HER SERENE HIGHNESS

DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

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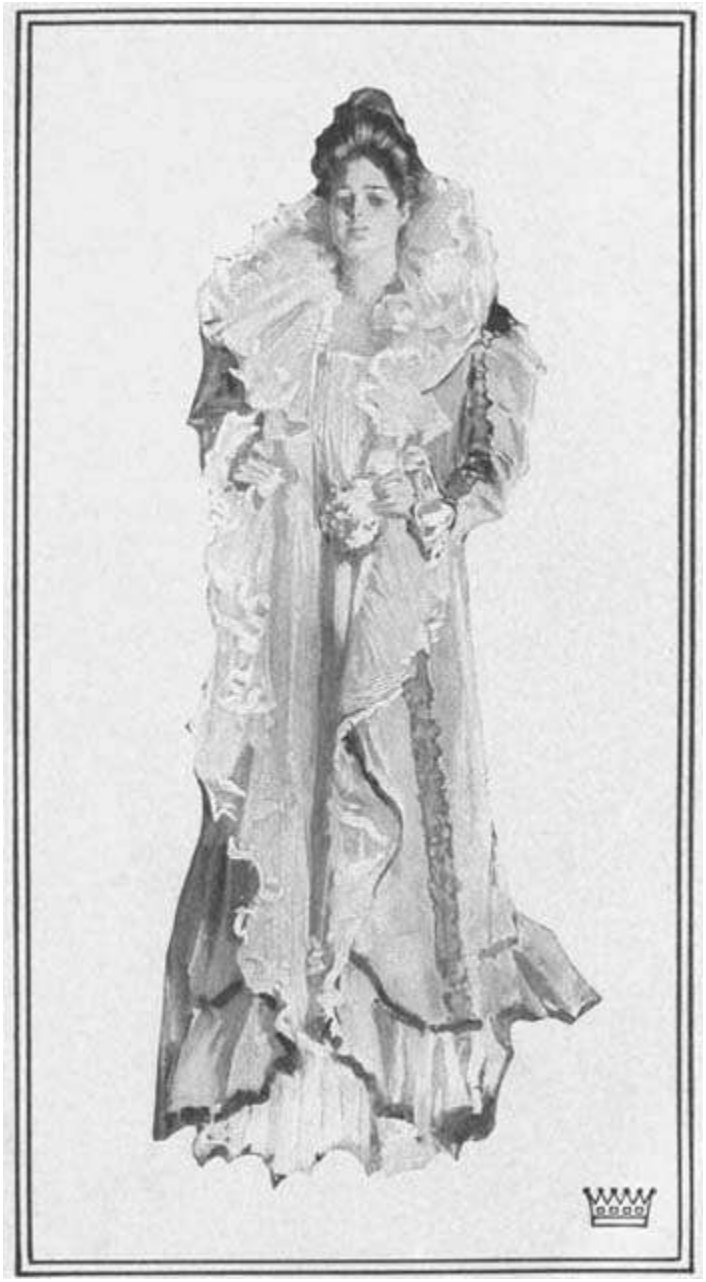

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I
The Grand Duke’s Spaniard

ON the top floor of Grafton’s house, in Michigan Avenue, there was a room filled with what he called “the sins of the fathers”—the bad pictures and statuary come down from two generations of more or less misdirected enthusiasm for art. In old age his father had begun this collection; forty years of dogged pursuit of good taste taught him much. Grafton completed it as soon as he came into possession.

In him a Grafton at last combined right instinct and right judgment. Although he was not yet thirty, every picture dealer of note in America and Europe knew him, and he knew not only them but also a multitude of small dealers with whom he carefully kept himself unknown. He was no mere picture buyer. The pretentious plutocrats of that class excited in him contempt—and resentment. How often had one of them destroyed, with a coarse fling of a moneybag, his subtle plans to capture a remarkable old picture at a small price. For he was a true collector—he knew pictures, he knew where they were to be found, he knew how to lie in wait patiently, how to search secretly. And no small part of his pride in his acquisitions came from what they represented as exhibits of his skill as a collector.

A few months before his father died they were in New York and went together to see the collection of that famous plutocratic wholesale picture buyer, Henry Acton.

“Do you see the young Spaniard over there?” said the father, pointing to one of the best-placed pictures in the room.

The son looked at it and was at once struck by the boldness, the imagination with which it was painted. “Acton has it credited to Velasquez,” he said. “It does look something like Velasquez, but it isn’t, I’m certain.”

“That picture was one of my costly mistakes,” continued the elder Grafton. “I bought it as a Velasquez. I was completely taken in—paid eleven thousand dollars for it in Paris about twenty-five years ago. But I soon found out what I’d done. How the critics did laugh at me! When the noise quieted down I sold it. It was shipped back to Paris and they palmed it off on Acton.”

Just then Acton joined them. “We were talking of your Velasquez there,” said the elder Grafton.

Acton grew red—the mention of that picture always put him angrily on the defensive. “Yes; it *is* a Velasquez. These ignorant critics say it isn’t, but I know a Velasquez when I see one. And I know Velasquez painted that face, or it wasn’t painted. It’ll hang there as a Velasquez while I live, and when I die it’ll hang in the Metropolitan Museum as a Velasquez. If they try to catalogue it any other way they lose my whole collection.”

While Acton was talking the younger Grafton was absorbed in the picture. The longer he looked the more he admired. He cared for pictures as well as for names, and he saw that this portrait was from a master-hand—the unknown painter had expressed through the features of that one face the whole of the Spaniard in the Middle Ages. He felt it was a reflection upon the name of Grafton that such a work of genius had been cast out obviously because a Grafton could appreciate only names. He said nothing to his father, but then and there made up his mind that he would have that picture back.

Apparently there was no hope. But he was not discouraged; patience and tenacity were the main factors in his temperament.

While he was sick with typhoid fever at a New York hotel Acton got into financial difficulties and was forced to “realize” on all his personal property. His pictures were hurriedly sent to the auctioneer. Grafton, a few days past the crisis in his illness, heard the news at nine o’clock in the evening of the third and last day of the sale. He leaped from bed and ordered the nurse to help him dress. He brushed aside protests and pleadings and warnings. They went together to Mendelssohn Hall. Grafton made the driver gallop the horses. He rushed in; his Spaniard was on the easel.

“How much is bid?” he called out.

Everybody looked round, and the auctioneer replied, “It’s just been sold.”

There was a laugh, Grafton looked so wild and strange. Leaning on the arm of the nurse he went to the settlement desk. “To whom was that picture sold?” he said to the clerk.

“On a cable from Paris, Mr. Grafton,” interrupted one of the members of the auction firm. “We’ve had a standing order from Candace Brothers for five years to let them know if the picture came or was likely to come into the market. And they’ve cabled every six months to remind us. When Mr. Acton decided to sell, we sent word. They ordered us to buy, with fifteen thousand dollars as the limit.”

Grafton was furious; he would gladly have paid twenty. “And what did it go for?” he asked.

“Seventeen hundred,” replied the dealer. “Everybody was suspicious of it. We would have got it for five hundred, if it hadn’t been for an artist; he bid it up to his limit.”

“I must sit,” said Grafton to his nurse. “This is too much—too much.”

He was little the worse for his imprudence, and was able to sail on the steamer that carried the picture. He beat it to Paris, and went at once to Candace Brothers, strolling in as if he had no purpose beyond killing time by looking about. He slowly led the conversation round to a point where Louis Candace, to whom he was talking, would naturally begin to think of the Acton sale.

“We’re getting in several pictures from New York,” said Candace—“from the Acton sale.”

“I was ill while it was on,” said Grafton, carelessly. “What did you take?”

“A Rousseau, a Corot, a Wyant, and a—Velasquez.” He hesitated before speaking the last name, and looked confused as Grafton slightly elevated his eyebrows. “Of course,” he hurried on, “we strongly suspect the Velasquez; in fact, we know it’s not genuine. But we’re delighted to get it.”

“I don’t understand,” said Grafton. “I know you too well to suspect that it will be sold as a Velasquez.”

“But certainly not. Even if we did that sort of thing, we couldn’t deceive any of your rich countrymen or any of the English with it. The story is too well known. No; we bought it for His Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Zweitenbourg. It is—or he thinks it is—a portrait of one of his Spanish ancestors. His agent tells me that it is the only known work of a remarkable young Spaniard who was soon afterwards killed at the siege of Barcelona, early in the eighteenth century. They are not even sure of his name. The Grand Duke was most anxious to get it. For years we have been sending him semiannual bulletins on Monsieur Acton’s health and financial condition.”

Grafton’s heart sank. Here was a true collector—a past-master of the art. “If I hadn’t been a mere novice,” thought Grafton, “I, too, would have had bulletins on Acton, and a standing order. As it is, my trouble has only begun,” for, being himself a true collector, with all the fatalism of the collector’s temperament, he was not despairing, was only the more resolute in face of these new difficulties.

“His Royal Highness,” continued Candace, “wants the picture because it fills one of the gaps in his gallery of ancestral portraits.” Under skilful questioning, Candace yielded the further information that the keeper of the Grand Duke’s privy purse, Baron Zeppstein, would arrive the following Thursday personally to escort the picture to Zweitenbourg.

It reached Paris on Tuesday, and Grafton took Jack Campbell, whom he found at the Ritz, round to Candace’s on Wednesday morning. Campbell, having been thoroughly coached, made offers for several pictures, all too low, then pretended to fall in love with the Spaniard. He insisted that it was a Velasquez—Grafton seemed to be disgusted with him, somewhat ashamed of him. When Candace told him that the picture was sold, he had them send a telegram to the Grand Duke offering eight thousand dollars for it. A curt refusal to sell at any price came a few hours later.

Campbell and Grafton were there the next morning when Baron Zeppstein came. As he was voluble, and appreciative of the rare pleasure of an attentive listener, Grafton rapidly ingratiated himself, and soon had him flowing on the subject of “my royal master.”

“His Royal Highness has two passions,” said the Baron, “Americans and his pictures. You Americans are making astonishing—I may say appalling—

inroads in Germany; your ideas are getting even into the heads of our women, our girls. I don't like it; I don't like it. It's breeding a race of thinking women. I can't endure a thinking woman. You can't imagine what I'm suffering just now through Her Serene Highness; but no matter. Your terrible democratic ideas of disrespect for tradition, for institutions, for restraints, are slipping about even in the palaces of our kings. His Royal Highness—the story goes that he was in love with one of your beautiful countrywomen and that she refused to marry him; she did marry his brother, Duke Wolfgang—morganatically, of course. It would be impossible for one of the house of Traubenheim to marry a commoner in the regular way. Your American invasion hasn't extended that far—"

"And the pictures?" interrupted Grafton, impatient of the digression.

"Ah—yes—*there* His Royal Highness has a high enthusiasm, a noble passion. He is positively mad about Rembrandts. He has a notable collection of them, and is always trying to add to it."

Grafton's eyes dropped; he feared that this simple old Zweitenbourgian might read his thoughts. "Rembrandts?" he said. "That interests me. I have the same craze in a small way." And he drew the Baron on. He learned that a Rembrandt filled the Grand Duke with the same burning longing for possession with which his craze, the spurious Velasquez, was now filling him. He began to see victory. He cabled his Chicago agent to send him forthwith, in care of Candace Brothers, his two examples of Rembrandt's early work. When he was a boy, travelling about with his father, he had found them in an obscure shop in Leyden. They now interested him little except as reminders of an early triumph. But to a collector of Rembrandts they would be treasures.

A few days after sending the cable he went in the morning with Mrs. Campbell to Paquin's—Mrs. Campbell was at Paris for her annual shopping. She was to be fitted for six dresses, she explained, and that meant an hour—perhaps two or three hours. But Grafton was so attracted by the scene that he said he would wait, at least until he was tired. He seated himself on the sofa against the wall, near the door. It was in line with the passage-way into which the fitting-salons open.

The general room was crowded with women—women in the fashions of the day preparing for the fashions of the morrow; girls—the pretty, graceful,

polite dressmakers' assistants famed in Parisian song and story—persuading, soothing, cajoling, flattering. There were a few men, all of them fitters except two. The exceptions were Grafton, trying to efface himself, and Paquin, trying to escape. He had come forth at the request of a customer important enough to be worthy of personal attention, but not important enough to be admitted to the honor of his private consultation-room. The women had seized him and, regardless of his bored and absent expression and speech, were swarming about him, impeding his retreat.

Grafton soon forgot himself, so interested was he in his surroundings—the clamor in French, German, English, American, Italian, Spanish; the exhibits of manners grand and manners sordid; the play of feminine emotions—the passion for dress, the thoughtful pauses before plunging into tempting extravagances, the reckless yieldings to temptation, the woe-begone putting aside of temptation; the mingling of women of all degrees, from royalty and American to actress and demi-mondaine. And they so far ignored the male intruder that they were presently tossing aside dresses into his lap or spreading them against his knees for better display. He retreated along the sofa before up-piling silks and satins and laces and linens. At last he had to choose between being submerged and abandoning the sofa. He still lingered, meekly standing, his hat and stick buried. As he was examining an evening dress that pleased him mightily—a new kind of silk in new shades, a cream white over which a haze of the palest blue-green seemed to be drifting—he chanced to glance along the passage-way.

One of the fitting-salons was open, and half in the doorway, half in the hall, stood a young woman. Her waist was off; her handsome shoulders and arms were bare, yet no more than if she had been in evening dress. She had fine brown hair with much red in it. Her features were strong and rather haughty, but delicate and pleasing. Her skin was dead-white, colorless even on her cheeks. She was frowning and biting her lip and tapping her foot on the floor. As he glanced she caught his eye. She beckoned imperiously.

He put down the dress and went slowly towards her.

"Quick," she said, in French. "My patience is exhausted. I've been waiting half an hour and no fitter has come. Are you a fitter?"

"No," he replied, also in French. "I'm not exactly a fitter; I'm a—an American. But I'll get you one."

“Heavens!” exclaimed the young woman, in English, and she darted into her salon and slammed the door.

Two attendants—a man and a woman—came at him from opposite directions. “But, monsieur! But, monsieur! What does monsieur do here? It is forbidden!” Their politeness was thin, indeed, over their alarm and indignation.

“The lady called me,” explained Grafton, calmly. “It was impossible for me to disobey her. She thought I was a fitter.”

As he spoke she opened her door and showed her head. The attendants, with serious faces, began to pour out apologies. “Pardon, Your Serene Highness! We hope that your—”

“It was my fault,” she interrupted, in French, and he noted that she had a German accent. Her look of condescending good-nature was not flattering to him. It said that in the mind of Her Serene Highness he and the two attendants formed a trio of inferior persons before whom she could conduct herself with almost as much freedom as before so many blocks of wood.

“No apology is necessary,” he said, with abrupt courtesy. “You wish a fitter. I’ll see that you get one at once.”

Her Serene Highness flushed and withdrew her head. “Take him away,” she called through the door, in a haughty tone, “and send a fitter.”

