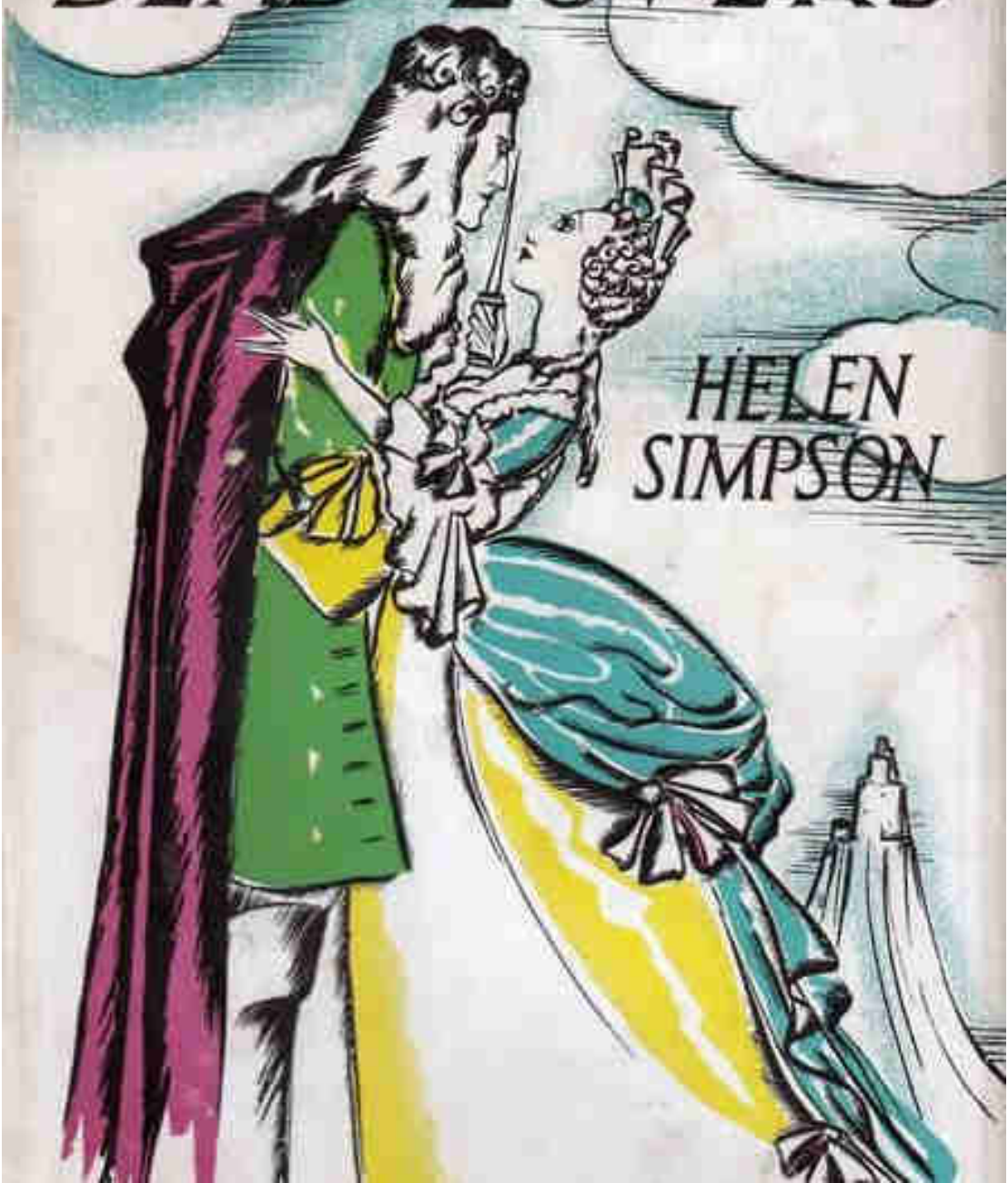
SARABAND for DEAD LOVERS



HELEN SIMPSON

Title: Saraband for Dead Lovers
Date of first publication: 1935
Author: Helen de Guerry Simpson (1897-1940)
Date first posted: Nov. 15, 2023
Date last updated: Nov. 15, 2023
Faded Page eBook #20231117

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau, Mark Akrigg, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

Helen Simpson

SARABAND FOR DEAD LOVERS

BY

HELEN SIMPSON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD
LONDON :: TORONTO

FIRST PUBLISHED 1935

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE WINDMILL PRESS, KINGSWOOD, SURREY

CONTENTS

Everyone knows, who has tried it, that history will not fit into fiction without some little adjustment here and there, a tampering with the letter in order that the spirit may have a better chance. Such adjustments have been made throughout this book, and may easily be discovered by the historian; but I hope he will not find that violence has been done to any essential truth.

H. S.

Queen Anne Street, W.1
November, 1934.

I

DUCHESS SOPHIA

AQUILINA. Tell him I am gone to Bed: Tell him I am not at Home; tell him I've better Company with me, or any thing; tell him in short I will not see him, the eternal troublesome vexatious Fool: —

MAID. But Madam! He's here already, just enter'd the Doors.

—*Venice Preserv'd.* Act III, Scene I.

(I)

"I send with all speed," wrote Elizabeth-Charlotte, Duchesse d'Orléans, tucked away in her little room surrounded by portraits of ancestors, "to wish you, my dearest aunt and Serene Highness, joy of the recent betrothal. It will redound to the happiness of Hanover and Zelle. It links two dominions which have long possessed for each other the affection natural to neighbours, but which now may justly embrace as allies. It appears to me that no arrangement could well be more suitable, and I offer to the high contracting parties my sincerest wishes for a continuance of their happiness."

The Duchess smiled grimly, dashed her quill into the ink, and proceeded in a more homely manner.

"Civilities apart, what in heaven's name is the Duke of Hanover about? This little Sophie-Dorothée will never do; she is not even legitimate, and as for her mother, you know as well as I do that Eléonore d'Olbreuse is nothing better than a French she-poodle to whom uncle George William of Zelle treated himself when he was younger, I will not say more foolish, and has never been able to get rid of since. What, with all respect, was your husband thinking of to bring French blood into a decent German family, and connected with the English throne, too! In brief, my dearest aunt, all this is a mystery to me. I can only presume that it was concluded over your head, and that money played the chief rôle. Men, men, men! Clink a thaler in their ear, and hold a carrot in front of a donkey, and forward both animals go, with never a blink, down God knows what precipice. I do beg of you to write me such details as you have time for, and to accept my honest hope that a business so ill-judged may not lead to disaster."

This letter, reaching the Duchess of Hanover immediately after the wedding, made no very pleasant reading, even allowing for Charlotte's well-known trick of looking on the gloomier side of all new relationships, and particularly of marriage. Its sting lay in the assumption which permitted the writer to criticise the whole affair with freedom, and to goad the Duchess under cover of her Duke.

The fact was, the whole match was of Duchess Sophia's making; but with what agonies of troubled pride, what angry tears!

To begin with, the girl Sophia-Dorothea was not exactly illegitimate. She had been legitimised some six years before as a result of a bargain struck between her father and his brother Ernest Augustus, now Duke of Hanover, then Bishop of Osnabrück; after which the official marriage of a morganatic wife with her ducal husband took place before the wondering eyes of their daughter, aged ten, who almost at once was swept into the matrimonial whirlpool with a princeling of Wolfenbüttel. True, this was only a betrothal, and the young man was carried off by a cannon-ball soon after; but it showed that the Frenchwoman's daughter need not go begging for suitors.

The Court of Hanover, holding aloof from these indecent proceedings, hurt in the very core of its pride by this admission of a half-commoner to the privileges of rank, turned away its eyes, while its ears remained alert for scandalous gossip. There was little enough, and that little ill-founded. The Frenchwoman was faithful to her Duke, and though tongues made the most of a letter from a Court page found among the twelve-year-old Dorothea's lesson books, such jejune displays of depravity were not satisfying. The Court of Hanover, besides, had problems of conduct peculiarly its own.

The Duke's mistress, Clara von Platen; what, for instance, of her? She was a part of the State furniture. The Duchess ignored her. The fashion in mistresses had been set by France and England; they were necessities of the time, they diverted, at some expense, kings' minds from serious matters; they were decorative often, and kept the arts alive for their service. But Platen troubled political waters. Duchess Sophia shrugged, and wrote high-spirited letters in three languages mocking such impudent creatures, together with other contemporary vexing trifles. One thing alone she did not mock. She set theologians jousting, she stirred philosophies with her chocolate-spoon, but genealogy was her God, and she would have no lack of reverence there. Her mother had been Bohemia's lovely ramshackle wandering queen, her brother Rupert grew gouty and sullen, a pensioner on the bounty of his English nephew Charles. Perhaps the Duke's mistress had never in her life known such straits of poverty and humiliation as, in her early days, had the Duke's wife. She knew the worth of money, did Duchess Sophia, having lacked it in youth, but it weighed light against blood. Baroness Platen, a backstairs influence, could not impinge upon the consciousness of Duchess Sophia. The Duchess of Zelle, risen by letters patent and the fondness of a fool to pseudo-royalty, did so impinge. Dignity was hurt by her continuing to breathe under her husband's roof, twenty miles away. How maintain brotherly relations with the Duke of Zelle, while continuing to treat his wife as—Sophia's own phrase—a little clot of dirt? How count upon his help in war while refusing the necessary civil interchanges of gifts and visits? How

forestall in practice his wife's manœuvres while in theory omitting to observe her existence? Duchess Sophia's own hope was that the girl would prove wanton. "Dorothée is *canaille*," she wrote hopefully to her niece, when the infamous ducal wedding was mooted. "She will avenge us all ——" betray her mean birth in some resounding way, kick over matrimonial traces, fail in dignity, run off with a groom; all these things Duchess Sophia hoped of the Frenchwoman's daughter, the Frenchwoman herself being so armed against scandal.

And yet six years later the girl was in her own house as a daughter, and the Duchess of Orléans could let her pen run in reprobation, heaving up tall capitals like lifted hands with something of that joy which the deserved misfortunes of a relative only can afford.

It was George-Louis, the eldest son of Hanover, who had forced his mother to this tribulation. He was a sulky, brutal, and courageous young man with a remote chance of the English throne, but nothing else to recommend him as a *parti*. Duchess Sophia beheld him without illusion. She had views, which could hardly be called hopes for him, in her cousin Charles's country, with her cousin James's daughter. The Duke of York had a leaning towards Popishness, the English would surely never abide him as King. His elder daughter had done well for herself in Holland, the younger, Anne, was free to receive advances. George-Louis knew no English, but on the whole silence became him better than the kind of speech he affected, and with a little pocket-money he might make a sufficient show. He was despatched, expensively, with letters for England which could very well have travelled by courier.

Unhappily for his less obvious mission, the Duke of York's daughter disliked him on sight. His pursuit of her, no doubt, was sluggish. He had been quite comfortable with a mistress, the sister of his father's Baroness, from the age of sixteen, and found himself not very patient of his mother's plans for an English marriage. She was always quoting England at him; it existed in her mind as an Isle of the Blessed, descent from whose kings gave strength and wisdom, having a mettlesome people better worth ruling than the mild Germans of her Hanover Duchy. But George-Louis liked Germans. They displayed right feelings where nobility was concerned; they were never casual. The English left his barge on the mud at Greenwich, and sent nobody to meet him; they lopped off the head of a nobleman while he was there with no more ceremony, his wondering letter noted, than a cook might show to a pullet. They made him, however, after much Latin speechifying, a

Doctor of Civil Law, and with this sole acknowledgment of interest in their future possible ruler sent him home.

Duchess Sophia received him with blended feelings of irritation and relief; after all, the Princess Anne's mother had been a commoner. But when she surveyed the marriageable young women of Europe, hardly a court was unblemished; France's bastards, for instance, were legitimised and gave themselves airs fit to send Madame the Duchess of Orléans into a swoon of rage. Those with the right quarterings had no money; and though Duchess Sophia would, if a choice were to be made, have let the money go—Bohemia was in her blood as well as England—her Duke was not of the same opinion. Her Duke's ambitions were not lofty; what was within his grasp, that he would put out his hand to. His brother's Duchy was near, was rich, would round off his own, and it went with his brother's only child.

The Duke gave his attention to the matter, urged by his mistress and her husband. The Platens knew their place. They aspired to no such coronet as had come the way of Eléonore d'Olbreuse, and cared exactly nothing for the externals of power. It delighted the Baroness to watch arms being presented and hats going off whenever the Duke of Hanover took the air, and to curtsey herself as low as anyone. She savoured with exquisite pleasure the difference between Ernest Augustus in his laced coat and Ernest Augustus in his nightshirt, and would dip to the one with all humility provided she might have her way the other. She saw matters clearly, an excellent territory going begging, and her sister's young lover provided for. Ernest Augustus kept his sons short; he had five of them, and no very princely disposition to spend. The marriage would put money in George-Louis' pocket, unquestioned money, money of which, if the settlements were properly managed, he should have the sole disposal. His affections were not volatile, Baroness Platen's sister might count on retaining her hold for many years to come. In short, it was to everyone's advantage to bring off the match.

(II)

Matters being so, a courier arrived early one morning bearing a very secret packet from some person about the Court of Zelle. (The agreeable brothers maintained spies in each other's houses.) This letter was written in the simple cipher of the time, wherein news ran its course and only the names of those concerned in it were disguised. It came first to Platen's hands, who had no need to get out his key-code from the locked portfolio

that so carefully accompanied him everywhere. He poised his spectacles and read:

"Frau Sudel is making preparations for the little Federleicht's feast, two days hence. Unless steps are taken, there may be some crockery broken, for invitations have gone out to Herr Wolf and his son, and you know that these, being in a sense relations, are likely to make the most of a chance to show off. Herr Nimrod would prefer other guests; he takes *family ties* seriously. But Frau Sudel is in command, and as for Federleicht, she is so well disposed to the guests that she has not wept or beaten her servants for weeks. If it is intended to pay a visit, it had best be soon."

By which Baron Platen understood that Duke Antony Ulrich of Wolfenbüttel, encouraged by the Duchess, was about to come forward with an acceptable son, and that there was every likelihood of the betrothal being announced at Zelle on September 15th, the birthday of Featherweight, the Princess Sophia-Dorothea, two days hence. The Baron sent a messenger running to his wife's quarters. She lay in rooms better lighted and more convenient in every way than the conjugal apartments, and the messenger, arriving, was told by her angular maid that she was still asleep. This euphemism meant that Ernest Augustus was with the Baroness, and as a rule the messenger had orders to withdraw respectfully on hearing it; but the envelope he bore had three red strokes of the quill clean across it, which meant that the business was urgent. With no wink, no grimace, civilly the messenger insisted.

"Be good enough to wake the esteemed lady, and tell her that I come on behalf of his Serene Highness."

Snores could be faintly heard through a double door to the left of the corridor. The maid looked incredulous, and repeated:

"His Serene Highness?"

The messenger inclined at the title, and with no change of expression in face or voice, said deferentially:

"Leave the old feather-bolster be, but wake her up if you have to spit in her ear. This letter's for her own hand."

The maid received these instructions without any perceptible disquiet, and withdrew to the inner door, which she opened. The snores increased in violence, but did not halt. Low voices answered each other to this accompaniment, there was the indefinable sound of rapid physical movement, and a figure in a puce silk robe flowered with damask

pomegranates stood an instant in the door, then came forward. She showed no care for her appearance before the manservant; her robe fell apart, her head was swathed in a ridiculous bed-turban of muslin with a twinkle of gold here and there. Stale paint lay patched on her cheeks and mouth; her eyes were crusted with sleep, lidded like a snake's, but bright; the face drowsily lovely. She held out one hand for the paper, keeping the bedgown together with the other, and in a deep voice, with a kind of angry geniality like that of a toper disturbed at his cups, questioned the messenger.

"What's this? Can't your master settle his own business without this wet-nursing? Give me your letter."

She took it and turned on the same movement. Over her shoulder came the one word:

"Wait."

The messenger bowed to her back and obeyed her, standing at attention. The maid waited with him, her face as blank as his own. Those hidden snores that had continued with pleasant regularity, a trustful homely sound, suddenly ceased in a snort. There were voices, one deep and grumbling, the other loud. In a moment the puce gown was at the door again.

"Hulda!"

"Gracious one?"

"Tell the man to be gone, there's no answer."

The messenger bowed once more to the half-shut door, the sound of the deep and grumbling voice inside it, and made his way down the corridor without looking back. There was no sense in looking back, nothing to be seen; but meeting a servant in the Duke's livery he jerked a thumb. The other waggled a hand and lifted his chin in a certain way, and it was fully understood between them where their master the Duke had spent the night. Neither smiled. Neither perceived in the Duke's behaviour anything to be reprobated. Both were excellent husbands and fathers, who watched the strangest goings-on above their heads which they made no attempt either to criticise or to take for example, recognising that any departure from conventional morality cost money and was not for them. They understood that these wigged Olympians must somehow beguile the tedium of enough money and too much time, but no more than the Greeks did they set out either to emulate or to deplore the exploits of their deities.

Inside the bedroom, under the crimson tent of a vast bed, the Bishop-Duke was sitting up, nightcap awry, and mouth twisted in a yawn to match.

“Just look at this,” Clara Platen ordered, holding her paper under his nose. He took it, scowled, stretched, and after an instant’s glance asked her how the devil did she expect him to remember the cipher. She answered with another question.

“What day of the month are we come to?”

He considered, reckoning by the Church calendar.

“We’re about a week off St. Matthew; the fourteenth, is it?”

“The fourteenth. And the fifteenth is this little bitch your Serene Highness’ niece’s birthday, and the fifteenth is to-morrow, and on the fifteenth the contract with the Wolfenbüttel will be signed. And when it is signed you will have something mighty like an enemy on your frontier.”

“Twenty-four hours! There’s nothing to be done.”

“Do you want the Zelle property?”

“It will come to me after my brother’s death. I saw to that when I gave my consent to him marrying. He can’t wriggle out of it.”

“And what about the money? All he’s saved, all he’s given to that woman? Wilhelmsburg, Stillhorn, half a dozen other estates? She’s the richest woman in Germany in her own right. She’s no fool. She’s feathered her nest. These Frenchwomen are all practical. It’s only the silly sentimental Germans like me that don’t look past the pillow to the purse.”

“Aren’t you satisfied, Clara? All this fighting—and then the boys, they take all my ready money.”

“And yet you won’t look at a plan to get one of them off your hands.”

The Duke pulled off his nightcap irritably; and as though reminded by it of conjugal duties, said gruffly:

“You’ll never get the Duchess round.” He fingered the letter, pointed to a phrase. “Frau Sudel;[1] that’s her name for the Frenchwoman.”

“I pay you the compliment of supposing that your Serene Highness ——” the pomegranates crumpled as she sank in a state curtsey—“can give your wife an order.”

“That I can, till I’m black in the face; getting it attended to is another matter.” He considered, shaking his head, with the natural distaste of an overfed ageing man for action. “It’s too late to do anything.”

“Zelle is twenty miles away. Ten hours’ travelling. I’ll do it; I’ll go there and make the demand. That is, my husband shall.”

The Duke-Bishop had not lived half a century in the world without acquiring a certain natural shrewdness which served him sometimes in lieu of statecraft; he was perfectly well aware that his brother, who retained a sense of punctilio oddly at variance with his abandon in marrying a commoner, would regard such an embassy as an insult. Platen, whose complaisance was known and mocked in the streets, cut no very dignified figure for all his dignities—Baron of this and that, Prime Minister and Councillor of State. The Duke, with sufficient brutality, voiced his opinion.

“They don’t like your sort of husband over there. And my brother doesn’t take much account of any whore except his own.”

The Baroness took no notice of this bluntness, concerned as she was for her Duke-Bishop’s pocket.

“In a matter of such urgency, it would do no harm for you to go in person.”

“I? Out of the question. Why, good God, it’s half a dozen years since I’ve spoken to George William. I’m not going to be the first to make advances. And to start off by asking a favour—no, put it out of your head.”

“Are you prepared to support your sot of a son all his life?”

The Duke muttered that George was not so bad, a fighter——

“And a spender, too. I’ve done what I could, put my own sister into his bed so that he shouldn’t get into the hands of some rapacious foreigner. And this is all the thanks I get. She’ll end by having to provide for him, I see that; already she’s lent him more than she can spare. Princely! And as for me, I go about in the same old dresses, driving the same old pair of bays. I don’t care for show, but it looks badly, the Duke’s lady down at heel like a butcher’s housekeeper. I may have to consider going away from here.”

“Clara! Well, but what the devil do you want me to do?”

The silk rustled, the ruddy pomegranates turned silver as their damask faced another light. Clara von Platen’s tone, which had been that of truculent good-humour, changed all at once to smoothness.

“Serene Highness, I think the matter could be so put to the Duchess that she would undertake this mission.”

The Duke ceased to twirl his nightcap, and stared, heavy lids lifted, heavy lips parted. Then he laughed.

"If she does, I'll give you a commission on the marriage settlement. Sophy! She'd as soon burn her family tree."

The Baroness disregarded this, and pounced on his offer.

"How much? The commission?"

"Five per cent," the Duke answered cheerfully, sure of not having to pay.

"Done! Clasp hands on it."

The Duke-Bishop gave his mistress's cheek an affectionate buffet, such an episcopal blow as is bestowed according to ritual upon candidates for confirmation.

"I'll clasp anything you like when you come and tell me it's settled."

"Will you stand by the promises I make?"

"In reason."

"Pull that bell for me, then."

The Duke put up a hand and tugged the embroidered bell-rope; a knock suspiciously instantaneous answered it, but the waiting maid made no attempt to enter. Baroness von Platen spoke loudly, to be heard through the panels.

"Send Hans to Her Serene Highness at once; he is to ask if the Prime Minister's wife may hope for the honour of an audience this morning to pay her respectful duty."

A voice repeated the message; it was confirmed with a brief word; the Baroness turned back into the room, and stood akimbo in front of her lover. She laughed, showing excellent teeth, the eye-teeth longer than the others, and sharp. The whole face had this fault, a sharpness edging beauty just out of line.

"Five per cent, and a prince's gratitude! I'll earn it, if I have to listen to theology for an hour."

"Dress, then. My wife's liberal, but she won't stand a bedgown. By God, I believe you may have a chance. She's a fool where the boys are concerned."

"That's a true word."

The half-clad figure stiffened, the shaved head went up; with his nightcap swinging on a finger the Duke rebuked his woman from the bed he had shared with her.

"I would remind you that you are speaking of a royal personage."

The pomegranates crumpled, this time not in mockery.

"Serene Highness! No apology can be too humble."

"It is forgotten. You have my best hopes for your success."

Duchess Sophia when the message arrived was up and at her books, reading Helvetius on the transmutation of gold, a work much studied by her brother Rupert, and by him sent from England.

"Moreover," wrote the learned doctor, "I may properly query which of the wisest Philosophers is so Sage, as to be able to comprehend with the acuteness of his own most dextrous ingeny, with what Obumbracle the Imaginative, Tinging, Venemous, or Monstrous Faculty of any pregnant woman, compleat its work in one Moment, if it be deduced with art by some External Object?"

