knowing ones; "they ought to warn the whole crowd off."

Anna heard these cries and began dimly to understand them. She knew that Willy Forrest had done this in return for the slight she had put upon him at Henley. He had named his own jockey for the race and chosen one who had little reputation to lose. Between them they would have reason to remember the Royal Hunt Cup for many a day. Their gains could have been little short of thirty thousand pounds—and of this sum, Anna owed them nearly five thousand.

She heard the people's cries and the sounds affrighted her. Not an Englishwoman, none the less she had a good sense of personal honor, and her pride was wounded, not only because of this affront but that a strange people should put it upon her. Had it been any individual accusation, she would have faced it gladly—but this intangible judgment of the multitude, the whispering all about her, the sidelong glances of the men and the open contempt of the women, these she could not meet.

"Let us go back to the bungalow to tea," she exclaimed suddenly, as though it were but a whim of the moment; "this place makes my head ache. Let us start now and avoid the crush. Don't you think it would be a great idea, Alban?"

He said that it would be—but chancing to look at her while she spoke, he perceived the tears gathering in her eyes and knew that she had suffered a great misfortune.

* * * * *

Richard Gessner knew nothing of Anna's racing escapades, nor had he any friend who made it his business to betray them. The day was rare when he made an inquiry concerning her amusements or the manner of them. Women were in his eyes just so many agreeable decorations for the tables at which men dined. Of their mental capacity he had no opinion whatever, and it was a common jest for him to declare their brain power consistently inferior to that of the male animal.

"There has been no woman financial genius since the world began," he would observe, and if those who contradicted him named the arts, he waved them aside. "What is art when finance is before us?" That Anna should amuse herself was well and proper. He wished her to marry well that he might have spoken of "my daughter, Lady Anna"—not with pride as most men would speak, but ironically as one far above such petty titles and able from his high place to deride them.

Of her daily life, it must be confessed that he knew very little. A succession of worthy if incompetent dependants acted the chaperones part for him and satisfied his conscience upon that score. He heard of her at this social function or at that, and was glad that she should go. Men would say, "There's a catch for you—old Gessner's daughter; he must be worth a million if he's worth a penny." Her culpable predisposition toward that pleasant and smooth-tongued rascal, Willy Forrest, annoyed him for the time being but was soon forgotten. He believed that the man would not dare to carry pursuit farther, and if he did, the remedy must be drastic.

"I will buy up his debts and send him through the Court," Gessner said. "If that does not do, we must find out his past and see where we can have him. My daughter may not marry as I wish, but if she marries a jockey, I have done with her." And this at hazard, though he had not the remotest idea who Forrest really was and had not taken the trouble to find out. When the man ceased to visit "Five Gables" he forgot him immediately. He was the very last person in all London whom he suspected when Anna, upon the day following his return from Paris, asked that they might have a little talk together and named the half-hour immediately before dinner for that purpose. He received her in his study, whither Fellows had already carried him a glass of sherry and bitters, and being in the best of good humor, he frankly confessed his pleasure that she should so appeal to him.

"Come in, Anna, come in, my dear. What's the matter now—been getting into mischief? Oh, you girls—always the same story, a man or a milliner, and the poor old father to get you out of it. What is it this time—Paquin or Worth? Don't mind me, Anna. I can always live in a cottage on a pound a week. The doctor says I should be the better for it. Perhaps I should. Half the complaints we suffer from are just 'too much.' Think that over and add it up. You look very pale, my girl. You're not ill, are you?"

The sudden change of tone occurred as Anna advanced into the light and seated herself in the bow-window overlooking the rose garden. She wore a delicate

skirt of pink satin below a superb gown of chiffon and real lace. A single pink rose decorated her fine black hair which she had coiled upon her neck to betray a shapely contour of dazzlingly white skin beneath it. Her jewels were few but remarkable. The pearls about her neck had been called bronze in tint and were perfect in their shape. She carried a diamond bracelet upon her right arm, and its glitter flashed about her as a radiant spirit of the riches whose emblems she wore. The pallor of her face was in keeping with the picture. The wild black eyes seemed alight with all the fires of tragedy unconfessed.

"I am not ill, father," she said, "but there is something about which I must speak to you."

"Yes, yes, Anna—of course. And this is neither Paquin nor Worth, it appears. Oh, you little rogue. To come to me like this—to come to your poor old father and bring him a son-in-law for dinner. Ha, ha,—I'll remember that—a son-in-law to dinner. Well, I sha'n't eat him, Anna, if he's all right. It wouldn't be Alban Kennedy now?"

He became serious in an instant, putting the question as though his favor depended upon her answer in the negative. Anna, however, quite ignored the suggestion when she replied.

"I came to speak to you about Ascot, father—"

"About Ascot—who's Ascot?"

"The races at Ascot. I ran a horse there and lost five thousand pounds."

"What—you lost—come, Anna, my dear child—you lost—think of it again—you lost fifty pounds? And who the devil took you there, I want to know—who's been playing the fool? I don't agree with young girls betting. I'll have none of that sort of thing in this house. Just tell him so—whoever he is. I'll have none of it, and if it's that—"

He broke off at the words, arrested in his banter by the sudden memory of a name. As in a flash he perceived the truth. The man Forrest was at the bottom of this.

"Now be plain with me," he cried, "you've seen Willy Forrest again and this is his doing. Yes or no, Anna? Don't you tell me a lie. It's Forrest—he took you to Ascot?"

She smiled at his anger.

"I ran a horse named Lodestar under the name of Count Donato. I believed that he would win and he lost. That's the story, father. Why drag any names into it?"

He regarded her, too amazed to speak. His daughter, this bit of a schoolgirl as he persisted in calling her, she had run a race-horse in her own name? What a thing to hear! But was it an evil thing. The girl had plenty of courage certainly. Very few would have had the pluck to do it at all. Of course it was unlucky that she had not won—but, after all, that could soon be put straight.

"You ran a race-horse—but who trained it for you? where did you keep it? Why did I know nothing about it? Look here, Anna, this isn't dealing very fair with me. I have never denied you any pleasure—you know I haven't. If you wanted to play this game, why couldn't you have come to me and told me so? I wouldn't have denied you—but five thousand; you're not serious about that—you don't mean to say that you lost five thousand pounds?"

"I lost five thousand pounds, father—and I must pay the money. They will call me a cheat if I do not. It must be paid on Monday—Willy says so—"

He turned upon her with a shout that was almost a roar. She knew in an instant how foolish she had been.

"Willy Forrest—did you lose the money to him? Come, speak out. I shall get at the truth somehow—did you lose the money to him?"

"I lost it through him—he made the bets for me."

"Then I will not pay a penny of it if it sends you to prison. Not a penny as I'm a living man."

She heard him calmly and delivered her answer as calmly.

"I shall marry him if you do not," she said.

Gessner stood quite still and watched her face closely. It had grown hard and cold, the face of a woman who has taken a resolution and will not be turned from it.

"You will marry Forrest?" he asked quietly.

"I shall marry him and he will pay my debts."

"He—he hasn't got two brass pieces to rub together. He's a needy out-at-elbow adventurer. Do you want to know who William Forrest is—well, my detectives shall tell me in the morning. I'll find out all about him for you. And you'd marry him! Well, my lady, there you'll do as you please. I've done with a daughter who tells me that to my face. Go and marry him. Live in a kennel. But don't come to me for a bone, don't think I'm to be talked over, because that's not my habit. If you choose such a man as that—"

"I do not choose him. There are few I would not sooner marry. I am thinking of my good name—of our good name. If I marry Willy Forrest, they will say that I helped to cheat the public. Do you not know that it is being said already. The horse was pulled—I believe that I am not to be allowed to race again. Poor Mr. Farrier is terribly upset. They say that we were all cheats together. What can I do, father? If I pay the money and they know that we lost it, that is a good answer to them. If I do not, Willy is probably the one man who can put matters straight and I shall marry him."

She rose as though this was the end of the argument. Her words, lightly spoken, were so transparently honest that the shrewd man of business summed up the whole situation in an instant. The mere possibility that his name should be mixed up with a racing scandal staggered him by its dangers and its absurdity. Anger against his daughter became in some measure compassion. Of course she was but a woman and a clever charlatan had entrapped her.

"Sit down—sit down," he said bluffly, motioning her back to her seat. "It is perfectly clear that this William Forrest of yours is a rogue, and as a rogue we must treat him. I am astonished at what you tell me. It is a piece of nonsense, women's sense as ridiculous as the silly business which is responsible for it. Of course you must pay them the money. I will do the rest, Anna. I have friends who will quickly put that matter straight—and if your rogue finds his way to a race-course again, he is a very lucky man. Now sit down and let me speak to you in my turn, Anna. I want you to speak about Alban—I want to hear how you like him. He has now been with us long enough for us to know something about him. Let us see if your opinion agrees with mine."

His keen scrutiny detected a flush upon her face while he asked the question and

he understood that all he had suspected had been nothing but the truth. Anna had come to love this open-minded lad who had been forced upon them by such an odd train of circumstances; her threats concerning Willy Forrest were the merest bravado. Gessner would have trembled at the knowledge a week ago, but to-night it found him singularly complacent. He listened to Anna's response with the air of a light-hearted judge who condemned a guilty prisoner out of her own mouth.

"Alban Kennedy has many good qualities," she said. "I think he is very worthy of your generosity."

"Ah, you like him, I perceive. Let us suppose, Anna, that my intentions toward him were to go beyond anything I had imagined—suppose, being no longer under any compulsion in the matter, the compulsion of an imaginary obligation which does not exist, I were still to consider him as my own son. Would you be surprised then at my conduct?"

"It would not surprise me," she said. "You have always wished for a son. Alban is the most original boy of his age I have ever met. He is clever and absurdly honest. I don't think you would regret any kindness you may show to him."

"And you yourself?"

"What have I to do with it, father?"

"It might concern you very closely, Anna."

"In what way, father?"

"In the only way which would concern a woman. Suppose that I thought of him as your husband?"

She flushed crimson.

"Have you spoken to him on the matter?"

"No, but being about to speak to him—after dinner to-night."

"I should defer my opinion until that has happened."

He laughed as though the idea of it amused him very much.

"Of course, he will have nothing to do with us, Anna. What is a fortune to such a fine fellow? What is a great house—and I say it—a very beautiful wife? Of

course, he will refuse us. Any boy would do that, especially one who has been brought up in Union Street. Now go and look for him in the garden. I must tell Geary to have that cheque drawn out—and mind you, if I meet that fellow Forrest, I will half kill him just to show my good opinion of him. This nonsense must end to-night. Remember, it is a promise to me."

She shrugged her shoulders and left the room with slow steps. Gessner, still smiling, turned up a lamp by his writing-table and took out his cheque-book.

CHAPTER XVIII

FATE IRONICAL

They were a merry party at the dinner-table, and the Reverend Silas Geary amused them greatly by his discussion of that absorbing topic, is golf worth playing? He himself, good man, deplored the fact that several worthy persons who, otherwise, would have been working ten or twelve hours a day as Cabinet ministers, deliberately toiled in the sloughs and pits of the golf course.

"The whole nation is chasing a little ball," he said; "we deplore the advance of Germany, but, I would ask you, how does the German spend his day, what are his needs, where do his amusements lie? There is a country for you—every man a soldier, every worker an intellect. In England nowadays our young fellows seem to try and find out how little they can do. We live for minimums. We are only happy when we have struck a bat with a ball and it has gone far. We reserve our greatest honors for those who thus excel."

Alban ventured to say that beer seemed to be the recreation of the average German and insolence his amusement. He confessed that the Germans beat his own people by hard work; but he asked, is it really a good thing that work should be the beginning and the end of all things? He had been taught at school that the supreme beauty of life lay in things apart and chiefly in a man's own soul. To which Gessner himself retorted that a woman's soul was what the writer probably meant.

"We have let civilization make us what we are," the banker said shrewdly, "and now we complain of her handiwork. Write what you like about it, money and love are the only two things left in the world to-day. The story has always been the same, but people did not read it so often formerly. There have always been ambition, strife, struggle, suffering—why should the historians trouble to tell of them? You yourself, Alban, would be a worker if the opportunity came to you. I have foreseen that from the first moment I met you. If you were interested, you would outdo the Germans and beat them both with your head and your hands. But it will be very difficult to interest you. You would need some great stimulus, and in your case it would be ambition rather than its rewards."

Alban replied that a love of power was probably the strongest influence in the world.

"We all hate work," he said, repeating his favorite dictum, "I don't suppose there is one man in a thousand who would do another day's work unless he were compelled. The success of Socialism in our time is the belief that it will glorify idleness and make it real. The agitators themselves never work. They have learned the rich men's secret—I have heard them preaching the dignity of labor a hundred times, but I never yet saw one wheeling a barrow. The poor fellows who listen to them think that you have only got to pass a few acts of Parliament to be happy forever after. I pity them, but how are you to teach them that the present state of things is just—and if it is not just, why should you wish it to last?"

Gessner could answer that. A rich man himself, all that concerned the new doctrines was of the profoundest interest to him.

"The present state of things is the only state of things—in the bulk," he said; "it is as old as the world and will go on as long as the world. We grumble at our rich men, but those who have amassed their own fortunes are properly the nation's bankers. Consider what a sudden gift of money would mean to the working-men of England to-day—drunkenness, crime, debauchery. You can legislate to improve the conditions of their lives, but to give them creative brains is beyond all legislation. And I will tell you this—that once you have passed any considerable socialistic legislation for this kingdom of Great Britain, you have decided her destiny. She will in twenty years be in the position of Holland—a country that was but never will be again."

No one disputed the proposition, for no one thoroughly understood it. Alban had not the courage to debate his pet theorems at such a time, and the parson was too intent upon denouncing the national want of seriousness to enter upon such abstruse questions as the banker would willingly have discussed. So they fell back upon athletics again, and were busy with football and cricket until the time came for Anna to withdraw and leave them to their cigars. Silas Geary, quickly imitating her, waited but for a glass of port before he made his excuses and departed, as he said, upon a "parochial necessity."

"We will go to the Winter Garden," Gessner said to Alban when they were alone —"I will see that Fellows takes our coffee there. Bring some cigarettes, Alban—I wish to have a little private talk with you."

Alban assented willingly, for he was glad of this opportunity to say much that he

had desired to say for some days past. The night had turned very hot and close, but the glass roof of the Winter Garden stood open and they sat there almost as in the open air, the great palms and shrubs all about them and many lights glowing cunningly amid the giant leaves. As earlier in the evening, so now Gessner was in the best of spirits, laughing at every trivial circumstance and compelling his guest to see how kindly was his desposition toward him.

"We shall be comfortable here," he said, "and far enough away from the port wine to save me self-reproach to-morrow. I see that you drink little, Alban. It is wise—all those who have the gout will speak of your wisdom. We drink because the wine is there, not because we want it. And then in the morning, we say, how foolish. Come now, light another cigarette and listen to me. I have great things to talk about, great questions to ask you. You must listen patiently, for this concerns your happiness—as closely perhaps as anything will concern it as long as you live."

He did not continue immediately, seeing the footman at his elbow with the coffee. Alban, upon his part, lighted a cigarette as he had been commanded, and waited patiently. He thought that he knew what was coming and yet was afraid of the thought. Anna's sudden passion for him had been too patent to all the world that he should lightly escape its consequences. Indeed, he had never waited for any one to speak with the anxiety which attended this interval of service. He thought that the footman would never leave them alone.

"Now," said Gessner at last, "now that those fellows are gone we can make ourselves comfortable. I shall be very plain, my lad—I shall not deceive you again. When you first came to my house, I did not tell you the truth—I am going to tell it to you to-night, for it is only right that you should know it."

He stirred his coffee vigorously and puffed at his cigar until it glowed red again. When he resumed he spoke in brief decisive sentences as though forbidding question or contradiction until he had finished.

"There is a fellow-countryman of mine—you know him and know his daughter. He believes that I am under some obligation to him and I do not contradict him. When we met in London, many years after the business transaction of which he complains, I asked him in what way I could be of service to him or to his family, as the case might be. He answered that he wanted nothing for himself, but that any favor I might be disposed to show should be toward his daughter and to you. I took it that you were in love with the girl and would marry her. That was what I

was given to believe. At the same time, this fellow Boriskoff assured me that you were well educated, of a singularly independent character, and well worthy of being received into this house. I will not deny that the fellow made very much of this request, and that it was put to me with certain alternatives which I considered impertinent. You, however, had no part in that. You came here because the whole truth was not told to you—and you remained because my daughter wished it. There I do not fear contradiction. You know yourself that it is true and will not contradict me. As the time went on, I perceived that you had established a claim to my generosity such as did not exist when first you came here—the claim of my affection and of my daughter's. This, I will confess, has given me more pleasure than anything which has happened here for a long time. I have no son and I take it as the beneficent work of Providence that one should be sent to me as you were sent. My daughter would possibly have married a scoundrel if the circumstances had been otherwise. So, you see, that while you are now established here by right of our affection, I am rewarded twofold for anything I may have done for you. Henceforth this happy state of things must become still happier. I have spoken to Anna to-night, and I should be very foolish if I could not construe her answer rightly. She loves you, my lad, and will take you for her husband. It remains for you to say that your happiness shall not be delayed any longer than may be reasonable."

It need scarcely be said with what surprise Alban listened to this lengthy recital. Some part of the truth had already been made known to him—but this fuller account could not but flatter his vanity while it left him silent in his amazement and perplexity. Richard Gessner, he understood, had always desired a brilliant match for Anna, and had sought an alliance with some of the foremost English families. If he abandoned these ambitions, a shrewd belief in the impossibility lay at the root of his determination. Anna would never marry as he wished. Her birthright and her Eastern blood forbade it. She would be the child of whim and of passion always, and it lay upon him to avert the greater evil by the lesser. Alban in a vague way understood this, but of his own case he could make little. What a world of ease and luxury and delight these few simple words opened up to him. He had but to say "yes" to become the ultimate master of this man's fortune, the possessor of a heritage which would have been considered fabulous but fifty years ago. And yet he would not say "yes." It was as though some unknown power restrained him, almost as though his own brain tricked him. Of Anna's sudden passion for him he had no doubt whatever. She was ready and willing to yield her whole self to him and would, it might be, make him a devoted wife. None the less, the temptation found him vacillating and incapable

even of a clear decision. Some voice of the past called to him and would not be silenced. Maladroitly, he gave no direct reply, but answered the question by another.

"Did Paul Boriskoff tell you that I was about to marry his daughter, Mr. Gessner?"

"My dear lad, what Paul Boriskoff said or did can be of little interest to you or me to-night. He is no longer in England, let me tell you. He left for Poland three days ago."

"Then you saw him or heard from him before he left?"

"Not at all. The less one sees or hears from that kind of person the better. You know the fellow and will understand me. He is a firebrand we can well do without. I recommended him to go to Poland and he has gone. His daughter, I understand, is being educated at Warsaw. Let me advise you to forget such acquaintances—they are no longer of any concern to either of us."

He waved his hand as though to dismiss the subject finally; but his words left Alban strangely ill at ease.