Grafton faced the attendants. He drew from his pocket two ten-franc pieces and gave one to each. “Have the goodness to get mademoiselle her fitter instantly,” he said.

They bowed and thanked him and he slowly returned to his sofa. Half an hour and she issued from her salon in street costume. Close behind her came an old-maidish German woman. As they reached the door, Grafton held it open. Her Serene Highness drew herself up coldly. He bowed with politeness and without impertinence, and closed the door behind them.

“Who was that lady?” he said to her fitter, hurrying past with her dresses on his arm.

“Her Serene Highness the Duchess Erica of Zweitenbourg, monsieur. She is the niece of His Royal Highness the Grand Duke Casimir.”

Grafton met her twice the next day. In the morning he was at the tomb of Napoleon. A woman—one of two walking together a short distance in front of him—dropped her handkerchief. He picked it up and overtook her.

“Pardon, mademoiselle,” he said. “Your handkerchief.” She paused. He saw that it was Her Serene Highness. At the same time she recognized him and the smile she had begun died away. She took the handkerchief with an icy “Thanks.” He dropped back, but their way happened to be his. Her companion glanced round presently; he was near enough to hear her say, “The person is following Your Serene Highness.” He came on, passed them as if unconscious of their existence, and they changed their route.

In the afternoon he was at the Louvre. He saw two women coming towards him—Her Serene Highness and her companion. As they saw him they turned abruptly into a side corridor. He came to where they had turned; there lay a handkerchief. He picked it up and noted that it was a fine one, deeply bordered with real lace. In the corner, under a ducal crown, was the initial “E.” He walked rapidly after the two women and, although they quickened their pace, he was soon beside them.

“Pardon, mademoiselle,” he began.

Her Serene Highness flushed with anger and her gray eyes blazed. “This is insufferable!” she exclaimed. “If you do not leave—”

“Your handkerchief,” he said, extending it, his eyes smiling but his face grave.

She looked at it in horror. “Monsieur is mistaken,” she said, fighting against embarrassment and a feeling that she had made herself ridiculous.

“Mademoiselle is mistaken—doubly mistaken,” he replied, tranquilly. “The handkerchief bears her monogram, and”—here he smiled satirically—“if mademoiselle is vain enough to mistake common courtesy for impudence, I am not vain enough to mistake accident—even *twice repeated* accident—for design.”

She looked at him with generous, impulsive repentance and took the handkerchief from his outstretched hand. “It is mine,” she said, in English, “and I regret my foolish mistake.” Her tone had no suggestion of condescension. It was the tone of the universal woman in presence of the universal man.

He bowed his appreciation without speaking and went rapidly away.

II
An American Invades

WHEN his Rembrandts came, Grafton took the package to his hotel, opened it, assured himself that they were in good condition, sealed it, and left it with Candace Brothers. “I may telegraph you to forward it,” he said. But he did not tell them what was in it nor where he was going; they might betray him or forestall him, and so deprive him of the pleasure of a successful campaign in person and unaided.

He reached the town of Zweitenbourg at noon on a Monday, five days after his Spaniard. At half-past two he was in a walking suit and on his way to the Grand Ducal Palace, “The Castle,” to reconnoitre. It was July, and the air of that elevated valley was both warm and bracing. From the beautiful road hills and mountains could be seen on every side—the frontiers of the Grand Duchy.

It had once been almost a kingdom. It was now shrunk, through the bad political and matrimonial management of the reigning house, to less than two hundred and fifty square miles. But the Zweitenbourgians were proudly patriotic—they disdained mere size; they were all for quality, not quantity. Besides, they were as vague in general geography as the average human being; they thoroughly knew only the internal geography of Zweitenbourg. In their text-books the Grand Duchy posed as the central state of civilization. In their school histories its grand dukes cut a great figure. For example, it was their Grand Duke Godfrey who, slightly assisted by a Prussian general, Blücher, won the battle of Waterloo. Wellington comes in for a mere mention, as a sort of “among those present”—“a small force of English under a Lord Wellington,” so runs the account, “was defeated in the first day’s engagement and almost caused the rout of the Grand Duke Godfrey and his allies; but on the second day, after the English had been beaten, and when they were about to run, the Grand Duke and Blücher came up with the main army and Napoleon was overthrown.” In the Zweitenbourg atlases the map of each country was printed on a separate

plate, and all were apparently of about the same size. And, finally, all Zweitenbourgians knew that their men were the bravest and their women the most beautiful in the world, and that all foreign nations were inhabited by peoples who were ignorant, foolish, and perfidious.

After two miles between garden-like farms, Grafton found himself at the entrance to what seemed a wilderness. There were two huge stone pillars, each capped with a grand-ducal crown. There were two great bronze gates with a large C under a crown in the centre of each. The gates were open, and between the pillars went the military road, clean, smooth, perfect, to plunge into the wilderness. Beside the entrance was an ivy-covered lodge, in front of it a soldier in the blue and white uniform of the Grand Duke's Household Guards. He was marching up and down, his rifle at shoulder arms. As Grafton advanced he halted and shifted his rifle to a challenge.

"Show your passport," he commanded, in a queer dialect of German.

"I have no passport," replied Grafton.

The soldier looked at him stupidly. "But every foreigner has a passport," he said.

"I have none."

"Ah; very well." The soldier shrugged his shoulders and resumed his march.

Grafton stood where he had halted. "May I go on?" he asked.

"Yes; why not?" said the soldier.

"But why did you ask for my passport?"

"It's in the rules. Pass on or you may get into trouble. You know perfectly well that all are admitted to the park at this season."

"Then there is a closed season?"

"I don't know," said the soldier, crossly. "I never heard of one. It's in the rules to admit every one from April until December. No one comes the rest of the year. But I don't suppose he could be shut out if he did. There's no rule which says so."

"Then why these rules?"

The soldier gave the profoundly thoughtful frown of those incapable of thought. “I don’t know,” he said. “Soldiers must have rules. Everything must be done by rules, so that it will be done just as it used to be. We’ve had the same rules—oh, hundreds of years. Nothing must be changed. What’s new is bad, what’s old is good.”

Grafton trudged on into the wilderness. The road gradually swept into another road. He saw that it was a circle, a girdle, about a lake which was perhaps four miles long and two miles wide, blue as the sky and mirroring it to its smallest flake of snowy cloud. Opposite him, across the width of the lake, towered and spread The Castle, with turrets and battlements, a vast, irregular mantle of ivy draping part of its old gray front. He could see terraces and lawns of brilliant green, the gaudiness of flower-beds and flowering bushes, red and blue and purple and yellow. “Where Her Serene Highness lives,” he thought.

He decided to walk as far as The Castle; next day he would drive and perhaps pay his respects to Baron Zeppstein. He was impressed by the loneliness of the park, apparently an untouched wilderness except the road. The birds were singing. Now and then there would be a crash and he would see a deer making off, or a whir and a scurrying flapping, and he would get a glimpse of some wild bird in panic-stricken flight. As he came nearer to The Castle the signs of habitation were numerous, but still not a human being. At last he was close to the walls, looking up at them.

He could see nothing but the perfect order of the shrubbery to indicate that any one had been there recently. The huge gates—solid doors rather than gates—were closed. The sun was shining, the waters of the lake glistened, the foliage was fresh and vivid, the soft, strong air blew in a gentle breeze. But there was a profound hush, as if the grim old fortress-palace, and all within and around it, had long been locked in a magic sleep.

A sense of uncanniness was creeping over him in spite of his incredulous American mind. He was startled by a trumpet blast which seemed to come from the depth of the woods to the left. Standing in the middle of the road, he turned. He had just time to jump aside.

Out of the woods, by a cross-road he had not noted, swept a gorgeous cavalcade. As he looked he felt more strongly than ever like a time-wanderer who had been, in a twinkling, borne backward several centuries.

First to pass him at a mad gallop were six soldiers on tall black chargers. They and their horses were trapped in the blue and white of the Household Guards. Corselets and plumed helmets and chains clashed and rattled and flashed as they flew past. A few yards behind them, at the same furious pace, came a graceful, long-bodied carriage of strange coloring and design, drawn by eight black horses with postilions. On a curious foot-board at the back of the carriage stood two footmen in a mediæval livery. They were hanging on by straps. Behind the carriage came six more black-horsed cavalrymen of the Household Guards.

As Grafton gaped through the dust in the wake of this ancient spectacle it halted before The Castle's gates so abruptly that every horse reared to its haunches. But immediately all was quiet, motionless. One of the cavalrymen put a trumpet to his lips and sent a blast echoing and re-echoing like a peal of fairy laughter to and fro over the lake. As if there were enchantment in that blast, the great weather and battle scarred doors of The Castle swung noiselessly back. Out came eight men in mediæval costumes, each bearing a long, slender, brazen trumpet. Four went to either side of the entrance. They put the trumpets to their lips and sounded a fanfare.

Grafton's expectation was at excitement pitch. What did this gorgeous revival of mediævalism presage? what dazzling apparition was about to greet his ravished eyes?

Now appeared a man in mediæval court costume, resplendent in velvet and lace and silver braid. He was walking backward, bowing low at each step, his velvet, beplumed hat in his hand. And then the central figure—His Royal Highness Casimir of Traubenheim, Grand Duke of Zweitenbourg, Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, Margrave of Plaut, Prince of Wiesser, of Dinn, of Feltenheim, Count in Brausch and in Ranau. He was a sallow, cross-looking little man, with thin shoulders, legs, and arms, and a great paunch of a stomach, dilated and sagged from overfeeding. He was dressed in a baggy tweed suit and a straight-brimmed top-hat. He seated himself in the carriage.

"What an anticlimax!" thought Grafton. But there was a second and briefer flourish of the trumpets, and then appeared the Duchess Erica, in a white cloth dress and a big white hat and carrying a white parasol. Grafton felt like applauding. "The spectacle is looking up," he said. He was near enough

to note that her sweet face was discontented, impatient, almost sad. She seated herself beside the Grand Duke. The mounted trumpeter blew, the cavalrymen in front wheeled and struck spurs into their horses, the whole procession was instant whirling away—it was gone. Grafton glanced at The Castle doors; they were closed again and the trumpeters and the courtier had disappeared. The dust settled, the magic sleep descended.

Grafton might have thought himself the victim of an illusion had he not seen, far away across the lake, a cloud of dust, and in front of it the gaudy cavalcade and the grand-ducal carriage, the shine of blue and silver and polished steel rushing along as if fleeing from a fiend. And after a few minutes it came towards The Castle again from the other direction. The horses were dripping, their coats streaked with foam. At the entrance there were the same startling halt, the same mysterious opening of doors, the same stage-like assembling of trumpeters, the same flourishes. The Grand Duke and his niece and the attendants disappeared, the procession fled into the woods; there was silence and ancient repose once more.

Grafton set out on the return walk, trying to force himself to stop thinking of Her Serene Highness and to resume thinking of her uncle and his Spaniard. He had not gone far when a court-officer issued from a by-path. He paused to get a good look at this romantic figure, and presently recognized beneath the enfoldings of finery his commonplace, voluble acquaintance of the Paris picture-shop, Baron Zeppstein.

“Why, how d’ye do, Baron Zeppstein!” he called out.

The Baron looked at him superciliously, then collapsed into cordiality. “Meester Grafton!” he exclaimed. “It is a pleasure—a joyful surprise. I did not know you at first.”

“Nor I you,” said Grafton. “I seem to be the only modern thing here—except the old gentleman who took that quiet jog around the lake a few minutes ago.”

“His Royal Highness,” corrected the Baron, pompously. “He takes a drive every afternoon.”

“A good show,” said Grafton. “But I think I’d tire of it. I’d rather look at it than be in it. I should say that he earned his salary.”

The Baron laughed vaguely. “You Americans do not understand our ways,” he said. “You are so practical—so busy. You have no time for tradition and beauty and ceremony.”

“No; we’re a common lot,” said Grafton. “We’d think this sort of thing was a joke if it happened outside of a circus. But it’s a very serious business, isn’t it?” His face was grave.

“It is; it is, indeed,” said Zeppstein, his shallow old face taking on a look of melancholy importance. “But we must do our public duty; we must accept the cares of high station. And His Royal Highness—ah, how he suffers! We others have our relaxations—we get away to our families. But His Royal Highness—this is his vacation. And, mein Gott, he yawns and curses all day long. Yes, it is trying to be near the great of earth, but not so trying as to be great.”

“He looks ill-tempered,” said Grafton, sympathetically.

“But think what he suffers. Imagine! Usually he must wear a heavy, tight uniform and a steel helmet; he says it has given him the headache almost every day for twenty-seven years. But the dignity of the nation must be maintained.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Grafton. “And when is the best time to see him? I’m going to call on him.”

Zeppstein looked at the American as if he thought him insane. “But, my dear sir,” he said, deprecatingly, “you don’t understand. You will have to wait until His Royal Highness’s vacation is over. Then you must go to your minister and he will lay your wish before the Grand Chamberlain. And if possible your name will be placed on the list for one of the levees—there are five each winter.”

“Oh, I don’t want to see the Grand Duke in his official capacity; it’s a little private matter—about a picture.”

“But the Grand Duke has no other capacity. He is head of the state; he is the state every hour of every day, except when he’s abroad. Then he often graciously condescends to be a mere gentleman.”

“But I can’t wait. You ought to be able to arrange it. You’ve got influence.”

“Yes.” Baron Zeppstein was flattered. “But, unfortunately, none is permitted to speak to His Royal Highness unless he has commanded it—that is, no one but his son, the Inheriting Grand Duke, and his niece, the Duchess Erica, and the Grand Chamberlain. And—I am, just at present, at outs with them. Her Serene Highness is most intractable—one of the new school of wild young princesses who are cutting loose from everything in these degenerate days.”

“She certainly doesn’t look tame.”

“I had the honor of escorting her to Paris when I went for His Royal Highness’s picture,” Zeppstein continued. “It was a painful experience. And instead of sustaining me, His Royal Highness—but it was most humiliating.”

“Excellent,” said Grafton. “I can be of service to you. I own a Rembrandt which I wish to let the Grand Duke have at a bargain. I’m certain he’ll be most anxious to get it once he hears of it. Now, if you should be of assistance to him in getting it, he would be grateful, wouldn’t he?”

Zeppstein became thoughtful. “Not grateful,” he said. “It isn’t in His Royal Highness to be grateful. But it might make him think me useful. What do you propose?”

“I don’t know; I can’t tell yet. Keep quiet until I’ve looked over the ground and made my plans.”

“I am at your service,” said Zeppstein. “You would weep to hear how the Grand Chamberlain and his faction have humiliated me. They make me the butt of their jokes at dinner to amuse His Royal Highness. They—”

“You shall be revenged,” said Grafton, shaking hands with him and hurrying away.

From the moment he recognized old Zeppstein until he left him he had been fighting to restrain himself from leading the talk to Erica. He now caught himself regretting it. He stopped short. “Ridiculous!” he exclaimed. “What an idiot I am to let such ideas into my head. It must be in the air here. I’m getting as romantic as—as—as she looks.” And he walked on, her face and her voice haunting him.