Duchess Sophia paused, frowned, smiled a little sideways, and pencilled in the margin of her book a reference to Ecclesiastes, that text which asks how any man shall understand the growth of bones in the womb. She looked up from her page to discover a lady-in-waiting at the ready to curtsey.

"What is it?"

"Serene Highness, a request from the Baroness Platen to be permitted to come and pay her duty."

"What does she want?"

"That was all the message, Serene Highness."

"I will receive her," said Duchess Sophia after a moment, and returned to her book. She had got to page 41, where Helvetius speaks of an experiment done at The Hague.

"The space of two weeks being elapsed, supernatant on the Spirit of Salt, appeared a most splendid Silver-Starre, so exceeding curious, as if it had been made with an Instrument by a most ingenious Artist. At the sight of which, the said Grill, filled with exceeding Joy, signified to us, that he had seen the Signate Star of Philosophers, touching which he had read in Basilius, as he thought. I, and many other honest men, did behold this Star ____"

There was an irruption of ladies, rustling, tapping their heels on the bare polished floor, and the Duchess Sophia, sighing, put away speculation. She did not rise to greet the Baroness nor put out her hand, but sat back in her chair, a thin fine-nosed elderly woman, ready to listen. She was, like the footmen in the Palace, like the little boys spitting from the town bridge, entirely aware of the relationship in which this person stood to her husband, but by no sign or word did she recognise it. Clara Platen for her part felt something of awe for the woman who disputed with theologians, and put aside Court whisperings as a man may walk past a stinking ditch with his handkerchief to his nose. She spoke of Duchess Sophia lightly because she was afraid of her, and she was afraid because Duchess Sophia was incalculable, not to be angered, not to be wounded, proof as though her soul walked armoured in a corslet of steel.

The Duchess spoke the necessary first words, using royalty's most excellent privilege, that of beginning and ending conversation at pleasure.

"And your health, Frau Baronin? You should take care of it, you are a necessary personage."

"Thank your Serene Highness, well. And the Prince of Hanover, if I may dare to enquire? Recovered?"

The Duchess was not aware that her eldest son had been ill of an unromantic surfeit of wine; the news had in fact reached Clara Platen in a note ten minutes before she set out from her own rooms. But she betrayed nothing of this, and no anxiety.

"These indispositions are seasonable. If he would be guided by me and take his pinch of antimony now and then, as I do, the Prince would not be troubled."

"The whole Court, the whole State, will be relieved to learn that it is not a putrid infection. Madam, you are known through the world for a Princess with whom her servants may speak honestly, without fear of displeasing."

"I hope I have philosophy enough to endure plain speaking. What's your intention, Baroness?"

Clara Platen hesitated. Duchess Sophia, shrugging, gave a look which sent the knot of waiting-ladies out of earshot to the other side of the room. Then the Duke's mistress said, steadily looking into the eyes of the Duke's wife:

"The Prince is in danger."

Duchess Sophia's expression did not change, the mask of civil interest did not lift, but for an instant her lids quivered. She answered with perfect steadiness:

"What threatens him?"

"Sickness. Debts. The chances of war."

Duchess Sophia answered, after a moment, coldly:

"These last are men's matters. He should go to his father."

Clara Platen's blunt good-fellow tone sank a little; she looked down in awkward embarrassment such as a man might show, and at last with what seemed an effort spoke again.

"I have reason to know—your Serene Highness will understand that this is painful for me, considering the channel through which the information comes—that the sickness is of a nature to affect the posterity of this noble house."

Duchess Sophia knew the channel; it was Clara Platen's own sister, Frau Busche, then, from whom George-Louis had his pox. But what could be Platen's motive for informing her of it, she could not conceive. She waited, a finger beginning to tap.

"The Prince has said to this person by whom I am informed, that he is overwhelmed with debt, and can see no way out of it but one that is dreadful even to consider."

Duchess Sophia laughed, and matched false bluntness with real.

"You are not telling me that my son George-Louis will ever put a pistol to his head because of money owing, or even because he has caught the pox off some whore."

"The Prince has said that he will take service abroad."

Again that twitch of the eyelid, so slight, so revealing, that showed the barb had struck home. George-Louis' liking for the camp, his unimaginative valour, were traits in him of which his mother was aware, and which now and then gave her wakeful nights.

"Service with the Emperor. Your Serene Highness knows that in the Empire there is always war of some kind going on; and the Prince has said —pardon, Serene Highness, I quote his words—he has said that since he must rot, it shall be under, and not above ground."

She stopped on that phrase, and the Duchess Sophia's fingers caught it from her and repeated it upon the table top, tapping, galloping. "Since he must rot, it shall be underground. Underground. Underground." The phrase had her son's stamp on it, the decision too was like him; there truth spoke. Only the woman's motive still puzzled her; and having that strange unworldliness, that bewilderment in face of everyday humanity which much philosophical reading imposes, she did not reject the thought that Platen was moved by honest concern, remorse perhaps. They knew little of each other beyond compliments face to face, and a woman who sells her body, conjectured the Duchess, that liberal woman, need not harbour all the other vices to match.

She said, therefore, less coldly:

"I am obliged to you. The Prince cannot take service without his father's consent——"

"Which the Duke will give."

Duchess Sophia had her answer, and did not for an instant think to disbelieve or dispute it. That George-Louis and his father disagreed even to blows she was aware. That the Duke, confronted with the alternative of paying his son's debts or letting him go to the Emperor's army, would choose the latter, she had no doubt at all. And her mind ran quickly over such means of getting money as were open to her, the only means she, as a queen's daughter, had ever known; selling jewels or pawning them, borrowing from rich commoners in exchange for a place at court, yielding up treasures of precious stones or privileges. She and her kind had no way to make riches; they could only exchange what they had, and do without when they had no more. She would not ask the amount of her son's debt; but as if her thought had made entry into Platen's mind the woman answered it.

"My informant lent the Prince such money as she could; she says that the Jews have got hold of him for a sum—but this may be not wholly true; however, she has it from the Prince himself; two hundred thousand thalers was the figure. But this may not be true."

Duchess Sophia put out of her head at once the notion that a bracelet and a brooch or two might dispose of her son's indebtedness. She forgot her calm for an instant, confronted with this unbelievable sum, to exclaim aloud:

"Hopeless! The folly of it——"

Then checked; and Baroness Platen began, reasonably and without emphasis, to speak, making a case for the marriage with Zelle. It would keep

George-Louis at home; it would pay his debts; it would gain territory and money for Hanover; it would affront Duke Antony Ulrich of Wolfenbüttel. She had time only to state these desiderata before there was a fluttering among the distant inquisitive ladies, a voice announcing, and Duchess Sophia was on her feet to greet her husband Ernest Augustus, who came at once into the discussion, pat upon his cue. The Baroness effaced herself; she had given the cue, had taught him his part, and now, confident, was prepared to wait in the wings among the other *figurantes* while he stormed through it. And storm he did, for the debts were real, and anger against his son rose easily to the necessary heat.

Clara von Platen, standing jovial yet subdued among the Duchess Sophia's ladies-in-waiting, all of whom searched her with a questing eye, wondering where the gift lay that had raised her to power, scorning and envying at once, heard, as the Duke's voice grew gustier, snatches of the talk. Each maintained a position, disdaining to answer statement with argument.

"I tell you this, that we have between us four sons, and can well afford to let one go. The people will thank us, and your own stiff-necked country, if ever we come to it." Thus the Duke.

"I will not have that brat of Zelle in my house, nor call her mother sister. I have kept them out of my acquaintance these sixteen years, and I have no mind to take them into my bosom now." Thus the Duchess.

"I will not pay the boy's debts. I have spent enough on him, first and last. That English journey cost a fortune, and what came of it? You were ready enough to take a commoner into your bosom there, and a d'Olbreuse is as good as Anne Hyde any day of the week."

"My uncle lost his head rather than bate a jot of his kingship. Such conduct is proper, and I am astonished to know you rate your own blood so low as to pollute it with such stuff as Zelle offers."

"Come now, Sophy——"

The voices sank. Clara von Platen, indifferent to the pretence of discretion all about her, stared eagerly at the disputants, reading their looks. The Duke talked earnestly, with something of episcopal unction; the Duchess listened, inscrutable; she was too far off for a watching eye to see the movements of her lids. Threats, threats, thought Clara Platen, a woman with a nose like that won't yield to a threat. She won't even snap at the

money. But there's a line of approach through her pride. Will he remember it?

His back was to her, he was speaking, but the Duchess's face in profile was unyielding, and her fingers rested quietly on Helvetius' small brown book. Clara Platen moved a little, manœuvred until in the round mirror at the end of the room she could see the Duke dwindled to a manikin, making tiny pleadings to the porcelain figure of his Duchess. A late wasp sallied in through the long window, darting in aimless angles hither, thither; Clara Platen made a great sweep of her hand at it, minimised by the mirror to an insect gesture, but which caught the Duke's eye. He turned. She innocently put up her fingers to the brooch holding her laces, a great coronet in diamonds, and let them rest there. He nodded, and within a few seconds the duel of the voices was resumed.

"There is another matter, our chance of the Electorate. With Zelle in my pocket, the Emperor would not refuse me."

"Do you deceive yourself. The Emperor has no more liking for bastards than I have."

"I will tell you what the Emperor has a liking for; a good compact state, not big enough to threaten, but big enough to help him. A state like that is dependable. He does not have to be running here and there to half a dozen princes to get an army together when he wants one. With Zelle, and the territories George William has bought, we should be in the running for an Electorate."

"An Electorate! If it were a kingdom, that would be something, perhaps."

"An Elector makes an Emperor out of a man, as the Roman priests make God out of a wafer. D'you call that nothing? Listen, Sophy——"

Yes, yes, thought Clara Platen, watching, fingers worrying the diamond crown at her breast, now she's yielding, now she's tempted. The right to wear a bonnet for her husband, a few extra cannon-shots when she goes on a visit abroad; how is it that a princess, always used to these things, should still find them worth gambling for? Thank God that it is so, or we should never swing her round to this marriage. Strange, though! She will read her books just the same, and tease her chaplains as Electress just the same, there will be no change in her way of existence. She will spend pride to get pride, and go about afterwards in an old dress like a servant. There goes her hand; he's touched her.

And in fact the Duchess's thin fingers were beginning to drum on her book. The Duke appeared to halt in his talk, the mirror showed the watcher his face in miniature; those minuscule features revealed nothing, success was betrayed only in the cock of his heavy chin. He stooped to the tapping hand, kissed it as though in thanksgiving, then departed through a surge of curtseying women.

The Duchess did not immediately summon them about her. She sat still, faintly frowning for some moments, and at last got to her feet with decision.

"Ladies, you are excused. I am going to my garden for a while, and shall need no company. Baroness von Platen, our interview is at an end. I am obliged to you."

The women sank once again as she passed, and afterwards, craning at a window, perceived their august mistress and highness wandering about the walks in an old hat, snipping off flower-heads here and there with a pair of damascened scissors. Her gardeners knew this perambulating mood, and kept close to their labours, neither standing to attention as she went by, nor attempting with baskets to follow after her and reverently retrieve the snippets. She marched in elderly garments, with long strides, soiling her hands like a market woman, while her mind concerned itself solely with crowns, quarterings—all the symbols and attributes of earthly pride.

Duchess Sophia wrestled thus all day. The dinner hour passed; a vast meal was served and eaten at which neither she nor George-Louis was present. The Duke's demeanour revealed nothing. Footmen in white gloves set the dishes to partners, four times covering the long table, poured wines, obeyed nods; all was tranquillity. In the late afternoon it was the Duchess's custom to summon her philosophers or clergymen with any visiting disputants to her chamber to talk, and in fact one such visitor was waiting to be summoned, an Irish Canon of Down with the reputation of a tongue that could split hairs. He had his clean bands on, and was ready with a civil speech in English for the Duchess, and a number of less polite Latin gambits for her chaplains, when a footman came to offer apologies, and to defer —"until a more profitable time,"—the joys of dispute. A similar message had been sent to the Hanoverian wranglers, and her ladies had received permission to absent themselves until evening.

Darkness fell soon, and cloudily. A small erratic wind sprang up that blew about the rose-trimmings, and hurried leaves here and there confusedly in front of the Duchess as she walked her paths. Nobody spied upon her; the windows of the palace, as yet unlit, showed no peering faces, the gardeners

had gathered their tools and, bowing to her upright back, had gone. The Duke was in his cabinet working with Platen; from time to time each looked, and caught the other looking, at the sun-shaped clock in the wall. Baroness Platen too, playing cards with a couple of young officers, careerists, looking admiringly over her shoulder, was preoccupied with the time, and constantly asked it, on pretence of admiring the watch, gold and shagreen, that the more penniless of her cavaliers readily brought out from his pocket.

Six o'clock, ran the Baroness's thoughts above the march of the cards, and the old woman's still fighting her pride. What, all this trouble about being civil to a sister-in-law, a gesture that means no more than if I set this diamond queen against this heart! Ten minutes and a couple of courtesies exchanged, against all that money and the bonnet. The girl's her niece already whether she likes it or not. Six o'clock!

But for all her preoccupation she neglected no chance, played her diamond knave, her hearts queen at the right moment, and took tricks with both.

"Infallible Baroness! Will you come one evening and show our mess how to play?"

"I'm no match for great blustering soldiers. You have only to go to war when you want more money, and take it out of other folk's pockets. I, if I lose, I lose."

"Baroness, we are all your bankers."

"Scandal, scandal," she answered laughing, while her pencil, busy with the score, worked out on her tablet a little sum that had nothing to do with it. How much would the dowry be? Three hundred thousand thalers—annually? Pray heaven. Five per cent on that, every year——

"Lord, Baroness, have you won all that? You're a better player even than I thought. Fifteen thousand!"

"No, no, Captain. That's to come. And now, I suppose it's no part of any soldier's duty to procure a mere woman a glass of wine?"

At seven, as the Duke was turning to and fro in his cabinet, and Platen stood as etiquette ordered, his Serene Highness being on his feet, the Duchess was announced. She came in wearing a great cloak with a hood, buff-coloured, unassailable by mud; dressed for travelling. The Duke stared. Her face was very white, her eyes bright like those of a woman in fever. She spoke without waiting for his greeting or question.

“The horses are ready. Have you no message for Zelle?”

“You’re going? Twenty miles of bad road, there’s no post-house fit for you——”

“I shall travel all night, and sleep when I can.”

“We have talked nothing over. We have not discussed any approach to the matter.”

She answered that grimly.

“Since I go, you may rest assured that I shall find arguments. I do not intend to fail. No!”

And she snapped her fingers angrily, the thought having come that perhaps after all the French bitch might prevail upon her husband to refuse Hanover’s son. The Duke worried still.

“There should be a gift. You go to offer congratulations on the birthday.”

“We are offering these people our son and our alliance. Do you suggest that trinkets would lend them lustre?” The Duchess’s mouth went sideways, recollecting the tag which bids fear the Greeks when they bring gifts. No wooden horse for her, but a beast that could leap and trample; direct assault, rather than treachery. The Duke, however, thought otherwise.

“Well, but a girl, you know, will expect some trifle. I will write a personal letter to my brother’s wife, mentioning the girl by name, but the occasion demands something further——”

Duchess Sophia put her right hand to her left, contemptuously stripped off a ring, an emerald with diamonds held in gold claws, and tossed it to Platen.

“Seal this up in a packet. Stamp our coronet large on the wax.”

Ernest Augustus frowned.

“Your emerald, Sophy! Is that necessary?”

“No,” said she, “not nowadays; but if we had all of us lived in the time of Paracelsus that stone might have served a purpose. I should have watched it on her hand, peered into it each morning. Unchastity splits it, that used to be the story. Now we have no such ready way of reckoning, these things hide in the blood, and we must look in the eyes of our grandchildren and read strangeness there before we can cry, The mother is unfaithful.”

The two men stood silent before her bitterness; then Platen busied himself with wax and a taper, and Duke Ernest Augustus sat down to write. His big cramped handwriting covered the page, the signature made a strong pattern at its foot, and he handed it, open, to the Duchess after sanding. She read it quickly, approved with a nod, and gave it back to be sealed. When the two packets were ready she stowed them in a deep pocket inside her cloak, without speaking. The Duke was made uncomfortable by her look, and her outburst upon the ring, but could see no reason for either. She had always been a stranger, her Englishness and learning alarmed him, her rare showings of emotion had come always from causes inadequate or mysterious to him; and though now he understood something of her trouble, he could find no way to comfort it; his common sense told him she was as well aware of the advantages of this match as he. He could, however, be solicitous for her comfort on the journey, could ask if she had eaten; and when he discovered that she was fasting, could ring and order a partridge and wine to be served instantly, under his own eye. She thanked him, and ate, a paltry meal, but sufficient to re-establish her husband's conceit of himself as a domestic diplomat. He was straddling in front of the fire as she ended, but three words brought his heels together.

"And our son?"

It was true; nobody, during the whole course of the day, had thought to inform the Prince of bliss impending.

"I will charge myself with that mission, if his Serene Highness approves."

That was Platen, bowing. Duchess Sophia eyed him, and without insolence answered:

"You have always our interests at heart, Baron. But family news comes best from the family's head." The Duke looked glum. Her hand, that had been on his sleeve, slid to his hand. "It is much to ask; but you have asked much of me."

The Duke, by an assenting movement, agreed to inform his eldest son with all gentleness of the morrow's probable betrothal. At heart, he thought his Duchess lent the boy a sensitiveness not by any means to be expected. Debts cleared, and a pretty little bit of a semi-French wife into the bargain—he ought, thought the Duke, to think himself lucky; and after the Duchess had gone, lit by flaring resinous torches down to her carriage, he gave a sudden abrupt laugh which startled his attendants at the thought of George-

Louis languishing, stricken in his pride, and coming not easily to unlimited money with an appetising girl.

---

[1] "Sudel" = puddle, dirt.

(III)

Duchess Sophia drove behind six horses through the night. She swung and clung in her painted box like a sailor in his cabin, at the mercy of the troughs and crests of an unfrequented road. Ducal equipages had not passed this way for a good many years, and the road had fallen to a kind of slough; it would have to be bettered in future, angrily she resolved, considering the traffic henceforth to be expected between Hanover and Zelle. She could not sleep and would not sit allowing anger to exhaust her in the dark; her discipline of mind repelled such indulgences. She tugged the bell that rang by her coachman's ear, there was a creaking and shouting, and the coach halted while she had the candles lit inside a lantern. The thick glass which protected their flame allowed her light enough to make out print; she had no wish to read, but only to set her thoughts running. To this end she opened *The Decay of Piety*, and as the coach moved from its calm, beginning once more to toss and strain, gave herself a chance sentence for meditation: "Men engage in designs, not on intuition of their lawfulness, but profit; and when they are such as nothing can warrant *a priori*, their only reserve is to make them good *a posteriori*, to bring a license after the fact, and justifies their beginning by their end; which how ridiculous soever it may only seem to sober reason, yet such is the natural shame, or secular inconvenience of owning an unjust Act, that men will wrap themselves, though in the thinnest and most diaphanous veils, make use of the absurdest pretences, and faintest colours to shadow their guilt, and whilst consciousness bids them say somewhat for themselves, and the case affords no solid plea, they are driven to these deplorable slights and subterfuges."

Small comfort, small matter for meditation in that! She had argued often enough that the end does justify the means employed to come at it, and maintained with spirit a proposition to which her reason had never assented; but she could not, in the half-darkness, with her soul for audience, uphold it now. Though she held no faith, and sat, as an English divine had observed disapprovingly, very loose in her religious principles, she was tormented

through the night by a sense of sin; what sin, might have puzzled a confessor to name. She was going of her own free will on an ugly errand, to marry a child to a boor, to cheat a brother, but her eyes smarted and her conscience upbraided for neither of these causes. She wept, she endured with closed eyes abominable rackings of the mind, because through her doing her grandchildren would not be *chapitré*, must admit to their stainless quarterings one not royal, and step down a place in their hierarchy of birth. She read and suffered through the best of the night; dozed at last towards morning; and woke to find the rolling of the coach soothed to a ground-swell on the High Street of Zelle, where apprentices turned, with shop shutters in their hands, to wonder at the six horses. She was at her journey's end; a sentry with his wits about him saluted the black cockades; her postilions tugged their horses to a standstill in front of the flowing stone stairs.

Heads pried from windows at the noise, and in no long time a major-domo with stocking-seams not quite straight at the back, solitary sign of the haste with which he had dressed, was bowing and backing in front of her. Duchess Sophia put one question:

"Duke Antony Ulrich—is he come yet?"

No, she was told, the excellent Duke of Wolfenbüttel was not yet in the Castle.

"Your master, where?"

At the dressing table, the major-domo thought. Should he send messengers, prepare his Highness? And meanwhile a cup of chocolate for her Highness? After which, no doubt, it would be convenient for their Highnesses——

"Which is his dressing room? Take me to it. No chocolate. Do not inform the Duchess."

She kept her buff cloak about her shoulders; it was muddy, there was mud on her cheek and forehead under the white ruffled hair. In the mirrors they passed she dispassionately observed her sunk eyes, all the stains and stresses of her dress, but made no single movement to modify any part of her appearance. A door was reached, and the major-domo with his hand upon it turned to question; the full announcement, all the titles, Duchess-Consort and the rest, or a simple Serene Highness? His answer was in movement, the thrust of Duchess Sophia's hand, a stride through the door, niggardly open, only one wing instead of both, her due; and his next vision

was of his master rising amid a cluster of valets, cropped and wigless, with astonished wrinkles climbing up his forehead, all under a ceiling whereon Leda yielded to the Swan.

Duke George William had heard nothing of the stir of his sister-in-law's arrival, and had expected nothing less. He knew her at once, however—what other woman in Germany would appear at that hour, in that get-up, in a man's dressing room, without warning?—and bowed his shaven head over her hand with genuine pleasure. He respected her, foibles and all; liked her common sense and her pride, even when these last struck against his own opinion; and he would have welcomed her friendship. True, the split between the families was of her making, but she was a Princess of England, a Princess of Bohemia, whose right to be difficult he recognised without rancour. He loved his wife and was faithful to her, but he could see her at times through Duchess Sophia's spectacles.

She entered, full sail upon a compliment.

"Your daughter is spoken of in every letter I receive. I could put you together a bouquet of adjectives, all sweet-smelling—lovely, graceful, spirited. I had a great curiosity, I confess, to see her for myself; and besides, it appeared to me that the family coldness had lasted long enough."

Duke George William would not, if left to himself, have alluded to the family coldness; but since the blunt Englishwoman had acknowledged it he would not contradict her.

"I am happy to see you. But how so early?"

"I set out from Hanover last night."

Duke George William looked incredulous, gratified, puzzled, but asked no further questions, though he perceived that something more than curiosity lay behind the journey, and looked with apprehension at a certain half-open door, through which could be seen the white and blue curtains of a bed. Duchess Sophia observed it.

"But first, where is your wife?"

