

THE MAD KING DIES

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*The Story of the Mad King, Ludwig II
of Bavaria: of his association with
and friendship for Richard Wagner:
and of some of the women
on the footsteps of
the Throne.*

BY

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CASSELL AND COMPANY LTD
London, Toronto, Melbourne and Sydney

First Published - - *September, 1928*
Second Impression - *October, 1928*

Printed in Great Britain

To JOAN

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FOREWORD

IT is many years ago since some rumours of the story of Ludwig of Bavaria, and his friend Richard Wagner, first made an enduring appeal to a boyish imagination. I was still at school when I read of the mad King's adventures upon the lake of Starnberg and upon its shore; of the swans which drew his boat upon those beautiful waters; of the fairy-like sleighs, gaudily illumined with flaming lamps, which terrified the peasants of the neighbouring mountains in the winter time; of his extravagances in the theatre; of the vast orchestra and the splendid company engaged to divert one man who sat alone in his box in the auditorium of a vast and otherwise deserted theatre. But this talk was merely rumour at the time. The Victorian press naturally hushed up many of the eccentricities attributed to the gentle monarch. We heard of them, but in odd ways from Continental sources, and more fully when the supreme tragedy came. Few people knew much about the King or his sanity until that moment.

The death of so remarkable a man naturally produced many biographies. There were the works of Doctor Franz Karl, of Louise von Kobell, of Professor Beyer, and of Friedrich Lampart, but there was also a most interesting story from a Norwegian source, "Ludwig the II., King of

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Bavaria," by Clara Tschudi, ably translated by E. H. Hearn, and to this particular book I am sure most romancers are indebted. I would hereby acknowledge the very great help in detail which I have derived from the perusal of this fascinating biography, and my obligations to its author.

Ludwig's story will for ever present an enigma. Was he mad or sane? If mad, undoubtedly there was method apparent. When he sent for Richard Wagner, then working in comparative obscurity in Switzerland, he saved for Europe the greatest musical genius of that or perhaps of any age. When he planned a great temple of music wherein the *Nibelungen* should be played, he had in mind the fame which such a musical endeavour would win for his country, and the glory it would reflect upon him and his successors. But his projects needed money and the Bavarian citizen was not more patient than the citizens of other states when demands were made upon his purse. I have shown at the end of this book, in a story otherwise largely romance, that Luitpold was not made Regent of Bavaria until Ludwig II. was actually negotiating a loan with France, and that because of that loan the Council discovered finally that he was mad. It was a madness, nevertheless, which had already given "The Ring" to the world, and helped to

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crown the Master in the Temple at Bayreuth.

There is another fact. This king unquestionably was beloved by his people. When physicians went to Neu-Schwanstein to arrest him as a madman, the very peasants came down from the hills with ploughshares in their hands. His charities were wide and indiscriminating. He retained his faith to the end, and his last present to one of his valets was a prayer book. "Pray for me," he said—and when he said it, he had already determined upon his own death.

That he was ever in love with a woman is doubtful. His friendships were many and often unwise. That he loved Richard Wagner and was by him beloved there is no possibility of doubt. He was a mere boy when he had heard the music of *Rienzi* and *Tannhäuser* and he had sworn that, if he ever came to the throne, such a musician should be honoured above all others. And honoured he was, as we know, until the greed of the citizens of Munich drove Richard Wagner out and first gave tongue to those accusations which were to bring their King to the grave.

I say that he was never known really to have loved a woman, but that women figured largely in his life this romance will show. I have taken some of the more memorable figures associated with his name, and have built about them those happenings

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which history has in part recorded. For the rest, a romancer's liberty must be claimed. The women of these pages all lived and were beloved by Ludwig II. ; but that Fricka was not the wife of von Rucker some historians will be bold enough to affirm, though the mere storyteller may well accept the fact and rely upon the common report.

Apart from the story of Ludwig, I have endeavoured to present some phases of the life of Richard Wagner, which may be of interest to those who are the disciples of that great master. When I first heard of Ludwig of Bavaria, I heard also of his friend. but too often in terms of contempt. Those were the days when the comic papers still derided the divine music of *Tannhäuser* and made merry when *Lohengrin* was discussed. Even some of the greatest critics on some of the greatest papers were unconverted to the end, and proclaimed Wagner a charlatan. We have travelled far since those days, but, in travelling, we have remembered much of the master's early struggles, of his often sordid love affairs, of his pride, his difficulties, and his faith. Above all, we have remembered what a great friend he found in Ludwig of Bavaria, and how wonderful was that hour of his destiny which transported him from poverty to the splendours of a palace and there established him in the luxuries he had so justly earned.

THE MAD KING DIES

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

DAUGHTER OF LOLA

LOLA had heard that there was to be a rehearsal of the German opera *Tannhäuser* in the Salle Beethoven, Passage de l' Opéra, and that it would be conducted by Hans von Bülow, who had been well known to her mother—that queen among adventuresses who once had ruled the fair kingdom of Bavaria, though she was but a cocotte among dancers and a dancer among cocottes.

Lola herself lived at that time just by the Ecole Militaire—and her few friends were not entitled to be censors of her morals, nor to inquire how she managed to buy the pretty dresses and to eat so often at the good restaurants, when she had no visible means of support except the admirable pair of legs which the soldiers so greatly admired.

No doubt it was all the work of the good fairies, who had bestowed many of her mother's charms upon her, especially the dark Irish eyes and the

pretty head of golden hair with which the military gentlemen delighted to play in the moments of their leisure.

This was a very beautiful young woman, no doubt, and although she was but twenty-two years old, she had a remarkable knowledge of the world and was quite convinced that if she could make herself known to Paris, she might even emulate the achievements of her remarkable mother and, perhaps, discover some ancient king who would permit her to manage his exchequer despite the anger of his chancellor. Unfortunately she had little talent for the adventure and like her mother, Lola Montez, could neither dance nor sing sufficiently well to persuade even the impressario of a *café chantant* to give her a hearing.

“Go back to your soldiers,” they would say to her; “this is a theatre, not a *place d’armes*,” and Lola would smile kindly at them and, having cast some aspersions upon their ancestors, would return to the Rue de la Fosse and there resume her military exercises as the *sales chiens* recommended her to do.

On this April morning of the year 1860, however, the case was very different. It was the height of the season in Paris, and even the enemies of the new Empire could admit its success.

Foreigners flocked into the city in numbers

unheard of previously. The Bois had never shown a spectacle more brilliant; while as for the great restaurants of the boulevards, it was almost impossible to find a seat in them, so great was the press. Here were princesses from the East cheek by jowl with cocottes from Madrid and rich *bourgeois* from the North—the statesmen of many nations; soldiers, adventurers, *escrocs*, all that *drôle du monde* which made the city famous as it undoubtedly made it rich.

Such people found excitement their meat and drink, and the wild licentiousness of fête and fair, the madness of the *bal masqué*, or the shabby splendours of the “Boul Mich” at play, were recreations they could reprobate and enjoy.

Lola herself naturally played but a small part upon this gilded stage. Sometimes a soldier had taken her to the Opera for one of the great balls there; and a rich English “milord,” who was really the keeper of a gaming-house in Pall Mall, used to drive her round the Bois now and then in a showy high gig with horses in tandem, so that she could look down upon the great world and imagine that she ruled it. But these were rare occasions, and for the most part she went afoot, wondering where she would get new shoes when the old ones were worn out.

At such an ebb-tide of fortune she had met that

good-looking Bavarian soldier, Karl von Pasch; and he it was who told her of Wagner's coming to Paris, and of the Emperor's invitation to have *Tannhäuser* played at the Opera. No fool, this young fellow who was an attaché at his Embassy, but a gifted politician who soon had Lola's story out of her and was as quick to suggest that she should profit by it.

"The daughter of Lola Montez, you!" he exclaimed, and then added, "Good God," as though the news were too much for him.

Lola assured him that it was the truth.

"I was sent to the Convent of the Benedictines at Passy when I was eight years old. I stayed with them until I was fourteen. They did not tell me whose daughter I was, but we had a dancing-master and he found out. So I ran away with him and we lived for three years in the Rue Pigalle, until one day he said that if I were Lola Montez's daughter, I must have property in Munich, as my mother had thousands from the old King . . . so he wrote to somebody there, and after that the police came and arrested him and they sent him back to Milan, for he really was an Italian. So I was left in Paris alone; and the Convent would not take me back again . . . and, you see, well—I met the Colonel Machin and so he made me a soldier."

She laughed very much at the idea ; and when she laughed, Lola could be a very fascinating young person, as the Captain Karl von Pasch was quite willing to admit.

“ If people could see you in tights,” he said, “ you would be the rage of Paris—you must get employment at the Opera. This Herr von Bülow, who conducts, knew your mother well . . . and is not his wife the sister of Abbé Liszt ? That man had the greatest admiration for your mother : if he knew you were in Paris, he would do a great deal for you—we must find out about him. But first I shall give you a letter to Bülow and say that he must engage you for the Ballet. Have you not heard that there is a scene called the ‘ Venusburg ’ and that Wagner has just written a ballet for it—though he declares that it ruins his opera ? Very well, you shall appear in that, for you should know something about love, my dear, and perhaps you can teach these clever old gentlemen a good deal.”

Lola was quite sure that she could ; and so it came about that she presented herself on the following day to the Herr von Bülow and carried with her a letter from Captain von Pasch, who declared that his protégée was undoubtedly the daughter of the famous Lola Montez and that her appearance as a dancer in the “ Venusburg ” would be one of the sensations of the year.

Unfortunately that great musician who was to do so much for Wagner's operas was not a credulous person and he did not take the Captain's letter seriously.

"What stuff is this!" he exclaimed, when he had read the note: "Lola Montez had no daughter! Who put such ideas into your head, child? Why do you come to me with a lying story?"

Lola drew herself up in a moment and her Irish eyes flashed anger.

"It is not a lying story! Go to the Convent of the Benedictines at Passy and they will tell you. My mother was Lola Montez, and if I do not know the name of my father, whose fault is that? You ought to be ashamed of yourself to say such things, and if you were not so old, I would tell you what I thought of you. Why, you have only to look at me to know that I am truly Lola's daughter!"

The musician was not a little astonished at the outburst, and he certainly did look at Lola a little more curiously. Whatever were his thoughts, however, he gave no expression to them, but, shrugging his shoulders, merely said: "Be at the Opera House to-morrow morning at nine o'clock and we will see what we can do"—and so he turned from her and went on with his rehearsing.

Be sure that Lola was there to the minute, and when the *maitre de ballet* had heard that she came

upon the instruction of the great Herr von Bülow, he soon had her clothes taken off her back and the canvas breeches of the ballet put on in their place.

“You know nothing, but you have pretty legs,” he said . . . and that was something Lola was quite well aware of, the soldiers having told her the same thing so often. She could not dance, she could not sing, but she felt sure that if Paris could but see, she might set out upon a pilgrimage of triumph such as her mother had known. The opportunity, truly, was remarkable.

Here was this wonderful man, Richard Wagner, who had been so often insulted by the French people, about to present them one of the most remarkable of his operas and that under the direct patronage of the Emperor Napoleon III., who had been advised to take this course by Madame de Metternich and other famous people in Paris, who truly believed that *Tannhäuser* was a masterpiece and that all the world would soon recognise it as such. Now at last would the weary labour of long years be rewarded and the musician come into his own. Everything that the great Opera House and its staff could do for the work that the Emperor commanded was done. And assuredly the very elect of the city and all the distinguished foreigners within its gates would be present. Lola would be

unlucky if she could not captivate one of these, the wonderful Irish eyes helping her. And if she did make a conquest, then the Captain von Pasch might go to the devil.

Such is the type of woman and of such things are her sweet dreams.

Lola saw herself the mistress at least of some potentate, with an apartment in the Avenue de Neuilly, a carriage and pair for the Bois and a box in this very Opera House, where now she was to appear as a mere ballet girl. Fine dreams indeed and not in accord with reality.

Paris had not then the musical brains to understand *Tannhäuser* and it was withdrawn upon the third night.

In vain Lola ogled and posed and kicked and twirled. She received three letters from "the front," three and no more. One was from a butcher in the Rue Saint Etienne, a second from a student at the Lycée and the third from a corporal of the Guard. The latter was too much for her. "She had supped of soldiers," as she said—and yet she must now return to the faithful Captain von Pasch and to his military embraces.

"We shall have to find a king for you yet," he said. "Your mother ruled my country when the King was sane and now that we have a King who is mad, why should you not rule it, too?"

The little fool took him seriously and often dwelt upon his words.

Richard Wagner, in the meantime, pursued by creditors, broken in spirit and almost despairing of himself, returned sadly to Switzerland, there to await the hour of his destiny so soon to rescue him in a magic instant from all the sorrows which lay upon him so heavily.

CHAPTER II

WE PASS TO THE LAKE OF STARNBERG

IN May of the year 1864 there happened an event which, perhaps, was as momentous as any in the whole history of music.

Richard Wagner was believed at that time to be in the city of Vienna at the very nadir of his fortunes. Paris had rejected him; his supreme masterpiece, the *Nibelungen*, remained a poem which lacked much of its music. He was pursued by his creditors and so deeply in debt that he dwelt in a state of profound sorrow, having drunk deeply, as he says, of every kind of bitterness and feeling that life no longer had any hope for him.

Yet, had he but known it, the great goddess Fortune was about to open the golden gates to him and to show him the Promised Land beyond.

Ludwig the Second, the mad King, had then come to the Bavarian throne. A young man of sentiment, a dreamer and a mystic, the music of Wagner had made an early appeal to his romantic mind,

and no sooner had he come to the throne than he sent his chancellor, Herr von Pfistermeister, to Vienna to bring the master to him.

This was no new desire of his.

When Wagner had asked, in his preface to the *Nibelungen*, "Is the Prince to be found who will make possible the representation of my work?"—Ludwig, then Crown Prince, had exclaimed: "When I am King, I will show the world how highly I prize his genius"; and that promise he was now to perform.

Carrying a portrait of his Royal Master and a superb ruby ring, the Chancellor set off for Vienna and took with him no other than our old friend Captain von Pasch, who had been Lola's lover in Paris. The pair travelled swiftly and arrived at Vienna towards the end of the month of April. Wagner, they were told, was at his house in the suburb of Penzig, where he had established himself with two servants and his faithful dog; but when they visited the little villa which had harboured the master, they found but disappointed brokers and heard but a tale of chagrin.

"He has fled, God knows whither," was the tale.

Once more, indeed, had the spectre of debt pursued the troubled musician and driven him out of even that mean harbourage.

Needless to say, the Herr von Pfistermeister was much troubled by this news. He knew that the King would be impatient of failure; and he did not dare to return to Munich without his quarry. So he suggested to the Captain von Pasch that each should go his own way in the city, inquiring and seeking and especially frequenting those haunts of the musicians where tidings of the missing Master might be had. To which course the Captain consented very willingly, for really he cared little about Art and much about the many pretty ladies in which the city of Vienna then abounded.

“We must become policemen,” the Secretary said: “I shall begin by going up the river to Linz, where I may get news from the Grand Duchess Hélène, who is at the castle there. You, on the other hand, must question everybody at the Opera, for somebody there is sure to know what has happened. I shall return in three days and then you will report to me.”

Pasch did not care how many days it might be, so long as he had a good time in the city; and he took his order so lightly that his evenings invariably found him in the gardens of the Prater, amongst the many pretty women there, none of whom appeared to have heard of the seventh or any other commandment. It is true that he did also frequent the purlieus of the Opera, but everybody there

still believed Wagner to be at his villa at Penzig, and all were much astonished to hear that it was not so.

“He owes money everywhere,” was the tale; “the poor man will never be rich, for when he has anything, he gives it away. You know that he has just performed the overture to *Freischutz* here, just as Weber wrote it; and that has never been done before. Oh, yes; all the world was there to hear it; but you do not make much money by concerts, and only the very few understand his wonderful music. We knew that he was in great trouble, but he was not the man to speak of it”—and so on, and so on, to the disappointment of the gallant Captain, who had hoped to have great news for the Secretary upon his return from Linz and must now go to him empty-handed.

Happily there were the *Bier-Halles* to console him, and in these he spent pleasant nights of a beautiful Spring, listening to the dashing music of Hungarian fiddlers and cuddling many a pretty girl who offered no valid objection to the process. It was upon one such happy occasion that he again met the daughter of Lola Montez and so recalled in an instant the gallant adventure in Paris and the happy days which had been its outcome.

Lola was very little changed, he thought, though undoubtedly become a beautiful woman. A slim

figure contrasted favourably with the enormous busts of the fat German *fraus* by whom she was surrounded ; while the fire of the Irish eyes was undimmed. As to her wonderful legs, there was no need to inquire after their welfare, for she wore but the lightest of clothes while she served the soldiers with beer and some were rude enough to observe that she might just as well have worn no clothes at all. With such impertinences it was clear that she knew well how to deal ; and she was, in fact, in the very midst of an argument with some truculent fellow, when her eyes lighted upon the round head of the gallant Captain and she hailed him with emphasis.

“ *Sacré nom d’un nom !* It is the Captain von Pasch ! ”

{ Captain von Pasch made no effort to hide his identity.

“ Lola Montez—for a hundred *gulden* ! ” said he . . . “ and the very last person I should have expected to see in Vienna.”

She crossed the room to his side, ignoring the soldiers ; and, sitting down by him, they began to talk of the Paris they both had loved so well.

“ Lola, my dear, you are very beautiful. How did I come to leave you ? ”

“ How do all the men come to leave me ! Because there is somebody else and they think her

more beautiful—for a little while,” she added naively.

“ Ah, but, my Lola, I have never met that other woman! Do you think, then, I would dare to forget you ? ”

She was quite sure of it—and, in fact, had enjoyed the favours of many men since he quitted her. On neither side, however, was there need of the words, and presently he was reminding her that she left him to find a king, though obviously she had not succeeded.

“ Vienna is no place for you,” he observed ; “ you should come to München, where our Prince is mad and does not love women. What a triumph to convert him, my dear ! Lola, the mistress of the lonely Ludwig ! In any case, you might dance at the opera house and I would rent you a villa on the banks of our Lake Starnberg, where your boat could be drawn by swans just as the King’s boat is.”

He was talking idle nonsense, of course, but Lola seized upon his words and made him repeat them often.

“ You would really get a house for me if I went to Starnberg ? ”

“ *Foi d’honneur !* I would get you a house and I would provide you with a lover.”

“ And I shall meet the King ? ”

He roared with laughter. Lola remembered

that others had laughed in the same way when her dead mother first set out for Munich.

“Of course you will meet the King—he often drives through the mountains at night and all the peasants think he is a god. He’s sure to stop at Starnberg some day, and then you can go to him and say: ‘I am the daughter of Lola Montez,’ and he will remember that his grandfather loved your mother and made her the mistress of his Kingdom.”

He slapped her on the back at the words and clamoured for more beer. Lola, however, remained in a reverie and sat there while somebody else served him.

“It is a long way to Starnberg,” she remarked presently.

He admitted that it was a very long way.

“Am I to ride in your carriage or am I to walk? I have no money, you know. I came here and tried to make myself known to the great people, but the police were very unkind to me and I was told that if I said who I was, I should be sent back to Paris immediately. So I have had to serve in this Hall—just as though I were a common woman. If I go to Munich, you must take me, Karl! Could not I go in the carriage with you?”

He shook his head at that, though the idea fascinated him.

“ And what would old Pfist say if I did any such thing ? I should have to put breeches on you and call you Joseph. Besides, I cannot go away at all until I have done my work. Now, if you could tell me just where I could find the musician Wagner, it would be another story altogether.”

“ The musician Wagner ?—oh, that is easy ! He is one of the few who have been kind to me here. I know very well where he is.”

“ You know ? Thousand devils !—and you have not told me before.”

“ But, Herr Karl, this is the first time you asked me ! ”

He admitted upon reflection that it was and burst again into a hearty peal of laughter.

“ We have been up and down the city like couriers, looking for him,” he said, “ and now you say you know ; just as though it were nothing at all. Why, old Pfist would have given you a hundred *gulden* for the information this very morning.”

She had not the remotest idea who old Pfist was, but she would very much have liked a hundred *gulden*.

“ He shall give it me to-night,” she said, with a woman’s quickness—and Pasch looked blue at that.

“ With a hundred *gulden* I could get to Munich, couldn’t I ? ” she went on.

“Listen!” he exclaimed: “I have an idea. Refuse to tell me what you know, but say that you will take us to the place if old Pfist will pay you. Don’t you see that in such a case we can go together—it is not far off, I suppose?”

She showed her pretty teeth in a cunning smile.

“The Herr Wagner is at Stuttgart—I know where,” she rejoined.

The gallant Captain made a rare grimace.

“By Venus,” he cried, “but I shall have you at Starnberg after all!”

It was a true saying—and she went in the carriage with him, booted and breeched as he had promised. Old Pfist was far too pleased to have the great musician’s whereabouts to trouble very much about this “boy” Joseph, who had become the Captain’s valet; and the whole party set out joyously for Stuttgart next day—Lola with dreams of a King’s embrace, the Herr Chancellor with the hope of many decorations, and the Captain himself fully convinced that he had found a pretty little mistress and that she would be a fair ornament for that villa upon the borders of Lake Starnberg where he had already known the ecstasy of many half-forgotten amours.

CHAPTER III

WAGNER IS WELCOMED BY THE KING

THE beautiful ruby ring and the King's portrait were duly carried by the Herr von Pfistermeister and there delivered with the letter, which invited the Master to go immediately to Munich and there to make an end of the anxieties which had afflicted him so many times.

“The unthinkable and the only thing that I required has become a reality. Heaven has sent me a patron. Through him I live and understand myself”—so wrote the harassed musician in the first moments of his salvation.

The words were from his heart and spoke truly of what might have been a miracle wrought by heaven that the highest art might flourish upon earth.

And in a flash his whole life was changed.

He who had not known where to turn for shelter and for help, now found himself the master of a villa upon the banks of the beautiful Lake of

Starnberg ; his debts were paid ; he was bidden to finish his mighty masterpiece *The Ring* ; the great Opera House was at his disposition—he could produce as he chose, so that the world at length should hear those treasures of music which the tragedy of ignorance had buried so long in a house of silence. And all this had come as in a vision of an entrancing night. Verily were the kingdoms of the earth at his feet.

Witness the letters between King and servant :

“ Feel assured,” wrote Ludwig, “ that I will do all that lies in my power to make reparation to you for your early sufferings. I will for ever chase away the trifling sorrows of everyday life from your head. I will give you the repose you require, so that, undisturbed in the pure spheres of your art, you can unfold your genius in its entirety. Unknowingly, you were the only source of my joys. From my earliest years you were to me a friend who, as no other, spoke to my heart—my best teacher and upbringer.”

In his turn, Wagner writes to his friend, Frau von Wille and tells of the good fortune which has come to him.

“ He (the King) is unhappily so handsome and so intellectual that I fear his life must disappear like a fleeting dream of gods in this commonplace world. He loves me with the tenderness and warmth of first love. He knows me and all about me and understands me as he does his own soul. He wishes me to live with him altogether, to work, to rest and have my works performed. He will give me everything I may require for this purpose. I am to complete *The Ring* and he will have them put on the stage

in the manner I desire. All need is to be taken from me; I am to have all I require—only I remain with him. You cannot imagine the charm of his glance—I only hope he may live; it is a real marvel.”

This was the beginning of that friendship which was to end so pitifully.

Wagner went to his *Schloss* by the lakeside and there began his work.

But there was another living by the lake who was to play a powerful rôle in this strange drama—and she so pretty a woman that all Munich was presently to be fascinated by her.

The Captain von Pasch had kept his word and Lola was now the mistress of that little temple of love the young soldier had promised her.

It was a picturesque villa enough; built in a clearing of the wood and permitting you to see from its front windows the shining waters of the lake.

Also, there was a garden full of primitive flowers and a pretty summer house, ornamented with French prints which might or might not have been approved by the *curé* had he popped in to look at them. Here Lola would sit and wait for the boisterous Captain to come riding out from Munich—bonbons strapped upon his holsters and expectancy of love urging him to haste. A great shout of greeting would herald his approach and, having

embraced her warmly, he would proceed to tell her of that city she so much desired to see.

“This Wagner, they talk of nobody else,” he would say; “the King has become like a child in his hands and he is spending all our money on his theatre. Of course, you know he is mad, Lola. Some night you will see him driving through the mountains and he will be dressed like a knight in armour—so mad he is, my dear. Have no fear, though. He does not like women and he will take no more notice of you than he would of a tree. That’s the only good thing about him, anyway. We shan’t have a mad son to follow a mad father—and so we ought to be grateful.”

Lola was by no means pleased to hear such a story.

“Why do you not take me to Munich?” she asked him—“am I always to be kept in this box with dogs for my company? I might as well be buried alive if that is all you can do for me. Take me with you one day and let me see this mad King of yours. Perhaps I shouldn’t find him as mad as you do.”

Karl laughed gaily, for he knew quite well what was in her mind.

“Ho, ho!—so you are remembering that story of your mother and his grandfather. Now there was

a proper lover, if you like. Heaven knows how many women he made uncrowned queens—but, then, he was a man; while all we have to-day is a poor mad fellow who worships this musician and lets him do what he likes with the country's money. It won't last, Lola, my dear. There will be trouble—great trouble, and perhaps I shall take part in it.”

“But not against the King, surely—you would not take part against him, Karl?”

He became evasive and more serious.

“We'll talk of that when the time comes. Have you seen Wagner, by the way?—he's at the Schloss Berg, quite near here. You must have seen him when you were walking in the woods.”

“I wish I had—he was a good friend to me in Vienna. Do you know he always said that I had the face of his Elsa and that it was an awful pity that I couldn't sing. Why does God give some people voices, I wonder, while others are just all noise? You know I can't sing, Karl, so when I go to the Opera House I will have to be a dancer. Of course you are going to take me there; I shall go mad if I have nobody but dogs to talk to.”

“I will take you, my dear, directly it is safe for you to go. Why not find out your musician and ask him to get a place for you? He'll want dancers for his *Tannhäuser* and you have beautiful legs,

my little Venus,—none better in Munich, I swear—and I know most of them.”

Lola pouted, but was not displeased.

When he had returned to Munich next morning, she called her dogs and went up the hill-side towards the Schloss Berg; but she had not the courage to ring the great bell and go in. Moreover, a piano played loudly within the house told her that the musician was at work and would not like to be interrupted—so she stopped there listening for a long while to the wonderful music and then went back to her villa, thinking how far off she was, after all, from becoming the mistress of a King, as her mother had been, and to what a very dull life this round-headed Captain really had brought her.

“He comes here and eats like a pig,” she told herself; “then he goes to sleep, and after that he yawns and says he must go back. His business indeed! A lot of good that empty head would be to any business. I would sooner my dog Walther look after my affairs than this Captain von Pasch.”

And then she added with a determination worthy of her:

“But he won’t keep me long, that’s sure—I shall go to Munich by myself if he doesn’t look out—and then he won’t see me any more. A fool I was to trust such a man, when I could have, perhaps,

met the Archduke in Vienna, if I had played my cards properly.”

How she could have met any archduke in Vienna, she, a waitress in a café, might have perplexed an ordinary person to say, but here was a lady of the dreams and she was always convinced that sooner or later she would have some great part to play—as her mother before her—and in this ambition, destiny and the King of Bavaria seemed ready to play a part as that very week was to declare.

It befell this way :

Lola had waited all day for her lagging Captain, who had not been able to leave Munich owing to some whim of his chief, the pompous “Pfist.”

Very lonely and not a little angry, she watched and waited, until at last darkness fell and still there was no sign of her Captain. Then, in sheer boredom of the house, she put on a heavy cloak and, wearing no hat, she went with her dogs a little way along the mountain road, hoping she knew not for what, but deciding that an adventure even with a shepherd boy would be better than no adventure at all. Thus had she gone some quarter of a mile, perhaps, when from afar she beheld a radiant light shining in the thick of the woods—floating in golden iridescence from tree to tree and striking at last in molten flash upon the very surface of the lake below. Highly strung as such women usually are,

her first emotion was one of dread. She knew the old stories of witches' ridings and elves at their gambols; of fauns who seize fair maidens and of evil spirits who worship the devil in the forest by night. Had she, then, happed upon a scene of Satanic revelling, or were those lights indeed carried by man?

A few moments answered her question.

There came from the woods above her, some twenty woodlanders, each bearing a torch of pine and waving it aloft. A great painted coach drawn by six horses followed after and in that coach sat the King of Bavaria, riding alone . . . the fine figure of a splendid man, deep now in thought and insensible alike to the glory of the illuminated woods or the softness of the night beyond. And insensible he would have remained but for that very commonplace happening—the barking of dogs which cannot tolerate the galloping of horses. One of Lola's Alsatians, indeed, flew at the leading pair, and nearly unseated the postillion. There were loud cries of anger from the woodlanders, the sudden reining back of excited animals, the stoppage of the coach—and a King who took notice.

And the first thing his Majesty saw was the face of Lola as the torches flashed upon it and strong men held the arms of the frightened girl as though to make ready for her instant execution.

The King perceived the face quite clearly, so bright were the flares . . . and the memories it awakened were curious. In the flesh, in book or picture, he had seen this child before. Odd fancies occurred to him and some of them not disassociated from that very errand upon which he was going. He beckoned Lola to him and asked her who she was.

“I am Lola Montez, your Majesty.”

“Lola Montez?—but she is dead.”

“That was my mother, sire—I am the daughter of her who once was very well known in Munich.”

The King remained silent a little while.

What a coincidence was this, he was thinking.

Here he was, on the way to meet his beloved friend, Richard Wagner, and there steps out of the profound night this daughter of a woman who had ruled Munich in his grandfather's time. And she, he thought, had the face of Elsa—of his Elsa who had wedded Parsifal's son. Assuredly was it a sign sent from on High. He, Ludwig, must also be the servant of the Holy Grail and must deliver this maiden from her enemies. She was not the daughter of Lola Montez, as she said, but veritably that sister of Godfrey, heir to the dukedom of Brabant, of whom Wagner had made so beautiful a poem.

Thus the madman reasoned as he gazed upon the

frightened girl and bade the woodmen release her.

“Your place is here beside me,” he said. “Come with me, Elsa, and I will show you many wonders”—and he made room for her, as they lifted her up, and kissed her on the forehead.

“To the Schloss,” he cried to the coachmen—and so they drove on to the villa—the King in a reverie, Lola hardly knowing whether she were asleep or awake.

Richard Wagner awaited his royal patron, standing in the vestibule of the house. He was much astonished when he saw a girl step out of the carriage—and perhaps he beheld the spectacle with a little natural annoyance. Mistresses always make trouble—and he had lived in the delusion, which others shared, that Ludwig had an aversion from women which was incurable. Now all that was denied by this pretty stranger’s presence—for he did not recognise her on the instant—and he waited anxiously for the King’s explanation.

“Your Majesty——”

“This,” said Ludwig, “is the daughter of one very well known to my grandfather, and not, I believe, unknown to you. The daughter of Lola Montez.”

Wagner was greatly relieved.

“Of course, of course,” he said, “I remember her very well—both in Paris and Vienna. But I did

not expect to see her at the Starnberg, as your Majesty may imagine. Why, the last time—was it not at the beer-hall on the Prater? Of course, of course, that was the place.”

Lola, fired by the excitement of it all, laughed joyously—quite forgetting both King and musician. The word “beer-hall” brought her to the plebeian earth and she could talk to these two as she had often talked impudently to the patrons, who used to give her a *gulden* and chuck her under the chin in Vienna.

“You were very kind to me,” she said: “always gave me something and said I should be famous one day. And now I must be famous, for I have ridden in the King’s carriage—and what is that if it isn’t fame?”

Ludwig, always quick to resent familiarity, seemed about to show anger, but they had passed on now to the music-room, and bright lamps there revealed the beautiful face of the young woman and the innocence of the laughter which added so much to its ornament.

Besides, was she not Elsa, whom, as a Knight of the Holy Grail, he must marry and renounce anon! Let her dwell in happiness a little while, then, for the day would come when she must know tears.

“She is not Lola,” he said to Wagner; “she is

Elsa, Brabant's daughter. You must teach her to sing, Richard—to sing to me.”

Wagner said nothing. Perhaps he remembered how dire had been Lola's performance in Paris—and certainly it must not be repeated here.

So he sat down and played to them both some of his own divine music from *Tristan*; and as he played, Ludwig drew Elsa to his feet and sat stroking her pretty hair.

The mistress of a King!

Her dream!

Was this, then, the beginning of its fulfilment?

The dawn found her wandering by the lake-side in an ecstasy of dreams. All the kingdoms of the earth seemed already at her feet.

It needed the coming of the round-headed Karl von Pasch to blur visions so enchanting.

He was at the villa early next morning, and somehow had learned all about it, while he verily believed that Lola had spent the night with the King and that all Munich would be buzzing with the talk of it presently.

“A devil of a mess there may be,” he argued; and the thought carried him to the lake-side as fast as a good horse could carry him.

CHAPTER IV

THE KNIGHT OF THE SWAN

FIRST of all, Pasch insisted upon knowing just how it had all happened and what really had passed between her and the King.

She told him truly about the first; but upon the second question she declined to say a word.

“That is the King’s business,” she explained, all her native impudence awakened and a real delight in his jealous curiosity. “You know you would get into trouble if I told you, and you would be wise to hold your tongue. I didn’t ask him to take me to the Schloss, and if you had been here instead of carrying on with a lot of women in Munich, it wouldn’t have happened at all. Why don’t you take me where I can see somebody? Do you think I am happy talking all day to the trees, then?”

Pasch had never thought of that and he did not wish to think of it now.

“Your mother’s name isn’t exactly revered in

this country," he protested, "and if it is known that the King is making love to you, why, then, you may be turned out neck and crop. I couldn't save you, my dear: I have no influence of that kind. That's why I tell you I am sorry this has happened. The King doesn't like women, and he is only making a fool of you. The best thing we can do is to lie low and hope he will forget all about it. If he doesn't, it may mean the ruin of us both."

She was not a bit afraid of that.

"We will go back to Vienna and start a café," she said cheekily. "All the men will come to see me, and you can take the money for the beer. Make a fuss when there is the need: I don't suppose, by this time, the King remembers anything about it. I was just a girl on the mountain-side and it amused him to take notice of me. To hear you talk, he might have bought me a palace and given me a diamond crown. What nonsense!—all I got was a glass of wine and three biscuits. Is Munich, then, going mad about that?"

Pasch shook his round head, but was not convinced.

"They would stand an ordinary mistress," he said, "but they won't have the daughter of Lola Montez. They say your mother nearly ruined the grandfather, and I don't suppose they will have the daughter ruining the grandson. Wait until old

Pfist gets the news and then hear what he has to say! I can see him getting too red in the face to speak—he's a devil when he's up against a woman he doesn't like."

"Most men are. Don't you see, my Karl, that it may not matter what he thinks? You shouldn't care, anyway. If the King likes me, he will be very kind to you, I am sure. Why, the first thing I shall ask him to do is to make you a colonel. I'm sure he won't refuse, if he really thinks he is in love with me."

The obtuse Captain had never thought of this and the idea comforted him greatly.

"Would you do that, Lola? My word, that would be good of you!"

And then, as though his honour demanded the delusion, he added gravely:

"Of course, there will be nothing between you. There never is between Ludwig and a woman. He will make a plaything of you; then throw you away."

"And you will catch me, great booby! Now say nothing more about it, for I don't suppose I shall ever see your King again, and you will take me into the city to see somebody else, for I shall go mad here, and a mad girl is no good to anybody."