III
A Skirmish

GRAFTON learned that the next was one of the three weekly public days at the Grand Duke’s galleries. About eleven the next morning he went to look at his Spaniard and develop his plans for its capture. As he neared The Castle he saw a gardener at work upon his knees, trimming a bush of big pink and white flowers.

“Where is the entrance to the galleries?” he asked, when he was within a yard of the gardener.

“Sh!” whispered the gardener, looking nervously up at the windows.

“What is it?” said Grafton, following his glance and seeing nothing.

“His Royal Highness permits no noise,” replied the gardener in an undertone. “He hears every sound—especially every little sound. Only Sunday it was that he sent out to have the noise stopped. And there was no noise that anybody could hear. And when the First Gentleman of the Bedchamber reported it to His Royal Highness, what do you think His Royal Highness said? It was marvellous!”

“And what did he say?” inquired Grafton.

“His Royal Highness said, ‘It is the sound of the grass and bushes growing. Tear them up!’ Isn’t it wonderful?”

“Wonderful!” said Grafton. “Why aren’t they torn up?”

“All the gentlemen of the court entreated and at last dissuaded His Royal Highness. It was a terrible crisis. Some of the gentlemen were weak from agitation and sweating. Yes, His Royal Highness is a true prince. Only a true prince could hear grass and bushes grow.”

“It’s fortunate he’s a prince, isn’t it?” said Grafton. “Now, if he were an ordinary mortal they’d lock him up in a lunatic asylum.”

The gardener gave a frightened look at the windows, then almost whispered: “Yes, that is so. But princes are different from us; they’re so sensitive, so high-bred. I often think of the things they do here, and I say, ‘If I were to do that, they’d think I was light in the head.’ But, of course, princes can’t be judged like ordinary people.”

“No, indeed,” assented Grafton, “that would never do. Where is the entrance to the galleries?”

“Take the path to the left until you come to the modern wing. The entrance is under the balcony; you will see it.”

Grafton followed the gardener’s directions and, climbing the steps, was about to open the door. At each side, in the same frame, were long, narrow glass windows. At one of these peeping-windows he saw the Grand Duke, his mouth distended in a tremendous yawn. Grafton hesitated. The Grand Duke, in an old, black frock-suit, opened the door.

“Good-morning,” said Grafton. “Are you the keeper of the galleries. These are the Grand Duke’s galleries, are they not?”

“Yes.” The Grand Duke beamed. “Won’t you come in?”

“I’m an American,” continued Grafton, “and I’m much interested in pictures. I particularly wished to see the Grand Duke’s Rembrandts.”

“Ah; it will be a pleasure to show you through. We like Americans here.” He spoke in excellent English. “We once had an American at our little court. But when her husband died she fled. It was too dull for her. But we have to stay here.”

“You surprise me,” said Grafton. “I had always heard that the Grand Duke was a most interesting, a most unusual man.”

Casimir shrugged his shoulders. “He is the most bored of all. He does nothing but regret his youth. He is old, worn-out, a poor creature—no strength, no stomach, no nothing but memories, and a bad temper. And he doesn’t get much pleasure out of his temper. Of what use is a temper when no one dares answer back?”

They had come to Grafton’s Spaniard, indifferently hung among the fierce-looking Teutonic war-lords in armor. “Evidently he doesn’t care especially

for it," said Grafton to himself. Aloud he said: "What a collection of fighters!"

"No wonder they fought," replied the Grand Duke. "They were so bored that they had to fight to save themselves from suicide or lunacy. Any one would make war in their position—if he dared."

"But it isn't allowed so much nowadays."

"No; worse luck," growled the Grand Duke.

"Why!" exclaimed Grafton. "There's the spurious Velasquez from Acton's collection. Surely the Grand Duke wasn't caught on that." Grafton went to the proper distance and angle and examined his beloved Spaniard with a tranquil face and a covetous heart. "It seems strange to meet an old acquaintance so far from home. If I hadn't been ill when Acton sold, I'd have bid on this. It's pleasing, very pleasing, though clearly not a Velasquez."

"We got it because it is a portrait of one of our house—the Duke of Hispania Media, who captured Barcelona early in the eighteenth century."

"Was that before or after the Archduke Charles took it?"

"It was the capture sometimes erroneously credited to the Archduke Charles. He was present, I believe."

Grafton laughed good-naturedly. "And in England I suppose they'd say Peterborough took it—he was present, I believe."

"The English are great liars," said Casimir, sourly.

"That's what every nation says about every other," said Grafton.

The Grand Duke chuckled. "And all are right. Now we come to the Rembrandts."

It was a fine collection, and Grafton and the Grand Duke went slowly from picture to picture, from drawing to drawing, comparing opinions, telling stories of experiences in collecting. When they reached the examples of Rembrandt's early work, Grafton was enthusiastic. "But," said he, "it is too small; there should be more examples."

"True," Casimir sighed. "It is not so satisfactory as we wish."

“Possibly I attach more importance to this weak spot,” continued Grafton, “than another would, because I have an example of his early work and so am interested in it.”

“What is your example, may I ask?” Casimir spoke in a too casual tone.

“A peasant woman with an astonishingly handsome-ugly face; it’s usually described as ‘The Woman with the Earrings,’ because they are very queerly shaped.”

As Grafton thus described the smaller and less interesting of his two early Rembrandts, he watched Casimir’s face mirrored in the glass over a picture. He saw a swift glance, so piercing that he would not have believed those burned-out eyes capable of it. But when Casimir spoke it was to say, carelessly, “I think I’ve heard of it—a small affair, isn’t it?”

“I couldn’t get more than fifteen or twenty thousand marks for it, if I were selling it,” said Grafton. If he had not seen the swoop of that covetous collector glance he would have been discouraged and would have begun to talk of his larger Rembrandt. But he decided to wait. Perhaps the smaller Rembrandt would alone get him his Spaniard, and possibly another picture to boot.

They went on with their examination. Apparently the Grafton Rembrandt had passed from the Grand Duke’s mind. After three-quarters of an hour he said: “Now this, I think, antedates your ‘Armorer.’”

The only outward sign of confusion Grafton gave was to pause abruptly in his walk. “Your ‘Armorer’!”—that was his other and finer Rembrandt. How did the Grand Duke know he had it when he had not spoken of it? “Fool that I am!” he said to himself. “The Grand Duke knows his subject, knows where the Rembrandts are. Why, he now knows my name, I’ll wager.” He was much depressed; he felt that he would not get his Spaniard either easily or cheaply. “The only advantage I have left is that he doesn’t know just what I want, though, no doubt, he has made up his mind that I’m not here for mere sight-seeing.”

As he was thinking he was examining the picture to which Casimir had called attention. He now said: “No, I think not; I’m sure my ‘Woman with the Earrings’ antedates it.” Again the glass covering of a picture betrayed

Casimir; Grafton saw a look of relief in his face. “He knew he’d made a break,” thought Grafton, “and now he hopes I didn’t notice it.”

After a few minutes Grafton said he must be going. Casimir’s face was as unreadable as his own; no one could have suspected from looking at either that both were determined to meet again. Grafton thanked Casimir heartily and turned away.

“Do you stay long here?” asked Casimir.

“A day or two, perhaps,” replied Grafton. “My plans are unsettled.”

“To-morrow is a closed day. But if you return, I shall be glad to show you the rest of the collection.”

Grafton knew he had scored. “You are very kind,” he said.

“It is possible that I may be able to show you through His Royal Highness’s apartments. There are several remarkable pictures—a Leonardo, a few Van Dycks, and some interesting moderns.”

“That would be delightful.”

“Then it is agreed?”

“If I can arrange it. At what hour?”

“At ten. I shall expect you.”

“I think I can come. You are most courteous.”

“It is a pleasure. Until to-morrow!”

IV
Two in the Trees

CLEAR of The Castle, Grafton looked at his watch; it was half-past three. “That’s why the servant poked his head in at the door so often,” he thought. “We were at it more than three hours.” He strode along in a jubilant frame of mind. He felt that the Spaniard was practically his; it was a question of detail. And Casimir was a worthy antagonist; the struggle would be full of interest for both.

He was still a quarter of a mile from the park gates when he heard a scream. He listened; nearly half a minute of silence, and then a lusty-lunged feminine call for help. He dashed into the wilderness, breaking a path with difficulty through the heavy undergrowth. He had gone three or four hundred yards, guided by the repeated calls, when he heard in the same voice, in German: “Come no nearer until I explain.” He pressed on; there was a ferocious, growling grunt and a big wild boar, with open jaws and long yellow tusks, came at him. He made for a tree and scrambled up into its branches. He heard a suppressed laugh; his panic-stricken climb could not have been other than ludicrous to an on-looker; he glanced all round but could see no one through the curtain of leaves.

“Where the devil is she?” he said, in English, his voice louder than he thought.

“Here,” came the reply, also in English; “the third tree to your right—the lowest limb.”

He now saw a pair of laced boots with high tops and the edge of a brown cloth walking-skirt. “Those feet look promising,” he thought, as he watched them swinging cheerfully. He crawled farther out on the big limb. When he paused again he could see her waist; a brown silk sash with tasselled ends was wrapped several times round it. He could also see one of her hands; she had her glove off and the hand was as promising as the feet. He crawled a little farther. Pausing again, he peered out; he was looking into the

charming, amused face of Her Serene Highness! She recognized him instantly. She tried to sober her features, but the spectacle of this dignified young man on all fours craning his neck at her through the leaves was too much for her gravity. She began to laugh, and, as he instinctively released one hand, took off his hat and bowed, she became almost hysterical.

He swung himself round and found a secure sitting from which he could view her. She said: “I beg your pardon; I’m so—”

“Don’t mind me,” he said, good-humoredly. “It’s most becoming to you to laugh.”

She straightened her face and elaborately brought forward a look designed to “put him in his place.”

“I prefer the laughter,” he said. “Posing isn’t a bit becoming to you—not a bit. You seem to have the habit of drawing me into disagreeable situations and then putting on airs. Who invited me down that passage-way at Paquin’s? Who dropped her handkerchief twice in my path and suspected me of flirtation? Who summoned me to come and amuse her by being chased by a wild boar?”

“But I told you to stop,” she protested, feebly.

“Rather late, wasn’t it? I’m not complaining. It’s delightful to have the chances fate has given me. But I strongly object to your blaming me for fate’s fault.”

“You are rude,” she said, hotly. “You are taking an unfair advantage of my helpless position.”

“Pray calm yourself,” he answered. “All I ask of you is ordinary civility or silence. I certainly have no desire to thrust myself upon you.”

Both were silent and sat watching the boar as it ranged frantically from one tree to the other, pausing at each to look up with an insane gleam in its wicked, little, blood-shot eyes. After fifteen minutes Grafton moved slowly back towards the fork of the tree. As he reached it and seemed about to descend, she said, in a humble tone that made him smile inwardly, “Where are you going, please?”

“I’m going to make a dash for a rifle I see on the ground,” he answered.

“You mustn’t—you mustn’t. I forbid it!” she exclaimed.

“Have you any suggestion to offer as to how we are to escape?”

“No,” she replied, reluctantly, “except to call out.”

“And bring somebody else to make an amusing spectacle of himself—if he doesn’t happen to get killed. I can’t congratulate you on your scheme.” And he continued his descent.

“Stop; for God’s sake, stop!” she called out. “I am ashamed of myself. I am sufficiently punished.”

“My dear young lady, I’m not punishing you; I’m trying to get myself, and incidentally you, out of this mess.”

“Please—*please*—come back where I can see you; I wish to say something to you.” It was certainly Erica and not Her Serene Highness who was speaking now.

He obeyed her. When he could see her again he said, “Well?”

“I—I want you to say that you forgive me,” she said, earnestly. “I want to see that you forgive me.”

He looked at her in a friendly way. “I understand how it is with you. I don’t in the least blame you. Only, in my country, we never permit any one to take that tone towards us. And now, please, Your Majesty of the Oak Tree, may I go for the rifle?”

“May I say that you mustn’t?” she asked, a smile in her eyes.

“I’d like to have a reason.”

“Well, in the first place”—she hesitated—“it isn’t loaded.”

He looked at her searchingly. She blushed.

“Is it your rifle?” he asked.

“Yes; I always carry it when I walk in the woods; there’s a chance that something disagreeable might escape from the forest into the park, though the fences are strong and high. And to-day when the boar came at me”—she looked as though she felt very foolish—“my foot caught and—I dropped the rifle.”

“And you don’t load it?”

She looked still more confused. “No, I’m not so silly as that. It is loaded,” she said. “You’re always making me apologize to you.”

“Or is it that I make you feel like apologizing to yourself?”

“Perhaps that is it,” she admitted. “But—*please* don’t go down for the rifle.” She looked at the boar—its thin, powerful body, its vicious green eyes, its greedy, raw mouth—how those tusks and those pointed hoofs could tear and rip and mangle! Then she looked at the handsome, calmly courageous young American. “*Please*,” she begged. “If anything should go wrong with you, think how it would make me suffer, for I got you into this danger.”

“I’ve a better plan,” he said. “I might climb through on the branches until I was directly over the gun. Then you could distract the brute’s attention by swinging your sash just over his nose. I could jump and grab the gun; I’d have plenty of time to aim and kill him.”

“That sounds very—unsafe,” she objected.

“At any rate, it will do no harm for me to get as near the gun as possible,” he said. And he began to crawl along a branch in the general direction of the rifle. The boar noted the movement and followed him underneath, snapping its fangs at him, the froth flowing from its ragged lips. Erica watched, her eyes wide, her face gray with dread. Crash! a branch gave way under him. He fell, and so low was he before he could stop himself that one of his feet, clad in a heavy shoe, kicked the boar in the nose. She, seeing him begin to fall, screamed and turned about to descend.

“Stop! Stop!” he exclaimed, as he drew himself up into the tree. “I’m all right!”

She clambered back just as the boar, dashing for her, flung itself high up the trunk. He looked at her, saw that her eyes were closed and that she was trembling. “Are you going to faint?” he exclaimed. “Quick, unwind your sash and fasten yourself in the tree with it.”

“No,” she said. “I sha’n’t faint. Oh, what a weak, cowardly creature I am!”

“You?” His look and his tone brought the color to her cheeks and a pleased look to her eyes. “You, who were coming down when you thought the boar

had me? You are the bravest girl I ever saw. You can be counted on."

He remembered the boar and again set out along the branches. "I'll be more careful," he called, over his shoulder. Soon he was within six feet of the rifle and directly above it.

"Now what will you do?" she said. "I don't see that we're any better off."

"Patience," he replied. He broke off a branch and lowered it towards the ground; it reached. He slowly pushed the rifle towards the base of the tree. The boar backed away and eyed the moving branch suspiciously. Grafton had got the rifle against the trunk before the boar rushed. He flung the branch far out from the tree, and the boar leaped into it and trampled and tore it, paying no attention to the rifle.