His gesture confirmed the indication of the glance. Duchess Sophia rose, and through the door addressed the bed's unseen occupant in her English voice, pitched across the bridge of the nose.

"I come to convey my compliments on this occasion. No ceremony, I beg you. Don't rise, don't put yourself to the least trouble, your husband will entertain me until I am able to greet your daughter in person. All my

apologies, I am troublesome, but I was concerned to be in time with my good wishes."

The curtains trembled, were parting; but before they could be pulled aside Duchess Sophia was back in the dressing room, savouring perplexity in the voice that pursued her:

"Who's there? Who's speaking?"

George William answered loudly:

"My brother's wife. Dress, and come quickly."

Astonished silence was broken by Duchess Sophia speaking low to the Duke.

"No. I have something to say to you. A family matter."

"My wife sits in my council, Duchess."

She answered that in her forthright manner:

"I have nothing against her, but—six years' estrangement is a long time. Let me come to it by degrees." And she quoted the Dutch proverb: "Jong rijs is te buigen, maar geen oude boomen."[2]

He looked dubious still, but as though the taste of Dutch on her tongue were palatable, she slipped easily into that speech, which he understood, and which had been the language of her girlhood. It was odds against the Frenchwoman understanding, one of a race that despised all other tongues, and kept vowels pure whatever might happen to blood. Insulting, thus to discuss her daughter's fate unintelligibly under her nose, but Duchess Sophia had the grand manner in all things, rudeness included. Twenty-five years of marriage with a German prince had given her a clue to the movements of such dignitaries' minds, ponderous and gilded as the movements of their watches. She was aware, having observed her own husband, that diplomacies often missed their mark through not being couched in language of sufficient simplicity, and determined to impose comprehension bluntly and at once. The chariots of Wolfenbüttel were approaching, ominous as those with whose threat Jeremiah scourged the Hebrews, at whose noise and whose rushing and whose rumbling of wheels fathers should flee, forgetting the peril of their children. Braver than Israel, Duchess Sophia stood her ground before the advance, and saw to her children's safety.

"You wonder to see me here"—she put up a hand to the caked-mud patches—"at this hour, in this disarray. Let pretty speeches alone; I know

how I look. Let all the compliments go, cards on the table, brother. I am sure I do not know what man I may treat as a rational being, if it is not you."

Duke George William was bowing to that when a voice came shrill from the bedroom, a suspicious voice, its German running quick and tilted, after the manner of France.

"What does her Highness say? Pray let me miss none of it."

George William answered, hesitating; he had none of his brother's episcopal readiness with words.

"Her Highness asks that—states that she has come to consult us."

Duchess Sophia let go that first person plural in her astonishment at the behaviour of the blue and white bed-curtains. These were agitated; they opened, closed, bellied and fell into tranquillity as though some strong wind possessed them. Seen through the door, these movements in a room otherwise decorous and unoccupied roused speculations which did not stretch to the true cause; which was, that George William's duchess was being prevented by horrified ladies from appearing before her Serene Highness of Hanover in a sky-blue bedgown. Allowances made for surprise and relationship, they mutely maintained that it would not do; and the Duchess Eléonore, who for years had been netting a web of etiquette about herself, now found it too strong for her resolution. Silently the ladies overpowered her. She was awake, she was their prey, theirs to wash and dress and hang with appropriate trinkets. She yielded, panting a little, the curtains ceased their motion, and Duchess Sophia took up her argument again.

"I have said that I come on account of your daughter, to see her, to discover if all the tales of her are true. No doubt they are. Beauty, grace, the virtues—very nice, but it all matters exactly nothing, brother. One thing matters only; or should to princes." He looked his question. "Power. And the dignities and pride, rightful pride, that go with power. I am here to offer you that; and if your daughter were a blackamoor or deaf and dumb, I should repeat it."

She perceived in the clouding-over of George William's eye that this was not the way to take him. How should a stolid country gentleman care if his grandson wore an electoral bonnet and came out of his own front door to the clamour of guns? Power meant responsibility, and from responsibility George William fled when he could, putting off whole territories on to other shoulders, capably managing and increasing his money, but indolent for

glory. He took his time to consider the statement, while her thoughts fled this way and that, seeking a way to involve him, and at last answered clean off the point.

"But I cannot see how the matter is affected by my daughter's complexion."

She could not check for this, only told herself that she must be brief and therefore more direct; a scuffling in the bedroom reassured her that Duchess Eléonore was not at her listening post.

"Listen. I have seen and heard enough of family quarrels in my life; with twelve brothers and sisters you may believe it. They waste as much time and as much money as any war, and end for the most part as wars do; both sides red in the face, and with empty pockets." George William nodded at that. "You have a daughter and lands to dispose of. I have a son, and my son will have a crown, perhaps, if matters in England go forward as I believe they may. Well, you don't care for that, you are a family man and a happy one."

"Duchess," the Duke interrupted with difficulty, after thought; her son, his daughter? "You are talking in riddles still. I am a plain man. I say to myself, My brother's wife takes many years to make up her mind to pay us a visit. She is not a woman to disturb herself and leave her books for nothing."

He paused. Duchess Sophia came in upon her cue without wavering. The words stabbed her; she spoke them the more clearly.

"Your daughter for my son. A match; and the house of Brunswick no longer divided against itself."

Duke George William looked at her, pushed back his wig as though for air, and rubbed his forehead. He walked aimlessly, a few steps to the right, then a half-turn; picked up a comb and set it down; looked in at the bedroom door, behind which a scurry of women told that his wife was dressing; then returned to his guest. She, sitting motionless, had followed his mind's working while he paced and wavered. Friendship—a comfortable thing for the two families. An honour, too, recognition at last of Eléonore. My brother and his high-nosed wife willing to overlook the break in royal blood! Why, this means friendship all round. If we marry into Hanover, we'll have consideration from all the other courts—Denmark, Prussia. And the land goes to George-Louis in the end; why not in this way, civilly, decently? And as for aggrandisement, the troublesome problem of more land to administer, that will come the grandchildren's way, not mine.

“I have heard,” said Duchess Sophia, looking at him directly, “that there might be some question of a marriage with Wolfenbüttel. I cannot think that you would sanction union with a husband’s brother; incest, for that’s what it comes to.”

The troubled Duke, listening against his will for sounds in the courtyard that would indicate the arrival of Duke Antony Ulrich and his younger son in their best clothes, jerked round on his heel. His daughter had been betrothed, and widowed by a cannon ball before she could come to an age to be wived. No bond of the flesh between her and the dead boy, no reason in common sense against marriage with the dead boy’s brother; and yet, somehow, the decencies were by the thought of such a match obscurely affronted. Incest, no! But a nastiness, a kind of lawyerish odour was over it which from the first, ever since his wife had proposed the match and even while she vigorously sought it, gave him uneasiness. His Dutch was not equal to circumlocutions.

“I don’t know about that. The contract’s as good as signed. They’ll be here this morning with their papers and seals, all ready——”

She broke in.

“Send them home again.” Then, as he looked once, and sheepishly, towards his wife’s room: “I am sorry for you, brother, Whichever way you turn there’s a lion in the path. Well, here’s my offer, I’ll be plain with you. Patch our quarrel, unite our split territories. Let our grandchildren be kings and electors, and—mend the road between Hanover and Zelle.”

She held out a hand, tanned and veined, with great yellow diamonds sparkling away on it. He had almost stooped to it when the subdued bedroom flurry broke to a sharp sound of curtains withdrawn, and the Duchess of Zelle, in the blue bedgown, but with her dark hair elaborately poised and twisted, came in upon them. She was in a fever of curiosity and mistrust. Warned by the common sense which French blood so generously accords, she was entirely aware that snobbery yields neither to sentiment nor years. She knew that her sister Duchess had come to command some favour; and in her heart envied perhaps the security, the ineffable insolence which could dispense with preliminary, and say to an enemy after a decade of silence, Give. Her own dark loveliness seemed not to defend her, to fall away like a loosened dress from her, leaving the ageing woman in the chair to eye her naked. She came forward, billowing; halted, and sought refuge from encounter in a curtsey. She had lived in courts and knew their ceremony well enough, but this was intimacy, strangeness, unsureness

combined. The Duke, that bluff country gentleman, alert to every nicety of the hunting field, was helpless in his own dressing room. Circumstances had to be long anticipated and simple in essence for the Duke to be their master.

"My apologies." The woman in the chair greeted her with directness, no title of address, no attempt at conciliation, no gesture, except a bend of the head acknowledging Duchess Eléonore's curtsey. "I come unseasonably."

"It gives us pleasure to welcome you, no matter why you come, or at what hour." Duchess Eléonore was adequately polite.

"I don't know that I have any right to expect civil phrases, and I do not make much account of them. I came with a proposal for my brother here. When I have my answer I shall understand whether or no I am welcome."

"He is accustomed to digest his decisions," said Duchess Eléonore, with a look at her Duke.

"He must not chew this one long," Duchess Sophia answered.

The Duke knew that well enough. The Wolfenbüttel could not be allowed the insult of a hopeful greeting. They must be warned, spared the humiliation of bringing their wedding gifts if these were not to be accepted. He looked out of the window, dreading to hear the sentries clap arms for their coach, and still looking away from both women, blurted in Dutch:

"I don't hear good accounts of George-Louis."

He did not translate the name, whose sound was an Open Sesame to Duchess Eléonore. She broke in, speaking her own tongue:

"Will not her Serene Highness accept the commodity of my dressing room? You have told her that we expect the Wolfenbüttel. She will wish to make changes in her dress."

Duchess Sophia understood perfectly, and was perfectly indifferent to this sally. She answered, drawling in bad French:

"If you do not receive Duke Antony Ulrich, I need make no changes in my dress."

Duchess Eléonore at that checked with a hand to her throat. Her great eyes implored the Duke to contradict her sister-in-law; but she had lived with him long enough to know that he who would risk a quarrel for his own convenience was mild in every other cause. His hesitation and the name of George-Louis told her the history of the whole interview. The thin-nosed woman with mud on her cheek had conquered him, rolled him up horse and

foot, by a few civil words and a great many plain ones. Duchess Eléonore had dreaded just this; and the sickness at her heart was not wholly for her own failure. She, too, heard no good accounts of George-Louis.

There was a brief running sound outside the great double doors. News of the arrival? But no chamberlain entered. Instead a small face peered in, its wide and naughty eyes obscured by curling dark hair. Flowers were tangled in this, not the decorous artificial flowers of courts, but field weeds, still dewy, such as the peasant women at weddings sometimes wore.

"Papa!" called Sophia-Dorothea. "How do you like the bride?"

She perceived at that moment the motionless visitor, clapped a hand to her mouth, and withdrew her head with all speed from the chink in the door, which closed noiselessly. A sound of flying feet emphasised the panic of this withdrawal. Duke George William strode to the door in an instant, and was shouting after her in his tally-ho voice:

"Daughter! Here!"

The feet approached. That this owner was making reluctant faces Duchess Sophia deduced from the scandalised motion of the Duke's hand—down, down—as to a tiresome puppy. She came through the door at length past him, and Duchess Sophia could survey her daughter-in-law, darkly pretty, plump, and still for the moment as a little field animal frightened. Duchess Eléonore was at once busy with adjurations. Above the chatter her eyes continually and imploringly sought those of the Duke.

"Dorothée, we are greatly honoured. Your birthday brings us a welcome guest from over the border. (Where is your curtsey?) Only a child yet, Duchess, and we see few visitors here. She is delighted, honoured, only a little shy. (Your compliment, Dorothée.)"

Sophia-Dorothea said, speaking stiffly and with pauses, like a child delivering a set speech: "I thank your Serene Highness—and I am grateful, your Serene Highness—and I am happy to pay my respectful duty."

"I have brought you a betrothal gift," said Duchess Sophia, bringing the packet out of her cloak with no accompanying compliment.

Sophia-Dorothea, with a little irresistible hop of interest like a bird drawing near to crumbs, came close, received, unwrapped the packet. Her childish exclamation rang high: "How kind you are, how kind—an emerald ring, look, Mamma!"

It was on her finger in an instant, and the plump hand was turning to catch light through the green stone. Duchess Sophia perceived that Duke George William was looking at her, refusing to catch his wife's eye, and understood that he consented to her plan. It was for him to speak to the girl, however. She held her tongue, and he his, while Sophia-Dorothea played with her ring in the sunlight, sending darts of light upwards from the brilliants, marking a flake of shallower green where the flaw of the emerald ran. Duchess Sophia finally understood that she must make up Duke George William's mind for him, and that he would not contradict what she might say in his name. She spoke suddenly to the girl.

"Do you see what arms are cut on that stone?"

There were leopards, chequers, a running deer; the girl had known that coat from childhood.

"Our own—Serene Highness."

"I had that ring from my husband when I was to marry him. I give it to you, to stand for my son's gift."

The girl looked down with an expression almost ludicrous, so abruptly did it change, and tugged at the ring. Her finger had swelled a little from its constriction, the ring did not immediately yield. She pulled at it furiously, stupidly, not turning it so that her knuckle might slip through; tears came into her eyes with the pain, starting to the lashes instantly, welling, dropping. She whimpered. At last she had it off, and threw it from her with all her strength.

"I won't take it, no, I won't wear it——" that came loudly.

"You will do as I order you. Put it on——" Duke George William.

"You cannot be so inhuman. The Wolfenbüttel, the shock, the affront ——" Duchess Eléonore.

Sophia-Dorothea by now was openly crying, her arms round her mother, and pleading: "Mamma, no; don't let me be taken away and married. I'll be a nun, I'll cut all my hair off and run away."

"Quiet! You'll do what I think best. You'll marry George-Louis if I say so. What kind of manners are these?" Duke George William shouted them both down.

His wife turned on him, the girl clasped to her.

“And yours? What kind of manners, to let Antony Ulrich come here with his son, with the very wedding clothes in their cloak-bags? Depending on your word. And Dorothée, so happy, gladly obedient.” She mastered herself, and spoke with restraint to Duchess Sophia sitting motionless. “Madame, will you not say, you whose presence so honours us, will you not say that a mistake has been made, and go, and let us bless you?”

To which Duchess Sophia answered unmoving:

“Madame, I don’t know that I will.”

She got up at that to take the sobbing girl by her shoulders and turn her round, away from her mother. Sophia-Dorothea was in a rage childishly complete and unselfconscious, her mouth was distorted, her cheeks blubbered, and she hiccuped as she tried to control her sobbing, facing the old Duchess’s steady eyes.

“Behave yourself,” commanded Duchess Sophia.

A pause, in which sounded, faint but unmistakable, the chanticleer crow of trumpets. The Wolfenbüttel had arrived. All four heard, and were held an instant still by it. Then the group broke. Sophia-Dorothea, knuckling her eyes, fled through the inner door to the bedroom; her mother followed, lifting hands in appeal to God; the Duke went to the window and looked with a kind of reluctant eagerness down into the court, from which ascended the sound of hoofs stamping, of harness clinking. Duchess Sophia moved across the room to where her ring had struck a marble faun and fallen. Stooping with a grunt, for her bones remembered the night they had spent, she picked it up and examined it for damage. The old setting was not harmed, the big dirty diamonds held their rank in an oval; but in the stone itself a crack appeared, some extension of the flaw that no large emerald lacks. It ran diagonally across the shield, a bar sinister. Duchess Sophia put no faith in omens; she did not, for all her readings in alchemy, believe precious stones to be talismans that would answer to emotional changes, and she did not suppose, for all her tirade to her Duke, that emeralds had ever burst asunder because wantons wore them. Still, it was a coincidence. Being a woman very plain-spoken within her own mind, she put her feeling briefly into thought, and at once hid it away. If she’s not a wanton yet she will be. That will just suit George-Louis. It’s what he’s used to. Well——

And becoming suddenly aware of Duke George William’s eye upon her, of her own faintness—she had eaten nothing for over twelve hours—she put the ring in her pocket, advancing upon him.

“What have you for breakfast, brother?”

Duke George William found this subject more to his taste.

“Breakfast! That’s better. But Antony Ulrich?”

“We have time while he is washing. I,” touching her cheek, “am past such vanities. What’s this my brother Rupert used to say? Mud chokes no eels.”

“No, by God, nor huntsmen neither. We’ll keep Antony Ulrich waiting.”

“For bride or breakfast?”

“Both. Yes, both. My mind’s made up.”

“I’m obliged to you, brother.”

In this manner, with just such odious ease, was her battle won. But she had always been able to do as she pleased with George William, save in the one instance of his marriage. While he, staid gentleman, handed her downstairs, mirrors, those worst of courtiers, reflected as they passed the unflattering image of a stolid red-faced man in fine clothes, with a great peruke curled up in front to make two horns of hair; and Sophia’s memory recalled how, soon after her own marriage to Bishop Ernest Augustus, this brother of his had become too attentive, his great outdoor hands too venturesome, so that she had been obliged to ask him plainly one day for the love of God to let her alone. It occurred to her, with a little jealous pang, that George-Louis her son also had brothers, and her thoughts leapt ahead to discover Max or Charles fumbling at George-Louis’ wife, without rebuke. That, perhaps, was the omen of the emerald. She shrugged (the mirrors sent up the shoulders of half a dozen Sophias) and addressed to heaven a hope that any scandal might be kept in the family.

Then footmen, bearing silver vessels that steamed, stood away from a door. Breakfast!

---

[2] Young twigs will bend, but not old trees.

(IV)

The marriage followed not long after, and not without protests. The Wolfenbüttel, greeted offhandedly with an announcement of the new betrothal, refused to rejoice and be glad, refused even to eat from the table or in the company of persons who had played them so unmannerly a trick. They took themselves off without unharnessing their horses, and entered with zest upon the first bitter stages of a family feud. Their resentment, happily, carried with it no danger, and was regretted by Duchess Eléonore alone. She had not met with such kindness in Germany that she could afford to lose even one old friend.

All the first day Sophia-Dorothea was invisible. For twelve hours she lay wailing on her bed, a governess twittering precepts at her, the Duchess supporting her head and sobbing sympathy. A servant appearing with a cup of chocolate found it kicked from his hand; a secretary from the Duke requiring her presence at dinner retired, after dodging a candlestick, to concoct as best he could a becoming apology for the Princess's absence. It was not until evening when George William himself was heard marching through the schoolroom that there was calm, and then it was of an ominous kind, a withdrawal the better to leap. The Duke did not argue. Leaning against the fat cupids of her mantelpiece, which Sophia-Dorothea had known since she was of a size with them, he gave orders. Tears and laughter in plenty, singing, prayers, and the pretty silly talk of a loved and spoiled child, to all these the room was accustomed; never before had it known this imperious sound. Sophia-Dorothea sat up in her petticoats decorously to welcome him, forlorn upon the bed, and dared make no answer; her mother dipped a curtsey when he departed, so alarming and princely had George William become. But when the footsteps had retired into the corridor again a concerted scream of despair went up from the bed and its guardian, and the governess took it upon herself to send for the castle physician, a calm gentleman, who having spent his day in the library knew nothing of all the day's happenings, and was able to give an opinion unprejudiced by the situation. The Princess had cried herself into an uncontrollable state; the Duchess from sheer rage was beginning to vomit. He advised bed for them both, and retired once more to his quills and candles, and his treatise entitled "A consideration of the methods which Leviticus enjoins upon those who would treat Leprosy."

Duchess Sophia, therefore, dined alone with the Duke, and deplored with him the unbiddableness of youth. She was not readily amused; but it occurred to her that though she now sat at his right hand in all the state accorded to a distinguished visitor, she might very well have been howling upstairs as his wife. There had been marriage proposals between them, thirty

years before, and she had reason to believe, from an indiscreet word or two dropped by Ernest Augustus, that the brothers had played cards for her—piquet, she hoped, where all the lower denominations were discarded before the game began. Humiliating, that upon a two or a three should swing the destiny of a queen's daughter! Decidedly, however, she had had the luck, for George William was without ambition, unless it might be to kill more beasts in a given time than some neighbouring sportsman, and he had only this one daughter to set against Ernest Augustus's roster of sons. She suspected some French arts there, some thwarting of nature, some care for the figure, and was sure that this meagre rate of production was not to be attributed to lack of effort on George William's part, nor to distractions elsewhere. "How comes it my children by the Queen die or are puny?" "Sir, other ladies take the full glass; her majesty does as best she can with the heel-taps." That dialogue between Louis XIV and his doctor had been sent her by Madame; it was amusing, but here it did not apply. She would, she thought, have done better by George William than his Frenchwoman.

That lady, torn between detestation of Sophia and dread of her influence, suddenly, at sight of the bed with the blue curtains, regained confidence, dressed, and descended to battle. She found her husband and his sister-in-law amiably in converse, bawling civilities to each other through the strains of a band which, reckoning noise as homage, was scraping, plucking, puffing its loudest. The end of the *morceau* coincided with Duchess Eléonore's entrance; it was as though her appearance—great eyes sunken but luminous with weeping, dark hair distractedly piled, like storm-clouds—had stricken them to silence. The Duke did not rise to greet his wife; it was not her due. Duchess Sophia did not rise; she remembered Eléonore d'Olbreuse as a lady-in-waiting, standing and shifting from foot to foot as the princes dined. She spoke civilly, however, trusting that the Princess might soon recover, commiserating maternal anxiety.

Duchess Eléonore made no answer beyond a bow, nor did she attempt to disguise her distress and its cause. Her simplicity suited her enemy better than the vapours of the afternoon, or that morning's uneasy politeness, and she gave good square answers to such questions as were asked. The first, however, was addressed to the Duke.

"You have sent couriers to Hanover?"

The Duke had, in fact, sent a fellow off. Ernest Augustus and his son would be—he looked at his watch—receiving the news about an hour hence, and might be trusted to pack at once and set out. "Make ready for them, madame." The Duchess at that, understanding the uselessness of protest,

forgot her status as a wife and turned mother. Nothing of Niobe was in her look as she faced Duchess Sophia; she had the wit to know that tears, though they became her, would not serve her turn with this dry and tranquil personage. She answered the Duke through his sister-in-law.

"I will prepare my daughter. But there are certain things I must know, and which you, madame, will perhaps tell me of your own free will. Your son——" she broke off. "I cannot question without offence."

Duchess Sophia understood very well what was required, but thought she might as well issue a warning.

"If you take my advice you won't unsettle the girl's mind. Let her suppose all husbands are alike."

Duchess Eléonore answered simply:

"She will not understand. She has been a witness of happiness all her life."

She did not look at the Duke, but he was touched, and put out a hand to squeeze her upper arm like any burgher husband reminded of his courtship. Duchess Sophia wasted no more sense on the sentimentalists.

"My son is a soldier. When you have said that you have said the best of him. He has no understanding of any of the arts of peace, and no liking for them. He is a great spender, but I have never known him have anything more than a sore head to show for an empty purse." Her voice grew stronger as she spoke. She was aware of the reality of her power, when she could decry the merchandise she brought and yet compel these people, against their judgment and their wills, to buy it. "He is no Prince Charming, but there must be some lure about him that a parent cannot discover, for his mistress keeps him in play-money." She saw the Duke fidget, his wife stiffen, and continued, daring them to comment: "his mistress, Frau Busche, wife to Frederick's tutor, sister to Baroness Platen."