He promised her that he would, having no intention of doing anything of the kind; and then

he rode away, remembering that old Pfist would complain bitterly of his absence if he missed him, and, perhaps, reassured by the thought that if Lola had really taken the King's fancy, it might be no bad thing if Ludwig did return to the Starnberg and carried on the pretence that he was *Lohengrin* and that Lola was no other than Elsa, the Duke of Brabant's daughter.

"He's mad enough for that," he argued—"and, after all, what does it matter to me if I am made a colonel and can tell old Pfist to go to the devil!"

It certainly did not matter; and just as certainly the King did decide that Lola should be the Duke's daughter and that he would be Parsifal's son—that Knight of the Holy Grail for whom his dear friend Wagner had written such glorious music. The very day was to prove it, for the sun was but just beginning to set over the lake when Lola heard a strain of triumphal music from the placid waters below her villa; and, running down through the wood, what should she see but a golden boat drawn by swans, and in that boat the figure of a knight in shining armour, his sword drawn and a glorious radiance about him, as though, indeed, he had come from an unknown world to save the woman of his dreams.

Pasch or no Pasch now, she had no intention of hiding herself at such a moment as this.

With heart pit-a-pat and a fairy step, she went down to the border of the lake and waited for her knight's approach.

There were musicians with him in the boat and they played the bridal music from *Lohengrin* as she drew near. Ludwig himself, as though her coming were the most natural thing in the world, waited for her to kneel to him in homage and then bade her come.

“They shall trouble you no more, sweet wife to be,” he said. “I came from a far country as you called me, and to-morrow I will meet your enemy. Now come with me that to-night we may forget. But ask me not my name, for the day when you do that you shall see me no more—as you have seen your brother Godfrey no more since he became that swan who shall now carry us to the Temple of our Love.”

The poor madman !

What efforts the woodlanders in another ship had to prevent the unhappy swans from flying away—and with what difficulty did the musicians forbear to laugh. Nevertheless the procession passed on somehow, the boat drawn hither and thither when it was not pushed from behind and the poor mad King seeing nothing of it, but dreaming only that he had rescued this maiden from the ravisher and presently would lead her to the altar.

Lola understood all this, realised that he was mad, but made no scruple at all to profit by his foolishness. Something good for her would come out of it, she thought, and if it did, what mattered the cause? She was very content to sit there in awed silence; while the musicians played their fiddles and their lutes and the boat drifted hither and thither and the swans hissed and darkness gradually settled over the land. Oh, yes, something would come of it; but not promotion for the round-headed Pasch. Why, she had almost forgotten that dull fellow's existence! Was she not with a King, who talked about marriage?—and none, hitherto, had spoken to Lola's daughter of that!

Unfortunately his Majesty was not a man whose mind dwelt long upon any one subject, unless it were music; and presently he proved himself so little lacking in gallantry as to seem to forget Lola's existence altogether. The lights shining from the windows of the Schloss Berg were the immediate cause of this; and when Ludwig saw them, he gave the word of command in anything but a lover's voice; and the barque was pushed hastily to the shore, the swans protesting, but the woodlanders greatly relieved to be quit of a farce so stupendous. At the water's edge, and without another word spoken to Lola, the monarch leaped lightly ashore and set out at a sharp and striding walk to rejoin

the friend whose company gave him so much happiness—and there was his “fair lady” alone upon the shore, the suppressed laughter of buffoons mocking her and one of them so daring as to call her “strumpet” under his breath. Never had she known a greater humiliation. There were tears in her eyes when Karl, the round-headed, greeted her at the door of her chalet and listened to her tale of woe.

“Did I not tell you?” he said, almost triumphantly—“the King cares nothing for women and he has only been having a game with you. To-morrow he will forget that you exist—but others will not. I see great danger for us both; and the best thing for you, my dear, is to get back to Paris as soon as possible. Indeed, I think that I shall have to take you there—or we may both find ourselves in a stone house and the key may be in another man’s pocket.”

Lola ceased to weep when she heard him; and, all her mother’s spirit reawakened within her, she told him to go to the devil.

“Why should I go away? Is it my fault if the King is in love with me? I did not ask him to come here and I certainly shan’t ask him to go away. Don’t you see that he will make you a colonel when he hears you have been my lover! Of course he will want to get you away—and so he will send you to Frankfort or Nurenberg with the

hussars. I shall miss you, Karl, but you will have to go. The King wants me, and that's the end of it."

Karl shook his head.

Not the end, but the beginning of it, he thought.

And yet he could remember how wise some of these courtesans are and how their wisdom often helped their favourites. Even if the King merely amused himself with Lola, he might, nevertheless, do something for her friends. She would not hesitate to ask such a favour in his case; for he perceived plainly that it would suit her also if he were sent to Nurenburg or to Frankfort. And so, for the moment, he forgot all about the prison and thought only of her kisses. The King did not want those; so why should he not take them? Pity to waste such excellent material.

He left her at dawn, promising to return with the news as soon as it were possible. She, on her part, promised not to forget about the colonelcy; though she forgot it directly he was gone. For her, the new day was one of waiting to see what the poor mad King would do. Would he return to her with a gift of jewels and speak again of marriage and the knight in shining armour? Or would he forget, as Pasch had sworn must be the case?

A gloomy fellow, that Captain.

And the worst of it was that he seemed to be right.

No King came to her villa that day—nor did swans hiss and threaten at the burden of a barge. Wagner had gone into Munich to rehearse his *Tristan*, they told her, and all was silent at the Schloss. When she went down to the lake-side, hobbledehoys there made strange eyes at her and boobies mouthed their contempt. For them, she was just a pretty cocotte who had caught the King's fancy—but only for a night. The priest would rout her out in a day or two, and that would be the end of it. She was frightened by their contempt and went back to the villa in dread of them, there locking herself up with her dogs and waiting expectantly for night-fall. The King might yet come to her. She would see the flare of the torches, golden upon the mountain side; and that would be the signal that her Knight remembered.

Alas, it did not so befall! No torches were waved amid the black hills; no mirrors of golden light fell upon the face of the placid waters. Ten o'clock, eleven—and still but the cooing voice of soft winds to speak to her. At twelve, somebody rode in haste to her door and carried a letter from the alarmed Pasch.

“It is known,” he wrote, “but not your true name. For God's sake keep quiet about that! I have said that you are French and the daughter of well-born people. If they discover the truth, they will put you over the frontier

without ceremony. Be prudent and we may yet pull it off! The King must think I have some interest in your family. He will not ask about the past if a prospect of the future pleases him. I shall come hereafter only by night. There will be spies to avoid; we must change our plans and find another way."

It was just like Pasch, she thought, making a mountain of a mole-hill; but she realised the danger of her name, none the less, and was resolutely determined that none in Munich should hear of it if she could prevent them. Since old Pfist must know, and Wagner and the King, the hope was optimistic; but none of them would tell, she believed, and none of them but Ludwig would trouble much about her. Even his Majesty, however, was no certainty. Why, he might have forgotten all about her already; and she might never see him more!

The night, and the three days that followed, appeared to confirm her fears. Ludwig did not come. In his place there was the fitful appearance of strange men who watched amid the trees and followed her afar when she went abroad with her dogs. These would be the spies of whom the Captain had spoken. Lola did not know much about spies, but she feared them, remembering stories of black dungeons and creaking chains and all the horror of the mediæval. Pasch should be there to protect her, she thought, and yet Pasch

did not come. Had they arrested him already—and for what, then ?

A pretty marriage this, which surrounded the bride's house with ruffians and sent her no word from the bridegroom !

And what the devil was to come of her if the King deserted her and she saw her lover no more ?

CHAPTER V

LOLA VISITS THE THEATRE

SHE did see him, however, and in circumstances which were strange.

It was upon the fourth day after the affair of the ungracious swans that all the spies about the Captain's villa lifted their eyes and inclined their ears to a well-mounted horseman, who rode rapidly up the hillside and rang the bell at the postern so loudly that all the doves went fluttering into the air together and the dogs barked as though beggars had come to town.

Who was the fellow and why did he approach the house as though his very coming would cause the walls to tumble at his feet ?

From the King, of course—as old Pfist must know this night. No other would have shown himself so openly at a courtesan's villa or take on the risk of having the captain's sword in his vitals. And this being so, his Majesty had by no means

forgotten the daughter of Lola Montez, but obviously was at the beginning of just such another intrigue as his grandfather had carried on with the mother—to the exasperation of the nation and the depletion of its treasury.

They went off to Munich with the news, following the courier, who did not delay when his message had been delivered.

What he carried to Lola was a glorious diamond which once had been the property of her mother, but had been filched from that adventurous lady when Bavaria turned her out neck and crop. So large was the stone, set in a locket with a stout gold chain, that it would have been reckoned a modest fortune even by a cocotte's reckoning—and the very size of it, the lustre, the light and the magnificence so astounded the ambitious little lady to whom it had been sent that she verily thought the riches of the world had come into her possession.

How she looked at it, fondled it, tried to see its glory as it dangled upon her bosom; carried it out into the sunlight; clasped it with hot fingers; had it here and had it there, was afraid to let it out of her sight, and finally thrust it deep down under her stays, determined that nobody should rob her of it! This done, she read for the twentieth time the letter which had accompanied it: so brief, so

very matter-of-fact and signed with the King's initial only.

“Wear this to-night when I shall send for you.”

So he was to send for her, then ; and, surely, if he sent, the great dream must come true after all ! He would speak of marriage—though she was no fool who believed that marriage would be meant thereby. As her mother had ruled and asked no blessing of the priests, so would she. Let this mad monarch once make her his mistress and she would know how to play the part.

Truly this was anticipation, but all that befell that night seemed to justify so impudent a hope.

At seven o'clock they sent a great coach and four horses to carry her to the city. It was very late when they arrived at Munich, and the Chamberlain, who had been deputed to the task, took her at once to the Hof Theatre ; and, being admitted without question, he led her to a private box on the right hand side of the stage, and there, bidding her to wait, he left her. Any experience more astonishing, in its way more terrifying, she had never known—for the vast theatre was but dimly lighted from a great chandelier and there was not one human being but herself within it.

To one of neurotic imaginings, as most cocottes are, it seemed to Lola that she had been buried

suddenly in some mighty valhalla and that a day of judgment alone could deliver her. The apparent immensity of the dark places, the silence, the mocking figures about the proscenium, the mystery—all appealed to that psychic dread which had afflicted her so often in hours of mental darkness. They had brought her here upon a trick—or at the best they would leave her here with a madman. No longer was her royal lover a knight of the golden swan, but a crazy fellow who would do her a mischief. So she said, and was upon the point of attempted flight when a fiddle was scraped in the orchestra below and a horn sounded. She was not alone then, after all, and there was going to be music. Excitement now supplanted fear. She could see the diamond shining upon her breast and remember that the King had given it to her. Thus she waited, trembling with expectancy, until the lights went up suddenly and the door of the box opened without warning.

A man entered the box alone ; and immediately the door was shut behind him and again the lights were lowered in the theatre. Lola saw at once that this man was the King, and she jumped up in alarm, but forbore to curtsy, so great was her confusion. He, however, took little notice of that ; but, again calling her “ little Elsa,” he bade her sit close beside him, on a footstool that had been

placed there for such a design; and, she being seated, his nervous hands began to play with her long hair and then to fondle her neck and bosom.

This was the Knight of the Holy Grail, become very human and far more amorous than report had made him out to be. Lola, on her part, did not mind how amorous he became, and when he kissed her, there was nothing whatever of the rustic maiden in her lingering return of that pleasant courtesy. Surely this was exactly what she had hoped; and now truly might she begin to believe with reason that she might follow in her mother's footsteps and that the beginning of her reign was at hand.

Unhappily this optimistic outlook was not immediately justified by the events which followed. The King ceased without warning to fondle her and leaned out of the box to hear more distinctly the beautiful prelude which the orchestra had begun to play—while, the chagrin of her momentary disappointment having passed, Lola could wonder at the eccentricity of a monarch who caused a whole opera to be played for his enjoyment and sat alone with her in that great auditorium—not one other person, apparently, being admitted to see the beautiful spectacle and hear the mighty music of the master. Yet such was almost the fact—for though Richard Wagner himself was hidden in the

box above them, the King and Lola appeared truly to be the only spectators of that superb performance, wherein some of the most famous singers and instrumentalists of Germany were engaged to their honour. No wonder the city of Munich came to cry out upon such extravagance; no wonder that unhappy events attended these displays and brought them to an abrupt end.

But that was for the future. To-night the poor mad King was engrossed by the representation of *Lohengrin* as hardly he had been before. Explaining the story of Brabant's daughter to Lola, he would dwell upon all that happened as though the tragedy concerned himself and the shrewd and amorous baggage who sat at his feet.

"See," he would say, "the Knight comes to save her in a barque drawn by a swan—as I came to save you at the Starnberg. He will kill her lover and they will be married—you shall hear the music they take to the bedchamber, as we will take it, my Elsa, when the priest has blessed us. Is it not glorious? Does it not go to your very soul? Ah, my friend, my friend, how glad I am that I found you and saved you from the world! Never again shall you leave me—no, no, they shall not separate us whatever befall!"

Lola thought for a little while that the friend thus apostrophised was none other than herself—and she

was by no means pleased when it dawned upon her that his Majesty referred to Richard Wagner and not to any slip of a girl. None the less, he had spoken of the priest blessing them and those were words to thrill her to the very marrow, little fool that she was. One wiser would have seen that the King lived in his dream and that, for the time being, he was truly the Knight of the Holy Grail and she the daughter of the Duke of Brabant. Nay, every gesture should have warned her, for when the bridal chamber was disclosed at last, his caresses became not a little embarrassing and even she was frightened by them.

But the scene soon passed and now the King was in another mood altogether.

“Elsa” was egged on in the play to ask the Knight who he was—defying his threat that if ever she did that, she would become a swan, as her brother before her—and, when she had defied him, the Knight in the box, imitating the Knight upon the stage, bade the Elsa of his imagination begone—just as that other warrior had done to the divine music of the act. Unable to turn Lola into a swan, the King ordered her to go in such a tone of anger that the blood ran cold in her veins and she fled from the box as though a demon had thrust her out. Nor was her ejection apparently unexpected—for there in the corridor was no other than that

booby of a Captain von Pasch—and that idiot was grinning all over his face as though this was the best joke he had heard for many a long day.

“Old Pfist told me what might happen and sent me to wait for you here. We’d better get away quick or there may be trouble. And mind”—he added more seriously—“not a word of this gets out, or you’ll be across the frontier before the sun rises!”

She followed him down the corridor; thence to a side door of the Hof, where none observed their departure. The hour was late and the streets deserted; and, Pasch having neglected to bring a cab, she had to walk to his lodgings through a drizzling rain which added to her chagrin.

To be dismissed like this! All her house of cards shattered in a twinkling! Nothing but contempt for her on the King’s part. Fine, now, seemed her dreams. Yet reflection might have taught her that a monarch who changed his mind so swiftly might change it again. Lola did not think of that. She refused flatly to stay the night in Munich.

“Get a carriage and take me back to the villa,” she said to Pasch; “to-morrow I shall go back to Paris.”

“Don’t be too sure of that,” was the enigmatical reply. “You must see old Pfist first. He has something to say to you.”

“The Chancellor! But is he not the man of whom you are afraid?”

“He was—but like other people, he may change his mind.”

She looked at him sharply. What conspiracy among them was this?

“Oh,” she cried, “so you have sold me to old Pfist. Promotion, I suppose!”

He laughed and rejoined frankly:

“A King’s whim is a courtier’s command. Don’t you understand that if you win the King, all our fortunes are made?”

She did understand it very well. A turn of new expectancy lent brightness to eyes which had been wet with tears. There was hope, then! Yes, she would do just what this merry Pasch wanted—for if he had no sense in his dull head; the Chancellor had enough for them both.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONSPIRACY

SHE was back at the Starnberg next day, and Wagner himself returned to the Schloss Berg accompanied by the King, who remained with him until nightfall.

Lola suffered a certain jealousy of the great musician, but it was shallow and ill-defined and came ultimately to this—that Ludwig preferred great music to a pretty woman; and that Richard Wagner was the creator of the most beautiful music the world had yet heard. Naturally, then, the bond between the two men bound them as with links of steel.

None the less, when she went out walking in the woods, she turned wistful eyes more than once to the Schloss, and fell to wondering if the King, as he passed her villa by, would remember her; would even deign to stop his carriage and speak to her. Nothing of this kind happened, however. The royal carriage went dashing past just at the

hour of twilight ; and although she stood at the gate in a girlish dress of white muslin, which should have attracted his Majesty's notice, he did not so much as turn his eyes that way when the *calèche* passed her house at a gallop.

Clearly he had forgotten the existence of his little "Elsa," and for the moment remembered only that of Wagner, his friend.

Meanwhile something had happened at the Villa which interested her vastly, though at first she did not grasp the meaning of it.

Three of the Captain's servants went back to Munich, and in their place came an old woman with stumbling gait and an ex-sergeant of the Guard, who took charge of the outbuildings and the garden. These worthies merely said that they had come by the orders of Captain von Pasch, and took possession as though they understood very well what their duties were to be. Lola said nothing more to them—but directly the Captain came she was all for an explanation ; and then, for the first time, she was to hear of the conspiracy which was to mean so much to her and to the Kingdom of Bavaria.

They had a quiet little supper together and then walked in the garden : upon a beautiful night of the early summer, with the moonlight searching out the profundity of sweet smelling woods and

all the lake afire. And so they talked of what had befallen during the day.

“I sent William and Anna to you for reasons of our own safety,” he began. “Old Pfist has some great ideas in his big head and he may want to come here to see you. In that case, we must have trustworthy people about us, since discovery might mean the ruin of us all.”

“Discovery of what?” she interrupted impatiently—this long-winded narration was so unlike Pasch.

“My pet,” he urged, “you must be patient. I have a long story to tell and you must hear it, for it concerns our fortunes closely. Now, to begin with, you know that your old friend Wagner is ruining the country and that if the King goes on giving him millions of *gulden*, we shall all be beggars and the laughing-stock of Europe.”

“I don’t know anything of the kind. Why shouldn’t he get the money? He is cleverer than the others: why shouldn’t he have it?”

“Because if he gets it, you won’t.”

She looked at him with wondering yet clever eyes.

“But I am not likely to get it, anyway.”

“Pfst says that you are—some of it, anyway—that is, if you can convince the King that he is making a fool of himself over this musician.”

The suggestion angered her.

“But Wagner is my friend! Why should I turn the King against him?”

“I repeat—because it is your interest to do so.”

“And yours, of course.”

“Are not our interests common, then? Consider what we could do, my dear, say with two-hundred-thousand *gulden*. The whole world would be open to us—Paris, Vienna, Rome, Madrid—you would make a sensation everywhere; while I—I should live in the sunshine.”

She was much impressed. Delightful visions of conquest and splendour began to take possession of her. And, after all, she was not the artificer of Richard Wagner's fortunes.

“Do you think they would give us two-hundred-thousand?” she put it to him.

He was sure they would.

“Wagner has just asked for a million. We should be cheap, my dear.”

“But how, Karl—how is this miracle to be worked?”

“Old Pfist will tell you that—he is coming here to-night. Yes, I think I see the lights of his carriage. Let us go back—and remember: prudence above all things. Say as little as you can, but listen, for this is one of the wisest men in the country.”

They turned hurriedly and retraced their steps. A carriage was creeping down the mountain road and the light of its lamps could be seen, shining white upon the trunks of the pines. They were at the gate, however, before it reached the villa ; and presently they perceived the bent and muffled figure of the Chancellor, who passed to the door without a word to them and did not show his face until the door of the little *salon* was closed behind him.

“ Ha,” said he, looking at Lola closely, “ so this is our pretty friend from Vienna—and Lola Montez’s daughter ! Well, my dear, we may as well make ourselves comfortable, so if Karl there will bring me some white wine and a cigar, we shall be able to talk at our ease.”

The wine was brought ; the cigar lighted. Lola confessed that she felt a little like a naughty child about to be cross-questioned by a schoolmaster, but the tremendous import of that encounter was not unrealised and she answered with incision all the many inquiries to which she was now subject.

“ Do you remember your mother, my dear ? ”

“ A little—when I was very young. We lived in Paris—how beautiful she was ! ”

“ Many men found her so—our King among the number. She left you in a convent, did she not,

when she went away with the pianist—the Abbé Liszt ? ”

“ Yes, the Convent of the Bons Secours. I was there for five years.”

“ And afterwards ? ”

“ Oh, I ran away with the dancing-master, Emile Carnoutius.”

“ Ah, I see they taught you to be good. Did you not hear from your mother again ? ”

“ She came to the convent once or twice. Some said she was not my mother, but——”

The old man cried “ s-s-s-sh ”—as though annoyed ; and he said quite sharply :

“ We do not want to hear of that. You are no good to us unless you never forget that you are Lola Montez’s daughter. Remember that always—you have to win the King, my dear, through your mother’s name.”

And then, bending over the table, he said solemnly :

“ He is to understand that what your mother was to his grandfather, so will you be to him.”

“ Oh, sir, but he turned me out of his box at the Hof Theatre last night. How can I be anything at all to him after that ? ”

“ You shall see, child. We have thought of all that and we believe we know how to bring it about. First, however, we must find you an apartment

such as your mother had when she came to Munich. That can be done . . . and the fine clothes and the carriages and all that you need. You have to make a name for yourself, as your mother made hers. You will not object to doing that, since you are a woman. Remember, you have to wean the King from this infatuation which is ruining the country. A woman can do it; it is a woman's work and it needs a woman's brain. Let us see how clever you are and we will reward you richly."

She told him that she would fall in willingly with his schemes whatever they were. Perhaps there was a little sadness in hearing this disparagement of her friend Wagner, but how could she help it? And did he not speak of a fine apartment and rich dresses and a carriage of her own? Certainly the good nuns had provided her with no weapon against so material an argument. She would have liked to set off for Munich that very night. Old Pfist, however, made it clear that there was still a great deal to be done.

"We must let him forget all this 'Elsa' nonsense first. Avoid him, my dear, when he drives to the Schloss Berg—and remember, if he sends to this villa for you, nobody knows where you are gone. When he sees you next, we should like him to forget that he has ever seen you before. Unfortunately

the Ludwigs have long memories, especially for pretty women."

Pasch laughed at that—and it was odd that he should laugh, seeing that this old rascal of a Chancellor was very willing to sell his friend's mistress to another man and he a King. Such, however, were the manners of the Bavaria of that day—and of many another country, incidentally.

"I shall be a colonel at the worst," Pasch thought; and, indeed, old Pfist had already promised to make him one.

So he was ready enough to take the Chancellor's instruction and to consent for a brief period to play the dove in the cote and to keep Lola hidden at the villa until all was prepared. Her debut, said Pfist, should be made at the great *bal masqué* to be given in the opera house in ten days' time. Lola was to go in the dress of Catherine of Russia—a character which aforesaid appealed to her dead mother and served her in the *bals masqués* of her day. As for the jewels, well, there were jewels and jewels and if some were real and some were false, what would it matter in a crush such as that?

Lola said it would not matter at all—and wisely did not speak of the great diamond the King already had given her. Like a Parisian *gamine* with an apple, she feared that it would be snatched from her if it were shown, and she carried it constantly

about her neck—and hid it by night under her pillow. No, she would not wear that at the ball, nor speak of it to anybody.

It was very late when the old Chancellor quitted the villa, and drove away, muffled up like a brigand, to the city he had ruled so wisely until music turned the King's head and began to empty the national purse. When he had gone, Pasch and Lola sat up a long time, talking it all over and happier together than they had been for many a long day.

"I shall still be your lover and see you sometimes," he reflected amorously.

Lola did not mind that.

She did not believe at all in her chances of fascinating the King, but she believed very much in the dresses, the apartment and the carriages which the diplomatic Pfist had promised her.

CHAPTER VII

LOLA TELLS THE KING'S FORTUNE

THE ball was a splendid affair.

Such a gathering of nobles, of soldiers and of the richest merchants had not been seen in Munich for many a day.

But of all the dresses worn by fat women or thin, by beauties or by those not beautiful, that of the surprisingly youthful Catherine of Russia was surpassed by none.

Possibly Ludwig, sitting in melancholy seclusion with the usually close-mouthed Chancellor, would not have noticed it—nor any other—if the wily Pfist had not called his attention to it by an observation well calculated, though seemingly an impromptu.

“If I believed in ghosts,” he observed, “I should say that yonder walks the dead Lola Montez.”

Ludwig had been annoyed that day by the

departure of his friend, Richard Wagner, who had gone to Zurich to fetch some of his manuscripts. The musician would return in a week's time—but that was a long interval to be spent in fretfulness and complaining. The mention of the name of Lola Montez just suited such a mood, for had not Wagner's brother-in-law, the Abbé Liszt, been the lover of that beautiful woman before she became the mistress of Ludwig's grandfather?

“What do you say?” he exclaimed with unusual animation. “Lola Montez—here! My friend, has she not been dead these many years?”

“True, sire—but, none the less, I see her now in the box yonder, and if your Majesty will take my glass, you may see her also.”

The King regarded Lola for a long while, the troubled brain trying to connect her with something which had happened recently.

His “little Elsa” was dead. She had died because she asked him who he was; and no woman could ask that of a Knight of the Holy Grail and live. Therefore the figure in the box opposite could not be that of Elsa; while as for it being the ghost of the dead Lola Montez, such a thought was absurd.

“I see a resemblance to the picture in the great hall at Stuttgart,” he said at last, in one of those moods of clear recollection which so baffled the

physicians when they had finally to pronounce an opinion upon his sanity. "But, of course," he added, "this is a very much younger woman."

"As your Majesty says, a much younger woman. The police tell me, however, that she is undoubtedly the daughter of that very clever adventuress who did so much for your revered grandfather despite the malice of her enemies."

The King put down his glass. Memory was troubling him. The daughter of Lola Montez! Yes, he had seen her somewhere and dimly he connected her with Elsa and the swans.

"Is she not the friend of the Master?" he asked unexpectedly. The question was just what the Chancellor had hoped for.

"A very true friend," he said, earnestly; "she followed him here from Vienna."

"She sings, then?"

"I fear not, sire—but she inherits her mother's wisdom in many ways—and I am told that her knowledge of the future is often astounding. They say she told the Herr Wagner that you would send for him and that at Munich all his troubles would come to an end—just as her mother foresaw that a revolution would drive your grandfather from the throne."

"I have heard of that. They say that if he had taken the woman's advice, all that would not have

happened. It would not be curious if the daughter had the same gifts."

"Your Majesty should seek to find out. It would pass an hour pleasantly—and no harm could come of it. That the girl is the friend of Richard Wagner is her greatest recommendation to the authorities here. She is spoken of as the possessor of great mental gifts and of the wisdom of many men. To which, I venture to add that she seems to possess a great deal of her dead mother's beauty."

The King agreed to that.

"Let her come to the palace in an hour's time," he said with some manifestation of eagerness: "she may tell me something which may help me to dismiss you, Chancellor, and all the others who complain so much about me"—and he laughed a little hardly, as one who had suffered much by the displeasure his generosity to Wagner had evoked. Pfist, however, was by no means frightened. That little devil of a Lola had been too well coached for that.

Lola was not very pleased to quit the ball, where her fine dress and the twinkling glass of her sham jewels had brought a crowd of young soldiers and elderly rakes buzzing about her, and had set the women chattering like envious monkeys; but she was there to play her part; and so she went begrudgingly at old Pfist's summons; and

she was in the palace ten minutes later, closeted with Ludwig, who had found the ball a bore and would much sooner have been talking to a pretty woman—his friend Wagner not being there to amuse him.

The room was the little blue *salon*, wherein Lola Montez, her mother, had so often given wise advice to Ludwig I.—and from which she had been driven with ignominy when the mob threatened the palace and the King was deposed.

There were two candles alight upon the writing-table and another two in a candelabrum against the blue-papered wall, but the curtains were drawn heavily over the windows and not a sound came from the city without.

Ludwig himself sat in a great chair by a low table, and another chair had been drawn up to it for the pretty soothsayer who was to tell his fortune. He beckoned her to take it directly she entered the room ; and then, lifting one of the candlesticks, he examined her face closely—and turned from it only to compare it with a picture of her mother, which had been hung by Pfist that very day on the wall beside his table.

What was in the mind of this poor mad fellow ?

Did he know perfectly well that Lola and his imagined “Elsa” were one and the same person ? Nobody will ever know. Perhaps he had the

will to dismiss the former dream, and, Elsa being dead, to forget all about her and see only the face of Lola Montez's daughter. Certainly he made no reference to recent days, and swans were not in his mental picture. He talked, indeed, with some sanity for quite a long while, and appeared to be rather amused by, than believing in, this pretty prophet.

"I remember your mother, child. She was a very pretty woman, as you are. And she gave my grandfather, the King, some very wise advice. They tell me that you take after her—I wonder what advice you could give to me, since they tell me you also are a prophetess."

Lola laughed at that. She had been told not to laugh, but to look uncommonly grave; but you might as well have asked a parakeet to hold its tongue. Laughter was almost life to her.

"Oh, no, your Majesty," she said, "I am not a prophetess but a dancer. I don't know anything that other people don't know—but sometimes I dream about the future and then I see things."

The King was interested.

"Have you dreamed, then, about me, my dear? Do I come into your pictures?"

"Oh, yes, often"—she remembered her lesson now. "I dreamed of your Majesty only a few days ago, but it was not a kind dream and I must

not tell you about it"—and here she cast down her eyes and looked so sorrowful that a crow upon his perch might have laughed at her.

"You dreamed of me?—Oh, I must hear about it! What was I doing, then, in your dream?"

Lola tried to look as though she were really frightened.

"You were surrounded by a lot of angry people, sire. They came all together to the palace to complain about something you had done. There was an evil influence, they said, and you must cast it out."

Ludwig thought a long time about that.

"An evil influence—that of a man or a woman?"

"Oh, sire, they say you do not like women. It was a man of whom they spoke. I think it must be your good friend, the Herr Wagner. And my friend, too," she added, with a little nod of her head as who would say: "I'd like to hear anybody speak against him!"

The King was much pleased. He had not expected to hear this.

"So you are the Herr Wagner's friend, also," he said with great content. "That is good, and we shall often talk about him together. Let me now ask you what you would do if you were in my place and the people were telling you that you must sacrifice one you loved. Would you listen

to them or punish them? Answer that question wisely and I will say that certainly you are the daughter of your clever mother."

Lola bit her lip and tried to frame her answer wisely. She had been told exactly what to say; but she forgot all about it in her excitement and spoke rather as the *gamine* of Paris than the fine lady of the *bal masqué*.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I should do nothing against my friend—not for anybody. But I should be as cunning as they. I would send him away for a little while and then bring him back again. The people would forget all about it in a few days and when he returned, nobody would make any bother."

Ludwig was greatly taken by this idea. He walked about the little room, snapping his fingers and uttering odd exclamations—sometimes of pleasure, as though he had cheated his enemies, sometimes of rage, as though he were trampling upon them.

"Send him away," he muttered; "yes, yes, I should have thought of that—to Stuttgart, where I can visit him, or to Switzerland, where he can work so well. The money will still be paid to him. I will see to that. They shall understand that I have parted with him and will see him no more. The fools, to think I would be so

faithless! Of course he shall return—in honour and triumph. I will build for him the new theatre I have promised. He shall conquer the world as he is destined to do.”

Lola watched, but said not a word.

Perhaps she was thinking that she had made a pretty mess of it all and that if old Pfist really knew what she had said, he would be in a flaming rage and bundle her neck and crop out of the country. Much she cared for that! Her obstinacy was truly feminine—and, despite her vices, she had that quality of loyalty to her friends which is ever a precious thing in women.

So she was at heart well content to watch the King as ideas passed swiftly through his troubled mind and he dealt swiftly in imagination with his enemies. When at last he did remember her presence, it was to say something which thrilled her, though she had long ceased to expect such words from his lips.

“You are Richard Wagner’s friend,” he said; “you shall be mine also. They say that I do not need women. I will give them the lie in my affection for you. Yes, yes: I will take you to my heart and show them that I am capable of a man’s love. To-morrow you shall come to the palace and be near me. I will see that none dishonours you—we can then talk of our friend

together and decide what must be done. Do you wish that also, little Lola?—are you willing to have the King for your lover? Then tell me so now—in my arms.”

The surprise of it overwhelmed her. She did not pause to remember—what woman would have done?—that this poor fellow was mad and that an asylum was already making ready to receive him. Here she was, in the King's embrace, and he was showering kisses on her lips. What more did she need that her fortune should be established?

* * * * *

Two hours later she went back to the fine apartment old Pfist had provided for her just near to the Hof Theatre—and there she found that old rascal waiting for her with impatience and greedy for her news.

“Well?” he cried with gasping eagerness.

“Wagner is to go,” she said, “and I am to have a place at the palace.”

“The devil you are!” cried Pfist.

He was not quite sure whether to be pleased or concerned.

Nor did Lola think it necessary to tell him of the splendid ruby ring the King had given her when she had left him in the blue *salon* half-an-hour ago.

CHAPTER VIII

LOLA WAITS FOR THE KING

LOLA awoke very early next morning in the great crimson and gold bed which old Pfist had chosen to decorate her apartment in the Hof Strasse; and directly she was awake, she rang the bell and asked the fat German woman who waited for her if any message had come to her from the palace or elsewhere. When she heard that there was none, she was a little disappointed, though why she should have expected the King to write to her at eight o'clock in the morning only a woman's logic could say.

The fat *frau* descended to the kitchen to say that something was "going on" and to hint in no prudent terms her opinion that my lady upstairs was no better than a "common baggage"—an opinion which caused her sleepless nights later on—for hardly had it been uttered when a young officer of hussars—one by name Joseph Hofmeyer—came riding with a royal carriage in

which were a very garden of superb flowers and a letter which no other than King Ludwig himself had written with his own far from fair hand. When the old woman understood that this was so, she went off into so dead a faint that cold water, and plenty of it, alone could restore her to consciousness, if not to reason.

The letter was a droll affair. Somebody has it in Paris to this day, but money would not buy it. Apparently his Majesty, being unaccustomed to write love-letters to women, had called the classics to his aid, quoted from Richter and Byron and Shelley, and thrown in a little Lucretius to round off the whole. Much of it would not have pleased the ministry and much of it was incoherent. Even a cleverer woman than Lola might have made little of it; but she, poor child, could as easily have read the Koran!

What on earth did the man mean with his talk of Greeks and Latins and ships and lovers and Kings who cut off each other's heads and poor girls who had pirates for their fathers and were discovered in embraces when they should have been clever enough never to have been discovered at all? Was the man coming to the house to see her, or was he not? Certainly she had not expected him to come—yet this letter made no mention of her going to him, and this in spite of the fact

that he had sworn to see her the very next morning and that nothing should turn him from that purpose.

Meanwhile there was the young officer—the smallest she had seen in Munich, so curly haired and upright and so very clean that the lubberly Pasch was a mere boor when compared with him. Lola had not noticed the soldier while reading the letter, but now she turned to him and for a moment quite forgot how angry that rigmarole of a letter had made her.

“Oh,” she cried, “have you brought this from the King, then?”

He laughed brightly—and his laugh was pleasant to see.

“Yes, my lady, from the King.”

“Then, I suppose, you are waiting for me to write an answer?”

He still smiled.

“I have no such instructions, my lady. His Majesty set out very early this morning for Starnberg, and my orders are to proceed there immediately. Nothing was said about any letter; and since the King is with the Herr Wagner, perhaps it is as well that you should not write, if I may presume to say so.”

A wise boy, this, very well able to talk paternally to this pretty lady. No doubt he had his instruc-

tions from old Pfist; but however it was, Lola was quite pleased to be talking to him, and had a good deal more to say before she let him go.