"Will you please unwind your sash," said Grafton, "and tease him with it?—keep the end just out of reach of his nose. While you do that I'll jump down the other side of the tree and shoot him."

She unwound the long brown sash and let down one of its tasselled ends. The boar rushed it several times, then came to a halt under it, prancing round and round, jumping into the air, frothing and snapping its tusks. Grafton watched until he could see that it was dizzy from rage and rapid whirling.

"Shout!" he called to her. "Shout at him and shake the scarf."

She obeyed. He dropped to the ground, snatched the rifle, took quick aim, and fired. The boar was leaping into the air. When it fell, it fell to its side, dead—there was not even a quiver.

"Don't come till I make sure," he called, running towards the carcass. Down upon it fluttered the brown sash, and then came a heavier body—Erica herself.

Grafton put his arms about her and stood up, holding her as if she were a child. Her long lashes lifted and she looked into his eyes with a faint, apologetic smile. "Put me down, please," she murmured.

"Not just yet," he said. "Don't make an effort, and you'll come round more quickly."

She closed her eyes and relaxed into his arms. “How strong he is!” she thought. “And how brave! How glad I am to see him again, to find that he’s just as I’ve been suspecting he’d be!” At this a little color came into her cheeks.

He, not dreaming what was going on in her romantic young mind, was looking down at her, trying to keep a very tender smile out of his face—she looked so like a sleeping, spoiled child, with her child’s complexion, her short upper lip, her round, aggressive little chin. Her skin was so fine that he could see the blood pulsing through the delicate tracery of the veins in her cheek.

“Now I’ll try,” she said, after a few seconds. He let her feet down, but still held her about the shoulders. He led her to a fallen tree, and they sat, she leaning against him, he holding her firmly in his arm. Soon she could sit alone, her elbows on her knees, her chin between her hands.

“You are an American; so you said at—at Paquin’s?”

“Yes; and so are you—almost. You look and speak and act like an American woman.”

“I had an American governess. And my father’s—second wife was an American.”

“But,” he went on, “I don’t feel like an American just now. I feel as if we both belonged here—in this wilderness—as if I had known you all the always I could remember.”

She sat up and smiled, dreamily, sympathetically, without looking at him. “I was just thinking,” she said, “I don’t even know your name, yet I feel as if I knew you as well as I have ever known any one.” She sighed. “I must go.”

She caught him looking longingly at her, and they both blushed and were embarrassed. “My name is Grafton—Frederick Grafton,” he said.

“And mine is Erica.”

“Yes, I know that much—Erica what?”

“That’s all, except several other Christian names.”

“But how are you distinguished from other Ericas?”

“Well, they might call me Erica of Zweitenbourg.”

“Then your name is the same as your uncle’s?”

“But that isn’t his name, nor mine. He’s Grand Duke of Zweitenbourg, and we’re of the younger line—the ducal branch. Our family is Traubenheim. We came here about four hundred years ago.”

“Then your name is Erica Traubenheim.”

“No; Erica *of* Traubenheim.”

“Erica Traubenheimer?”

“Dear me, no! That’s a dreadful name.”

“I don’t understand,” said Grafton. “It’s as though I should call myself Frederick of Grafton.”

“That is it; only in your country you write your names differently. I was talking to the American minister about it; he explained that you have your noble families as we do, only they don’t reign, but hold aloof from politics, except to accept the high appointments of state.”

Grafton laughed. “Did he tell you that?”

“Oh! I knew at once that you were of a noble family.”

“A noble family of—dress-fitters?”

Erica blushed.

“My father was a pork-packer,” continued Grafton. “And his father was a pork-packer, and before that a farmer, and—I had an aunt who was crazy on genealogy; she found out that we were descended from a blacksmith. And my mother’s grandfather was a carpenter—when he could get carpentering to do. We’re all like that in America.”

“It must be very—very queer.” She seemed disappointed, depressed.

“Every country seems queer to every other. This country seems queer to me. Do you really like it—that life at The Castle?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Well, it seemed to me that if I were caught in such a routine—having to live my life on a plan fixed hundreds of years ago—never allowed to be my

natural human self—it seems to me I'd die of weariness, unless I were imbecile or became so."

"You wouldn't mind it if you'd been educated for it." She thought for a few minutes, then said: "Unfortunately, I wasn't. My father's—second wife persuaded him to educate me in the modern way. That makes this life almost impossible for me; it seems narrow and unreal, and useless. And it's so dull, so deadly dull!"

"Why don't you get out of it—break away?"

"A woman is helpless. Besides, I'm not sure—"

She rose and put on her Tyrol hat and wrapped her brown sash about her waist.

"I'll walk with you as far as the road," he said. "I don't think I could find it alone."

As they went, both silent and she constrained, he noted that she watched him curiously, as it seemed to him, critically, whenever she thought he was not seeing. They came to the cross-road and he asked, "When am I to see you again?"

She flushed painfully. "I—I'm afraid it's impossible."

He put out his hand. She hesitated, then gave him hers. "Good-bye," she said.

"No; that wasn't what I meant," he explained, clasping her hand. She made a faint effort to draw it away, then let it lie in his. "Impossible, you say? Then you don't wish to let me see you again?"

She hung her head. "No; not that. I do wish it. But it's impossible—I think."

He dropped her hand. "Very well," he said.

They walked slowly on. She felt him going—going out of her life. She could not endure it. She said: "But"—she colored and kept her eyes down—"I—I walk here nearly every afternoon at three o'clock."

"Isn't that fortunate!" he said. "So do I."

Their faces showed how happy they were. They came out of the woods into the main road and lingered over the parting. They parted like friends at the

beginning of a promising friendship—a promising man-and-woman friendship. He stood looking after her, and as he was turning away found her handkerchief where she had stood. He picked it up, kissed it with a gentle smile of self-mockery, and put it carefully in the breast-pocket of his coat. “And I thought I came here for the Grand Duke’s Spaniard!” he said.

V
A Prince in a Passion

AT luncheon the next day the Grand Duke was in one of his tantrums. He sneered at Erica and the ladies of the court, he insulted the gentlemen-in-waiting and the heads of the royal household, he cursed the servants. As usual, he ate enormously; as usual, his face grew redder and redder; as usual, his temper rose as the luncheon progressed. At first the others made some attempts to start and carry a conversation. But finding that to speak was to make one's self a target for sneer and jeer, all became silent. Erica endured with unprecedented meekness. Her thoughts were far away, and she had a feeling about her immediate surroundings which she did not attempt to explain to herself—a feeling that they were slowly fading from her real life.

When he could eat no more, Casimir pushed back his chair from the table and lighted a cigar. "Was ever man damned to such a life as this!" he snarled. "Surrounded by chuckleheads and numskulls, we go through life cracking our jaws with yawning. And here you sit or stand, mute, smirking, and bowing us on towards insanity!" He looked savagely round. "Well!" he exclaimed, "has nobody anything to say?"

All except Erica were trembling. They were accustomed to these outbursts; they knew that their lives and limbs were safe. But their sovereign was thundering, and it was their duty to fear and tremble. Besides, they might lose their places at court, might be banished from its glory, might be deprived of the honor and the happiness of receiving these humiliations and insults from exalted rank.

Choking with rage, Casimir rose and stamped from the room. In his cabinet he flung himself on a sofa and cursed and ground his cigar between his teeth. As he had never in his life been curbed, and as there was no public opinion to control him, no standard of private conduct to constrain him, he acted precisely as he felt, when he was not posing before the people. He

despised the people, of course; but they paid the taxes, and they paid because they believed him a superior being, a shepherd without whom they, the lowly flock, would be in a miserable plight. He was most careful to keep up appearances before them, to do nothing that would discourage their loyalty to the throne, their tolerance of its tax-gatherers.

The cause of Casimir's present outburst was Grafton's failure to keep his appointment. "Has he gone away?" thought Casimir. "Or is he playing on my notorious craze for Rembrandts?" He sent his personal servant to the Hôtel de l'Europe privately to inquire. When he learned that Grafton was still there he began to fear that he was mistaken in thinking he had come to Zweitenbourg with a definite purpose. How to reopen the negotiation—that was the question.

He sent for Erica. "Read!" he said. "No; talk! Are you glad Aloyse is coming to-night?" This with a sneer.

"I had forgotten it," replied Erica, calmly.

"Forgotten it? Forgotten your sweetheart? Forgotten! Haven't you seen this morning's *Gazette*? It's a love-match, the *Gazette* says, 'The handsome and brilliant heir to the throne and his beautiful cousin have been lovers since childhood.'" Casimir laughed harshly. "Love! And you could forget my high-spirited, handsome, intellectual heir? Wonderful!"

"I had an adventure in the park yesterday that I've been thinking about ever since," said Erica. And she went on to tell the story of the boar, saying as little as possible of Grafton, and being careful to put that little prudently.

The Grand Duke was so interested that he sat up, forgot his indigestion and his boredom and his departed youth. "And who was this man?" he asked. "He must be rewarded."

"An American," replied Erica. "A—a—I think he said his name was Graf something—yes, Grafton." She concealed her delight at the success of her plan.

"Grafton!" The Grand Duke leaped to his feet and paced the floor excitedly. He rang a bell and told the servant to send Baron Zeppstein to him, then continued his impatient walk and his muttering until Zeppstein stood before him, bent double in a bow. "Baron," he said, "go at once to the Hôtel de l'Europe and present our compliments to a Mr. Grafton who is there, and

tell him that we have commanded his presence at once. We wish to thank him for having saved the life of Her Serene Highness."

Erica was radiant. She took her uncle's shrivelled hand, courtesied, and kissed it. "You are so good," she said, gratefully.

"Good? Nonsense! He's one of those Americans who pay enormous prices for pictures and take them away from us to that barbarous republic and they're never seen by civilized eyes again. He's got two pictures that I want. Your adventure gives me the chance to get hold of him."

Erica went to the door. "Stay here, child," said he. "I wish to talk at somebody. I must give the fellow something—the Order of the Green Hawk will do."

"But you give that to hotel-keepers when you stay at their hotels and to tradesmen who make you presents of goods you like."

"It's enough; he won't know the difference, and he'll be beside himself with delight; it takes little to tickle a democrat. But how shall I bring up the subject of the pictures?—that's what I'm considering."

"I don't think it would be tactful to speak of them at the first meeting," said Erica. "You might invite him to dinner, or—to luncheon to-morrow."

"That is an idea. He's a well-appearing person and interesting."

"Have you seen him?" Erica looked the amazement she felt.

"Talked with him for three hours yesterday," replied her uncle. Then he laughed. "He'll be surprised when he sees that the keeper of the galleries is the Grand Duke. I let him think I was the keeper."

Meanwhile Zeppstein had found Grafton at the Hôtel de l'Europe, dejectedly preparing to leave. When he explained his mission, Grafton at first flatly refused. "I've changed my mind," he said. "I wish to get away from here on the next train."

"But, my dear Mr. Grafton, think of the honor—His Royal Highness proposes in person to thank you! And—I don't wish to raise false hopes, but I'm confident he will decorate you!"

"I'm overwhelmed!" said Grafton. "I should die of joy; I must not go."

Zeppstein looked suspicious of mockery, then decided that he was mistaken, and went on with his pleadings. “His Royal Highness can be most gracious. He will not make you feel the difference in station.”

While he talked Grafton was not listening but reflecting. On impulse he decided to go. “Why not see her again?” he thought. “I can feel no worse.” His mind made up, he pretended reluctantly to yield. “I’ll waive the etiquette of the occasion, I think,” he said.

“The etiquette? Pardon me; I do not follow you.”

“Why, the Grand Duke should have called first.”

“My dear Mr. Grafton—”

“Isn’t he only a grand duke?”

“But, may I ask, what are you?”

Grafton looked cautiously about. “A king,” he said. “But I don’t want it known.”

Zeppstein grew nervous. “You Americans are great jesters,” he murmured.

“And we’re all kings, but we don’t use the title; it’s too common at home and too troublesome abroad. However, I’ll overlook the difference in our rank. Lead on!”

On the way Zeppstein gave him detailed instructions in how to behave himself. “I shall probably be permitted to conduct you only to the door of the cabinet,” he said. “You must knock quietly and enter at once without waiting for an answer. As soon as you are inside the door, draw it shut behind you, but don’t turn round in doing so. You must be facing His Royal Highness and making a bow, head on a level with the loins, until he speaks. You might have your right hand ungloved. His Royal Highness may in the circumstances be graciously pleased to give you his hand to shake. If he should decorate you, you must sink to your knees, and when he has put the decoration over your bowed head you must kiss his hand—place the back of your right hand under his palm and kiss respectfully but not lingeringly. Be sure your lips are dry. His Royal Highness has a horror of being touched by damp lips. Be careful what you say; it is wisest to answer as briefly as possible such questions as His Royal Highness may be graciously pleased to ask. And don’t say ‘you’ to him, always ‘Your Royal Highness.’”

“And when I leave—do I walk, wriggle, or crawl?” asked Grafton.

“Walk backwards,” said Zeppstein. “Only members of the cabinet wriggle in and out on their knees, and they only when they’re sworn.”

“No; I think that’s too self-respecting,” replied Grafton. “I think I’ll crawl.”

“But, my dear Mr. Grafton, it is against all precedent. We haven’t crawled for several centuries.”

“I’ll revive the fashion. This is a bumptious generation; it should be taught humility.”

“My dear sir, I beg that you will not crawl; you would bring disgrace upon me. I should be suspected of having so instructed you.”

“To oblige you, I’ll try to forego the pleasure of treating a sovereign as a sovereign should be treated. But it will be a sacrifice.”

When their names were sent up, the command came for both together. “Now,” whispered Zeppstein, as they stood at the door of the cabinet, “don’t forget my instructions.” He knocked and got his hips and shoulders ready for his presence-bow. “You must enter first,” he whispered.

Grafton walked in. The Grand Duke was standing facing the door with Erica a few feet away to his left. Grafton advanced towards Erica. “His Royal Highness first,” whispered Zeppstein, plucking at his sleeve.

Grafton went on to Erica and put out his hand. “How d’ye do?” he said. “I’m glad to see you again.” But his face was sad and his voice lifeless. He turned to the Grand Duke. They shook hands, and the Grand Duke laughed familiarly. Baron Zeppstein stood aghast.

“Her Serene Highness has been telling me—” began the Grand Duke.

“Yes; Baron Zeppstein here explained to me,” interrupted Grafton. “But it was nothing; your niece was in no danger—”

Zeppstein had sidled behind him and now whispered, “Not ‘you,’ but ‘Your Royal Highness,’ not ‘your niece,’ but ‘Her Serene Highness,’ and *don’t* interrupt!”

“What’s Zeppstein whispering?” asked the Grand Duke, sharply.

“He’s very kindly instructing me in etiquette, but”—here Grafton hesitated, with a twinkle in his eyes—“I’ve been so differently bred in America that I fear I’m not reflecting credit upon him.”

The Grand Duke waved his hand at Zeppstein. “Take yourself off,” he said.