She would have preferred to put it more plainly, to have said: "I put up with rivalry, I receive Baroness Platen; I, the daughter and granddaughter of kings. What I do, your little Featherweight can subdue her base blood to copy." But she had pity on their discomfort and left the thing at a hint. The Duke said nothing. His wife, with a desperate gesture, a shuddering which sometimes took her at sight of a doe slavered by hounds, said strongly:

"That woman must go."

Duchess Sophia made unexpected answer.

“Are you wise?”

“No, no, I am not wise, my God! I see only that a child of sixteen must not come all at once to ugly knowledge.”

“I have told you something of my son,” Duchess Sophia answered. “Here is something to add: he is resentful of changes. If marriage with your daughter is to mean alteration in his ways, he will break the marriage rather than the habit.”

Even the Duke was shocked by this.

“Come, come, sister, you’ve seen my girl. Oughtn’t she to content any young man?”

Duchess Sophia answered briefly:

“Princes should not look to find such satisfactions in marriage.”

Even at that Duchess Eléonore did not give battle; she held steadily, with all the respectability of her French Huguenot blood, to the matter in hand.

“You have spoken frankly of your son, madame. I thank you for that. I perceive that certain things are, for the sake of peace and quiet, to be accepted. But not yet, not yet! Sophie-Dorothée will be obedient; she will learn. I beg only that the lesson may be delayed a little, until she has acquired the discipline. At present, she will cry any grief from the house-tops.”

True enough, thought Duchess Sophia, remembering the morning’s scene. The girl would be capable of running away, of appealing to the people, of any enormity at all. Busche must go for a while. She considered, and gave a frank answer:

“I dare say you are right. We cannot begin by a scandal. But you will be doing your daughter no service, madame, if you teach her to look for romance in Hanover. We have no secret meetings, no rope-ladders and moonshine there. We jog on in our old ways, and do not much care to be criticised. I remember once trying to teach one of our ladies the rules of lansquenet. She mastered them soon enough, and won; at the end of the game she said to me: ‘I don’t know, Ma’am, but what we did very well before with our snip, snap, snurre.’ Don’t let your daughter think she can better our snip, snap, snurre for us. Tell her to hold her tongue and her nose too, if the stink of us proves too much for her; and let her think of George-Louis as she likes, so long as she is civil to him in public and complaisant to him in bed. But Frau Busche shall go.”

Duchess Eléonore had won. She talked no more, but with simplicity and dignity answered:

"Thank you, madame. I go now to my daughter, with your leave."

The Duke took a deep breath and blew it out slowly as though a hunting horn were at his lips and he sounding the *Ti a hillaut* for a beast gone away. Duchess Sophia, who had no more to say to him, took from her pocket the book which recalled, together with those plenary aches in her limbs, the previous night's journey, and began to read of matters comfortable to theologians, of freewill and damnation, hell hanging upon some mispersuasion of a text, and the meritoriousness of being factious. She could track a casuist through argument's mazes as surely as Duke George William could follow his hunted stags down the woody rides of forests. Theology was Duchess Sophia's distraction, and preserved her spirits from melancholy more surely than attendance at music or a play. She enjoyed the interplay of argument, and to watch premises and deductions flick here and there swiftly as foils, with subtleties not distinguishable save to the accustomed eye. She enjoyed, too, the reading of English, and as Allestree's good rough periods went their way under her eyes she forgot politics, and her bones, and the ructions sure, sooner or later, to ensue upon this marriage, and sat smiling, nodding her head now and then to some bold wordy stroke.

She came back from her invisible world an hour later to discover a footman handing a letter, addressed in a small French hand; written, too, in the French language.

"Madame," it began, "I have so much respect for the Duke your husband, as well as for my own father, that whatever they may pledge me to shall find me very well content. As for yourself, your Highness must believe that nobody could be more grateful than I am for your goodness. I will try all my life long to deserve your consideration, and to show by my humble duty and respectfulness my understanding of your kindness in accepting me as your daughter, which duty shall be my pleasure. With all proper submission I sign myself, Madame, your Highness's very humble and obedient servant, Sophie-Dorothée."

Very good, thought Duchess Sophia, folding the letter lengthwise to serve as a book-mark. The mother dictates, the girl accepts, reserving in her little feather-mind the right to be as troublesome to us as she pleases, once we are saddled with her. George-Louis must fight his own battles. It is always easier to be polite and tolerant when one is not anxious about money; I dare say they will rub along together pretty well.

She sighed involuntarily, for no reason that her intelligence recognised as valid; then stood up stiffly, shut her book upon the letter of capitulation, and went off to order a hot bath with herbs and brandy in it.

(V)

Her husband and son paid Duchess Sophia's diplomacy the compliment of decent haste, and appeared next day looking very fine; the son sullen, however, and in no mood to make the best of himself. His future wife fainted at sight of him, an unprompted proof of the distaste his appearance excited. He was uncomfortable among these too friendly strangers, lost without his accustomed companions and bottles, unsure how much of the money he was thus earning would be pouched by his father. A hundred thousand thalers a year had a good plump sound; but he would have to support this wife, and pay for her dresses, and maintain her in the manner to which she had been accustomed, with a pack of ladies, waiting-maids, outriders, trumpeters and footmen in livery. Angrily he meditated, and before his mind's eye, that glazed and bloodshot organ of inner vision, rose the handsome regiment, the batteries that all this money, rightly used, might equip. He grumbled to his mother. She shrugged, told him that if every man could make money simply by doing his duty in bed the world would be full of bankers, and sat down at last to tell Elizabeth-Charlotte, Duchesse d'Orléans, of the marriage.

"One hundred thousand thalers a year is a very pretty sum, not to mention the pretty piece that it goes with. But she will meet her match, in both senses of that word, in George-Louis, my son, the most stubborn animal of a boy that ever lived. So thick is the crust round his brains that I defy any man, or woman either, to prove they exist. He does not care much for the notion of a wife. Still, the money has brought him to it, as it would have brought anyone in his senses."

The money had to work hard. After the contract was signed—so much a year, such and such estates entailed, provision for widowhood, provision for children—when the document was as binding as coloured ribbons, and wax, and florid ducal signatures could make it, Duchess Sophia sent for her eldest son, who came into her room smelling of horses, his boots covered with lather, and stood before her twisting his whip in his fingers like a great booby of six years old. He feared his mother.

"So it's settled, my son. I congratulate you."

He looked at her, suspecting irony, and gave a brief nod.

"Now for the obligations that don't look so well on paper. Busche will have to go."

"Let him. He's no use to Frederick. Don't know one card from another."

"Not the man. She—Busche's wife."

He did not move at that; he was hard to surprise. But his very forehead became red.

"Go? Who says so?"

"I say so. It's not fitting. There's this girl's youth to consider."

"She hates me. I'm damned if I put myself out for her."

"Be good enough to do as I tell you." He stood, lowering. "Draw up that chair there, and choose yourself a pen. Are you ready? Write——"

He obeyed her, seated himself, picked up the quill and dipped it. Suddenly he swung round, head and shoulders turning together like a threatening bull.

"What claim has this little bastard on me?"

His mother eyed him, and gave him the kind of answer he comprehended.

"If you don't want her to bear you little bastards, you'd better be civil."

"By God, she shan't play any of her dirty French tricks on me."

"Then don't give her cause. Write as I dictate. 'Madame: It will be as well for you to leave Hanover before November 22nd, on which date I bring home my bride——' "

"I can't send her a letter like that. She wouldn't go. I owe her money."

"How much?"

"How should I know? Five or six thousand thalers."

"Write: 'on which date I bring home my bride. I hope in a short time to repay the money you were so obliging as to lend me; but such repayment must be conditional on your withdrawal.' End how you please."

He wrote laboriously, scowling, and when the letter was done threw down the quill, which rolled, leaving a trail of ink across the paper. His mother took the sheet, read, and put it before him again.

“Sign.”

He did so, and wrote the direction. She folded the letter, herself dropped wax upon the fold, and sealed it with the gold seal that hung among other trinkets at her waist. The crowned S stood out sharply upon a great smudge of wax, unmistakable.

“Now ring.”

He obeyed her, and made to leave the room, but she detained him, a hand on his sleeve, until she had given the servant his order; a courier immediately for Hanover with this packet. Even when the man had gone she would not permit George-Louis to escape. With a twist of the wrist that served her as well as another woman’s wink she pointed to a book on the table, and bade her son read.

“A useful habit for a family man. Cultivate it, my son. Give me now the pleasure of hearing how you shape.”

He went to the table, picked up the book as though it weighed a stone, and returned to her side.

“Well? You know which way up to hold a book, I think? Begin where you see the marker set; the top paragraph of the left-hand page.”

He sat despairingly and began to stumble about among the English phrases, mispronouncing words.

“We find how sad the doom was of that Servant who wrapt up his talent, but we have no cause to think it would have been at all easier if he had melted the Talent into bullets——”

A sound of departing hoofs echoed in the courtyard; her courier had lost no time. George-Louis too heard the clatter, and raised his head from the book with a heavy imploring glance which his mother’s imperious fingers beat down again to Mr. Allestree’s pages.

“—we have beat our ploughshares into swords, and our pruning hooks into spears, all the instruments of fertility and growth in Grace into Engines of war and discord.”

His eye, wandering, caught a sentence in thin French writing upon the paper that served as marker—“your kindness in accepting me as your daughter—” He clapped-to the book upon it, and blurted at his mother:

“Why should I pay her a compliment my father’s never paid you?”

“I am not obliged to answer such a question. Continue.”

“A mistress is cleaner, safer than whores: you can’t deny that.”

“I ask you to read.”

“There’s no sense in it.”

“Read!”

He gave in, went back to the mystifying pages, and blundered along until the clock struck five, and the room darkened. His mother then, with the ghost of a laugh, let him go. Her courier had an hour’s start on the road to Hanover.

(VI)

Sophia-Dorothea meanwhile was in the chapel, angrily and piteously reasoning with God. It was an unusual place for her to be found in. Indeed, her mother, to whom any recourse to church on a weekday spelt Popery, would have been as shocked as was the organist, who, coming in to practise his epithalamia, stood amazed to discover her Highness up by the altar rails, kneeling, her shoulders shaking, despairing sounds coming from her. He pushed back through the door the boy, his blower, and went away troubled.

Her Highness was arguing with her Creator via her conscience and getting the worst of it.

“I won’t be made do it. They can’t make me say Yes. I could wait till they were standing here and the bishop asked me the question, and then shout No! No! in all their teeth. Wouldn’t they stare! What would happen? Papa might have me put in prison—” Her mind afforded her two or three quick colourless pictures of stone hollows under the *Schloss*, where the air struck cold to her skin as though she walked through breatheable water; not used now, they told her. (But there were doors that Kurt would not open, that he had hurried her by.) “Oh Lord God, what’s the use of having brought me into the world if I’m not to be happy? Duty is happiness—it’s not, dear Lord, indeed it isn’t, as You’d know if You ever had to do things You hated. Why, he’s not even polite. He walks like a groom, and belches at meals. He scratches, I saw him, and his face is horribly fat already. Dear Lord, You don’t know. It can’t be right when it makes me sick and faint to have him near me. I wish You were a woman, I wish the Virgin wasn’t Popery; she’d understand. She never had to go to bed with any horrible man. It’s only babies they want, princes for the succession. Why couldn’t You let women alone to have them by themselves without making it all hateful with men?”

She caught her breath. This was questioning the ways of God, a sin against which people were warned; more especially women, to whom the ways of God must always appear inexplicable.

"Lord, I beg your pardon. Lord, I didn't mean to say that everything wasn't for the best. Everybody knows how much You are always doing for us, blessing us, and keeping us alive—" Tears overcame her. "But oh, please, please, why must it be me?"

There was silence in the chapel like that in the cave of an oracle before the hollow voice begins booming out riddles, as though God were preparing to answer in person. It frightened Sophia-Dorothea, who started up from her knees and looked about her, right, left. No one was there, but the windows on either side held up a dozen coloured reminders of her obligations, shields, mottoes of dead Dukes whose possessions must not be allowed to disintegrate nor their names to die. Sacred, the family; inviolable, the duty to perpetuate and enrich it.

But Sophia-Dorothea's Creator was of quite another mind. My child, said He, speaking through the clatter and glitter of the shields, shall I tell you how to know a false god? He is one that demands the wrong sacrifices. He wrings the spirit, and leaves the body its toys. He is without love for those who worship him. I love My creatures dearly. The sun and stars please Me in ministering to you, and your agonies are hateful to Me. My victims come joyfully, throwing aside, as they run to Me, crowns, garments, and the silly desires of their flesh. They reach My breast naked as they departed from it, and the false gods pick up such rubbish as they drop by the way. Girl, will you be one of My happy runners?

Sophia-Dorothea heard this reasoning, but it was as distasteful to her as had been the clamour of the painted shields. She could not, despite her threat to her father, see herself as a nun; such was, she supposed, the gist of her Creator's suggestion. She wanted, wanted—to escape, to be her own arbitress, to be let alone, to love; it was all indefinite, but she did undoubtedly desire these things. On the other, the negative side, she had absolute certainty.

"Dear Lord, I know what I don't want."

That is a beginning, rejoined her Creator.

"I don't want George-Louis."

For happiness you must not want him, nor any other man, nor any other thing.

“Dear Lord, that’s Your happiness, not ours.”

If you will not give up everything, then give up nothing. Be all life, and mettle, and vigour, and love to everything, and that, equally, will poise you.

“But I want to keep the things that please me, and let the others go.”

My poor child! said her Creator, unresentful but sorry, and spoke no more.

(VII)

Word went out soon after this to the drummers and ringers and the Mayor of Zelle—to all those dignitaries whose functions a royal marriage might bring into play. There were decorations set up in the streets; loyal banners with mottoes, angels with gilt cornucopias, and painted masts from which streamers swayed and snapped in the wind. Thus the townspeople were kept busy. The richer burghers’ wives brought out their plate, and prepared beds for such visiting magnates as might not be accommodated inside the Castle. A squad of intemperate but harmless persons suddenly found themselves apprehended by a strengthened watch on the score of riotousness and set to work out their sentence upon the roads.

In the Castle itself the servants found themselves, for once, with enough to do. Duchess Eléonore sat daily, with her librarian and an ancient major-domo at her elbow, looking up pedigrees and allotting rooms or seats at tables according to the number of quarterings shown by each guest. Her Duke hunted with his brother the Bishop. Duchess Sophia went back to Hanover to see to the refurbishing of the Old Palace, a little shabby ancient dwelling in the very centre of Hanover Town, which was to house George-Louis and his bride. Baroness von Platen bought some magnificent new dresses, and spoke roughly to her sister, who had not obeyed George-Louis’ letter, despite the crowned S on the wax and the near ominous presence of Duchess Sophia.

“What a fool you are,” said Clara von Platen, buffeting her sister’s ear as she sat biting her nails and frowning. “You don’t care for that donkey; why do you moon and sulk because you are asked to take a holiday?”

“She’ll get him away from me,” Catherine-Maria answered sourly.

“And what then? You’ve got his notes of hand, haven’t you? You needn’t lack for money. Let him go, and thank God.”

"I'm not going to be pointed at. 'She's had her day, she's done for'—that's what they'll all say. His mother wrote that letter. I won't go."

"You're a fool. She'll send you out of Hanover at the cart's tail."

"Not if you speak to the Duke."

"The Duke won't hear of any impudence to Sophy; she's a king's daughter. I've warned you."

Catherine-Maria made no answer, and her sister, with an impatient click of the tongue, left her to brood. Clara von Platen had no patience with any behaviour that was not pliable, nor with useless defiance. She herself, when she was crossed in her will, was accustomed to consider the matter impartially in the light of her power; if she could she would strike, if she could not strike she would smile. She wasted no effort and no passion. She cared for money and took pains to earn it. She enjoyed pulling strings, but knew just which were for her hand. She had not yet encountered an emergency in which the desire to hurt another should make her careless of damage to herself; that is to say, she had not so far, in all her life, been in love. Armed with this single-mindedness and readiness to cut losses she walked the court proof against disaster as Duchess Sophia's self. The gulf of the climacteric, however, was between the two women. Duchess Sophia had passed safely; Clara von Platen was approaching it, without resentment or fear. There were times when her womanhood enraged her, when she would have given all her jewels to be able to go out into the world with a sword, as her needy father had done, and buy consideration at the point of it. She did at times very heartily detest her *métier*, not from any moral scruple or reluctance, but from a contempt for the men through whom power came, who would part with difficult jewels for easy kisses; and she looked forward to the day when, such sports being at an end for both of them, the Duke should turn to her for advice rather than for satisfaction.

Thus the attitude of her sister appeared to her indefensible by reason, and not to be accounted for by any of the better known unreasons—love, cupidity, or malice. She shrugged, and went to try on the splendid dress in which she was to stand at the wedding among the wives of State officers.

George-Louis remained not too unwillingly at Zelle. He was getting used to his betrothed, and even a little interested. There was excellent sport to be had, and he was a good horseman and shot. But he missed his habits. He killed, in the course of his visit, six or seven stags a day, and smaller game by the dozen, doggedly taking their lives in resentment for his customary routine disturbed and consequent boredom. Not a soul at Zelle had seen a

battle, or knew a king from a deuce; they were all as Puritanical as the fellows who had chopped off his uncle Charles's head. He did not dare make excuses to return to Hanover, knowing very well that his mother expected just such a departure, and was lying in wait for him. There was nothing for it but to canter along the forest rides and bring down the deer, baying, gasping; dabble the blood where it should go, wind the dogs in, and set off again at a canter, while the body followed on a funeral cart of its own, escorted by a forester, to the place where the day's kill was to be displayed. Once a man's body lay on the beasts in this cart, a beater shot by one of the sportsmen who had mistaken his movement for the rustle of a hare. "By God," said George-Louis to his uncle as the pile went past them, "they didn't tell me we were shooting beaters, Serene Highness; I could have got a dozen if I'd known." The joke was applauded.

Duchess Sophia meanwhile gave orders to the Hanoverian tradesmen and had twenty men at work under her own eye upon the small dark rooms of the Old Palace. She was not niggardly; the decorations were well done, with a good deal of gilding upon the panels to lighten them. After all, the girl's own money was to pay for it. Duchess Sophia fitted up as nursery a low-browed room at the back of the house, with a view upon the gardens, whose door, when the paint was dry, and the furniture in, she locked. The key went into a packet, to be given to Sophia-Dorothea the day she entered the house as a reminder of her duty, and perhaps as a hint of consolation. Children, thought Duchess Sophia, take one's mind off the husband, and thanked be God for it!

When the place was ready, not a pin astray, she ordered casually and hastily a very grand and unbecoming dress, upon which real jewels were sewn by the tailors under a lady-in-waiting's alert eye, and made ready to take coach for Zelle. But first she sent for Frau von Platen.

"Baroness, you can give me news of your sister. She has not yet left the town, I believe."

"Not yet, Serene Highness."

"Make it clear to her that I will not have her here when my son returns with his wife."

"I have done what I could, Serene Highness, but—" and she came out with a proverb in Duchess Sophia's own manner—"guter Rath lasst sich geben, aber gute Sitte nicht."[3]

“If she will not mend her manners, she must not expect consideration. There are plenty of reasons why she should behave herself. Do not let her presume upon her position. A woman may give a prince the pox and still not be safe from a whipping.”

“I have told her as much, Serene Highness. I think she sees reason. I think she does intend to go.”

“I am flattered that she does me the honour to intend to obey me. Understand that her absence or her presence can be of no moment whatever to me; I do not observe persons so closely. It is a matter of common politeness and fittingness. Make her understand that, if you can. Have you made arrangements to go to Zelle?”

The sudden question took Clara von Platen by surprise. She answered confidently enough, however, that she had taken that liberty, and was to set out with her husband the next day.

“I think, Baroness, it will be better if you do not go.”

That too was a surprise, but one for which the previous question had in some obscure way prepared her. She was aware of a shock to her self-esteem, of disappointment, of resentment; reasoned them down, and answered bluffly:

“Ma’am! It will look singular if the Prime Minister’s wife is not among the first to wish our new Princess joy.”

“In the circumstances it will look more singular still if she does. You understand me—” Clara’s mouth opened “and I have no wish to argue. You may suppose that, on various accounts, irregularity will not be frowned on at Zelle. You are deceived. I need dot no i’s; my wish must be enough for you, as for your sister.”

Clara Von Platen, governing her expression, dipped in acquiescence, and waited for dismissal. It came with ironic civility a moment later—“Thank you, Baroness. I am obliged to you—” and she was able to walk bewildered out of Duchess Sophia’s room, whose walls were autumn with the reds and browns of books, to consider plans for action.

First, there was no question but that the Duchess must be obeyed. Next, how to take the sting out of such obedience? A fictitious illness at once suggested itself; and that must mean—Clara von Platen was thorough—seclusion for some days. The sickness must be an authoritative one, no convenient malaise which the ill-intentioned might sneer at or discount. She recollected, and laughed at the astonishing way the threads of events weave

under and out, a trick that used to be played by the Turkish boy Selim, who had been captured in the course of the recent war and sent with two camels to Hanover. Selim made pretensions to magic; the court ladies could never have enough of his divination by means of keys dancing on a drum. But one trick he had shown Baroness von Platen in private, how to hold an ivory ball under the armpit and by the simplest pressure on it to weaken or stop the pulse. She would be ill, therefore, and Duchess Sophia's own doctor, a sceptical yet limited old man, should attend her.

She bestowed herself in bed, whitened her face, and sent for him. He peered, fingered, clucked; had a moment's gravity, and sat back from her.

"Doctor, make me well at once. The wedding is only two days off, and I must dance at it."

"Dance to your grave! I don't like this pulse."

"Doctor!"

"Come now, Baroness, you're a sensible woman. You won't contradict me on a point so easily to be proved as this. The pulse hardly beats."

"It's true I do feel poorly. But what will the Duchess say?"

"I'll deal with the Duchess." He took out a pocketbook and gently shook it before her eyes. "You see this? You shall hear what I write. I pay you the compliment of telling you the truth about yourself; it is the highest in a doctor's power. Now—" writing: " 'I am of opinion, Serene Highness, that Baroness von Platen should by no means attempt any journey, or any festivities presently. Her pulse is hardly to be felt; she has a kind of distemperature which renders any effort inadvisable. On her behalf I request your Serene Highness's leave for her to be absent from the happy ceremonies to take place at Zelle.' " He showed it to her. "Will that calm your apprehensions? What consciences you court ladies have!"

He despatched the note, gave directions for warm soups, and sleep, and a decoction of juniper, and departed. An hour later came a servant with the answering note and a parcel from Duchess Sophia.

"I have every sympathy with your indisposition, and readily grant you leave of absence for so long as may be necessary. To beguile the tedium of illness I send a recent English work, which may serve to remind you that I am always interested in your affairs."