“You must tell me your name,” she urged: “the King is sure to be sending me more letters and I must know who brings them. You are in the hussars, I see. Well, I always thought their uniform very pretty, and now I am sure of it.”

He grinned at the compliment and was quite well aware of the impression he had created.

“My name is Joseph Hofmeyer,” he said; “I am a lieutenant of hussars as you see—and an aide-de-camp at the palace, my lady”—and from laughter his tone changed to one of unrest. There would be the devil to pay if anyone told Ludwig that he had been coquetting with the King’s own baggage—and spies were many in this city of Munich.

Lola said she was glad to hear it and would have given him a chocolate but for the fact that she had eaten the last herself. As a kiss might have surprised him, and a flirtation might be dangerous, as she also had the wit to see, she dismissed him with a warm shake of her dainty hand and then looked out of the window to watch him ride down the Hof Strasse upon a beautiful black horse which really could have made a page in a picture-book.

When he was gone, she turned to her flowers and to her thoughts.

The King had not forgotten—but, nevertheless, he was not coming to see her. This friendship for the musician was stronger than his affection for her—a fact which did not flatter her, though it could not be helped. After all, there was no other woman in the case and that was much to be thankful for. She determined to order her fine carriage and to go for a drive—remembering, however, that she had little money and that to drive in a carriage without money is almost as bad as to possess a compass without a needle. None the less, she set out, nor had she gone very far before it became apparent to her that unrest was abroad also and that her own incognito was no longer a safeguard.

Men laughed as she passed; women pointed menacing fingers at her. She heard such cries as, “There she goes, the strumpet” or “Look, my dear, that is the French woman;” and, oddly enough, her own name seemed coupled often to that of “the Master”—as though all knew that she was Wagner’s friend. When she passed a procession of the citizens with drums and banners, the men proved more civil than the women, some of them saying, “Bravo, black eyes!”—while others told her that the King was a lucky man. Their purpose had nothing to do with a

woman. They were out to say that they would not spend a million *gulden* upon a new theatre, just to have Wagner's music played therein—and they said it with a vehemence which was menacing.

She returned to her apartment a little perplexed and perhaps afraid. There was no message from Pasch or the Chancellor, and she passed the afternoon entirely alone. A sad business, this waiting upon Kings. And what was to become of her if it all ended in smoke and she saw Ludwig no more? To Pasch certainly she would never return. Nor had she any intention of leading a nun's life, even though she might lead it in luxury.

In this uncertainty she passed the long hours of the afternoon—and when darkness fell, she was still alone. Desperate ideas came to her. The King would have returned by this time, she imagined, and if she went to the palace, she might see him. On the other hand, she might not; and, in either case, old Pfist would be furious. She was still debating it when she heard a hubbub among the servants below; then the heavy step of a man upon the stairs.

“The King!” she cried, amazed—and King Ludwig it was.

He had come to her, it appeared, straight from the Starnberg, where he had left the Master after

telling him what was passing in Munich and what might be the outcome of it. The dress he wore was that of a country gentleman, a plain tweed suit and a Homburg hat. He carried a cane and had a beautiful red rose in his buttonhole. But his manner betrayed both weariness and unrest; and the first thing he did upon entering the room was to throw himself into a great armchair and to ask for a glass of wine.

“I am very tired, my child—it has been a long day and a sad one. Now, I hear that the people lampoon me and are going to my palace to-night to burn my poor figure in effigy. We shall see the flames very well from here. I think I will stay with you, Lola, until they have quite finished with me—that is, if you do not find me in your way, little friend.”

Of course she said that he was not in the way, that she was tremendously honoured, and all that kind of thing, while she wrestled with a refractory cork and spilled about half-a-pint of wine down her pretty dress in opening that disloyal bottle. When she had filled his glass twice and he had lighted a cigar, he began to question her about the events of the day, especially about the processions which had paraded the city and the banners which demanded the demolition of a theatre not yet erected—so like the agitator and his logic.

“ You saw them, of course, Lola ? ”

“ Oh, yes, sire—I went out in the carriage which old Pfist—that is, the Chancellor—bought me, and we met them face to face two or three times. They won’t have any new theatre, they say ; and they are crying out for the Herr Wagner to go. It made me laugh, just because I know he is going and the theatre isn’t built. Did anybody ever hear anything more ridiculous ? ”

Ludwig looked very grave.

“ My friend will go, but he will return,” he said almost in anger. “ Those who have been his enemies shall be punished, your friend the Chancellor first of all. Then the theatre will be built and you shall sit at my side to hear *Tristan* again. That I promise you, little Lola.”

And then he exclaimed with savage ardour :

“ Do they think, then, that I am a child, who shall be told to do this and do that—and will obey them because they have a rod ? Not so, my Lola ; I am the one to teach, and the lesson shall be bitter. And you shall help me, my dear, because your head is full of wisdom, as this fellow the Chancellor has wisely said.”

She did not know how to answer him, and for quite a long while he remained silent, as though dwelling in thought upon this passion of revenge. At last, however, a sound from the city without

recalled him to the actualities of the hour; and when he heard the rolling of drums and the shouts of raucous voices, he knew well what such omens presaged.

“Look out of the window, child, and tell me what is happening.”

She obeyed him and gave him a faithful account of it.

“There is a great procession, sire—the men carry torches and lanterns—there are women with them—many women. I cannot hear what they are saying, they make so much noise.”

“Open the window, child—open it wide. We must lose no word of this—it is a message to the King”—and he laughed angrily at the very thought of that impertinence.

She opened the window and then she heard their words. Some were crying, “No theatre, no waste of our money!” Others shouted, “Let the Prussian go!”—meaning Richard Wagner thereby—though anybody less like a Prussian it would have been impossible to imagine. Still, the cry satisfied and Ludwig heard with satisfaction that neither man nor woman among them raised a word against the King. Their rage was for the stranger genius within their gates—who wanted a million *gulden* and had already spent their money by the cartload.

“Let him go back!—Away with him!—What do we want with a new theatre here?—The old is good enough for us!—Let Wagner go!—He is deceiving the King—an impostor—a beggar—we do not want him!”—and so on, and so on, lost to all sense of reason and justice, as mobs so often are. The meanness of their thoughts filled the King with despair. He was almost tempted to cry: “They know not what they do.”

“You see,” he exclaimed in that high tone which betrays anger, “here are those who say to Pilate, ‘Crucify him, crucify him!’ Their city is honoured as few cities have been and they turn and rend the man who brought honour to them. Twenty years hence, all Germany will cry shame upon this night’s work. The glory of Richard Wagner will shine throughout the world. People will come here as to a place of pilgrimage. And I shall be remembered—I, who sought out my friend and made his music known—that divine music which comes to us from the very gates of heaven itself.”

The idea excited him and he began to pace about the room, muttering strange words, now listening at the window, now turning from it as from a spectacle which filled him with loathing. The clear reasoning which had marked his early apprehension of the situation as he explained it to Lola, gave place slowly to the madness of anger—

and in that mood he was once more her Knight of the Holy Grail and she the Elsa of his dreams.

“We will go away together,” he said, “to the Starnberg, where I shall protect you—yes, yes—we will go there, my little wife; and our friend shall follow and we will teach this rabble their lesson.”

And then he added, as though all the powers of the Holy Grail were his :

“I will strike dead those who oppose me. Let them beware, for they know not with whom they deal !”

Then hallucination once more played its part and this poor Ludwig ceased to be a King—became a knight in shining armour. Before him strong men fell dead at a word and women worshipped in awed homage. At any other time, Lola, the child of the “Boul Mich” and the cabarets of Paris, might have laughed despite her fears at a spectacle so tragic; but this night laughter was not for her. Instinct said she was in peril, she knew not of what. Here truly was her ambition realised and she was the mistress of a King—but of what a King and in what a state ! The madman’s embrace terrified rather than entranced her. She would willingly have fled the house—anywhere for obscurity; but he held her in arms that were as bonds of steel about her, and his kisses were as fire upon her

lips. So we shall cease to wonder that the sudden coming of old Pfist was a profound relief to her. She could almost have kissed the Chancellor, so pleased she was to see him.

He came openly, a Colonel of the Guards with him and other mounted soldiers in the street below to serve as his escort.

The King must go to the palace without loss of time, he said. The people insisted upon seeing him. A few words from him would pacify them; and if he did not go, they would burn the place to the ground.

Ludwig listened apathetically, almost as a man in a dream; but he did not deem it necessary to strike them dead nor to remember that he really was not Ludwig at all, but a Knight of the Holy Grail who could work miracles when he had the mind. In truth, his manner became sheep-like and humble—and, without one single word spoken to Lola, he quitted the room and left her.

And that was the last time she ever set eyes upon her Royal lover—indeed, the last night she was ever to spend in the noble city of Munich.

She did not know it, of course, had no idea of it at all.

The King went clattering down the stairs, afraid of discovery no longer; and the party rode back to the palace at a fast trot, his Majesty deep in the

cushions of the coach which had been waiting for him. Thus was Lola left in the room where but one candle burned, so discreet had his Majesty been ; and all the sounds she heard were the shouts afar which demanded that the King should address them and tell them that Wagner had gone. If she were relieved that her mad lover's embarrassing ecstasy was for the moment checked, none the less the excitement of the night remained. Ludwig, she thought, would come back to her when all this was over ; they would go away to Starnberg together, as he had promised ; and, Wagner no longer wanting money, there would be plenty for her to spend. It was the argument of the theatres, but she knew no other. If Kings loved dancers—Kings must pay for the privilege.

The hope cheered her and she dwelt upon it a long while. Nor was she disappointed when Ludwig did not return, for she understood that he might think it imprudent at such a time, especially with old Pfist there to watch him. In the end she determined to go to bed and to enjoy pleasant dreams—and she was just about half-undressed when the second surprise of the night awaited her. Once more she heard a man's footsteps on the stone stairs of the lonely house. This time, however, they were very active steps and did not speak either of colonels or Chancellor. For they

were the steps of our young friend, the Lieutenant Joseph, and he carried a message from old Pfist which he declared was urgent.

“You are to leave at once,” he said. “I am to accompany you to the frontier, mademoiselle. Dress yourself immediately and come down. There is a carriage waiting at the garden entrance and there is not a moment to lose.”

That poor little Lola!

There she was, a shawl thrown hurriedly over her bare shoulders, her black eyes full of wonder, her shoes on the carpet before her—and this young gallant of a hussar become suddenly as serious as a judge and really alarmed for her safety. Being a woman, however, she was not for obeying him without an argument and that she told him flatly.

“Go away at once?—why should I go away? Has the King sent you to tell me that?”

“Not the King, mademoiselle—the Herr Chancellor. The people have discovered who you are, and if you do not leave this house immediately they will burn it over your head.”

She trembled at the words.

Somebody, then, had told the people that the daughter of the hated Lola Montez was in the city and she had been warned what that might mean. As they drove her mother out, so would they drive

her. And with the people in such a mood, their driving might not be done with gentle hands. Not three years ago, report said, a French actress had been shoo'd across the frontier in ignominy, a rabble following her and a label on her back. Never would she suffer that! Nevertheless, the obstinacy of argument was not modified. She hated to show this curly-headed young soldier that she was afraid.

“But my clothes, my things!” she protested—“how am I to take those?—what am I to do?”

“I will help you to fill your arms with them—we dare not stop for bags and boxes, mademoiselle. Now come at once, for I think our friends are returning.”

It was the truth.

The mob learned at the palace that Wagner had left the Starnberg that very night and gone to Zürich. But with that report came another. Mysterious voices amid the press of people shouted that the daughter of Lola Montez was in the Hof Strasse and that the King had been with her that very night. The murmurs became loud cries and anon threats followed. Was there, then, to be another woman ruling the city as it had been ruled when Ludwig the First was King? Assuredly not, if the citizens could prevent it. So when a ruffian with a bull's neck cried, “Let

us smoke her out!" other voices took up that war-cry vociferously—"Yes, yes, let her be smoked out—burn the house above her head—no Lola Montez in that galley!" And, saying it, they began to follow the bull-necked man like so many devouring wolves and streamed across the Frederick Platz as though the real sport of the night were at hand.

"I think our friends are returning."

The poor, curly-wigged hussar, saddled with this responsibility for a pretty woman's safety, spoke wisely when he said that Lola had no time to lose. Drums were now rolled, flags waved, torches lifted high, not to compel a King to get rid of a musician but to drive a poor little French girl back to the land whence she came.

And while some cried, "Smoke her out!" and others, "Death to the strumpet," there were the soldier and the maiden snatching up odd garments as though they were apples in an orchard, grabbing this ornament or that and all the time racing against a fate which lumbered towards them with heavy steps. In truth, the mob was not a hundred paces from the very door of Lola's house when the soldier Joseph dragged her roughly down the back stairs, and told her they might already have stayed too long.

"If they think about the garden gate," said

he, "then we are lost. I shall do what I can for you; but, mademoiselle——"

She pushed him on, saying, "I know, I know"; and with the roar of a thousand voices in their ears, heard oddly over the roofs of the houses, they went down the narrow garden and so to the alley-way which lay behind the Hof Strasse and harboured the stables of its people. Here a light travelling-carriage awaited the hussar; and he pushed Lola into it headlong, while to the coachman he uttered one word—"Forward!"—and, upon that, the horses went at a canter down the narrow street and, turning by the statue of Frederick the Great at its corner, they struck the high road to Augsburg, where the soldier said their train would be found.

"I dared not let you go to the station here," he explained: "they would have been there as soon as we were. We shall get the early morning train at Augsburg and that will take us to Würtemberg, where there will be an express to Strassbourg. I shall leave you at Augsburg, however, for you will be in no danger once we are there. Those are my instructions from the Herr Chancellor."

She laughed with the laughter of the hard woman of the world, when he mentioned the name of the Chancellor.

“I think I understand it all,” she said quietly; “it was your Chancellor who told the people my name, and his agents who set them on me. Of course I might have known that once the Master had gone he would have no use for me. But I shall not forget him, and when I am in Paris I shall tell the story to all the world.”

Joseph Hofmeyer did not think that she would and made no bones about telling her so.

“That would be to get yourself into great trouble,” he said. “The King will not be ungenerous if you are wise and hold your tongue. I was to tell you that from the Chancellor himself. You will let him know where you are, mademoiselle, and he will write to you at once. To-night we could think of nothing else but your safety. Now, however, that it is assured, we can talk of more pleasant things. And first of money——”

Her eyes glistened at that.

They were going to give her some money!

“Oh, yes,” she cried: “let us talk of money by all means.”

“I have a thousand *gulden* for you and your ticket to Strassbourg.”

“My ticket to Strassbourg! Then that old *blageur* knew all about it long before the people did! The liar—to deceive me so!”

“Possibly, mademoiselle: most Chancellors are

liars—it is their business to be. This one, however, is a very good liar, and so the people honour him. You should do that also, seeing that he gives you a thousand *gulden*.”

“He knew, of course, that I should have to leave everything the King had given me.”

“That he feared.”

“Then he is again a liar,” but the meaning of this enigma she would not explain. Nor did the discerning Joseph ask her to explain. Pleased enough he was to be so close to so pretty a girl on a night so dark. Did she not relent towards him bye-and-by and permit his hand to cover hers and his cheek to brush her pretty hair. The poor boy—who must leave her at Augsburg!

Or shall we say the young rascal, who did not really leave her for six weeks and was long remembered in the Rue de Neuilly, where Lola had an apartment after her return to Paris and managed to make a brave show despite her plea of poverty?

She had called the Chancellor a liar because he had said that she carried nothing into Munich; so should she carry nothing out—except that miserable present of *gulden* he had thrown to her as a lean bone to a mangy dog. And she had called him so truly.

For as she rode by the lieutenant's side in that rolling carriage, she still carried in her bosom the

great diamond King Ludwig had given her . . . and wise friends were to tell her later that it was worth a fortune.

So she had cheated that rogue of a Pfist, who, having schemed to drive a genius from his country, schemed also to get rid of the pretty instrument by whom that intrigue had been so cleverly furthered.

“Two birds with one stone!” the old rascal had determined.

And here was one in a carriage with a curly-haired hussar . . . and the other on the road to Zürich and to fame which was to endure.

* * * * *

Lola saw the high and mighty Chancellor, the Herr von Pfistermeister, once again in the course of her eventful life, and that of all places in the world was at the Alhambra Theatre in London, where he was smoking a cigar in a box and she was dancing in a Spanish ballet.

He did not recognise her, of course, but she remembered him; and she had the great consolation of shouting out that far from pretty word “swine” in a tone so loud that many in the stalls heard it and laughed. Indeed, the management was greatly distressed and offered an apology,

while she, who had the ambition to be the mistress of a King, was sent incontinent back to Paris, there to fascinate many an English visitor who frequented the Folies Bergère, but to remain untroubled by German Chancellors.

Some say that she was a woman with a great heart and wonderful brains. Alas! the maelstrom of her troubled life had little to do either with heart or brains.

Nor to this day does Paris really know whether she were or were not the daughter of that great courtesan, the magnificent, the irresistible Lola Montez—mistress of a King and of the country he was supposed to govern.

PART TWO

CHAPTER IX

PHANTOMS OF THE STORM

When Ludwig sent to Switzerland his emissaries to bring Richard Wagner to the palace at Munich, he knew little of the years of poverty and of wandering which the great Master had suffered since the genius which wrote *Rienzi* had first been recognised by the German people.

Perhaps some of this *wanderlust* was not without profit. When Wagner reached Munich, he told the King of the inspiration upon which he had founded *The Flying Dutchman* and there is in the Hof palace to-day a curious manuscript which speaks of the beginnings of that almost forgotten opera and of the mighty storm off the North Cape to which it owed its origin. As the story speaks also of a woman, it is better told here before we go on to refer to those other women who were friends of the musician but undoubtedly the mistresses of the King.

THE storm had menaced the ship since two bells of the first dog-watch; but its full fury was not to be experienced until darkness fell.

A fiery sun sank into clouds as black as thunder

when the bells were heard ; and anon, the wind came wailing from the West with such a note of utter melancholy that even the oldest among the sailors shuddered at their own prophecies ; while the passengers of many nations lay huddled about the deck or sought the deep shelter of the profound cabin, where a crazy lamp but emphasised the darkness. There a dutch pastor prayed that God would deliver them from the storm—while women clutched their children as though strong arms would protect them.

Now, this was a Dutch barque that had put out from Riga to sail to London ; and among its passengers was a young musician with a lofty brow and a thinker's moods, who had set out from Russia to visit Paris, in the hope of having the first of his serious operas represented there.

Richard Wagner was twenty-six years old at that time. He had written much that was afterwards to be forgotten ; had studied at Leipzig and at Vienna, where he composed the music of a romantic opera *Die Feen* and subsequently heard that great singer, Schroeder-Devrient, for whom he was to complete *Rienzi* and so at last come into his own.

Unhappily, Germany did not yet know the genius in her midst—and poor, and at his wits' end for bread, the Master passed from one scene to another

—always seeking a haven for his genius but yet to find it. A post as musical director in the theatre at Riga did not satisfy him—and feeling that he was being too much influenced by the music of France and Italy, he conceived the idea that Paris might welcome him . . . and that, even from the least musical nation in Europe, the English, he might obtain a hearing.

He was very poor at that time, occupied a mean lodging in Riga and had the greatest difficulty in supporting himself and the wife, who subsequently was to suffer so much chagrin because of his infidelities.

But he managed, nevertheless, to secure a passage for them both upon the Dutch barque that was to sail for London—nor did he forget to take his Great Dane, Robber, who accompanied him at that time on all his voyages.

So the party set out and soon was faced by the difficulties of the passage.

A motley horde of Russians, Poles, Germans and Dutch crowded the mean ship to the point of danger. There were two or three English merchants, some sailors of the same race who had been shipwrecked on an island of the Baltic—a group of Jewish traders and last, but by no means the least interesting to the romantic Master, there was Senta, the Norwegian girl, with her

wide blue eyes and her plaintive songs and her weird stories of the sea, which the Vikings surely should have taught her in the great ages of adventure.

‡ It was Robber, the Great Dane, who first discovered Senta, as she squatted by the round house amidships and recited her legends to the sailors. Somehow, the monster hound seemed a fit companion for that fragile little creature, whose mind was an index to the ages but whose body was a mere wraith. He would curl up beside her and reward her ballads with no more than reproachful eyes—while when her voice sank into the soft melancholy of some doleful fable of the sea, he would howl without shame and so rebuke her. Nevertheless, all felt that Senta was quite safe in the great dog's keeping—and when the Captain Darand tried to make love to her, he cursed the day which brought such a ferocious beast aboard.

To a man of the romantic and amorous temperament of Richard Wagner, his discovery of a blue-eyed prophetess was a godsend.

Often he would pace the deck with her until the early hours of the morning; and always in her talk he discovered that profound note of melancholy which the drear seas and ghostly northern lands inspire. Nevertheless, it was not always of

the sagas that she spoke but sometimes of the more earthly passion of love.

"I am to marry Erik of Bergen when he returns from his next voyage," she confessed to the Master one day—and no sooner had the words been uttered than she fell into a profound melancholy, as though the tidings were of sorrow and not of joy.

"Does not marriage mean very much to you, then?" the Master asked her. "Are you not in love with this sailor lover of yours?"

Senta looked up with eyes that burned.

"I am so much in love with him that we shall sail the seas together when all here are in their graves and this ship is but rotting wood on a forgotten shore."

Wagner was not at all surprised. He knew what Norse imagery was and would not mock it.

"A very old woman you will be then, Senta."

"A very, very old woman, Master, who now has but a few days to live. We go into the world of shadows, Erik and I, and we sail these seas for ever. Thus has sadness come to me. I shall perish, but this ship may be saved at last. The voices tell me so and they have never lied to me."

"But Senta, why should the ship be in danger? Was there ever a calmer sea than this upon which we sail? And if a storm comes, are there not

many havens? Come, come, let us think of Erik and of love. I will make a song for you, and you shall sing it. We will call it Erik the Steersman—for I also have written of your sagas and you shall hear my verses when there is nobody round about to hear us.”

She told him in return that she had known both of him and his music when she had been in Riga, and his proper vanity swelled at her prophecies of his future greatness.

“All the world will acknowledge you for its Master,” she said, “but there will be weary years of waiting. Count nothing upon the city to which you are going, for it is through your own Germany that success will come. The English will not understand you, for they know no music; and in Paris they will not hear you. No, no, Master, it is to Germany that you must look if the ship is saved!”

“Then even your voices are not sure about that, Senta. They think there is danger for us.”

“There is great danger, Master, and it is coming out of the West. Some will perish but some will live—while I, I shall ride upon the storm with my lover through all eternity—even as she who gave me her name and whose spirit hovers upon these waters even as we talk.”

She took up her guitar at the words and began

to sing softly, as though addressing one unseen but waiting.

The Master, however, went back to his cabin wondering at this message of death and asking himself if the hour which should end all his dreams was at hand.

CHAPTER X

NOT OF THIS WORLD

SO the menace of the storm became apparent, when the ship had rounded the North Cape and was heading to the South West for the Port of Bergen.

The day had been fair enough with a clear light of an ungenerous sun and placid waters which were a solace to the emigrants. All, indeed, was life and laughter upon the crowded ship . . . and even Senta, the dreamer, could attune her song to the mood and remember the cry of her youth. They had all been dancing to her music when the dinner bell called them . . . and Richard Wagner himself was thinking in terms of a ballet, which, many years later on was to ornament his opera of *Tannhäuser* as Paris first knew it. So the merry hours passed until the reddening sun sank beneath the ominous bank of the clouds and the dirge of the wind began to be heard in the rigging as a prelude to the dreadful night. Then,

truly, Senta's laughter passed; and gathering the seamen about her, she told them stories of phantom ships and of shrieks from their stricken decks, above which the spirits hovered as the doomed vessels drove on to a penance of eternity.

"There was one named Darand, as this captain of yours is named," she said, "and he was in the Southern seas, long, long years ago. There was also a wind such as blows upon us to-night . . . and the great Cape faced him and all his skill could not bring his ship into the Western waters. Then he cared not for God or Devil, but called upon the spirits of Evil to answer him and they came up from the black waters and pestilence fell upon all that company and it died horribly even while the storm was still raging. But the souls of those poor people came back again to Darand's barque from the blackness of death and the steersman took his place at the wheel again and now for ever the ship sails that Southern sea and woe to those whose eyes look upon it for they also shall surely perish. . . ."

So much and much more fell from the lips of the little prophetess as she gathered the seamen about her, and together they watched the oncoming storm.

Darand, their Captain, a lusty fellow with the courage of a rabbit, did not hear his name thus

taken in vain . . . and for long he refused to believe that the storm was more than a passing squall; while he averred that midnight would show them a fine heaven of stars with a breeze so favourable that they would be half-way to Bergen at the same hour of the morrow. At the same time, he continued to hope that fear might yet drive the pretty Senta to his cabin . . . and he fixed wanton eyes upon her while she sang her plaintive little songs to the sailors and even carried her a pannikin of wine, like a gallant lover who thinks first of his *Dulcinea* whatever the peril of the hour. When she drank it, however, her toast was "the Phantom Ship" and that so scared this sawdust Nelson that he turned as white as one of his own sails and began to question her closely.

"How—you talk of phantom ships. Who, then, has put that nonsense into your head, my pretty? There are no phantom ships in these waters, as every sailor knows. Why, then, speak of what does not exist?"

"I speak, Captain, of that which my eyes have seen. A ship sails yonder in the loom of the cloud and its crew are not of this world. Be warned, then, for the danger is upon us and God alone knows if any of us will be alive when the new day breaks."

She pointed with a hand no bigger than that of

a child away to the West and to the gold and the deep crimson of its horizon. There was no ship there—but so had she hypnotised the devil-fearing seamen about her that more than one cried—“yonder, yonder on the starboard bow—don’t you see her—a fore-and-aft schooner—no, no, a brig—I tell you she’s a barque . . . there’s a man on the quarter deck—no, two and two more at the wheel. . . . I tell you it’s nothing at all, just the shadows, that’s what it is . . . and the wind rising—my God, how long is the old man going to hold on like this . . . has he lost his senses then ?”

Darand himself was at first too afraid to say anything at all, but presently he awoke to the realities and crying—“all hands on deck to take in sail,” he began to prepare the ship for the ordeal which was upon her. In a twinkling, as it were, the top-sails were down, the jibs bellowing on the boom, the mizzen lowered and the hatches battened down. All passengers were ordered below and sent there with little ceremony ; and so it befell that Richard Wagner and Senta, neither of whom the Dutchman cared to provoke, sought the shelter of the cuddy beneath the quarter deck, where two men now stood at the wheel and the great dog watched them as though his very presence might avail against the tempest.

“ You spoke of a phantom ship,” said the Master presently, “ I saw none and there was none to see. Are these things then revealed to you in a vision, child, or do you desire to drive these good fellows crazy? That, surely, would not be worthy of you.”

She flushed at the rebuke and for a little while did not know how to answer him.

“ I see with my soul but not with my eyes,” she said at last, “ since my childhood, the visions have come to me and I have heard voices which tell me of things hidden from those about me. To-night, I can hear the voices of Evil which come from the Phantom Ship and so I speak of it. It is a warning that many of these poor people must die—that God is about to judge their souls. Why, then, should I be silent when the voices bid me speak? Have I not told you already the things that are true?”

“ You have said that I shall live when many perish.”

“ It is true, true,” she cried . . . and then with a voice of woe, she added—“ but I shall die and go to my love and we shall sail these seas for ever.”

CHAPTER XI

THE DEAD ABOUT THE SHIP

FOR ever !
Richard Wagner looked out on the storm-ridden ocean and the terror of her prophecy appalled him.

What an irony of his destiny if all his dreams should perish in these dark waters ! He believed that he had a master message to deliver to the peoples of all countries and that the first notes of it would soon be heard. Now the raging sea threatened to obliterate all that he had planned and desired with such an earnest hope . . . and he knew for a truth that his grave might be there amidst the tumult of the surf which now drove the barque headlong.

Yet his was not a superstitious mind and although its images were of the shadow world of gods and syrens and sagas of the remote past, his faith was merely negative ; and he no more believed the story of a phantom ship than of the devil

knocking on Luther's door at Weimar. Squatting there upon the deck of the barque he had become a materialist, weighing but his personal chance of safety in the balance, and yet content, almost as one driven to any consolation, to listen to this little dreamer and to take comfort in her words.

He would live ; but she would perish.

Her youth, her spirituality fascinated him . . . and he looked at her with profound sorrow as he thought that to-morrow, the same beautiful eyes might be gazing sightless at the angry heaven . . . the voice hushed, the poetry of her thoughts unsung. Then, almost in the same mood, he could rid himself of the spell and come back to reality. The ship and all its people might perish despite her prophecies. And, indeed, it soon seemed that such must be their fate and that the end truly was at hand.

It was black dark by this time and all their light came from the loom of the scudding cloud, where the lightning found its curtain and cast back great aureoles of light down upon the frenzied breakers. All the terror of the storm would be revealed at one instant, to be blotted out the next and left but a memory of a menacing revelation. And all the time, the wind howled and screeched in the flying rigging ; sails were torn to ribbons ; the decks washed by huge waves ; the lanterns

extinguished . . . and those below terrified by the waters which poured in among them as the backwash of that Styx they presently must cross.

Anon, panic arose.

Russians mad with terror forced their way to the decks and shouted wildly at a Captain, whom fear had already deprived of his wits. Drink was got from the purser's store and a keg of brandy broached in the waist of the barque. Soon, weird figures staggered to the slippery decks and shook impotent fists at the skies which mocked them. Men were swept overboard now as flies from a board which is washed and women died in men's arms for very fear. There came a crescendo of terrifying sounds out of the void and the thunders crashed as though a myriad devils were clamouring for souls, while there was no longer steerage way upon the barque, nor any thought of a haven. She had become the sport of the tempest and her hours appeared to be numbered.

Throughout it all, Senta and the Master watched from the shelter of the lower deck and rarely ventured a word in the momentary intervals of storm. Once, indeed, it became again apparent that she saw some vision of the sea and that some figure of her subjective mind appeared to her. When the musician dared to ask her what that figure

was, she declared without hesitation, that Erik, her lover, was calling to her and that he had told her that the ship would be saved.

“But only,” she said with unutterable sadness—“only if I go to him where he is waiting for me.”

“You do not fear to go, my dear—not to your lover, surely.”

“You do not understand,” she said, “when Erik comes for me, then I must die. Oh, I know it, I know it!” and for the first time she began to weep, not for fear of the storm but for the man’s sake.

Wagner was well acquainted with moods such as this and his own dreams were often the fruit of them.

Profound mysteries of the Unseen, the shadow-world peopled by unnumbered souls; gods fighting in the air and below the water, lovers who died because they had loved . . . of such fables were his mighty operas to be made. And here, surely, in this pathetic little oracle, whom the visions haunted, here, in truth, was just such a figure as he loved.

He believed no word of her story, it may be, and yet her words gave him consolation. The ship was to be saved, she said, though she might perish. He did not believe that she was to die,

yet such argument as he could use seemed weak enough in view of his bias toward the dreamer.

“Believe no such thing,” he said, “if this Erik of yours is the brave fellow I believe him to be, he will be the first to protect you—is he not a sailor also? I think that you have told me so, my dear. Then, surely, sailors do not come to do evil to those they love?”

The question intrigued her and turned her thoughts to other scenes.

“He is captain of the sloop ‘Christiana,’” she said, “his father is the minister in the church of Molda. He was at Riga last year and we spent many days together—such happy days they were, never to come again. We should have seen him this time at Bergen if God had let us go there. But now I know it must be in some other place . . . and if he finds me, it will be because he is sent to do so. Oh, do not think that I fear death with Erik—but we are both so young to leave the sunshine and the light; and at one time it seemed that we had many years before us. It cannot be now. I have seen the Phantom Ship and none see it and live. . . .”

“You think, then, that all these mad people who perished to-night, they all saw the vision with you?”

“I am sure of it. Did you not hear their words?”

‘Yonder,’ they cried, and pointed at it. Then I knew how it would be with them—and you, Master, you have seen it happen with your own eyes.”

He had to confess that it was so.

The sea had claimed the price of folly and the dead already floated about the ship in the darkness.

CHAPTER XII

MUSIC OF THE SOUL

IT was the crisis of the storm; and none upon the barque believed that she could live.

Darand, the Captain, had long given up any hope of saving either vessel or cargo, and of his crew, few were sober. Some sang crazy songs of ancient mariners and of seamen who had gone to the devil; others lay about like logs, half insensible and wholly indifferent to the storm. Of them all but the Englishman, Barker, and the Scottish bo'sun, Atkinson, kept their wits and did all that seamanship could do to keep the crazy ship afloat and the monster seas from engulfing her. Rousing such of the hands as were capable of any service at all, they got the torn jibs from the booms and stripped the aft rigging of all canvas. Almost under bare poles, the barque headed to the South West and so toward that town of Bergen, which it now seemed impossible that she should ever see. And

as though such courage merited reward, there was at last a breaking of the hurricane, a modulation in the raucous voices of winds and a sudden cleavage of the black cloud, which drove no longer across the heavens in unbroken mass but was riven to let the moon shine upon the raging water and to show them Ursa Major in all its majesty. Now, indeed, the mate began to tell them that there was hope . . . and as though to justify his words, the man at the wheel cried "light on the port bow"—and instantly the whole company became alert as though this was the end of it and the port of their salvation already made.

Richard Wagner saw the light and Senta with him.

She knew that Northern shore well, for she had often sailed it with the seamen who came to her father's house; and her lover Erik had spent the best part of his young life in trading with the villages of the fjords and in piloting strange ships into them.

So, no sooner had she seen the beacon than she declared it to be that of the Hammerfest and that if they could weather the great Cape which sheltered the fjord, then indeed were they as surely saved as though they had dropped anchor in the harbour of Bergen.

"I know the place," she cried wildly. "I have

sailed there often with Erik when he was taking English people to the North Cape. There is another light, a red one, when you pass the point of the island, and after that you can see the houses of the town, a very little town with very poor people, but there is an inn there and we can all shelter there. Did I not tell you that the ship would be saved? Was I not right from the beginning, dear Master?"

He told her that she was and rejoiced to see that her other words had seemingly been forgotten. The joy of hope and life was as sure for her as any upon the ship—and in the new excitement of deliverance, she stood by the side of the Englishman telling him that this or that was the course he must follow, explaining the situation both of the island and the port and promising him water enough to float the greatest ship that ever sailed the seas.

"They say that the fjord is a mile deep even against the side of the mountain. I have seen Erik sail the 'Christiana' so close to the rock that I could put my hand upon it. Now keep a little more to port and then you must put the helm hard over. Yes, yes, there is the red lantern and those are the lights of the town. We are safe now and shall think of storm no more."

The man obeyed, while Captain Darand, perceiv-

ing what had happened, came to his senses and again took charge of the barque.

Among the passengers, there was indescribable reaction. Women fainted for joy of their escape; men sang incoherently or danced about or remembered the unfinished bottles. And gradually, as the vessel was steered amid the jagged rocks upon which great waves still broke into fountains of foam and swirling waters, even Richard Wagner suffered an intense emotion which even he could not control.

Music now came to his aid and all its magic inspiration.

He has told us how, at that moment, the scheme of *The Flying Dutchman* came to him. How the music possessed his soul and would be heard. The thunder of storm; the tragic love (if it were to be tragic) of the little prophetess; the great crags towering up in the first light of the coming dawn—all contributed to that elation of the spirit by which alone great masterpieces are born.

Yet there remained the doubt.