“I hope you won’t send him away,” interposed Grafton. “He’s to blame for me being here. It was his talk in Paris about your Rembrandts that made me come.”

“I’m beginning to suspect that you knew me yesterday,” said Casimir.

“I did; but I thought I’d humor your desire to be unknown. We could talk more freely.”

The Grand Duke took from the table the ribbon and medal of the Order of the Green Hawk, and held it as if he expected Grafton to kneel to receive it. Grafton stretched out his hand for it. The Grand Duke smiled as he gave it to him, and chuckled when Grafton, saying, “Thank you; it is very nice; a great honor; more than I deserve, I’m sure,” put it in his pocket. Erica turned away to the window, her shoulders shaking violently.

After a few minutes’ talk, Grafton rose to take his leave. Zeppstein frowned at him to wait until the Grand Duke rose to indicate that the audience was at an end. The Grand Duke said, “Won’t you lunch with us very informally to-morrow, at two?”

“Thank you,” replied Grafton; “but I have arranged to go on the night train to Ostend.”

“There is a matter—some pictures—I’d much like to talk with you about it.”

Grafton hesitated. His wandering glance noted Erica’s face and its expression. “Thank you,” he said to Casimir, “I can easily change my plans.” And to himself he said: “Why not? I may at least, get my Spaniard.”

After leaving “the presence,” Grafton extricated himself from Zeppstein as quickly as possible, which was not so quickly as he would have liked. He set out alone for the walk to town. A quarter of a mile along that quiet, beautiful road and he saw Erica coming towards him by a side-path.

“I am late in my walk to-day,” she began, with shy friendliness. “You are going—perhaps to-morrow? I may not see you.” In spite of herself her voice trembled. “I wish to thank you again, to wish you—all happiness.”

They went down the side-path together. “I can think of nothing to say,” he said at last, in a dreary tone. “I have had bad news.”

She instinctively came nearer and looked up at him with quick sympathy. “Is it a death—some one you loved?”

“Some one I loved—yes,” he replied. “But not death—worse, I think—worse for me.”

“Forgive me; I did not mean to intrude—to hurt you.”

“I am the one to apologize; I ought not to have intruded my sorrow. Let me speak of your happiness. I read in the *Gazette* this morning that your engagement is about to be announced—that you are marrying some one you have loved since childhood. I wish you happiness. I’m glad that you are getting your heart’s desire.”

She sighed; it sounded very like a sigh of relief. She seated herself on a rustic bench and he sat beside her. “You don’t understand how it is with us,” she said, after a long pause. “I am marrying my cousin. It is not a love-match; we care nothing each for the other. That is the way everything is with us—never for ourselves, always for the house, for the state.”

“Trash!” he ejaculated, bitterly. “Of course I don’t understand; there’s nothing to understand. It’s all pretence and lies, vain show, theatrical nonsense. We belong to the present, not to the childish, ignorant past. Now, I suppose I’ve offended you; I regret it, but—”

“No; I’m not offended. I almost agree with you. Then—my surroundings, my inheritance are too strong for me.”

“Suppose you had only a day to live,” he burst out. “Suppose you knew that you would die at sunset to-morrow—wink out, vanish, be gone forever, pass away utterly. Would you spend your one day of life in such fooleries as these?”

“No,” she replied. “No, indeed!”

“Well; you have in reality only one day—your little span of life in the stretch of eternity. You must do the best you can with it; you won’t get another. You must enjoy it; you will never have a chance to enjoy another. You must be happy and contented and useful in it; to-morrow you vanish. And you tell me you’re going to spend it with a man you don’t love, spend it in this cold, empty, silly life of kissing hands and bowing and strutting, of vanity and gilt. What a life—what a miserable, degrading death-in-life!”

“You don’t understand,” she repeated, with a suggestion of haughtiness or attempt at haughtiness.

“Well, do you? There you sit—young, beautiful, a woman with love and passion in her eyes, a woman to be loved, to be happy, and to make others happy. And you think yourself superior—you who propose to spend your life in a way that—I’d hate to characterize it. Why did God give you beauty and brains and a common-sense education? Why did He bring you into the world a queen—not a toy queen, not a figurehead of a ‘house,’ but a real, royal queen—queen by the true, divine right? In order that you should act like a slave? That you should be dazzled by spangles like a vulgar peasant—play all your life with puppets like a child—be a puppet?”

“Why do you say these things to me?” She looked at him sadly, all the haughtiness gone from her face and voice.

“Because I love you; that is why. Because I know—it is useless for you to deny it—that you would like to love me—if you dared.”

Her bosom rose and fell rapidly. “Is it true?” she said, looking at him with a thirsty longing in her eyes. “Do you?”

“What does it matter?” He shrugged his shoulders. “I not only love you but I would win you, if you had—”

“Had what? Say it!”

“Courage!”

Both were silent a long time. He laughed bitterly, and said: “When I was a boy there used to be in one of our school-books the story of a man who went down in a shipwreck because he would not give up the bag of gold that was strapped to him. There was a silly moral; I forget it. But how human what he did was! How many human beings there are who drown

their real selves because they won't cut away some dead weight of false pride or false glory or gold or conventionality—" He rose abruptly. "Let us go."

"And I am dragging you down into my unhappiness because I won't throw away my dead weight."

"That is not for you to consider. Your own case is quite enough."

"Yes; I lack courage, or I am too foolish."

"I don't blame you; don't think that I do. You'd probably be unhappy after you'd given up. I've thought of that. If I hadn't, I'd—"

"What?"

"Carry you off."

"Why don't you?" She stood before him, looking eagerly up into his face. "I wish to have my mind made up for me."

"Not I! You must decide for yourself." He stood very close to her. "But—how I love you! Not because you are a Traubenheim instead of only a Traubenheimer; not for the reasons that seem to count most with you; but just for the sake of your wonderful self that has dazzled me into this folly of loving you, dear—"

"Yes; go on," she murmured.

There was the clatter of many hoofs on the main road; they were only a few yards from it. A brilliant cavalcade swept by; a young man in a gaudy field-marshal's uniform, followed by a dozen officers in blue and white, with glittering helmets and cuirasses; after them several companies of the Household Guards.

"My cousin," she murmured.

From the direction of The Castle came the booming of cannon and then the strains of a military band. Frederick and Erica stood, neither looking at the other. He began to walk towards the main road and she reluctantly followed him.

"Good-bye," he said, holding out his hand.

“Good-bye,” she said. “That is—until to-morrow. You will come here at four—”

There was the sound of a horse at a gallop and soon round the bend of the road swept the young man in the field-marshal’s uniform. He looked a giant, in his tall helmet surmounted by three huge white plumes. He reined his horse near Grafton and Erica, and flung himself from the saddle. Grafton saw that he was not tall, but short; not broad, but narrow—that his imposing appearance had been due wholly to his uniform. Also it was apparent that he was in a fury. Leaving the horse, he stalked towards them, his sword clanking against his spurs. Erica was pale and nervous. If Grafton had been looking at her he would have seen that she watched her cousin with an expression of aversion.

Aloyse stepped on a loose stone and it slipped. His sword swung round and caught between his short legs. He tripped, toppled, plunged forward and, as his helmet flew off, his face ploughed into the dust. He was lying prostrate at Erica’s feet.

Grafton sprang to him and lifted him up and set him on his legs. “I hope you’re not hurt?” he said, with perfect self-control.

Aloyse’s hair, mustache, eyes, and mouth were full of dust, his uniform was coated with it. “Go to the devil!” he exclaimed, turning his back on Grafton and wiping his face with a handkerchief he drew from his sleeve. “Who is this person?” he demanded of Erica, in German. “And what are you doing here? I saw you hiding in the woods as I came by.” He spoke to her as if she were his property, and anger flamed in her cheeks and sparkled in her eyes.

“Try to seem a gentleman,” she whispered to him, in German. Then she turned to Grafton. “Mr. Grafton,” she said, in English, “my cousin, the Inheriting Grand Duke.”

Grafton bowed coldly. Aloyse looked at him insolently from head to foot. “Take yourself off,” he said.

Grafton’s eyes blazed. He put out his hand to Erica. “I shall see you at luncheon to-morrow.” As Erica was about to shake hands with him, Aloyse struck his hand up.

“None of your impertinence. Be off!” he said, his weak, blond face ridiculous with rage and dust.

Grafton brought his hand down on Aloyse's shoulder and closed his fingers. Aloyse shivered, winced, bit his lips till the blood came to crush back a howl of pain. Grafton set him to one side and released him. Then he shook hands with Erica, lifted his hat, and walked away. Aloyse and Erica stood looking after him.

"I *hate* him," thought Aloyse.

"I *love* him," thought Erica.

VI
Her Serene Highness Surrenders

AT ten the next morning there was excitement in the hotel—the Inheriting Grand Duke had come, had sent up his card to the American gentleman, and the American gentleman, instead of descending, had told the servant to "show him up." The Inheriting Grand Duke was in top-hat and long coat. He was looking insignificant, sheepish, and surly.

When Grafton's sitting-room door was closed behind him, he bowed stiffly and said, "At the command of His Royal Highness, I have come to apologize to you."

Grafton waved his hand. "Say no more about it. I thought your father wouldn't approve of such a performance. I regret, for your sake, that you didn't come on your own account. Is that all?"

"At the command of His Royal Highness I say that we shall be pleased to see you at luncheon."

"Tell your father I'll be there." Grafton looked significantly at the door.

"On my own account, I say that, after you have finished your affair with His Royal Highness, I have a matter which one of my officers, Prince von Moltzahn, will bring to your attention."

"That sounds interesting."

"And I may assure His Royal Highness that you will be at luncheon?"

"Yes. Good-morning."

Aloyse bowed stiffly, and pompously left the room.

When Grafton reached The Castle it was apparent to him that there had been a storm, doubtless a quarrel between the Grand Duke and his son.

Luncheon was served in a huge, clammily cool chamber of state. Conversation was all but impossible, so elaborate were the ceremonies of

feeding the Grand Duke. Each dish for him was passed from servant to servant in ascending order, and then from gentleman-in-waiting to gentleman-in-waiting in ascending rank until at last it was set before His Royal Highness. After he had been served, the others were served with almost equal elaboration of ceremony—Aloyse before Erica, and Grafton, by special courtesy, immediately after her, to the irritation of the ladies and gentlemen of the court whose rank in the royal household gave them seats at the royal luncheon-table. Grafton watched the tedious ceremonies, marvelling that any one would tolerate them day after day and year after year. Erica and Aloyse sat gazing into their plates and did not speak. The Grand Duke fussed and blustered over his food, and ate greedily, with much smacking of lips, between mouthfuls asking questions about America.

It was half-past three when he rose and said to Grafton, “We will smoke in my apartment.” Grafton followed him through five or six enormous rooms, all gaudily decorated, all clammy cool, all impossible as human habitations. They ascended a stairway down which fifteen men might have marched abreast. They came to a mezzanine floor, and, dodging under a low beam, went along a dark passage-way. It ended in a small, low-ceilinged room plainly furnished, every article showing signs of long and hard usage. There was much dust and an odor of stuffy staleness, and the heat was intense. “Here’s where I live,” said the Grand Duke, dropping to a ragged old lounge with a sigh of pleasure and lighting a pipe. “I have to have some place where I can be comfortable.” The pipe was old and strong, the windows were tight shut. “I always feel cold after eating,” said the Grand Duke. “You don’t mind the windows being closed?”

“Not at all,” said Grafton, in an unconvincing tone. It seemed to him that if he stayed there many minutes he would faint. “I suppose it is about my Rembrandts that you wished to talk to me,” he began, wishing to hasten the end.

“What you said about them interested me greatly,” replied the Grand Duke. “I thought possibly we might come to some agreement about them—if—”

“Well, I was attracted by only one picture in your collection that you could part with—the one you bought from Acton—the spurious Velasquez. I’ve always wanted it—in fact, I came here to try to get it. But I’ve almost lost interest in it.”

“It is idle to discuss that. I could not think of giving up the picture; it is one of my ancestors—”

“That is by no means certain—as you know.”

“I so regard it,” said Casimir.

“I will exchange the ‘Woman with the Earrings’ for it,” continued Grafton.

“Come, now, Mr. Grafton. Is that reasonable?”

“I can get for it double what you paid for the Spaniard.”

“And I will pay you double,” said Casimir.

“Money would not tempt me. The Spaniard or nothing. But—I’m not well to-day—you must excuse me. I can meet you at the gallery to-morrow at eleven, or you can let me know what you will do.”

Grafton was overwhelmed by the foul air of the Grand Duke’s “cosey corner” of the palace. His plea was the literal truth and the Grand Duke could see it in his face. He assented to the appointment for the following morning, and Grafton hurriedly made his escape.

He felt that within the next few minutes he would be at his life-crisis.

Another bend of the road and the park gates would be in view. And still no Erica. He was about to turn back when she called him from an obscure side-path. As his eyes met hers his heart leaped—he knew that he had won.

“They have been following me,” she said, in a low tone. “Quick; come with me.” She darted into the wilderness, he close behind her. They wound in and out through a tangle of paths which only one thoroughly familiar with the park would have known as paths. At last they came to a fallen tree in a thicket so dense that it was barely lighted, although sunset was four hours away.

“We are safe,” she said, her eyes brilliant.

He caught her in his arms. “It seems to me that I loved you the instant I saw you. And I shall not give you up. We will go away to my country—to our country.”

“Yes—yes,” she said. “You have opened a gate I’ve often looked at, and I see beyond it the paradise I’ve dreamed of. And I must follow you. I care

only for you. I”—she had a very wonderful expression in her eyes—“I love you!”

“I shall see the Grand Duke to-morrow morning. I shall tell him. He will—”

“You must try to understand, dear. He will never consent. Can’t you see how he would look at it? And under the law he has absolute control of me for five years yet—until I am twenty-five.”

“But he will release you when he knows that you do not love his son, that you are determined to marry me.”

“No; there is but one way. We must go across the Swiss border; there I shall be free.”

“Then the sooner the better. Let us go to-night.”

“Yes, to-night. What is that—listen! No—this way—come!”

“It is useless,” called a man’s voice from the direction in which they started, and immediately a young officer appeared.

“Prince von Moltzahn!” exclaimed Erica. She drew herself up haughtily. “You are insolent, sir!”

“Your Serene Highness, I am obeying orders.”

“So I’ve caught you,” came in Aloyse’s voice behind them. He was advancing upon Grafton with his sword drawn. His eyes looked murder.

Erica darted between them. “Aloyse! Would you attack an unarmed man?”

“Stand aside!” foamed Aloyse.

She advanced upon him and caught his sword. “Give it to me,” she commanded.

“Let go! Let go!” he said, wildly. “I wish to kill him—the scum—the vermin!”

“You wish to make yourself infamous,” she replied, still holding the sword. “Prince von Moltzahn,” she called over her shoulder, “either hand your sword to Mr. Grafton or help me disarm this fool.”

Moltzahn stood uncertainly, murmuring something about “the son of my sovereign.”