Clara von Platen opened the tract. She had a little English and spelt out without much difficulty the title-page, which announced in the forthright

manner particular to religious controversy, “A Shove to a Heavy-Ars’d Christian.” When she had taken in the sense of this the Baroness laughed, and for a moment felt something like affection for the old woman and her grim joking. Sophy would protect the family dignity, would she? Prevent the mistress from standing beside the wife, and thus preserve her Bishop-Duke’s prestige in his brother’s eyes. The Baroness reclined and considered whether or not she should strike back. At Duchess Sophia? Dangerous. At the Duke? The source of power. George-Louis? Too thick-skinned. The girl Sophia-Dorothea, half a commoner, half French, defenceless among strangers—why not the girl?

Baroness von Platen drank her decoction of juniper and her slops, kept her bed, and planned. Next day, when the carriages were off through pouring rain, and footsteps sounded rarely in the courtyard, she sent for her sister, Catherine-Maria, who came looking sluttish and weary in a bedgown, still meditating defiance, still undecided.

“So here you are still!”

“And what about you? How about your grand dresses? Has the old woman been at you too?”

“I’m sick.” She looked it; her voice wavered and was feeble. “The doctor keeps me here.”

Catherine-Maria looked at her closely for a second; but the actress was able, and she was satisfied at once.

“I’ve been thinking of you. What are you going to do? There’s not much time left.”

“I can’t decide.” Catherine-Maria was at her nails again, and began pacing. “I won’t be sent away like a servant caught stealing. I’ve done nothing. She can do nothing to me.”

“Not if George-Louis stands by you. But he won’t. He wrote that letter at his mother’s orders, you admit it.”

“It might be a trick of hers. It was her turn of speaking, and there were none of the names he calls me when we are together.”

“As?”

“*Schweinchen, Gänslein*—”

“*Ach*, love-names from the farmyard! So you don’t think he wants to get rid of you?”

"If I thought that I wouldn't go. I'll plague him. He owes me money."

"He can pay it off now. He's a rich man, with a rich wife. Respectability, and good-bye, *Schweinchen*!"

Catherine-Maria was white with anger and dismay. She stood still at last, grinding her fist into her palm.

"Paid off like a servant! Dismissed like a servant. Oh no, oh no, master Prince George!"

"Stay then."

Catherine-Maria quietened down, for she had a genuine fear of that old termagant who had threatened her by means of a little S pressed into a blob of hot wax. Her sister, indifferently lying back, picked up from the table by her side, on which the potions and their glasses stood, a letter which she turned about in her hands, scanning it back, then front, for some sentence she wanted. "Let us see what my husband says about the matter. He writes from Zelle." She read: "Our bridegroom is lusty, and in a fair way to be reconciled to his lot. He shows more interest than I should have supposed in the little wife. He looks at her as though he would relish the mouthful."

She dropped the letter from her slackened fingers; Catherine-Maria pounced on it, scanned and cast it down again angrily.

"Cypher! Does Platen indeed say that?"

"You heard me read it."

Catherine-Maria, the blood beginning to flood over her cheek-bones and down into her neck, stamped once, and burst into loud sobbing. Her sister turned her head upon the pillow from side to side, wearily, as if in an attempt to escape the noise.

"My God, Catherine, this is a sick-room, can't you be quiet? You must be quiet, or go."

"Go!" repeated Frau Busche, gulping and snorting, "I'll stay, d'you hear? He'll find me here when he arms her up the steps. He can't put me off like that, like an old dirty glove—"

"Go away! Leave me in peace. What do I care what you do? I care for nothing. I'm ill."

She closed her eyes and fluttered the lids. Catherine-Maria, alarmed, clanged the bell by the bedside to summon the women and fled, a handkerchief to her face, down the corridors to her own apartment. There

she halted, looking at herself in the long glass between two windows, approaching her smeared face to it, a sob now and then interrupting breath. Then, in rage at her spoiled looks, she struck her doubled hands a dozen times against the cold surface, drumming, and abruptly turned away from her reflection, having grinned at it once.

Baroness von Platen drank the appointed cordial and her women left her smiling at some inward satisfaction or other.

---

[3] Good advice may be given, but not good manners.

(VIII)

The marriage took place on November 21st amid the ravings of a thunderstorm that did not take long to become proverbial. Lightning whitened the chapel from time to time in defiance of four hundred candles and their gentle gold. The tallest mast with the longest streamers on it, that which stood outside the Mayor's house, was struck and fell athwart the street, killing a child at a window. Guests who had been boarded out in Zelle town found their way to the Castle in any sort of conveyance that offered a hood for protection; there was a story told afterwards of one very fine lady who lay down flat upon the tented church bier, and thus was borne by four men to the wedding.

Despite the storm there were processions, such as the ample design of the Castle allowed; the bride's procession winding down one staircase preceded by singing children, the bridegroom approaching from another accompanied by gentlemen all in white; the procession of the relatives, led by Duchess Eléonore on the Duke-Bishop's arm; and the procession of Lutheran clergy, unable to make much of a show with their black and white, but walking very portentously and clasping rich red books.

Once the processions had been wheeled and halted, the actual exchange of vows took very little time. George-Louis stood straight, no bad figure of a man from the back, and gave his answers soldierly and loud. Sophia-Dorothea nodded her Yes to the main question, and it had to be put to her again. Thunder broke out just overhead, making the candles shiver and the assembly rustle. She gave a little gasp; and George-Louis, with such an unthinking movement of reassurance as he might have made to a

whimpering puppy, took her arm in his grasp and patted it. She looked up at him, drew a little nearer, and this time spoke her Yes. The assembly at her back nodded at each other, applauding the pretty scene, and when the pastor, having knit them firmly, turned in his exhortation to the counsels of Ecclesiasticus, the Bishop-Duke, something of a connoisseur in sermons, found his text apt: “Thou shalt put her on as a robe of honour, and shalt put her about thee as a crown of joy.”

Duchess Sophia, looking at the shields in the windows that had threatened her daughter-in-law not long before, found not much comfort there among the emblems which Dukes of Lüneburg and Brunswick had carried on their forays. She sat stiffly, withdrawn, fighting the last of her pride, and assailed by snatches of irrelevant memory. She recalled the day of her eldest son’s birth, when Elizabeth-Charlotte, now Duchess of Orléans, inquisitively surveying the preparations, had been led into the garden to discover a doll in a rosemary bush, with assurances that in just such a manner would her aunt’s baby be found. But the child, not appeased, and hearing Sophia’s moans, crept back unseen into the bedroom and hid there crying, unnoticed until they moved the big screen and brought a bath to wash George-Louis. Now in a year’s time or so this girl would be moaning with George-Louis’ son. Duchess Sophia had no pity for her, any more than she had pity for a man going to war, but she hated to take help from this semi-royal body for breeding, as she would have spurned help in war offered by a republic.

The exhortation done, the processions re-formed, and slowly, for the chapel was of a size not convenient for manœuvring, made their way out again, along to the great hall where the wedding-feast waited. George-Louis and his wife, coming at the end of the trail of guests, clergy, and relatives, did not look at each other as they paced, she with her hand on his left sleeve, he holding a hat under his right arm. He, however, once glancing down sideways, was struck with the pallor of her face, and the red of her bitten lips, and said—his first words as a husband:

“What would do you good is some hot soup with a sausage in it.”

She shook her head, repenting her involuntary movement towards him when the thunder alarmed her, determined to resent him. They walked the rest of the way, and took their places on the dais, glumly and in silence.

They were put to bed in state, with good wishes, bad jokes, and, from Duchess Eléonore, tears. Even she who had married for love had been frightened when George William first came to her, and she was able to

perceive only too clearly that Sophia-Dorothea was in such fear as may beset a wild animal picked up and held for the first time in a human hand. She could think of no way to help, except to mix the girl a great glass of strong hot wine with dried sunflower buds boiled in it; these, in the herbalist's notion, "surpassing the Artichoke far in procuring bodily lust." Thus Duchess Eléonore hoped to combine awakening for the body with a kind of numbness of the facilities. She saw the glass empty before, suddenly and not kissing her daughter in bed, she quitted the room.

When at last the doors were shut George-Louis swung his bare feet down—it was a tall pyramid of a bed—and went over to the fireplace near which some food had been set. He stood there munching, and sticking out his feet one by one to the fire, against which his wife saw him in silhouette as a shaven head with no back to it, a frilled neck like a lizard, body made shapeless by the nightshirt, and strong lumpy legs. After a moment he held out his plate in her direction; she shook her head on the pillow, but he came across to her, climbed the steps and hoisted himself into bed beside her, still holding the plate, which he put on the coverlet.

"Good dog," said George-Louis, holding a bit of breast in his fingers above her nose. She flounced away from him. His hand followed her, wheedling. "A nice bit of meat for a good little she-dog. Come now, snap!"

At that the anger which fatigue and the urgency of good behaviour in public had kept down all day, possessed her fully.

"If you do that again I'll bite your hand."

"Oho!" George-Louis laughed, supposing that she was entering into the spirit of the thing. He liked these farmyard games. "I'll look out for myself. I'm the master. If you bite me, bitchkin, you'll get the whip, and you won't like that." He gave a sonorous hiccup. "That's bad stuff, that French wine your father gave us; unwholesome. Well, come on, take your titbit."

He smeared the meat against her mouth. She twisted, and bit him in the fleshy part of his hand so fiercely that she felt the blood come up under her teeth. It was this, and not his instant box on the ear, that made her let go. He swore, using words which shocked her though she did not know their meaning, and shook his bleeding hand over the side of the bed. She sat up clutching at the bell-rope which hung on the wall behind the bed-curtains.

"I told you what I'd do. If you touch me again I'll ring and have all the servants in."

He did not answer her, but sat with his legs swinging, intently composing a bandage. The night handkerchief that should have bound his head was handy; he tore the new linen across with an ease that revealed ominous strength, and tied up the wound neatly, using his teeth to tighten the knot. That done, he turned with unexpected quickness, and brutally pulling her fingers apart got possession of the bell-rope; tossed it up, so that it hung across one of the tester rails quite out of her reach; then with a chuckle slid under the sheets.

"Well, bitchkin, we'll have to show you who's master. All right, all right, I don't mind you wriggling. Keep quiet, don't yelp like that, I'm not hurting you. I'll teach you a few tricks. Now—"

The women servants who came about midday to make the vacated bed found it much rumpled, as was to be expected, and indeed only right; but what puzzled them was a sprinkling of blood on the valance which hung down, and a neckerchief torn in half, thrown on the floor.

"The Serene Prince will have been taken with nosebleed" was the only opinion they could arrive at. And folding the sheets without further comment they carried them off, as was usual, to exhibit them to the Serene parents of both parties, for these to judge by their condition whether or no the marriage had been consummated; a matter on which there was general and immediate agreement.

(IX)

They travelled to Hanover a fortnight later, Sophia-Dorothea with her mother-in-law in a great pumpkin-shaped carriage, George-Louis riding, a far more comfortable way of travelling, the condition of the roads considered; their wedding thunderstorm had broken the weather, and the gullies and ruts were awash. They halted that night at Herrenhausen, the country palace, and made their state entry next day into the town. Like Zelle, it was decorated and agog; the people had heard rumours of a pretty bride, and had considerable good-will for George-Louis, who did them credit in war and spent what money he had in the town. He, indifferent to popularity, took off his hat from time to time, and bent his thick lips to some sort of smile; but Sophia-Dorothea was delighted with the shouting. She carried a posy of spring-flowers—not real ones, but very creditable scented imitations; and this, as the enthusiasm mounted at sight of her, she suddenly pulled to pieces and flung in scraps to her admirers. The flowers were light,

they fell near to the carriage wheels and the horses of the escort; children and young men jumped forward among the hoofs to secure a rosebud, a scrap of mignonette, and kissed their trophies to her, as though they drank the perfume of the flowers to her good luck. She adored this. Her dark eyes sparkled, she waved to the people, and caught George-Louis' fingers in excitement which he saw no reason to share. At regular intervals his hand moved to his hat, and he bowed, right, left, then sat straight again, looking in front of him. Despite her resolve she could not help speaking to him.

"Kind people, good people! You never told me they were like this in Hanover."

"They're not, as a rule."

"It's all for me, say it's for me!"

"Of course it is. They know better than to turn the town upside down for us."

"I love them. Kind people, I'm happy."

"Be quiet, they'll think you're mad. You don't suppose my mother says things like that to them."

"More's the pity."

She sat more quietly, though, after that, a trifle clouded by the thought of Duchess Sophia going about her path and about her bed, and spying out her ways. But the cheering continued, and the waving from the windows. Boys shinned up the striped masts that lined the streets to shout for her. Bells added their noise to the rest.

The girl was quite drunk with the din all about her. As their six white horses drew up before a pedimented door draped with tapestry, she stood up and held out her arms to the crowd, bringing her hands together over her heart again as if she pressed them all to it, tears of happiness brightening her eyes. Then footmen came running to set steps, and George-Louis held a hand for her to descend. With her foot on the step, warned, troubled in some way, she looked up at one of the windows to the left of the door, and saw standing there, a woman whose sharp face sneered and was distorted as she stared down.

"Who's that?"

George-Louis looked, did not answer, but gave an impatient tug at her skirt which nearly pulled her forward off the step. She needed no words to assure her of that identity; the thrust of George-Louis' underlip was enough

for her. Her father had spoken to her; no tantrums, no independence, a blind eye when necessary; one must not expect to find the same manners everywhere. Her mother had hinted at the need for particular tact in a certain quarter, "which, if you make yourself agreeable to your husband, may after all not be required of you." That the woman should insolently await her in her own house was unexpected, ugly, and she could not all at once, out of her poor little experience of sixteen gay years, find means to deal with the situation. She hesitated, turning from pale to scarlet, and at last, barely touching George-Louis' hand, let him lead her in.

Not so Duchess Sophia, who from her following carriage had observed the whole incident. She sat rigidly, leisurely descended, and entered the Old Palace upon her young people's heels; but instead of following them to the hall where notabilities were waiting to bow their respects, she turned aside into the ante-room, beckoning a footman to attend her orders.

"Go to the room, third along the corridor from the head of the stairs. You will find there Frau Busche. If you do not, look for her. Take one of your fellows to help you. Request her to come here to me."

While the man was gone, she paced, her winged nostrils ominously pinched; but when the door opened, and the servant's toneless voice announced his capture, she stood where she was, her back to the door, disdaining to move.

"Come here to me, Frau Busche. Where I can see you."

The woman had to advance towards that thin stiff back, her heels clicking some twenty paces before she reached it; had to turn round a table to meet those eyes. All the time Duchess Sophia made no motion and no sound. When the woman curtseyed, she still did not speak, but looked as if she focused her sight upon some object at a considerable distance beyond her. Then the words came.

"You received my orders."

"Serene Highness—"

"You received and disobeyed them. You have deliberately affronted my son and his wife by your presence in their house. Now you are to be deported."

"But my husband—"

Duchess Sophia laughed. Catherine-Maria put out her hands, incredulous.

“Listen, Ma’am, you must listen to me—”

“You are to take the carriage which will be ready for you in half an hour; you will give me then a receipt for as many thousand thalers as my son owes you.”

“When I have had payment.” Catherine-Maria was defiant.

“I give you your choice between a fine and a whipping. You are to regard this money as being paid by you to save your back from the hangman’s attentions.”

“If I go,” Catherine-Maria broke in loudly, “my sister should be turned away. My sister Clara—she is the schemer.”

“Your sister has not offended. I have no more to say to you.” Frau Busche still stood before her, biting the insides of her cheeks, clenching her hands. “You are dismissed.”

Duchess Sophia did not turn. It was the other who must curtsey, turn, click down the twenty paces to where the servant stood unmoving; to him Duchess Sophia gave the order, raising her voice:

“Send Krauss to me.”

The major-domo came, received orders for a carriage to be in readiness half an hour hence; and when the matter was settled Duchess Sophia adjusted her dress with a careless pull or stroke here and there, and went between the ranks of footmen to the hall, where on a dais, in her place, she beheld the small plump figure of her son’s wife seated. A spasm of bitter feeling twisted her lip.

“I defend a bastard against the insults of a wanton. I cut myself in pieces to set mine enemy over me. ‘I will declare thy righteousness and thy works, for they shall not profit thee.’ Old Isaiah knew his God there!”

The heralds set up their trumpets, caught each other’s eyes, nodded and blared together for her entrance. A roaring great voice announced her:

“The high and well-born Princess Sophia, of Hanover and Osnabrück Duchess and Consort!”

As she went up the room notabilities sank bowing before her, like grain before a strong summer wind.

II

SOPHIA-DOROTHEA

Why was such Happiness not given me pure?
Why dash'd with cruel Wrongs, and bitter Warnings?

—*Venice Preserv'd.* Act IV, Scene I.

(I)

"I am not able to express," wrote Charlotte-Elizabeth of Orléans four years later, "my felicity at the happy event, which recently has blessed your house by the addition of a daughter to the family of your eldest son. My dearest aunt, I thought it was all too good to last. The girl had luck with her first child; a boy within ten months of the nuptials! But a paltry daughter three years after will bring down our little lady's proud crest. True, I did the same thing myself, but then my children had not the chance of two thrones, and you know Monsieur's little ways; he had no more liking for the job than I had myself. Indeed how we ever managed our couple I now can hardly make out, for he could not bear a woman in his bed, nor to be touched while he slept. Many a time have I lain so far towards the edge that a turn of my body brought me dump on the floor like a sack of potatoes, and nobody was more glad than I when he made the suggestion that we should sleep apart.

"But to this girl. You are very discreet where she is concerned, and rightly; you are not one, nor am I, to foul your own nest. All the same, rumours get about, and Lassaye has been indiscreet. You ought never to have let her go to Italy, even under the shelter of your husband's wing. Like will to like, and I dare say the French blood in her found nothing nauseating in the mimping, pimping manners of Lassaye. He reports her lovely beyond dreams. Well! Bastardy is no hindrance to a woman nowadays in her career, and the strange thing seems to be that there is nothing like an illicit connection for bestowing looks. Nobody could be more securely and legitimately born than I, for example, and yet look what a fright I am! However, as your proverb says, roses fell but their thorns remain, and I dare say this thorn in your side will give you a few uneasy moments yet."

The Duchess of Orléans went a little far, thought Duchess Sophia, reading this billet; she had been too long in France, where they speak lightly of such things as bastardy. The letter in return was stiff.

"I thank you for your congratulations, which I know very well proceed from your good heart towards me. You will be happy to learn that my son's wife's child is considered my portrait, and in fact, looking at it without prejudice, and making allowance for the lack of any true nose, I imagine that I do find some resemblance. Looks are, as you say, a family matter, but they run in the good line as well as the bad. My mother had great beauty, and though I may not flatter myself that I resemble her, yet this little girl has a

look of her. There is some natural disappointment that we have not a second boy, but there is plenty of time for that. I think you should pay no attention to any boastings or chatter of the Marquis de Lassaye. From what I am told, he is a *mauvaise langue*, and wants to have the reputation of a man of conquests without troubling to earn it."

Having intimated that Charlotte-Elizabeth must in future hold her tongue where the Princess of Hanover was concerned, Duchess Sophia put down her pen, and went to see the new baby.

Her daughter-in-law lay on a day bed, looking—the old woman remembered a phrase in Charlotte-Elizabeth's letter—very like a wild rose. Her cheeks were regaining their faint flush, her mouth was red, and she had untidy childish hair. Her baby lay beside her in a gilded French cradle, the gift of Duchess Eléonore, its amorphous face showing no resemblance whatever to the thin hooked mask of its grandmother. Sophia-Dorothea got to her feet when the Duchess was announced. The Duchess allowed her to stand for a moment and attempt to curtsey; that was part of the discipline. Then a gesture indicated that sufficient respect had been paid; the girl lay down again, one hand upon the cradle top.

"Do you find yourself stronger?"

"Thank you, Serene Highness."

"The child takes her food well?"

"Thank you, Serene Highness."

The answers came mechanically, in that tone of submission which the demi-gods of Hanover preferred. But there were signs of storm, a crumpled handkerchief, the eyes too bright; a moment's silence, and it broke.

"Serene Highness, I beg you will have the goodness to speak to your son."

"Wait. Send the woman away." Duchess Sophia would not give orders in her son's house. Sophia-Dorothea dismissed the nurse. "What is it? Can you not speak to your own husband?"

"There are stories going about—"

"You listen to tales, do you?"

"There are other women. He makes me a laughing-stock."

"That is one thing that no other person can do for us. We have only ourselves to thank if we are laughed at."

“What is marriage, then?” the girl angrily demanded. “Has he no obligation to me but to fill me with children?”

“And to stand beside you in public. That is about the sum of it.”

Sophia-Dorothea struck her hand upon the cradle, and the baby gave a whimper; it was almost waking.

“If he can please himself, I can please myself.”

“No; because there are thrones in question here, and bastards will not do. A man’s bastards dishonour only himself; a woman’s dishonour her, and him, and whatever succession there may be. Let me hear no more of this sort of talk.”

“Then let him be kinder.”

“Listen to me. You have no affection for George-Louis. (I am not reproaching.) What can his behaviour matter to you, how can it touch you? He was attentive to you during the first year; what was your cry then? ‘Go away, leave me alone!’ Now you have your wish, he troubles you no more with his company, you have your children. Any woman who asks more than that from life may take up gardening.”

“You are older than I am. It is easier for you.”

“What is easier?”

Sophia-Dorothea heard danger in the tone, but there was no checking. She went on with a rush:

“To ignore such things. To let the Duke take Countess Platen to Italy. How I hated to see her there, with her old red face flaunting, and dressed—you never have such dresses. Standing in your place, and you a Princess, royal twice over! I hated her, and I told the Duke so, and I would not speak to her, except when there was no help for it. You talk of dignity. How is it dignity to smile at such a creature, and be civil to her? It is cruel of the Duke to oblige you to receive her, and your patience I honour, but for me, no, no! I won’t take orders from that creature, or any other of their creatures, and I won’t sit quietly to hear those women laugh at me; I won’t!”

She was shouting, and the baby, waking completely, joined its voice to hers in a kind of angry breathless mewling. Duchess Sophia picked it up, and holding it skilfully, spoke over its damp dark head to the girl on the day bed.

“Have the goodness never again in my hearing to criticise the Duke. Your concern is misplaced. My behaviour regards myself, and calls for no such solicitude from you. As for your own position, it rests with you to make it tolerable.”

The words, coming crisply through the baby’s mewling took the faint colour out of Sophia-Dorothea’s face. She made no answer; she was violently angry at hearing her championship rejected. Duchess Sophia held the child away from her, eyeing it, and spoke to it with understanding.

“Time for a drink, you think, do you, Princess Thumbelina? Soon then; in a moment.” She questioned its mother. “Does she take to the wet-nurse?”

Sophia-Dorothea would not answer; she pulled the bell, however, for that necessary woman, who came, curtseyed, and bore Thumbelina away. Duchess Sophia rose, putting on her formal manner like a veil.

“I am glad to see you restored. You must try a walk as soon as your strength permits. The wind is from the west, but it does not reach one in the little wood.”

“Thank you, Serene Highness. I will attempt it.”