"Old Paul is a fanatic," he said presently, "but a very kindly one. I think he is very selfish where his daughter is concerned, but he loves his country and is quite honest in his opinions. From what I have heard in Union Street, he is very unwise to go back to Poland. The Russian authorities must be perfectly well aware what he has done in London, and are not likely to forget it. Yes, indeed, I am sorry that he has been so foolish."

He spoke as one who regretted sincerely the indiscretions of a friend and would have saved him from them. Gessner, upon his side, desired as little talk of the Boriskoffs as might be. If he had told the truth, he knew that Alban Kennedy would walk out of his house never to return. For it had been his own accomplices who had persuaded old Paul to return to Poland—and the Russian police were waiting for him across the frontier. Any hour might bring the news of his arrest. The poor fanatic who babbled threats would be under lock and key before many hours had passed, on his way to Saghalin perhaps—and his daughter might starve if she were obstinate enough. All this was in Gessner's mind, but he said nothing of it. His quick perception set a finger upon Alban's difficulty and instantly grappled with it.

"We must do what we can for the old fellow," he said lightly, "I am already paying for the daughter's education and will see to her future. You would be wise, Alban, to cut all those connections finally. I want you to take a good place in the world. You have a fine talent, and when you come into my business, as I propose that you shall do, you will get a training you could not better in Europe. Believe me, a financier's position is more influential in its way than that of kings. Here am I living in this quiet way, rarely seen by anybody, following my own simple pleasures just as a country gentleman might do, and yet I have but to send a telegram over the wires to make thousands rich or to ruin them. You will inherit my influence as you will inherit my fortune. When you are Anna's husband, you must be my right hand, acting for me, speaking for me, learning to think for me. This I foresee and welcome—this is what I offer you to-night. Now go to Anna and speak to her for yourself. She is waiting for you in the drawing-room and you must not tease her. Go to her, my dear boy, and say that which I know she wishes to hear."

He did not doubt the issue—who would have done? Standing there with his hand upon Alban's shoulder, he believed that he had found a son and saved his daughter from the peril of her heritage.

So is Fate ironical. For as they talked, Fellows appeared in the garden and announced the Russian, who carried to Hampstead tidings of a failure disastrous beyond any in the eventful story of this man's life.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PLOT HAS FAILED

The Russian appeared to be a young man, some thirty years of age perhaps. His dress was after the French fashion. He wore a shirt with a soft embroidered front and a tousled black cravat which added a shade of pallor to his unusually pale face. When he spoke in the German tongue, his voice had a pleasant musical ring, even while it narrated the story of his friend's misfortune.

"We have failed, mein Heir," he said, "I come to you with grievous news. We have failed and there is not an hour to lose."

Gessner heard him with that self-mastery to which his whole life had trained him. Betraying no sign of emotion whatever, he pulled a chair toward the light and invited the stranger to take it.

"This is my young kinsman," he said, introducing Alban who still lingered in the garden; "you have heard of him, Count." And then to Alban, "Let me present you to my very old friend, Count Zamoyaki. He is a cavalry soldier, Alban, and there is no finer rider in Europe."

Alban took the outstretched hand and, having exchanged a word with the stranger, would have left the place instantly. This, however, Count Zamoyski himself forbade. Speaking rapidly to Gessner in the German tongue, he turned to the lad presently and asked him to remain.

"Young heads are wise heads sometimes," he said in excellent English, "you may be able to help us, Mr. Kennedy. Please wait until we have discussed the matter a little more fully."

To this the banker assented by a single inclination of his head.

"As you say, Count—we shall know presently. Please tell me the story from the beginning."

The Count lighted a cigarette, and sinking down into the depths of a monstrous arm-chair, he began to speak in smooth low tones—a tragedy told almost in whispers; for thus complacently, as the great Frenchman has reminded us, do we

bear the misfortunes of our neighbors.

"I bring news both of failure and of success," he began, "but the failure is of greater moment to us. Your instructions to my Government, that the Boriskoffs, father and daughter, were an embarrassment to you which must be removed, have been faithfully interpreted and acted upon immediately. The father was arrested at Alexandrovf Station, as I promised that he should be—the police have visited the school in Warsaw where the daughter was supposed to reside—this also as I promised you—but their mission has been in vain. So you see that while Paul Boriskoff is now in the old prison at Petersburg, the daughter is heaven knows where, which I may say is nowhere for our purpose. That we did not complete the affair is our misfortune. The girl, we are convinced, is still in Warsaw, but her friends are hiding her. Remember that the police knew the father, but that the daughter is unknown to them. These Polish girls—pardon me, I refer to the peasant classes—are as alike as two roses on a bush. We shall do nothing until we establish identity—and how that is to be done, I do not pretend to say. If you can help us—and it is very necessary for your own safety to do so—you have not a minute to lose. We should act at once, I say, without the loss of a single hour."

Thus did this man of affairs, one who had been deep in many a brave intrigue, make known to the man who had employed him the supreme misfortune of their adventure. Had he said, "Your life is in such peril that you may not have another hour to live," it would have been no more than the truth. Their plot had failed and the story of it was abroad. This had he come from Paris to tell—this was the news that Richard Gessner heard with less apparent emotion than though one had told him of the pettiest event of a common day.

"The matter has been very badly bungled," he said. "I shall write to General Trepoff and complain of it. Do you not see how inconvenient this is? If the girl has escaped, she will be sheltered by the Revolutionaries, and if she knows my story, she will tell it to them. I may be followed here—to this very house. You know that these people stick at nothing. They would avenge this man's liberty whatever the price. What remains to discover is the precise amount of her knowledge. Does she know my name, my story? You must find that out, Zamoyski—there is not an hour to lose, as you say."

He repeated his fears, pacing the room and smoking incessantly. The whole danger of a situation is not usually realized upon its first statement, but every instant added to this man's apprehensions and brought the drops of sweat anew

to his forehead. He had planned to arrest both Boriskoff and his daughter. The Russian Government, seeking the financial support of his house, fell in readily with his plans and commanded the police to assist him. Paul Boriskoff himself had been arrested at the frontier station upon an endeavor to return to Poland. His daughter Lois, warned in some mysterious manner, had fled from the school where she was being educated and put herself beyond the reach of her father's enemies. This was the simple story of the plot. But God alone could tell what the price of failure might be.

"It is very easy to say what we must do," the Count observed, "the difficulties remain. Identify this girl for us among the twenty thousand who answer to her description in Warsaw, and I will undertake that the Government shall deal well by her. But who is to identify her? Where is your agent to be found? Name him to me and the task begins to-night. We can do nothing more. I say again that my Government has done all in its power. The rest is with you, Herr Gessner, to direct us where we have failed."

Gessner made no immediate answer. Perhaps he was about to admit the difficulties of the Count's position and to agree that identification was impossible, when suddenly his glance fell upon Alban, waiting, as he had asked, until the interview should be done. And what an inspiration was that—what an instantaneous revelation of possibilities. Let this lad go to Warsaw and he would discover Lois Boriskoff quickly enough. The girl had been in love with him and would hold her tongue at his bidding. As in a flash, he perceived this spar which should save him, and clutched at it. Let the lad go to Warsaw—let him be the agent. If the police arrested the girl after all—well, that would be an accident which he might regret, but certainly would not seek to prevent. A man whose life is imperilled must be one in ten thousand if any common dictates of faith or conduct guide him. Richard Gessner had a fear of death so terrible that he would have dared the uttermost treachery to save himself.

"Count," he exclaimed suddenly, "your agent is here, in this room. He will go to Warsaw at your bidding. He will find the girl."

The Count, who knew something of Alban's story already, received the intimation as though he had expected it.

"It was for that I asked him to wait. I have been thinking of it. He will go to Warsaw and tell the lady that she may obtain her father's liberty upon a condition. Let her make a direct appeal to the Government—and we will

consider it. Of course you intend an immediate departure—you are not contemplating a delay, Herr Gessner?"

"Delay—am I the man to delay? He shall go to-morrow by the first train."

A smile hovered upon the Count's face in spite of himself.

"In a week," he was saying to himself, "Lois Boriskoff shall be flogged in the Schusselburg."

In truth, the whip was the weapon he liked best—when women were to be schooled.

CHAPTER XX

ALBAN GOES TO WARSAW

Alban had never been abroad, and it would have been difficult for him to give any good account of his journey to Warsaw. The swiftly changing scenes, the new countries, the uproar and strife of cities, the glamour of the sea, put upon his ripe imagination so heavy a burden that he lived as one apart, almost as a dreamer who had forgotten how to dream. If he carried an abiding impression it was that of the miracle of travel and the wonders that travel could work. In twenty hours he had almost forgotten the existence of the England he had left. Chains of bondage fell from his willing shoulders. He felt as one released from a prison house to all the freedom of a boundless world.

And so at last he came to the beautiful city of Warsaw and his sterner task began. Here, as in London, that pleasant person Count Sergius Zamoyski reminded him how considerable was the service he could confer, not alone upon his patron but upon the friends of his evil days.

"It has all been a mistake," the Count would say with fine protestation of regret; "my Government arrested that poor old fellow Boriskoff, but it would gladly let him go. To begin with, however, we must have pledges. You know perfectly well that the man is a fanatic and will work a great mischief unless some saner head prevents it. We must find his daughter and see that she promises to hold her tongue concerning our friend at Hampstead. When that is done, we shall pack off the pair to London and they will carry a good round sum in their pockets. Herr Gessner is not the man to deal ungenerously with them—nor with you to whom he may owe so much."

He was a shrewd man of the world, this amiable diplomat, and who can wonder that so simple a youth as Alban Kennedy proved no match for him. Alban honestly believed that he would be helping both Gessner and his old friends, the Boriskoffs, should he discover little Lois' whereabouts and take her back to London. A very natural longing to see her once more added to the excitements of the journey. He would not have been willing to confess this interest, but it prompted him secretly so that he was often reminding himself of the old days when Lois had been his daily companion and their mutual confidences had been

their mutual pleasure. Just as a knight-errant of the old time might set out to seek his mistress, so did Alban go to Warsaw determined to succeed. He would find Lois in this whirling wonderland of delight, and, finding her, would return triumphant to their home.

Now, they arrived in Warsaw upon the Thursday evening after the memorable interview at Hampstead; and driving through the crowded streets of that pleasant city, by its squares, its gardens, and its famous Palaces, they descended at last at the door of the Hôtel de France; and there they heard the fateful news which the city itself had discussed all day and would discuss far into the night.

General Trubenoff, the new Dictator, had been shot dead at the gate of the Arsenal that very afternoon, men said, and the Revolutionaries were already armed and abroad. What would happen in the next few hours, heaven and the Deputy Governor alone could tell. Were this not sufficiently significant, the aspect of the great Square itself was menacing enough to awe the imagination even of the least impressionable of travellers. Excited crowds passed and repassed; Cossacks were riding by at the gallop—even the reports of distant rifle shots were to be heard and, from time to time, the screams and curses of those upon whose faces and shoulders the soldiers' whips fell so pitilessly.

In the great hall of the hotel itself pandemonium reigned. Afraid of the streets and of their homes, the wives and daughters of many officials fled hither as to a haven of refuge which would never be suspected. They crowded the passages, the staircases, the reception-rooms. They besieged the officers for news of that which befell without. Their terrified faces remained a striking tribute to the ferocity of their enemies and the reality of the peril.

Let it be said in justice that this majestic spectacle of tragedy found Alban Kennedy well prepared to understand its meaning. Had he told the truth he would have said that the mob orators of Union Street had prepared him for such a state of things as he now beheld. The Cossacks, were they not the Cossacks whom old Paul had called "the enemies of the human race?" The gilt-belarded generals, had he not seen them cast upon the screen in England and there heard their names with curses? Just as they had told him would be the case, so now he had stumbled upon autocracy face to face with its ancient enemy, the people. He saw the brutal Cossacks with their puny horses and their terrible whips parading beneath his balcony and treating all the poor folk with that insolence for which they are famous. He beheld the huddled crowds lifting white faces to the sky and cowering before the relentless lash. Not a whit had the patriot exiles in London

exaggerated these things or misrepresented them. Men, and women too, were struck down, their faces ripped by the thongs, their shoulders lacerated before his very eyes. And all this, as he vaguely understood, that freedom might be denied to this nation and justice withheld from her citizens. Truly had he travelled far since he left England a few short days ago.

Sergius Zamoyski had engaged a handsome suite of rooms upon the first floor of the magnificent modern hotel which looks down upon the Aleja Avenue, and to these they went at once upon their arrival. It was something at least to escape from the excited throngs below and to stand apart, alike from the rabble and the soldiers. Nor was the advantage of their situation to be despised; for they had but to step out upon the veranda before their sitting-rooms to command the whole prospect of the avenue, and there, at their will, to be observers of the conflict. To Sergius Zamoyski, familiar with such scenes, Warsaw offered no surprises whatever. To Alban it remained a city of whirlwind, and of human strife and suffering beyond all imagination terrible. He would have been content to remain out there upon that high balcony until the last trooper had ridden from the street and the last bitter cry been raised. The Count's invitation to dinner seemed grotesque in its reversion to commonplace affairs.

"All this is an every-day affair here now," that young man remarked with amazing nonchalance; "since the workmen began to shoot the patrols, the city has had no peace. I see that it interests you very much. You will find it less amusing when you have been in Russia for a month or two. Now let us dress and dine while we can. Those vultures down below will not leave a bone of the carcass if we don't take care."

He re-entered the sitting-room and thence the two passed to their respective dressing-rooms. An obsequious valet offered Alban a cigarette while he made his bath, and served a glass of an American cocktail. The superb luxury of these apartments did not surprise the young English boy as much as they might have done, for he had already stayed one night at an almost equally luxurious hotel in Berlin and so approached them somewhat familiarly; but the impression, oddly conceived and incurable, that he had no right to enjoy such luxuries and was in some way an intruder, remained. No one would have guessed this, the silent valet least of all; but in truth, Alban dressed shyly, afraid of the splendor and the richness; and his feet fell softly upon the thick Persian carpets as though some one would spy him out presently and cry, "Here is the guest who has not the wedding garment." In the dining-room, face to face with the gay Count, some of these odd ideas vanished; so that an observer might have named them material

rather than personal.

They dined with open windows, taking a zakuska in the Russian fashion in lieu of hors d'œuvre, and nibbling at smoked fish, caviar and other pickled mysteries. The Count's ability to drink three or four glasses of liquor with this prefatory repast astonished Alban not a little—which the young Russian observed and remarked upon.

"I am glad that I was born in the East," he said lightly, "you English have no digestions. When you have them, your climate ruins them. Here in Russia we eat and drink what we please—that is our compensation. We are Tartars, I admit—but when you remember that a Tartar is a person who owns no master, rides like a jockey, and drinks as much as he pleases with impunity, the imputation is not serious. None of you Western people understand the Russian. None of you understand that we are men in a very big sense of the word—men with none of your feminine Western weaknesses—great fighters, splendid lovers, fine drinkers. You preach civilization instead—and we point to your Whitechapel, your Belleville, your Bowery. Just think of it, your upper classes, as you yourselves admit, are utterly decadent, alike in brains and in morals; your middle classes are smug hypocrites—your lower classes starve in filthy dens. This is what you desire to bring about in Russia under the name of freedom and liberty. Do you wonder that those of us who have travelled will have none of it. Are you surprised that we fight your civilization with the whip—as we are fighting it outside at this moment. If we fail, very well, we shall know how to fail. But do not tell me that it would be a blessing for this country to imitate your institutions, for I could not believe you if you did."

He laughed upon it as though disbelieving his own words and, giving Alban no opportunity to reply, fell to talk of that which they must do and of the task immediately before them.

"We are better in this hotel than at the Palace Zamoyski, my kinsman's house," he said, "for here no inquisitive servants will trouble us. Naturally, you think it a strange thing to be brought to a great city like this and there asked to identify a face. Let me say that I don't think it will be a difficult matter. The Chief of the Police will call upon me in the morning and he will be able to tell us in how many houses it would be possible for the girl Lois Boriskoff to hide. We shall search them and discover her—and then learn what Herr Gessner desires to learn. I confess it amazes me that a man with his extraordinary fortune should have dealt so clumsily with these troublesome people. A thousand pounds paid

to them ten years ago might have purchased his security for life. But there's your millionaire all over. He will not pay the money and so he risks not only his fortune but his life. Let me assure you that he is not mistaken when he declares that there is no time to lose. These people, should they discover that he has been aiding my Government, would follow him to the ends of the earth. They may have already sent an assassin after him—it would be in accord with their practice to lose no time, and as you see they are not in a temper to procrastinate. The best thing for us to do is to speak of our business to no one. When we have discovered the girl, we will promise her father's liberty in return for her silence. Herr Gessner must now deal with these people once and for all—generously and finally. I see no other chance for him whatever."

Alban agreed to this, although he had some reservations to make.

"I know the Boriskoffs very well," he said, "and they are kindly people. We have always considered old Paul a bit of a madman, but a harmless one. Even his own countrymen in London laugh when he talks to them. I am sure he would be incapable of committing such a crime as you suggest; and as for his daughter, Lois, she is quite a little schoolgirl who may know nothing about the matter at all. Mr. Gessner undoubtedly owes Paul a great deal, and I should be pleased to see the poor fellow in better circumstances. But is it quite fair to keep him in prison just because you are afraid of what his daughter may say?"

"It is our only weapon. If we give him liberty, will he hold his tongue then? By your own admissions a louder talker does not exist. And remember that it may cost Herr Gessner many thousand pounds and many weeks of hard work to secure his liberty at all. Is he likely to undertake this while the daughter is at liberty and harbored among the ruffians of this city? He would be a madman to do so. I, who know the Poles as few of them know themselves, will tell you that they would sooner strike at those whom they call 'traitors in exile' than at their enemies round about us. If the girl has told them what she knows of Herr Gessner and his past, I would not be in his shoes to-night for a million of roubles heaped up upon the table. No, no, we have no time to lose—we owe it to him to act with great dispatch."

Alban did not make any immediate reply. Hopeful as the Count was, the difficulties of tracking little Lois down in such a city at such a time seemed to him well-nigh insuperable. He had seen hundreds of faces like hers as they drove through Warsaw that very afternoon. The monstrous crowd showed him types both of Anna and of Lois, and he wondered no longer at the resemblance he had

detected between them when he first saw Richard Gessner's daughter on the balcony of the house in St. James' Square. None the less, the excitements of the task continued to grow upon him. How would it all end, he asked impulsively. And what if they were too late after all and his friend and patron were to be the victim of old Boriskoff's vengeance? That would be terrible indeed—it would drive him from Lois' friendship forever.

All this was in his mind as the dinner drew toward a conclusion and the solemn waiters served them cigars and coffee. There had been some cessation of the uproar in the streets during the latter moments; but a new outcry arising presently, the Count suggested that they should return to the balcony and see what was happening.

"I would have taken you to the theatre," he said laughingly, "but we shall see something prettier here. They are firing their rifles, it appears. Do not let us miss the play when we can have good seats for nothing. And mind you bring that kummel, for it is the best in Europe."