As he watched the frail Senta standing triumphantly at the helmsman's side, he could ask, what of to-morrow.

Was the fable of her end but a fable, or had she been truly warned?

Time alone would tell him whether this child of the dreams had dreamed truly—whether she would die or live, prove her prophecies true or deny them gloriously.

CHAPTER XIII

OF ANOTHER WORLD?

THE ship was anchored to the rock just as the day broke—and even at that early hour, some townsmen waited on the shore to offer help to a company so miraculously saved.

A dreadful night it had been, they declared. More than one good barque would sail the seas no more. Dead men's faces had been seen from the cliff head and wreckage had been washed up against the barrier reefs outside. Fortunate was this fellow Darand; fortunate those who sailed with him. He should go to the church, they said, and give thanks—and for that the church stood open and there were candles lighted upon its altar.

A few obeyed this injunction; but more thought of the inn and of hot food and drink there to be prepared.

Soon a procession was formed, the lanterns of the welcomers still lighted though the day had come. The pious sang hymns; the impious laughed and shouted and patted upon their broad backs the good folk who welcomed them. It was natural

at this time, that Richard Wagner should find himself walking side by side with Senta of the dark prophecies and that he should wish to recall them to her. She, however, had the radiance of the new day upon her pretty face . . . and when it passed, it was some memory of the man Darand and of his pursuit of her which brought the cloud.

“I shall sail no more with him,” she said, “you see how he insults me. It is well for him that Erik is not here. There would be no more Captain Darand, no surely,” and then with real anger she cried: “But he shall yet repay—I will tell a tale of him at Bergen that many will hear—if ever I see Bergen again.”

“But, my dear, you don’t doubt that now. What is to forbid you? We shall wait until the good weather comes and then we shall sail—you cannot stop in a wild man’s country like this. It might be months before any ship called to take you to your home.”

She laughed at that.

“They are my own people and none are kinder. . . . I shall tell them how Darand has treated me and they also may have something to say to him. I don’t fear him here and I will never sail with him again—even though I have seen the Phantom Ship and may not have many days to live.”

So back to her premonitions and to their sorrow. She had not forgotten the apparition, as Wagner hoped; and the old legend still could affright her.

“You must forget that,” the Master said, with a kindly hand laid upon her shoulder, “think no more of it, Senta. I like to hear these old tales as well as anybody, but I know that they are all nonsense. They come out of the darkness of the blind ages when life was a terrible thing and men had no true perception of God or of His purpose. They are the fairy stories of people whose imagination dwelt often upon death because life itself was such a hazardous thing. We know that they are false now when we listen to them—and you are too wise to give them credence.”

She shook her head but was not convinced.

“I hope it may be so—I do not know,” she said, “things have been revealed to me in dreams often and I have never found them untrue. The days will tell us, Master, the days that are to come. If Erik comes here, then I shall know that all is true and that it is the end.”

He tried to laugh it away with kindly banter about her lover . . . and so they went to the hospitable inn and to the warm breakfast there prepared for them. Darand, the captain, it appeared had arrived there before them and his stories of the adventure seemed to imply that his

courage had been as high as the waves which so nearly overwhelmed them. Menacingly also, he declared that it all came of having a "witch" woman aboard—and that true or false, he was convinced in his own mind that all their misfortunes had been brought upon them by a little strumpet, who pretended to see phantom ships and such like and had frightened the seamen half out of their wits.

Ridiculous as these tales were, a lonely people listened to them with greedy ears. Many a superstition held its own triumphantly amid those dominating crags and angry seas, where life itself was a daily battle with want and darkness and the loom of solitude. To such a hamlet, no visitor was less welcome than one credited with occult powers, able to tell them of to-morrow and to prophesy of life and death. Senta, indeed, would have been thrust bodily out of the inn but for Wagner's presence and protection.

"You are fools to listen to any such stories," he thundered, "the child is to marry Erik of Bergen and would he marry a witch? Ask that fellow Darand rather, how he has done his duty by her and then let us answer him. I will be responsible for her, good people. You need fear nothing while she is with me."

This was well enough; but it was quite clear

that no house in the little town would shelter her when night came again and that she must, willy nilly, either sleep on the shore or go back to Darand and the ship. Wagner advised the latter course, being afraid of what would happen if she remained ashore. Indeed, he promised to accompany her, though much preferring a dry bed at the inn, and so they set out together at sundown and a fisherman rowed them back to the barque—almost deserted save for a few of its crew and still showing shattered evidence of the storm.

The night was fair and the wind much moderated. Darand had not returned to the ship; and it appeared that he would not return; yet Senta was afraid to go to her cabin, and they made themselves snug in the old harbourage by the wheel house. A bribe to a somnolent cook brought them hot coffee from the galley, and afterwards there was the guitar for those songs which had so sure a hold upon the imagination of the seamen. Senta sang as sweetly as ever; but this time it was of the ancient heroes, of vikings in armour who sailed the Southern seas and returned with women and booty as their prey. And while she sang, the tarry sailors gathered about her and tears of sentiment or of greed rolled down their unwashed cheeks.

Wagner found, as ever, this barbarous music much to his liking. The scheme of his life's work

was already shaping in his mind and he was preparing to abandon all those traditions of French and Italian art by which hitherto he had been bound. Soon he would teach the world the lessons it must learn and by those lessons his own fame would be won. So he listened patiently to Senta; and when at last she wearied and the sailors crept to their bunks, he still dwelt upon the immensity of his dream and all that realisation would mean to him. Then sleep overtook him also—and the sunshine of a better day was shining when he awoke to hear a sailor tell him that Senta had left the ship and that the manner of her going had been miraculous.

“The ship passed us in the night—I saw the loom of her sails,” he said—“a voice called out to her and she sprang from yonder poop as the phantom went by us—in silence, sir, as a wisp of cloud that drifts down from the hills. No man will ever see or hear of her again, believe me. She has gone whence none return, and God deliver her soul.”

The Master thought upon it, pacing the deck in the chill air and full of wonder at what he had heard.

Was the story of another world or of this?

Had Erik come after all in his ship “The Christiana” and was her cry one of recognition as she leapt into the arms awaiting her? He believed it

might be so—and yet, who shall fathom all the mystery of the sea and her phantoms ?

One thing is sure.

The truth he never learned. Next day the barque set sail for London and a few weeks after, Richard Wagner was in Paris.

But he never forgot Senta nor her songs ; *The Flying Dutchman* bore witness to that as all the world knows. He would never have written so great a masterpiece, he has confessed, but for the little Prophetess, who believed that death awaited her and yet may have found life in her lover's arms.

PART THREE

CHAPTER XIV

JOSEPHINE FOLLOWS LOLA

ALL roads led to Munich, when that great master, Richard Wagner, was creating the masterpieces by which his music was to dominate the world—and of those who took the particular road, which passed by the beautiful lake known as the Starnberg, Josephine Shefzky was one of the most remarkable.

To begin with, she had many good reasons for seeking the patronage of the mad but generous King.

She was beautiful, men said; and her lovers added that she was passionate to a degree that was sometimes embarrassing. Her eyes had moved inferior poets in Vienna to rhapsodies and her voice had fascinated unmusical kings. Moreover her figure, disclosed to eminent painters among many others, had finally decorated the art galleries

of more than one mid-European city—and if she had not had the bad luck to spill champagne down an emperor's back instead of pouring it down his capacious throat, she might still have been the reigning Queen of Vienna with all the people and a first rate orchestra at her feet.

Poor Josephine had this little misfortune with the wine; and being discovered unluckily in the bedroom of a princeling when she should have been rehearsing *The Flying Dutchman* at the opera house, was advised to leave Vienna for a season and seek a clime more suited to one of such exuberant passions and tendencies so indiscreet.

Whither, then, so wisely as to that city of Bavaria, which the great Richard Wagner was making immortal and where women of even moderate talent were robing themselves in fine raiment and decorating their beautiful necks with pearls beyond price—as the jewellers who sold them most properly declared. Already Josephine had heard of one pretty little strumpet, the alleged daughter of Lola Montez, the dancer, who had followed the Master to Munich, been installed there in a villa by the eccentric King and rewarded with diamonds so large that the reporter who wrote of them lacked adjectives for his purpose.

“And really, you know,” she would add with true feminine charity, “she was merely a dancer

with pretty legs and what men see in her, I can't even think."

None the less Lola had gone to Munich, had flourished and was at that moment, perchance, in the bed of a king, who was supposed to hate women exceedingly and to love but one human being in the world—Richard Wagner, the master of his emotions, his household and his purse.

If one woman, why not two ?

Josephine knew that her beauty was beyond compare more wonderful than that of the little soubrette, who used to serve *café* in the Prater—while as for her voice, well, the singing of Lola's daughter was like the hissing of swans, while she, Josephine, had been the very light of the Royal Opera ; a soprano of real quality to whom all had promised European fame. Talk not of Lola, then, in her presence. Ludwig had but to look at her and all other stars must be forgotten.

Unhappily, it was just this exhibition of her charms she found so difficult.

Munich was greatly agitated by certain happenings when she arrived there, and that very Lola had not a little to do with them. Driven out of the city she had been, and with ignominy (to say nothing of certain fine diamonds) the gossips said. More than that, the Master who had conferred immortal honour upon this King and people had

also been the victim of the vagaries of mobs ; and had returned to his home in Switzerland, despised and rejected of men. No time, surely, for a new beauty to appear and to knock at the palace door asking to see his Majesty. Old Pfist indeed, the Chancellor, bundled our Josephine out headlong and advised her to take the next train back to Vienna. A very unpleasant old gentleman, evidently, with an absurd affection for the seventh commandment.

Josephine did not go back to Vienna.

The cleverness that she showed at this hour has been the subject of comment by historians, though certain people have described it as merely wickedness.

Knowing that Lola, the King's alleged mistress, had been expelled from her villa on the lake of Starnberg, she hastened to an agent to rent it. Not only that, but she engaged some of the servants, who had been in Lola's employ—and there she was presently, installed in the house of the discarded one and quite convinced that the King would answer her letters sooner or later ; and, dressed as Lohengrin or Tristan, would ride through the mountains in his carriage of state and bid her take a proud seat beside him.

“All that I desire,” she had written to Ludwig, “is to offer my humble services in assisting the

splendid ambition of your Majesty to glorify one whose genius belongs to the whole world but which you have enshrined in your beautiful city of Munich. I seek no reward, would make no conditions. Your Majesty has but to command and I am here to obey."

A Vienna journalist had written this for her, flagon in one hand and pen in the other. She thought it wonderful at the time; but at Starnberg she wondered if it really were so wise. Richard Wagner was out of favour and clearly she should have mentioned some other composer. Mozart or Meyerbeer or even the gentle Bellini. What was done was done, however, and all that remained was to take "the air of the lake" and any other trifle she could get in the meantime.

It certainly was a beautiful place and Josephine was a lover of beauty—in things as well as in men.

The still waters of the mere; the groves of pines; the verdant sward—chalets laughing at you between the trees; the white sails of little ships—leaping goats and lowing kine—sunsets of magic wonder and moons which really shone upon you—nature in these moods touched the heart of a woman who had lived most of her life in forests of canvas and passed not a few of her days in palaces of papier-maché.

Josephine tried to think that she was a little girl

again ; bathed in the lake as Nature made her—and stalked the groves in breeches to the astonishment of the woodlanders and the vexation of an aged priest, who saw her thus clad upon his way to the morning Mass. Her friends were few : it almost might have been said that she had no friends.

She was not one of those women who because they have a liaison with the theatre, desire also a liaison with a *premier venu*—and certainly she did not allow either the gardener or the milkman to make love to her. The *grand amour* rather appealed to her ; and in imagination the man who held her in his arms must be mounted upon a white horse and have a great many other horsemen prancing about him. Thus, when one day, a young soldier met her face to face in the woods, he did not wholly answer to the tests—for his horse was a sleek black and he was alone on the mountain path.

Nevertheless, there he was—and somebody to talk to, all said and done. Josephine, indeed, wished him good-day quite affably and soon she perceived that he must be a person of importance for he spoke of the Court in terms of familiarity and did not at all mind her knowing that he was on the way to the Berg, where stood the house of the mighty Richard Wagner . . . now empty as she supposed since the Master was said to be in Switzerland.

So much she told the young officer, holding to the leather of his stirrup iron and making wonderful eyes at him—as she knew very well how to make them.

“You are wasting your time, my Captain,” she insisted, “the Herr Wagner has gone to Switzerland, they say, and will never come back again.”

“Ah, but my beautiful lady, that is only what they say. If you look at me closely with those wicked eyes of yours, you will see that I am a conjuror and carry a magic carpet in my haversack. When I want the Herr Wagner, I just make a pass—so—and here he is—behold.”

She beheld—having wiped away the kiss he had bestowed upon her pouting lips; and lo, there, coming down the mountain side was the great Richard himself, a light cloak about his shoulders and a sheaf of newspapers in his hand. Never had she been more surprised—but she was also a little disappointed when the young soldier turned away from her immediately and with the curtest adieu, proceeded to ride his horse up the hill side, the musician at his side and the pair in earnest talk, as men who discuss an urgent affair. Richard Wagner was not out of Bavaria, though the mob was ready to stone him and all the ignorant to cry out upon him for an adventurer.

Josephine saw herself instantly a figure of a

State intrigue ; a person of new consequence and one who might be the very centre of a political storm did she choose to make proper use of her information. Yet to whom she should disclose it and to what immediate end, she knew not at all.

As a matter of fact, the letter which the young officer now handed to the musician has been enshrined in history and many have read it. It was then, however, a document of precious and secret import and no other eyes but those of the King had been set upon it.

“My Precious Tenderly Loved Friend,—

“Words cannot express the pain gnawing at my heart. Whatever it is possible to do to refute the abominable newspaper accounts shall be done. That it should have come to this ! Our ideals shall be faithfully cultivated. I need hardly tell you this. Let us write often and much to one another. I ask it of you. We know each other and we will not give up the friendship that binds us. For the sake of your peace, I had to act as I have done.

“Do not misjudge me for a moment ; it would be the pangs of hell to me. Success to my most beloved friend. May his works flourish. A hearty greeting with my whole soul from

Your faithful

LUDWIG.”

So wrote the King of Bavaria to the composer of *Tristan* ; and because of this confidence the young soldier rode alone.

Josephine certainly saw him no more that day, though she dwelt with the goats on the mountain

side and forgot her "midday bread" until the outraged cook declared it was ruined. One event alone excited her, and that was the swift passage of a carriage just as the sun was setting and the lights were beginning to shine in the hamlets on the border of the lake. For Richard Wagner was in that carriage and a woman sat by his side . . . and, at last, he was fleeing from the country which had used him so ill.

Josephine was sorry to be the witness of this flight, for, surely, no person of consequence would now come to the Berg villa and she could not hope to see the young soldier again.

Nevertheless her dreams were of a black horse and a martial figure seated thereon—while in a tragic sleep she beheld a carriage driven madly down the mountain side and all the figures of the Valkyrie in close pursuit thereof.

CHAPTER XV

THE VENUSBERG IS DISCOVERED

THIS, to be sure, was only a dream and no "fairies" did really trouble; nor anybody else for some days to come.

Disappointed by the failure of the King to answer the very nice letter she had written him, Josephine wrote other letters; one to the great Herr von Bülow, the director of the opera; another to Herr Richter and a third to the Lord High Chancellor, the Herr Pfistermeister, whom everybody called old Pfist. Each of them answered her politely though none seemed very anxious for her immediate appearance at the Hof Theatre. As a matter of fact, these adventuring women were the devil, as Bülow observed—and little Lola Montez had already made enough trouble and spent enough of the King's money to satisfy any craving upon the part of the Court officials for further coquetry with the art of Vienna. Indeed the Opera was quite under a cloud for the moment—

and while some deplored the insult offered to Richard Wagner, many thought that even his music had been heard at too dear a price.

So there was this really gifted singer, Josephine, left to trill it to the goats and to flirt with any good looking young man who might ride by her villa on a horse, whatsoever the colour of the quadruped.

She was very dull, alternated between fits of violent passion and surrender to rustic delights—thought of going to Paris, to Madrid, or to London—and finally waited where she was, hoping that the young soldier would return, as return he did though not in the manner of her expectation.

It was a day of the later summer ; gold in the woods and a great moon to make a fairyland of the lake by night.

Little ships a many now sailed those still and silvered waters ; the mountains were alive with the voices of the children, happy in their release from the city and as nimble as the very goats, who adorned the modest crags of the Starnberg. Many a villa was now lighted by night, where formerly it had been shuttered and deserted ; and the carriages of the “ great ” (which really meant those honest burghers who ate the most and so laughed and grew fat) rolled through the hills—and their tinkling bells were the sweet music of the night.

Josephine was far too eclectic a mistress to desire .

the admiration of these fat men ; whom she had ever regarded with a witty contempt—and although she would admit that there was something in them, she had no alluring smiles to give them and could laugh aloud at their passionate posing. Her hope was in the young soldier of her dreams ; and when he returned, quite unexpectedly and at an improper hour, she had merely a warm welcome to offer him.

To be truthful about her, she was in bed at that moment and all her little household asleep. Soft music from afar was her lullaby, and the moonlight fell bewitchingly about the bed which harboured her pretty figure.

Lying thus, she became aware of some to-do upon the mountain road before her villa. A carriage passed swiftly, another followed it and another. The voices of many people disturbed the peace of the hill-side but not unpleasantly. She heard the music of a horn and then of a flute—while presently somebody with a wonderfully pure tenor voice began to sing the famous love song from *Tannhäuser* and the lilt was taken up jovially by the others.

Then the echoing sounds of this strange procession passed away in the distance . . . and Josephine lay back upon her pillows once more. She had not dared to get up and look out, fearing a party of tipsy roysterers and the peril of discovery

by them. But now she rather wished that she had dared it, and she was just rebuking herself, when she heard her own name cried lustily beneath her window; and recognising the soldier's voice, she leaped out of bed regardless of fashion or the conventions.

"Who is there?" she asked—the minx knowing perfectly well who it was.

"Do you not recognise me, signorina—it is Captain Helder, we met on the road the other day, you will remember?"

She laughed . . . taking good care that he should have a fair vision of a rounded white arm and a shapely shoulder as Nature had moulded them.

"Why do you call me 'signorina'—I am not an Italian, Herr Captain."

"Oh, but I thought all you ladies who sang at the opera house were Italians. Never mind, I will call you the beautiful Josephine instead. Is that better . . . and, oh my dear, what a very pretty pair of arms I see upon your window-sill. Are they yours by any chance?"

She withdrew her arms, taking good care, however, that he could still behold that heaving bosom which he might be disposed to desire—and standing thus for a moment, she hid herself presently in the shadows as a bashful maiden might be expected to do.

“Do you not think it is very bold of you to come to my villa at this time of night?” she asked.

The Captain Arnold von Helder did not think it rude at all.

“Since I come to carry you to a pleasant party it is not rude at all. Come down at once my dear, for here is the carriage I have ordered to take. . . .”

“Me—to a party—at this time of night. But don’t you see, I am not dressed!”

“Absolutely the best of reasons for making haste. You will need few clothes at the house to which we are going—and those you wear should be as flimsy as possible. I suggest you as you are—but perhaps . . .”

She really was almost tempted to flare up at this and to tell him what she thought of him in terms she knew well how to command. If she had not been quite in love with him, undoubtedly she would have done so . . . but as she really cared very little for appearances and was ahunger for his kisses, she quenched her flaming anger and treated the whole suggestion as a joke.

“You are an impertinent fellow, and really I ought to tell you to go to the devil . . . but since you probably have been drinking. . . .”

“Oh, come along, my dear, and do not make speeches. Here is the carriage waiting for you and we shall be late for the party. Don’t you under-

stand that it may depend upon what you do to-night whether the King ever hears you sing or sends you back to Vienna with a snub for your pains. Come along at once then and do not jeopardise your chances."

She argued no more but dressed swiftly and covering her shoulders with a cape of fur, she went out to meet him at the gate. A carriage waited, and in it was one she recognised as Gustave Florien, the *maitre-de-ballet* at the Hof Theatre. He knew her at once; and indeed, had been with her in the Royal opera at Vienna.

"Josephine Shefzky," he cried, "playing the shepherdess at the Starnberg—what, then, is the meaning of this? Truly, my dear, you will be a great acquisition to us to-night when—the—that is . . ." and he changed his tone abruptly fearing an indiscretion, "that is, you sing the music of the *Venusberg*, do you not, dear fraulein?"

"You know that I do, maître; were you not in Vienna when I sang it before the Emperor and the Herr Wagner himself conducted?"

"Of course, of course—I was thinking of that. And now you will sing it again—here in these beautiful woods. I told them so directly I heard you had come among us. A lucky thing for everybody . . . and a Venus after our heart's desire if you will permit me to say so."

Josephine permitted anybody to say anything if he did but tell her that she was beautiful. She was in a whirl of excitement and, what with the mystery of the promised performance, her desire for a rendezvous with the young captain and her utter inability to understand the meaning of the whole affair, she felt somehow that she had fallen among magicians and that these were really enchanted mountains. Thus, they went for some two miles, up and up towards the summit of the pass; and when they stopped it was an amphitheatre of the hills, grassy and cup-like and the very arena for an *alfresco* theatre.

An odd scene, indeed, and carefully prepared for the performance of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* now to be given.

An ancient schloss was to lend its great hall for the scene of the bards and their harping. The Venusberg was a very bower framed in the woods—a great tent sheltering the amorous goddess from the night winds and all the tokens of her frailties artistically emphasised. Couches were here and soft oriental carpets; a fountain played with coloured lights dancing amidst its spraying waters—perfumes of the East scented the air and lanterns were placed cunningly so as to be no embarrassment to diffident lovers. But with all this lavish *décor*, the odd thing was that there seemed no accommo-

dation for any kind of audience whatever.

“We play to amuse ourselves,” said the ballet master evasively—and then he told her that a room had been prepared for her within the Schloss and that she had better make haste and *get her clothes off*; “for,” he said, “I can assure you that Venus wears very little on these occasions and we expect such a true artiste as Josephine Shefzky to do real justice to her rôle.”

She did not demur. It mattered little to her whether Venus was or was not to be a reproach to the costumiers of Vienna or of Paris—and she realised moreover that this was an occasion of real import, while she guessed correctly that King Ludwig, that most eccentric of monarchs, had more than a little to do with it. Even if her amatory interest in the young Captain gave place to the excitement of appearing, as she might be about to do, before his Majesty himself . . . and so she hurried to her dressing room, where everything had been prepared for her—and soon she beheld in the glass a Venus whom no god could have resisted had he been a human god at all.

There never was an odder representation of a masterpiece than this playing of *Tannhäuser* in the hills on that glorious night of summer.

At one time all the woods would appear alive with nymphs and monks and hunters and ballet

girls ; then all would disappear as suddenly and profound silence reign. A superb orchestra played, now in the Schloss, again at the gate of the Venusberg . . . or was to be heard far away as it were in the very heart of the forest. When they sent for Josephine, it was to enthrone her in her bower, and then to withdraw as though the scene were sacred. But *Tannhäuser* came to her there, the handsome figure of a man, superbly clad in black velvet and with priceless jewels about his dress. For a little while he contemplated her with evident satisfaction—then stretched himself upon the couch and appeared to sleep as the part declared. Meanwhile the orchestra without was playing the stupendous music of the overture ; and when the final chords had crashed, the music of the Venusberg opened and Josephine suddenly remembered that she was there to sing. No sweeter, more beautiful voice surely had ever been heard in those verdant hills.

She was a great singer as all her world has so often told us.

That the man to whom she sang was the King, she had no doubt whatever.

She had seen his portrait many a time in Vienna and could not be mistaken. The firm profile, the brilliant eyes, the massive figure, all said "Ludwig"; and she knew it could be no other. Such a thought

inspired ; for surely no woman from the opera had ever played with a king before. And she was his Venus, the goddess of his amours and his debaucheries. Josephine wondered what would come after—and her heart fluttered at the possibilities. He was mad perchance . . . but even madmen may be entertaining lovers.

A willing Venus and a real king to woo her !

Unfortunately the wooing was done by deputy, for when his Majesty should have sung his famous song of love, a singer hidden by the foliage sang it for him and the real sovereign merely thumbed the strings of his lyre in time with him. No doubt that muddled brain did believe that those resounding harmonies were of its own creating and Ludwig had the true madman's gift for believing himself to be somebody else and absolutely living in the part. Indeed through all the ballet music ; when ravishing maidens and lovers with them, danced about Venus and her swain, he held the trembling Josephine in his arms and cuddled her as any ploughman might have cuddled a village maiden. Such passion almost frightened her ; it was so strange and in a sense rather violence than passion. But she had the sense to submit to it—and she sang with all the skill she possessed to the end of the strangest scene for which a great opera has ever been responsible.

Then followed, naturally, the sudden transition from the realms of Venus to the beautiful valley of the Wartburg; when the agonised knight appeals to the Virgin Mary and is thrust out into the cold world which he has come to desire ardently. In this tragic moment, the King absolutely flung his Venus from him and strode away as though the devil were at his heels. Poor Josephine, exhausted and breathless, lay for quite a long while upon her throne of tinsel and was more than a little astonished when nobody appeared to applaud her at the end of the scene, and the whole action seemed to move away into the distant woods.

Verily was she a Venus deserted—and haunting as was the distant piping of shepherds, the note of the huntsman's horn, and the dolorous chanting of the monks heard from afar, she would have much preferred a bottle of champagne and a few kind words from his Majesty. He, however, had followed the monks towards the hills . . . and presently there came to the Schloss news which was at once startling and ludicrous.

That eminent performer, his Majesty Ludwig, had suddenly forgotten all about *Tannhäuser* and his Venus; and jumping upon his horse, he had ridden away to Munich with all the speed he could command.

Here was a blow, to be sure, and one which should

have awakened loud laughter in the woodlands . . . but nobody dared to laugh fearing that the echo of his mockery might reach the King's ears to-morrow, and all joined willingly in declaring that the poor monarch was really tired and would carry on the affair upon some other occasion. So the company fell gladly upon the food and drink prepared for it ; imbibed much excellent hock and ate more varieties of sausage than the common cookery book has named. Nor did it forget the amatory side of the masquerade ; for there was far more kissing and cuddling than the Herr Wagner had stipulated for in his great opera ; and the pious of the valleys round about spoke of sighs and exclamations in the dark of the thickets which were enough to bring thunder from the mountains.

Josephine, herself, uttered none of these mystic cries ; nor was she very happy at the supper table.

Some of the singers, who really wished her at the devil because of her magnificent voice, told her that she had done very well, though they cleverly conveyed the insinuation that the King might have bolted because of her upper C's. One fat man beside her tried to squeeze her hand but merely succeeded in grasping a fork ; while the youth opposite who tried to find her feet with his own, kicked the fat man by mistake and provoked a

scene. All this was very much of the theatre and inappropriate to the dignity of a great prima donna. She determined to return to her villa and sent servants to find her carriage when the day was still young and the sun had not been over the mountain top for more than an hour.

Here, however, humiliation met her ; for, in the absence of the young Captain, nobody seemed to know anything about any carriage and most of the coachmen were too intoxicated to care whether the beautiful fraulein was driven to her home or had to walk there. So the pretty singer was left to rage and fume impotently . . . and when, quite an hour later, the young Captain Arnold returned, she told him what she thought of him in words that were bitter.

“ My dearest lady,” he protested, “ I have been with the King. What could I do then ? They have taken our carriage because some of them were too drunk to ride and here’s a pretty affair. You must either come on my saddle bow or stay where you are. Never have I seen such a drunken lot of pigs . . . but, there, they do not always have such opportunities. We must make the best of it and to-morrow I will tell the King all about it. He did nothing but talk of you while I was with him. Upon my honour he seems to be quite infatuated. . . .”

And so on, and so on.

Josephine did not know whether to believe him or not ; but she was pleased to be told that the King was infatuated and, there being obviously no carriage to take her, she consented at last to climb upon the young man's saddle and to permit him to put a strong arm about her while he carried her back to her villa.

Scandal says that he did not leave that pretty chalet on the banks of the lake until two days later.

But no reasonable person would believe this of the splendid Josephine.

CHAPTER XVI

JOSEPHINE BECOMES THE KING'S MISTRESS

TRUE or false, an amorous Josephine or one cold as ice, all this really did not matter.

What was of world import was the indisputable fact that within ten days of her adventure at the Venusberg, she was singing *Isolde* to Ludwig in the great theatre at Munich, and he was listening to her enraptured.

“This is the true *Isolde*,” he was reported to have said, “this woman is the Queen of lovers”; and so taken was he by her performance that he wrote a long letter to Richard Wagner applauding it and maintaining his opinion that no such music had been written since the world began. Herein probably he was right; but Munich said that he should have shared his pleasure with others . . . and when, night after night, he sat alone in the great theatre and listened selfishly to that divine exposition of passion and of tragedy, the city

merely figured out the cost and began to cry out upon poor Josephine as though she were responsible for such profligacy.

Was it her fault that she was a very great artiste? Could she order the King to open the doors and permit all the people to come and witness her triumph? She would have liked to do so . . . but as well might she have hoped to put the crown of Bavaria upon her snow-white brow. Ludwig would have none of it. He preferred to sit there and imagine that he was Tristan and that Isolde was alone with him on a ship. He made love to her without words. And what was more remarkable, he appointed her his "official mistress" after her fifth performance . . . and all the Court stood aghast until some of the men laughed aloud at an idea which so tickled their sense of humour.

"*Lucus e non lucendo*" one wit observed. Another spoke of Don Juan in a bathchair. This poor Josephine, who liked kisses so well! Whence would she get them now? Of course she would have to be faithful to him. Faithful to nothing, as the rumour went. She herself, was by no means displeased however. She had a fine apartment in Munich, carriages and horses and some really wonderful jewels. And was there not the young Captain Arnold—though, to be sure, some lying tongue declared that he came to her rooms disguised

as a bootmaker and properly carried a bag full of shoes whenever he entered a bedroom.

Those two discussed the situation in dark whispers when the lights were low . . . he to discover, if it were possible, whether the King had yet embraced her, she to find out what other people were saying.

“Last night he really kissed me,” she would say. “I thought that I really should have to make him behave himself after the second act; but just as I was getting anxious he walked out of the room and shut the door with a crash—an awful crash, my dear, which brought the guards into the corridor. I haven’t recovered from the shock of it yet.”

Captain Arnold was by no means discontented that it should be.

“You get a fine apartment,” he said, “and you have been a great artistic success here. What more do you want? Let him continue to call you his mistress if it pleases him. The people are glad enough to hear that he has any interest in women at all. If he makes love to you, he may make love to a wife presently and that is what everybody wants. So just continue, but for God’s sake never mention my name or I shall be ruined.”

She promised not to do so—being far too accomplished a woman to commit such an imprudence.

Secretly, she was piqued at her failure to attract the King physically and she determined to use all a woman's arts to do so. These she practised with the skill which Vienna had fostered and sometimes they appeared about to succeed; while upon other occasions, they left her in tears.

This impossible man. How he would ogle her, kiss her, hold her in his arms at one moment only to cast her out in the next. And they called her his "official mistress." Official truly! She might just as well have had the twin-faced Janus for her lover. Nevertheless she hoped ever saying: "One day I shall win him."

Such a hope appeared to be justified when a Royal command came to her, saying that she was to appear upon the following evening as Elsa in *Lohengrin* and that the representation was to be in the palace and not in the theatre. The King, then, would make her his operatic bride in a place where no other eye could behold them. Josephine hoped much from this and her heart beat high when she went to the palace. This was the opportunity and this the hour. She would not believe that it could fail her.

The scene was wonderfully prepared.

In the Winter Garden of the Palace, an artificial lake had been prepared. Elsa was to be drawn about the lake in a golden boat and real swans

were to be named among the players. She sang divinely, they said, and never had the King been more amorous. Indeed the tuneful March excited him above ordinary—"and now," said Josephine, "let them dare to say that I am not really his mistress."

Well might she have thought that their wedding would be consummated that night, but most unhappily her particular divinities did not approve and they played a scurvy trick upon her.

At the very moment of crisis, when the King's heart beat high and his wonderful eyes shone like coals of fire, the boat upset and both of them went headlong into the water.

Unhappy Josephine!

Did he behave tenderly toward her, cry "my poor child" or anything of that kind? Not a bit of it, but soused like an honest herring, he scrambled to the bank and roared—"drag that woman out."

"That woman"! It was the last straw.

A few weeks later our poor Josephine was informed that her appointment as "Court Singer" was terminated and that she must quit Munich.

She had sung her "swan song" beyond all doubt.

But she met Ludwig in after years and he was very civil to her as history records.

And one may say justly that if he had ever

known any stirring of passion within his chill veins, that beautiful singer Josephine Shefzky had been the instrument of it.

PART FOUR

CHAPTER XVII

OLGA IS AWAKENED

THE little postmistress, Olga, would have been hard put to it to tell you just how she learned to sing some of the music of *Tristan*; but learn it she did, and her song has passed into history and the riddle of a King's destiny has been read therein.

She was a very humble person, to be sure; so small in stature that many took her to be still a child even when she had known her twenty-first birthday—as fair as “the angels” dear to Pope Gregory and as impudent as the urchins who cried after Richard Wagner in the streets of Munich.

Moreover, and this is sad to tell, it is to be feared that she knew little about those moral laws of which her good priest spoke so earnestly—and that more than one brave fellow had come to the Schliersee to seek her favours and had enjoyed them without difficulty. “A very bad little lady,” the

neighbours said—"but a very good postmistress," as the younger men would avow.

After all, who are we to judge her? She lived in a dull village on the banks of a beautiful lake—and if she went down to the city of Munich once a year, that was the beginning and end of her joyous holiday. For the rest, she looked after the letters of the clods about her or joined the revellers in the village inn and listened to their stories of courts and kings with ears that tingled while her eyes expressed that wonder which such narrations inspired in the bosom of a dreamer.

Sometimes, however, there would be some little happening at the Schliersee—scabbards rattling and horses all caparisoned trotting on the great highroad. Princes would pass her door and beggars in their wake. Even strolling players were heard from time to time—and when some great singers from Vienna appeared one day and declared that they were riding into Munich to play a new opera by that wonderful maestro, Richard Wagner, then was she all eyes both for them and their music.

We shall pass by the licentious story that Olga heard some of the glorious song of Isolde in the seclusion of her bedroom or that a certain Tristan was publicly rebuked by a parish priest for his outrageous flirtations with her in the forest.

These must have been but the slanders of the envious; and the only sure fact which remains is the sweetness of her song and its ultimate influence upon the destiny of a King . . . that mad King of Bavaria, who yet permitted the world to hear the supreme masterpieces of a genius, whom none has surpassed.

Naturally, our fragile little Olga knew nothing of all this as she sorted her letters in the puny post office or sang to a giant trooper on the bank of the glorious lake. Her quick ear had mastered some of the passages of *Tristan* quite successfully; and if there were other passages which Richard Wagner would not have recognised, what did her trooper care about that when he had her in his arms and could interrupt her song by kisses. True, he was not always the same "trooper" and that is a sad admission—but this is merely to say that there were gay ladies in the world before our little Olga was born—and, no doubt, there have been others since her time. And, after all, how small she was—a very doll for men to play with.

Sometimes it would happen that Olga did not sing to a trooper, but to herself.

She would see that all her morning letters—and they were few enough—were delivered to the peasants, who mostly could not read them; and then, locking the door of the post-house, she would

go down to the lakeside and tune a pretty throat as one William Shakespeare had tuned his before her. When she was tired of this, she often fell asleep to dream of soldiers in breast-plates of gold, or of cavaliers, who desired to carry her to distant castles and there to set her on a throne. It was from such a sleep that a handsome young man awakened her one day and asked her to sing the music of *Isolde* to him . . . a silly thing to ask of a pretty girl, who was only half awake and whose hair was all tousled.