Duchess Sophia nodded approval and departed, musing. Her meditations returned always to two points: We should not have dismissed Frau Busche; Platen has made the mischief here.

(II)

How to cope with Platen, now that she had withdrawn from the court to a country house, now that a journey into Italy at Ernest Augustus’s side had given her the imprimatur, *Nihil obstat*, nothing stands in the way? She lay without the walls like an enemy equipped for a siege. From time to time Court and town received reminders that she was within range—a challenge, or some flaming scrap of scandal tossed down between them. She had money, her yearly commission upon the Princess of Hanover’s dowry; with patience and extreme discretion she now applied herself to the gathering of power. The first phase was over, when she worked in the dark, enjoying an influence affecting every soul about the Court, but which none could trace to its source. Her pliable temper had put up with obscurity while there was danger. Now danger was gone, her hold upon the Bishop-Duke was close; she reigned like a Montespan or a Castlemaine, had her own courtiers, and might skirmish openly, under her own banners, against whom she chose to

challenge. She enjoyed quarrels, and cared nothing for the noise they made. For example, only with the help of theology had Duchess Sophia contrived to ignore the vast clatter, the thudding drums that signalled the disgrace of Ilse.

Ilse was a waiting-woman, a good creature and pretty, who had been some five years in the service of the Platen. She took orders and asked no questions. Her mouth did not gape when she beheld, going in with morning chocolate, the nightcapped head of Ernest Augustus upon her mistress's pillow. She carried letters without prying into them, and had retained her virtue, maintaining it without difficulty against the bribes of complacent young gentlemen who attempted to pay with their persons the entrée into Countess von Platen's circle. Ilse had proposed to wait on the Countess five years more, by which time she would have gathered money enough to set up an inn and marry its keeper, a youth, to whom she had been betrothed at eighteen. She was a Catholic, very faithful to her duties; and so different from ordinary humanity did the Bishop-Duke and her mistress appear, so little did she speculate upon their behaviour to judge it, that she ran their errands and made their bed with no sense of sin whatever. Had any honest person of her village accused Ilse of earning dubious money she would have reddened, and whitened, and perhaps struck out at the speaker. She did her duty in that state to which she had been called, as a servant in the house of the honoured lady, Countess von Platen, wife to the Prime Minister; and to know gossip or spread it was as remote from her imagination as though the Countess had been one of those goddesses that reclined among scarves of cloud upon the ceilings of Monplaisir, her country house.

This being so, it was astonishing to her, and very shocking, to be approached by the Duke-Bishop one day in a manner which forbade misapprehension. He came unexpectedly, the Countess was out riding, and when search had been made it fell to Ilse's duty to inform his Serene Highness that her mistress was not to be found. The Duke-Bishop wasted no words, but in a casual-paternal manner put his arm about her. Ilse had repulsed this gesture from underlings a hundred times; she knew just the turn, and swing of the hips, and clack of the open hand that would deal with it. But she was too timid, and too much in awe to treat him so, and she endured, trembling, hoping that a little fingering would content him.

Ernest Augustus, however, was in the mood; and, thwarted by the absence of Countess von Platen, had just as much a mind to her maid. He insisted, not in words. Ilse, torn between respect for him, respect for herself, and consideration of the rights of her innkeeper, made such protest as she

might; but finding respectful resistance ineffectual, as such resistance always must be, she at last gave a loud call for help. Ernest Augustus hushed her, and from his pocket took a heavy purse. She flung it from her. It struck and shattered a mirror at the very moment that the door opened and Countess von Platen, warm from her ride, came striding in, all plumes and curls, with a whip in her hand.

Clara von Platen had none of Duchess Sophia's tolerance. She understood the significance of the scene perfectly well; indeed, no woman with eyes in her head could have missed it—the torn bodice and red cheeks of the girl, the purse on the floor, and the Duke's sulky refusal to meet her glance. She took a step forward, lifted her right hand, and brought down her whip across Ilse's bare shoulders. The Duke caught the whip before the second stroke, and at last met full the anger in his mistress's eyes.

"None of that," said the Duke. "Let her go."

"Is this girl then in your service, Serene Highness?"

"She is in my service, as you are." The girl, observing a nod from him, fled. "Come now, Clara, no scandal. I am not to account to you for every action. Besides, good God, you were out."

"I was out! And so you amuse yourself, in my house, on my couch, with one of my servants. And the girl goes out to preen and boast to her fellows that she's stood in her mistress's shoes. Who knows—" she stirred the fallen purse with her foot—"who knows but she, this little greasy maid, may not find herself set up with a house and horses, and money to spend, and I can take myself off at half an hour's notice, like my sister! That's pretty. That's very fine."

"Clara, hold your tongue. The girl's had no money, and for that matter I've had no fun. Can't you take a joke?"

"A slut in my very room—"

"*Pax, pax vobiscum!* I'm tired of your noise."

But she would not be quiet. She reproached; she cried herself down as a poor woman helpless and forsaken; she would not weep, for she had to be a little careful of her appearance, but without that there was enough. It was a tirade as calculated to its end as any one of Racine's; for the Duke, though he stood up to them, detested scenes, and knew no way out of them save by purchase. He had, on this occasion, nothing to offer but promises; funds were low, the boys were extravagant, a bad harvest in Zelle meant delay in payment of the yearly stipend. He offered her a couple of commissions in

his regiments to sell. She accepted these, but asked in addition for a blank warrant. He scribbled it, sitting at her escritoire; she stuck it away unscanned in her pocket, and smiled at last. But the Duke, after an hour and a half of wrangling, was no longer in the mood. His body's energy had been tapped to run along the hidden conduits of the mind, to be ejected unsatisfactorily in jets of words. He refused the couch, accepted wine, then ordered his carriage and went home. Clara von Platen picked up from among clinking glass on the ante-chamber's floor Ilse's rejected purse, and spilled its contents without counting into her own.

A ducal policeman-orderly-officer was in constant attendance at Monplaisir, ostensibly to obey the orders and run the errands of the Prime Minister, though that discreet man kept for the most part in Hanover town. The Countess sent for him just so soon as Ernest Augustus was out of sight, and gave him instructions in the Duke-Bishop's name to convey her waiting-woman Ilse to the town bridewell, offering her signed paper as warranty. But the official was a stickler. He read the paper through, and at last, bowing and hesitating, pointed out that as it stood the warrant could not apply to a woman. Sure enough the wording was clear: "This shall be sufficient authority for the conveying of that man whose name appears above—" Three strong scrapes of Ernest Augustus' pen underlined the word "man." He would not defend the girl openly from the trouble to which he had brought her, but he had had compunction enough to load this charge with blank.

Clara von Platen, with no change of countenance, considered the document for a moment, then took it from the officer, civilly thanking him for the care he had displayed. "Since orders are so well examined, the Duke need have no fear for their carrying out." She then, without haste, wrote a duplicate of the document, save that the word underlined was changed to suit her purpose, and signed it boldly with her own name. This, steadily smiling, she gave to the officer, who accepted it at once. It was no part of his business to question who bade him do this or that; he, with the rest of Hanover, knew where the State's authority lay. Not the who, but the what and the how was his concern; and though he would have knocked the Mayor on the head without scruple if a warrant to do so had lain in his pocket, he would have suffered in conscience had he used a truncheon for that purpose where the document stipulated a sword.

He went now to the kitchen quarters of Monplaisir, and found Ilse preparing for flight. She implored, she clung; but he had his orders, and knew what to do with her. A horse with a pillion was ready, and on this, with

her arms about her captor's waist in ironic simulation of a domestic journey, Ilse travelled to the Spinning House, where prostitutes sat all day weaving. Here for three days she sat despairing, until the warrant under which she was committed, signed by the officer from Monplaisir, countersigned by the keeper of the bridewell, and embodied in a report, reached the table of the functionary in whose hands lay the maintenance of public order, the Prime Minister, Count von Platen. He stared, knew his wife's hand, and did not care for the look of the business at all. His wife's writ might run, but from the Duke came the authority, his name should license all such official goings and comings; if it did not, then his authority was worth nothing, and his power might dwindle down by delegation from Clara to her secretary, from her secretary to her cook.

With diffidence Platen, now a Count and indispensable, put the paper before the eyes of his master at their conference. The Duke took it, searching for his spectacles, and testily asking, "What's this, eh?" But when he had read it he sat back, angrily blowing out his thick lips with little explosive sounds, and thrumming on the table. Even he saw the implications.

"A mistake," said he at last to the silently attentive Prime Minister. "Have the girl out." Count Platen asked no questions, and beckoned to a secretary to take dictation. Inwardly he was tremulous, thinking that this time Clara, for all her sense of a situation, had gone too far.

Ilse, released without condition or explanation, could think of no place save one where she would be safe. An hour later she was in tears before Sophia-Dorothea at the Old Palace. The Princess of Hanover, cheeks stinging with indignation, heart labouring at the thought of wrongs so picturesque, entered the fray with a will. For a week there were indignant cabals in her rooms, where loyal ladies twittered against Countess Platen, and Ilse retold her story; which, by reason of the reticence necessary to be observed concerning the conduct of the Duke, had become motiveless, hence even more barbarous. The young princes, George-Louis' brothers, came in to chatter of the iniquity, and to spread it. They detested Clara von Platen, on whose account their father kept them short of money. Monplaisir was outer darkness, the Old Palace was the abode of all true charity and love.

Into this fluttering consciousness of being right, of tattle justified by its subject-matter, and grievances out for an airing, stalked George-Louis, one afternoon. He took no part in the politics of his family and household, disliked his brothers, and had not much kindness for his wife's enthusiasms,

so that his entrance caused astonishment not free from apprehension. He accepted a cup of chocolate, listened to the voices, and at last said:

"If you take my advice you'll send this girl off."

"What?" None of the ladies could believe her ears. Their afflicted one, their delightful wounded dove who so piteously allowed them to tend her, to be thrust out upon the world again! He gave his reasons, addressing his wife:

"My father doesn't like it."

"But—" All the ladies looked at each other, remembering that first version of the story now become unofficial, and the Duke-Bishop's part in it.

"He don't care she should snap her fingers at Countess Platen." That name all the ladies echoed in varying degrees of scorn. He talked above their lisping, like a trumpet sounding over reeds. "And I don't think myself it's the right thing. You're making an enemy for yourself—" he spoke to Sophia-Dorothea, "—you mayn't care for that, but a fact's a fact."

That Countess von Platen was, while the Duke-Bishop lasted, Hanover's sovereign; that she loved a fight, and that Sophia-Dorothea was no match for her—there were the facts that were facts. He did not name them, but the imagination of his wife ranked them at once in order. She was angry, unreasonably and at once.

"I shall keep Ilse here while I please. She is my servant. I don't interfere with your grooms."

"I don't pick grooms out of the town gaol. Look at it from the girl's point of view. It's going to mean trouble for her."

"She's here with me, she's under my protection. I suppose my house—your house"—she dipped to him—"may be thought safe."

"I won't have her in my house."

That was what he had come to say; having said it he abruptly put down his chocolate-cup and went. Sophia-Dorothea stood tapping her foot, malevolently fixing with her eyes the door that had clapped to behind him. He would not even pay her the compliment of sustaining her judgment in public; he forbade all her chivalries, the little gusts of humanity blowing in from some warmer world than his. Frau Busche, her imagination assured her, was behind it all; Frau Busche, the Platen's sister, machinating from a distance, powerful still after four years of exile. She shrugged, feeling the ladies' eyes on her, and tossed up her hands as if she threw into the air sprigs of some disinfecting herb.

“The girl shall go to my mother.”

How wise, acclaimed the ladies, how uncontroversial! The very place, and Duchess Eléonore the very woman! Sophia-Dorothea frowned while they applauded, perceiving that even this departure was a victory for Monplaisir. Clara von Platen’s will still prevailed, filtering through the Duke-Bishop to his son, through George-Louis to his wife, driving the woman out of Hanover. No matter how the thing was frilled and ornamented, Clara von Platen had decreed that Ilse was to go, and Ilse was going.

Sophia-Dorothea and her confidants were all mentally of an age when to cock a snook at the victor takes the sting from defeat. They planned for a day or two, giggled, were busy in a mysterious manner, gave secret orders; and two days later a coach drove to the door of the Old Palace at the hour of Sophia-Dorothea’s usual outing. But it was not she who stepped into it. Down the steps alone, to the astonishment of watching idlers, came a young woman in a neat servant’s dress and shoes with a bundle or two packed up in linen, just like any farmer’s daughter going home from market. This young person timidly stepped into the gilded pumpkin, the door was closed upon her by a footman in the state livery, and off she went, slowly but very magnificently behind four horses, out of Hanover.

This was the best Sophia-Dorothea could do in the way of defiance. She was well scolded for it by George-Louis, on the grounds that twenty miles with that carriage behind them was too much for the horses, and by her mother-in-law, who, observing her to ignore the Countess’s curtsey that evening with a great pretence of preoccupation, said half a dozen words in her ear.

“I think you do not see the Prime Minister’s wife. No airs, if you please.”

She obeyed, with an underlip stuck out until it looked like some little red fruit, and said a stiff word or two. Clara von Platen, perfectly informed of the afternoon’s doings, said jovially:

“I’m glad, Serene Highness, that you have got rid at last of that Ilse of mine.”

“What’s this, Countess?” That was Ernest Augustus, suspicious at sight of the two women talking.

“Serene Highness, I am congratulating the Princess of Hanover on her good judgment. You would not recollect; but a silly servant of mine, whom I

dismissed for impertinence a week ago, took herself and her lies to the Princess, who would have nothing to do with her, and this very afternoon packed her off."

"In my own chariot," said Sophia-Dorothea, coldly as she could, but bewildered; had Platen not heard, then, of the state departure?

The Countess wagged a respectful finger at her.

"Cruel, cruel, Serene Highness! The girl did not deserve to be made a laughing-stock. I hear that when the people ran after the carriage, hoping for a sight of you, and found her cocked up inside in her duffle cloak, they gave her some rough music. No, no, she did not deserve that."

And once again, by keeping her temper and a good look-out the Platen won. She held all the cards, always. She had no softness where she could be struck. She was invulnerable, invincible. Her good-humour masked her, and kept insult away, as surely as did Duchess Sophia's disillusion and withdrawal. Her enemies were young; she grinned down on their manœuvres like a man stirring a litter of puppies with his foot, driving them to ecstasies of silliness. Let one more incident illustrate her quality.

Prince Maximilian, ranging about his mother's room during a rating, pulled down one of her books and looked into it idly. It was not for once a theological work, but a compilation wherein somebody had set down remedies and tests, odd recipes, an alchemical experiment, and a charm or two. "An Electuary Queen Mary was wont to take for the passion of the hart. Take damaske roses half blowne out——" He flipped the pages over, with his forefinger setting up a little crackling defence against his mother's steady voice. "To make a bath for Melancholy——" "of Emrodes or Piles——" "Mirabolanorum——" "uskabaugh——" "For a madd or franticke person ——" He checked the scurry of the pages, looking down intently upon a short paragraph, reading, chuckling all of a sudden. His mother had heard that chuckle before, from men reading the *Cabinet Satyrique*, the *Bigarrures*, grubby stuff of the kind; and she was for an instant surprised that any book from her shelves could excite it. Imperiously she put out her hand for the book, which Max with a very innocent look gave her at once. She turned it over, wondering.

"My old nurse Joan's medicine book——"

"Mother, can I have it?"

This request astonished Duchess Sophia completely. While she sat in silence, her son went on:

"I'd rather have it than twenty thalers. Mother, do give it to me."

"Would you? Rather than twenty thalers?"

Duchess Sophia took from the drawer of her desk a little purse, and held it upon one palm towards him, the book lying flat on the other. Without hesitation he chose the book, and was off, after a rudimentary bow, before she could recover her wits. She suspected mischief, but since the book in her recollection contained nothing but receipts, including some that a very young man might find amusing, she let the incident pass.

Cabals began again in Sophia-Dorothea's rooms. The tittering was incessant, and stopped guiltily whenever George-Louis showed his nose. There was borrowing of saucepans from the kitchens, expeditions incognito by ladies to market, and at last, sole result of all these, a phial of greenish liquor like water that peas have been long boiled in. Sophia-Dorothea, Max and Gustchen contemplated this phial with such an uplifting of spirit as might touch more pious persons at the sight of St. Januarius's liquefying blood, and went about their daily business with understanding glances, and gestures that indicated a shared secret. Nurse Joan's book was demurely returned.

All this time preparations for a vast banquet were stirring in the *Leine Schloss*, the parental palace within the town. Every now and then these upheavals occurred, when all those entitled to do so would attend in their best clothes to watch the royalties dine; they were occasions of the utmost publicity and grandeur, tailor's harvest, cook's despair, and an ever-recurring chance for climbers. The reigning family's task was to put on its jewels and to eat, with what dignity the process of mastication allowed, through a dozen dishes or so. Each course was blown in by trumpets. Fiddles rasped continuously in the gallery above the dais. There was little or no conversation. It was a spectacle, to the tune of tan-tan-tara.

To the sacred board mortals of high standing were sometimes admitted, generals, visiting princelings, the officers of state and their wives. On this occasion the Prime Minister and his wife were so privileged. They looked alien despite the Countess's diamonds, not through any want of decorum or oddity of dress, but simply lacking the heavy lips, broad noses, and round dog-like foreheads of the ruling house, whose princes sat ranked about their parents like small change for two heavy and valuable coins. Sophia-Dorothea too had nothing of that ducal heaviness; her dark eyes darted, her hands fluttered like a pair of pennons in a breeze, she chattered and ate nothing.

The end of the meal was approaching, footmen were bringing bowls of rose-water for the hands, a pretty and ancient custom which the Duke-Bishop held to, perhaps with some recollection of the *quod ore sumpsimus* of his Catholic predecessors. Prince Max, sitting by Countess Platen, fumbled in the wide skirt-pocket of his coat and brought out a child's toy, a squirt which he aimed like a gun, squinting along it, at his neighbour. The Countess laughed.

"A new scent, Serene Highness? Has one of your pretty ladies been distilling?"

"Will you try her complexion wash?" Max answered, with dangerous lightness.

"Perhaps I will," the Countess agreed cheerfully. "What's it good for?"

"Paint," said Max, and pushed home the plunger of the squirt. Greenish cloudy water streamed down Clara von Platen's cheek, discolouring as it went, gathering up the rouge and powder until the drops that reached her shoulders were muddy. She put up a napkin to her face with a short sound like an oath, and took it away stained. Max was grinning, Sophia-Dorothea three seats away had her handkerchief over her mouth, the attention of the whole audience was concentrated upon this horseplay at the Olympian table. Only the strains of the untiring band saved the Countess from hearing their comments and their laughter. She had two seconds for thought while the napkin covered her eyes. When it dropped she was shown laughing, her big pointed teeth all bared, her breasts shaking; no shrillness in it; a genuine great hostler's laugh. Then she picked up a roll of bread from the pile near her, sprinkled salt over it, and scrubbed her smeared cheek with it; illustrating upon her person the old proverb every one of them had heard at meals as a child. Real colour lay on her cheek-bones now, with a patch where the crust of the loaf had scraped her, and with a bow she took a bite from her roll towards Max, as though she ate his health.

"Salt and bread, Make the cheeks red," said Countess Platen, high above the fiddles.

And she sat there for the rest of the time that the ducal party kept its seats, one cheek raddled, mocking herself so that no one might mock her, ruler of the situation, victor over the attacking infants, good-humoured, secure.

Not so Ernest Augustus. He had seen the outrage, and was half out of his chair when Clara Platen's gesture saved him from open intervention and

scandal. He sat back, controlled his frown to some slight degree, from thunderous to stormy, and waited. When the procession had made its way down the appointed lane of bowing and curtseying coats and dresses, and the doors had been clapped to upon the family, he stood still as a bull before the charge and roared out the one word, “Max!”

Two women answered the roar; Duchess Sophia would fight for her boys whatever their proved enormities, Sophia-Dorothea would not let this young brother take all the blame.

“Not to-night,” said Duchess Sophia, a hand on the Duke’s arm.

“Grandpapa——” began Sophia-Dorothea, using the name he liked when her children played with him.

Ernest Augustus, lowering his head, brought down a foot heavily to the floor, a stamp of command and fury, and repeated the one word. Max obeyed, swaggering, the subsequent gesture that ordered him to fall in at his father’s heels, and they stalked from the startled group of relatives whose eyes followed them down the endless corridor. When the pair had gone fifty paces Sophia-Dorothea, with something like a sob, picked up her skirts to be after them. George-Louis caught her arm, and swung her back so roughly that she stumbled. He said nothing, held her up with a jerk, and continued to hold her. She faced him.

“Let me go. What will he do to Max?”

“I don’t care if he shoots him—skylarking fool!”

“He’d better shoot me, then. I cooked the peas.” At that, recollection of the fun of the whole silly plot made her smile; George-Louis, seeing it, gave her arm a shake, and said gruffly:

“Nice work for a Princess of Hanover.”

“Nicer work than counting up my husband’s mistresses on my fingers.”

“You say that, you, with Max in your pocket!”

“Children!”

That was Duchess Sophia, cutting the quarrel in two with a pair of steely syllables. George-Louis let his wife go, looked at his mother, bowed, and offered Sophia-Dorothea his arm for departure. They took official leave of the family and went towards their own carriage, which waited at the door. The servants, ranged at ten-foot intervals down the corridor, each holding a

large candle cased in brass, had remained expressionless throughout the entire altercation.

Duchess Sophia went with grave majestic pace to her own apartments; there she dismissed her lady-in-waiting before she sighed and sat, one hand tapping. Not even theology could help this trouble of spirit; love for her sons was the only unreasoning emotion of her life, and it set her imagination exploring unfamiliar regions, wandering, as the English doctor Browne had it, in the Americas and untravelled parts of truth. When they went off to war she fretted, had frequent unsightly dreams, and wrote them cheerful, even slangy letters; when they spent stupidly she rated them and paid up. She knew her own weakness in this matter, but it was one she could not bring herself to discipline. The passion in her was not spent, and she dreaded lest, if she were to put her sons from her, she might be brought to the more terrible extravagance of loving God.

Next morning an ill-folded note reached her.

"My father has blown me sky-high; he says I'm to go to the military prison. Mother, for God's sake! It was only a joke, and the *Grafin* herself was the first to laugh at it. Make him see reason. If I'm to be shut up for nothing, next time I'll make it something worth while."

Sophia-Dorothea too had her scribbled message.

"Sisterkin, look here, keep out of this. Don't go near my father, he's savage just at the moment. I shall be all right, and it was worth it, anyhow. Did you see her all mottled? Now, promise me!"

Sophia-Dorothea saw through this at once, knew that Max was in bad trouble, and went without ceremony to her father-in-law. He was pleasant to her as a rule; she looked charming, she brought money into the family, she had provided an heir. But this morning he had already had speech with his wife, and though his temper was not so high as when he had roared for Max in the corridor, his obstinacy was putting down roots. He had refused Duchess Sophia's entreaties, made with a bluntness that covered badly her angry distaste for the task. Unconquerable affection brought her to it; pride forbade success. Ernest Augustus respected his wife, and his brief refusal to argue the case was due to a dislike that she should be involved in any affair that concerned his mistress. He was impatiently walking about after this interview when the Princess of Hanover was upon him.