They were just lighting the great arc lamps upon the avenue as the two emerged from the dining-room and took up their stations by the railing of the balcony. In the roadway below the spectacle had become superb in its weird drama and excited ferocity. Great crowds passed incessantly upon the broad pavements and were as frequently dispersed by the fiery Cossacks who rode headlong as though mad with the lust of slaughter. Holding all who were abroad to be their enemies, these fellows slashed with their brutal whips at every upturned face and had no pity even for the children. Alban saw little lads of ten and twelve years of age carried bleeding from the streets—he beheld gentle women cut and lashed until they fell dying upon the pavement—he heard the death-cry from many a human throat. Just as the exiles had related it, so the drama went, with a white-faced, terror-stricken mob for the people of its scene and these devils upon their little horses for the chief actors. When the troopers fell (and from time to time a bullet would find its billet and leave a corpse rolling in a saddle) this was but the signal for a new outburst, surpassing the old in its diabolical ferocity. A very orgy of blood and slaughter; a Carnival of whips cutting deep into soft white flesh and drawing from their victims cries so awful that they might have risen up from hell itself.

And in this crowd, among this people perhaps, little Lois Boriskoff must be looked for. Her friends would be the people's friends. Wayward as she was, a true child of the streets, Alban did not believe that she would remain at home

this night or consent to forego the excitements of a spectacle so wonderful. Nor in this was he mistaken, for he had been but a very few minutes upon the balcony when he perceived Lois herself looking up to him from the press below and plainly intimating that she had both seen and recognized him.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BOY IN THE BLUE BLOUSE

A sharp exclamation brought the Count to Alban's side.

"Lois is down there," Alban said, "I am sure of it—she waved to me just now. She was walking with a man in a dark blue blouse. I could not have been mistaken."

He was quite excited that he should have discovered her thus, and Sergius Zamoyski did not lag behind him in interest.

"Do you still see her?" he asked—"is she there now?"

"I cannot see her now—the soldiers drove the people back. Perhaps if we went down—"

The Count laughed.

"Even I could not protect you to-night," he exclaimed dryly, "no—whatever is to be done must be done to-morrow. But does not that prove to you what eyes and ears these people have. Here we left London as secretly as a man on a love affair. With the single exception of our friend at Hampstead, not a human being should have known of our departure or our destination. And yet we are not three hours in this place before this girl is outside our hotel, as well aware that we have arrived as we are ourselves. That is what baffles our police. They cannot contend with miracles. They are only human, and I tell you that these people are more than human."

Alban, still peering down into the press in the hope that he might see Lois' face again, confessed that he could offer no explanation whatever.

"They told me the same thing in London," he said, "but I did not believe them. Old Boriskoff used to boast that he knew of things which had happened in Warsaw before the Russian Government. They seem to have spies in every street and every house. If Lois' presence is not a coincidence—"

"My dear fellow, are you also a believer in coincidence—the idle excuse of men

who will not reason. Forgive me, but I think very little of coincidence. Just figure the chances against such a meeting as this. Would it not run into millions —your first visit to Warsaw; nobody expecting you; nobody knowing your name in the city—and here is the girl waiting under your window before you have changed your clothes. Oh, no, I will have nothing to do with coincidence. These people certainly knew that we had left England—they have been expecting us; they will do their best to baffle us. Yes, and that means that we run some danger. I must think of it—I must see the Chief of the Police to-night. It would be foolish to neglect all reasonable precautions."

Alban looked at him with surprise.

"None of those people will do me an injury," he exclaimed, "and you, Count, why should you fear them?"

The Count lighted a cigarette very deliberately. "There may be reasons," he said —and that was all.

Had he told the whole truth, revealed the secrets of his work during the last three years, Alban would have understood very well what those reasons were. A shrewder agent of the Government, a more discreet zealous official of the secret service, did not exist. His very bonhomie and good-fellowship had hitherto been his surest defence against discovery. Men spoke of him as the great gambler and a fine sportsman. The Revolutionaries had been persuaded to look upon him as their friend. Some day they would learn the truth—and then, God help him. Meanwhile, the work was well enough. He found it even more amusing than making love and a vast deal more exciting than big-game hunting.

"Yes," he repeated anon, "There may be reasons, but it is a little too late to remember them. I am sending over to the Bureau now. If the Chief is there, he will be able to help me. Of course, you will see or hear from this girl again. These people would deliver a letter if you locked yourself up in an iron safe. They will communicate with you in the morning and we must make up our minds what to do. That is why I want advice."

"If you take mine," said Alban quietly, "you will permit me to see her at once. I am the last person in all Warsaw whom Lois Boriskoff will desire to injure."

"Am I to understand, then—but no, it would be impossible. Forgive me even thinking of it. I had really imagined for a moment that you might be her lover."

Alban's face flushed crimson.

"She was my little friend in London—she will be the same in Warsaw, Count."

Count Sergius bowed as though he readily accepted this simple explanation and apologized for his own thoughts. A shrewd man of the world, he did not believe a word of it, however. These two, boy and girl together, had been daily associates in the slums of London. They had shared their earnings and their pleasures and passed for those who would be man and wife presently. This Richard Gessner had told him when they discussed the affair, and he remembered it to his great satisfaction. For if Alban were Lois Boriskoff's lover, then might he venture even where the police were afraid to go.

"I will talk it all over with the Chief," the Count exclaimed abruptly; "you have had a long day and are better in bed. Don't stand on any ceremony, but please go directly you feel inclined."

Alban did not demur for he was tired out and that was the truth of it. In his own room he recalled the question the Count had put to him and wondered that it had so distressed him. Why had his cheeks tingled and the words stumbled upon his lips because he had been called Lois Boriskoff's lover? It used not to be so when they walked Union Street together and all the neighbors regarded the engagement as an accomplished fact. He had never resented such a charge then —what had happened that he should resent it now? Was it the long weeks of temptation he had suffered in Anna Gessner's presence? Had the world of riches so changed him that any mention of the old time could make him ashamed? He knew not what to think—the blood rushed to his cheeks again and his heart beat quickly when he remembered that but for Count Sergius's visit to Hampstead, he might have been Anna's betrothed to-day.

In this he was, as ever, entirely candid with himself, neither condoning his faults nor accusing himself blindly. There had been nothing of the humbler realities of love in his relations with Richard Gessner's daughter; none of the superb spirit of self-sacrifice; none of those fine ideals which his boyhood had desired to set up. He had worshipped her beauty—so much he readily admitted; her presence had ever been potent to quicken his blood and claim the homage of his senses; but of that deeper understanding and mutual sympathy by which love is born she had taught him nothing. Why this should have been so, he could not pretend to say. Her father's riches and the glamour of the great house may have had not a little to do with it. Alban had always seemed to stand apart from all which the new

world showed to him. He felt that he had no title to a place there, no just claim at all to those very favors his patron thrust upon him so lavishly.

He was as a man escaped from a prison whose bars were of gold—a prison whereof the jailer had been a beautiful and capricious woman. Here in Warsaw he discovered a new world; but one that seemed altogether familiar. All this clamor of the streets, this going to and fro of people, the roar of traffic, the shriek of whistles, the ringing of bells—had he not known them all in London when Lois was his friend and old Paul his neighbor? There had been many Poles by Thrawl Street and the harsh music of their tongue came to him as an old friend. It is true that he was housed luxuriously, in a palace built for millionaires; but he had the notion that he would not long continue there and that a newer and a stranger destiny awaited him. This thought, indeed, he carried to his bedroom and slept upon at last. He would find Lois to-morrow and she would be his messenger.

There had still been excited crowds in the streets when he found his bedroom and a high balcony showed him the last phases of a weird pageant. Though it was then nearly midnight, Cossacks continued to patrol the avenue and the mob to deride them. By here and there, where the arc lamps illuminated the pavement, the white faces and slouching figures of the more obstinate among the Revolutionaries spoke of dogged defiance and an utter indifference to personal safety. Alban could well understand why the people had ventured out, but that they should have taken women and even young children with them astonished him beyond measure. These, certainly, could vindicate no principle when their flesh was cut by the brutal whips and the savage horses rode them down to emphasize the majesty of the Czar. Such sights he had beheld that afternoon and such were being repeated, if the terrible cries which came to his ears from time to time were true harbingers. Alban closed his windows at last for very shame and anger. He tried to shut the city's terrible voice from his ears. He wished to believe that his eyes had deceived him.

This would have been about one o'clock in the morning. When he awoke from a heavy sleep (and youth will sleep whatever the circumstance) the sun was shining into his rooms and the church-bells called the people to early Mass. An early riser, long accustomed to be up and out when the clock struck six, he dressed himself at once and determined to see something of Warsaw before the Count was about. This good resolution led him first to the splendid avenue upon which the great hotel was built, and here he walked awhile, rejoicing in his freedom and wondering why he had ever parted with it. Let a man have self-

reliance and courage enough and there is no city in all the world which may not become a home to him, no land among whose people he may not find friends, no government whose laws shall trouble him. Alban's old nomadic habits brought these truths to his mind again as he walked briskly down the avenue and filled his lungs with the fresh breezes of that sunny morning. Why should he return to the Count at all? What was Gessner's money to him now? He cared less for it than the stones beneath his feet; he would not have purchased an hour's command of a princely fortune for one of these precious moments.

He was not alone in the streets. The electric cars had already commenced to run and there were many soberly dressed work-people hurrying to the factories. It was difficult to believe that this place had been the scene of a civic battle yesterday, or to picture the great avenues, with their pretty trees, tall and stately houses and fine broad pavements, as the scene of an encounter bloody beyond all belief. Not a sign now remained of all this conflict. The dead had already been carried to the mortuaries; the prisoners were safe at the police-stations where, since sundown, the whips had been so busy that their lashes were but crimson shreds. True there were Cossacks at many a street corner and patrols upon some of the broader thoroughfares—but of Revolutionaries not a trace. These, after the patient habits of their race, would go to work to-day as though yesterday had never been. Not a tear would be shed where any other eye could see it—not a tear for the children whose voices were forever silent or the mothers who had perished that their sons might live. Warsaw had become schooled to the necessity of sacrifice. Freedom stood upon the heights, but the valley was the valley of the shadow of death.

Alban realized this in a dim way, for he had heard the story from many a platform in Whitechapel. Perhaps he had enough selfishness in his nature to be glad that the evil sights were hidden from his eyes. His old craving for journeying amid narrow streets came upon him here in Warsaw and held him fascinated. Knowing nothing of the city or its environment, he visited the castle, the barracks, the Saxon gardens, watched the winding river Vistula and the Praga suburb beyond, and did not fail to spy out the old town, lying beneath the guns of the fortress, a maze of red roofs and tortuous streets and alleys wherein the outcasts were hiding. To this latter he turned by some good instinct which seemed to say that he had an errand there. And here little Lois Boriskoff touched him upon the shoulder and bade him follow her—just as imagination had told him would be the case. She had come up to him so silently that even a trained ear might not have detected her footstep. Whence she came or how he could not

say. The street wherein they met was one of the narrowest he had yet discovered. The crazy eaves almost touched above his head—the shops were tenanted by Jews already awake and crying their merchandise. Had Alban been a traveller he would have matched the scene only in Nuremberg, the old German town. As it was, he could but stare open-mouthed.

Lois—was it Lois? The voice rang familiarly enough in his ears, the eyes were those pathetic, patient eyes he had known so well in London. But the black hair cut in short and silky curls about the neck, the blue engineer's blouse reaching to the knees, the stockings and shoes below—was this Lois or some young relative sent to warn him of her hiding-place? For an instant he stared at her amazed. Then he understood.

"Lois—it is Lois?" he said.

The girl looked swiftly up and down the street before she answered him. He thought her very pale and careworn. He could see that her hands were trembling while she spoke.

"Go down to the river and ask for Herr Petermann," she said almost in a whisper. "I dare not speak to you here, Alb dear. Go down to the river and find out the timber-yard—I shall be there when you come."

She ran from him without another word and disappeared in one of the rows which diverged from the narrow street and were so many filthy lanes in the possession of the scum of Warsaw. To Alban both her coming and her going were full of mystery. If Count Sergius had told him the truth, the Russian Government wished well not only to her but also to her father, the poor old fanatic Paul who was now in the prison at Petersburg. Why, then, was it necessary for her to appear in the streets of Warsaw disguised as a boy and afraid to exchange a single word with a friend from England. The truth astounded him and provoked his curiosity intolerably. Was Lois in danger then? Had the Count been lying to him? He could come to no other conclusion.

It was not difficult to find Herr Petermann's timber-yard, for many Englishmen found their way there and many a ship's captain from Dantzig had business with the merry old fellow whom Alban now sought out at Lois' bidding. The yard itself might have covered an acre of ground perhaps, bordering the river by a handsome quay and showing mighty stacks of good wood all ready for the barges or seasoning against next year's shipment. Two gates of considerable size admitted the lorries that went in from the town, and by them stood the wooden

hut at whose window inquiries must be made. Here Alban presented himself ten minutes after Lois had left him.

"I wish to see Herr Petermann," he said in English.

A young Jew clerk took up a scrap of paper and thrust it forward.

"To write your name, please, mein Herr."

Alban wrote his name without any hesitation whatever. The clerk called a boy, who had been playing by a timber stack, and dispatched him in quest of his chief.

"From Dantzig, mein Herr?" he asked.

"No," said Alban civilly, "from London."

"Ah," said the clerk, "I think it would be Dantzig. Lot of Englishes from Dantzig —you have not much of the woods in Engerland, mein Herr."

He did not expect a reply and immediately applied himself to the useful occupation of killing a blue-bottle with the point of his pen. Two or three lorries rolled in and out while Alban waited. He could see ships passing upon the river and hear the scream of a steam-saw from a shed upon his left hand. A soldier passed the gate, but hardly cast a glance at the yard. Five minutes must have elapsed before Herr Petermann appeared. He held the paper in a thin cadaverous hand as though quite unacquainted with his visitor's name and not at all curious to be enlightened.

"You are Mr. Kennedy," he said in excellent English.

"Yes," said Alban, "a friend of mine told me to come here."

"It would be upon the business of the English ship—ah, I should have remembered it. Please come to my office. I am sorry to have kept you waiting."

He was a short man and very fat, clean shaven and a thorough German in appearance. Dressed in a very dirty white canvas suit, he shuffled rather than walked across the yard, never once looking to the right hand or to the left and apparently oblivious of the presence of a stranger. This manner had befriended him through all the stormy days Warsaw had lately known. Even the police had no suspicion of him. Old fat Petermann, who hobnobbed with sailors—what had revolution to do with him!

"This way, mein Herr—yonder is my office. When I go to Dantzig by water my books go with me. That is very good for the health to live upon the water. Now please to cross the plank carefully, for what shall you say to me if you fall in? This is my *bureau de travail*—you will tell me how you like him by and by."

There were two barges of considerable size moored to the quay and a substantial plank bridged the abyss between the stone and the combings of the great hatchway. Herr Petermann went first, walking briskly in spite of his fat; Alban, no less adroit, followed with a lad's nimble foot and was upon the old fellow's heels when they stepped on board. The barges, he perceived, were fully laden and covered by heavy tarpaulins. Commodious cabins at the stern accommodated the crew—and into one of these Herr Petermann now turned, stooping as he went and crying to his guest to take care.

"It is rather dark, my friend, but you soon shall be accustomed to that. This is my private room, you see. In England you would not laugh at a man who works afloat, for you are all sailors. Now, tell me how you like it?"

The cabin certainly was beautifully furnished. Walls of polished wood had their adornment of excellent seascapes, many of them bought at the Paris salon. A bureau with delightful curves and a clock set at the apex above the writing-shelf pleased Alban immensely—he thought that he had seen nothing more graceful even at "Five Gables"; while the chair to match it needed no sham expert to declare its worth. The carpet was of crimson, without pattern but elegantly bordered. There were many shelves for books, but no evidence of commercial papers other than a great staring ledger which was the one eyesore.

"I like your room very much indeed," said Alban upon his swift survey—"not many people would have thought of this. We are all afraid of the damp in England, and if we talked of a floating office, people would think us mad." And then he added—"But you don't come here in winter, Herr Petermann—this place is no use to you then?"

Herr Petermann smiled as though he were well pleased.

"Every place has its uses sometimes," he rejoined a little vaguely, "we never know what is going to happen to us. That is why we should help each other when the occasion arises. You, of course, are visiting Warsaw merely as a tourist, Mr. Kennedy?"

"Indeed, no—I have come here to find a very old friend, the daughter—"

"No names, if you please, Mr. Kennedy. You have come here, I think you said, to find the son of a very old friend. What makes you suppose that I can help you?"

His change of tone had been a marvellous thing to hear—so swift, so masterful that Alban understood in a moment what strength of will and purpose lay hidden by this bland smile and benevolent manner. Herr Petermann was far from being the simple old fellow he pretended to be. You never could have named him that if you had heard him speak as he spoke those few stern words. Alban, upon his part, felt as though some one had slapped him upon the cheek and called him a fool.

"I am very sorry," he blundered—and then recovering himself, he said as honestly—"Is there any need to ask me for reasons? Are not our aims the same, Herr Petermann?"

"To sell wood, Mr. Kennedy?"

Alban was almost angry.

"I was walking down from the Castle," he began, but again the stern voice arrested him.

"Neither names nor history, if your please, Mr. Kennedy. We are here to do business together as two honest merchants. All that I shall have to ask you is your word, the word of an English gentleman, that nothing which transpires upon my premises shall be spoken of outside under any circumstances whatever."

"That is very readily given, Herr Petermann."

"Your solemn assurance?"

"My solemn assurance."

The old fellow nodded and smiled. He had become altogether benevolent once more and seemed exceedingly pleased with himself and everybody else.

"It is fortunate that you should have applied to me," he exclaimed very cheerily —"since you are thinking of taking a Polish servant—please do not interrupt me —since you are thinking of taking a Polish servant and of asking him to accompany you to England, by boat, if you should find the journey otherwise inconvenient—I merely put the idea to you—there is a young man in my

employment who might very honestly be recommended to your notice. Is it not lucky that he is here at this moment—on board this very barge, Mr. Kennedy?"

Alban looked about him astonished. He half expected to see Lois step out of one of the cupboards or appear from the recess beneath Herr Petermann's table. The amiable wood merchant enjoyed his perplexity—as others of his race he was easily amused.

"Ah, I see that I am troubling you," he exclaimed, "and really there is not much time to be lost. Let me introduce this amiable young man to you without delay, Mr. Kennedy. I am sure he will be very pleased to see you."

He stood up and went to the wall of the cabin nearest to the ship's bow. A panel cut in this gave access to the lower deck; he opened it and revealed a great empty hold, deftly covered by the tarpaulin and made to appear fully loaded to any one who looked at the barge from the shore.

"Here is your friend," he cried with huge delight of his own cleverness, "here is the young servant you are looking for, Mr. Kennedy. And mind," he added this in the same stern voice which had exacted the promise, "and mind, I have your solemn promise."