“Release him, Erica,” said Grafton. “He dare not attack me. He’s had time to think.”

Erica tugged at the sword, and Aloyse yielded it with a great show of reluctance. “Now what are you going to do?” she said, scornfully. “Why are you here? Why are you always making yourself ridiculous?”

“You’ll see what I’ll do. My father thought I was mistaken yesterday. He’ll know better now. Both of you must come to The Castle.”

“With the greatest pleasure,” said Grafton.

“You go by separate ways,” continued Aloyse. “Erica, von Moltzahn will escort you. I have a few soldiers at the end of this path; I’ve kept them out of sight, as we want no scandal. After you are on the way, we’ll escort this person,” with a contemptuous gesture towards Grafton.

“No,” said Erica. “We go together. Send your soldiers away, Aloyse.”

The Inheriting Grand Duke distended his chest and began to bluster, but she cut him short. “Send them away or I’ll send them away myself.”

They walked to The Castle together, Erica and Grafton in apparent high spirits, Aloyse and Moltzahn silent and sullen. They appeared before the Grand Duke in his cabinet.

“What’s all this?” he demanded, glowering.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Erica, gayly. “Mr. Grafton and I were talking in the park, and Aloyse and the Prince suddenly appeared; I think Aloyse had some soldiers hidden somewhere. And they insisted on taking Mr. Grafton and me prisoners and bringing us here.”

“You jackass!” shouted the Grand Duke at the Inheriting Grand Duke.

“Now wait till you hear me, father,” whined the Inheriting Grand Duke. “There’s something up between Erica and this fellow; I know it. He calls her Erica, and they were hidden in a thicket, and I saw him kiss her.”

“You’re stark mad,” said the Grand Duke, looking at him disgustedly. “What is the matter, Mr. Grafton?”

“The Duchess Erica has explained all that either of us knows,” replied Grafton, discreetly.

Aloyse appealed to Moltzahn. “Am I not right? Didn’t he call her Erica and kiss her? Weren’t they hid in a thicket?”

Moltzahn bowed. “Your Royal Highness has given the facts as I can testify.”

Grafton, watching the Grand Duke’s face closely, saw a change in it which was instantly corrected. “The old fox,” he thought. “He suspects. What will he do?”

Casimir looked at Moltzahn black as a thunder-cloud. “Liar!” he roared. “How dare you utter such a scandal of Her Serene Highness?” Then he turned to Grafton. “A thousand pardons, Mr. Grafton. We trust you will forget this folly. We owe you an apology. We feel profoundly humiliated.”

“Pray think no more about it,” said Grafton.

“You will pardon us for the brevity of our apologies to-day, we beg. Baron Zeppstein will escort you to your hotel. And we look forward to the pleasure of seeing you at the galleries at eleven to-morrow.”

“At eleven,” said Grafton, bowing to Erica as the Grand Duke, taking his arm, escorted him to the anteroom. They shook hands, the Grand Duke placing his left hand cordially, even affectionately, on Grafton’s shoulder.

Zeppstein had an abstracted companion on the drive, and when Grafton was alone he flung himself on the divan in his sitting-room and abandoned himself to thoughts that gave his face an expression of deep discouragement.

When the Grand Duke returned to his cabinet, he withered Moltzahn with a furious look. “What!” he snarled. “Still here? Be off! You are a loathsome creature. Don’t show yourself at court for three months. And if we ever hear that a word of this has passed your lips, we’ll strip your epaulettes from you before the entire army and banish you. Out of our sight!”

Moltzahn backed from the room, bowing and cringing. When he was gone the Grand Duke turned on his son. “And now for you, sir! Apologize to Her Serene Highness! Say after me—put your heels together and bend—now say: ‘Your Serene Highness, I humbly ask pardon for my infamous conduct, for my lies, for my insults.’”

The Inheriting Grand Duke repeated the words in a choked voice.

“And,” continued the Grand Duke, “if you should meet Mr. Grafton again, we command you to speak to him as one gentleman to another with whom he is on friendly terms. Do you hear?”

“Yes, Your Royal Highness,” murmured his heir.

“You will withdraw.”

Erica and the Grand Duke were now alone. “I’m sorry, indeed, my dear child, that this has happened.” He took her hand affectionately.

“You have done all that I expected—more.” Erica was blushing and looked extremely guilty. She felt that Aloyse and Moltzahn had outrageously insulted her, but she did not like this reparation on false pretences. “I have much to say to you—”

“Not to-day—not to-day,” interrupted the Grand Duke. “I am exhausted, my dear. Go to your apartments and compose yourself.”

VII
The Grand Duke Gives Battle

ERICA went to her wing of The Castle and sat by a window, trying to plan the next move. But her brain was so hot and her thoughts so rambling that she could devise nothing. She rang for her maid. An old woman appeared. “I rang for Ernestine,” said Erica.

“Yes, Your Serene Highness. Ernestine has been taken suddenly ill and sent me in her place. I’m Greta.”

Something in the old woman’s face and manner roused an uneasiness in her. She went to the outer door of her apartment. A stupid-looking soldier was on guard there, marching stiffly to and fro.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded.

“I’m on guard,” he answered, in a mountain dialect of German which she could hardly understand.

She started down the corridor.

“Come now, lady, don’t make trouble. I can’t let you pass.” He put his hand on her arm.

“Don’t touch me!” She looked at him haughtily. “I am the Duchess Erica.”

“Yes; I know you think so, lady; that’s your trouble. Now go back quietly—do!”

She returned to her apartment. “Leave me,” she said to the old woman.

Greta retired to the anteroom. “Out of the apartment!” exclaimed Erica. “I do not wish you about.”

“Pardon, Your Serene Highness, but His Royal Highness has commanded me not to leave.”

Erica closed the door of her boudoir. She paced the floor. “How helpless I am!” she thought. “I cannot move in any direction!”

Early the next morning Grafton went to a lawyer—Fogel, who is conspicuous in the Zweitenbourg Reichstag as a fierce anti-monarchist. Grafton professed a student’s interest in the laws affecting the royal prerogative. Fogel was most courteous and obliging. He explained in detail, and, when he had ended, Grafton saw that legally his affair was hopeless. The Grand Duke was absolute over the members of his own family and court, except that he could not inflict the death penalty, nor could he detain any one in prison for a longer period than six months without showing cause before the supreme tribunal—on application of a relative of the detained person.

Grafton thanked Fogel and went mournfully back to his hotel. He was expecting every moment a message from the Grand Duke postponing or breaking his engagement, but at half-past ten no message had come. He drove out to The Castle. As he passed the northwest wing he looked up; there stood Erica. He saw her make a gesture as if she were flinging something. It struck the road just ahead of his carriage. He told the driver to stop, descended, picked up a little silver box and with it several small stones. He sent the stones sailing one at a time out over the lake. He put the box in his pocket.

With the carriage following him, he walked round The Castle to the galleries and entered. No one was there; he opened the box, drew out a small paper: “I am a prisoner; my uncle knows. My maid, Ernestine Wundsch, lives in Emperor Ferdinand Second Street, No. 643—over the bake-shop. I love you; be careful for my sake. When I escape I shall go to Schaffhausen.”

He thrust the note into his pocket and came out of the alcove into which he had withdrawn to make sure of not being spied upon. Ten minutes passed before the Grand Duke came in. “Pardon my tardiness,” he said, politely. Grafton noted a malicious twinkle in his eyes. “I was arranging the marriage of my son and my niece. The days of romance are not dead. After

their little misunderstanding yesterday, they made it up and—how hot young blood is!—they were all for marrying at once. I hadn't the heart to refuse them. But—to our little affair."

"I've decided not to part with my Rembrandts," said Grafton. His head was in a whirl. Beneath a fairly composed exterior mad impulses to strangle, to kill, to fight his way to her and bear her off were raging.

"Ah! I regret it. And when do you leave us? That devil, von Moltzahn, is a dangerous fellow. I'm having my police guard you. No; don't thank me. It's no trouble, I assure you. You had a pleasant little talk on law with Fogel this morning; he was most enthusiastic over your eagerness to learn; he was talking with one of my secret police about it. I'm sorry you have decided to leave us so soon—to-night, I think you were saying yesterday? And if you change your mind about the Rembrandts, you know I'm always willing to listen to any reasonable terms."

The Grand Duke bowed him out, but did not offer to shake hands. Grafton entered his carriage and was driven rapidly away, an officer in a plain uniform following him. As soon as Grafton saw it, he drew the silver box from his pocket, took out the note, read it until he had it by heart, then put it in his mouth and swallowed it. He waited until the road wound close to the edge of the lake. He looked back; the officer could not see him. He tossed the little box into the lake.

At the park gates the carriage was halted. The officer came up, several others appeared from the lodge, including one who seemed to be of high rank. They were most polite, most apologetic, but they took him into the lodge and searched him thoroughly. And when he went on to town it was in another carriage.

The proprietor was waiting for him. "I regret exceedingly, sir," he said, in a frightened, deprecating voice, "but your rooms are taken from ten o'clock to-morrow."

"That will be satisfactory to me," replied Grafton. "I shall leave to-night or early in the morning."

"Thank you, Highness." The proprietor bowed low and beamed gratitude and relief.

VIII
The American is Reinforced

GRAFTON went into the public square, opposite the hotel, and walked up and down under the trees. Schemes plausible and schemes fantastical crowded his brain; the wildest was as practicable as the most sensible. He cursed his lack of ingenuity. He felt that the intensity of his love for Erica was paralyzing thought. “In matters about which I care nothing,” he said to himself, “I can always think of something to do.” And now he could think of no plan which he did not almost instantly dismiss. He could not even devise a scheme for seeing Ernestine. To go to her would be fatal, as the secret police would go with him, were no doubt watching her.

He seated himself on a bench at the other end of which was an American tourist. There was a certain sense of companionship, of strength, in the nearness of a man from “home” at such a time. He noted that his fellow-countryman was a youth of the unmistakable American type—tall, thin, with a narrow, shrewd, frank face. The longer he looked at him the better he liked him. After perhaps twenty minutes the young American rose to go.

“Please sit again without looking at me or seeming to notice me,” said Grafton, not moving his lips.

The young American involuntarily glanced at him, but looked away instantly. He seated himself, yawned, took out his cigarette-case, lighted a cigarette, and began smoking languidly. A newsboy passed; Grafton stopped him and bought a paper. He rested his elbows on his knees, and so held the paper that his face could not be seen, yet was apparently not designedly hid.

“My name is Frederick Grafton, and I’m from Chicago,” he said. “I’ve fallen in love with a girl here, and—well, there’s the devil to pay. I’m being watched; her family’s got a lot of influence. It is vital that I see her maid. She lives at No. 643 Emperor Ferdinand Second Street, over the bake-shop. Her name is Ernestine Wundsch. Describe me to her and tell her to come

and sit on the end of this bench, or, better, send some one she can trust absolutely. Probably she's watched, so be careful not to go directly there from here. Will you help me? On my honor there is nothing in this affair which, if you knew it, would make you hesitate."

Grafton straightened up and could see from the corner of his eye that his countryman was studying his face. "I'll risk it," said the youth, rising and lounging away.

Soon Grafton began to watch the faces of passing women. After nearly an hour a working-man came and sat on the other end of the bench. Grafton scowled at him, but he sat placidly smoking his pipe. At last he said: "Ernestine, my sister, did not dare come. She sent me by the back way. She says nothing can be done. I waited to be sure it was you."

At this moment Grafton saw Moltzahn coming towards him. "Wait," he said to Ernestine's brother. "Don't move until I've spoken to you again."

Moltzahn advanced towards him and bowed politely, much to Grafton's surprise. "I know that you are watched," he said to Grafton. "As I have something to communicate to you, we must seem to meet as friendly acquaintances and to be talking on indifferent subjects. Will you walk with me a few minutes, please?"

There was a thinly veiled contempt in Moltzahn's tone which made Grafton feel like kicking him. But in the circumstances he would have been civil to Aloyse himself in the hope of laying hold of something that would bring him nearer Erica. He rose, and they began a slow promenade.

"His Royal Highness, the Inheriting Grand Duke, has made me the reluctant bearer of a challenge to you. I have tried to dissuade him, but he is determined to punish you for your insults. He waives the difference in rank, the fact that he has no right to send a challenge to such as you."

"It will be a great pleasure," said Grafton, with grim joy. "I, too, will waive the difference of rank—the fact that he is not a gentleman."

"It is impossible for me to answer you as you deserve—"

"You couldn't say anything that would disturb the friendly feeling I have for you," said Grafton. "You don't know how grateful I am to you for

bringing me this—this opportunity. I could almost—yes, I think I could—shake hands with you."

"What weapons?" said Moltzahn. "But have you a second?"

"I shall have one—and I choose pistols."

"I suggest that the meeting be at a little town on the Swiss border—Zoltenau. Do you know it?"

"Yes; I shall be there."

"The circumstances make it impossible to follow the formalities and arrange through your second. When can you be there?"

"Whenever you say."

"Then at three to-morrow morning. We shall be on the main road about a hundred yards from the last house—the inn—at the eastern end of the village. But will you be able to evade the police?"

"Easily; I shall be there."

They bowed, Moltzahn went his way, Grafton returned to the bench. With his face concealed, he said to the working-man: "In case I should wish to send a message to Ernestine for her mistress, is there an address that would be safe?"

"Johann Windmuller, 41 Duke Albrecht Street," he answered.

"Very well. And if there should be any news for me, send a letter or telegram to Victor Brandt, care the American Consul, Schaffhausen. Can you remember that?"

"Yes," said the man, and he repeated it twice.

Grafton sent him away; he felt that the police could not have suspected. He went to the hotel and in the smoking-room, near the entrance, found the American youth. Grafton dropped into a seat beside him. "Thank you," he said. "May I ask who has done me this great service?"

"My name is Burroughs; I come from San Francisco."

They discovered that they had many acquaintances and a few friends in common, and both belonged to the same club in New York. Burroughs, who

was seven or eight years younger than Grafton, and just out of college, had often heard of him.

“Is there anything else I can do for you?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied Grafton. “Since I saw you I’ve engaged to fight a duel at three to-morrow morning, and I need a second.”

“I’d be pleased if you’d accept me, though I’ve had no experience.”

“But I warn you that it may be an ugly business before it’s ended, though I think I can arrange to get you out of it. I mean to kill my man and his death’ll make a row in this part of the world.”

“I’ll see you through,” said Burroughs.

Grafton took him to his rooms, and, having tested him thoroughly, gave him his entire confidence. When he had finished the story, Burroughs said: “I feel that you’re going to win out.” His eyes were sparkling with excitement. “But don’t kill him; remember, he’s her cousin. She might balk at marrying you if you’d killed her cousin.”

Grafton thought for a few minutes. “That gives me an idea—that remark of yours. We’ll talk it over to-night.”