Olga sat up with a start and looked at the young man critically.

He was about twenty years of age, she thought, and his dress was good if not magnificent. She perceived that he had the most remarkable blue eyes and a way of looking into her own which made her tremble. Moreover, there was a great emerald on the fourth finger of his left hand and it seemed to say that he must be very rich. Altogether she found him most desirable—and so, having smoothed her hair with a very small hand, she smiled upon the youth and deigned to reply :

“ Oh, mein lieber Herr, but who told you that I could sing ? ”

He sat down beside her and began to assist her in the hair dressing process. His hand was large and could hold both of hers in its firm grasp

—so that finally they sat thus, one of his paws upon her neck and the other imprisoning her a little ardently.

“The swans told me while I was rowing on the lake. ‘Isolde lives up yonder,’ they say, ‘and she is waiting for her Tristan.’ I came at once—‘the king will never look for us in the woods’ I said—so you see I was prudent, my beloved, and here I am, waiting eagerly for you to open your pretty lips.”

Olga had heard the story of Tristan, so when he spoke of “the king” she knew what he meant and could laugh coquettishly at such mischief.

“But suppose,” she urged, “suppose I do not think it right to sing to anybody except the King, my lover—what would you say to that?”

The young man laughed in his turn.

“I should say that the King was an old fool to let so pretty a bird out of the cage and that she was a young fool if she did not take advantage of her liberty. She is going to do so, however, because I ask her. I see that plainly enough and I am waiting for her to begin.”

He said this as one accustomed to authority and his tone became suddenly so commanding that Olga began to be just a little afraid of him. Evidently he was some great noble, for whom, perhaps, a carriage and servants waited in the

hills. This thought did not help her to do her best; but she sang quite prettily none the less and the youth joined in with gusto—such a duet as might have moved mountaineers to rhapsodies and musicians to mirth. When it was ended, the young man kissed his Isolde on the lips—and then taking the emerald ring from his finger, he slipped it on one of hers and was gone from her sight even while she was gazing enraptured upon a gift so magnificent.

Truly as one in a dream, she went back to her little post-house. All the magic of the Wagnerian myth seemed to have contrived that scene and its mysteries. Olga thought once more of palaces and princes . . . yet when she looked at her little white bed, she could have wished that this particular prince had not been in such a hurry to go on his way; and she could not but fall to wondering if she would ever see him again.

Meanwhile, there was the ring and of that she was almost afraid.

The villagers would never believe her story and the dreaded police might even think that she had stolen it.

Olga, indeed, was much alarmed by so wonderful a present; and she hid it away from all eyes, hoping that her cavalier would return to-morrow and ask it of her.

CHAPTER XVIII

NEWS OF THE KING

THE cavalier did not return to the Schliersee next day—but in his stead, and many days after, there came great news.

A horseman riding to the post-house for the letters of the great Duke Max of Bavaria and for those of his wife, the Duchess Ludovica—Olga's neighbours on the borders of the lake—declared that the young King, Ludwig, had at length determined to marry and that his choice had fallen upon his cousin, the Duchess Sophie Charlotte, the Grand Duke's daughter. Such news went round the little village like a flame of fire and for days after that simple people could talk of nothing else.

Their young King to marry!

Why, had not everybody said that he hated women and would make a better monk than lover! Already, he had refused the pretty daughter of the Empress of Russia and had sworn to his beloved friend, Richard Wagner, that he would

never take a wife. "A silly oath," said the wise, "for who is to suppose that a handsome young man will long remain indifferent to the charms of pretty women—and why should this young man differ from the others?"

Clearly King Ludwig had not differed.

"There was a ball at the Museum two nights gone," said the horseman from Munich, "and our fine King followed his beautiful cousin like a dog follows his mistress. Yesterday, he rode up to the Castle here and had a talk with the Duchess who will be his mother-in-law. Now it's all arranged, they say, and published in the newspapers. You will have to put on your dancing shoes, my dear, and make yourself a pretty frock. There'll be some fine doings on the lakeside before the summer is over and a good deal less wine in Bavaria, believe me. It's the best thing that's happened to our country since we sent Richard Wagner packing and began to keep our money in our own pockets."

Olga did not agree with this, for the Maestro was one among her many heroes, and she had never forgotten a day when he had spoken to her by the lakeside and she had wondered at his gracious kindness and the sweetness of his manner toward so humble an admirer. It was no time for disputation, however, so great was the news . . .

and by and by, she went from house to house, proud in her possession of such exciting tidings.

Many were the exclamations of surprise and pleasure which attended her pilgrimage, but there were a few wise ones among the peasants who shook their heads doubtingly, for they had heard things about the Duchess Sophie and they wondered if, after all, the King had made so wise a choice.

“A regular little dare-devil, so they tell me. She thrashes her grooms and there isn't a woman servant in the Castle who hasn't got a mark on her. Pity the King can't see her when maid is doing her hair. Why, she's half-killed the poor child more than once and well I know it. . . .”

Olga had never seen the King to her knowledge, but she knew these stories were true and she was very sorry for him.

Naturally, she depicted him as a great cavalier in more or less shining armour; and she thought of that other mysterious knight who had met her by the lakeside and made her sing so ridiculously to him.

All this atmosphere of myth and fable was, indeed congenial to the simple peasants of the Bavarian highlands, and their own King had made it very real to them. His nocturnal rides, his lantern-lit sleighs gliding mysteriously over the unriven snows of the higher solitudes—his masquer-

ades and rustic carnivals, they all seemed to carry the people back to the mediæval age, although it was the year 1864 and railways and the telegraph had been known in Bavaria for twenty years and more. Olga, however, lived in the world of the Cid rather than in that of a modern Germany. She would not have been a whit surprised if St. George himself had ridden up to the village church and laid a sword upon its altar.

So it was natural that the Prince's love affair should bring her thoughts back to her own. Weeks had passed now since the day of her singing; and often had she roamed the woods wistfully, longing for a flash of the silver armour in the sunlight or for the vision of that magnificent cavalier who had held her in such strong arms and caressed her at the same time so gently. He had not come, however, and again and again had she returned to the dull post-house to hear her aged mother's chatter about the forthcoming wedding at the Castle or to read a news-sheet to her doddering father.

Clearly, for her, romance had begun and ended with one glorious hour of mystery—and she must take a new lover from the clods of the village for whom she had such a contempt. So, she said, that very night, then the long delayed message came to her . . . and she was just wondering if she should send a message to an old flame, Mark,

the woodlander's son, when someone knocked at her cottage door and running out into the street, she perceived the lights of a carriage, halted some hundred yards away and heard a strange voice asking her if she were the Fraulein Olga Herst. Of course, she answered that she was, though her heart beat fast when she uttered the words; and her excitement was no less when the messenger bade her come with him, "for, Fraulein," said he, "you are wanted by the Herr Obermeister at the Castle, and must come immediately."

Now, Olga was a shrewd little girl and she did not really believe that any official business could arise at such an hour. Indeed, she guessed from the first that her mysterious cavalier had a hand in the business—and she perceived how clever he was to give her so good an excuse to leave her home at that time of night. So she ran indoors to tell her father curtly that she was wanted at the Castle . . . and then with a flimsy cloak about her shoulders, she rejoined the aged messenger and entered the carriage with him. Not a word did that "ancient" speak voluntarily; nor would he answer her excited questions by anything more than a monosyllable. "He was a servant at the Castle," she thought, "and evidently he had his instructions" and they dictated silence.

The drive was a brief one and it carried them to

the shores of the lake; where a fine yacht lay anchored in the moonlight. To this a small boat, rowed by two youths in the green habits of the old-time foresters, carried Olga speedily; and no sooner had she climbed aboard the strange ship than she saw her cavalier, a superb figure of a man, in a suit of purple velvet and a cap all bejewelled and glittering. What, however, was more odd was the manner of his greeting, for that seemed cold almost to the point of annoyance, and having bidden her enter the cabin of the yacht, he took the helm at once and the boat put out toward the centre of the lake; while unseen singers lifted a haunting chantey—and the soft music of fiddles was heard almost as a dulcet harmony from afar.

There was a great coloured lantern in the cabin, and a divan, spread with fine tapestries of silk and having before it a low table whereon stood flagons of wine and a cup of silver.

As far as she could see them in the aureole of the fantastic lamp, Olga perceived that the pictures were not such as her parish priest would have chosen; while the very air of the place was redolent of incense or of the odours of Oriental perfumes.

Olga thought she understood the meaning of all this; and she began to forgive the apparent coldness of her lover.

“He does not wish the crew to know about us,” she thought—and if the guess were incorrect, at least it reassured her.

Why should she be afraid of any man? She certainly was not afraid of this bejewelled singer, who could desire nothing of her but her favours. And about those there could be little doubt. She was in love with her cavalier and would make no bones at all about confessing as much.

In the meantime, the master of the ship certainly betrayed no lover's haste. Half-an-hour passed and still Olga was alone in the cabin, all curled up on the divan and almost trembling with expectancy. When, at last, she heard a step on the ladder without, she started violently, and when her Tristan entered, he found her with flushed face and eyes that shone like jewels. Nor did he, even then, take her “passionately” into his arms as the lovers of the book were wont to do. In truth, he began to talk quite strangely and neither kiss nor caress punctuated that dull narrative.

“So Isolde goes at length to marry the King,” he said—“and thus our dreams must end in the ashes of a hope.”

Olga had not the slightest intention of marrying any King; but she thought that it was hardly the moment to say so.

“You want me to be play-acting again,” she

exclaimed with plebeian candour, "you know I can't really sing at all and that I don't want to. Why cannot we talk about other things. . . . I'm sure it would be nice to be natural for once."

To her surprise, the young man was not at all angry with her. Far from it, for he broke into a hearty laugh; and dropping on the divan by her side, he took her into his great arms and almost devoured her with kisses.

"Quite right, my little Isolde," he said, "and well spoken. Isolde does not go to her King in clothes like these and we must have others. Come, now, let us see how the Princess of Ireland looks in robes that befit her" . . . and clapping his hands, he summoned to the room a young woman who had been waiting and bade her dress his princess.

"There must be jewels in your hair when we drink the love potion," he said, "jewels and ornaments of gold. Come, my Princess, and let us see you as you really are—for assuredly, some musician has bewitched you—and this is not the Isolde of my vision."

Olga realised that it was all in "the play" and, laughing like the child she was, she submitted to the masquerade.

Perhaps she ought to have made some objection to the presence of her cavalier at such a delicate business

as that of changing her simple robes for the showy garments the Hof Theatre had sent her—but Tristan made no fuss about the business, unlacing her with real merriment and showing himself to be a shrewd judge of how this “thing” should be worn and which way “the other” should lie. The dress itself proved to be a flowing gown of blue with much silver lace upon it; while the head-dress was ablaze with jewels which some merchant in glass had supplied upon an estimate which was modest. Olga, however, might well have thought they were real; and her one regret was the absence of a looking glass in which she might have admired her beauty thus adorned.

Happily, Tristan spoke for her, and he seemed to find her altogether ravishing.

“By the stars,” cried he, “but such a Princess never trod a ship’s deck before. I need no philtre to make love to you, my fairest—yet wine will bring colour to your cheeks and that we must drink”—and again he clapped his hands and a steward entered the cabin humbly and filled a great beaker with the golden hock. This the young man raised as he pledged “the King’s wanton, who knows not how to love me”—not an accurate description of the little postmistress, though her virtue was nothing to boast about. Yet she was afraid to answer so great a person; and she

exclaimed a little vulgarly that the King would have to wait a long while before she would be anything to him—a rejoinder which amused her eccentric lover immensely, though she did not know why.

“ You are really wonderful, my little Olga . . . and I am now going to look into your eyes and to discover if the potion has worked. We are lovers, you and I, and nothing but death can separate us. Death, however, will come, dark and menacing and clad in robes of the blackest night—and he who would cheat Death will arrive to find us locked in each other’s arms and to know that he is too late and that we have passed into that Heaven which awaits the faithful and where no man may do us harm. Come then, my beloved, for I would look into your heart and read what is written thereon.”

He knelt beside her and pressing her close, he looked deep into the blue eyes of one who was by no means disposed to avert them from the gaze of such a lover.

Olga, it may be, was half entranced, half fearful. She believed that her “Tristan” was some noble with a great love for the theatre and a zest for the masquerade, which led him naturally into these extravagances. He would make her his mistress for a while and then discard her, as nobles

always did—but, meanwhile, she was honestly in love with him and she was sure that he would treat her generously. So she replied to his look with such a passionate gaze that he fell immediately to kissing her almost with ferocity . . . and in that engaging occupation quite forgot that there was such a person as the legendary King Mark or that death was the ultimate penalty of Tristan's love for his Isolde. Indeed, such was his ardour that the dawn found them still in each other's arms and Heaven knows how long their amours might have endured if there had not come a sudden outcry from the deck above and quite an unmistakable intimation that something had happened to the good ship which carried them.

“The fools—they have run us ashore,” exclaimed this now matter-of-fact Tristan.

He had ceased instantly to be the lover . . . and was, as ever, as good a sailor as any on the Schliersee. Up on the deck, he perceived that the yacht, enveloped by the haze of dawn, had gone ashore on a spot of land within half-a-mile of that very Castle in which the Duchess Sophie resided. Nothing could have annoyed the young man more. He cursed and swore as no knight should have done—and finally getting into a small boat which had put out hurriedly from the shore, he was rowed away without one further word to the little mistress,

who but five minutes before had been sighing in his arms.

Thus it befell that, very much later in the day, Olga returned to the post-house in a beautiful robe of blue and silver, hidden only by an ancient cloak which went ill with raiment at once so gorgeous and so theatrical. To an angry mother, she said only that she had been compelled to stop away from home that night, but when an outraged father lifted a stout stick menacingly—"Who have you been with—tell me his name?" then she answered boldly, "I have been with the King"—and the stick fell from the old man's limp fingers and all the colour left his angry face.

She knew her lover's name now—this shrewd little postmistress.

Had not the man who came from the shore in the small boat, been indiscreet enough to say: "there has been some anxiety at the Castle about *your Majesty*." And what other "Majesty" could there be at the Schliersee, but their own King Ludwig, whom all the people loved!

CHAPTER XIX

TAKING THE WATERS

THERE came presents to the post-house, but no King.

Richard Wagner, framed in gold and uncut amethysts henceforth, looked at our little postmistress from the mantel of her bedroom. She wore bangles of gold with turquoise inset upon her shapely arms, and another ring, this time with a ruby inset, decorated those minute fingers which the Royal hand had squeezed so unsparingly. These were the material rewards of Olga's might of love . . . but the human recompense was not forthcoming. She waited; but she did not sigh. The times were far too exciting for that.

The King was about to be married. Long live the King.

In the homes of loyal Bavaria, you heard talk of little else.

Newspapers appeared with horrible woodcuts which pretended to be portraits of the Royal lovers. Gossip of the happy pair spoke of billings

and cooings which promised an earthly paradise when a bishop had finished his blessings. There were balls and fêtes and carnivals—performances of Wagner, of Weber and of Mozart at the opera . . . gardens of flowers within the palace and the soft cadence of the love birds in the trees. Everything was there, indeed, except the truth. And that, perhaps, the King and his fiancée only knew—unless it were the little postmistress, who had the gossip from the Duchess Sophie's own waiting maid, Olga's cousin, Gretchen, who had a small ear for a keyhole but used it diligently.

“Such goings on,” this agitated maid would say in a whisper that was virginal, “if the King only knew, my dear. She hates him—I know she does. And her tempers—Jesus, Mary, was there ever such a she-devil heard of before? Last night she threw a lamp at me and it was only God's mercy that the Castle was not set on fire. The chaplain's had his ears boxed because he preached too long last Sunday and there isn't one of her grooms who hasn't been horsewhipped. Happy couple indeed! I'd like to hear 'em when she wakes up in the morning.”

Olga, be sure, was all ears for this.

She was not one of those vain little fools, who believe that because they have been a great man's plaything for an hour, he will subsequently marry

them and they will live happily ever afterwards. She knew that she could never be anything to Ludwig but the humblest of his mistresses—nevertheless his marriage must be a great blow to her hopes and possibly her own romance would perish with it. Therefore, it behoved her to stop the whole thing if she could. Amazing little postmistress to think that she could interfere in the affairs of a kingdom and control the destinies of its King! Yet she did do so, as history has told us.

Ludwig was at his villa on the banks of the Starnberger See at that time, and no more devoted lover was to be found in Bavaria.

Often his yacht "Tristan" carried him to the house of his beloved, where he would read to her or they would play the music of Richard Wagner together. Every morning he rode across to Possenhofen with an enormous bunch of roses on his saddle bow . . . and if she did not send him that same day a gushing letter of thanks, he suspected her fidelity. In her turn, the young Duchess suffered without complaint, though bored to the point of distraction.

These readings, this chatter of art, this tinkering music, how she hated it all. Her real lover was a soldier, who talked neither of Wagner nor of Schiller; but had fine ripe kisses to be gathered and arms which could hold one in a grip of iron.

Sophie hardly dared to see him now—though monstrous tales were told of a man climbing a rope to her window and of shadows upon a naughty blind. Ludwig did not hear the stories; but he suspected Sophie. Thus are men often wiser than their knowledge.

Things were thus going, happily in the public estimation, but sorrowfully in the King's heart, when our little postmistress heard that her Royal lover had suddenly gone to Paris and would be away for some weeks.

She did not receive any letter from him, but in lieu of that there came an official notification which was significant.

She was ordered to leave the Schliersee and to go to the post-house of the Starnberger See.

“What!” she asked, quite trembling with excitement, “what can this mean but that the King wishes me to be near him—wishes it even upon the eve of his marriage! Was a more meaning compliment ever paid to a mistress!”

“She will be his wife, but I shall be the one he really loves,” Olga told herself—and that thought sent hot blood to her cheeks and lent lustre to her eyes.

Whether this were or were not the King's intention, no man has been able truly to say.

He was not a lover of women in any true sense;

and the little postmistress was, it may be, one of the very few who ever enjoyed his kisses.

She also was the one who stood between him and his pretty cousin at the fateful moment ; of that it is not possible to doubt.

As affairs stood, the King was to be married in the month of August.

Everything was prepared for a splendid ceremony—dresses made, gorgeous uniforms braided in gold and silver, invitations sent to all the Royal houses, regiments rehearsed, bands tuned, court functionaries half killed by their labours. Not a word of any hitch for the public ear ; no abatement of the billings, nor mute upon the cooing. And Ludwig was back from Paris now ; and once more he rode upon the banks of the beautiful Starnberger and, riding, he met his little postmistress and started as though he had seen a ghost.

“ You, my little friend, you here at Possenhofen ? But are you not of the Schliersee—what then are you doing on the Starnberger ? ”

He paused in thought, and then, while she was still trying to tell him how it was, he seemed to recollect.

“ Yes, yes, I remember something about it ; I sent for you, did I not ? A very wise thing to do, my little Olga, for now you can tell me all the news. Certainly, I was right to bring you here.

There is much that a postmistress should know which other people do not know. Let us talk awhile, then, and you shall enlighten me."

He swung off his horse and leading her into the wood amid the pines, they sat at length upon a fallen trunk while the good horse browsed almost at their feet.

It had been a great shock to Olga that Ludwig should receive her so coldly—no kisses passing, no memory of their night of love—but she was, none the less, with the King by her side and all the opportunity hers, and in her shrewd little brain the determination to fight her own battle with all a woman's wit and all her determination. So her manner was alert and almost abrupt—and she spoke with a freedom which only that which had passed between them could excuse.

"Oh, yes," she said, brazenly, "I've lots of news though it does not make me very happy . . . you see, my cousin Gretchen is maid to your Duchess and a cruel time she has. You think you're marrying an angel, don't you? but I know you're mistaken. Why don't you go to Possenhofen one morning early and see for yourself. You'd have a pretty surprise, I know. Of course, it's wrong of me to say all this, and I don't suppose you'll ever speak to me again. But I would say it if you sent me to prison on the spot. Haven't I the right to

—oh, your Majesty, didn't you give me the right that night . . . ?”

She burst into tears, quite opportunely and with a sense of tragedy which marked the true actress. Ludwig, however, greatly disliked to see a woman weeping, and although he stroked her hand as he should have done, and said, “there, there, my pretty child”—or something of that kind, he was really thinking of what she had told him of his Duchess and of its meaning.

Did she know of an intrigue between Sophie and another, then? And if not that, what did she mean?

“You have every right to tell me,” he admitted sympathetically, “to-morrow morning I will ride to Possenhofen . . . and little Olga, my dear, I shall not forget the service you have rendered me. So dry up your tears and wait a little while to hear from me. Who knows that we may not go sailing together again as once we did . . . a memory that lives in my heart and will never be blotted out.”

It was natural for the emotional Ludwig thus to strike the poetic note, though, possibly, he did not mean a word of it.

Anyway, he greatly comforted his little post-mistress and left her smiling through her pretty tears. And faithful to his promise, he did ride to his Duchess's castle next morning, a bouquet of roses

in his hand and trouble in his poetic heart. Here was his angel, just waked from her angelic sleep, he thought ; here his love dream, his wife, his all.

Certainly she was there, as her shrieking and her oaths bore witness.

Unhappily, that unfortunate Ludwig had chanced to call just when the angel Sophie was having a few words with Gretchen, her maid.

Out came the poor serving girl from that stately bedroom, her skirts flying, her hair all tousled, her eyes speaking of terror.

And after her there followed the whole contents of a washing basin, a baptism of soapy water, which doused her astonished sovereign and left him soused from head to foot.

Who shall wonder if within three days, Bavaria heard that the marriage was off and that Duke Max and his daughter had left for Russia.

Certainly little Olga was not surprised . . . though, alas, she was never to see her knightly lover again.

They sent her to Nuremberg and the order for her to go was peremptory. Mistress of the post she might be, but not mistress of the King.

So she married a fat burgomaster, by whom she had many children, and nothing remained of all her romance but a ruby ring upon her finger and a golden bangle upon her arm.

PART FIVE

CHAPTER XX

SIEGFRIED IS CHRISTENED

PUBLIC opinion had driven Wagner from Munich; but it could not deprive him of the mad king's friendship.

Some there are who hold that this uncouth banishment contributed not a little to that final calamity, which led to the tragedy of the Schloss Berg. Ludwig mourned the friend and genius of whom the Court schemers had robbed him. Nor did he miss any opportunity of visiting Herr Wagner at Treibschen where the Master had now a beautiful villa and where he married Liszt's daughter, Madame Hans von Bülow in the year 1870.

No doubt this wedding was a sad affair for Ludwig, who had steadily refused to recognise the liaison between Wagner and von Bülow's wife and was no more pleased by the marriage. Yet he travelled incognito to Treibschen and was present a year later at the Christening of Wagner's son

Siegfried, when a beautiful fête was given in the gardens and upon the lake, and many quaint conceits delighted a monarch who had already proved himself a master of pageantry.

Richard Wagner, of course, very well understood the King's whims and made every effort to humour them. In an ecstasy of paternal felicity, he sat down and composed a cradle song and not one *leit-motiv*, but four which ultimately he wove into the fourth act of *Siegfried*. The orchestra which played these pieces was hidden cunningly in a bower of the garden and waited until Madame Wagner's appearance to greet her with those divine harmonies which all the world of music has learned since to know and to applaud. There were lanterns amid the trees at night and boats to harbour the philanderers who cared not for any port save that of a lover's arms. And there gathered many of the Master's well-beloved friends, and all, perhaps, thought how happy a thing it would be if they could have the King with them upon a night so propitious.

Herein, they were not to be disappointed, though the manner of Ludwig's coming was not anticipated. He had travelled incognito from Munich to Lucerne and there had chartered a little steamer which carried him as "the Count of Starnberg" to Wagner's garden. Hans Richter was the first to recognise him as he strode up the

path in his great black cloak—but the greeting was hardly exchanged when Richard Wagner himself heard the well known voice and ran to embrace his patron as a father may run to embrace a son.

“Your Majesty,” he cried, “we were waiting but for this. Now, indeed, shall this be the happiest day of our lives.”

The King said that he hoped so and then desired to see the little Siegfried. The valet Mayr brought from the boat the gold cup that had been carried from Munich as a gift and a great gold chain for the proud mother. There were libations of wine and music anon—and then, taking the Master aside, Ludwig asked him of his plans and spoke once more of that great theatre they would have built together but for the parsimony of his councillors and the displeasure of his people.

“I owe ten million marks,” he said a little sadly, “and am no more able to build you a theatre than is my own gardener. The Chancellor still says that you have ruined me and his friends say that I am mad. Yet it would have been a noble thing to do . . . and who knows that someday our dream may not come true. We can but wait, my dear friend, and trust to our destiny.”

Wagner had not expected any other message; but none the less his heart sank at the words.

“In any other country, yes, I would have expected it,” he said, “but in your own city, among the people we have sought to know. How little can they realise the honour that would come to them. We, ourselves, are forbidden to think of money when we speak of our art—for the art that is of money has ceased to be itself. But this Temple would rise high above all the temples of the world and all the nations would come to visit it. Munich, then, would be the first of all the cities of Europe—it would be your city, Majesty, and there would be no throne so glorious.”

The flattery pleased a monarch to whom flattery was life.

“It would be so surely,” he said, “and yet, how shall we teach them? A councillor, looking into his money bags, has no ears for the song of a Tristan, and Meistersingers cannot make themselves heard when the *gulden* rattle. Munich to-day remembers only that I am in debt and that in the long run it will have to pay. If, friend, we laid the foundations of your Temple to-morrow, it would dig them up the day after. The trumpets of finance would bring down your walls even as those of Jericho. And we, the builders, might perish in the dust—who knows!”

The Master understood a mood such as this too well to argue with it. To-morrow or to-morrow or

to-morrow the King might come to him with the money in his train. To-night he must be humoured. Moreover, the proper vanity of the man told him that kings were less to him than formerly. Would not his own countrymen build the theatre of his dreams ?

“ You shall risk nothing for me, Majesty,” he said warmly, “ my affection thinks first of your welfare and my own follows. These men are afflicted by a profound ignorance and against that reason cannot prevail. Let us forget Munich and think rather of Germany. Will not our own countrymen support an enterprise which would bring them so much honour ? At least, I will put the question to them . . . when *The Ring* is finished, for then I shall have a message more wonderful than any I have yet delivered.”

He went on to speak, as Hans Richter has told us, of his labour upon that surpassing masterpiece . . . which he had abandoned in the year 1857 just when he was in the middle of the second act of *Siegfried*, but the composition of which he had now resumed. Now he had progressed as far as the first act of *Götterdämmerung*, though he believed he would need another two years to finish the whole to his satisfaction. Thus, there would be every opportunity to complete his Temple . . . if the million francs he sought were forthcoming.

Alas, that so many great men ignored their responsibilities in this way, and that, at the moment, there was not a single mark in the treasury of this particular fund.

Ludwig heard him patiently . . . but anon, his passion for seclusion asserted itself, and when Wagner went away from him for a spell to give directions to his accomplished orchestra, the King walked through the pretty gardens and found himself ultimately in the woods beyond them.

Here were noble pines and splashes of soft moonlight upon the sward; an odour of flowers and a murmur of falling waters. Mounting the hillside, he could see the gardens of the village traced as it were upon a map of stars; and beyond them was the still water of the great lake, a sheet of bronze which phantasy had burnished.

Ludwig walked with steps that made powdered gold of the blooms amid the herbage and were a great sound in that glade of shadows and of silence. He was alone, at last, and standing there, it pleased his fancy to believe that he was really the lord of wood and mountain, and that, if he did but raise his staff, the villa and all within it would turn to ashes as in the legend of the Holy Grail which his friend, Richard, had sent to him. This was a madman's dream and for a while very real. Then, ironically, he reflected that this Master of

the Stars could not raise a million francs and that the greatest genius of the age must beg of him in vain. A puppet king truly—to be thus the mock of chancellors and the byword of rich Jews. And he was impotent among them—of no more account than his own valet, Mayr.

Thus was his mood when he met the gipsy girl, and heard her singing in the glade. Though he could not see her face distinctly, the moonlight showed him the grace of her figure and gestures . . . and, to his wonder, he discovered that she was singing the music of the Venusberg from the opera *Tannhäuser* and that he had heard many a voice less pleasing in his own Hof Theatre at Munich. Instantly he stood quite still and waited for the singer to finish. Was she, in her turn, mourning the lost love of some passionate youth, who had turned to Rome with a pilgrim's staff in his hand? If it were so, her Tannhäuser must have been a foolish fellow, the King thought—and, perhaps, with some idea of making good the deficiency, or, at the worst, of satisfying the curiosity, he now stepped forward and declared himself.

“Well sung, my pretty maiden. Who taught you to do that?”

The gipsy was evidently startled by this sudden interruption . . . but she recovered her self-possession and, in lieu of retreating, she advanced

a few steps and looked Ludwig full in the face. Then she laughed very pleasantly and deigned to answer him.

“The great man down there taught me,” she said—and she indicated the villa which the King had just left.

“What! You know Herr Wagner! You are one of his pupils!”

“I am one of his pupils, but he does not know me. He has never seen my face and perhaps he never will. . . .”

“But you say that he taught you!”

“I listen to his music and so I learn. Hush, now, that is the Bride’s song in his *Lobengrin* and I can sing it for you though I am not a bride.”

Ludwig laughed.

“It should be easy to alter all that, my child. What does your lover say about it . . . you have a lover, of course?”

She shrugged her shoulders defiantly. A confession of eclecticism would not please this handsome man, she thought . . . and certainly, he had found favour in her eyes.

“As to my lovers,” she rejoined, “they are my own affair . . . while I have them. But if one cannot sing as a bride unless” . . . and she laughed roguishly as one who told him that, of marriage contracts, she really thought but little.

“I see,” Ludwig continued with a sudden instinct of a possible amour—to which he was addicted despite the fables history had written of him—“you are wise enough not to ask after the roses of yesterday, knowing that the thorns too often remain.”

She cared nothing for thorns, this little gipsy.

“I wear the roses in my heart,” she observed sentimentally . . . and then with a laugh as a new thought flashed upon her, she exclaimed: “but why do you ask, mein Herr; you do not come here to bring me roses; you come to avoid your friends down there, because you are jealous of the affection the Master shows them. Am I not right? You wished to be alone and you found me. How unhappy, then, you should be!”

There was both wisdom and the kitchen in this . . . and the King could hardly avoid the platitude which assured her that he was far from unhappy and would not be anywhere else for a fortune.

“A prophetess and a beautiful one,” he rejoined, “what more to be desired. . . . Tell me your name, child, for I see that we are about to be friends.”

“My name is Nadje.”

“And your home——?”

“Is there between the trees. To-morrow it may be twenty miles away!”

She indicated three caravans, drawn up in a

clearing of the wood and lighted by lanterns at their doors. Horses browsed by them and there were mangy dogs on guard. Clearly this dark-skinned maiden was not alone as Ludwig desired that she should be.

“ I have lived in many places but never in a caravan,” he observed, “ sometimes I envy those who do.”

“ But you are rich and famous, perhaps. Why should you envy poor people like us ? ”

“ What made you think I am rich ? ”

“ Oh, I hope that you are, because if you are rich, you will send me to Zurich to study and one day, perhaps, I shall sing the Herr Wagner’s music and you will listen to me.”

He smiled . . . this amorous Ludwig.

“ Let us walk a little while and talk of it,” he said . . . and he led her away from the undesired caravan to a silent place of the woods where none could overhear them. There he flung himself upon the grass and the girl squatted beside him. It was not often that she had a *tête-à-tête* with a man who had a ruby ring upon his finger and a great gold chain across his breast. A pity, she thought, if such an interview did not reward her.

“ So you think I am a rich man, Nadje ! What else do you know about me ? ”

“ Then you are rich. . . . I wish that I could see

the lines of your hand. I could tell you so much . . . you know, I am very clever at telling people things, even the Herr Wagner knows that. A year ago, I told him that he would go back to his own Germany and build a great Temple there. I do not know where the town is, but there are woods all about it, and it is not far from the city of Nurenberg. He should go there soon—he will live and he will die there ; but first of all the people will pay him great honour and the King will come and bring him money.”

“ The King—what king is that ? ”

She looked at him questioningly. Surely he, a friend of the Herr Wagner, knew !

“ Why, the King of Bavaria, of course. He is the great lover of music, who saved the Master when he was poor and without friends. Some said that he would be down there to-night—but how should one expect him to come, so long a journey for so little a thing.”

Ludwig smiled.

“ And yet, I am told, it is a very fine baby, Nadje.”

“ I do not know anything of babies. . . . I do not want to know *yet*. . . .”

“ And you have never seen the King ? ”

“ Never, or how should I forget him ? ”

“ If you went to Munich to study and not to

Zurich—which is a poor place, my dear—you would see him, wouldn't you? Perhaps you would sing before him in the theatre!"

"Ah!" she cried, and her eyes were bright at the thought.

"Then you would like to go . . . with me?"

"I would go with you anywhere."

"But you know nothing about me; you do not even know my name."

"I will not ask it . . . you shall tell me when it pleases you."

"And the little propheticess has no other message for me. Cannot she read my life as she read that of the Master?"

He held out his hand to her as though the moonlight would permit her to delineate it . . . but Nadje made no such attempt. She held it rather close to her bosom and looking him full in the face she said:

"You have many enemies, sir."

"Many indeed."

"The day will come when they will be dangerous to you. In that day, beware the waters. . . ."

"The waters, why should I fear the waters?"

"Because by them you may perish if your enemies prevail."

He affected to laugh at her, but fear stalked in the shadows.

“ These things, are they near me now, Nadjé ? ”

“ I cannot say. First, you must take me away with you. When we are together, I may learn how to tell you many things. It is impossible here where I see but your eyes.”

Ludwig was relieved.

“ You shall start for Munich to-morrow,” he said, “ a messenger shall bring you the money. Go to the Hof Theatre and say that the Count of Starnberg commanded you to come. We will have you taught and see what we can make of you. To-night I prefer to speak of your wonderful eyes ”—and catching her suddenly in his arms, he overwhelmed her by his kisses.

When he was gone, the gipsy lay for a long while motionless on the grass.

She was wondering if she were the first of her tribe who had been a King’s mistress an hour after a chance encounter by moonlight in a wood above a lake.

CHAPTER XXI

BAYREUTH IS DISCOVERED

WAGNER had dreamed of a colossal Temple of Music since the year 1836, and even in his darkest days of poverty and contempt, he had never wholly abandoned his project.

Hopeless as it seemed for a struggling musician derided by his ignorant contemporaries and almost wanting bread upon occasion, to raise the sum of a million odd francs which the contemplated theatre was to cost, he never released the ambition from his mind; and when the mad King of Bavaria ultimately came to his aid at the critical hour, then he believed that at last the gates of achievement were about to open for him and the Temple to arise.

It was a vain hope as we know.

The city of Munich liked music well enough—but, in the main, it had ears chiefly for the Italian school and would sooner have danced with Donizetti than wept with Wotan.

So Richard Wagner went into the wilderness;

but neither unhonoured nor unsung. Europe now recognised his genius and the critics of London alone were sublime in the comic ignorance of their decision. Elsewhere, in Vienna, in Berlin, in Venice, the awakening to the true meaning of this musical revolution was remarkable; while Wagnerian societies were founded in many cities and the profits of them sent to the Master that the great Temple might enshrine for all time the genius of this man, whose like the world had not seen.