CHAPTER XXII

A FIGURE IN THE STRAW

A little light filtered down through the crevices and betrayed the secrets of that strange refuge in all their amazing simplicity. Here was neither costly furniture nor any adornment whatsoever. A thick carpet of straw, giving flecks of gold wherever the sunlight struck down upon it, had been laid to such a depth that a grown man might have concealed himself therein. A few empty bales stood here and there as though thrown down at hazard; there were coils of rope and great blocks of timber used by the stevedores who loaded the barges. But of the common things of daily life not a trace. No tables, no chairs, neither bed nor blanket adorn this rude habitation. Let a sergeant of police open his lantern there and the tousled straw would answer him in mockery. This, for a truth, had been the case. Little Lois could tell a tale of Cossacks on the barge, even of rifles fired down into the hold, and of a child's heart beating so quickly that she thought she must cry out for very pain of it. But that was before the men were told that the ship belonged to merry Herr Petermann. They went away at once then—to drink the old fellow's beer and to laugh with him.

That had been a terrible day and Lois had never forgotten it. Whenever old Petermann opened the door of his office now, she would start and tremble as though a Cossack's hand already touched her shoulder. Sometimes she lay deep down in the straw, afraid to declare herself even though a friend's voice called her. And so it was upon that morning of Alban's visit.

Old Petermann had shut the cabin door behind him and discreetly left the young people together. Seeing little in the deep gloom and his eyes blinking wherever he turned them, Alban stood almost knee-deep in straw and cried Lois' name aloud.

"Lois—where are you, Lois—why don't you answer me?"

She crept from the depths at his very feet and shaking the straw from her pretty hair, she stood upright and put both her hands upon his shoulders.

"I am here, Alb dear, just waiting for you. Won't you kiss me, Alb dear?"

He put his arms about her neck and kissed her at her wish—just as a brother might have kissed a sister in the hour of her peril.

"I came at once, Lois," he said, "of course I did not understand that it would be like this. Why are you here? Whatever has happened—what does it all mean? Will you not teach me to understand, Lois?"

"Sit by my side, Alb dear, sit down and listen to me. I want you to know what your friends have been doing. Oh, I have been so lonely, so frightened, and I don't deserve that. You know that my father is in prison, Alb—the Count told you that?"

"I heard it before I left England, Lois. You did not answer my letters?"

"I was ashamed to, dear. That was the first thing they taught me at the school—to be ashamed to write to you until you would not be ashamed to read my letters. Can't you understand, Alb? Wasn't I right to be ashamed?"

She buried her head upon his breast and put a little hot hand into his own. A great tenderness toward her filled his whole being and brought a sense of happiness very foreign to him lately. How gentle and kindly this little waif of fortune had ever been. And how even those few weeks of a better schooling had improved her. She had shed all the old vulgarities—she was just a simple schoolgirl as he would have wished her to be.

"We are never right to be ashamed before those who love us," Alban said kindly; "you did not write to me and how was I to know what had happened? Of course, your father told you what I had been doing and why I went away from Union Street? It was all his kindness. I know it now and I have come to Russia to thank him—when he is free. That won't be very long now that I have found you. They were frightened of you, Lois—they thought you were going to betray their secrets to the Revolutionary party. I knew that you would not do so—I said so all along."

She looked up at him with glowing eyes, and putting her lips very close to his ear she said:

"I loved you, Alb—I never could have told them while I loved you—not even to save my father, and God knows how much I love him. Did not they say that you were very happy with Mr. Gessner? There would have been no more happiness if I had told them."

"And that is what kept you silent, Lois?"

She would not answer him, but hiding her face again, she asked him a question which surprised him greatly.

"Do you know why the police wished to arrest me, Alb dear?"

"How could I know that, Lois?"

"It was the Count who told them to do so. He is only deceiving you, dear. He does not want to release my father and will never do so. If I were in prison too, he thinks that Mr. Gessner would be quite safe. Do not trust the Count if you would help us. My people understand him and they will punish him some day. He has done a great wrong to many in Warsaw, and he deserves to be punished. You must remember this, dear, when he promises my father's freedom. He is not telling you the truth—he is only asking you to punish me."

"But, Lois, what have you done, what charge can they bring against a little schoolgirl?"

"I am my father's daughter," she said proudly, "that is why they would punish me. Oh, you don't know, dear. Even the little children are criminals in Warsaw. My father escaped from Saghalen and I have no right to live in Russia. When he sent me to school here, I did not come under my own name, they called me Lois Werner and believed I was a German. Then my people heard that Count Sergius wished to have me arrested, and they took me away from the school and brought me here. Herr Petermann is one of my father's oldest friends. He has saved a great many who would be in prison but for his kindness. We can trust Herr Petermann, dear—he will never betray us."

Alban understood, but he had no answer ready for her. All that she had told him filled him with unutterable contempt toward the men he had but lately considered as his patrons and his friends. The polished, courtly Sergius, his master Richard Gessner—to what duplicity had they not stooped, nay, to what treachery? For they had sent him into Russia, not to befriend this child, but to put the ultimate shame of a Russian prison upon her—the cell, the lash, the unnamable infamy. As in a flash he detected the whole conspiracy and laid it bare. He, Alban Kennedy, had been chosen as their instrument—he had been sent to Poland to condemn this little friend of the dreadful years to the living death in a Russian prison. The blood raced in his veins at the thought. Perhaps for the first time in his life he knew the meaning of the word anger.

"Lois," he exclaimed presently, "if Mr. Gessner does not set your father free, I myself will tell your people. That is the message I am going to send to him to-day. Count Sergius will not lie to me again—I shall tell him so when I return."

She started up in wild alarm.

"You must not do it—I forbid it," she cried, closing her white arms about his neck as though to protect him already from his enemies. "Oh, my dear, you do not know the Russian people, you do not know what it means to stand against the police here and have them for your enemies. Mr. Gessner is their friend. The Government would do a great deal to serve him—my father says so. If Count Sergius heard that you had met me, we should both be in prison this night—ah, dear God, what a prison, what suffering—and I have seen it myself, the women cowering from the lash, the men beaten so that they cut the flesh from their faces. That's what happens to those who go against the Government, dear Alb—but not to you because you love me."

She clung to him hysterically, for this long vigil had tried her nerves and the shadow of discovery lay upon her always. It had been no surprise to her to find Alban in Warsaw, for the Revolutionary Committee in London had informed her friends by cable on the very day that Count Sergius had left. She knew exactly how he had come, where he had stopped, and when to seek him out. But now that his arms were about her, she dreaded a new separation and was almost afraid to release his hand from hers.

"You will not leave me, Alban," she said—a new dignity coming to her suddenly as though some lesson, not of the school, but of life, had taught it to her—"you will take me to London with you—yes, yes, dear, as your servant. That is what my friends wish, they have thought it all out. I am to go as your servant and you must get a passport for me—for Lois Werner, and then if you call me by my own name no one will know. There we can see Mr. Gessner together and speak of my father. I will promise him that his secret shall never be known. He will trust me, Alban, because I promise him."

Alban stooped and kissed her upon the lips.

"No," he said, "the work must be done here in Russia, Lois. I am called to do it and I go now. Let me find you at the same time to-morrow, and I will tell you what I have done. God bless you, Lois. It is happiness to be with you again."

Their lips met, their arms unclasped reluctantly. A single tap upon the panel of

the cabin brought that merry old fellow, Herr Petermann, to open to them. Alban told him in a sentence what had happened and hastened back to the hotel.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN INSTRUCTION TO THE POLICE

Count Sergius was a little more than uneasy when Alban returned—he was suspicious. A highly trained agent of Government himself, he rarely permitted any circumstance, however trifling, to escape him; and this circumstance of tardiness was not trifling.

"He has met the girl," the argument went, "and she is detaining him with a fine story of her wrongs. He may learn that we have tricked him and that would be troublesome. Certainly I was a fool not to have had him watched—but, then, his first night in Warsaw and he a stranger! We shall make up for lost time at once. I will see the Chief and give instructions. A dove does not go but once to the nest. We will take wings ourselves next time."

By which it will be perceived that he blamed himself for having lost a great opportunity and determined not to do so a second time. His whole purpose in coming to Warsaw had been to track down Boriskoff's daughter and to hand her over to the police. This he owed to his employers, the Government, and to his friend, Richard Gessner—than whom none would pay a better price for the service. And when it were done, then he imagined that nothing in the world would be easier than to excuse himself to this amiable lad and to take him back to England without any loss of time whatever. In all a pretty plan, lacking only the finer judgment to discern the strength of the enemy's force and not to despise them.

Alban entered the sitting-room just as the Count had determined to have his breakfast. It was nearly twelve o'clock then and the fierce heat of the day made the streets intolerable. Few people were abroad in the great avenue—there was no repetition of the disturbance of yesterday, nor any Cossack going at a gallop. Down below in the restaurant a bevy of smartly dressed women ate and gossiped to the music of a good Hungarian band. From distant streets there came an echo of gongs and the muffled hum of wheels; the sirens of the steam-tugs screamed incessantly upon the sleepy river.

Whatever the Count's curiosity may have been, he had the wit to hide it when

Alban appeared. Adopting a well-feigned tone of raillery, he spoke as men speak when another has been absent and has no good excuse to make.

"I will ask no questions," he said with mock solemnity—"A man who forgets how to breakfast is in a bad way. That is to suppose that you have not breakfasted—ah, forgive me, she makes coffee like a chef, perhaps, and there is no Rhine wine to match the gold of her hair. Let us talk politics, history, the arts—anything you like. I am absolutely discreet, Mr. Kennedy, I have forgotten already that you were late."

Alban drew a chair to the table and began to eat with good appetite. His sense of humor was strong enough to lead him to despise such talk at any time, but to-day it exasperated him. Understanding perfectly well what was in the Count's mind, he was not to be trapped by any such artifice. Honesty is a card which a diplomatist rarely expects an opponent to hold. Alban held such a card and determined to play it without loss of time.

"I have seen Lois Boriskoff," he said.

"Again—that is quick work."

The Count looked up, still smiling.

"I told you that we should have no difficulties," he exclaimed.

Alban helped himself to some superb bisque soup and permitted the waiter to fill his glass from a flask of Chablis.

"It was quite an accident upon my part. I went up to the Castle as you advised me and then down into the old town. Lois is with her friends there. I have had a long talk to her and now I understand everything."

The Count nodded his head and sipped his wine. The frankness of all this deceived him but not wholly. The boy had discovered something—it remained to be seen how much.

"You are successful beyond hope," he exclaimed presently, "this will be great news for Mr. Gessner. Of course, you asked her plainly what had happened?"

"She told me without my asking, Count. Now I understand everything—for the first time."

The tone of the reply arrested Sergius' attention and brought a frown to his face.

He kept his eyes upon Alban when next he spoke.

"Those people are splendid liars," he remarked as though he had been expecting just such a story—"of course she spoke about me. I can almost imagine what she said."

"It was a very great surprise to me," Alban rejoined, and with so simple an air that any immediate reply seemed impossible. For five minutes they ate and drank in silence. Then Count Sergius, excusing himself, stood up and went to the window.

"Is she to come to this hotel?" he asked anon.

"She would be very foolish to do so, Count."

"Foolish, my dear fellow, whatever do you mean?"

"I mean what I say—that she would be mad to put herself into your power."

The Count bit his lip. It had been many years since so direct an insult had been offered to him, and yet he did not know how to answer it.

"I see that these people have been lying to you as I thought," he rejoined sharply, "is it not indiscreet to accept the word of such a person?"

"You know perfectly well that it is not, Count. You brought me to Warsaw to help you to arrest Lois Boriskoff. Well, I am not going to do so and that is all."

"Are you prepared to say the same to your friend in London—will you cable that news to Mr. Gessner?"

"I was going to do so without any loss of time. You can send the message for me if you like."

"Nothing will be easier. Let me take it down at your dictation. Really I am not offended. You have been deceived and are right to say what you think. Our friend at Hampstead shall judge between us."

He lighted a cigarette with apparent unconcern and sat down before the writing-table near the window.

"Now," he asked, "how shall we put it to him?"

Alban came over and stood by his side.

"Say that Paul Boriskoff must be released by his intervention without any condition whatever."

"He will never consent to that."

"He will have to consent, Count Sergius. His personal safety depends upon it."

"But, my dear boy, what of the girl? Are you going to leave her here to shout our friend's secret all over Warsaw?"

"She has not spoken and she will not speak, Count."

"Ah, you are among the credulous. Your confidence flatters her, I fear."

"It is just—she has never lied to me."

The Count shrugged his shoulders.

"I will send your message," he said.

He wrote the cable in a fine pointed hand and duly delivered it to the waiter. His own would follow it ten minutes later—when he had made up his mind how to act. A dangerous thought had come to him and begun to obsess his mind. This English boy, he was saying, might yet be a more dangerous enemy than the girl they had set out to trap. It might yet be necessary to clap them both in the same prison until the whole truth were known. He resolved to debate it at his leisure. There was plenty of time, for the police were watching all the exits from the city, and if Lois Boriskoff attempted to pass out, God help her.

"We must not expect an answer to this before dinner," he said, holding out the message for the waiter to take it. "If you think it all right, we can proceed to amuse ourselves until the reply comes. Warsaw is somewhat a remarkable city as you will already have seen. Some of its finest monuments have been erected to celebrate the execution of its best patriots. Every public square stands for an insurrection. The castle is fortified not against the stranger but the citizen—those guns you tell me about were put there by Nicolas to remind us that he would stand no nonsense. We are the sons of a nation which, officially, does not exist—but we honor our dead kings everywhere and can show you some of Thorwaldsen's finest monuments to them. Let us go out and see these wonders if you are willing."

The apparent digression served him admirably, for it permitted him to think. As

many another in the service of the autocracy, he had a sterling love for Poland in its historical aspect, and was as proud as any man when he uttered the name of a Sobieski, a Sigismund or a Ladislaus. Revolution as a modern phase he despised. To him there were but people and nobles, and the former had become vulgar disturbers of the Czar's peace who must be chastened with rods. His own career depended altogether upon his callous indifference to mere human sympathies.

Alban could offer no objection to visit Warsaw under such a pleasant guide and he also welcomed the hours of truce. It came to him that the Count might honestly doubt Lois' word and that, knowing nothing of her, he would have had little reason to trust her. The morning passed in a pleasant stroll down the Senatorska where are the chief shops of Moscow. Here the Count insisted upon buying his English friend a very beautiful amber and gold cigarette-case, to remind him, as he said, of their quarrel.

"It was very natural," he admitted, "I know these people so well. They talk like angels and act like devils. You will know more about them in good time. If I have interfered, it was at my friend Gessner's wish. I shall leave the matter in his hands now. If he accepts the girl's word, he is perfectly at liberty to do so. To me it is a matter of absolute indifference."

Alban took the cigarette-case but accepted it reluctantly. He could not resist the charm of this man's manner nor had he any abiding desire to do so. As far as that went, there was so much to see in these bright streets, so many odd equipages, fine horses, prettily dressed women, magnificent soldiers, that his interest was perpetually enchained and he uttered many exclamations of surprised delight very foreign to his usual manner.

"I cannot believe that this is the city we saw yesterday," he declared as the Count called a drosky and bade the driver make a tour of the avenues and the gardens —"you would think the people were the happiest in the world. I have never seen so many smiling faces before."

The Count understood the situation better.

"Life is sweet to them because of its uncertainty. They live while they can. When I used to fish in your English waters, they sent me to a river where the Mayfly was out—ah, that beautiful, fluttering creature which may live one minute or may live five. He struggles up from the bottom of the river, you remember, and then, just as he has extended his splendid wings, up comes a great trout and swallows him—the poor thing of ten or twenty or a hundred seconds. Here we

struggle up through the social ranks, and just when the waters of intrigue fascinate us and we go to play Narcissus to them, up comes the official trout and down his throat we go. Some day there will be so many of us that the trout will be gorged and unable to move. Then he will go to the cooking-pot—but not in our time, I think."

Alban remained silent. That "not in our time" seemed so strange a saying when he recalled the threats and the promises of the fanatics of Union Street. Was this fine fellow deceiving himself, or was he like the Russian bureaucracy, simply ignorant? The lad of twenty could not say, but he made a shrewder guess at the truth than the diplomatist by his side.

They visited the Lazienki Park, passing many of Warsaw's famous people as they went, and so affording the Count many opportunities for delightful little histories in which such men excel. No pretty woman escaped his observation, few the rigors of his tongue. He could tell you precisely when Madame Latienski began to receive young Prince Nicolas at her house and the exact terms in which old Latienski objected to the visits. Priests, jockeys, politicians, actors—for these he had a distinguishing gesture of contempt or pity or gracious admiration. The actresses invariably recognized him with alluring smiles, which he received condescendingly as who should say—well, you were fortunate. When they arrived at the Moktowski barracks, a group of officers quickly surrounded them and conducted them to a place where champagne corks might pop and cigarettes be lighted. This was but the beginning of a round of visits which Alban found tiresome to the last degree. How many glasses of wine he sipped, how many cigarettes he lighted, he could not have told you for a fortune. It was nearly five o'clock when they returned to the hotel and the Count proposed an hour's repose "de travail."

"There is no message from your friend," he said candidly, "no doubt your telegram has troubled him. Perhaps we shall get it by dinner-time. You must be very tired and perhaps you would like to lie down."

Alban did not demur and he went to his own room, and taking off his boots he lay upon his bed and quickly fell fast asleep. Count Sergius, however, had no intention of doing any such thing. He was closeted with the Chief of the Police ten minutes after they had returned, and in twenty he had come to a resolution.

"This young Englishman will meet the girl Lois Boriskoff to-morrow morning," he said. "Arrest the pair of them and let me know when it is done. But mind you

—treat him as though he were your own son. I have my reasons."

The Chief merely bowed. He quite understood that such a man as Sergius Zamoyski would have very good reasons indeed.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DAWN OF THE DAY

Count Sergius believed that he had settled the affaire Gessner when he gave his instructions to the Chief of the Police, and the subsequent hours found him exceedingly pleased with himself. An artist in his profession, he flattered himself that it had all come about in the manner of his own anticipations and that he would be able to carry back to London a story which would not only win upon a rich man's gratitude, but advance him considerably in the favor of those who could well reward his labors.

This was an amiable reflection and one that ministered greatly to his self-content. No cloud stood upon the horizon of his self-esteem nor did shadows darken his glowing hopes. He had promised Richard Gessner to arrest the girl Lois Boriskoff, and arrested she would be before twelve o'clock to-morrow. As for this amiable English lad, so full of fine resolutions, so defiant, so self-willed, it would be a good jest enough to clap him in a police-station for four-and-twenty hours and to bow him out again, with profuse apologies, when the girl was on her way to Petersburg to join her amiable father in the Schlusselburg.

For Alban personally he had a warm regard. The very honesty of his character, his habit of saying just what he meant (so foreign to the Count's own practice), his ingenuous delight in all that he saw, his modern knight-errantry based upon an absurdly old-fashioned notion of right and wrong and justice and all such stuff as that, these were the very qualities to win the admiration of a man of the world who possessed none of them. Count Sergius said that the lad must suffer nothing. His intrigues with the daughter of a Polish anarchist were both dangerous and foolish. And was he not already the acknowledged lover of Anna Gessner, whom he must marry upon his return to London. Certainly, it would be very wrong not to lock him up, and he, Sergius, was not going to take the responsibility of any other course upon his already over-burdened shoulders.