As Zoltenau was about midway between the town of Zweitenbourg and Bâle—a score of miles from each—they decided to evade the Grand Duke’s spies by going to Bâle. Burroughs went on the seven-o’clock train to arrange for a doctor and a carriage. Grafton, leaving on the nine-o’clock express, bought places in the bed-car for Venice. At Bâle he dropped from the car as the train was passing out at the end of the station. His servant went on with the baggage, to return by a roundabout route to Schaffhausen and there await the arrival of Victor Brandt.

IX
The Crown Prince is Decorated

AS the road from Zweitenbourg to Zoltenau is almost level, except the last four miles, Aloyse, Moltzahn, and Dr. Kirschner did not set out until nearly one o'clock. Aloyse and Moltzahn had deceived the doctor; he thought he was going to a friend of theirs who had been desperately wounded in a duel. Aloyse was thus unable to boast of what he was about to do to the "American pig-dog." As he could think of nothing else, the drive passed in silence, broken only by feeble attempts on the part of the doctor to improve his good fortune of being in such distinguished company. They reached the inn at a quarter before the hour. As they walked up the road the doctor was undeceived by Moltzahn.

He stopped and fell to weeping and wringing his hands with fright. "A duel —my Crown Prince a principal—my God, Highness, I shall be ruined! I refuse to go."

Moltzahn caught him by the arm. "Come on, imbecile!" he said, roughly. "There is no turning back now. You will be protected. But if anything should happen, think of my fate."

Aloyse was a few yards in advance. He was strutting along with his chest out. He was confident that the "American upstart" would give him little trouble. "A physical bully," he said to himself. "Only a gentleman can be brave in a duel." He turned. "How does the doctor take it?" he asked.

"My Crown Prince!" exclaimed the doctor. "I beg you—I implore you—" He fell on his knees before Aloyse.

"Get up! Get up!" Aloyse spoke in a kindly, condescending tone. It always delighted him to receive ocular proof of his superiority; some of his father's remarks were most disquieting. "No harm shall come to you, my good man."

The doctor, still weeping and in such mental turmoil that he forgot to dust the knees of his trousers and the tails of his long, black coat, kept pace with Moltzahn. Aloyse was whistling and brandishing a small cane. His round face, empty of all save appetites, was gay—it became a prince thus to go to the duel. And, in fact, he was not a coward, except before his father; and he longed to punish the low creature who had dared to lift his eyes to a princess of the house of Traubenheim, had dared to lay hands in anger upon a royal person.

“I can hardly wait to get at the dog, Moltzahn,” he said. “I’m afraid he won’t come.”

Moltzahn replied, “Yes, Your Royal Highness,” absently. The nearer he got to the field the gloomier he became. He had taken many risks, had done many degrading things in furthering the ambition of his life, to be the man next the throne in Zweitenbourg. But this risk was a senseless fly straight into the face of fate.

It was almost broad day when Grafton, Burroughs, and a doctor from Bâle arrived. They lifted their hats to the first-comers. Dr. Kirschner lifted his hat in return; Moltzahn gave a slight salute to Burroughs. Aloyse stared insolently at Grafton and made no salutation whatever.

Grafton turned to Burroughs. “You see, Burroughs, what kind of cattle they are. I apologize again for bringing you.”

Burroughs was white and nervous. “Which one do I deal with?” he asked, in an undertone.

Grafton pointed at Moltzahn. “And keep your eyes on him. He’s a blackguard through and through, capable of anything.”

Aloyse continued to stare at Grafton, a cruel smile on his lips, and the vindictive hate of the brainless in his eyes. Grafton did not like that smile. “I am taking long chances,” he muttered, “but—I must!” He turned his face towards the north, towards Zweitenbourg, and forgot Aloyse.

Moltzahn and Burroughs found a level well back from the road and private. To this the party went. The snow on the peaks was rosy red, and the birds were awakening to full song, and from the earth rose the fresh, living gladness of welcome to the new day. The lot decided that Aloyse should

face the south and Grafton the north—“a good omen,” thought Grafton, and the look in his face showed how far murder was from his heart.

As they were about to take their places he said to Aloyse, “I wish a few words with you in private.”

“Absurd—impossible!” interrupted Moltzahn. “Such conduct is intolerable!”

Grafton looked at Aloyse as if Moltzahn had not spoken.

Aloyse hesitated. “Don’t!” pleaded Moltzahn, in a whisper. “He may say something that will unsettle your nerves.”

Aloyse drew himself up haughtily. “Stand aside,” he ordered, “all of you. The fellow may wish to apologize. If so, I may let him off with a sound caning.”

Grafton went close to him. “It may be,” he said, in an even voice, “that you will kill me, so I take the precaution of speaking beforehand. I could easily kill you, because I happen to be a dead shot with the pistol. But I shall spare your life. I shall only shatter your right hand. I do it that you may wear, as long as your body holds together, the badge of my mercy to you—for her sake.”

“How dare you speak of her!” fumed Aloyse. “Yes; I shall kill you for your insolence to our house.”

“It amuses me to see you rage,” said Grafton. “It makes me realize what I rescued her from.”

Aloyse was in a paroxysm of anger. “My cousin and I will marry the day after to-morrow. It is all arranged—”

“All—except her consent,” answered Grafton, with a mocking smile. “I love her. I know her. I trust her. However this may fall out, she will never marry you.”

He returned to his place. “I think I’ve put a shake into his hand,” he said to Burroughs, in an undertone. “I don’t mind admitting I tried to, as this is a farce so far as I am concerned. I’m not anxious to die if I can help it.”

Moltzahn, holding the pistols, was standing midway between Aloyse and Grafton, and a little to one side. He looked from Grafton to Aloyse. “Walk

towards me," he said, "and when you are face to face turn your backs each to the other. I will hand each of you a pistol. Walk towards your places again, and when you reach them stand without turning until Mr. Burroughs begins to count. At three turn and fire at your convenience. Are you ready, gentlemen?"

Aloyse and Grafton bowed.

"Advance!"

They walked slowly and steadily, each towards the other. Grafton seemed dreamy and abstracted, Aloyse's little brown eyes were angry and his brows were drawn in an exaggerated frown. When they were about two feet apart, Moltzahn, standing as near to one as to the other, said: "Turn!"

They wheeled, and he handed each a cocked pistol. "To your places, gentlemen," he said. They began the slow return. Burroughs, his hands trembling, was trying to moisten his lips for the giving of the signal. The two doctors, all in black and with long brown beards, stood apart, the Swiss doctor interested but calm, the Zweitenbourgian with his knees knocking together and his hands sliding nervously one over the other. The sun, clearing the crest of a ridge, sent an enormous billow of light to burst through the mists and flood the dense, dew-showered foliage of the western front of the valley.

"Now, Mr. Burroughs," said Moltzahn, in a low tone.

"One!" said Burroughs, and his voice was thin and shrill; the sound of it made him shiver. "Oh, God!" he thought, "I may be giving the signal for a murder."

"Two!" His voice was hoarse.

"Three!" wrenched itself from his tightening throat in a gasp. He hid his face in his arms. "What have I done? What have I done?" he groaned. It seemed an eternity; why did they not shoot and have it over with? He dropped his arm and looked; they had had barely time to come round face to face.

Aloyse fired first by an instant; then Grafton. Grafton stood motionless. Aloyse gave an exclamation of pain; his pistol dropped to the ground and

the blood spurted over his shattered hand until it was red and raining red from every finger.

Grafton, his feet together, began slowly to fall forward, his eyes closing. Burroughs cried out and rushed to him and caught him.

“Where is it?” he whispered.

“A mere trifle—a scratch on the arm,” whispered Grafton. “Sh! Be careful!” And he closed his eyes and lay motionless.

“Quick, Dr. Berners!” exclaimed Burroughs, starting up wildly from beside his friend. “I think he’s been killed.”

Berners was already there, was tearing open Grafton’s coat, waistcoat, shirt, and undershirt. Dr. Kirschner, his face beaming and his hands rubbing, bustled up. “His Royal Highness has been graciously pleased to send me to render what aid I can. His Royal Highness’s own wound is slight—”

“Back to your master!” exclaimed Burroughs, apparently beside himself with rage and grief, and standing between Kirschner and Grafton. “My friend is dead—shot down by that assassin!”

Dr. Kirschner put on the death-bed look. “Let us hope not so bad as that.”

“Yes—dead,” said Berners, looking round at his colleague and shielding Grafton so that Kirschner could not see his chest. “He is shot through the heart.”

Kirschner rushed to Aloyse and Moltzahn. Aloyse was ruefully regarding the bandage Kirschner had hastily wrapped round his hand before going on Aloyse’s magnanimous mission. “I regret to inform Your Royal Highness that Mr. Grafton’s wound is most serious.”

“Is that all?” Aloyse scowled. “I aimed for his heart.”

Dr. Kirschner lowered his eyes; even his humble soul revolted. “Your Royal Highness,” he said, in a low voice, “Mr. Grafton is dead.”

“Dead!” Aloyse’s lips shrivelled and he staggered slightly.

“Your Royal Highness shot him through the heart,” said Moltzahn, in a congratulatory tone.

“Dead!” Aloyse’s voice was hoarse. “Let us go,” he said.

“But I must dress Your Royal Highness’s wound,” urged Kirschner.

“In the carriage,” Aloyse answered, impatiently. He cast a hasty glance towards the group on the grass—the prostrate man, the two kneeling beside him. “Let us go,” he said, and led the way.

X
The Grand Duke Prepares to Celebrate

ON the drive back to Zweitenbourg Aloyse's spirits gradually rose. He ceased to see that group with such painful distinctness; Moltzahn and presently Dr. Kirschner flattered him on his marksmanship. Pshaw! it had been a mere coincidence that Grafton had shot him precisely as he said he would. He forced himself to remember more and more vividly Grafton's impudence—and impudence to a Traubenheim! And impudence to a Traubenheim in an affair of the heart!—and that affair one in which the lady was also a Traubenheim. He had but meted out just punishment for an assault upon his own honor, the honor of his wife-to-be, the honor of his house.

In the last two or three miles he was hilarious, boasting boisterously—he had had something to drink and nothing to eat—of his prowess and of how all Traubenheims always thus served the impudent enemies of their house. And Moltzahn, concealing his contempt and disgust, and Dr. Kirschner, full of the loyalty of a devoted subject, urged him on. He set the doctor down at his house and Moltzahn at his club—Moltzahn did not dare show himself at The Castle. Then he drove on with a growing appetite. He reached The Castle at seven o'clock, just in time for his regular breakfast with his father.

The Grand Duke was invariably in a vile humor in the morning; he ate so much and exercised so little that he slept badly. He insisted on his son always breakfasting alone with him, and, under the pretence of training him for the throne, wreaked his ill-humor upon him. Aloyse hurriedly changed from the plain clothes in which he had fought to an undress uniform, and flew to the breakfast-room. He was in high spirits; at last he had done something which his father would applaud. As he entered, Casimir looked at him sourly. He brought his heels together and saluted. Then he advanced, as usual, bent his knee, but put his left hand, instead of his right, under his father's right hand extended for him to kiss.

“What is the matter with your right hand?” screamed the Grand Duke.

Aloyse jumped and shivered like a guilty child and his wits scattered. He held out his right hand in its sling, stupidly staring at it.

“Speak—and no lies!”

“In a duel,” he stammered.

The Grand Duke pushed back his chair from the table. His look was so frightful that terror gave speed to Aloyse’s tongue. “I challenged the American, father—and killed him,” he said, the last phrase explosively. “I shot him through the heart.”

Casimir brought his chair close to the table again, lifted his cup of coffee, and drew in several draughts, each with a loud, sucking sound. “Eat your breakfast!” he said, in a sharp but not unkindly tone. “You must be hungry; have one of my peaches.”

Casimir’s peaches were his especial dish. They were grown at great expense under his own eye, and no one else was permitted to have them. In all his life Aloyse could remember only one occasion on which his father had offered to share his peaches; it was twenty years before, when Aloyse, seated in a high-chair at that table, had seen the Prime Minister take one at Casimir’s request; the reason, as Aloyse learned long afterwards, was that the Prime Minister had saved the Traubenheims their title of “Royal Highness,” which was gravely threatened. Though he detested peaches, Aloyse ate the peach greedily, swelling with pride and importance.

Prudence bade him say no more of his achievement; but vanity and a loose tongue impelled him to seek further flatteries from his father. He looked at the old man’s sardonic, yellow face several times before he ventured to speak.

“I ask to be permitted to tell Erica myself,” he said.

His father stopped eating and raised his head from his plate. He seemed to have concentrated all the acidity of his nature in his face. The color rose in Aloyse’s cheeks and mounted his brow until his features were all ablaze and a sweat was standing on his forehead.

“You propose to tell the woman you wish to marry, and whose consent you must get—you propose to tell her that you have murdered her lover.”

Casimir said the words slowly, without accent, quietly. Then he put his face down until it was again hovering within a few inches of his plate.

There was a long pause, and Casimir spoke again. “Every day you remind me more and more of your grand-uncle.” Aloyse remembered his grand-uncle—the Grand Duke Wilhelm, a jibbering idiot, who sat all day on the floor in a corner gnawing his nails and his great whiskers.

Another long pause, and Casimir spoke again. “Go to your apartments, and don’t leave them until I summon you. And never permit a syllable about your duel to escape your lips. Deny it; if necessary, *swear* you know nothing about it. If possible, she must never know how he died or that he’s dead. Be off!”

Later in the morning Casimir read the report of the chief of his secret police on Grafton’s last hours in Zweitenbourg. His secret agents said that Grafton had communicated with no one except an American tourist—an obviously casual acquaintance and talk; that Ernestine had not moved from her home over the bake-shop in Emperor Ferdinand Second Street. And when the chief came to him and in great confusion confessed that his men had lost Grafton between Zweitenbourg and Venice, the Grand Duke was sarcastic but not angry. “Drop the matter,” he said.

He sent Baron Zeppstein to inquire how Her Serene Highness did, and whether she would permit His Royal Highness to do himself the honor of waiting upon her. As the answer was favorable, Casimir put on his most paternal face and went to Erica’s apartments. She was all fire and indignation.

“First,” she said, “I demand that Your Royal Highness send away that woman and that soldier.”

“Certainly, my child.” And he went to the door and himself ordered them away. As the woman was leaving he called her back. He returned to Erica. “Shall I send for your own maid?” he said. “This woman can fetch her. Yes?” And he told the woman to bring Ernestine forthwith.

“The peril is past,” he said, standing beside Erica and laying his hand on her shoulder. “I know what youth and hot blood are; I, too, have dreamed of happiness. But our rank means duty; to you it means Aloyse and the future

of our ancient house. You think I'm harsh, child, but it is the kindness of experience."

Erica looked scorn at him. "The grand-ducal house of Traubenheim," she said, "has the throne. The ducal house has the private wealth. Yes, my dear uncle, you are, indeed, kind—to yourself and Aloyse. You know—none better—that your son is an ignorant, brutish fool. You know that this life here is dull and repellent—a hell on earth, a mockery of a life, a torture-pen of yawning and meaningless routine. Don't flatter my intelligence, my dear uncle, by talking of your kindness and my duty." She started up. "And sooner or later I shall go where love and life call me," she exclaimed, passionately.