This was all very well, but so far, no city had wished the Master to build his theatre within its walls, nor was even the site of the new building chosen. Wagner wandered from town to town, still seeking but seeking in vain. He had become a mighty pilgrim in search of a shrine but finding no place where his goddess should lay her head. And, he reflected, that even if he found it, he still needed a million francs for his project—and whence they should come, no man might say.

Thus were things with the musician when Ludwig in Munich rediscovered his little gipsy and found her to be good.

One day, it befell that they were rehearsing *Tannhäuser* at the Hof Theatre and the King was overtaken by a sudden impulse to visit the house and hear what they were doing. So he went down from the palace to his splendid box and there

discovered the chorus in the business of the famous ballet, which Paris had compelled Wagner to add to his opera. His recognition of Nadjé was swift and sure. She wore the ballerina's calotte and was quite without make-up; and though none of the others had seen the King steal into the theatre, she detected him at once and could not take her eyes from his face.

She was a graceful dancer, he thought, but they had given her no part to sing, and so he presumed that the voice, which had pleased him in the wood, had not pleased Hans Richter in the theatre. Her fascination lay in her suggestion of the voluptuous and the passionate. All her gestures were the suggestion of the caress while her lips pouted perpetually as though inviting kisses. Ludwig watched her ardently and then asked himself, why he had forgotten all about her for so many months. And in the same breath almost, he sent his commands by his aide-de-camp, Henrich Fahl, that she was to be at the Schloss Berg on the Starnberg lake at eight o'clock on the following evening.

"She must play here to-night, or they will talk," he argued—yet he was annoyed that he must wait and found himself all that day and the next ardently desiring to see her.

She was at the Schloss punctually, for Captain

Henrich saw to that, and she lied as prettily as ever when Ludwig asked her if she was not surprised to discover who he was.

“Oh, sire,” she said, “I never could have imagined such a thing”—while, as a matter of fact, she had recognised him five minutes after he spoke to her in the wood above Treibschén.

“There are many foolish tongues in Munich,” he went on, “it would not have done to send for you before. That would have destroyed my projects for you—now, I am able to help you, for I am no longer willing to let the politicians and the priests govern me. So, in future, my dear, you must come often to the Schloss and sing—that is, if they have taught you to sing as I wished them to do.”

Nadje had plenty of courage and was not afraid to speak.

“Your projects, Majesty,” she exclaimed with feminine irony—“oh, I like to hear of those. But, I am only a ballet dancer after all these months and they pay me twenty *gulden* a week. It is better to be a gipsy in a caravan than to live in a city and starve. Soon I shall go back to my old life—for I am tired of your theatre. What is to keep me since they say I have no voice and will not even try to teach me?”

Ludwig heard her with some displeasure—less in

sympathy with her than in anger against those who had refused to humour him.

“ They will not teach you ! But I commanded them to do so. And you have a beautiful voice, my dear—have I not heard you ? I will have them all at the Schloss and the theatre shall be closed. What do you say to that, Nadje—a performance for you alone and the orchestra to play for you ? Is not that better than your caravan ? ”

She was very proud of it all and perhaps not a little frightened. Ludwig, however, enjoyed both her dilemma and the humiliation of his sycophants. Even as he had promised, so he performed, and the next evening saw a beautiful pavilion erected in the gardens of the Schloss, the theatre orchestra brought out from Munich and all the bigwigs compelled to listen to a performance which must have wrung their very vitals.

Nadje, indeed, sang but indifferently and with a voice wholly untrained. They had never believed in Munich that the King would give her a second thought . . . and so they put her in the ballet and paid her two pounds a week.

When the farce in the pavilion was over, all the bigwigs went to the Schloss for supper and were given a banquet which compensated in a measure for their musical sufferings. The king, however, took Nadje on the lake in his barge . . . and the

romantic mood recapturing him, he spoke of their first meeting and of their night of love beneath the stars.

“You told me, then,” he said, “that I must beware of the waters. Do you say that still, Nadjé, now that we sail in this ship together? Am I to beware of the waters to-night or is this not the appointed hour?”

He drew her toward him, catching her by both her brown hands and trying to look deep into her dark and shining eyes. Nadjé, however, seemed to avoid his gaze and her mood had fallen suddenly to one of sadness.

“No, no,” she exclaimed, “it is not to-night, Majesty—much must happen before that. Your work is unfinished. You have yet many things to do. . . . I see the future darkly—but while the Master lives, you must live and help him.”

“You speak of Richard Wagner, child. Do you see him also in your dreams, then?”

“I see him often, sire. . . . I see him dead while you are yet living. But afterwards, I do not know. The waters are black and the shadow of death hovers over them. Who knows what is written in the Eternal Book—for sometimes the shadows pass and there is light. It may be so yet for you . . . but for the Master, no!”

“Is death so near to him, then?”

“He will die when his work is done. First he must build the Temple . . . but to build it he will stand by his own grace.”

“Can you then, since you see these things so plainly, can you tell me where the Temple will be built?”

Nadje answered with confidence.

“It will be built in the town of Bayreuth, Majesty. When you talked with me at Treibschén, I could see the city but I did not know the name of it. This year, Herr Flecher, the violinist, took me there upon my holiday. Then I knew that I had seen it all before and that this was the place to which the Master should come.”

Ludwig became greatly interested.

“I will write to him to-morrow and tell him so. Perhaps you have done us both a great service . . . time will show. Moreover, there may be the sunlight of which you speak. I must find it in your eyes to-night, my dear, for assuredly they shine like the stars.”

Thus, in a flash, he forgot her talk of death and remembered once more that he would be a lover.

And next day he sent a courier to Richard Wagner, asking him to go to Bayreuth and there to discuss his project with the burgomasters.

And by the same courier, he sent a letter to the

Director of the Hof Theatre in which he commanded that the violinist, Herr Flecher, should be sent away to Stuttgart—a city whose climate was notoriously healthy for violinists.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TEMPLE IS BUILT

LUDWIG set out for Berlin three days after his philandering on the Starnberg—and for many months he forgot the existence of Nadjé, the gipsy.

His present to her had been a ruby ring—he loved the blood-red of the stone, as most of his mistresses were well aware. Nadjé, however, preferred emeralds, though her knowledge of jewellery was founded upon a string of imitation pearls she had worn in her childhood. Nevertheless, she wore the ring and talked about it foolishly—so that the wily old Chancellor came to hear of it, and did what he had done so often before—sent a trusty aide-de-camp to Nadjé's lodgings and recommended a change of air for her.

“You must leave Munich at once,” the aide-de-camp said—“we shall provide you with a sum of money——”

“But, sir, the King said——”

“It does not matter what the King said, woman. He has gone to Berlin and will not return for a long while. The Chancellor is master here and he gives you until to-morrow night to be gone. I have only this to add—your friend Flecher, the violinist, is leaving to-morrow for Stuttgart and if you have the mind—but that is your affair and I will now wish you a very good night.”

Nadje thought it was not a very good night but she had the mind—and Flecher, it appears, shared it with her, and they left together for Stuttgart next day—to the great satisfaction both of the Chancellor and of certain other ladies, who were waiting for ruby rings in their turn. Meanwhile, Ludwig was at Berlin, hobnobbing with Bismarck and the old Emperor and hearing about all sorts of plans for the final crushing of France and of British obstinacy, which would not allow those plans to mature.

Now, this was a high-handed proceeding on the Chancellor's part and many in Munich wondered how the King would take it upon his return. When he never so much as mentioned the gipsy's name even in the theatre, some sighs of relief were heaved . . . but as a matter of fact, madness was growing upon him rapidly and the Chancellor and his coterie conspired already to bring about that final revolution, which was to cast Ludwig

from his throne and send him to that premature grave which his ancestry had prepared for him. So none of his immediate entourage really feared his anger—while many women were pleased.

He forgot Nadje, but he was not to go to his death without seeing her again and that at a critical hour.

One night at Munich, they say, he dreamed a dream . . . and it was of the Temple which Richard Wagner had now built at Bayreuth, according to the gipsy's prophecy, and for which the Master needed the money so sorely.

Though the first artists in Germany, the great architects, the builders, had conspired to erect the long-dreamed-of Temple, its gates must remain shut until the million francs were found; and of these four hundred thousand were yet to come. That very night, Ludwig had received a pitiful appeal and had been compelled by his Chancellor to refuse it. Not a *gulden* from the national exchequer was his determination—and the poor mad King knew too well that the state of his own finances would permit no such adventure. He must say "no" to his friend and the gates of the Temple must remain shut.

Upon this profound sorrow, he slept; and in his sleep he dreamed that he saw the great theatre at Bayreuth and that dark waters washed about its

portals and that in that water were to be seen the faces of the dying and the dead. Weird strains of mournful music filled the air and evil spirits hovered all about him.

“You are poor,” they cried to him, “you have lived your life . . . enter, then, the river of oblivion and sleep eternally.”

Ludwig fought wearily against this evil of the dream, but his will seemed to him broken and he had the idea that he must throw himself into the stream and there perish; but even as he took a step towards the swirling flood, the scene changed and he was lying by the side of Nadjé, the gipsy, in the wood above Treibschen and she was telling him that he must build the Temple in order that his name might be honoured in all countries. So clear was the face of the girl, so near to him, that he went to take her in his arms; but she pushed him from her laughingly—and just as day broke in the woods, she disappeared from his sight and he awoke.

The dream troubled the King very much and he found himself thinking about it all the next day and for many days afterwards. In the end, the impulse came to him to go to Bayreuth and see Wagner for himself; and that very night he set off, not in state, but as a common passenger by a common train. At the hotel, he gave the name of

the Count of Starnberg, and the clerk failing to recognise him, he was shown into a poor room on the second floor and there he had spent an hour resting upon a mean bed when the valet knocked upon the door and told him that a lady desired to see him and would not be refused.

Ludwig was neither surprised nor angry.

The same instinct which told him that he must go to Bayreuth now told him that Nadjé was the woman who had found him out—and without any waste of words he told the man to show her up. Smartly dressed in a German imitation of the Paris fashion, she carried herself jauntily and seemed to have lost nothing in spirit by the loss of a royal lover. Nor was Ludwig's vanity flattered when he perceived that she wore no longer the ruby ring, which was his one considerable gift to her. Indeed, she wore no jewellery at all, and in the simplicity and good style of her dress, he found a greater charm.

“Ha, the little gipsy. And who sent you here, my child? How did you find me out?”

“Majesty, I wished you to come.”

“You wished me to come!”

“Yes, I wished it very much. The Herr Wagner greatly needs you. He cannot open his theatre unless you give him money. So I said that I would call you to Bayreuth——”

“ You said—child, are you the devil then ? ”

“ Majesty, if we will anything very much and wish another to obey us, we may succeed if our will is strong enough.”

Ludwig laughed.

“ I thought young women of your stamp willed chiefly for the pretty things which go on their fingers and about their necks. You are different, I see. For instance, you do not even show me the ruby ring I gave you——”

Nadje sighed.

“ I sold that, Majesty, and sent the money to the Herr Wagner to help to build his theatre.”

Ludwig stood up and taking both her hands in his, he looked deep into her eyes to see if she were lying.

“ You sold your ring ! ”

“ Why not, Majesty ? Should not everybody help ? ”

“ But, child, what are you telling me ? ”

“ That you will help Herr Wagner in the same way, sire.”

“ By selling my jewels. Upon my life, I had never thought of that. Yes, yes, I have many that I do not need. And who shall forbid me ? Am I not King whatever they may say ? Yes, yes, I could find the money and the theatre would be opened. You have put a great idea into my head,

child. But you shall not lose by it. There are other jewels in Munich and some of them may find their way to my friend, little Nadje."

She was honestly pleased, and after an interval which does not concern the historian, she suggested that the good news should be carried to the Herr Wagner at once.

"You will find him in the garden of his house. His grave is there, Majesty."

The King shuddered as ever he did at the mention of death.

"You say that he is about to die, child?"

"When his work is done, sire. But there is much yet to do and all Germany will yet come here to honour him."

The King liked that saying. If all Germany honoured Richard Wagner, the name of Ludwig surely would stand out as that of the supreme benefactor who had made these things possible.

And in that moment the mad monarch finally resolved that the great Temple at Bayreuth should open its doors. He did not foresee that in a very short time the great musician would be dead.

* * * *

Relating the circumstance some days afterwards to the amorous violinist, Nadje showed him the emerald ring the King had sent her by a special messenger from Munich. She thought that it went

very well with the ruby he had given her previously.

“Of course I had to lie to him,” she said, “or he wouldn’t have done it.”

And that also was a truly feminine argument.

PART SIX

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR LOVE OF THE KING

LUDWIG rarely loved a woman ; but many loved him to their cost, as history has told us.

Sometimes, in that life of darkness there would be hours of sunshine when it seemed that he might think at last of wife and child and the heir to that throne he had at once adorned and degraded. But caprice swiftly darkened a lone horizon—and soon he would become the mad King again, appearing as a spectre of the mountains or sailing alone amid the islands of the Chienisee—a dreamer who had become the King of swans but not of his people.

Naturally, these mad explorations were not unattended by adventures, of some of which we have already heard.

Women were found in lone inns ; picked up on the mountain side ; even carried off for the voices they inadvertently betrayed.

In the case of Fricka, the wife of the musician Rucker, whom he discovered in a village of the Chienisee, they say it was her skill as a pianist which first attracted him.

The night was one of early spring and the lake all glorious in its shimmer of changing lights and softly playing waters.

A mood of wanderlust had taken the mad King abroad and for a while he sailed the lake in the gondola of the swan, though a lusty Venetian and not a bird now propelled it. Later, his carriage with the flaming headlights awaited him and he entered it and drove up toward the hills. So it befell that he passed the chalet where Fricka lived and heard her playing the Ninth Sonata—that Sonata which his dead friend, Richard Wagner, had always declared to be the most wonderful achievement in the whole story of music.

Ludwig stopped the carriage at once. He strode through the little garden, they say, as a man unafraid of his own curiosity, and the door of the villa being unlocked, he entered unhesitatingly and was at Fricka's side before she was aware that anybody had entered the house at all.

"Dear lady," he said, "you play beautifully. Be good enough to tell me whose pupil you are."

Fricka, had she been a woman of the conventions, naturally would have started up with a scream and

called for assistance. But, in truth, she was an exceedingly pretty and amorous little blonde of some twenty-three years of age and no man with so pleasing a voice and so magnificent a figure was at all likely to startle her. So she decided not to scream, but turning about she recognised the King immediately and did not choose to act a silly part.

“Oh, Majesty,” she said, “however did you get into the house without my servants seeing you?”

Ludwig sat down in a low chair at the side of the piano and answered with a light gesture as though miracles were not part of the argument.

“I came in through an open door—you gave me the invitation. Does anybody who is not deaf run away from Beethoven’s Ninth Sonata when such hands are playing it?”

Fricka laughed a little nervously. Perhaps she was glad that her husband was away in Munich.

“It was Richard Wagner’s favourite,” she said, turning over the pages of the book with restless fingers; “there is so little of his own music one can play on a piano. It seems almost a sacrilege to try to do so.”

Ludwig agreed.

“Richard disliked having one in the house,” he said, “he used to say it was almost a musical instrument. The Sonatas, however, they are different. You shall let me hear you play again

and then we will go and walk in the garden and talk of Isolde. Come, you don't refuse to play for me—you have music in your eyes, I see."

She lifted them toward him and felt that thrill with which he rarely failed to inspire women. And she played for him, as any woman would willingly have done, passionate music after his heart's desire.

Later on, they say, he supped with her on the loggia by the lake side, wrapping her up against the night air with much tenderness and talking of Richard Wagner with his eyes upon the stars. Perhaps, in those later hours, Fricka was more pleased than before that a fat and worthy husband was sleeping soundly in his bed at Munich; but we can imagine that she forgot to mention the fact to Ludwig and that when he came to make more violent love to her, she regarded the performance as a fit sequel to the inspiration of the music she had played for him.

He left the villa at four in the morning, the servants said.

When next Fricka set out to try to see him, they told her that his life was in peril and that all the peasants of the hillside were gathering to defend him.

So she called her servants to saddle her horse, and alone she rode forth to be among the number of her lover's defenders.

CHAPTER XXIV

REVOLT

LUDWIG'S madness had developed more slowly than that of his brother Otto; and, indeed, there were many who believed to the end that he was not mad. A man of extraordinary gifts, a lover of all the arts, a master builder of vast palaces, nevertheless his strange friendships, his growing aversion from women, his wild adventures upon the waters and the hills warned many that fate inexorable would engulf him and that he would die in a madhouse whatever he did.

Perhaps he knew that himself. The dread secret may have driven him to many of the orgies which his enemies remembered ultimately to his cost.

Did he not know that his brother Otto had been treated by upstart physicians with an insolence hardly surpassed in the story of a civilised royal house. Struck and beaten and bound, they had confined him to his cell as though he had been a raving maniac . . . and had ignored even the King's protest.

So, Ludwig pacing his empty palaces must have

paused often (as we know he did upon occasion) to stare at himself in the great hall of mirrors and to ask, "is this the face of a madman, do these eyes betray the reason which used to lighten them, is the brain diseased and shall I, also, soon be raving in a cell with gaolers to strike me as they will?"

From such thoughts, his refuge was the music which Wagner and the other great masters created for him.

He would sit alone in the theatre listening to *Tristan* or *The Ring* and forgetting the world of common realities all about him.

Or, at other times, he would delude himself with the odd notion that he belonged to a past age and another country.

Louis the Magnificent, of France had ever been his model of an absolute monarch, and from the life of Louis he made the plays in which he alone acted.

We can read the story at Neu-Schwanstein and the other palaces, where in the halls of the mirrors and the immense galleries are the art of the *Grand Monarque* and the furniture which the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries wrought so inimitably. Ludwig moved amid this splendour as he believed that the French King had moved two hundred years before. He held imaginary courts, sent traitors

headlong to the Bastille, bowed to the courtly figure in the mirrors, caused French music to be played and French comedies to be acted. Shall we wonder that the faithful few who watched him, said among themselves, "the hour has come; now we know that our poor King is mad."

Unhappily, others as well as friends came to the same conclusion and began to discuss the matter openly in cabinet and council.

Money played a great part here; and there can be no doubt that if Ludwig had been an economist, he might have reigned to the end.

Munich had rebelled against his project to build a mighty theatre for Richard Wagner; but he had abandoned the idea and the city forgave him.

Subsequently, when he subscribed great sums to the Temple at Bayreuth, the contributions were, in a measure, secret; and national enthusiasm in the Wagnerian cause forbade the inquiry of economists willing to charge the King with extravagance. It needed the political movements of the Rothschilds and the intervention of France to awaken those slumbering passions which eventually were to drive Ludwig to his grave.

One day, Munich learned that the King had, through the Rothschilds, been endeavouring to negotiate a loan in Paris, and the news provoked both anger and deeds.

Germany protested, both to the Cabinet in Munich and to the Powers. There seemed a real danger of that "great war" which Europe dreaded—but was not to face for twenty-eight years. In Bavaria, men told each other that the King undoubtedly was mad and a council of State was called to consider his condition. Soon doctors were appointed to go to the palace to examine him and they set off upon the ninth day of June in the year 1886—a pitiless morning of rain and storm—to arrest a monarch and convey him to a madhouse.

Ludwig, they say, had been alone all that morning, and in a mood of unaccustomed sanity. His "toys" from France had amused him; he caused some of the music of *Die Meistersinger* to be played to him and when he had lunched, he called for his carriage and drove for an hour in the mountains, despite the rain and the wind. There the spectacle was one of unwonted grandeur. The river foamed and raced hundreds of feet below the battlements of the castle—trees bent to the storm or were uprooted; the waterfalls flooded the poor roads and contrived to make Neu-Schwanstein unapproachable. Yet the King persisted for a while in braving the tempest and not until his coach was wheel high in the flood, did he turn back and again amuse himself with the music of his dead friend, Wagner—ever his consolation in adversity.

All this time, we remember, the eager physicians were posting headlong upon a work which was far from one of mercy.

They were determined to carry back to Munich the news that Ludwig was mad and that they had taken him to an asylum as their authority permitted them to do. Indeed, so impudent were they, that no sooner had they arrived in the village at the foot of the pass whereon the palace stood than they babbled recklessly to the landlord and informed him quite pleasantly that Ludwig was no longer his King but that the Prince Luitpold ruled in his stead.

Now, this landlord was a certain Herr Rudolph Weiss, who had a great love for his King and a very poor opinion of doctors.

He had been astonished to see hussars riding up to his house and to find them followed by royal carriages, from which emerged black-coated old gentlemen with doctors' bags in their hands. But when these same hussars entered his kitchen, drank ale by the bucket-full and declared themselves far from satisfied with the errand that had brought them to the mountains, then the worthy Weiss pricked up his ears and listened with the curiosity of an amorous parlour-maid. Half an hour later he had learned the whole truth, and before an hour was run, the village had it also.

See this excited landlord, out there in his stable-

yard, in earnest conversation with his ostler Paul.

“They are after the King,” he whispered, “they say he is mad and will carry him to prison. Are we, his friends, to suffer that? I would sooner lose my right hand than have it said of me. Go at once to Zanhoff, the woodlander, and tell him the news. Let him bring his men down and every mountaineer he can command. Henry, meanwhile, shall run to the house of the Herr Rucker and tell the news there. My lady will think of something—be sure of it. Go swiftly now and do not delay. There is not an instant to lose.”

The ostler Paul needed no spur upon his zeal, and in five minutes' time, he was galloping up the hillside like one possessed. “To hell with your hussars,” had been his answer to the Herr Rudolph and he meant every word of it, though unacquainted with the precise locality of the infernal regions. Such an errand was greatly to his liking—and when, twenty minutes later he burst into the cottage of Zanhoff, the woodlander, the rain dripped from his nose but his courage was unchilled.

“They have come for our King,” he cried in words punctuated by his heavy breathing. It was as though one had said, they have come to remove the mountains.

Zanhoff, a huge fellow, with a mop of tousled red hair, took an immense pipe from his mouth,

preparatory to opening an enormous mouth to its devouring capacity.

“The King—take him? Who takes the King and where? Fool, you are drunk or dreaming. Recollect yourself and talk sense.”

The ostler, Paul, now recovering his breath, shook more wet from his cape and then found his tongue again.

“It is the Herr Rudolph who sends me, I tell you. There are hussars in his house and presently they will be at the Castle gates. Don’t you understand—they say the King is mad and will take him to the penitentiary. Are we going to stand by and see that—we, who have loved him? God in heaven, who would have thought you would have listened so calmly!”

Zanhoff, dimly comprehending, made him repeat every word of it; but he was not idle while the lad spoke. Deliberately he took down his gun from its place over the chimney-piece and loaded both barrels of it. Then he proceeded to put on a greatcoat of green cloth and to cram a woodlander’s soft hat over his ears. It was plain that he, also, understood the need of haste.

“They are mad themselves,” he cried, “the fools—it may cost them their lives. To come here thinking we are all children who play with pebbles. We must teach them a lesson”—and so saying he

lighted a lantern, for it was now growing dark in the pass, and bade Paul follow him to the stall, wherein his sturdy grey mare had already been bedded for the night.

“To the shrine first,” he said, “and then to the village. We must have the people out. Hussars, say you—then it will be an ugly business, friend, and there will be mothers lacking sons to-morrow.”

Paul, the ostler, was not sentimental and had no tears for such a possibility. He was, in truth, given to pugnacity and would sooner have been cracking a skull than cooing a ballad any day. The rigors of the night suited him finely. While the rain raced down the mountain-side, the torrents overflowed and the thunder reverberated from peak to peak, he was truly in his element. Take their King! He would have liked to see the man who would lay a hand upon him.

With such a thought, he rode after the burly Zanhoff, down toward the little shrine of St. Ursula, which stood in a niche of the mountain-side, some half a mile from the village. There was a chapel there and a crazy bell, which had called the peasants to revolt upon many a mediæval day and was now to call them to revolt this night. Zanhoff, himself the keeper of the shrine, raised a tocsin which no thunder could deafen—and the echo of it went from chalet to chalet, rousing shepherds from the reveries

of twilight and disturbing good wives at their cooking-pots. "To the market place" was its message as ever it had been—and soon there were men hurrying upon every hill road and guns loaded and old pikes refurbished as though they were precious weapons and had won kingdoms.

The ostler Paul was soon to put himself at the head of this mob of men. Zanhoff went on to the villa of the lady Fricka to be sure that the servant Henry had done his duty and that madame was warned. He found her already at her gate waiting for the carriage which was to take her to the palace. She believed that she had but to see Ludwig and that all would be well. She did not know that hussars already guarded the palace gates and that their orders were to shoot. With Zanhoff, the cleverest mountaineer for miles round, their task was as good as done, she thought.

"Oh, yes," she cried as he came up, "I know everything and it is quite clear what we must do. They have been plotting against him for weeks past at Munich and this is the result of it. My husband's letters speak of nothing else. 'Warn his Majesty,' he has said—and I have warned him again and again. Now, you see, the time has come. The King must go into Tyrol and you must come with us, Zanhoff. I was going to send for you in any case and here you are. Nothing could be more

fortunate. We shall set out at once and my servants can follow with the baggage."

So she prattled on, a pretty woman who saw herself about to elope with a King and was properly excited by the project. Zanhoff, wiser in his knowledge, shook his shaggy head at her enthusiasm and told her in brief words the impossibility of her project.

"My lady, there are hussars at the gates. How, then, can the King go into Tyrol? Did not Henry speak of what had happened? He is a fool if he did not——"

"He said nothing of any soldiers"—and the hope in her eyes clouded; "do you mean to say they are carrying him away by force?"

"That and nothing else. Nobody from the village will get into Neu-Schwanstein to-night. Truly, my lady, we have seen our King for the last time . . . unless our people prevail. I have called them to the market-place and there we shall find them presently. But there will be some who will never return to their homes if his Majesty is to go free."

"They will make the sacrifice—I know them," she exclaimed triumphantly; "let us go there, Zanhoff. Let us help them to do their duty."

He was very willing, and the carriage now coming to the gate, he set off to ride with her to the village. It was black dark by this time and many a lantern

swung an aureole upon the hillside—while, in the village, lights moved mysteriously as though men and women were awakened to some sense of peril.

As in the old time, so this night the tocsin had been answered bravely by the shepherds of the mountains and they came down without question or complaint to learn what their brethren of the village needed of them. When they heard that the King's life was in peril, then was their answer without fear.

It was Fricka, herself, who told them the story, standing upon the old stone bench before the inn-door and speaking as one of them, though many held her to be a bird of passage in the district.

“Friends,” she said, “they have gone to the Castle to carry our King to an asylum. The doctors who are waiting to tell his countrymen that he is mad are in that room yonder, waiting to hear that the soldiers have done their work and that the gates are forced. What have you, his friends, to say to that? Is there one of you to whom he has not been as a brother? Is there a woman or child in all the countryside who has not known his love and kindness? Was it madness that fed the poor and sheltered the fatherless? If it be so, then God make all our rulers as mad as he.”

So she spoke to them, a dramatic little figure of a woman with cheeks aflame and eyes afire. And

they answered her with a resounding shout which was heard upon the battlements of the castle, three hundred feet above them. "To the gates—to the gates—save the King, save the father of our people." The cry echoed weirdly in the hills—the heavy tramp of many men marching succeeded to it. A little army had set out and many would never return.

Fricka had thought, at first, to accompany this band and to put herself at the head of it; but both Weiss, the landlord, and Zanhoff, the woodlander, dissuaded her from that and pointed out that there was a better way.

"You will serve nobody at the gates," they said, "you should be with the King and not with those seeking him"—the mere suggestion of it brought the colour anew to her cheeks and set her heart beating. With the King, who had been her lover, and at such an hour. If it were possible.

Zanhoff, who had guided many a party to the heights, thought that it was, though the way was dangerous.

"We will take ropes and a ladder," he said, "and if you have the courage, you shall go in by the chapel battlement. But, lady, that needs a sure foot and a stout heart and if you are afraid——"

"Afraid of what?"

He looked at her with pride and knew that he

could not answer her. In his turn, old Weiss was sending all round the village for boots and a cloak for such a job and it was nearly nine o'clock of the night before he could find them.

An ominous hour. As they stood at the inn door about to set off for the height, there came the sound of gunshots from the mount above and then the shouting of many voices.

“God help us” was now the cry of the women who stood out in the pitiless rain, waiting for their sons to return.

Here was revolution—not against, but for the life of a King.

And in the hotel, the black-coated doctors drank their hock and smoked their cigars and said that they would go up to the Castle presently and take charge of this madman, who was no longer their King.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MUSIC ROOM

FOR a quarter of a mile and a little more Zanhoff followed the rocky road to the gates of the Castle, his lantern guiding them through the heavy rain. Then, at the foot of the little cascade, which ultimately runs out to the river in a pretty torrent, he extinguished the light and told Fricka that here lay the road he proposed to take.

“We must climb now from stone to stone,” he said, “have no fear for I am strong and can hold you. But I fear, my lady, you will be very wet, and Mayr, the valet, must find you some dry clothes when you go in. Now take my hand and let us see what we can do.”

The heavy rain had swollen the cascade and the great boulders over which it ran were loose and slippery when Fricka's little feet sought to tread them. A fountain of spray nearly blinded her at the outset, and but for the iron grip upon her arm, she would have fallen almost at every step. But Zanhoff had the foot of a goat and the strength of a bull. There were moments when he lifted her high in the air to avoid the torrent and stood

poised as a gladiator for a picture. Or, again, he would stand to get his breath, setting his feet upon the rocks and carrying her weight upon his vast shoulders. But it was a sadly doused heroine who came eventually to the grassy slope above the fall and there protested that she could never enter "the presence" in such a state and that if she was to see Ludwig, somebody must find her some clothes, be they those of man or woman.

Zanhoff had some contempt for women and their finery, but not for this woman nor for her finery.

"They could dress fifty women up yonder," he said, "and there would still be silks and satins to spare. Think rather of your errand, lady, than of your appearance for that can always take care of itself"—a little compliment she liked though she would have preferred to see the silks and satins he spoke of.

They were now upon the northern side of the great ravine, at the head of which the Castle stands; and here was a wood of pines and above that again the sheer walls of the palace rising dominantly and formidable from the solid rock of the mountain. There were, in the common way, neither guards nor soldiers at this spot—but as they climbed the slope, Zanhoff's quick eye detected the presence of figures in the wood and he whispered to Fricka to keep silent and go warily.

“They stand at the chapel gate,” he said, “we shall watch there with them—go lightly now and follow at my heels. If there are men to be dealt with, it is a man’s work” . . . and so saying he swung his shot-gun back over his shoulder and grasped his heavy cudgel firmly. It was at the very moment that the face of a hussar peered into his own from the darkness and the two men stood looking at each other ridiculously as though both were afraid to speak and neither had the will to act.

“Ho, ho,” said the hussar at last, “and what may you be doing here, my friend?”

Zanhoff became quite candid.

“I am taking this lady to see the King,” he said bluntly, “as your fellows are so busy over yonder, this seems to me the better road.”

The hussar, who had not the least ill-will in the world toward Ludwig and would sooner have helped than harmed him, thought the undertaking altogether reasonable.

“Well,” he stammered, “as to that, I have no orders, friend. ‘Nobody is to leave the Castle,’ says the sergeant, but about a lady going in, that’s another matter—and a very good one if she be pretty enough”—and he laughed as though pleased with an idea that had come to him. It was Fricka’s turn to speak now, however, and her words were as

ever those of a woman who knew what she wanted and usually managed to get it.

“Here is a *gulden*,” said she, “go to the inn and ask Herr Weiss to give you a bottle of wine. You can return before anybody will miss you—why waste your time talking when you might be drinking; I wouldn’t if I were you——”

He shook his head though he did not hesitate to pocket the money.

“Sergeants are sergeants and whips are whips. I shall stop here, lady, and the wine will keep until the work be done. If, however, your ladyship likes to go further, let that be your pleasure,” and he shook the heavy rain from his cape to demonstrate the particular joy which he himself experienced at such a moment.

So they left him where they found him and pushed on, while from the Southern gate on the far side of the ravine, there came anew a sound of angry voices and intermittently the report of rifles. Evidently, the peasants were still striving to beat down the vast doors and to make the King their honoured prisoner; while, just as obviously, the soldiers were holding them back and not hesitating to use their weapons. Fricka trembled at the thought and quickened her steps.

“They cannot save him that way,” she cried, “we must stop it all, Zanhoff, we must get to him,”

and so saying, they came up to the battlement above the chapel and without a word more said, the mountaineer began to climb the buttress of the great wall, where one false step would have cast him down headlong to the bed of the river three hundred feet below.

The rain ceased at this time and a summer sky was revealed. There was even moonlight presently to glisten upon the deeper pools of the lazy stream and to silver the stately pinnacles of the fortress which had become a palace. Fricka, trembling with fear and the chill of the changing night, watched the black figure of the climber as he went from stone to stone of the buttress and seemed like some great bat clinging to the sheer walls with wings outspread. Must he also give his life for the lonely King those ramparts imprisoned? She feared, indeed, to watch him—but praying silently looked across the river to the mountains, beyond which safety lay for them—and, for her, it might even be the love of a man no woman had yet been able to comprehend.

And so Zanhoff gained the parapet at last. Swiftly fixing a rope to one of the battlements, he handed up my lady as though she were a burden of feathers and set her down presently upon the stone pavement where the King had so often delighted to walk. Now they could see the woods

below and the placid river and the lights of the village wherein the doctors waited. But of the peasant army they could see nothing—for that was at the Southern gate and a great wing of the palace hid it from their view.

“There is a door here which his Majesty himself uses,” said Zanhoff, as he led her to the far end of the paved battlement and showed her a stout portal of iron and oak, unlocked since the King had passed through it when first they told him that hussars surrounded his palace—“go to Mayr, the valet, and tell him your errand, for he, they say, is the real master of Neu-Schwanstein these days——”

She promised to do so and left him to await her summons when she had need of him. But Fricka herself passed the heavy door and descending a narrow stairway, she found herself in a little gallery of the central dome, wherefrom she could see the great central hall of the palace and the flunkeys who waited there, afraid of the mob without, yet too honest to leave their master. These would have stopped her had she come in by any other door—but none of them looked to the sky for an intruder—and so she slipped quietly down the stairway, and passing by the gallery of the mirrors—for she knew the way well—she entered the music-room of the palace to find no other than Ludwig

himself, seated before the organ and playing the prelude to the third act of *Lohengrin*, as he so often did in moments of danger or of doubt.

CHAPTER XXVI

A KING IN CHAINS

LUDWIG was at that time a little more than forty years of age.

Considered for many years the handsomest man in Bavaria, he had lost few of his looks. The figure was still that of the soldier; the wonderful eyes could fascinate women, as they had ever done.

This night he wore the blue and scarlet uniform of his guards. War had been declared upon him, he said, by certain traitors in Munich, and he must take the field against them.

Yet all his army was the valet Mayr, who remained faithful to the end, and the few hesitating lackeys who wondered how long his kitchen would be a home for them.

In truth, he was quite alone when Fricka found him, though the room itself blazed with lights and a great fire burned in an enormous grate as though it were mid-winter and not the month of roses.

“Who is that—what do you want with me?” he asked, hearing a light step behind him and wide awake to every alien sound.

“Majesty,” she said, “it is I, Fricka; I have come to save you if you will listen to me”—and she knelt by his side, and kissed his hand, like any supplicant from the people, though she had long been his mistress. He did not rise from the organ seat, but turned half about and so discovered the plight she was in.

“My poor little Fricka,” he exclaimed, “have you been bathing in the lake then?” and he smiled curiously, the smile of a man but just awakening from a dream.