These being his ideas, he found it amusing enough to meet Alban at the dinner-table and to speak of to-morrow and its programme. The reply to the cable they had dispatched to London lay already warm in his pocket, sent straight to him from the post-office as the police had directed. It was fitting that he should open

the ball with a lie about this, and add thereto any other pleasant fancy which a fertile imagination dictated.

"Gessner does not cable us," he said at that moment of the repast when the glasses are first filled and the tongue is loosed. "I suppose he has gone over to Paris again as he hinted might be the case. If there is no news to-morrow, we must reconsider the arguments and see how we stand. You know that I am perfectly willing to be guided by him and will do nothing of my own initiative. If he can procure the old man's freedom, I will be the first to congratulate you. Meanwhile, I am not to forget that we have a box at the opera and that *Huguenots* is on the bill. When I am not in musical circles, I confess my enjoyment of *Huguenots*. Meyerbeer always seemed to me a grand old charlatan who should have run a modern show in New York. He wrote one masterpiece and some five miles of rubbish—but why decry a great work because there are also those which are not great. Besides, I am not musician enough really to enjoy the Ring. If it were not for the pretty women who come to my box to escape ennui, I would find Wagner intolerable."

Alban, very quiet and not a little excited to-night, differed from this opinion altogether.

"My father was a musician," he said. "I believe that if he had not been a parson, he would have been a great musician. I don't know very much about music myself, but the first time that Mr. Gessner took me to hear one of Wagner's operas, I seemed to live in a new world. It could not have been just the desire to like it, for I had made up my mind that it would be very dry. There is something in such music as that which is better than all argument. I shall never forget the curious sensation which came to me when first I heard the overture to Tannhäuser played by a big orchestra. You will not deny that it is splendid?"

"Undoubtedly it's fine—especially where the clarinets came in and you seem to have five hundred mice running up your back. I am not going to be drawn into an argument on the point—these likes and dislikes are purely individual. To me it seems perfectly ridiculous that one man should quarrel with another because a third person has said or written something about which they disagree. In politics, of course, there is justification. The Have-Nots want to get money out of the Haves and the pockets supply the adjectives. But in the arts, which exist for our pleasure,—why, I might as well fall foul of you because you do not like caviar and are more partial to brunettes than to blondes. My taste is all the other way—I dote upon caviar; golden-haired women are to me just a little more attractive

than the angels. But, of course, that does not speak for their tempers."

He laughed at the candor of it, and looking round the brilliant restaurant where they dined to-night, he began to speak in a low tone of Russian and Polish women generally.

"The Polish ladies are old-fashioned enough to love one man at a time—in their own country, at any rate. The Russians, on the contrary, are less selfish. A Russian woman is often the victim of three centuries, of suppressed female ambitions. She has large ideas, fierce passions, an excellent political sense—and all these must be cooled by the wet blanket of a very ordinary domesticity. In reality, she is not domesticated at all and would far sooner be following her lover—the one chosen for the day—down the street with a flag. Here you have the reason why a Russian woman appeals to us. She is rarely beautiful—some of them would themselves admit the deficiency—but she is never an embarrassment. Tell her that you are tired of her and you will discover that she was about to stagger your vanity by a similar confidence. In these days of revolution, she is seen at her best. Fear neither of God nor man will restrain her. We have more of the show of religion and less of the spirit in Russia than in any other country in the world. Here in Poland, it is a little different. Some of our women are as the idealists would have them to be. But there are others—or the city would be intolerable."

Alban had lived too long in a world of mean cynics that this talk should either surprise or entertain him. Men in Union Street spoke of women much as this careless fellow did, rarely generous to them and often exceedingly unjust. His own ideals he had confessed wholly to none, not even to Anna Gessner in the moment of their greatest intimacy. That fine old-world notion of the perfect womanhood, developed to the point of idolatry by the Celts of the West, but standing none the less as a witness to the whole world's desire, might remain but as a memory of his youth—he would neither surrender it nor admit that it was unworthy of men's homage. When Sergius spoke of his own countrywomen, Alban could forgive him all other estimates. And this was as much as to say that the image of Lois was with him even in that splendid place, and that some sentiment of her humble faith and sacrifice had touched him to the quick.

They went to the opera as the Count had promised and there heard an indifferent rendering of the *Huguenots*. A veritable sisterhood of blondes, willing to show off Count Sergius to some advantage, came from time to time to his box and was by him visited in turn. Officers in uniform crowded the foyers and talked in loud

tones during the finest passages. A general sense of unrest made itself felt everywhere as though all understood the danger which threatened the city and the precarious existence its defenders must lead. When they quitted the theatre and turned into one of the military clubs for supper, the common excitement was even more marked and ubiquitous enough to arrest the attention even of such a *flâneur* as Sergius.

"These fellows are sitting down to supper with bombs under their chairs," he said *sotto voce*. "That is to say, each thinks that a bomb is there and hopes that it will kill his neighbor. We have no sympathy in our public life here—the conditions are altogether against it. Imagine five hundred men upon the deck of a ship which has struck a rock, and consider what opportunities there would be to deplore the drowned. In Russia each plays for his own safety and does not care a rouble what becomes of the man next door. Such a fact is both our strength and our weakness—our strength because opportunities make men, and our weakness because we have no unity of plan which will enable us to fight such a combination as is now being pitted against us. I myself believe that the old order is at an end. That is why I have a villa in the south of France and some excellent apartments in Paris."

"You believe that the Revolutionaries will be victorious?" Alban asked in his quiet way.

"I believe that the power is passing from the hands of all autocratic governments, and that some phase of socialism will eventually be the policy of all civilized nations."

"Then what is the good of going to England, Count, if you believe that it will be the same story there?"

"It is only a step on the road. You will never have a revolution in your country, you have too much common sense. But you will tax your bourgeois until you make him bankrupt, and that will be your way of having all things in common. In America the workingman is too well off and the country is too young to permit this kind of thing yet. Its day will be much later—but it will come all the same, and then the deluge. Let us rejoice that we shall not see these things in our time. It is something to know that our champagne is assured to us."

He lifted a golden glass and drank a vague toast heartily. Others in the Club were frankly intoxicated and many a heated scene marked the progress of unceremonious and impromptu revels. Young officers, who carried their lives in

their hands every hour, showed their contempt of life in many bottles. Old men, stern and gray at dawn, were so many babbling imbeciles at midnight. The waiters ran to and fro ceaselessly, their faces dripping with perspiration and their throats hoarse with shouting. The musicians fiddled as though the end of all things was at hand and must not surprise them at a broken bar. In Russia the scene was familiar enough, but to the stranger incomprehensible and revolting. Alban felt as one released from a pit of gluttony when at three in the morning Sergius staggered to his feet and bade a servant call him in a drosky.

"We have much to do to-morrow," he muttered, "much to do—and then, ah, my friend, if we only knew what we meant when we say 'and then.'"

CHAPTER XXV

COUNT ZAMOYSKI SLEEPS

A glimmer of wan daylight in the Count's bedroom troubled him while he undressed and he drew the curtains with angry fingers. Down there in the dismal streets the Cossacks watched the night-birds going home to bed and envied them alike their condition and its consequences. If Sergius rested a moment at the window, it was to mark the presence of these men and to take heart at it. And this is to say that few who knew him in the social world had any notion of the life he lived apart or guessed that authority stood to him for his shield and buckler against the unknown enemies his labors had created. Perhaps he rarely admitted the truth himself. Light and laughter and music were his friends in so far as they permitted him to forget the inevitable or to deride it.

Here in this room of eloquent shadows he was a different man indeed from the fine fellow of the opera and the barracks—a haunted secret man looking deep into the mysteries and weary for the sun. The brilliant scene he had but just quitted could now be regretted chiefly because he needed the mental anæsthetic with which society alone could supply him. Pale and gaunt and inept in his movements, few would have recognized the Sergius Zamoyski of the dressing-room or named him for the diplomatist whose successes had earned the warmest encomiums of harassed authority. Herein lay a testimony to his success which his bitterest enemy would not have denied him. None knew better than he that the day of reckoning had come for all who opposed revolution in Russia, none had anticipated that day with a greater personal dread.

He closed the curtains, thankful that the Cossacks stood sentinels without, and hungering for sleep which had been denied to him so often lately. If he had any consolation of his thoughts, it lay in the comparative secrecy of his present mission and the fact that to-day would accomplish its purpose. The girl Lois had not confessed Richard Gessner's secret and she would stand presently where confession would not help her. As for this agreeable youth, who certainly had been her lover, he must be coerced into silence, threatened, cajoled, bought. Sergius remembered Alban's fine gospel of life and laughed when he recalled it. This devotion to humanity, this belief in great causes, what was it worth when a

woman laughed and her rosy lips parted for a kiss? The world is too busy for the pedants who would stem the social revolution, was his argument—the rich men have too much to do to hide their common frailties that they should put on the habits of the friars. Let this hot gospeller acquire a fortune and he would become as the others before a month had passed. The women would see to that—for were not two of them already about the business?

He closed his curtains and undressed with a clumsy hand upon the buttons and many a curse at the obstinate things. The intense silence of the morning hour depressed him and he wondered that the hotel should sleep so soundly. His own door was both locked and bolted—he had a pistol in his travelling-bag and would finger it with grim satisfaction at such moments as these. Hitherto he had owed much to his very bravado, to a habit of going in and out among the people freely, and deriding all politics as a fool's employment. Latterly he had been wondering how far this habit would protect him, had made shrewd guesses at the truth and had come to the stage of question. Yesterday's work helped him to confirm these vague suspicions. How came it that Lois Boriskoff was able to warn this young Englishman, why had she come immediately to his hotel and followed him to the old quarters of the city? This could only mean that her friends had telegraphed the information from London, that every step of the journey had been reported and that a promising plan of action had been decided upon. Sergius dreaded this more than anything that could have happened to him. They will ask what share I had in it, he told himself; and he knew what the answer to that must be. Let them but suspect a hundredth part of the truth and he might not have twenty hours to live.

It had been a splendid life so far and a sufficient atonement for the dreaded hours apart. There in his own room he gave battle to the phantoms by recalling the faces of the pretty women he had cajoled and defeated, the houses of pride he had destroyed, the triumphs he had numbered and the recompense he had enjoyed. To be known to none save as a careless idler, to pass as a figure of vengeance unrecognized across the continents, to be the idol of the police in three cities, to have men running to and fro at his command though they knew not by whose order they were sent, here was wine of life so intoxicating that a man might sell his very soul to possess it. Sergius did not believe that there was any need for such a bargain as this—he had been consistently successful hitherto in eluding even the paltriest consequences of his employment—but the dark hours came none the less, and coming, they whispered a word which even the bravest may shudder to hear.

He slept but fitfully, listening for any sounds from the city without and anxious for the hotel to awaken to its daily routine. The cooler argument of the passing hour declared it most unlikely that any plan would be ventured until Lois Boriskoff's fate were known and Alban had visited her this morning. If there were danger to be apprehended, the moment of it would arrive when the girl was arrested and the story of Alban Kennedy's misadventure made known to her friends. Sergius began to perceive that he must not linger an hour in Warsaw when this were done. He could direct operations as easily from Paris or London as from this conspicuous hotel, and with infinitely less risk to himself and his empire. Sometimes he wondered that he had been so foolish as to enter Russia at all. Why could he not have telegraphed to the Chief of the Police to arrest the girl as soon as might be and to flog her into a confession. The whip would have purchased her secret readily enough, then the others could have been arrested also and Gessner left reassured beyond question. Sergius blamed himself very much that he had permitted a finer chivalry to guide his acts. "I came because this young man persuaded me to come," he admitted, and added the thought that he had been a fool for his pains.

This would have been about four o'clock of the morning. He slept a little while upon it, but woke again at five and sat up in bed to mark a step on the landing without and to ask himself who had the right to be there at such an hour. When he had waited a little while, he came to the conclusion that two people were approaching his door and making little secret of their coming. Presently a knock informed him that he had nothing whatever to fear; and upon asking the question "What do you want?" a voice answered immediately, "From the bureau, your excellency, with a letter." This he concluded to mean that the Chief of the Police had some important news to convey to him and had sent his own messenger to the hotel.

"Wait a moment and I will let you in," he replied, and asked, "I suppose you can wait a little while?"

"It is very urgent, excellency—you had better open at once."

The Count sprang up from his bed and drew the curtains back from the window. A warm glow of sunlight instantly suffused the cold room and warmed it with welcome beams. Down there in the streets the Cossacks still nodded upon patient horses as though no event of the night had disturbed them. A drosky passed, driving an old man to the railway station—there were porters at the doors of some of the houses and a few wagons going down toward the river. All

this Sergius perceived instantly in one swift vision. Then he opened the door and admitted the officer.

"There were two of you," he exclaimed, peering down the passage.

"It is true, excellency, myself and the night-porter, but he has gone to sleep again."

"And you?"

"From the Chief, excellency, with this letter."

He held out a great square document, grotesquely sealed and carefully folded. A small man with a pockmarked face, he wore the uniform of an ordinary gendarme and aped that rôle to perfection. Saluting gravely, he permitted the letter to pass from his hands. Then he closed the door and leaned his back against it.

"I am to take an answer to the bureau, excellency."

The Count read a few lines of the document and looked up uneasily.

"You say that you were commanded to wake me up—for this?"

"Those are my orders."

"Zaniloff must have lost his wits—there was nothing else?"

The man took one stride forward.

"Yes," he cried in a low voice, "there was this, excellency."

* * * * *

Alban slept no better than his friend; in truth he hardly closed his eyes until they waked him and told him of the tragedy. He had said little to Sergius during the evening, but the perplexities of the long day remained with him and were not to be readily silenced.

That his patron sent no reply to their urgent telegram he thought a little strange. Mr. Gessner's silence could only mean that he had left London suddenly, perhaps had set out to join them in Warsaw. Meanwhile Alban perceived very clearly in what a position of danger Lois stood and how difficult it would be to help her if others did not come to his assistance.

Accustomed to regard all the Revolutionaries from the standpoint of the wild creatures who talked nonsense in the East End of London, he could not believe in old Herr Petermann's optimism or pay much attention to the wild plan of escape he had devised. It must be absurd to think that Lois could leave Poland disguised as a servant. Alban himself would readily have recognized her in her disguise if he had been seeking her at the time, and the police would very soon detect it when their minds were set upon the purpose. In his own opinion, and this was shrewd enough, their hope of salvation lay in Richard Gessner's frank acceptance of the position. The banker had influence enough with the Russian authorities to release both Lois and her father. He must do so or accept the consequences of his obstinacy.

All this and much more was in Alban's head while he tossed restlessly upon his strange bed and waited impatiently for the day. The oddest fancies came to him, the most fantastic ideas. Now he would be living in London again, a drudge at the works, the nightly companion of little Lois, the adventurer of the streets and the slums. Then, as readily, he would recall the most trifling incidents of his life in Richard Gessner's house, the days of the miracles, the wonderful hours when he had worshipped Anna Gessner and believed almost in her divinity. This had been a false faith, surely. He knew now that he would never marry Anna, and that must mean return to the wilderness, the bitter days of poverty and all the old-time strife with circumstance. It would have been easier, he thought, if those weeks of wonderland had never been. Richard Gessner had done him no service—rich men rarely help those whom they patronize for their own ends.

Alban thought of all this, and still being unable to sleep, he fell to numbering the hours which stood between him and his meeting with Lois. He was sure that she would be ready for him however early his visit might be—and he said that he would ring for his coffee at seven o'clock and try to go down to the river at eight. If there were no message from Mr. Gessner before he left, he thought it would be wise to counsel patience for this day at least. In plain truth he was less concerned about the diplomatic side of the affair than the personal. An overmastering desire for Lois' companionship, the wish to hear her voice, to speak to her, to talk as they had talked in the dark days of long ago, prevailed above the calm reckoning of yesterday. His resolution to defeat Count Sergius at his own game seemed less heroic than it had done twelve hours ago. Alban had conceit enough not to fear the Count. That incurable faith in British citizenship still upheld him.

Seven had been the hour named by his intention—it was a little after six o'clock when he heard a knock upon his bedroom door and started up wondering who

called him at such an hour.

"Who is there, what do you want?" he cried, with the bedclothes still about his shoulders. No one answered this, but the knock was repeated, a decisive knock as of one who meant to win admittance.

"All right, I will come in a minute," was now his answer; to which he added the question—"Is that you, Count? Do you know it's only just six o'clock?"

He opened the door and found himself face to face with the hotel valet, an amiable young Frenchman by the name of Malette.

"Monsieur," said the man, "will you please come at once? There has been an accident—his excellency is very ill."

"An accident to the Count? Is it serious, Malette?"

"It is very serious, monsieur. They say that he will not live. The doctors are with him—I thought that you would wish to know immediately."

Alban turned without a word and began to put on his clothes. His hands were quite cold and he trembled as though stricken by an ague. When he had found a dressing-gown, he huddled it on anyhow and followed Malette down the corridor.

"When did this happen, Malette?"

"I do not know, monsieur. One of the servants chanced to pass his excellency's door and saw something which frightened him. He called the concierge and they waked the Herr Director. Afterwards they sent for the police."

"Do they think that the Count was assassinated, then?"

"Ah, that is to find out. The officers will help us to say. Will you go in at once, monsieur, or shall I tell the Herr Director?"

Alban said that he would go at once. The young fear to look upon the face of death and he was no braver than others of his age. A terrible sense of dread overtook him while he stood before the door and heard the hushed whispers of those about it. Here a giant police officer had already taken up his post as sentinel and he cast a searching glance upon all who approached. There were two or three privileged servants standing apart and discussing the affair; but a stain upon a crimson carpet was more eloquent of the truth than any word. Alban

came near to swooning as he stepped over it and entered the room without word or knock.

They had laid the Count upon the bed and dragged it to the window to husband the light. Two doctors, hastily summoned from a neighboring hospital, worked like heroes in their shirt sleeves—a nurse in a gray dress stood behind them holding sponge and bandages. At the first glance, the untrained onlooker would have said that Sergius Zamoyski was certainly dead. The intense pallor of his face, the set eyes, the stiffened limbs, spoke of the rigor mortis and the finality of tragedy. None the less, the surgeons went to work as though all might yet be saved. Uttering their orders in the calm and measured tones of those whom no scene of death could unnerve, they were unconscious of all else but the task before them and its immediate achievement. When they had need of anything, they spoke to the Herr Director of the hotel who passed on his commands in a sharp decisive tone to a porter who stood at his heels. Near by him stood the Chief of the Police, Zaniloff, a short burly man who wore a dark green uniform and held his sheathed sword lightly in his left hand. These latter looked up when the door opened, but the doctors took no notice whatever. There was an overpowering odor of anaesthetics in the room although the windows had been thrown wide open.

"Is the Count dead?" Alban asked them in a low voice. He had taken a few steps toward the bed and there halted irresolute. "What is it, what has happened, sir?" he continued, turning to Zaniloff. That worthy merely shrugged his shoulders.

"The Count has been assassinated—we believe by a woman. The doctors will tell us by and by."