A ghost of a sardonic smile flitted over the yellow old face at this reference to Grafton. Then he said, sternly, but without harshness: "We shall send the heralds into the town this afternoon to proclaim the marriage for Monday. We shall announce in the *Gazette* that the Inheriting Grand Duke is ill, and that, because of your great love for him and his for you, the marriage has been hastened. And on Monday you will be married."

The old man spoke with much dignity—the dignity of one all his life accustomed to being implicitly obeyed, of one descended from a long line of arbitrary rulers. And although Erica denounced and denied his command with all the strength of her soul, his words sounded to her like clods upon a coffin.

"As I said," he went on, in a gentler voice, "the peril is past. That young adventurer, that young picture dealer from across the water"—he laughed—"his impudence was refreshing! I admire audacity; he almost deserved to win; I'm not surprised that you were almost swept off your feet. But he will not annoy you further. He's gone, my child; he took himself away last night. So, feeling that you were no longer in danger of being annoyed and humiliated by his impertinences, I have removed the guards."

"Then I am free?"

"It would be well," said Casimir, with faint emphasis, "for you to keep within The Castle for the present; of course, you must have your walks under proper protection."

He extended his hand for her to kiss it. For the first time in her life the act seemed not a ceremony but a degradation. “I begin anew here,” she said to herself. She pretended not to see his hand. He slipped away with his soft, sliding shuffle. When he walked in that fashion those who knew him feared him.

XI
An Overwhelming Defeat

THERE was no time to be lost, as it was now noon, Saturday, and the wedding was to be on Monday. As soon as Ernestine came Erica began to act.

“You must go back home at once,” she said to her. “You have forgotten your clothes; that will do as a pretext. Send your brother to Schaffhausen on the first train. He must see Mr. Brandt and tell him to meet me to-night at the first cross-road beyond the park gates. I shall try to be there at one. If I can come at all, it will not be later than three. If he cannot come, he will find me at the Hotel Rhein to-morrow, or next day, under the name of Madam von Briesen.”

As Ernestine left The Castle a soldier joined her, saying: “My orders are to go with you and let no one speak to you except in my presence.”

Ernestine took this news with a seeming of great cheerfulness, and jested with her guard all the way to town. Her family lived in three rooms, and with a little diplomacy she easily delivered her message to her brother in the rear room while the soldier sat in the front room drinking beer with her youngest sister. But she did not venture to call at Windmuller’s, in Duke Albrecht Street.

When she returned to The Castle the preparations for the wedding were going forward apace. The central part, where were the principal rooms of state, was open at every window and door; tradespeople were coming and going; there were sounds of hammering, clouds of dust from the windows, a press of wagons about the doors. The Grand Duke had decided to make the wedding a big, public affair, so that Erica would feel that it was impossible to retreat. And he had left it open whether the ceremony itself was to be public or private.

At eleven that night Ernestine crept softly down the corridor and reconnoitred both stairways leading from the apartments of Her Serene Highness to the lower floors. At the foot of each was a soldier with a huge white rosette on his left arm, in honor of the coming gayeties. Erica had expected this; she simply wished to discover where the enemy lay. She dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant of the Household Guards. When she and Ernestine had made it, two years before, she had been full of the idea of running away for several days to “see the world” from a man’s point of view. But her audacity failed her—that is, she permitted the obstacles to seem insurmountable, and she never got beyond parading her rooms in it, with Ernestine as a critic of her counterfeit of a man’s figure and walk. The feat she now proposed would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, in woman’s dress.

She was putting the finishing touches to her masculine toilet when Ernestine hurried into her dressing-room in a panic. Baron Zeppstein was waiting to see her. Erica drew off her top-boots and thrust her feet into a pair of slippers; she drew on a loose wrapper, tied a white shawl about her shoulders, and, letting down her hair, appeared before the Baron.

Zeppstein’s old head was almost knocking his swollen knee-joints. “By His Royal Highness’s command, Your Serene Highness,” he said, humbly, “I come to inquire of you in person whether you are entirely comfortable.”

Erica was gracious, bade him sit, asked about the preparations for the wedding in detail, made several adroit remarks which seemed to indicate that she was secretly preparing to yield but did not wish to gratify the Grand Duke and humiliate herself by relieving his suspense. Zeppstein went away convinced, and was able to make a convincing report which stood the test of Casimir’s exhaustive and searching cross-examination.

It was now midnight and Ernestine put out all lights. She was to go to bed, and if any one came and insisted upon seeing her mistress, she was to detain him as long as possible, and profess ignorance and alarm should the flight be discovered.

Erica advanced down the lofty stone passage-way. It was an alternation of bands of darkness and bands of moonlight. She took the second corridor to the left and stole along it until, in the darkness, her foot touched the first

step of the ascending stairway. She went up, opened the door at the top, and entered. When she had bolted this door she breathed more freely.

She went up a second and narrower flight of stairs and slipped through a window to a small balcony. It was in the full moonlight, but it looked only upon the roofs and the deserted battlements of The Castle. Holding to the ridge of stone above her head she stepped to the next balcony. From this she was able to go out upon the ledge extending along the huge tower fifteen or twenty feet above the battlements. The ledge was narrow and there was no hold for her hands. She clung to the wall and sidled slowly along, feeling her way with her feet and her body. She did not dare open her eyes except when she paused.

At last she came to the place where the ledge passed immediately above and very close to the pointed roof of the throne-room. She stepped down softly and cautiously; the roof was steep, and, should she slip, she would slide to the edge, where, if she did not fall to the battlements, she would cling until rescued and returned to captivity. She worked herself along the ridge of the roof to the great circular skylight which divided it into two parts. She glanced down through one of the open sections. Scores of people were at work decorating the throne-room for the wedding.

“If I fail,” she thought, “I shall be forced there, perhaps, and it is set for to-morrow!”

The last qualm of nervousness left her. She walked the ledge round the skylight and crawled out upon the pointed roof beyond. She drew herself along it until she was above one of the windows projecting from the slope of the roof. She let herself down; she touched the cap of the window; she slid slowly along the outer edge of its frame until she was able to reach round into it.

It was fastened. Clinging to roof and window-frame she unbuckled her sword, and with it broke a pane of glass. She listened; not a sound after the echo of the crash had died away. Then she became conscious that some one else was on that roof.

With heart beating wildly and body trembling she peered round the window-frame. Far away along the ridge of the roof she saw a shape which was unmistakably a man’s. And as she watched, it moved; it was some one

coming from the eastern end towards her. Had he seen her, or had he come after she had slid behind the window-frame? She feared he was on his way to intercept her, but she did not lose heart.

She reached through the broken pane and unfastened the window and opened it. Then, with as little noise and as little exposure of herself as the profound quiet and the brightness of the moon permitted, she crawled round the projecting frame and into the window. She ventured to glance out and upward again; the man was creeping along the ridge; he had passed the point where he would have begun to descend towards her if he had seen or heard her; he was moving in the direction from which she had come. With a long sigh she closed the window. “Two minutes later,” she said to herself, “and I should have been taken.”

She was in an empty room, in the attic of the extreme eastern end of the central part of The Castle. She brushed her uniform, straightened her belt and sword, set her helmet well forward on her head, and sallied forth. She went down the stairway, cobwebs clinging to her face and sounds of the movements of disturbed creatures—bats or birds—coming to her through the darkness. At the foot of a second and long flight of stairs she found herself on the landing from which two great corridors branched—the one to the right leading to liberty, the one to the left leading to her cousin Aloyse’s apartments.

Some one was coming towards her in the corridor to the right; she was compelled to take Aloyse’s corridor. The footsteps—they were cautious footsteps—followed her. She shrank into a niche and stood like a statue. As the man passed a window the moonlight revealed him to her—Prince von Moltzahn. He was disregarding her uncle’s prohibition and was coming to see Aloyse. He opened a door so nearly opposite where she stood that she could see into the room—could see Aloyse, in a dressing-gown, seated at a table on which was a tray containing bottles of whiskey and soda.

“Ah! von Moltzahn; you were never so welcome. No; leave the door open. It’s frightful in here. I can’t breathe. Help yourself to the whiskey.”

“I expected to find you ill,” said Moltzahn. “His Royal Highness has given out that you have a fever.”

“Yes; and he’s shut me up here until the wedding. He treats me like a dog. But wait until I’m married and get hold of some cash. He won’t be able to keep his feet on my neck then.”

“But why has he shut you in?”

“I wanted to tell Her Serene Highness that I’d killed that American pig.”

Erica heard; but not until the words had repeated themselves again and again in her brain did she understand them. Her cousin went on: “He was pleased when I told him; he gave me one of his peaches. But he doesn’t want her to know about it. He doesn’t understand women’s—”

“What was that?” exclaimed Moltzahn, and both leaped to their feet. Aloyse rushed to the doorway.

Erica had sunk straight down to the floor, and, as her collapsed body fell over, her sword and helmet clashed against the stone. Aloyse, looking into the dimness, could see the form of a soldier—suggestions of the uniform of the Household Guards. He muttered a curse.

“What is it?” called Moltzahn.

“The old brute has put a guard over me,” said Aloyse, turning back, “and the fellow’s in a drunken sleep. You’d better go.”

Moltzahn fled, with only a glance at Erica, and Aloyse closed his door and went sullenly to bed. Gradually the coolness of the stone revived her. She sat up—and remembered. She could not imagine, did not try to imagine, how long she had lain there or why she had not been discovered. A wave of desolation swept over her. She had thought she loved this man who had come into her life so suddenly, who had taken her heart by storm, who had opened for her a way of escape from a wearisome life which marriage to her cousin would have made hideous, unendurable. But she did not until now realize how much she loved him—not as her liberator but as her lover. “No; he is not dead!” her heart protested. “Aloyse is a liar, a braggart. There is some mistake.”

She dragged herself to her feet. “I will go back,” she moaned. “Dead—my love is dead!” She knew that it was the truth; she felt that it was a lie. “But I shall go back—”

To what? To be the wife of the man she had heard boasting of his murder. She became suddenly strong. “Never! Never!” And aching with grief, yet hoping beside the corpse of hope, she rushed on until she was almost in the arms of a sentinel. She turned back and dropped upon a bench round a corner a few feet from him. The big bell of the chapel boomed half-past one. She rose and went a few steps in the direction of Aloyse’s room. Hate, a passion for vengeance, was bounding through her veins; she would wrench the truth from him, then kill him.

But now there came the sound of several shots and confused shouts. The sentinel ran, and she turned and followed him across one of the huge entrance halls out into the open; the cool air from the mountains poured upon her, and her heart began to revive. She saw a man dart from the shadow of The Castle’s walls to the west, strike down a soldier who barred his path, and run zig-zag towards the forest. All were rushing in that direction, and she ran also, but as quickly as she could plunged into the deep shadows. She made a détour and took a course parallel to the road that led to the park gates, two miles and a half away. She must get to the cross-roads where Ernestine’s brother would be waiting—to tell her that her lover was dead! But instead of enfeebling her the thought carried only enough conviction of its truth to inflame her desire to get away—to fly where she would never again see the wretch who had desolated her.

There was some one in the shadow ahead; it must be the escaping robber. But how would he—how would she—pass the sentinel at the park gates? The alarm must have been signalled from The Castle. She was almost exhausted. She could see the robber—he was between her and the one dim gate-lamp over the small side gate. He heard her coming and whirled about.

“Come on!” she panted, hoarsely; were they not companions in flight? “I’ll get you through!”

He followed her as she ran straight for the sentry, who was standing with his gun at a challenge.

“Halt!” said the sentry, loudly.

“Quick! Quick! Open!” she panted. The robber, who had been standing aloof, suspicious of her now that he saw her uniform, came forward. The

sentry also noted the uniform and saluted. “There’s been a robbery or something at The Castle—” he began.

“Yes—yes,” she gasped. “That’s it—open—don’t delay us!”

The sentry stupidly stood aside, and she and the robber dashed through the side gate and down the dark road abreast.

“Hi! Come back!” yelled the sentry, his slow wits at last collecting in a doubt. He sent a shot after them.

But they ran the faster, getting into the deepest shadow. At the second bend from the gates she stopped and sank into the grass. The robber stopped also.

“Go on,” she gasped, in a whisper; her voice was all but gone. “Don’t mind me.”

“That wouldn’t be fair,” he said. At the sound of his voice she rose up, flung her arms about his neck, and fainted.

“Well!” ejaculated the man. “What’ll I do with him?” He held her in his arms, looking helplessly about. He tried to lift her to his shoulders, but he was too exhausted to bear the additional weight. He laid her in the grass and ran on down the road.

She came to in the dampness and cold of the long grass. As she sat up a troop of cavalry rushed by on its way to the town. She began to remember; she had got the robber through the gates, and then delirium had seized her and she had fancied he was Grafton—no, it was not delirium; he *was* Grafton! She understood now; her message had not reached him, but he had come on his own plan; it was he who passed her on the roof of the throne-room; it was he who, seeking her, had been discovered, and, making a dash for liberty, had given her the chance to escape—no, it was not delirium. But where was he now? She could hear only the murmur of the woods. Why had he left her after she had flung her arms about his neck?

From far down the road in the direction of the town came a rush and roar as of a locomotive. She rose to her knees, to her feet. It was a racing-automobile. As it drew near its pace slackened and its noise grew louder. It came to a stop a few feet from her and stood shaking and panting.

“Somewhere along here,” she heard, in Grafton’s voice, and he leaped from the seat and came into the shadow. “Oh, there you are! Why didn’t you call

out? Come, get in here!” And he caught her by the arm. “Don’t you hear the cavalry coming back?” He half lifted, half flung her into the seat and leaped in himself. “Turn about, Burroughs, and go straight for ’em!”

She tried to speak, but she was dumb, limp. The automobile sprang forward and was soon going at a tremendous pace; it would have been impossible for a voice to be heard. She looked ahead; the wind was shrieking in her ears; the cavalrymen had halted in a moonlit stretch of the road.

She could see their pistols lifting. “They are about to fire!” she thought.

She flung off her helmet, released her hair, and stood up. The moon was shining full upon her face and upon her long hair streaming and gleaming behind her. She saw the pistols instantly fall before the apparition of “Her Serene Highness,” and the horses reined back upon their haunches. The automobile rushed past them at the speed of an express train and fled, unpursued and unpursuable, along the military road towards the Swiss border.

She felt somebody’s arms close about her and then somebody’s kisses on her face.

XII
The Spaniard is Captured

AT dinner at the Hôtel Krone, Schaffhausen, that same evening, Grafton told his wife and Burroughs the story of the Spaniard—how it had led him to her. She secretly resolved that the Spaniard must and should be theirs. In the morning she wrote her uncle an offer to give up the part of her estates that lay in the Grand Duchy in exchange for the picture. The acceptance came, prompt and polite; Casimir is not the man to bite his nails and chatter his teeth at fate. And so there was a surprise for Grafton when they went to Paris.

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