She told him the story swiftly. There were hussars at the gate and the people were trying to drive them off. She, herself, had crossed by the cascade and Zanhoff, the woodlander, had helped to bring her there. Ludwig, however, understood little of it. He merely saw one of the Rhine maidens and she was very wet—as a Rhine maiden should be.

“Let them bring you clothes,” he cried abruptly, rising from the stool and clapping his hands as an Oriental would do. When Mayr, the valet, came, he upbraided him as though his negligence had opened the heavens that night.

“Do you not see what a state madame is in—why do you let her come here like that? Go at once and fetch Kathleen. We must have clothes, I say—Queen’s clothes—here is the Austrian woman

and she is our guest. Let her be dressed properly, I say, and then bring her back to me."

The valet shrugged his shoulders and bade Fricka follow him. In the anteroom, he asked her how she had got in the palace—and when he learned, told her that she was a fool for her pains.

"They will be here within the hour," he said, "and you will be carried off to prison. Don't you know that Luitpold was proclaimed in Munich to-day? All this is now play-acting. He will go to an asylum and we must take care of ourselves. Dress up if you please but don't deceive yourself. You are seeing him for the last time."

She did not answer, believing that he might still prove a false prophet; and so they went on again to the room of the great Wardrobe, where you might find the uniforms of half the cavalry regiments in Europe—to say nothing of masqueraders' attire in abundance. Often had Louis the Magnificent been dressed here and Marie Antoinette in her splendour and Charlemagne in his might—and now it was to be Fricka's turn to humour a madman in his madness and to become Queen of France for his delectation.

"Do what he wishes or he will not see you again," said the valet—and the woman Kathleen echoed his wisdom.

"An hour ago, he dressed himself as Frederick

the Great and believed that he was marching on Venice. Now, it is France again and French you must be, my dear, if you are to please him. After all, what is it to us? He will not be King to-morrow and another will be at Neu-Schwanstein. Let us, then, do what we can and while we can."

Fricka cared little how it was. She was very wet and strangely excited, and when they sent her back to the King in a superb gown of white and silver, she thought less of it than of the warm welcome he now accorded to her. Quite wonderfully, she had brought him down from dreamland to the stern realities of the hour, and it was not hidden from her that he admired the courage which had carried her to the palace.

"First—how did you get here?" he asked, holding both her hands and looking straight into her eyes as he had done so rarely since first she surrendered to him. She told him all the story—how the landlord Weiss had sent to her, how the hussars and the doctors had come to the village—how the peasants were even then at the gates—all news to him in a sense, for he had been dreaming until she awakened him and had understood nothing of that which was passing even within the palace itself.

"It is Holnstein's work," he said, pacing to and fro with the slow step of a man greatly moved;

“I was warned ten days ago but I did not believe it. All this, my dear, is because I have asked France to lend me some money and the Rothschilds have helped me. It has been money always, always—when I would have helped the greatest of men, Richard Wagner, was it not money that brought the mob about my ears? I would have given them a theatre which would have made Munich glorious throughout the world and they despised me for the thought. Now others claim the fame of Bayreuth and the dead Master lies there. So money degrades us and would cast me out. Yet I still have friends. Let them not think that I will go like a lackey who is discharged. My people will rally round me. The Army will come to my aid—yes, yes, the end is not yet though that old rascal, Luitpold, believes it to be.”

She did not dare to tell him what friends had already told her, that the Army would follow his enemy, Holnstein, and that its chiefs had declared already for a new King. There was hope for him, she believed, but not at Neu-Schwanstein. Let him reach the frontier and all might yet be saved.

“Majesty,” she said, “I came because I believe that if you will listen to us, we can save you. But the Army is not the means, nor any friends in Munich. You must wait for the people to learn

what is happening. They are your real friends. Don't you see that even these poor peasants are willing to give their lives for you. What, then, of all the others in your cities? Neither Holnstein nor any other dare lift a hand against them. That is why I say—do not let them take you here to-night. There is a road across the mountains by the Kitzberg pass and Zanhoff knows it well. We could cross the frontier by dawn and be beyond the reach of Holnstein or any other this time to-morrow. Sincerely do I ask you to listen to me and to let Zanhoff come. There is none more faithful—no better guide in all the mountains.”

Her earnestness was impressive and her devotion to him beyond suspicion. Presently he said that he would go to the battlements and see for himself just what the people were doing and how it fared with them. But he did not promise to summon Zanhoff and already she feared that indecision would cost him his liberty, if not his life.

“Let us put ourselves at the head of our gallant army,” he exclaimed with some irony, as he wrapped his soldier's cloak about her and called to Mayr to bring another for himself. It was something, surely, that he still had servants who held the gate for him and would not open to these rascally doctors. Ludwig had yet to thank them and anon he did with gifts beyond all their expect-

ations. But first he took her to the battlements and there he showed himself fearlessly to the ragged army which defended and to the hussars who would lift no carbine against him. It was an odd scene, truly, and nothing like it has been known in a modern age.

There, below, in the great outer courtyard of the palace was gathered the mob of peasants, their arms still in their hands, but their courage less vocal. Lanterns showed angry faces and faces that were afraid—and they showed also darker figures lying stiff upon the wet stones and other figures writhing and contorted in their agony. These had paid the price for their loyalty to the madman, who now looked down upon them curiously—no pity in his heart but only pride that he, Ludwig, should have provoked such loyalty.

“See,” he said, “these men live in hovels and they often want bread. Yet they will come here and give their lives for another man who drinks out of silver cups and is clothed in purple and fine linen. Is not the Will of the Supreme Power to be discerned in such seeming madness? Does it not say that I am necessary to this Kingdom and that without me, it must perish? Let our Council of the Princes of the Blood understand that and all may yet be well. But who is to tell them? Where

shall I find a messenger who will ride to Munich with such a message? No, indeed, it will never be spoken, perhaps, for these fellows will come here presently and then an asylum awaits me. I shall be thrown into a padded cell, as my brother Otto, has been; and there will be gyves upon my wrists. That is the Council's reading of the Will of the Almighty. A King in chains and a scoundrel like Luitpold in his place. Such is the end of a dynasty _____”

His tone for the moment had become that of one addressing a Senate rather than a woman; but such was his habit in moments of excitement, as the record shows. Fricka would have preferred to hear him speak of flight, but it was evident that this jostling crowd of poor peasants intrigued him strangely and that he watched their every movement as though presently they would beat the good-tempered hussars back and the palace would again become the house of his freedom. This, however, was not to be. A bright-eyed Captain rode to and fro incessantly, imploring the deluded people to return to their homes and assuring them of a pardon for what they had done if they would but obey him.

“Your King is ill. We have come here to help and not to harass him. What do you think you are doing, my good fellows? Can you fight an

army with sticks in your hands? Don't compel me to send for help, for if you do that, the artillery will come with its guns and it will blow you all sky-high. Listen to reason, then, and return to your homes. The King will thank you for doing so to-morrow and I will see that you are not punished for your crimes."

They understood but did not believe him. All the real fight had gone out of them by this time and they merely rocked to and fro against the thin line of horsemen, taking knocks patiently but rarely striking in reply. When the right moment came, and the Captain ordered his men to draw their swords, one of those quick panics which afflict undisciplined mobs suddenly overtook them, and they raced pell-mell down the mountain-side as though the devil was at their heels. Then the mad King laughed for the first time that night; and gripping Fricka by the arm he led her to the other side of the Castle whence they could see the mountains and the pass which might open the gates of freedom if they could but reach it.

"You are right, my angel," he said, still in the boisterous mood, "our army has gone home to supper and we shall have no reinforcements. Now I am at the mercy of the lackeys downstairs, and God knows what they will do. Let us forget about it and remember that we have not eaten.

You shall sup with me, my angel, the last time, perhaps, that I shall ever sup with man or woman again."

The mood was ominous, the decision in a way tragic. If he were to escape, the time was now and there was no instant to lose. Fricka understood it all and begged him to see Zanhoff without delay.

"He will be waiting by the Northern postern," she pleaded, "I am sure we could go freely if your Majesty will leave now. Zanhoff could arrange to bring the horses to the terrace and we could reach the pass while the doctors are still down yonder. There is no time to lose if it is to be done. Will not you do this, sire, for all our sakes. To-morrow, the Council will send a regiment here and it will be too late . . . now, you can outwit them if you will only say the word."

He would give her no definite answer.

Vacillating as ever, his mind was set upon supping with a pretty woman and hearing her play "the Ninth" to him afterwards. Yet also there was in his head that thought of suicide which, later on, was to culminate in the supreme tragedy. Standing there on the battlements three hundred feet above the moonlit river, he spoke of death and spoke with courage.

"Why should I live—for whom?" he asked suddenly, while he stood almost as though about to

cast himself down to the silvered waters below. "The people love me but they will love Luitpold to-morrow if I go. Have I not lived with my dreams as long as I can remember. That is the better kingdom, my beloved—the world where men are but shadows and women turn to golden mists in our arms; music that we never hear when waking; voices that are of no world that we know—and death far from us since we feel already the kiss of death upon our eyes. What, then, forbids us to seek this sleep—what but the jargon of the priests and the fear they instil? Why, my Fricka, should not I awake presently in a world where I may find those eternal truths of art and music and life which this world has denied me? I leap and all my wrongs are righted, justice done me, my councillors alone charged with the infamy, if infamy it be. Who is there who has the right to forbid me if this be the way—one step and all is finished"—and so he stepped forward even as he spoke while the woman cried out and held his arm convulsively with those shapely hands which often he had covered with kisses.

"You shall not, you shall not," she cried; and she clung to him desperately as he stood there, half willing to cast her off; yet fascinated by the terror of the eyes which reproached him.

Thus they rested through dreadful moments,

until, happily, Zanhoff, the mountaineer, appeared from the shadows and ranged himself by Fricka's side.

"You called me, my lady. . . ."

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed, "his Majesty wishes to speak to you, Zanhoff."

And then to the King, she said: "Here is our friend who can help us. It is Zanhoff, sire, who brought me to-night."

Ludwig turned at the words and recognising a friend, he laid a hand upon his shoulder and greeted the hunter cordially.

"Ah, old Zanhoff, the shaggy one. Well, friend, and so you think that I should cross the pass to Tyrol and that you can 'guide' me there—is it so?"

"It is so, Majesty; if you will go afoot, sire, to Herrenschen. I will find horses there and the road thereafter will be easy. There are no grooms now in your stables and nothing to be done there. But at Herrenschen I have friends to be trusted."

The King hardly heard him.

His groom had betrayed him, then, and his horses were already in the village stables, he thought. There remained but a few lackeys to defend the great doors and God knew how long they would be faithful to him. Soon he might be the only man in all that vast palace. And of all his people, there

was but one woman who stood by his side in the hour of tragedy and sought to save him from his enemies.

“I will think of this, Zanhoff,” he said presently, almost as a man waking from a dream. “Go down to the great hall and see that the door is kept. We must keep these doctors to their cups while my lady and I have supper. Afterwards, it will be time enough to consider what you have said to me.”

He would have no argument upon it and left the battlement immediately to go down to the Salle Louis Quatorze in which he was wont to sup.

Here the valet Mayr, who in this hour of crisis was also major-domo and butler, upon that, had caused supper to be set for two and had seen to it that champagne was provided in abundance. Ludwig clapped his hands like a boy at the spectacle and taking Fricka by the hand, he led her to the table as though she were a young bride and this was the night of their honeymoon. None looking upon him in that moment would guess that he had contemplated suicide not ten minutes previously.

“Let us eat and drink,” he cried, “since tomorrow we die.” But he did not say it as a man who had any other thought than that of a joyous life he proposed to live.

“There is one man,” he continued presently, “who could make all this straight in a moment

if I could get a letter to him. Holnstein till now has always been my friend and would be my friend still if he heard me. Since they stopped my letters and handed them to Luitpold, I am without an advocate at the palace. They are the judges and they do not hear the prisoner. It would be different if I had the ear of Holnstein; but how shall I get it? Who will carry the letter which might mean so much to me?"

He knew, of course, that she would offer herself immediately and her answer did not disappoint him.

"If you wished it," she cried, a fire of excitement in her eyes, "I would set off now. What is there to detain me? I could leave as I came and Zanhoff would still be here to guide you to the frontier. Write as you please, for who will suspect me? I shall be returning to my husband—as, of course, I ought to be . . . they will be pleased to see the back of me. Why not write, then, and write now——"

"Because, my pretty Fricka, I am hungry and there is a pretty woman at my side. Afterwards, when there is no more wine, we will write together. At this moment, I would not leave your side for a kingdom," and he drew her close to him and embraced her with the passion of a lover who has just discovered a mistress.

On her part, Fricka was in despair. The changing moods baffled her and she discerned the danger of them.

As another King, nearly a hundred years before, had lost his head because he would dine at a village inn, so was this King to perish for a last amour.

Clearly she perceived that if he would act with decision and with no further loss of time, all might yet be saved. He could cross the frontier and would find many friends in Austria. Whatever old Luitpold might dare, a war with his kinsmen across the border was not to be contemplated. There would be support in Germany for the man who had saved Richard Wagner and Bismarck would intervene. Yet what was to be done must be done quickly—for were there not hussars at the gate and the ghouls who called themselves “physicians” in the inn below? Fricka expected every moment to hear the crash of the great door and to know that the soldiers had entered. Their delay was incomprehensible, unless it were that they were awaiting further instructions from the Supreme Council and that the revolt of the peasants had awed them.

Meanwhile Ludwig seemed to be losing all sense of apprehension and to be living more and more for the excitements of the hour. He had never made love to her more primitively or drunk deeper

of the champagne, which had so often been his refuge in adversity. Toast succeeded toast. He drank to her eyes, to her lips, to her wonderful hair. The presence of the faithful Mayr in no way disconcerted him. She was upon his knees while his glass was filled and his arm was about her neck when, a little later, he made her sing Elizabeth's song from *Tannhäuser* and laughed when her voice failed her.

“You shall go and see old Holnstein for me,” he declared boisterously, as she escaped at length from his arms and reminded him that the precious hours were flying; “you shall tell him that, if he will stand with me, we will make a laughing stock yet of this precious Council and see old Luitpold in a fortress. Let him persuade Durckheim that his interests are our own and we shall have the Army with us. It depends upon that, my angel. We are the servants of the Pretorians, as the Romans were and if their thumbs be turned up, then has our day come. Durckheim—he's in supreme command at Munich to-day—will understand that and know on which side his bread is buttered. Let him bring the Army over and our day is won. And he can do it—he will do it, for he was once my friend, and soldiers do not betray.”

The thought seemed to give him pleasure, and he laughed over it.

Called a madman by the Supreme Council, this friend of Wagner had the quick wit to understand that he had no friends and that if those two stood by him, all could yet be saved. The chancellor and the Commander-in-Chief of his Army, who could serve him better if they would? To them, then, he would appeal, and this pretty woman, who had come to him so strangely, should be his emissary.

Meanwhile, what of the flight to the Tyrol and the salvation it offered?

Fricka, watching the King at his writing table, believed no longer that he would go. And, if he would not go, hers was the fault. Like many another man before him, he had come in his hour of need to rely wholly upon a woman and to believe that her charms could work miracles. Yes, this wonderful Fricka would save him. She would cozen the Chancellor, make love to the soldier and between them bring about that *volte-face* which would undo his rival utterly.

“Yes, yes,” he repeated, “you are the instrument, my Fricka. Yours is the destiny to save your King. Carry this letter to Holnstein at the Hof Palace and you will see what he will do. Who is there to prevent you—who will ever suspect that my pretty visitor is really as clever a diplomat as any of them? Truly was it God’s will that you

should come here to-night. And you will go as secretly as you came—Zanhoff will see to that—old Zanhoff who has led me to many a buck. Yes, he shall be your guide and your own carriage will take you straight to Munich, to the Hof and to the man who is about to save me from the mad-house.”

All this he said in the intervals of covering sheets of paper with fine phrases and solemn protestations. Many times he destroyed what he had written and started anew, but at last the dangerous document was finished to his satisfaction; and when he had sealed it with the purple wax he always used, he gave it to her as though indeed it were worth a King's ransom.

“Go now,” he cried authoritatively, “there is not a moment to lose. Go to Holnstein and say you are from me. That seal will open all doors—you have nothing to fear since you travel under my protection. . . .”

She took the letter and thrust it into the bosom of her gown.

But he had scarcely let her go from his grateful arms, when there came thunderous sounds from the great hall below and anon the sound of many footsteps.

Ludwig turned pale when he heard the uproar but he did not flinch.

“Here are my friends,” he cried, “come to take me to the madhouse.”

Fricka, however, said not a word, but slipping away by a door which gave upon the King's bedroom, she hid herself and waited, she knew not for what.

Assuredly, they would discover and search her.

She could hope for no mercy in that case and if she were discovered, then as surely would they carry her to a prison as they were about to carry the King to an asylum.

CHAPTER XXVII

AN INVITATION TO SUPPER

WEBER, a valet who kept the King's uniforms, discovered Madame at five o'clock of the day; and when the surprise of the recontre was over, he immediately offered to help her.

"You had better return to your villa, my lady," he said; "nobody now can do anything more for his Majesty. The Count Durckheim is here and the King himself has ordered our gendarmes to submit."

"The gendarmes—whence did they come, then? There was none here last night."

"The Mayor of Flussel came at their head. The whole countryside is now aroused. For my part, I do not envy those doctors. Already, they have nearly killed one of them in the village, and the others are asking Munich to send more soldiers. My lady would be well advised to return to her home at once—and if she will permit me, I will bring the clothes in which she came here last night."

He smiled at his words and Fricka must smile with him.

It was quite obvious that daylight would not

suffer the masquerade which the King had willed last night ; and when she saw herself in the glass and beheld the tousled caricature of a French queen she recalled all that passed and the exciting adventures of her journey.

“Certainly, they will say that I am mad also. Bring me my clothes, Weber, and I will do as you suggest. If we cannot help his Majesty, it is no good our staying here. I shall return to the villa until he has need of me—if ever he has need of me again.”

Those were her words ; but secretly she clung to the thought of the precious letter and of all it might yet achieve.

Let her carry it to Munich safely and who could say that Holnstein might not yet appeal to the people in the King’s name and that the people might not answer him triumphantly. No man was more beloved by the multitudes of Bavaria than this monarch, who covered up the snow about his palaces in winter time that he might believe summer had come, or would dismiss a servant who failed to kill an imagined serpent upon his carpet. His country, indeed, knew Ludwig as a very fount of generosity and goodness toward the poor—nor would it ever forget that his patronage had established the fame of Richard Wagner throughout the world.

So Fricka believed that, if she could reach Munich safely with her precious letter in her hand, all might yet be saved.

Discovery had not overtaken her in the palace ; and although her presence had been known to the doctors and the Count Durckheim, nobody had given her a second thought. A woman! Well, it was something to the madman's credit that he could still make love to a woman, and they wished him joy of her. Which is to say that the valet Mayr appeared to have been faithful to his Master and that the secret of the precious letter had been kept.

She dressed herself quickly, forgetting at the moment that she was a pretty woman and one accustomed to the homage of men. Her way from the palace lay through the orangery—thence to the private garden, and the woods. Within the house, she had heard the excited voices of men and seen some of the soldiers the Count Durckheim had brought with him from Munich—but of what was happening to the King, she learned nothing. Nor was the scene without more enlightening. A vast crowd had assembled before the Castle at the break of day—and was not without its humours, since the fire brigade had come up with the Mayor from Flus-sel and appeared quite ready to put out the doctors if a little water could contribute to solve their

difficulties. Of the others, many were peasants with axes in their hands; not a few, gendarmes from the neighbouring villages, very ready to strike a blow for the King they loved.

Through these Fricka passed without observation to her villa. Her course was obvious. She would order her own carriage immediately and set out for Munich. Very tired after the events of the night, nevertheless she gave orders to her servants immediately to prepare for the journey; while she herself remembered that if a pretty woman would fascinate a minister she must look the part; with which objective, she caused some of her prettiest dresses to be packed and did not fail to choose an attractive *costume de voyage* which might help her on the journey if human obstacle there were.

Content that it should be thus—for she still dreamed of a flight across the mountains with Ludwig for a lover—she breakfasted at the villa and at ten o'clock precisely she set out for the capital.

Of news from the palace she had none, though the highroad spoke of news — with its carriages of state passing frequently and its cavalrymen patrolling, carbines at the hip as though an invading force might be looked for any moment and the King himself at the head of it.

If Ludwig had surrendered, clearly he had not

surrendered as one vanquished and condemned. His enemies still feared him and the voice of his people had yet to be heard. Fricka took heart at this ; and well content at the ease of her escape, she lay back in her carriage to admire the beauty of the day and to wonder what to-morrow had in store for her.

And beautiful indeed it was.

A glorious sunshine had followed upon the storms of night and there was the vigour as of wine in the air. Flowers perfumed the air with delicious odours and the scent of the pines was almost overpowering. Never did she remember the near hills to have looked greener nor the woods to have suggested the fairy scenes of her childhood. As for the river itself, its falls glistened as though molten silver were being poured into the lake below ; while the waters of the vast Chienisee should have housed the gondolas of a phantom kingdom, whose princes were armoured in burnished gold.

Such was the beginning of this great adventure ; but, anon, the incidents of it were changing and ultimately they became disquieting.

To begin, she arrived at a military post upon the borders of the lake and the sergeant in charge of it seemed curious both about her and her journey.

“You are going to Munich ? What errand, then, takes you there ?”

Fricka was all smiles and frivolity in a moment.

“I am going to my husband, the musician Herr Rucker—do you need a better reason, sergeant?”

The soldier pulled at a grey moustache and seemed a little perplexed.

“Are you from the Castle, lady—a guest of his Majesty?”

“I—what a question. I live at the Villa Petit-Trianon and not in palaces, my good man. Whatever put it into your head to ask me such a question?”

“We are instructed to stop and search for anybody who was at Neu-Schwanstein last night. You say that you have not been there but at your home. Can you give me any proof of that?”

Fricka came instantly to a resolution.

“Heinrich,” she cried to her footman in the imperial behind her, “open my dressing bag and take out some of the letters you will find there. The sergeant may read them if he chooses.”

The footman obeyed, admiring, perhaps, the facility with which his mistress lied. As to the sergeant, he stared at several of the opened letters which were thrust upon him but did not make any other effort to read them other than scanning the addresses in the torn envelopes. If he had known that this woman carried a secret missive from the King to his friend, Count Holnstein in Munich,

we can imagine that his moustache would no longer have been in danger.

“Well,” he grumbled at last, “I suppose I must pass you—are you returning to-day, lady?”

“Oh,” she exclaimed with one of her happiest smiles, “how can I tell you that when I am going to my husband.”

The sergeant was himself married exceedingly and, perhaps, reflected that things would have been different in his own home. The human appeal aroused jealousy but no hostility. He certainly would pass a woman who obeyed her husband and so my lady went on, her footman laughing heartily when the soldier was out of sight and she herself well content with the good fortune which appeared to attend her embassy.

Here, unhappily, she was not a little premature.

Soldiers appeared on the road, anon—a troop of lancers with a certain Captain Nicholas Hohler at their head. Fricka recognised him as one of Count Durckheim’s aides-de-camp and thought he must be riding to the Castle to see his superior officer; but the Captain cried a halt directly he perceived her carriage and coming up to her, he bade her coachman pull up in words that carried authority.

“The lady von Rucker, is it not?” he asked—and then he said quickly, “surely I had the honour to meet you at the Schloss Berg last year?”

Fricka did not like his tone though she did not dislike the man. And this was natural since Captain Hohler was accounted the handsomest officer in the Bavarian army and women by the score had sighed o' nights when they remembered him.

Thirty years of age, he was ridiculously fair with blue eyes and hair that a woman might have envied. His figure would have served for the model of a Grecian athlete and he had that masterful and merry manner which rarely fails to appeal. That day, however, he was unusually serious for the time being and he told Fricka immediately that he had been sent to question her.

"My information is," he explained, "that you have just left the King and are riding to the city upon his affairs. I hope the story is not true for your sake ; but in any case I have to see you safely on the road and you will be very wise to make a friend of me."

She did not know how to answer him.

Of what avail would it be to deny her visit to the palace, since the telegraph evidently had informed him of it? A sense of a near peril troubled her, but she had too much wit to betray herself. After all, he merely threatened to escort her to Munich and then she would demand to be taken to her husband's house.

"Of course I will make a friend of you," she

avowed, "don't think I am a dreadful conspirator, please. I went to the palace last night because I heard everybody had deserted the King and he was alone. You know why I went because you met me at the Schloss Berg," and she smiled archly, as one who should say, "there is my secret and I share it with you."

Captain Hohler smiled with a man's approval of an intrigue and appeared to agree with her.

"It is purely formal, this arrest," he declared, "you will see the Chancellor and, no doubt, he will ask you some questions. After that, you will be free to go to your home as you wish. Let us hurry on now for we have a long journey before us," and wheeling about, he ordered the troop to surround the carriage and then commanded the coachman to drive on.

It was a silent journey. The boisterous Captain had become the quiet man of affairs, while as for Fricka, her brain was busy with so many thoughts that a clear course of action would not suggest itself. Chiefly, however, she repeated to herself the promise that she was to see Count Holnstein. Could anything more fortunate happen? She would deliver her letter and that would be the end of her mission. Nor could she forbear a smile at the simplicity of these diplomats who chose for her the very destination she so ardently desired.

These conflicting thoughts carried her into the city; which was reached at sundown. Some excitement in the streets betrayed the national anxiety and she did not fail to observe that there were soldiers everywhere, a double guard at the palaces and posses of men about the banks and palaces. The citizens themselves thronged the cafés and the beerhouses and appeared to be engaged in earnest and often excited talk, though their sympathies found no loud expression in the presence of the police who were everywhere. Fricka wondered if they were really awaiting the King's coming with hope or desirous that the Council of State should prevail. Was Ludwig still beloved by them or had that cunning old fox, Luitpold, at last persuaded them that the Almighty had destined him to be their ruler henceforth?

She could form no opinion about this, and as the carriage rolled on through the crowded streets, other anxieties possessed her.

This Captain Hohler had not asked her where her husband lived nor did any anxiety on that point appear to trouble him. The carriage was being conducted away from the Wotanstrasse where she resided and its destination appeared to be the Hof Barracks wherein the Captain was bivouacked. They would question her there, Fricka thought and take her on afterwards for an interview with the

Count Holnstein. She smiled at the idea but smiled prematurely. The Captain's destination was neither the barracks nor the palace. He went instead to a small house in the Baden Platz and hardly had they pulled up at its door when the astonished lady recognised it for the former home of one of Ludwig's mistresses, the singer from Vienna whom he had insulted so outrageously before dismissing her.

"My lady," said the Captain, as he helped her from the carriage, "I am merely doing my duty. The Count Durckheim has ordered that you be detained in this house until the Count Holnstein is ready to see you."

"Detained—a prisoner?" she cried, now thoroughly afraid.

"A prisoner, yes, but one whose prison is hung with silk; fear nothing, we know what King Ludwig thought of you and we shall not fail to do you honour."

The soldiers now closed about the carriage and ordered away the idlers who had begun to collect on the pavement. Fricka realised that any further protest would be ridiculous and without another word spoken she entered the house and heard the door of it locked immediately behind her.

A pompous major-domo, who looked as though he also had been in the army, received her in the

hall, and introduced her to the maid, Katherine, who evidently had expected her coming. They conducted her immediately to a salon on the first floor, decorated in the style of Louis Quatorze and not without some elegance. There Captain Hohler joined her—his military airs now forgotten and only his natural gallantry remaining.

“Now,” he said boisterously, “now we can be friends. I want you to understand that I will help you if I can; but nothing can be done until you have seen Holnstein. Meanwhile, I am to amuse you if that is possible. You must say if that is agreeable to you—for, dear lady, I fear at present they will permit you to see nobody else but this unworthy gaoler of yours.”

She was greatly astonished. The situation appeared more serious than she had thought. To see nobody . . . except this Captain. Well, he must come then, for she had always dreaded solitude.

“When do you propose to return?” she asked.

“To supper, dear lady—if you wish it.”

She did not answer, But he took her silence for consent and saluting he left her alone.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MANIFESTO

MEANWHILE, what of Ludwig and the palace.

Curious things were happening there; revelations of character he had not expected—treachery he certainly had not looked for.

To begin with—here was his Minister of War, Durckheim, come, not to arrest him but to see if he could not save him at the last moment.

And this very Minister had assured him that the man upon whom he counted most, the Count Holnstein, was really at the back of the Council of State, that he it was who wished to send a regiment to Neu-Schwanstein to seize his King and that Prince Luitpold had usurped the throne only with his connivance.

Did Ludwig remember, when he heard this, that he had written secretly to Holnstein last night and that a pretty woman was even then carrying the letter to Munich?

Possibly not, since he had remembrance for little those days, when he would even forget sometimes that he had eaten his dinner.

Meanwhile this maligned Chief of Staff was doing all that he could to cheer up his King, even if he did it blunderingly.

He had that very morning sent a telegram to the Count von Bismarck in Berlin and actually had received an answer, though Holnstein's spies were supposed to be in possession of the telegraph.

"His Majesty ought to drive at once to Munich and take care of his interests before the assembled Parliament," had been the great Chancellor's advice. Later, he explained that this was only a ruse to discover the King's real condition.

"I thought thus," he said, "'either the King is well, when he will follow my advice, or he is really mad.'"

Ludwig, unhappily, did not take his advice. Just as he had played with Fricka's idea that he should resort to flight and find a temporary haven in Tyrol, so now did he beat about the bush with Durckheim. Had he shown himself that day in Munich the people would have saved him. So at least thought that eminent historian Clara Tschudi.

There was no such showing unfortunately. The King paced to and fro in the great salon of the mirrors as an animal newly caged. He still wore the splendid uniform of his guards and carried a

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sword as though he would cut down anybody that laid a hand upon him. And Durckheim could but listen patiently while he raved—or wrote appealing telegrams, a few of which were delivered. One was to the Emperor of Austria, another to his beautiful Empress.

“They will not suffer me to be taken to a mad-house. Get them through if you can, Durckheim. It is our last hope.”

Durckheim did his best. He himself went down to the stables and ordered some of his own servants to put horses to and drive to the frontier. “To Ruelle, as quickly as you can even if you kill your team,” he cried.

The carriage went, but the intervention, alike of the Emperor and the Empress, was too late. Traitors in Munich had corrupted the regiments there and such as were faithful were kept from the news. Even the rascal Mayr had a hand in this. He added secret words to Durckheim’s messages and commandants of Jaegers were ordered to consult the Minister of War in Munich before marching their troops to the King’s assistance. So they never came at all and the doctors went on with their relentless task, uninterrupted by further bayonets.

Perhaps Ludwig was wiser than the old Count in this and knew that the people were his only

hope. Yet he would not go to them, he would write. He had always been eloquent with his pen and so when he decided to fall back upon a proclamation he was in his element. Even Durckheim admired the good sense and well balanced rhetoric of the document the King now drew up, signed at a gilded table with an immense quill pen in his often trembling hand.

“I, Ludwig, King of Bavaria, feel constrained to make the following manifesto to my beloved Bavarians and the collective German people.

“Prince Luitpold desires against my will to make himself ruler of my land. My former Ministry has duped my beloved people by erroneous representations as to the state of my health and has been guilty of high treason.

“I feel myself physically and mentally in as good health as any other monarch. The projected treason has come in a manner so surprising that I have not been able to defeat the base intentions of the Ministry.

“Should the projected deeds of violence be put into execution and Prince Luitpold seize the reins of government against my will, I give my faithful friends the task of protecting my rights with all their means and under all circumstances——”

So it went on. All loyal citizens were called upon to brand Luitpold as a traitor . . . and,

perhaps, the mad King's vision showed him Munich in flames while he fiddled the death song of *Siegfried*. Even Durckheim wondered if the Council could hold out against such an appeal—as sane a document as King ever addressed to a nation and one his friends have ever relied upon to prove that Ludwig, the dreamer, was not also Ludwig, the madman.

Meanwhile his enemies were not idle.

That very day the Council met again and persuaded Parliament to decree that the King was insane. Durckheim was ordered by the War Office to return immediately to Munich and his pathetic telegrams, begging that he might remain at Neu-Schwanstein were treated as infractions of duty for which later he must pay the penalty. "The orders of the Ministry of War must be obeyed" the answer ran. So the Count had been dismissed, then, and another had taken his place.

"I can serve you better in the city than here," he said regretfully, and Ludwig had to admit that it was so.

"We must rely upon the people," the King repeated. "We have no other friends. Go as they command you, Count, but look for me to follow you when the hour has come."

"The hour is now if you but knew it," said the Count dejectedly, and that indeed was true.

These two men could have set out together and

all would have been saved. Durckheim's authority would have let the King pass and none could have kept the knowledge of his presence from the people of the capital. As to the soldiers, they would have suffered no Luitpold if the well-beloved Ludwig had been among them. But the old indecision prevailed. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow. How many a throne of life has thus been lost.

It was night when the Minister left him and now the rascal Mayr and the faithful Weber were his only companions. Never did King spend such a vigil. Sometimes he would rave as a woman in hysteria. "I am not mad," he would say, tears of fear and rage upon his cheeks. And as he uttered the words, his hands were clenched, and his eyes staring in his head. "To be cast down from the heights to nothing—to be thrown into a cell, manacled and fettered as my poor brother Otto was—I will not stand it—I will not live through it"—thus he betrayed the idea of suicide still in his mind and becoming each instant more powerful.

The valets pitied him, perhaps, but could do nothing. Clara Tschudi declared afterwards that he asked for cyanide of potassium, but was refused sternly as might have been expected, even if the cupboards of the palace had harboured that deadly drug. Afterwards he remembered the battlements

—how easy it would be to cast himself into the falls of the river as he had threatened to do last night when the lady Fricka was with him. But the doors were now locked and men guarded the Castle heights, so that he could but remain in his own apartments—a prisoner who yet nominally enjoyed his liberty. Nevertheless, he seems to have convinced himself by this time that he would die by his own hand and there was a moment when he prayed to the Almighty to forgive him the step he was about to take. In such a mood he cried: “They are driving me to death; my blood be upon their heads.” Or again: “This fellow, this Luitpold is no Prince Regent; he is a Prince Rebel.”

It was all a vain lament; the beating of broken wings against bars of iron. When the valet Weber calmed him a little, he took a diamond clasp from his cloak, lying on the table before him and pressed it upon the servant’s acceptance. The poor devil got charged with the theft of it afterwards; but that was another story. Nobody, however, asked for the King’s prayer-book which accompanied the gift, and none would have begrudged the prayers for which the doomed man asked.

“Pray for me, Weber, pray for me. There is none other than you who will do so.”

And this to a humble valet, the last of all his

servants who remained faithful to him in all that lonely palace.

It was a terrible night. The glorious heaven of the day had given place to heavy cloud from the mountains; and anon fog rolled over the Castle, to be followed by heavy rain and a darkness as of caverns. Notwithstanding it, the King suddenly remembered Fricka's promise that if he could reach the Kitzberg Pass all would be well; and he astonished Mayr, who had returned to the salon, by asking for his carriage and his coachman. The request alarmed the servant, who, feigning to obey, went to the great gate and informed the guard there of what was happening. Clearly, now was the time for the doctors to act, if ever. Instantly a trooper went down to the village to fetch them and in half-an-hour they were within the palace.

Ludwig still waited for the coach which was to carry him to Tyrol. Where was his coachman; what did the delay mean?

The request permitted a stratagem. Mayr entered the salon and declared that all was now ready and that the King could leave immediately. So they persuaded him to enter the small apartment which gave upon the staircase and there immediately four doctors confronted him. Behind them stood the keepers ready to seize their prey.