Alban shuddered at the words and took another step toward the bed. He felt giddy and faint. The words he had just heard were ringing in his ears as a sound of rushing waters. "Has Lois done this thing?"—incredible! And yet the man implied as much.

"I cannot stay here," he exclaimed presently, "I must go to my room, if you please."

He turned and reeled from the place, ashamed of his weakness, yet unable to control it. Outside upon the landing, he discovered that Zaniloff was at his elbow and had something to say to him. Speaking sharply and autocratically in the Russian tongue, that worthy realized almost immediately that he had failed to make himself understood and so called the Herr Director to his aid.

"They will require your attendance at the bureau," the Director said with an obsequious bow toward Alban—"you must dress at once, sir, and accompany this gentleman."

Alban said that he would do so. He was miserably cold and ill and trembling still. Knowing nothing of the truth, he believed that they were taking him to Lois Boriskoff and that she was already in custody.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN INTERLUDE IN PICCADILLY

Alban had been fifteen days out of England when Anna Gessner met Willy Forrest one afternoon as she was driving a pair of chestnut ponies down Piccadilly towards the Circus. He, amiable creature, had just left a club and a bridge table which had been worth fifteen pounds to him. The gray frock suit he wore suited him admirably. He certainly looked very smart and wide-awake.

"Anna, by Jupiter," he cried, as he stepped from the pavement at the very corner of Dover Street—"well, if my luck don't beat cock-fighting. Where are you off to, Anna—what have you done with the shoving-machine? I thought you never aired the gee-gees now. Something new for you, isn't it? May I get in and have a pawt? We shall be fined forty bob and costs at Marlborough Street if we hold up the traffic. Say, you look ripping in this char à bancs, upon my soul you're killing."

She had not meant to stop for him, and half against her wish she now reined the ponies in and made room for him. There never had been a day in her life since she had known him when she was able to resist altogether the blandishments of this pleasant rogue, who made so many appeals to her interest. To-day sheer curiosity conquered her. She wished above all things to hear what he had done with the extravagant cheque her father had sent him.

"I drove the ponies for a change," she said coldly, "we must not be unkind to dumb creatures. Do you know, it is most improper that you should be seen with me in this carriage, Willy. Just think what my father would say if he heard of it."

Willy Forest, to give him his due, rarely devoted much time to unpleasant thoughts.

"What's the good of dragging your father in, Anna?" he asked her sagely. "I want to have a talk to you and you want to have a talk to me. Where shall we go, now? We can't blow the loud trumpet at a tea-shop and a hotel is inquisitive. Why not come round to my rooms? There's an old charwoman there who will do very well when rumors arise—and she'll make us a cup of tea. Why not come, Anna?"

"It's out of the question, Willy. You know that it is. Besides, I am never going to speak to you again."

"Oh, that's all right—that's what you used to say when you came over to the cottage. We're getting too old for that kind of nonsense, you and I, Anna. Suppose I tell your man to wait for us in Berkeley Square. I'll say that we are going into the Arcade to look at the motor-cars—and they won't let you keep a carriage waiting in Bond Street now. I can tell you what I've heard about your friend Alban Kennedy while you're cutting me the bread and butter."

Her attention was arrested in an instant.

"What can you know about Mr. Kennedy?" she asked quickly, while her face betrayed her interest.

"Oh, I know a lot more than most. I've struck more than one friend of his these later days, and a fine time he seems having with the girls out yonder. Come over to my rooms and I'll tell you about it. I'm just fitting up a bit of a place in the Albany since your good father began to encourage virtue. I say, Anna,—he should never have sent me that cheque, you know he shouldn't."

It was a masterpiece of impudence, but it won upon her favor none the less. She had made up her mind a week ago that Willy Forrest was a rogue, a thief, and a charlatan. Yet here she was—for such is woman—tolerating his conversation and not unwilling to hear his explanations. Upon it all came his insinuation that he had news of Alban. Certainly, she did not know how to refuse him.

"You are sure that there is some one in your rooms—I will leave them instantly if there is not," she exclaimed, surprised at scruples which never had troubled her hitherto. Forrest protested by all the gods that the very doubt was an outrage.

"There's a hag about fit to knock down a policeman," he rejoined, with a feigned indignation fine to see. "Now be sensible, Anna, and let's get out. Are we babes and sucklings or what? Don't make a scene about it. I don't want you to come if you'd rather not."

She turned the ponies round almost at the door of the Albany, which they had just passed while they talked, and drove up to the door of that somewhat dismal abode. A word to her groom to be in Berkeley Square in half-an-hour did not astonish that worthy, who was quite accustomed to "Miss Hanna's" vagaries. In the corridor before the chambers, Willy laid stress upon the point about the

charwoman and made much of her.

"I'll ring the old girl up and you can cross-question her if you like. She's a regular beauty. Don't you think that I'd deceive you, Anna. Have I ever done it in all my miserable life—eh, what?" he said at the door. "Now walk right in and I'll order tea. It seems like old times to have you about, upon my word it does."

She followed him into the chambers, her anxiety about the charwoman absolutely at rest. The rooms themselves were in some little confusion, but promised to be splendidly furnished presently. Fine suites of furniture were all huddled together like policemen at a scene of public rejoicing. The rich curtains, unhung, were neatly folded upon chairs and sofas—a few sporting prints relieved the cold monotony of tinted walls—the library boasted Ruff and Wisdom for its chief masterpieces. Nothing, however, disconcerted Willy Forrest. He had produced that charwoman before you could count five.

"Make us a cup of tea, Mrs. Smiggs, will you?" he asked her boisterously. "Here's my cousin come to tell me how to plant the furniture. We shan't trouble you long—just make love to the kettle and say we're in a hurry, will you now, there's a good soul."

Mrs. Smiggs took a sidelong glance at the lady, and tossing a proud but tousled head assented to the proposition in far from becoming terms.

"I'm sure, sir, that I'm always willing to oblige," she said condescendingly, "if as the young lady wouldn't like me to step out and get no cakes nor nothing—"

"No, no, no cakes, thank you, Mrs. Smiggs—just a cup of tea as you can make it and that's all. My cousin's carriage is waiting—she won't be here ten minutes—eh, what?"

The good woman left them, carrying a retroussé nose at an angle of suspicion. Willy Forrest drew an arm-chair towards the window of that which would presently be his dining-room, and having persuaded Anna to take it, he poised himself elegantly upon the arm of a sofa near by and at once invited her confidence.

"Say, Anna, now, what's the good of nonsense? Why did you let the old man send me that cheque?"

She began to pull off her gloves, slowly and with contemplative deliberation.

"I let him send it because I did not wish to marry you."

"That's just what I thought. You got in a huff about a lot of fool's talk on the course and turned it round upon me. Just like a woman—eh, what? As if I could prevent your horse going dotty. That was Farrier's business, not mine."

"But you let me back the horse."

"Of course I did. He might have won. I was just backing my luck against yours. Of course I didn't mean you to lose anything. We were just two good pals together, and what I took out of the ring would have been yours if you'd asked me. Good Lord, what a mess your father's made of it! Me with his five thou in my pocket and you calling me a blackguard. You did call me a blackguard—now didn't you, Anna?"

It was very droll to see him sitting there and for a wonder telling her something very like the truth. This, however, had been the keystone of a moderately successful life. He had always told people that he was a scamp—a kind of admission the world is very fond of. In Anna's case he found the practice quite useful. It rarely failed to win her over.

"What was I to think?" she exclaimed almost as though her perplexity distressed her. "The people say that I have cheated them and you win my money. If I don't pay you, you say that I must marry you. Will you deny that it is the truth? You won this money from me to compel me to marry you?"

Captain Willy Forrest slapped his thigh as though she had told him an excellent joke.

"That's the best thing I've heard for a twelvemonth," cried he; "as if you were the sort to be caught that way, Anna—by an impostor too, as your Little Boy Blue told you at Henley. He said I was an impostor, didn't he? Well, he's about right there—I'm not the son of old Sir James Forrest—never was, my dear. He was my father's employer, and a devilish good servant he had. But I've some claims on his memory all the same—and why shouldn't I call myself Forrest if I want to? Now, Anna, I'll be as plain with you as a parson at a pigeon match. I do want to marry you—I've wanted to marry you ever since I knew you—but if you think I'm such a fool as to go about it in the way you say I've done, well, then, I'll put right in for the Balmy Stakes and win 'em sure and certain. Don't you see that the boot's just on the other leg right along? I win your money because I want you to think I'm a decent sort of chap when I don't take it. As for the bookies who

hissed the horse on the course—who's to pity them? Didn't they see the old gee in the paddock—eh, what! Hadn't they as good a chance as any of us to spot that dotty leg. If I'd a been born with a little white choker round my swan's-down, I'd have shouted the news from the mulberry tree. But I wasn't, my dear—I'm just one of the ruck on the lookout to make a bit—and who'll grease my wheels if I leave my can at home? No, don't you think it—I wanted to marry you right enough, but that wasn't the road. What your father's paid me, he's going to have back again and pretty soon about. Let him give it to the kid who's playing Peep-bo with the Polish Venus—I shan't take it, no, not if I come down to a porcelain bath in the Poplar Union—and what's more, you know I won't, Anna."

His keen eyes searched her face earnestly, much more earnestly than their wont, as he asked her this pointed question. Anna, upon her part, knew that he had juggled cleverly with the admitted facts of the case and yet her interest in his confession waxed stronger every moment. What an odd fascination this man exercised upon her. She felt drawn toward him as to some destiny she could not possibly escape. And when he spoke of Alban, then he had her finally enmeshed.

"What do you know of Mr. Kennedy?" she asked, sitting up very straight and turning flashing eyes upon him. "He certainly wouldn't write to you. How do you know what he is doing?"

"A little fat bird in a black coat living down Whitechapel way. Oh, I don't make any secret of it. I know a man who used to be a parson. He began to stick needles into himself, and the Bishop said—what ho! They took off his pinafore and he is now teaching Latin outside Aldgate Station. He's in with the Polish crowd—I beg your pardon, the gentlemen refugees from Poland—who are sewing the buttons on our shirts not far from the Commercial Road. Those people knew more about your friend than he knows about himself. Ask 'em straight and they'll tell you that he is in Warsaw and the girl Lois Boriskoff with him. Whether they've begun to keep house, I don't pretend to say. But it's as true as the east wind and that's gospel. You ask your father to make his own inquiries. I don't want to take it on myself. If he can tell you that Master Alban Kennedy is not something like the husband of the Polish lady Lois Boriskoff, then I'll give a penny to a hospital. Now go and ask him, Anna—don't you wait a minute, you go and ask him."

"Not until I've had that cup of tea, Willy."

She turned round as the charwoman entered and so hid her face from him. Light

laughter cloaked at once the deep affront her pride had received, and the personal sense of shame his words had left. Not for a moment did she question the truth of his story or seek to prove it. As women all the world over, she accepted instantly the hint at a man's faithlessness and determined that it must be true. And this was to say that her passion for Alban Kennedy had never been anything but a phase of girlish romance acceptable for the moment and to be made permanent only by persistence. The Eastern blood, flowing warm in her veins, would never have left her long satisfied with the precise and strenuous Englishman and the restraint his nationality put upon him. She hungered for the warm passionate caress which the East had taught her to desire. She was drawn insensibly toward the man who had awakened this instinct within her and ministered to it whenever he approached her.

They drank their tea in silence, each perhaps afraid to admit the hazard of their task. When the moment came, she had recovered her self-control sufficiently to refer again to the question of the cheque and to do so adroitly.

"Are you going to return that money to my father, Willy?"

"That's just as you like. When you come here for good, we could send it back together."

"What makes you think that I will come here for good, Willy?"

"Because when I kiss you—like this—you tremble, Anna."

He caught her instantly in his arms and covered her face with passionate kisses. Struggling for a moment in his embrace, she lay there presently acquiescent as he had known even before his hands touched her. An hour had passed before Anna quitted the flat—and then she knew beyond any possibility of question that she was about to become Willy Forrest's wife.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PRISON YARD

The great gates of the prison yard rolled back to admit the carriage in which Alban had been driven from the hotel, and a cordon of straight-backed officials immediately surrounded it. Early as the hour was, the meanest servant whom Zaniloff commanded had work to do and well understood the urgency of his task. The night had been one long story of plot and counterplot; of Revolutionaries fleeing from street to street, Cossacks galloping upon their heels, houses awakened and doors beaten down, the screams and cries of women, the savage anger of men. And all this, not upon the famous avenues which knew little of the new émeute, but down in the narrow alleys of the old city where bulging gables hid the sight from a clear heaven of stars and the crazy eaves had husbanded the cries.

There had been a civil battle fought and many were the prisoners. Not a cell about that great yard but had not its batch of ragged, shivering wretches whose backs were still bloody, whose wounds were still unbound. The quadrangle itself served, as a Cossack jocularly remarked, for the overflow meeting. Here you might perceive many types of men-students, still defiant, sage lawyers given to the parley, ragged vermin of the slums gathering their rags close about their shoulders as though to protect them from the lash; timid apostles of the gospel of humanity cowering before human fiends—thus the yard and its environment. For Alban, however, the place might not have existed. His eyes knew nothing of this grim spectacle. He followed the Chief to the upper rooms, remembering only that Lois was here.

They passed down a gloomy corridor and entered a lofty room high up on the third floor of the station. Two spacious windows gave them a fine view of the yard below with all its gregarious misery. There was a table here covered by a green baize cloth, and an officer in uniform writing at it. He stood and saluted Zaniloff with a gravity fine to see. The Chief, in turn, nodded to him and drew a chair to the table. When he had found ink and paper he began the interrogation which should help his dossier.

"You are an Englishman and your age is"—he waited and turned to Alban.

"My age is just about twenty-one."

"You were born in England?"

"In London; I was born in London."

"And you now live?"

"With Mr. Richard Gessner at Hampstead."

So it went—interminable question and answer, of the most trivial kind. It seemed an age before they came to the vital issue.

"And what do you know of this crime which has been committed?"

"I know nothing—how could I know anything."

"Pardon me, you were yesterday in company of the girl who is charged with its commission."

"The charge is absurd—I am sure of it."

"We shall decide that for ourselves. You visited her upon the barge of the German merchant, Petermann. He is now in custody and has confessed as much. What did she say to you when you were alone with her?"

"She asked me to help to set her father free."

"An honest admission—we shall do very well, I see. When she spoke of his excellency the Count, she said—"

"I am not afraid to tell you. She did not like him and asked me to take her away from Warsaw, disguised as my servant."

"That was not clever, sir. As if we should not have known—but I pass it by. You left her and then—"

"I spent the day with the Count and returned with him to the hotel at three o'clock in the morning."

"There was no one with him, then?"

"Yes, his valet was with him."

"Did you leave them together when you went to bed?"

"He always helped the Count to undress. I cannot remember where I left him."

"You have not a good memory, I perceive."

"Not for that which happened at three o'clock in the morning."

Zaniloff permitted the merest suspicion of a smile to lurk about the corners of a sensual mouth.

"It is difficult," he said dryly—and then, "your memory will be better later on. Did the girl tell you that his excellency would be assassinated?"

"You know very well that she did not."

"I know?"

"Certainly, you have had too much experience not to know."

"Most flattering—please do not mistake me. I am asking you these questions because I wish that justice shall be done. If you can do nothing to clear Lois Boriskoff, I am afraid that we shall have to flog her."

"That would be a cowardly thing to do. It would also be very foolish. She has many friends both here and in England. I don't think they will forget her."

"Wild talk, Mr. Kennedy, very wild talk. I see that you will not help me. We must let the Governor know as much and he will decide. I warn you at the same time that it will go very hard with you if the Count should die—and as for this woman, we will try other measures. She must certainly be flogged."

"If you do that, I myself will see that her friends in England know about it. The Governor will never be so foolish—that is, if he wishes to save Mr. Gessner."

"Gessner—Gessner—I hear the name often—pardon me, I have not the honor of his acquaintance."

"Telegraph to the Minister at St. Petersburg and he will tell you who Mr. Gessner is. I think you would be wise to do so."

Zaniloff could make nothing of it. The cool effrontery of this mere stripling was unlike anything he had heard at the bureau in all the years he had served authority. Why, the bravest men had gone down on their knees to him before now and almost shrieked for mercy. And here was this bit of an English boy plucking the venerable beard of Terror as unconcernedly as though he were a

sullen-eyed Cossack with a nagaika in his hand. Assuredly he could be no ordinary traveller. And why did he harp upon this name Gessner, Richard Gessner! Reflection brought it to Zaniloff's mind that he had heard the name before. Yes, it had been mentioned in a dossier from the Ministry of Justice. He thought again and recalled other circumstances. The Government had been anxious to do the man a service—they had commanded the arrest of the Boriskoffs—why, at this very Gessner's bidding! And had not the Count warned him to treat the young Englishman as his own son—merely to play a comedian's part and to frighten him before opening the doors with profuse apologies. Zaniloff did not like the turn affairs had taken. He determined to see the Governor-General without a moment's loss of time. Meanwhile there could be no earthly reason why the girl should not be flogged. Whatever happened the Minister would approve that.

"It shall be done as you advise," he rejoined presently, the admission passing for an excellent joke. "The telegram shall be dispatched immediately. While we are waiting for an answer I will command them to bring you some breakfast to my own private room. Meanwhile, as I say, the girl must be flogged."

Alban shrugged his shoulders.

"I did not believe that you could possibly be so foolish," he said.

It puzzled Zaniloff altogether. Searching that open face with eyes accustomed to read many human stories, he could discern neither emotion nor anger, but just an honest man's faith in his own cause and a sure belief that it must triumph. Whatever Alban might really feel, the sickening apprehension of which he was the victim, the almost overmastering desire to take this ruffian by the throat and strangle him as he sat, not a trace of it could be discerned either in his speech or his attitude. "He stood before me like a dog which has barked and is waiting to bite," Zaniloff said afterwards. "I might as well have threatened to flog the statue of Sobiesky in the Castle gardens." This impression, however, he was careful to conceal from the prisoner. Official dignity never argues—especially when it is getting the worst of the deal.

"My wisdom is not for us to discuss," he snapped; "please to remember that I am in authority here and allow no one to question what I do. You will remain in my room until I return, sir. Afterwards it must be as the Governor decides."

He took up his papers and whispering a few words to the stolid secretary he left the room and went clanking down the corridor. The officer who remained

seemed principally concerned in driving the flies from his bald head and from the documents he compiled so laboriously. Stopping from time to time to shape a quill pen to his liking, he would write a few lines carefully, kill a number of flies, take a peep at Alban from beneath his shaggy brows and then resume the cycle of his labors. Alban pitied him cynically. This labor of docketing scarred backs seemed wretchedly monotonous. He was really glad when the fellow spoke to him, in as amazing a combination of tongues as man had ever heard:

"Mein Herr—pardon—what shall you say—comment à dire—for the English—Moskowa?"

"We say Moscow, sir."

"Ah—Mosk—Mosk-nitchevo—je ne m'en souviens jamais."