"Grandpapa Duke, where's Max?"

“I cannot have argument about Max’s matter, and I cannot have questions.”

“I won’t argue, I won’t ask. I only want to tell you it said in the book that if you boiled peas and bathed your face in the water it would dissolve all impurities. Countess Platen’s face has impurities an inch thick all over it, and we thought——”

“Go back to your husband, and tell him from me to keep you in better order. My own wife, a Princess of England and Bohemia, has never lent herself to any criticism of me.”

“It’s because we all love you so that we can’t bear jumped-up people making you look nobody.”

The Duke-Bishop at that fairly laid hands on her, not with his usual unctuousness, but soldierly, and turned her out of the room, squealing.

It was Clara von Platen whose intervention at last released Max from the fear of common imprisonment. She had pondered the incident, knew herself to have had the best of it, knew too that a favour from her would humble the boy more completely than a month under lock and key. She stood over Ernest Augustus, laughing him out of his ill-humour, joking at her own appearance; and at last brought an argument out of his own armoury to bear.

“You can’t afford to have these younger boys of yours too discontented. They don’t know yet about the will.”

“Nobody knows of it. Nobody would tell them.”

“The birds of the air carry such things. Keep your sons quiet, don’t make martyrs of them.”

This was good advice, and Ernest Augustus knew it. He was in the running for an Electorate if he could keep his territory together, and prevent it being split up among five sons according to the usual German practice. Primogeniture—all to the eldest; that was the operative word of the will. He grumbled a little; Countess Platen, certain of success, patted his shoulder and cheek—a rare thing for her, who cared neither to give nor to take such minor caresses—and dictated the letter which, like a genie’s hand, should pluck away the sentry from before Max’s bedroom door. By midday Max was free and sulky; by four o’clock the story of Countess Platen’s intervention was all over the court, by night all over the town; and while men reconsidered their estimate of her, women said to each other:

“*Listig!*[4] She throws the little fish back.”

[4] Artful!

(III)

When Countess Platen was at the top of her power, Sophia-Dorothea impotent save to inflict petty slights, her husband beginning to be occupied with Frau Busche's successor, the tall corn-coloured Schulenburg; about this time a rich young man, Count Philip-Christopher Königsmark, came into Hanover with a train of twenty-nine servants and twice that number of horses; looked about him, was pleased with the town, and took a vast overhanging old house near the *Leine Schloss* which he immediately filled with good company. Every sovereign in Europe knew the Königsmark. Christopher-John, his grandfather, burned Prague, and practised astrology. Otho-William, his uncle, blew up the Parthenon. Charles-John, his brother, fought with the Knights of Malta against Barbary pirates; took a galley single-handed, swarming up a rope in full armour; survived the blowing up of his vessel to fight in Italy; travelled France with a female page (seen by Charlotte-Elizabeth d'Orléans, who sent her aunt a spiteful account of this attendant's accouchement at an inn); visited Spain, Holland and England, in which last country he ordered an assassination and ran off with an heiress; fought for Louis XIV at Courtrai, and was wounded; fought in Catalonia; fought in Argos; and died, aged twenty-six, of a fever in the Morea. Philip-Christopher was only so much of a soldier as his blood made inevitable. He fought a little in Hungary, enough to appease the hereditary need, and then, with his dead brother's villages and money tumbling into his hands, discovered more amusing ways of spending them. Like all his people, he was a wanderer; England knew him, and he had fought a duel or two in Holland and Venice, where the ladies were kind. But the English looked down on all nobility save their own, and his brother's trial for murder, even though he was found not guilty, had made something of a stench; the Dutch were uninteresting, the Venetians' eternal carnival offered too little variety in pleasure. He set off across Europe, remembered perhaps that he had played in the gardens of Zelle as a child, and halted at Hanover. His sisters joined him there, lovely creatures both, the one married to a nobleman of Sweden, the other unattached, but with a wandering eye for suitable princes. The family began without delay to make friends.

Monplaisir claimed him first. Through Monplaisir all visiting foreigners passed, there to be sieved into their degrees, approved or sped. Countess Platen's shrewd eye could judge more truly than all her husband's police whether a stranger would prove useful or troublesome to the State. She had, besides, a good rough-and-ready touchstone. A certain quickness and discipline of the mind, or its lack, is revealed by the demeanour of a man across a green table; and she was accustomed to tell the Duke when he grumbled, paying her losses at cards, that thus she obtained, for trifling sums and in a short time, information that no bribe could have purchased.

She planned, accordingly, such a test for Königsmark; filled her great comfortable rooms one evening with young men—no women, for these distracted attention from the cards, and spoilt sport in some directions while they made it in others. The Duke was there, but informally; there were no presentations. He cast his eye over the new candidate for allegiance, liked his looks well enough, but temporised and was pettish when Countess Platen spoke of a commission in the Hanoverian army.

"You know I don't care for foreigners. Why can't his own king give him a regiment?"

"Serene Highness, if we all kept to our own quarrels, there'd be an end of glory." English William was angling for the Duke's support, and this shot went home. "Besides, I don't say give him a regiment. He's got money."

"That's another matter. Of course, if he's willing to pay——" The Duke turned up his eyes to hers with sudden intentness. "What's your interest in him?"

She shrugged her wide shoulders, and gave him the truth.

"I like pretty young men. And I don't like to see good gold go out of Hanover. Keep him here, let him spend. You tax his tradesmen, and at the end of it all one or two pieces fall into my pocket."

The Duke laughed at that. It was an explanation that he could understand. She took instant advantage of this better humour.

"He's not altogether a stranger. Your brother Zelle knows him. He ran about the gardens there with the Princess when the pair of them were children. And it's a great family. A prince may think himself of consequence when one of the Königsmark offers him his sword."

The Duke yielded. He was in no mood for argument, dreading the onset of an attack of gout, for which Duchess Sophia, whom he trusted in such matters, had prescribed early hours and one of her comprehensive English

possets. At midnight, therefore, meekly, he took leave and departed for Hanover in a pumpkin coach over which clambered and clung numberless footmen in black. The Countess watched the lights of it sway down her avenue, then returned quickly to her gaming-room and the business of the evening. Königsmark was standing with three other young men, their game ended. He was talking, helping out his bad German with thick gestures and nods of the head. His brown hair fell over his eyes; he brushed it away with a hand fine as a woman's, and snapped the fingers twice to emphasise the point of some story he was telling. The face was that of a pretty young man, yet a fighter; there was something of the burning of Prague, something of the Parthenon blown sky-high, in the cut of the mouth. A young man accustomed to please everybody, including himself; having courage, certainly; but discretion? quick wits? The Countess beckoned him. Answers to these the game of Cinq-Cents would show.

They cut for deal, having sorted the cards. The Countess won, dealt; and turned up seven for the trump, an immediate score of ten points.

"This won't last," she warned her opponent.

"I hope it may not," said he, in his odd mixture of German eked out with French, "for that would mean you were unlucky in love."

"One person's bad luck is another's good."

He did not answer that, except with a smile, and they began their play. It became evident, after a few cards were cut, what was the object of each. The Countess was out for the highest score of all, a sequence of the five top trumps, towards which she had already the king and queen, a royal marriage.

Not so Königsmark, who, drawing the knave of diamonds at the second trick, neglected all other combinations in hope of the queen of spades. They drew, declared, laid cards down. The *talon*, the stock, and his chances declined together. Countess Platen, with some notion of what he was attempting, and the queen he needed safe in her own hand, held up play for a moment.

"We've settled no stake. Shall we bet now, on these last eight tricks, or let the game go for love?"

"Love," said he, with a boy's sudden grin. "There's plenty of time for money."

She nodded agreement, and the cards began to fall. She won easily; Königsmark had taken no precautions, intent upon his single hope. She gathered the cards again and scolded him.

"Do you play so recklessly always?"

"It depends on the stakes. Sometimes a man would rather lose than win."

This was said very lightly, as a compliment; no more. They played again, and again he lost. She was taking his measure as she trumped his tricks. A gentleman; rash, but no fool; his weakness, self-satisfaction; able to take well a beating at cards, where vanity may soothe itself with, Luck is against me, but not a beating at chess, where it is one mind and one vigilance against another, with no luck to take the blame for defeat. While she summed his qualities she added the points in her head, as in this game it is necessary to do; came to a conclusion, smiled, and knocked gently with her knuckles on the tables, the sign that she had reached five hundred, victory. Königsmark's under-lip stuck out for an instant; he too was reckoning, without counters or reminders of the score, what each of them had won, and the lady, by his count, was fifteen short of her five hundred. It was so in fact. Countess Platen knew it, and watched to see if he would let the cheat go or challenge it. But he had never taken a woman seriously in his life, and the lip protruded for no more than a second or two. Women always cheated at games, he found. They liked winning. They had only these small hazards to set against the great chances open to men of life and death.

He smiled, and pulled out his purse.

There was supper, with a good deal of wine, after the main business of play stopped. The young man drank, sang, argued, and took no notice of a great sun-shaped clock. Königsmark had learned in half a dozen countries how to drink; he had *le vin gai*; he stood on a table and gave them a song, an English song wherein constancy was mocked:

> "From Love our fetters never sprung,
> That smiling God, all wanton gay and young,
> Shows by his wings he cannot be
> Confined to a restless slavery——"

His memory failed, and he finished off with a light swift rhythm of toe and heel on the table, an exquisite test of sobriety and balance. In a moment glasses filled to the brim with wine were set in a pattern, and still he danced among them, spilling no drop, to the tune of their clapped hands and whistling. His brown hair danced on his shoulders, he was drunk and flushed and very young. Countess Platen, while her mouth laughed, eyed him steadily. When he leapt off the table, making way for a clodhopping ensign of the Brunswickers, she took his arm in her casual friendly fashion and led him away with her, talking, to a big room hung with red, cool, with some

scented tree or other blossoming outside its open windows whose fragrance the faint breeze carried within. The quiet came upon his senses almost like a blow, and for the first time his sure feet faltered.

"Are you sober enough to listen to a State matter?" Clara von Platen asked. "Sit there. I've news for you."

"It's an odd thing that while you keep drinking you're not drunk, or if you are you don't know it. But the moment you stop, and try something different, something sensible, your legs start playing the fool."

He uttered this profundity owlishly, beating time to its cadences with a hand that sometimes overdid the gesture. One such miscalculation caused his fingers to strike the strong bared arm of his hostess. She did not withdraw, but caught the hand, and said, holding it quiet:

"Listen. Do you want to stay in Hanover? Do you want to serve? We have plenty good little wars; soon, perhaps a big one, if the Duke makes up his mind to hold with Orange against the French."

"War's a fool's game," the young man responded with sudden vivacity, "the way these leaders play it. Winter quarters, and damned uncomfortable at that, five months of the year; manœuvres and sieges the rest of the time. Nobody fights a battle now. It's a lost art, battles. If I had my way I'd equip a mobile force, and carry my food with me, and strike in the winter. That's the time. Only these dukes and such won't see it——"

"Listen. The Duke will let you have a regiment to play with."

"Will he?" Enthusiasm lighted. "You're a sensible woman, Countess. Not offended at my saying that? Well now, as a sensible woman you must know that everything ought to begin at the beginning. You'll agree to that?"

She agreed; and gently began to finger the hand she still held, exploring the palm, hot and dry.

"What's the beginning of a soldier? Birth; that's where he begins. And how are you to get soldiers born? Nobody has enough soldiers. You want to make it worth a woman's while to propagate; so my suggestion is that you ought to put a tax on whores—public whores, that is, because they're sterile—and give the money to every woman that has a child. More for a boy and less for a girl. That's my idea. But do you think one of these dukes or kings will look at it?" He suddenly became aware of her fingers, stroking, skilfully soothing his arm to which they had access by the wide cuff.

"What's that you're doing? I like it."

“Do you?”

“When I said ‘whores,’ I meant no offence.”

“I’m sure of that.” She laughed, not her guffaw, but a deep animal chuckle, and pulled him sideways and down.

“Countess, look here, this is a bed we’re on.”

“Is it?”

“Well, if you don’t mind——”

“I don’t mind.”

The drunken young men in the distant room were dropping off to sleep one by one, not comfortably, for they had broken a good deal of glass, which made the floor unacceptable as a place to lie. The ensign who had succeeded Königsmark on the table was the last to succumb; he supposed himself by now to be in some kind of inn, and had forgotten where his room lay. He surveyed his companions with contempt, picked up a two-branched candlestick in which the candles, though they guttered, still remained alight, and set out down the corridor to discover his room. Servants tried to intercept him, but they were drowsy too by now, and sullen at thought of rooms to be cleared up, after the guests had had their sleep out. He rebuffed all offers to guide him, waving the candles so that wax flecked the walls, and they let him go. He found a providential privy; but reminding himself, after a period of meditation, that a gentleman and a soldier could not, for the dignity of the service, sleep in such a place, with a sigh he moved on. One candle by this time was done for, the other dying. He found a door, and blundered through it, holding his light high. A great bed hung with red confronted him, out of whose drawn curtains a man’s leg hung, the foot still in a shoe. It seemed to the ensign that he had never seen a more degrading spectacle. He approached, and tugged at the shoe. A snore stopped half-way, and the leg gave an impatient jerk upwards. The ensign drew the curtain to remonstrate, and saw that though the owner of the shoe was fully dressed his companion was not; she lay on her back, a sheet half over her, displaying curves. The ensign felt immeasurable embarrassment at his own intrusion. He met the opening eyes of the lady with an imploring glance, a glance that begged indulgence, inspiration—— How to reassure her? How to make naught his discovery? How to bring the situation back to morality? He thought; a smile dawned. With a bow, withdrawing his eye from the curves, he made his peace-offering:

“Your pardon—gentlemen.”

And reached the door before the last candle went out.

(IV)

In this manner Königsmark was offered, and accepted, a commission in the Duke of Hanover's guards, to be colonel in place of George-Louis, moving ever upwards, with the full weight of family pressure behind him, towards marshaldom. The Court was open to him, his duty took him to both palaces, where he made the regulation number of bows, the regulation conversation, and escaped as soon as he could to the informalities of Monplaisir or his own tall house near the *Alte Palais*. The promised war against the Turks took him soon enough to the Morea, where already some ten thousand of the Emperor's forces had died of malaria, to the greater glory of God. He fought in the skirmish where Prince Charles of Hanover died, and six months later came back with a cap and a pistol that had belonged to the boy, poor relics, all that could be saved for a memory of him. He had audience of Duchess Sophia for their delivery, and found himself, when the door opened and the ladies-in-waiting rustled to attention, locking into the eyes of a very tired old woman. She did not sit, however, but held herself upright, now and then fingering the cap as it lay on her table. He told the story, a pitiful one of useless gallantry. Duchess Sophia heard him to the end without comment. Then, after a moment's silence, with an effort she said: "I should be glad to know that he received my letters."

Königsmark remembered the boy's petulance—"my mother's pen must be growing to her fingers——" his greed for money, his anger when the packets from Hanover contained none.

"He carried them about his person, Madam."

The poor letters, torn to scraps, twisted to make pipe spills! But when he saw her face he was glad of the lie.

"I am obliged to you, Count Königsmark. I am happy to think my son had so good a friend by him."

"Madam," said he impulsively, and picked up the lace of her sleeve to kiss it, "I loved him too."

And though that was true, the tears that lay in his eyes as he lifted them were not for Charles, but for her. Duchess Sophia was moved; she put a hand on his bent head, and said in a voice grown strangely thin:

"You have a look of my brother Rupert, when he was young. The good God give us peace in our time." A pause. "If you could find it convenient to speak with my daughter the Princess I know she would gladly hear you. She and my son were friends."

Königsmark, for all the sad tale he was to tell, changed his dark coat before he went to the Princess. She was young, and had, when she could put off formality, a delicious foolishness that pleased him. She had an eye for anything new that was quick as a child's.

He put on a coat of murrey brown with his best lace, and went on foot the few paces to her palace. The major-domo was doubtful; her Serene Highness was in the garden with their Serene Highnesses—George and Sophy, the children. There was also with her, the functionary believed, a number of ladies. He would, however, advise her Serene Highness; and ushering the Colonel of Guards into a little ante-room that gave upon the terrace, made his way into the air. It was thundery. As the major-domo's white stockings reached the top of the steps, impetuous drenching summer rain began to fall. Königsmark heard a rattle of it on the windows and turned from his contemplation of some bulged Brunswick portrait or other to look out. He saw with amusement a bevy of ladies running towards shelter, the starch of their *fontanges* already wilting, dresses beginning to cling to their arms. The Princess gave her children each one a hand and pattered along as fast as they did, laughing with them, all three faces held up to catch the raindrops. They came thus to the steps and were lost to sight. He waited for the damp heads to come bobbing up. Nothing appeared, but, dulled by the glass, a loud wail reached him. Rain came in swathes and thickened the windows. Still at the terrace level no heads showed. Königsmark, with a shrug of his too fine shoulders, pulled open the door to the terrace, and ran out, to discover a group on the steps reasoning, drenched, with a roaring child. The boy George held his mother's hand; it was Sophy who lay bawling with a bleeding knee, refusing to rise, refusing to be left. The Princess made to lift her with one free hand; the leaden child was transmuted, and kicked. Seven ladies respectfully deferred their own escape to shelter, but offered no help of any kind, save one, who held up a silver box of comfits as though luring a dog. The whole party was involved in one of those dilemmas that constantly beset Court personages; etiquette held them helpless in its fine web; not one of these ladies was fitted by her status to cope with the tantrums of a refractory Highness; none but a Duchess might lift her, or her peasant nurse.

The Colonel of Guards, a foreigner, walked through the web without hesitation or apology. He picked up the small girl in one hand, tucked the boy under the other arm, and went up the steps two at a time in a whirl of kicking legs. The group followed, relieved but scandalised, in time to hear an unorthodox dialogue between Princess and rescuer.

"Oh, your coat!" It was velvet, by now hopelessly spotted. "Sophy, bad child, look at the Count's coat."

"History repeats itself."

Her face changed. "At home, you mean? At Zelle? That time when I wouldn't obey Mamma——"

"You kicked me."

"To be picked up like that—I hated you. A great strong boy——"

The children, delighted at this foreshadowing of their own misdeeds, began to jump and clap.

"Mamma, why did you kick him? Mamma, what did he do?" Sophia-Dorothea with an effort returned to decorum.

"Thank Count Königsmark for his goodness, children." They restrained themselves at the tone, made a leg and a dip. "And come with me to change your dresses. We are obliged to the Count."

She gave a hand to each child. The ladies saluted after their manner, exchanging glances, looking forward to the moment when they could be left alone. Their cup of chatter was, however, not yet full. Königsmark had not done with the Princess. He walked beside her in a friendly manner and the prick-eared ladies heard, before the door was closed by the major-domo: "I have a message——"

Message from whom? What message? The ladies flew together, and their tongues rattled questions, conjectures, fantasies. Königsmark waited meanwhile in the Princess's own writing room, talking with Eléonore Knesebeck while Sophia-Dorothea changed her wet muslins. It was a pretty room, of a comfort more common in England than Germany, yet with some touch of France. Carpets lay on the floor instead of across tables. There was a pretty brass clock, where a manikin with an arrow struck the hour. In china cases here and there fresh flowers stood. On one wall hung a painting of the Princess Nausicaa naked, playing ball by the sea with her women. This room a mirror reflected, rounding it, dwindling Nausicaa's white body, the flowers, the gay strokes of colour in the carpets to a mere pattern of light.

Königsmark surveyed it with a sense of pleasure not at first to be identified, unreasoning, as a man in summer will hold out his hands to a fire, and said what came first into his head:

"This has a look of her."

Knesebeck could make nothing of such a remark. To her a room was a room, and a handsome colonel one's own lover or somebody else's. She giggled, however, and asked the warrior a question which had long been provoking speculation:

"Do the Turks carry their concubines with them to war on the backs of camels?"

"They leave the concubines at home, for these are expensive and not used to fatigue. Honest women in Turkey are cheap, easily replaced, and therefore it is their wives that the Turks carry about among the bullets."

Knesebeck was off into immediate and immoderate laughter at that, and it was to the tune of her tinkle that Sophia-Dorothea entered. She had repented of her impulsiveness, knowing that in an hour it would be all over the Court, and was resolved to preserve dignity. She said, therefore:

"Count Königsmark comes to give us news of the death of Prince Charles, I understand."

Knesebeck checked, nipped her lower lip with her teeth, and withdrew her head between her shoulders, looking comically penitent. The Princess sat on a tall caned chair. Königsmark stood before her, the spotted velvet of his sleeves silently reminding them both of indiscretion, and said nothing. The Princess, prepared with composure to listen or to speak, found herself unready for this silent exchange. Dignity ebbed for an instant; she beat with her foot on the floor.

"Well. Well. You have something to tell me, I think."

"I waited for your Serene Highness to address me." Königsmark knew the game of Courts, and played it deliberately to tease her.

"Be good enough to proceed."

He told the story, forced by the strange language to a simplicity which made it poignant. The cavalry of Hanover rode among Albanian hills, singing; a whistle sounded, high among the rocks on their left; at once soldiers in white came tumbling downhill on small sure horses; curved blades swung against straight ones, there was a long high yelling; Charles, hurt, and weighted by heavy armour, toppled from his mount; a man in a red

high cap picked him up and slung him over his saddle; the raiders gathered to a trumpet sound, and were off, scrambling among the rocks, whence puffs of smoke warned the pursuers not to follow.

Sophia-Dorothea listened, her spine stiff against the chair-back, her hands still. But Charles had been her friend, gay, troublesome, her one ally since Max was in disgrace, and she could not without distress think of him bleeding across an enemy saddle. Tears pricked her eyes.

"Dead? Is it sure?"

Königsmark saw no reason here for lies; he had, suddenly, the wish to hurt her.

"Quite sure, Madam. His neck was cut half through."

She dropped her eyes. As unreasonably as he had wished to hurt, now he longed to console; with this went a pang of anger against the dead Charles, surprising in its sharpness.

"I'm sorry, Madam, with all my heart. He spoke of you often."

How? She wanted to ask him. Königsmark remained silent. At last she put the question, asked the favour, childishly, her hand at her throat:

"It would give me pleasure to hear his Serene Highness's words, if they were not spoken in confidence."

"He said," Königsmark answered, looking at her directly, "that with you he could laugh; that you were kind, always his defender."

"Was that all?"

"He said," Königsmark began, and halted. But the high air of false serenity must be troubled somehow. A girl he had picked, squealing, out of the fountain at Zelle! "Prince Charles said that his elder brother had all the luck, and did all the growling, like the dog in the manger."

She could not receive it steadily. Since the easiest emotion to feign is anger, she covered her discomfiture with this:

"I am astonished that you should think fit to repeat such a thing to me, if indeed Prince Charles ever said it."