Dr. Gudden, the great brain specialist, was the spokesman of the company in the name of the Prince Luitpold, who was now Regent of the Kingdom.

“Your Majesty,” he said, “this is a sad hour for me. The Council has received an account of your Majesty’s state of health, and I am ordered to accompany you to the Schloss Berg without delay——”

The King sprang back and made as though he would draw his sword. Then as swiftly he relented.

“Do not touch me,” he cried, “I am ready to go with you.”

So ended the reign of Ludwig the Second. He, who had given Wagner’s music to the world, was already doomed to the madhouse.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LETTER

WHILE this tragedy was thus drawing to its close at Neu-Schwanstein, our little friend Fricka von Rucker was making herself beautiful to entertain the Captain Nicholas Hohler in her apartments in the Baden Platz.

She did not know—how could she?—that she had been trapped by the very man to whom she was carrying her precious letter—the Count Holnstein; and that his object was two-fold. Firstly, he was determined that she should make no trouble in Munich among the King's friends—for he knew the capacities of a pretty woman where trouble is concerned; and, secondly, he desired to discover just what had been planned at the palace between Ludwig and this amorous conspirator, who had dared so much to go to the aid of her sovereign in his hour of need.

Possibly, so shrewd a man did not keep it from himself that my lady carried letters; but even if that were so, he had no intention whatever of causing her to be searched. Such high-handed treatment could only have the effect of closing her

mouth and depriving her velvet-handed gaolers of any other information she had to give them.

“Hohler,” the argument ran, “Hohler will know how to deal with her, and if there be any documents in her possession we may be very sure he will not overlook them. Leave it to him, for we have yet to meet the woman who can resist him.”

To give him due credit, the Captain certainly did deserve the compliment. He knew how to deal with women and few were able to resist him. Even Fricka, still obsessed by the idea of saving the King and flying with him to some friendly country, even she experienced a sense of pleasure at the thought of the Captain's return; nor did she by any means neglect those feminine adornments suitable to a pretty woman who is about to have supper with the handsomest soldier in an army which did not lack fine men.

It was just nine o'clock when he came to the Baden Platz—the hour of his departure it would be an indiscretion to reveal. Certainly, he also had been at some pains to appear at an advantage—and his uniform was of that glittering fashion, so popular in the theatres and so potent in its appeal to the feminine imagination. Fricka told herself immediately that she had never seen a more attractive figure nor talked with a man who put

her so quickly at her ease. Moreover, with a woman's vanity of wit, she argued that all soldiers were necessarily foolish, and concluded that if her brains could not prevail with this young man, then, indeed, he was unlike his fellows.

They talked at first of common topics—the opera where *Lohengrin* was being played, the coming Bayreuth festival; the growing popularity of Wagner.

“Why, even the English are beginning to understand him,” said the Captain, “and they are the worst musicians in Europe. I heard *Tannhäuser* in London and they didn't talk. That annoyed me, for I was with a pretty girl and I had a lot to say to her. Admittedly, I am not much in that line myself—I like Strauss—even Wagner himself said he was one of the best. Give me a waltz and I will leave you your Isolde; a devilish tiresome woman she would have been to take out to supper, now don't you think so?”

Fricka did think so, but, as she pointed out, waltzing was hardly an accomplishment of the Knights and possibly they could make love well despite their professions.

“Wagner perceived the poetry of life, not the gymnastics. He was like the ancient Greeks—he saw us as puppets in the hands of the gods and saw also that they were puppets with us. But he

made us realise the soul as few musicians have ever done. That's why the French won't have him. Paris has many beautiful things but the soul is not one of them. Imagine Meyerbeer teaching you anything at all! You hear him as you hear a hurdy-gurdy in the streets—just sound and nothing more.”

“Oh, but, dear lady, the love music in the fourth act of *Huguenots* always sets me on fire. Imagine being able to make love to a woman like that. Why, we should be irresistible.”

He meant to invite her to say that he was irresistible as it was; but she made no concessions.

“Surely a man need not sing to impress a woman. She does not ask for nightingales. I always feel that the operatic tenor can look very ridiculous, though I adore hearing him. Imagine the noise there would be if all the lovers in the Hof Gardens made love in the manner of Tristan. Nobody would be able to hear himself speak—surely a good whisperer is to be preferred.”

He agreed to that.

“Love is often silence. The eyes do not speak, they electrify. Yours at this moment are adorable. Unfortunately, it would appear that they are seeking another. Why let them do that since they will never see him again?”

The question was put earnestly and she fell immediately to the new mood of seriousness.

“Is that decided, then?” she asked. “Has the Council arrested him? If that were so, why are they keeping me here?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Nothing is ever decided in a revolution. Each hour brings its own decision. If they have arrested Ludwig, they certainly have not told me. That is why I am here to-night. I don’t serve two masters and I want to know how you and I can serve one. Perhaps you have sufficient faith in me to tell me that?”

“Of course I have. Why should I doubt you? Let me have an interview with Holnstein and you will do the King a great service. You might yet save everything.”

“Through Holnstein?”

“Of course, is he not the greatest friend our friend has in Munich? Why then not arrange a meeting between us?”

He shook his head.

“The house is watched. We should never be able to leave it to-night. I don’t say that something might not be arranged to-morrow—but the day will tell us. Meanwhile, you are asking me to risk everything for you—my rank, my liberty, perhaps my life. Why should I do that for any-

body who is almost a stranger to me ? Now, if it were for my mistress— ? ”

The words did not frighten her. She knew very well what he meant and instantly there came that arithmetic of the devoted woman's mind. Was it worth while to make the supreme sacrifice to save the King—if supreme sacrifice were necessary ? The thought went through her head like a flash and was instantly dismissed. But it was to recur later on when the actor became really the lover—as the fascination of this extraordinarily attractive woman compelled him ultimately to be.

“ For your mistress,” Fricka repeated, assuming an ignorance of his meaning which was worthy of her art, “ why not for your King ? ”

Hohler was quite candid about that.

“ I do not chase shadows but the substance. If you were to show me to-night just what we could do together to save Ludwig, I might do it for a woman's smile but not in the delusion that the Highest Born would remember my services or even my name twenty-four hours after we had saved him. I should be a gambler staking my life and fortune upon a King's sense of gratitude—a poor reed as even a woman might know.”

She assented to that. Ludwig, in truth, had a poor memory for his friends sometimes, and the thought now came to her, perhaps—what if he has

a poor memory for me? Being very feminine, however, she neglected to ask herself if this fascinating soldier was likely to be more constant. She refused to recount the number of "affairs" with which gossip associated him in Munich.

"You say, 'if we saved the King,' " she argued; "you think, then, that he could be saved?"

"Ah, that is the question. I, of course, have not given the matter very much consideration. Why should I? It is nothing to me when I am not looking into your eyes. But when I see how deeply you feel the misfortunes which have overtaken his Majesty, then I ask myself seriously, how can I help you—what is it in your mind to do?"

"To begin with, I should go to Holnstein and give him my letter!"

He opened his eyes widely.

A letter. He had never thought of that. Where did she carry it, then? Why somewhere under that gown she wore so gracefully. Hohler foresaw that he would have to hold her in his arms sooner or later, if he were to recover it for that very Count in whom she trusted.

Naturally, he could have arranged the interview she desired and arranged it immediately. If he did not do so, it was because this woman had fascinated him as few women he had known. She was not a "type." Her beauty was elusive—some did

not think her beautiful at all—and those who were sensible of it, discovered in it something new and wholly desirable. She held the affections of men in a remarkable manner when she won them—and Nicholas Hohler was by no means alone in his opinion that she was wholly desirable and in many ways without rival in the city.

So he would not let her go to Holnstein, just because there was danger in her going. A sense of chivalry toward her usurped the place of his former intention to trap her. He would save and not destroy her.

All this passed quickly in his mind, when he heard her avowal.

“ So you have a letter, then—from the King ? ”

“ From the King to Count Holnstein, yes, it is true. Why do you look so astonished ? Is not the Count the first of our friends ? ”

He laughed a little savagely.

“ The first of our enemies, you mean. There is not one better in all Bavaria. It is he who urged the Regency upon Luitpold ; it is he who sent the doctors to Neu-Schwanstein ; it is he who will put Ludwig into a madhouse as he put his brother Otto.”

Fricka heard him vaguely. Her heart beat fast and she was very pale. What did it all mean ? Was he telling her the truth or merely finding a

pretext to put her off? When she looked at him closely, her faith in him remained. Such earnestness could not be feigned by a man of his habits and character.

“What are you telling me?” she cried; and then, “Oh, but the King believes him absolutely—he is his last hope. If the Count fails him, who is left? There isn’t, then, one friend remaining in all his Kingdom.”

She was greatly distressed, and in his blundering way, he tried to reassure her.

“We need patience. Nothing can be done at present. The soldiers have yet to speak, and it is by no means certain that they are with the Count. I believe the best thing to be done is to get the King here somehow. We may even have to bring him secretly. Don’t you see, that if they send him to the Schloss Berg, it will be easy to get access to him there. I would undertake to do it myself—a good pair of horses, a few stout fellows and what would be the worth of the guard they will send? You would want a regiment to keep him there securely and they are not likely to send one. On the other hand, we shall find a way in and our friends will be waiting for us here. Don’t you see what a *coup*—can’t you hear the cheers of the people if they saw the King coming in among them?”

He was really immensely excited by the plot—the plot he had not the slightest idea of putting into execution. How splendid it all sounded. He, Nicholas Hohler, on a fine black horse and Ludwig, the well-beloved, by his side. The people would go mad and he himself would be made commander-in-chief on the spot. A pity it was all dreaming. Hohler had no intention of risking his skin that way. But he had every intention of making Fricka his mistress that night.

Unfortunately, she, who was usually so quick in reading the hearts of men, failed upon this occasion to divine a purpose. It may have been that her physical bias toward so attractive a companion weakened her judgment and left her a prey to her passions. The enthusiasm which Hohler feigned was very real to her. Yes, yes, they would help the King's escape from the Schloss Berg and carry him in triumph to the city. The people would rise; the soldiers revolt; the traitors fly. It all seemed so simple . . . she did not realise that she was a prisoner and that the man, who talked to her so glibly, was really her gaoler.

“Yes, yes, indeed you are right,” she declared as one inspired suddenly with a faith which was unquenchable; “if Holnstein is our enemy, we had better burn the King's letter here and now. It would only do him harm . . . your own plan is

so much better. To take him from the prison they have chosen, what a triumph! And I am sure you could do it. The men would obey you—they would follow you anywhere.”

He did not contradict her. This precious letter, how much he wanted it. His fingers itched to touch her bosom and discover it.

“As you say, the first thing is to decide about this unhappy document. Let me see it and I will tell you what we should do. They may search you presently and they will not have such gentle fingers as mine. If it is a harmless letter, you may see Holnstein and, perhaps, get some news from him that will help us. But if it is what they would call treachery to Luitpold, then you will go to prison, my dear, and all my regiment could not get you out again. So I suggest that you let me read it and then I shall really be in a position to advise you.”

She thought a moment, and then made her decision. If this man would not help her, whither should she turn for help? So at last she unlaced her corsets and produced the missive. Hohler's hands trembled as he tore the envelope of it. Holnstein would reward him richly for this. Why, he might be a colonel in three days' time.

“Well,” she said, after a long pause.

He looked very grave.

“ You know its contents ? ” he asked.

“ Yes, they were read to me. The Regent is denounced as a traitor and the Count is commanded to imprison all who have assisted him.”

“ So that all who have assisted him are your enemies the moment the words are read.”

“ If they are read. Don't you say we should destroy it ? Where, then, is the danger ? ”

“ From the King himself—he may have sent other messengers to Holnstein saying you have a letter. Then there may be a copy of it. How do you know that his valet at Neu-Schwanstein did not read it ? ”

He was merely fencing—afraid to destroy a document which might do him so much good, yet really anxious for her safety.

“ I know that neither Weber nor Mayr read it, for neither was in the room when it was written. It went straight into the place where you saw it ”—and she blushed at the memory.

He reflected a little while and then came to a resolution.

“ I will destroy it myself where there will be no trace of it. You must leave this house at once. I must get you away whatever the risk. To-morrow they may come here and question you very closely and if the servants had found ashes—well, we know what servants are. Now, let me think what is best

to be done. You must pack a valise and be prepared. I shall return to the garden entrance in half-an-hour and bring a carriage. The destination I will decide upon when I have reflected."

He did not wait either for assent or protest but strode out of the room, leaving her amazed and not a little frightened. Why had he not torn up the letter in her presence? The neglect awakened her suspicions but did not wholly rob her of her confidence. Somehow she still believed that this soldier would save her—and certainly she realised the nature of her peril. Luitpold, the Usurper, would have her shot without scruple. She knew both the man and his methods.

So there was nothing for it but to repack her valise and to make ready for another journey. Perhaps she was not sorry to get away from a house which had witnessed the degradation of two women and seemed about to add to the number. She had not believed the Captain to possess such authority that he could open the doors at his own will; but it was plain that he meant to do so; and she had to admit that she was now wholly in his power and that at a word from him, she might be shot as so many were to be in the days that followed after. The thought frightened her greatly, nor may any blame her if, from that moment she began to

consider the fortunes of Ludwig less and her own position more.

Of what avail to risk her own life in a cause already lost ?

If the last desperate attempts to save Ludwig failed, then truly was her own case desperate. Stark ruin faced her. If they did not actually kill her, they certainly would send her to prison and prison was near to death for such a woman. The very fear of it compelled a new attitude toward Nicholas Hohler. As her lover, he might also save the King ! The idea took possession of her while she waited for the carriage with an expectation that bordered upon agitation. Yes, indeed, this soldier was now her last hope.

It was an hour before he returned, but his excuses were reasonable and his demeanour that of a happy man.

“ I have seen Holnstein and it is well that I did so,” he said, “ he does not want any women mixed up in this affair but he tells me very frankly that if you are not across the frontier by daylight, he will have you in the Hof prison and you may not be alive in three days’ time. If you do go, I will undertake to get you a pardon if the King is taken ; while, if his friends get him across the pass, as you hope, you will then get me a pardon—so we shall be safe either way. That must be the bond between

us—true friends, I hope, for a very long time.”

She knew well what he meant but she would not argue about it. His words seemed to say that there was still hope for Ludwig and the confession reanimated her moribund hopes.

“ You say that the King may still get away into Austria; then they have not taken him at Neuschwanstein?”

“ It is not that. He certainly is a prisoner, but there is yet the Schloss Berg and from that he may be delivered by the soldiers. Durckheim remains loyal to him and holds many regiments. If his Jaegers say ‘no,’ I shall be sorry for Luitpold and his gang. It’s all a toss of a coin, my angel; but one thing is certain, that we must be across the frontier by daybreak and the sooner we set out the better.”

He had fallen a little to the manner of the lover again and looked at her with eyes which shone with a lustre she could not mistake. The time for reconsideration of her attitude was now passed and she uttered no protest, either at his endearment or his light caress as he conducted her to the carriage. She saw only that the stars of a summer night were shining on the garden; knew only that the perfume of the gardenias and nicotinas was almost overpowering. And so she entered the

berline which stood at the gate and they set out immediately for the Austrian frontier.

It must have been nearly two o'clock of the morning. Nobody appeared to have gone to bed in Munich and the streets were full of excited people, who also thronged the beer-gardens and the cafés. Orchestras in some of the more disreputable halls were playing Hungarian music and tousled-haired women danced feverishly as other women might have danced while Rome was burning. One fact, however, was not lost to the observation of the keen-eyed Fricka. There were no soldiers save those who stood sentries at the gates of the barracks, the banks and the palaces. The police, in their turn, kept order by good temper and had been instructed that the more frivolous—perhaps dangerous—the amusement of the people, the better the Council of State would be pleased. So they merely smiled upon the baggages of the café and were very fathers to any courtesan who had been overcome by the "night air" and desired the assistance of friendly arms. This policy of license obviously had been dictated—and its wisdom was apparent when nobody had a word to say for the poor mad King, but all were ready to applaud the usurper, Luitpold, as though he, truly, were the saviour of the city.

We say that there were no soldiers abroad.

More to be observed was the fact that none accompanied the carriage which carried Fricka out of Bavaria. A footman sat upon the box with the fat civilian who drove the excellent horses but no other was in attendance. Evidently those who had employed Nicholas Hohler upon this strange mission, did not believe for a moment that the King's friends would attempt to rescue the King's ambassador, and she, at any rate, had in their opinion passed out of the picture. To-morrow, she would be in Austria, banished until it should please Holnstein to pardon her, if pardon were ever to be granted.

Meanwhile, the Captain was growing more and more amorous every hour. He seemed at this time very ready to pose as the hero of her salvation and in no way backward in demanding his price.

"Don't you see how fortunate we have been," he would remind her often; "if I had not gone to Holnstein and given him the precious letter——"

"Then you gave it to him after all? Surely there was no need to do that?"

"Every need, my angel—he knew of it, sure enough. They were watching you while the King wrote it and if I had not carried it to the Count, they would be searching you by this time and the rest of the night you would have spent in prison. But I said, 'she wants to give it up freely—"

she's tired of the whole business and understands that she has been a fool. So here it is and you see that it is not the kind of thing a woman would plan. He fascinated her,' I said, 'as he has fascinated so many women. You should think nothing of it, Count, and send her back to her villa. She's not the sort of woman to do any mischief—I pledge my word of honour.' ”

She thought upon it, perplexed and again afraid.

“ He did not believe you, this Count. If he had done so, you would not now be taking me into Austria.”

“ Ah, that is for your safety. I insisted upon it when I saw that there was no villa for us. The Council is in a panic and will sit all night. It would certainly lay its hands upon you if the fact of the letter were known. But Holnstein will see to that. He knows how to deal with an affair of this kind——”

“ An affair—what do you mean by an affair ? ”

He put his arm boldly round her and hesitated no longer to declare himself.

“ I mean that Holnstein is letting you go because he knows that I am in love. . . . ”

“ You told him so ? ”

“ I told him so as plainly as I am telling you now. ‘ She is the most fascinating and the cleverest woman I have met for many years,’ I said, ‘ if you

put her in prison, you will make me the most unhappy man in Munich to-night. If, on the other hand, you let her go, I will answer for her—she will be no danger to anybody but me and I will take the risk,' ” and he laughed loudly, as though the idea of Fricka either resisting or harming him were the best of jokes.

Fricka, on her part, did not know what to say : what woman of her temperament would have found a ready answer? Romance, indeed, of the kind which should properly be associated with the moonlight of a theatre had begun to dominate her and wholly to change her perspective. The mountain road, the glimpses of rushing rivers and torrents upon glistening rocks, silvered woods and ghostly chalets combined to make a background for the drama in which she realised that she was playing the part of the heroine pursued and that a bold lover was beside her. Thus was she driven to the excitement which the commonplace of their chatter vainly sought to conceal. A great adventure had overtaken her—she knew not where it would end.

So she was silent for a little while, and when next she spoke it was of her own future.

“ When will they let me return to my house ? ”

“ Ah, that will depend. If Ludwig's friends make no attempt to rescue him, then they will not

concern themselves any more about you. Should there be a row, it will be different. You may be banished for months——”

“Months—but how am I to live? My husband will never leave Munich. You must understand. He has not been a husband to me for a long while now.”

He smiled curiously.

“I understand that—but he will not be permitted to desert you—and are there not your friends? My own thought is a villa in the Tyrol for the time being; that is, unless the King is saved. Should we be able to do that, you will have a great future before you, my angel—I shall then be seeking your protection—you will not need mine. But to-night we must think only of to-night and let the day bring its own message.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“To-night is to-day already—don’t you see that the dawn is breaking?”

It was very true. The cold grey light of day had begun to creep upon the mountains and hills and valleys soon stood out clearly as though some mighty hand had carved them out of the darkness. Now were the torrents chilling to the sight, the chalets shuttered and inhospitable, the cattle grouped to wait for the sun, the still waters veiled by the mists of morning. Fricka shivered a little

at the frost of the scene and did not resent the strong arm which drew her to the warmth of an ardent embrace. An odd destiny had overtaken her. Why resist it ?

For a full hour they drove thus, silent and afraid to talk. The sun came anon, at first but a flush of the pink of roses upon the higher crests—anon, a mingling of celestial colours flashing from dome to dome across the eternal snows and searching out at last every jewel in the merry torrent which ran by the high-road which carried them into Austria. And in this glory of the sun, they came to the frontier and the man left the carriage to deal with the formalities while Fricka sat alone as one in a dream from which she had no desire to be awakened.

How far off yesterday seemed. The old life was done with—so much was very evident. She might never see Munich or her friends again. Or a miracle might come to pass, the King win back his own and her reward be beyond all estimation wonderful. A gambler in spirit, she thrilled at the prospect of this tremendous uncertainty. Even now all might be won.

Hohler returned presently and they drove on a little way upon the same high-road. Then the horses were turned toward the East and for some two miles they followed a narrow and stony track

which appeared to lead up to the nearer hills. Their destination was here. A hunting box stood at the foot of a low green mountain, some hundred feet above the rapid river, with a forest of pines about it and a pretty garden of English flowers at its gates. Here an Austrian manservant received the Captain, whose coming evidently was expected. Without a word they entered a spacious hall and passed upstairs into a large bedroom where a fire of logs burned brightly and a breakfast of coffee and fruit had been prepared for them.

“You did not know that I had a hunting box in Tyrol?” the soldier asked her. She said that she had been quite unaware of it.

“My old uncle, the Count Hohler, was very fond of of this place. He left it to me when he died two years ago. He was a bad old man with the ladies and you will find, I think, all a woman needs in your drawing room. Don’t be too long about it, though, for we must both be very hungry . . . and after that there is sleep to be thought about,” and he laughed oddly that he should remember sleep at such a time.

Fricka, in her turn, hastened to remember that she had travelled all night and that her appearance could not at the moment justify those rhapsodies in which the soldier had indulged during the journey. She welcomed the coming of the sub-

stantial maid, Elizabeth, and was not a little astonished to find herself in a dressing room where the ornaments were of tortoiseshell and gold and the mirrors would have satisfied a mannequin.

Certainly she needed some reparation ; but when all had been done, her dress changed and her pretty hair again disciplined, the glass told her that excitement had added not a little to her beauty and that she might return to the Captain with confidence.

“Wonderful,” he exclaimed, when he saw her, “now I understand why my friend Holnstein is so very much afraid of you. He is quite right to be so. You would fascinate the devil if you looked at him like that.”

“But I don’t wish to fascinate anybody—I want my breakfast,” and she sat at the table and poured out the coffee as though she were already mistress of the château.

* * * *

Fricka awoke at seven o’clock that night in the great bed which had been the chief ornament of the vast room wherein she had breakfasted with Nicholas Hohler. He was no longer by her side and when the maid Elizabeth answered her ring, the maid said that the Captain had left an hour ago for Munich but that there was a letter on the table to be given to her mistress.

“Holnstein has sent for me,” he wrote, “this should mean that his news is good. Expect my return at the earliest possible hour. I would not wake you this night, my beloved, but will do so many nights, I hope.

Your own NICHOLAS.”

She put the letter on the table beside the bed and questioned the maid.

“When did the Captain leave, Elizabeth?”

“An hour ago, Madame. A telegram came from the station and Karl was compelled to wake my master.”

Fricka blushed deeply.

“He came to this room, Elizabeth?”

“He entered it, yes, Madame. He has done so many times when a message has come from the post.”

It was as though she had said: “Do not distress yourself, dear lady. You are not the first mistress who has come to the Schloss Kilzberg by a very long way. We think nothing of that here—it is just what we expect.”

Fricka, however, buried herself deeply in the bedclothes and was afraid to ask any more questions.

Later on they served her with an excellent dinner in the same room and afterwards she slept until a late hour of the morning. When she awakened for the second time, she found that a telegram had come

also for her and that it was from the Captain.

“My duties forbid me to return to the Schloss,” it said; “await you here expectantly. Your safety assured. Come to my house in the Baden Platz. All is for your happiness. NICHOLAS.”

The message perplexed, but it did not displease her. The new romance had supplanted the old. She had become the mistress of Nicholas Hohler and although she knew it not, that notorious philanderer was to remain faithful to her for five long years.

A carriage took her from the Schloss at one o'clock and by nine o'clock at night she entered Munich.

No longer was it a city of excursions and alarms. Soldiers were no longer confined to barracks, the people in the beerhouses and the cafés asked each no more whether Ludwig, their King, would continue to reign, or the usurper Luitpold take his place. In lieu of the confusion, the fears and the uncertainty of yesterday, there was the calm of a great certainty; the grief of a people which had lost a beloved friend; the pity of those who remembered the dead with compassion.

For Ludwig the Second of Bavaria was dead and a new King reigned in his stead.

Thus it befell that Fricka went with tears to her

lover in the Baden Platz, and in his arms forgot her mad dreams of one who was ever a dreamer—of one who had stood to her for the supreme romance of a life which was still to be romantic, as her written story shows.

CHAPTER XXX

THE KING IS DEAD

THE King, truly, was dead.

Those who had carried him triumphantly to the madhouse had enjoyed a victory, the fruit of which had turned bitter in their mouths.

No longer might they plume themselves that Ludwig would share the ignominy and the insults bestowed upon his poor brother, Otto. For him there would be no strait-waistcoat, no padded cell, no warder to strike him, no hours of privation and darkness. He had passed to that sleep in which dreams should come—to the halls of eternal light where his friend Richard Wagner must surely await him with that music of the spheres which had been so often in his ears.

As we have seen, he had consented at last to leave his palace at Neu-Schwanstein after no more than an angry protest. He desired no scene, though a scene would have been welcome to his

captors. Even at that hour, it seemed that the thought of suicide was in his mind, and twice he asked the valet Weber for the key of the tower, from which undoubtedly he would have thrown himself had that key been forthcoming. When this was refused him upon a polite pretext, for the valet was his faithful friend to the end, he merely waited for the carriage in silence, submitting, as all believed, to the cruel destiny which had overtaken him.

It was four o'clock in the morning when the cortège set out from Neu-Schwanstein. As Ethel Harriet Hearn has told us, he looked ill—"his complexion was ashy white; his glance irresolute." The rain still fell in fitful showers and heavy mist clouds rolled up the river valley and obscured that view of distant green mountains which had so often given him pleasure. Now he must rub the damp window-pane of the carriage to see anything at all. There were peasants waiting at the gate, but their looks were as sorrowful as his own. This poor King of theirs—what was to become of him? Was he not as one of their own—he who had been so good a father to them? And what would happen to them when he was gone and this Prince Luitpold reigned in his stead? No more phantoms of the mountain passes then; no flaming sledges cleaving the darkness of the night; no gifts flung

to peasants' huts as the gilded coach went by; no mysterious visits of masked men to the sick and dying; no gentle hand to lift a child from the wayside and set it down again with silver in its little hands. No wonder the sun did not shine upon such a morning—for surely sunshine had gone out of the world.

There were four carriages in all for this historic journey, and in the first of them went a doctor and stout keepers. They put the King in the second and left him alone there; but there was a sturdy fellow on the box by the coachman's side and he carried arms and was not afraid to show them. Behind in a great barouche rode the famous Dr. Gudden and with him more of his breed; all ready to swear as the new Government wished, and honest, no doubt, in their conviction that Ludwig truly was a madman. They were followed by a wagonette full of keepers and police, ready to bully any that cursed them and quite prepared to do violence upon their King should the occasion call for it.

Perhaps there was some cause for the apprehensions which disturbed these blue-coated warriors as they watched the wet high-road and fingered their pistols while doing so.

That the peasants would spring to insurrection at a word was well known to them. The Jaegers

of Linderhof were already confined to their barracks, their fidelity to the new Government being in question ; while from Munich had come ominous stories of a discontented people and a soldiery which obeyed the new order with reluctance. Anything, indeed, might happen to that cortège : an ambush in any defile, a charge of horsemen in a wood, rocks rolled from a mountain height, a shot from a peasant's gun which would leave one dead on the highway as the finger of fate directed the bullet. Little wonder that the fat servitors looked round and about them with some curiosity. They were no candidates for martyrdom ; the celestial crown was not their ambition.

As for Ludwig himself, none may ever know what his thoughts were.

Possibly, he was living for a little while wholly in the world of his dreams. He entered Valhalla and heard the voices of the gods. Siegfried's death march rang in his ears—or he listened to the rustling of the leaves in the enchanted forest which the Master had created.

That he thought of Wagner, none may doubt.

The coachman who drove him declared afterwards that he called more than once for his dead friend and muttered his name as though he were there, seated beside him in the carriage. It may be that his mind went back to that memorable day

when he had written to the Maestro in Switzerland and had rescued him from that hell of debt and disdain into which he had fallen. What joy that letter had carried to Richard Wagner ! How he had hurried to his friend, flung himself at his feet, and professed his gratitude with tears in his eyes ! And what music had thus been given to a world which had just awakened to the knowledge of the genius who, hitherto, had lived in the shadows and might have been forgotten altogether but for a King's bounty. Yes, indeed, Ludwig did well to dwell upon those splendid hours, when alone in the Hof Theatre, he had first heard the Rhine-maidens and the gods had sung to him such music as no man hitherto had made.

So the journey went, with no word from any man for the King's ear ; no civility, hardly a thought for his comfort. They did not even halt to break their fast ; although they had left Neu-Schwanstein at four in the morning. And it was a tired and weary man who was driven at last, just before midday in fact, to the gates of the Schloss Berg and there shown at once to the prison which had been prepared for him.

"Let my servants come to me," were the first words he uttered. The Staff-Comptroller, Zanders, who had conducted him to his room, replied a little sadly that neither of his valets had been

admitted to the Castle, but dispatched to Munich as the Council of State ordered.

“Then I am to consider myself a close prisoner?”

“Your Majesty must not say so—we have our orders, sire. I trust they will be changed presently—when other affairs of state are settled.”

The King shrugged his shoulders but made no other comment. His face was dark and angry and there was a strange look in the wonderful eyes which could not be mistaken. He should have been pleased to come to the Schloss, for here some of the happiest days of his life had been spent; days when he had roamed about the woods with Richard Wagner by his side; days when he had known the ecstatic dreams, making of him a Knight of the Holy Grail and putting swans to the barque which carried him. Here he had watched Wagner at work upon the *Nibelungen* and first had heard the damnation of the gods: here beautiful women had sung the music of *Isolde* for him and the Master himself had conducted the works of Beethoven and Mozart. Every pathway in that beautiful forest was known to him; the very fishermen on the lakeside were friends whom he called by their Christian names.

And now he had come back to this well-beloved home to discover iron bars upon the windows which

should have revealed the scenes of his youthful delight and to discover holes in the doors through which the spies about him might watch his every action and record every word he spoke.

None will ever know the bitterness of the man's soul in that tragic hour. If he were mad, his madness was of a world apart; of a world in which he would dwell for a brief hour, returning wholly to the saner sphere of men and realities when the mood had passed, and there often showing himself possessed of a judgment which was sound and a shrewdness which many envied. So we may well imagine that these earliest hours at the Schloss Berg were hours of realisation and of understanding. They had conquered him at last, those enemies of his in Munich. Never again would they set him as a King over them.

If these were his thoughts, they were not disclosed to the surly warders who guarded him.

His attitude, we are told, was one of apparent submission. He ate the food they set before him and drank champagne, which the complaisant Gudden did not deny him. So pleased, indeed, was that self-satisfied physician with all that had passed, that he dispatched a telegram to Count Holnstein in Munich declaring that all was well and that no further apprehension need be felt.

Nor did this appear, at the moment, to be a rash prophecy.

The King went to bed that night and slept placidly until four in the morning. When he attempted to rise and go walking by the lakeside, he discovered that the keepers had taken away his clothes. It was then that he first lost his temper and fell to raving at the situation in which they had placed him. He, a King, to be browbeaten by the bullies with which they had surrounded him. He, who yesterday, had the world at his feet, to be less to-day than the meanest serving man at the Schloss. Drops of sweat gathered upon his brow at the thought, and his eyes blazed. Yet it was after six o'clock when Zanders, for whom he had sent, came to his room and uttered his lame apologies.

“Superior orders from the Council. Naturally they feared his Majesty’s displeasure and felt constrained to limit his liberties at the moment. Then the physicians thought that strenuous exercise at such an early hour of the morning was not good for his Majesty”—and so on, and so on—a good man wrestling with the lies which conspirators had put into his mouth.

“How long is this insolence to last?” was the King’s angry question.

Zanders thought it would be but for a few hours.

“The doctor Gudden will make his report, sire, and then all will be well. I am sure that you need fear nothing from the Count when he understands how willing you are to fall in with his views. What is happening is for the moment only. Let us put our trust in a Higher Power and be sure that He will see justice is done.”

Ludwig might have retorted that the Council appeared to put its trust in iron bars and lusty keepers, but he made no comment. His mood had changed suddenly to one of intense reserve. There can be no doubt that the idea of death ran strongly in his mind. Yet none had the wit to guess the fact.

He walked in the park later on and Dr. Gudden, followed by two keepers, went with him.

The outrageous treatment meted out to their King seemed to the liking of the physicians, whose first thought was to please the Regent and his advisers in the capital. Gudden, however, tried to be as amiable as possible; and at lunch more champagne was produced, and some excellent cigars. When the meal was over and Ludwig had rested a little while, another walk was proposed and again Dr. Gudden set out with his patient, though shortly afterwards, he dismissed the two keepers, believing the King to be now thoroughly resigned to his position. Unhappy man. He was to pay for that delusion with his life.

None will ever know the whole truth of that tragic excursion.

Ludwig had set out upon it determined to end his life and it is evident that a madman's strength and a madman's cunning came to his aid. The latter counselled him to revisit some of the scenes of his youth; the leafy woods, the beautiful glades, the by-paths he had sought as a lover when women were not yet abhorrent to him. And when this rambling was over, he sat upon a bench but a little way removed from the waterside and the now amiable Gudden, a book in his hand, sat beside him and for all we know talked of that music which had meant so much to the mad monarch who had saved the fame of Richard Wagner and helped to build a mighty temple in his friend's honour. But of whatever they talked, it is clear that their conversation helped to cloak the King's purpose; and sitting there in the dream of the sunshine, the physician was but ill-prepared for the tragic moment to follow.

Now tragedy befell.

Ludwig has thrown his hat aside and is making a madman's dash for the water wherein he will end his sorrows. He gains the lake, the terrified doctor is on his heels—they close, they fight as men rarely have fought before. Nor does Ludwig now hesitate to strike. A rain of blows bruises the doctor's face

and blackens his eyes. Locked together, whirling round and round, the two enter the water and the madman becomes possessed of a thousand devils. He has the physician by the throat and slowly, slowly, he forces his head beneath the placid lake. Gudden is powerless now; his work is done. He struggles still but he is choking—choking and dying at the hands of that King he has served so ill. And presently his struggles cease; the body becomes limp in the monarch's hands—the work is done and Ludwig is free.

Now he plunges a little way farther into the still water but not to a place so deep that he would be beyond his depth had he the mind to stand up. Very deliberately, he crouches beneath the surface and with a will-power that only madness could give, he drowns himself as a dog that is drowned in any mean pond. And so his reign ends and Ludwig the Second of Bavaria is dead and Luitpold, the usurper, reigns in his stead.

They did not discover the tragedy until some hours later and then fishermen, who loved him, had to bring out their boats to discover the bent body beneath the shimmering water and the battered doctor, who had paid for his confidence with his life.

Munich had the news before sunset, however, and next morning all the world knew that the

gentle King was no more and that his sorrows had led him to the eternal gates of death by the waters of affliction he had known from his youth up.

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