He continued to write as though laboring under an incurable disappointment. That Alban knew what Moskowa meant was not surprising, for he had heard the word so often in Union Street. Here in this very courtyard, far below his windows, were the sons and the brothers of those who had preached revolution in England. How miserable they looked—great hordes of them, all crouching in the shadow of the wall to save their lacerated skins from the burning sunshine. Verily did they resemble sheep driven into pens for the slaughter. As for the Cossacks who moved in and out among them, there was hardly a moment which found their whips at rest. Standing or sitting, you could not escape the dreadful thongs—lashes of raw hide upon a core of wires, leaded at the end and cutting as knives. Sometimes they would strike at a huddled form as though they resented its mute confession of overwhelming misery. An upturned face almost invariably invited a cut which laid it open from forehead to chin. And not only this, but there were ordered floggings, one of which Alban must witness as he stood at the window above, too fascinated by the horror of the spectacle to move away and not unwilling to know the truth.

Many police assisted at this—driving their victims before them to a rude bench in the centre of the yard. There was neither strap nor triangle. They threw their man down and held him across the plank, gripping his wrists and ankles and one forcing his head to the floor. The whip of a single lash, wired to cut and leaded everywhere, fell across the naked flesh with a sound of a cane upon a board. Great welts were left at the very first blow, torn flesh afterwards and sights not to be recounted. The most stolid were broken to shrieks and screams despite their resolutions. The laugh upon defiant lips became instantly a terrible cry seeming

to echo the ultimate misery. As they did to these poor wretches so would they do to Lois, Alban said. He was giddy when a voice called him from the window and he almost reeled as he turned.

"Well, what do you want with me?"

"I am to take you to the cell of the girl Lois Boriskoff, mein Herr. Please to follow me."

An official, well dressed in civilian's clothes, spoke to him this time and with a sufficient knowledge of the English language. The bald-headed secretary still snapped up the unconsidered insectile trifles which troubled his paper. Alban, his heart thumping audibly, followed the newcomer from the room and remembered only that he was going to Lois.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MEETING

They had imprisoned many of the women in one of the stables behind the great yard of the station. So numerous were the captives that the common cells had been full and overflowing long ago. Zaniloff, charged with the command to restore order in the city at any cost, cared not a straw what the world without might say of him. The rifle, the bayonet, the revolver, the whip—here were fine tools and proved. Let but a breath of suspicion frost the burnish of a reputation and he would have that man or woman at the bar, though arrest might cost a hundred lives. Thus it came about that those within the gates were a heterogeneous multitude to which all classes had contributed. The milliner's assistant crouched side by side with the Countess, though she still feared to touch her robe. There were professors' daughters and dockers' wives, ladies from the avenue and ladies from the hovels. And just as in the great arena beyond the walls, so here Pride was the staff of the well-born, Prejudice of the weak.

Amid this trembling company, in the second of the stables, the gloom shrouding her from suspicious observation, none noticing so humble a creature, Alban found Lois and made himself known to her. The amiable civilian with his two or three hundred words of English seemed as guileless as a child when he announced Master Zaniloff's message and dwelt upon his honorable master's beneficence.

"You are to see this lady, sir, and to tell her that if she is honest with us we shall do our best to clear her of the charge. She knows what that will mean to name the others to us and then for herself the liberty. That is his excellency my master's decision."

"Much obliged to him," said Alban, dryly, and perhaps it was as well that Herr Amiability did not catch the tone of it.

"We have much prisoner," the good man went on, "much prisoner and not so much prison. That is as you say a perplexity. But it will be better; later in the time after. Here is the girl, this is the place."

He bent his head to enter the stable and Alban followed him, silently for very

fear of his own excitement. There was so little light in the place that he could scarcely distinguish anything at first, nothing, indeed, but great beds of straw and black figures huddled upon them. By and by these took shape and became figures of women of all ages and types. Many, he perceived, were Jewesses, dark as night and as mysterious. Their clothes were poor, their attitude courageous and quiet. A Circassian, whose hair was the very color of the straw with which it mingled, stood out in contrast with the others. She had lately been flogged and the clothes, torn from her bleeding shoulders, had not been replaced. Near by, the wife of a professor at the University, young and distinguished and but yesterday welcomed everywhere, sat dumb in misery, her eyes wide open, her thoughts upon the child she had left. Not among these did Alban find Lois, but in the second of the great stalls still waiting its complement of prisoners. He wondered that he found her at all, so dark was this place; but a sure instinct led him to her and he stopped before he had even seen her face.

"Lois dear, I am sure it is Lois."

She started up from the straw, straining wild eyes in the shadows. Awakened from her sleep when they arrested her, she wore the dress which she had carried to her haven from the school, quite plain and pretty, with linen collars and cuffs in the old-fashioned style. Her hair had been loosely plaited and was bound about her like a cord. She rested upon the palms of her hands turned down to the pavement. There was but one other woman near her, and she appeared to be asleep. When she heard Alban's voice, she cried out almost as though they had struck her with the whip.

"Why do you come here?" she asked him wildly. "Alban, dear, whatever made you come?"

Why do you come here? she asked him wildly.

"Why do you come here?" she asked him wildly.

He stepped forward and kneeling down in the straw he pressed his cold lips to

hers and held them there for many minutes.

"Did you not wish me to come, Lois?"

She shivered, her big eyes were casting quick glances everywhere, they rested at last upon the woman who seemed to sleep almost at her feet.

"They will hear every word we say, Alb, dear. That woman is listening, she is a spy."

"I am glad of it, she can go and give her master a message from me. Tell me, Lois, do not be afraid to speak. You knew nothing of Count Zamoyski's death. Say that you knew nothing."

She cowered and would not answer him. A dreadful fear came upon Alban. He began to tremble and could not keep his hands still upon her shoulders.

"Good God, Lois, why do you not speak to me? I must know the truth, you didn't kill him."

She shrank back, laughing horribly. The pent-up excitements of the night had broken her nerve at last. For an instant he feared almost for her reason.

"Lois, Lois dear, Lois, listen to me; I have come to help you. I can help you. Lois, will you not hear me patiently?"

He caught her to him as he spoke and pressed her burning forehead to his lips. So she lay for a little while, rocked in his arms as a child that would be comforted. A single ray of sunshine filtered through a slit in the wall above, dwelt for a moment upon her white face and showed him all the pity of it.

"Lois, why should you speak like this because I come to you? Is it so difficult to tell the truth?"

"Did they tell you to ask me that, Alban?"

"It was forced from me, Lois. I don't believe it. I would as soon believe it of myself. But don't you see that we must answer them? They are saying it, and we must answer them."

She struggled to be free, half resenting the manner of his question, but in her heart admitting its necessity.

"I knew nothing of it," she said simply, "you may tell them that, Alban. If they

offered me all the riches in the world, I could not say more. I don't know who did it, dear, and I'd never tell them if I did."

A little cry escaped his lips and he caught her close in his arms again. It was not to say that he had believed the darker story at which imagination, in a cowardly mood, might hint, but this plain denial, from the lips of Lois who had never told him a lie, came as a very message of their salvation.

"You have made me very happy, Lois," he said, "now I can talk to them as they deserve. Of course, I shall get you out of here. Mr. Gessner will help me to do so. We have the whip hand of him all said and done, for don't you see, that if you don't tell your people, I shall, and that will be the end of it. Of course, it won't come to that. I know how he will act, and what they will do when the time arrives. Perhaps they will bundle us both out of Russia, Lois, thankful to see the back of us."

She shook her head, looking up to him with a wild face.

"I would not go, Alb dear. Not while my father is a prisoner. Who is there to work for him, if I don't? No, my dear, I must not think of it. I have my duty to do whatever comes. But you, it is different for you, Alban, you would be right to go."

He answered her hotly with a boyish phrase, conventional but true.

"You would make a coward of me, Lois," he said, "just a coward like the others. But I am not going to let you. You left me once before; I have never forgotten that. You went to Russia, and forgot that we had ever been friends. Was that very kind, was it your true self that did so? I'll never believe, unless you say so now."

She sat a little apart from him, regarding him wistfully as though she wondered greatly at his accusation.

"You went to live in another world, dear, and so did I. My father made me promise that I would not try to see you for six months, and I kept my word. That was better for you and better for me. If money had changed you, and money does change most of us, you would have been happier for my silence. I have told you about the letters, and that's God's truth. If I had not been ashamed, I couldn't have kept my word, for I loved you, dear, and I shall always love you. When my father sent you to Mr. Gessner's house, I think he wished to find out if his good opinion of you was right or not. He said that you were going to carry a sword

into Wonderland and kill some of the giants. If you came back to us, you were to marry me, but if you forgot us, then he would never believe in any man again. There's the truth for you, my dear, I tell you because it all means nothing to me now. I could not go to London and leave my father in prison here, and they will never release him, Alban, they will never do it as things are, for they are more frightened of him than of any man in Russia. When I go away from here, it will be to Petersburg to try and see my father. There's no one else in all the world to help him, and I shall go there and try to see him. If they will let me stay with him, that will be something, dear. You can ask them that for me; when Mr. Gessner writes, you can beg it of the Ministry in Mr. Gessner's name."

"Ask them to send you to prison, Lois?"

"To send me to my father, dear."

Alban sat very silent, almost ashamed for himself and his own desires. The stupendous sacrifice of which she spoke so lightly revealed to him a page in the story of human sympathy which he had often read and as often derided. Here in the prison cell he stood face to face with human love as Wonderland knew nothing of it. Supreme above all other desires of her life, this desire to save her father, to share his sorrows, to stand by him to the end, prevailed. The riches of the world could not purchase a devotion as precious, or any fine philosophy belittle it. He knew that she would go to Petersburg because Paul Boriskoff, her father, had need of her. This was her answer to his selfish complaints during the years of their exile.

"And what am I to do if they give you the permission, Lois?"

"To go back to London and marry Anna Gessner. Won't you do that, Alban?"

"You know that I shall never do so."

"There was a time when you would not have said that, my dear."

He was greatly troubled, for the accusation was very just. The impossibility of making the whole truth plain to her had stared him in the face since the moment of her pathetic confession when he met her on the barge. Impossible to say to her, "I had an ideal and pursued it, looking to the right and the left for the figure of the vision and suffering it to escape me all the time." This he could not tell her or even hint at. The lie cried for a hearing, and the lie was detestable to him.

"There was a time, yes, Lois," he said, turning his face from her, "I am ashamed

to remember it now, since you have spoken. If you love me, you would understand what all the wonders of Mr. Gessner's house meant to a poor devil, brought up as I had been. It was another world with strange people everywhere. I thought they were more than human and found them just like the rest of us. Oh, that's the truth of it, and I know it now. Our preachers are always calling upon the rich to do fine things for the poor, but the rich man is deaf as often as not, because some little puny thing in their own lives is dinning in their ears and will shut out all other sounds. I know that it must be so. The man who has millions doesn't think about humanity at all. He wages war upon trifles, his money-books are his library, he has blinded himself by reading them and lost his outlook upon the world. I thought it would all be so different, and then somebody touches me upon the shoulder and I look up and see that my vision is no vision at all, and that the true heart of it is my own all the time. Can you understand that, Lois, is it hidden from you also?"

"It is not hidden, Alban, it is just as I said it would be."

"And you did not love me less because of it?"

"I should never have loved you less, whatever you had done."

"I shall remind you of that when we are in England together."

"That will never be, Alban dear, unless my father is free."

She repeated it again and again. Her manner of speaking had now become that of one who understood that this was a last farewell.

"You cannot help us," she said, "why should you suffer because we must? In England there's a great future before you as Mr. Gessner's adopted son. I shall never hear of it, but I shall be proud because I know the world will talk about you. That will be something to take with me, dear, something they can never rob me of, whatever happens. When you remember who Lois was, say that she is thinking of you in Russia far away. They cannot separate us, dear Alban, while we love."

He had no word to answer this and could but harp again upon all the promise of his fine resolution. When the matter-of-fact official came to find him, Lois was close in his embrace and there were tears of regret in his eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX

ALBAN RETURNS TO LONDON

They returned to the great courtyard, but not to Zaniloff's room as the promise had been. Here by the gates there stood a passable private carriage, and into this Alban perceived that he was to be hustled. The bestarred transcriber of the upper story, he who waged the battle of the flies, now stood by the carriage door and appeared to be ill at ease. Evidently his study of strange tongues still troubled him.

"Pardon, mein Herr—how in English—khorosho?" he asked very deferentially.

"It means 'that's all right,' sir." Alban answered immediately.

"It means that,—ah, nitchevo—je ne m'en souviens jamais."

He held the door open and Alban entered the carriage without a word. Apparently they still waited for someone and five minutes passed and found their attitudes unchanged. Then Zaniloff himself appeared full of bustle and business but in a temper modified toward concession.

"I am taking you back to your hotel, mein Herr," he said to Alban, "it is the Governor's order. You will leave Warsaw to-night. Those are our instructions."

He sank back in the cushions and the great gates were shut behind them with a sonorous clang. Out in the streets the outbreak of the earlier hours had been a veritable battle but was now a truce. The whole city seemed to be swarming with troops. Well might Zaniloff think of other things.

"Is the Count better, sir?" Alban ventured presently.

"He will live," was the dry response, "at least the doctors say so."

"And you have discovered the truth about the affair?"

"The man who attacked him was shot on the Rymarska half an hour ago."

"Then that is why you are taking me back to my hotel?"

"There is positively no other reason," said the Chief.

The statement was frank to the point of brutality, but it carried also such a message of hope that Alban hardly dared to repeat the words of it even to himself; there was no longer any possibility of a capital charge against the child he had just left in the wretched stable. Let the other facts be as they might, these people could not detain Lois Boriskoff upon the Count's affair or add it to the dossier in which her father's offences were narrated. Of this Zaniloff's tone convinced him. "He would never have admitted it at all if Lois were compromised," the argument ran, and was worthy of the wise head which arrived at it.

"I am glad that you have found the man," he explained presently, "it clears up so much and must be very satisfactory. Would you have any objection to telling me what you are going to do with the girl I have just left?"

Zaniloff smiled.

"I have no objection at all. When the Ministry at St. Petersburg condescends to inform me, you shall share my information. At present I am going to keep her under lock and key, and if she is obstinate I am going to flog her."

"Do the people at St. Petersburg wish you to do that?"

"I do not consult their feelings," was the curt reply.

They fell to silence once more and the carriage rolled on through the busy streets. It had escaped Alban's notice hitherto, that an escort of Cossacks accompanied them, but as they turned into the great avenue he caught a glimpse of bright accoutrements and of horsemen going at a gentle canter. The avenue itself was almost deserted save by the ever-present infantry who lined its walks as though some great cavalcade were to pass. When they had gone another hundred paces, the need for the presence of the soldiers declared itself in a heap of blackened ruins and a great fire still smouldering. Zaniloff smiled grimly when they passed the place.

"Half an hour ago that was the palace of my namesake, the Grand Duke Sergius," he said, almost as though the intelligence were a matter of personal satisfaction to him.

Alban looked at the smouldering ruins and could not help remembering the strange threats he had heard in Union Street on the very eve of his departure

from England. Had any of the old mad orators a hand in this? Those wild figures of the platforms and the slums, had they achieved so much, if indeed it were achievement at all?

"They are fools to make war upon bricks and mortar," Zaniloff remarked in his old quiet way.

"I told them so in London, sir."

"You told them; do you enjoy the honor of their acquaintance then?"

"I know as much about them as any of your people, and that is saying a good deal. They are very ignorant men who are suffering great wrongs. If your government would make an effort to learn what the world is thinking about to-day, you would soon end all this. But you will never do it by the whip, and guns will not help you."

Zaniloff laid a hand upon his shoulder almost in a kindly way.

"My honor alone forbids me to believe that," he exclaimed.

They arrived at the hotel while he spoke and passed immediately to the private apartments above. A brief intimation that Alban must consider himself still a prisoner and not leave his rooms under any circumstances, whatever, found a ready acquiescence from one who had heard an echo in Lois' words of his own farewell to Russia. That the authorities would detain him he did not believe, and he knew that his long task was not here. He must return to England and save Lois. How or by what means he could not say; for the ultimate threat, so lightly spoken, affrighted him when he was alone and left him a coward. How, indeed, if he went to the fanatics of Union Street and said to them,—"Richard Gessner is your enemy; strike at him." There would be vengeance surely, but he had received too many kindnesses at Hampstead that he should contemplate such an infamy. And what other course lay before him? He could not say, his life seemed lived. Neither ambition nor desire, apart from the prison he had left, remained to him.

The French valet Malette waited upon him in his rooms and gave him such news of the Count as the sentinels of the sick-room permitted. Oh, yes, his excellency was a little better. He had spoken a few words and asked for his English friend. Nothing was known of the madman who struck him save that which the papers in his pocket told them. The fellow had been shot as he left the Grand Duke's

palace; some thought that he had been formerly in the Count's service and that this was merely an act of vengeance, *mais terrible*, as Malette added with emphasis. Later on his excellency would be able to tell the story for himself. His grand constitution had meant very much to him to-day.

The interview took place at three o'clock in the afternoon, the doctors having left their patient, and the perplexed Zaniloff being again at the prison. The bed had now been wheeled a little way from the window and the room set in pleasant order by clever and willing hands. The Count himself had lost none of his courage. The attack in truth had nerved him to believe that he had nothing further to fear in Warsaw, for who would think about a man already as good as buried by the newspapers. Here was something to help the surgeons and bring some little flush of color to the patient's pallid cheeks. He spoke as a man who had been through the valley of the shadow and had suffered little inconvenience by the journey.

"I am forbidden to talk," he said to Alban, and immediately began to talk in defiance of a nurse's protests.

"So you have been to prison, mon vieux; well, it is so much experience for you, and experience is useful. I have done a good morning's work, as you see. Imagine it. I open my door to a policeman, and when I ask him what he has got for me, he whips out a butcher's knife and makes a thrust at my ribs. Happily for me, I come from a bony race. The surgeons have now gone to fight a duel about it. One is for septic pneumonia, the other for the removal of the lungs. I shall be out of Poland in my beautiful France by the time they agree."

He flushed with the exertion and cast reproachful eyes upon the nurse who stood up to forbid his further eloquence. Alban, in turn, began to tell him of the adventure of the morning.

"It was a Jack and Jill business, except that Jill does not come tumbling after," he said. "What is going to happen I cannot tell you. Lois will not leave Poland until her father is released, and I have it from her that he never will be released. Don't you see, Count, that Mr. Gessner is a fool to play with fire like this. Does he believe that this secret will be kept because these two are in prison? I know that it will not. If he is to be saved, it must be by generosity and courage. I should have thought he would have known it from the beginning. Let him act fairly by old Paul Boriskoff and I will answer for his safety. If he does not do so, he must blame himself for the consequences."

"Pride never blames itself, Kennedy, even when it is foolish. I like your wisdom and shall give a good account of it. Of course, there is the other side of the picture, and that is not very pretty. How can we answer for the man, even if he be generously dealt with? More important still, how can we answer for the woman?"

"I will answer for her, Count."

"You, my dear boy. How can you do that?"

"By making her my wife."

"Do you say this seriously?"

"I say it seriously."

"But why not at Hampstead before we left England. That would have made it easier for us all."

"I would try to tell you, but you would not understand. Perhaps I did not know then what I know now. There are some things which we only learn with difficulty, lessons which it needs suffering to teach us."

A sharp spasm, almost of pain, crossed the Count's face.

"That is very true," he exclaimed, "please do not think I am deficient in understanding. It has been necessary for you to come to Poland to discover where your happiness lay?"

"Yes, it has been necessary."

"Do you understand, that this would mean the termination of your good understanding with my friend Gessner. You could not remain in his house naturally."

"I have thought of that. It will be necessary for me to leave him as you say. But I have been an interloper from the beginning, and I do not see how I could have remained. While everything was new to me, while I lived in Wonderland, I never gave much thought to it; but here when I begin to think, I am no longer in doubt. How could I shut myself up in a citadel of riches and know that so many of my poor people were starving not ten miles from my door. I would feel as though I had gone into the enemy's camp and sold myself for the gratification of a few silly desires and a whole pantomime of show which a decent man must laugh at.

It is better for me to have done with it once and for all and try to get my own living. Lois will give me the right to work, if she ever wins her liberty, which I doubt. You could help her to do so, if you were willing, Count."

"I, what influence have I?"

"As much as any man in Poland, I should say."

"Ah, you appeal to my vanity. I wish it could respond. Frankly, my Government will be little inclined to clemency, just now at any rate. Why should it be? These people are burning down our houses, why should we help them to build their own? Your old friend Boriskoff was as dangerous a man as any in Poland, why should they let him go just because an English banker wishes it."

"They will let him go because he is more dangerous in prison than out of it. In London I could answer for him. I could not answer while he is at Petersburg."

"My dear lad, we must really make you Master of all these pretty ceremonies. I'll speak to Zaniloff." He laughed lightly, for the idea of this mere stripling being of any use to his Government amused him greatly. His apologies for the indulgence, however, were not to be spoken, for the blood suddenly rushed from his cheeks, and the good nurse intervened in some alarm.

"Please to leave him," she said to Alban in French. He obeyed her immediately, seeing that he had been wrong to stay so long.

"I will come again when you permit me. Please let me know when his excellency is better."

She promised him that she would do so, and he returned to his own rooms. He was not, however, to see the Count again until he met him many years afterwards in Paris. The distressed Zaniloff himself carried the amazing news, some two hours later.

"You are to leave for London by the evening mail," the Chief said shortly, "a berth has been reserved for you, and I myself will see you into the train. Do not complain of us, Mr. Kennedy. I can assure you that there are many cities more agreeable than Warsaw at the present moment."

Alban was not surprised, nor would he argue upon it. He realized that his labors in Poland had been in vain. If he could save Lois from the prison, he must do so in London, in the alleys and dens he had so long deserted. Not toward

Wonderland, not at the shrines of riches, but as an exile returned to labor with the humblest, must this journey carry him.

And he bowed his head to destiny and believed that he stood alone against the world.

CHAPTER XXX

WE MEET OLD FRIENDS

Alban had returned some two months from Poland, when, upon a drear October evening, the Archbishop of Bloomsbury, my Lady Sarah, the flower girl, and "Betty," the half-witted boy, made their way about half-past nine o'clock to the deserted stage of the Regent Theatre, and there by the courtesy of the watchman, distantly related to Sarah, began their preparations for a homely evening meal.

To be quite candid, this was altogether a more respectable company than that which had assembled in the Caves at the springtime of the year. The Lady Sarah wore a spruce black silk dress which had adorned the back of a Duchess more than three years ago; the Archbishop boasted a coat that would have done no discredit to a Canon of St. Paul's; the boy they would call "Betty" had a flower at the button-hole of a neat gray suit, and carried himself as though all the world belonged to him. This purple and fine linen, to be sure, were rather lost upon the empty stage of that dismal theatre, nor did the watchman's lantern and two proud wax-candles which the Lady Sarah carried do much for their reputation; but, as the Archbishop wisely said, "We know that they are there, and Sarah has the satisfaction of rustling for us."

Now to be plainer, this was the occasion of a letter just received from "the Panorama," who had gone to America since June, and of joyful news from that incurable optimism.

"I gather," the Archbishop had said, as he passed the document round, "that our young friend, er—hem—having exhibited the American nation in wax, a symbol of its pliability, surely is now proceeding to melt it down and to return to England. That is a wise undertaking. Syrus, the philosopher, has told us that Fortune is like glass, when she shines too much she is broken. Let our friend take the tide at the flood and not complain afterwards that his ship was too frail. The Panorama has achieved reputation, and who is of the world does not know the pecuniary worth of that? Consider my own case and bear with me. I have the misfortune to prick myself with a needle and to suffer certain personal inconveniences thereby. The world calls me a villain. Other men, differently situated, kill thousands of their fellow-creatures and look forward to the day

when they will be buried in Westminster Abbey. We envy them at the height and the depth of it. This the Panorama should remember. A successful showman is here to-day and—er—hem—melted down to-morrow. It is something to have left no debts behind him; it is much more to have remembered his old friends in these small tokens which we shall consume in all thankfulness, according to our happiness and our digestions."

He had seated himself upon a stage chair, gilt and anciently splendid, to deliver himself of this fine harangue. The lady Sarah, in her turn, hastened to take up a commanding position upon the throne that had served for a very modern Cleopatra, while the boy "Betty," accustomed to hard beds, squatted upon the bare boards and was the happier for his liberty. For inward satisfaction, the menu declared a monstrous pie from a shop near by; a plentiful supply of fried fish; three dozen oysters in a puny barrel, and a half a dozen bottles of stout, three of which protruded from the Archbishop's capacious pockets. The occasion was a great one, indeed, the memory of their old friend, the Panorama, at its zenith.

"I always did say as he'd make a noise in the world, and that's the truth, God knows," Sarah took an early occasion to remark. "Not if he were my own brother could I wish him more than I do this night. 'Tisn't all of us would care to go 'crost the ocean among the cannibals and take the King of Hingerland in a 'amper. I saw him myself, wrapped up in a piper box and lookin' beautiful, God's truth, with the crown done up in tissue beside him. That was before the Panorama left us. 'Be a good boy,' says I, 'and don't fall in love with any of them darkies as you'll find in' Mericky. So help me lucky, I'd a good mind ter come after you,' says I, 'and marry their Ole Man jess ter set 'em a good example.'"

By which it will be perceived that the Lady Sarah's knowledge of the great and mighty Republic beyond the seas was clearly limited. Such ignorance had often provoked the Archbishop of Bloomsbury to exasperation, it annoyed him not a little to-night.

"My dear child," he protested, "you are laboring under a very great delusion. Be assured that America is a very great country, where—er—hem—they may eat each other, but not as you imagine. I believe that the American ladies are very beautiful. I have met some of them—er—in the old days, when—hem—the Bishops showed their confidence in me by drinking my claret and finding it to their liking. All that we have in England they have in America—prisons, paupers, policemen, palaces. You are thinking of Africa, Sarah, darkest Africa, that used to be, but is fast disappearing. Led me add—"

Sarah, however, was already busy upon her dozen of oysters and had no patience to hear the good man out.

"Don't you take on so, Bishop," she intervened, "'Mericky ain't done much for me and precious little it's going ter do for you. What I says is, let those as have got a good 'ome stop there and be thankful. Yer may talk about your oshun wave, but I ain't taking any, no, not though there was diamonds on the sea beach the other side and 'ot-'arse roses fer nothink. Who ever sees their ole friends as is swallered up by the sea? Who ever heard of Alb Kennedy since he went ter Berling as he told us for to mike his fortune? Ho, a life on the oshun wave if yer like, but not for them as has bread and cheese ashore and a good bed to go to arterwards; that's what I shall say as long as I've breath in my body."

"Betty," the boy, answered to this earnest lamentation with a sound word of good common sense.

"You're a-goin' to sleep in one o' them boxes to-night, ain't you, Sarah?" he asked, and she admitted the truth of his conclusions.

"And sweeter dreams I would have if I knew where the Dook was a-layin' his 'ed this night," she added.

The Archbishop ate a succulent morsel and drank a long draught from the unadorned black bottle.

"Nothing is known of Kennedy at Hampstead," he interposed, "I have made diligent inquiries of the gardener there, and he assures me that our dear friend never returned from Poland and that no one knows anything of him, not even Mr. Gessner. Anna, the daughter, I understand, is married to an old acquaintance of ours and has taken a little house in Curzon Street. She liked to go the—er—hem —pace, as the people say; and she is mated to one who will not be afraid of exceeding the legal limits. Mr. Gessner himself is on his yacht, and is supposed to be cruising off the coast of Norway. That is what they tell me. I have no reason to doubt the truth of their information. Would to heaven I had. Kennedy was a friend, a true friend, while he was in England. I have known many a bitter night since he left us."

He sighed, but valiantly, and applied himself once more to the pewter pot. It was a terrible night outside, raining heavily and blowing a bitter wind. Even here on the stage of the deserted theatre a chilling draught sported with their candles and made fine ghosts for them upon the faded canvas. Talk of Alban Kennedy

seemed to have depressed them all. They uttered no word for many minutes, not indeed until one of the iron doors suddenly swung open and Alban himself came in among them. He was drenched to the skin, for he had carried no umbrella, and wore but a light travelling suit, the identical one in which he had returned from Poland. Very pale and worn and thin, this, they said, was the ghost of the Alban who had left them in the early summer. And his manner was as odd as his appearance. You might almost have said that he had thrown the last shred of the aristocratic rags to the winds and put on old habits so long discarded that they were almost forgotten. When he crossed the stage to them, it was with his former air of dogged indifference and cynical self-content. Explanations were neither offered nor asked. He flung his hat aside and sat upon the corner of a crazy sofa despised by the rest of the company. A hungry look, cast upon the inviting delicacies, betrayed the fact that he was hungry. Be sure it was not lost upon the watchful Sarah.

"Good Gawd, to see him walk in amongst us like that. Why, Mr. Kennedy, whatever's up, whatever brings you here a night like this?"

Alban had always admired the Lady Sarah, he admired her more than ever to-night.

"Wind and rain, Sarah," he said shortly, "they brought me here, to say nothing of Master Betty cutting across the street as though the cops were at his heels. How are you all? How's his reverence? Speak up, my lord, how are the affairs of your extensive diocese?"

"My affairs," said the Archbishop, slowly, "are what might be called in *nubibus*—cloudy, my dear boy, distinctly cloudy. I am, to adopt a homely simile, at present under a neighbor's umbrella, which is not as sound as it might be. Behold me, none the less, in that state of content to which the poet Horace has happily referred—*nec vixit male qui natus moriensque fefellit*. At this moment you discover me upon a pleasant bridge which spans an unknown abyss. I eat, drink and am merry. What more shall I desire?"

"And Betty here, does Betty keep out of mischief?"

Sarah answered this.

"I got him a job at Covent Garden, and he's there regular at four o'clock every morning sure as the sun's in heaven. Don't you go thinking nothink about Betty, Mr. Kennedy, and so I tell you straight."

"And what have you done with the Panorama, Sarah?"

She laughed loudly.

"Panorama's among the black men, them's his oysters as we're eatin' now. Try one, Mr. Kennedy. You look as if a drop of summat would do you good, so help me you do. Take a sup o' stout and rest yourself awhile. It is a surprise to see you, I must say."

"A very pleasant surprise, indeed," added the Archbishop, emphatically. "There has been no event in my life for many months which has given me so much satisfaction. We have not so many friends that we can spare even one of them to those higher spheres, which, I must say, he has adorned with such conspicuous lustre."

"Oh, spare me, reverence, don't talk nonsense to-night. I am tired as you see, tired and hungry. And I'm going to beg food and drink from old friends who have loved me. Now, Sarah, what's it to be?"

He drew the sofa nearer to the bare table and began to eat with them. Sarah's motherly protestations induced him to take off his coat and hang it up in the watchman's office to dry. The same tender care served out to him the most delicate morsels, from a generous if uncouth table, and insisted upon their acceptance. If his old friends were hot with curiosity to know whence he came and what he had been doing, they, as the poor alone can do successfully, asked no questions nor even hinted at their desire. Not until the supper was over and the Archbishop had produced a little packet of cigars, did any general conversation interrupt that serious business of eating and drinking, so rarely indulged in, so sacred when opportunity offered.

This amiable truce to curiosity, dictated by nature, was first broken by the Archbishop, who did not possess my Lady Sarah's robust powers of self-command. Passing Alban a cigar, he asked him a question which had been upon his lips from the beginning.

"You are just returned from Poland, Kennedy?"

"I have been in England two months, reverence."

"But not at Hampstead, my dear boy, not at Hampstead, surely?"

"As you say, not at Hampstead, at least not at "Five Gables." Mr. Gessner is

away yachting; I read it in the newspapers."

"You read it in the newspapers. God bless me! do you mean to say that he did not tell you himself?"

"He told me nothing. How could he? He hasn't got my address."

They all stared, open-eyed in wonder. Even the Lady Sarah had a question to ask now.

"You're not back in Whitechapel again."

"True as gold. I am living in Union Street, and going to be married."

"To be married; who's the lidy?"

"That's what I want to know; perhaps it would be little red-haired Chris Denholm. I can't exactly tell you, Sarah."

"Here none of that—you're pullin'—"

Sarah caught the Archbishop's frown, and corrected herself adroitly.

"It ain't true, Mr. Kennedy, is it now?"

"God knows, Sarah, I don't. I'm earning two pounds a week in a motor shop and living in the old ken by Union Street. Mr. Gessner has left the country and his daughter is married to Willy Forrest. I hope she'll like him. They'll make a pretty pair in a crow's nest. Pass the stout and let's drink to 'em. I must be off directly; if I don't walk home, it'll be pneumonia or something equally pleasant. But I'm glad to see you all, you know it, and I wish you luck from the bottom of my heart."

He took a long drink from a newly opened bottle and claiming his coat passed out as mysteriously as he had come. The watchman said that a man waited for him upon the pavement, but his information seemed vague. The others continued to discuss him until weariness overtook them and they slept where they lay. His going had taken a friend away from them, and their friends were few enough, God knows!

CHAPTER XXXI

THE MAN UPON THE PAVEMENT

A well-meaning stage-door keeper for once had told the plain truth and there had been a man upon the pavement when Alban quitted the Regent Theatre.

Little more than six months ago, this identical fellow had been commissioned by Richard Gessner to seek Alban out and report upon his habits. He had visited the great ship-building yard, had made a hundred inquiries in Thrawl Street and the Commercial Road, had tracked his quarry to the Caves and carried his news thereafter triumphantly to Hampstead and his employer. To-night his purpose was otherwise. He sought not gossip but a man, and that man now appeared before him upon the pavement, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his head bent, his attitude that of utter dejection and despair.

"Mr. Kennedy, if you please."

The stranger spoke beneath the shadow of a great lamp in the Charing Cross Road. Not hearing him immediately, Alban had arrived at the next lamp before the earnest entreaty arrested him and found him erect and watchful in a moment.

"I beg your pardon, sir; you are Mr. Kennedy, are you not?"

"My name, at least the half of it."

"Mr. Alban Kennedy, shall we say. I have been looking for you for three days, sir. It is not often that I search three days for anybody when his house is known. Forgive me, it is not my fault that there has been a delay."

Alban knew no more than the man in the moon what he was driving at, and he thought it must be all a mistake.

"What's it all about, old chap?" he exclaimed, falling into the manners of the street. "Why have you been hurrying yourself on my account?"

"To give you this letter, sir, and to ask you to accompany me."

Alban whistled, but took the note nevertheless and tore it open with trembling

fingers. He thought that he recognized the handwriting, but was not sure. When he had read the letter through, he turned to the man and said that he would go with him.

"Then I will call a hansom, sir."

The detective blew a shrill whistle, and a hansom immediately tried to cannon an omnibus, and succeeding came skidding to the pavement. The two men entered without a word to each other; but to the driver the direction was Hampstead Heath. He, wise merchant, demurred with chosen phrase of weight, until a fare was named and then lashed his horse triumphantly.

"My lucky's in," he cried to a friend upon another box, "it's a quid if I ain't bilked."

Alban meanwhile took a cigarette from a paper packet, and asked his companion for a light. When he struck it an observer would have noticed that his hand was still shaking.

"Did you go down yonder?" he asked, indicating generally the neighborhood east of Aldgate.

"Searched every coffee shop in Whitechapel, sir."

"Ah, you weren't lucky. I have been living three days on Hampstead Heath."

"On Hampstead Heath? My godfather, I wish I'd known."

They were driving through Regent's Park by this time, and the darkness of a tempestuous night enshrouded them. Alban recalled that unforgotten evening of spring when, with the amiable Silas Geary for his companion, he had first driven to Mr. Gessner's house and had heard the story of Wonderland, as that very ordinary cleric had described it. What days he had lived through since then! And now this news surpassing all the miracles! What must it mean to him, and to her! Had they been fooling him again or might he dare to accept it for the truth? He knew not what to think. A surpassing excitement seized upon him and held him dumb. He felt that he would give years of his life to know.

They toiled up the long hill to the Heath and entered the grounds of "Five Gables" just as the church clock was striking eleven. There were lights in the Italian Garden and in the drawing-room. Just as it had been six months ago, so now the obliging Fellows opened the door to them. Alban gave him a kindly nod

and asked him where Lois was.

"The young lady is there, in the hall, sir. Pardon me saying it, she seems much upset to-night."

"Mr. Gessner is still away?"

"On his yacht, sir. We think he is going to visit South America."

Alban waited for no more, but went straight on, his eyes half blinded by the glaring lights, his hands outstretched as though feeling for other hands to grasp them.

"Lois, I am here as you wished."

A deep sob answered him, a hot face was pressed close to his own.

"Alban," she said, "my father is dead!"

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE NAME OF HUMANITY

Very early upon the following morning, almost before it was light, Alban entered the familiar study at "Five Gables" and read his patron's letter. It had been written the day after he himself returned from Poland, and had long awaited him, there in that great lonely house. He opened it almost as though it had been a message from the dead.

"I am leaving England to-day," the note went on, "and may be many months abroad. The unhappy death of Paul Boriskoff in the Schlusselburg will be already known to you, and will relieve you of any further anxiety upon his daughter's account. I have the assurance of the Minister of St. Petersburg that she will be released immediately and sent to "Five Gables" as I have wished. There I have made that provision for her future which I owe to my own past, and there she will live as your wife until the days of my exile are finished.

"You, Alban Kennedy, must henceforth be the agent of my fortunes. To you, in the name of humanity, I entrust the realization of those dreams which have endeared you to me and made you as my own son. If there be salvation for the outcasts of this city by such labors as you will now undertake upon their behalf, then let yours be the ministering hands, and the people's gratitude. I have lived too long in the kingdom of the money-changers either to accept your beliefs or to put them into practice. Go you out then as an Apostle in my name, that at my coming I may help you to reap a rich harvest.

"My agents will be able at all times to tell upon what sea or in what haven I am to be found. I go in quest of that peace which the world has denied to me. But I carry your name before others in my memory, and if I live, I will return to call you my son."

So the letter went on, so Alban read it as the dawn broke and the great city woke to the labors of the day.

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