She was, as she spoke, almost genuinely angry with him for making his approach so abruptly that she must repulse it. He, on the other hand, was a little tired of her airs.

“Which of us do you impugn, Madam? Prince Charles is dead, and I am not able to answer a woman.” She did not reply. “If your Serene Highness has no more use for me, I have my duty.”

Still she could find nothing to say; she must either withdraw her scolding or let his bold speech stand. She stood up and gave, automatically, that small gracious nod which was the sign of an ended interview. Königsmark made his bow three yards away from her. On an impulse she thrust out her hand. He looked at her, then took and kissed it lightly, his brown hair falling forward on her wrist. The manikin on the clock struck his arrow four times upon the bell.

“Conduct the Count, Knesebeck.”

When he had gone she was surrounded by a crowd of abigails who dressed her like some expensive puppet for dinner; the Duke and Duchess were to be her guests that night. The structure of a Princess was built up by degrees, from the simplicity of stockings and shift to the splendid elaborations of a dress whose stiffened and gleaming shell could have done its wearer’s duty upon a dais. When she was curled and pinned to her servants’ liking she went for one moment, before descending, into the writing room. It smelled faintly of flowers; Nausicaa fled by her painted sea, a king’s daughter, but happy. Sophia-Dorothea took one of the roses from a vase and tried it on the breast of her dress among laces and stitched pearls. It looked pitiful there. After a moment she took it away, and, carefully biting the stalk as Duchess Sophia had taught her, put it back in the vase to live a little longer.

(V)

Prince Charles was dead, Prince Max had blown two fingers off his left hand shooting swallows, Prince George-Louis was with his regiments in Flanders, Hanover was poor, but the royal family, caught in a vicious circle of precedent, could not take time to mourn. The fair at Brunswick was a yearly occasion of festivity. To it came merchants from the Baltic with amber, from Poland with furs, from other parts of Germany with toys, stuffs, and samples of wine. The Duke-Bishop took money from all these, a kind of poll-tax plus licence to trade, and he had been accustomed every year to lend the gathering his benediction. It was a picnic for the Court. There was a pleasant tiny palace which fitted the Duke and Duchess, with their immediate following, as neatly as their wigs. The rest, princes, courtiers,

soldiers on leave, had to find themselves room where they might in a town already lodging a thousand strangers. The chief inn, "The Sun," refused all comers with the excuse: "We serve Countess Platen." She paid well, or rather the Duke did; and there had been a time when Duchess Sophia, hearing Ernest Augustus pesting against the extravagance, had suggested that apartments should be found for the Countess in their own little palace. The Duke turned a scandalised face and refused blankly, giving no reason. His wife knew that he refused out of respect for her, and sighed. So much money, to save the incommodity of having the woman and her bed under a roof with them both! Duchess Sophia had no great feeling about beds, once the danger of bastard children was past, and she sighed for her neglected gardens, the empty purses of her sons.

This year, for the first time, she refused to accompany the Duke to Brunswick. She had been ill; he too. But while her sickness came from her unhappiness, his derived simply from gout, and the Carlsbad waters had cured it. He was, therefore, though her grief pained him, by no means unwilling to leave her behind, for it followed that if the Duchess did not occupy the ladies' wing of Brunswick's little castle, there could be no scandal in setting up the Countess in it, provided her husband would stand chaperone.

But the husband, Platen the dependable, for once was compelled to disoblige his master. He had a fever, caught nobody knew how, which gave the doctors trouble. They dosed him with brews to make him sweat, and followed these with further brews to dry him. They bled him and fed him. Through their ministrations distressing sickness persisted, with a most inconstant and uncontrollable bowel. There could be no question of moving him, let alone subjecting him to the junketings of Brunswick Fair.

Another guarantor of the Countess's good name must be found, and Ernest Augustus, looking about him, could see none more suitable than his son's wife. He liked to have her near him on such sprees as this; and if the thought of her questionable behaviour in Venice troubled his mind for an instant—why, she was no longer so young, she had children of her own, and such a portent as Lassaye, the Frenchman, was as unlikely as a comet to repeat itself.

He made known his wishes. The Princess received them at first with clapped hands. Then, as gossip reached her of Countess Platen's preparations, her husband's sickness, and last, the news that the Countess was to be installed in the right wing of the Castle while she, the heir-

apparent's wife, took the left, she stamped, tore a handkerchief, and went off in a fury to Duchess Sophia.

"Good evening, my daughter."

"Serene Highness." The regulation greeting passed. "Serene Highness, am I to go to Brunswick?"

"Has not the Duke made his wish known to you?"

"But the Countess is to be there, in the Castle."

"In your husband's absence it is fitting that you should have the company of some older woman. Since I cannot go, the Prime Minister's wife——"

"Serene Highness, I don't care for it. I'm sad about Charles, and you'll be alone. Let me stay with you."

"And the Duke's wishes?"

"I won't be in the house with that woman. It will be Schulenburg next."

Duchess Sophia's hand began softly to move upon the brown spine of the book she held.

"My dear daughter: we are not to have hearts, we are not to have feelings. That is not within our province. If I were well enough I should go to Brunswick. We have no more right to inequality of temper than our own town clock to irregularities of time. The people set their lives upon us."

"If I must go, I will go. Yes, and I'll see the fair too. I'll dance in a mask, Max will take me into the booths. I have asked to stay behind, to be dull with my children, and if that is not allowed, then I'll please myself."

"So long as you are obedient to the Duke and polite to his guests there is no reason why you should not."

Sophia-Dorothea, the wind taken out of her sails, stood agape. Her mother-in-law's thin hand left the book and went towards her.

"My dear child, you have had something to bear. But you are to remember that with us happiness is not to be looked for by the fireside. I find it"—still holding the small plump hand, she looked down at her book —"in consideration of things that God has left dark for our comfort, so that speculation need never exhaust itself."

"But I love life, and while I eat and sleep it goes past."

“And for that, you cry out! Thank your God for it. When the hours drag, when the day is a weight that you roll like Sisyphus’s stone, uphill——” Duchess Sophia drew a quick breath and let the girl’s hand go, as though she feared that between them by that contact might pass some intelligence, a revealing of things hidden. “Well now, you’ll go to Brunswick, I think.”

“Serene Highness, it makes me angry——”

“Da, da, da! I’m tired.”

Sophia-Dorothea went away, angrily frowning, still undecided. As she passed the room where the Guards officers messed when they took duty, Königsmark came out, saw her, and stood to attention. She had not meant to stop, but he smiled at her past his sword, and she checked her angry march. Having disregarded decorum by greeting the Princess of Hanover thus friendly, he held his tongue and obliged her to speak.

“Good afternoon.”

“Good afternoon, Madam. Are you going to Brunswick?”

That question, coming so pat, startled her; but having decided that his abruptness came from unfamiliarity with formal German, she was able to answer without puffing up at once into royalty:

“It is not decided. And you?”

“If I can get leave. I like to see many people together. I like noise. If I cannot have a battle, I like a fair.”

“I hope your coat is recovered.”

“I don’t know. I’ve not worn it since.”

“Pity—such a beautiful coat!”

“Her little Highness didn’t take cold?”

“She asked for you this morning. ‘The kind Count,’ she called you—” Sophia-Dorothea broke off, reddening, remembering the full phrase: “that kind Count Mamma kicked when she was little.” Snatching at dignity, a proceeding always and deservedly unsuccessful, she could find nothing to say but: “My husband writes that they may soon perhaps have an encounter in Flanders.”

“The Prince,” answered Königsmark, his dark smiling eyes upon her, “has all the luck.”

Dangerous ambiguity! But her cheeks were pink already. She gave her pretty nod of dismissal and went on towards the door. In her chariot, bowing to the people, she was aware of a savour in life and a feeling of happy anticipation such as she had not known since childhood, when every other day was golden. It was without surprise that she discovered her mind to be made up.

"Knesebeck, we go to the Fair."

"Oh, darling lady! But how about the Countess?"

"What does she matter, why should she poison it all for us? I'll find you a lovely officer to dance with."

"I'm not past finding one for myself."

"A lovely officer, with—oh, I don't know; yellow hair, and great strong arms to up with you and away."

"That's not the one I've got my eye on. I don't like them all hairy and strong. Womanish, a little. Like Count Königsmark."

"I saw him just now. He hasn't worn his pretty coat since."

"No, and we know why." Knesebeck wagged her finger. "It's because you put your hand on his sleeve, that day."

"Nonsense. Oh, Knesebeck, dear silly Nell, won't it be fun at the Fair!"

They set off for Brunswick two days later, the Duke on horseback, clouds of young gentlemen round him showing off their riding; the ladies in chariots with full equipments, postilions, outriders with horns, and mounted gallants. Prince Max, his hurt hand still in a sling, sat by Sophia-Dorothea looking glumly out at the riders. She saw his right hand from time to time practise a movement, twisting the strap of the window. It was easy to interpret.

"It won't interfere with your riding. You'll hold the reins in your right, that's all."

Max did not answer her, beyond a quick frown. He did not care to be read so easily, even by her. He let the strap fall. She, solicitous, could not leave him alone.

"It hurts still, does it?"

"No, no, I'm all right." Then, repenting of his abruptness, caught by the desire to uncover his misery: "I'm done for, anyhow. They'll never give me

a regiment again. Your husband's seen to that."

She could not deny it. She had heard George-Louis' opinion of his brother as a soldier. He could sometimes phrase a cruel thing neatly enough, and he had said that King Louis would never be beaten until the day that Max deserted to him. Max saw a battle, not as the moment of supreme crisis to which weeks of preparation tended, but as an occasion for the display of dash. His cavalry was for ever at full gallop, going nowhere in particular, his hero was Uncle Rupert, his mother's brother, and his tactics those of the sabre and spur. He was, besides, unlucky, though his men loved him, and followed him gallantly into the military gulfs he contrived for them.

Now that the confidence was begun it went on, shaken out of him in spurts as the carriage jolted.

"Christian and Gustchen and I; what have we got to look forward to? The sooner we follow Charles the better. My father wouldn't kick at a handsome monument apiece, and we'd be out of the way."

"Max, don't."

He turned on her.

"What, hasn't Countess Platen told you anything about my father's will? Ask her; she knows about it. So does that fellow Colt they've sent out from England. England doesn't like to think of her future King—my God! poor devils—doesn't like to think of him as just a German Duke. Elector, that's what England wants, and an Elector with a nice lot of territory, too. Looks better, you see. So Gustchen and Christian and I, we're cut out, and George-Louis takes the lot." He laughed abruptly. "England can't swallow the Pope, but she'll swill down George-Louis, thick head, women, and all."

"And have not I to do just that?"

He put his right hand swiftly on her knee; then the grievance was uppermost again.

"I haven't seen the document, but I've picked up one or two things Colt let drop, and—I tell you what, sisterkin. If my father makes it worth my while I'll stick to him and stick to Luther. If he doesn't—"

"You've been talking to that Jesuit again."

"The Emperor's a Catholic, isn't he? We were all Catholics once."

"Oh, don't, don't! Your mother's so unhappy, she frets after Charles; if you turn your faith it will kill her."

"My mother's tough."

But he quieted, and when he spoke next the bitterness was gone from his voice.

"I won't do anything till I've got proof that the will's been altered. But how's one to get it? Make love to Platen?" They both laughed. "Or find somebody—" He started up, and leaning out of the window called to a horseman that was passing: "Königsmark! Königsmark! Get down and eat with us. Halt, all! We'll dine here."

The carriage, tugging and jingling, came to rest in the midst of a flat green marshy country, with hills and forests south and north. Slow rivers threaded it; in spring the flowers that thrive in such places, cuckoo-flower and herb Paris, grew unheeded save where children came out from Peine to gather them for May crowns. The road, a three-rutted way, went looping here and there across the flat expanse, milestones slanting, culverts broken; there was no money to spare for mending roads while half a dozen interests pulled the Duke to war. No habitation showed, but somewhere, in a direction rendered vague by the fitfulness of the wind that brought it, the fiddle of a goat-herd sounded.

Königsmark dismounted. A groom took his horse, and the carriage attendants made themselves busy. There was a basket under the seat which at Max's orders was carried to a tussock at a little distance, on which lambs and young goats played King of the Castle in spring. Now the Princess of Hanover was installed by its side, the two young men spreading their cloaks for her. She wore a comfortable dress of rusty cloth, a great cape over it, which she let slip from her shoulders; her dark hair was bared by the dropping of the hood to the autumn sun. She had grown a little more plump in the past year, and the roundness became her; black eyes, full and eager mouth, she had a ripe and southern look.

Königsmark watched her, hardly heeding Max, who, however, went straight to the point.

"I won't ask you any questions, Philip, but just tell me one thing. Do you ever have a chance to speak with Countess Platen alone?"

Sophia-Dorothea answered for him, curiosity spurring:

"Of course he does. Monplaisir is his headquarters. Why not? The Countess is, or soon will be"—she waited an instant, mischievously—"his mother-in-law."

"Who tells you that, Serene Highness?"

“Birds of the air, ladies of the Court, hairdressers, tailors.”

“They should know, if any do.”

This was not an answer, and Sophia-Dorothea wanted an answer.

“You don’t say they are wrong.”

“Because for the world I would not contradict a Princess.”

Max struck in, tired of this cross-talk.

“Well, but, you see, I’ve a reason for asking. My father—”

And out came the whole story, England’s highhandedness, the Duke’s secretiveness, the younger sons’ discontent, Countess Platen’s knowledge. Königsmark listened, pulling at the short grass, from time to time taking a blade in his small and even teeth. Max ended:

“If it is so, there’ll be trouble. We’re all of us ready for it. And now would be a good time, with George-Louis away. But we want to know for certain before we start. Now, you can get anything you like out of the Countess, just as she gets what she likes out of my father—”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, you give her pleasure, I suppose. Well, don’t let’s go into that. But will you give us what help you can?”

Königsmark asked, still playing with strands of grass:

“Is the Princess concerned in this? What does her husband say?”

Sophia-Dorothea answered for herself:

“He says nothing. He is to have all my father’s land, and England too perhaps. Why should he take his brothers’ share as well?”

It was the first time she had spoken in this tone of George-Louis to any person except Duchess Sophia. Königsmark looked up sharply, and saw the red underlip trembling, the dark eyes hidden but welling. Her hands came together in her lap, fingers straining, plaited together. In a moment of impulse, moved by the sole desire to comfort her, he said:

“Conspirators, then.” And struck down his own hand upon the clasped ones. Her skin was soft, but he could feel, even in that clumsy touch, the strong little bones beneath, and knew that he had made the gesture for the sake of the touch. They held the grip for an instant, then parted with a laugh of self-consciousness.

The postilions were looking towards them, leading the horses towards their pole again. The sun was lowering; it was time to be gone. The Princess, on her knees, gravely plucked three of the marsh flowers, intent as Circe plucking up moly with brass hooks in the full of the moon. When she had three exactly similar she gave one sprig to Max, one to Königsmark, and tucked the third into the breast of her dress.

"The sign," said she.

Max took his, and stuck it in the band of his hat. Königsmark brushed a cheek with his.

"Cool," said he. "Queer that a thing should have life and yet be cold."

"This place," said Max, indicating the marsh. He liked to explain the obvious.

Königsmark pulled out a handkerchief, wrapped the flower carefully, and thrust it inside his shirt.

"It'll die there," said Max, staring.

Königsmark did not answer, buttoning his fine shirt again. Sophia-Dorothea was astonished to find herself trembling; and when at last they set out again over her father-in-law's neglected roads she was grateful to the quivering and restlessness of the carriage, which dissembled her own.

(VI)

They came into Brunswick after nightfall. Lights were in all the windows, the streets seethed; flags and streamers bidding welcome, or extolling the town, flapped overhead, visible only as the wind brought them within the radius of some upturned beam, but audible constantly; their tails sounded overhead like giant fingers snapping. At the palace the Duke was already installed; the Countess, whose chariot had taken a different route, and who had not delayed upon it to pick wild flowers, was at supper with him. The major-domo informed their Serene Highness that there would be no formal meal to-night; the cooks sent up soup and some hot spiced wine with excellent promptness, and Max set off into the town, muttering something about seeing the sights. As for Königsmark, he had ridden on ahead, and after the gates were passed they had seen no more of him and his people. Sophia-Dorothea, made aware of fatigue by the ceasing of its cause, and drowsy with much air, went to her bed in a room giving upon the

courtyard. The rhythm of the sentry's tramp—twelve steps, stamp, twelve steps—was soothing. She put her dying marsh flower into a prayer-book, the prayer-book under her pillow, and having thus sanctified the symbol as a bravo might say "Hail, Mary!" over his knife, slept upon comforting considerations of revolt.

Königsmark too had his quarters in the palace, since he came to Brunswick on duty, as Colonel of his corps. He walked into the guard-room, to the astonishment of the soldiers, at the same hour that the Princess, yawning, dismissed her women and snuffed the light. A young ensign was asleep in the only bed fit for an officer. Königsmark would not dispossess him. He sat in his stockings before the fire, weary, and in a rage with himself; he recognised what was happening to him by that which had happened already a good many times before. He put a hand into his shirt. The marsh flower, clammy and limp, reminded him of his promise to get information from a woman who guarded her tongue far more carefully than the conventionally inviolable parts of her person. A stupid plot; stupid his own commitment to it. For he could see the end: Max's revolt failing, the complicity of the Princess discovered, her dog-nosed husband triumphant and vengeful, his own commission lost, the pleasant days in Hanover ended. These children, while they understood Countess Platen's power, supposed it founded only on her skill as a courtesan. But she had capacity, she had the brain of a general, she was ill to cross.

He started up, called for boots, and went out to inspect the sentries. They gave him the word, were all alert. The man under the Princess's window was the most wide awake of the lot, and gave no cause to rate him; but the Colonel spoke to him abruptly, as though he had committed some fault only in being posted there, and stamped off noisily across the gravelled court.

Next day, at four, when the royalties were obliged to be on show watching peasant children dancing, and distributing prizes for embroidery and spinning, Countess Platen sent for him. She looked handsome, and greeted him cheerfully.

"We must relax your duties, Colonel. They keep you away from your pleasures."

She held her hand for him to kiss, and when he had given it the official salute turned the palm, ran the whole broad arm past his mouth. He understood what was expected of him, trusted her judgment too well to raise difficulties—safe? the Duke?—and began to slip off the sling in which he carried his sword. She watched him undress, herself not stirring to unfasten

so much as a hook; her eyes were steady and greedy, not drooping as a woman's should before such an encounter; they were the appraising eyes of a man. Made uncomfortable by that look, he would not strip off his shirt. She beckoned him, and when he stood beside her she put her two hands to where the neck opening of the fine linen ended, and with a wrench tore it down to the hem. The brutality of the gesture angered him. He was accustomed to choose, not to be chosen, and he felt helpless, standing there naked, appraised by a big woman fully dressed in buckram and silks.

But she was able to make herself desired. He acquitted himself not unsatisfactorily, and when she put him from her he was able to see that the bold eyes at last had dropped their lids.

"Königsmark." She spoke low and harshly, still with closed eyes. He answered with a grunt of enquiry. He had satisfied her, he was not obliged to be civil. She spoke again, in that voice, so different from her everyday tones, as though it dragged from her very entrails.

"Königsmark—one day perhaps we might be together."

He answered that casually, thinking she meant another rendezvous:

"At your service; whenever his Serene Goutiness is out of the way."

"Not like that. Together. In some place that would be quiet. In your Sweden."

"Sweden!" He turned, half into his breeches, and hoisted them into place before he went on: "That's not possible. The Duke—"

She opened her eyes, and their look now was not greedy, but profoundly mocking. She lay at ease, legs crossed, skirt lifted to show powerful thighs.

"When the Duke changes to Elector he'll have to behave himself. England won't like a *maîtresse en titre*. There's been too much of that sort of thing with nephew Charles and nephew James. And so when that comes, soon now, the Duke will give me my little pension, and we say adieu."

He knew that this was the moment to discover what he could. She had started to talk; she suspected nothing. But knowledge that his question had a purpose made him stammer as he asked it.

"Is it sure; the Electorate, England?"

"I'll make it sure," said she. Now her voice had lost its harsh languor, it was her own organ, loud, certain. "He'll do as I tell him, he'll go with the Emperor against France, and get his bonnet. Do you know why I make him

do that? So that I can be quit of him. So that I can have time for—other things." She took his hand. "What a fool I am! You think so."

He was at a loss. Aggression changing thus quickly to a kind of humility —he did not know what to make of it. She went on, caressing his hand; the voice had softened.

"I'll tell you something else; laugh, if you like. I have had lovers, besides the Duke"—she halted, reckoning—"five. No, six. Six, and the Duke, and that's all. Not so many, for a poor gentlewoman with her way to make at court. I took them for what I could get, never for what I could give; not even the Duke—ah, he was handsome when he was younger. Now I'm forty-four. I tell you the truth. Truth's a weapon, and I put it into your hand. Six lovers, forty-four years old. And for the first time in love."

She put his hand roughly from her and stood up, her silk skirts flowing down with a grassy rustle. She turned away, screwing her fists into her eyes with an ugly gesture like a little servant of seventeen. She could have walked the town of Brunswick naked, but she was ashamed of tears.

Königsmark supposed that she turned because she did not care for him to see the mess of wetted rouge on her cheeks. He was relieved when, abruptly, she told him to go, and went, a little uneasy to find himself encumbered with a grand passion. If his vanity found it satisfying to be thus loved, his soldier's instinct let him know that there was danger in it. No principle defended him from this danger. He was aware, however, that according to how he might meet and counter it, so his whole future would be ordered. The knowledge did not trouble him.

Supper that evening was gay. The Duke during this week stepped down from the heights, and went back to the manners of his grandfather's day, comfortably aware that the Brunswickers could not presume on a condescension which came their way only once a year. There was no ceremonial eating, nor ceremonial gazing from below the salt. The hall was filled with Brunswickers dressed ridiculously, in preparation for the outdoor masked dancing which should succeed the feast, a pretty custom imported by the Duke from Italy and sonorously condemned by all the pastors in the town after it was all over, and the Duke gone. But German taste running to grotesqueness and the macabre where that of Italy was only gaudy, some of the dresses, and more especially some of the masks, had a nightmare look. Ladies, eating contentedly such dishes as sturgeon boiled with ginger and barberries, or ducks farced with currants, slung their masks upon their arms, and with each spoonful lifted a warty nose, or a wolf's jowl, or a face all

mouth to the table's level. They had not many notions for dresses to draw upon, and mostly wore their best, disguised with some fantasy of feathers or gauze. It was the masks upon which trouble had been laboured, and these were infinitely varied.

Königsmark, on duty until the supper ended in one of the little corridors, had received a note. "Isabella may perhaps be waiting in the thatched summer-house by the three birches. Eleven o'clock will find her there, but only if you have news. A handkerchief carried in the hilt of your sword will mean you have something to tell."

He laughed at this, and its little atmosphere of intrigue. A conspiracy carried on in terms of the Italian comedy amused him, for he too had been in Italy, he knew very well this personage of Isabella, the disillusioned, the maker of epigrams, the mocker, heartless; and his mind's eye, seeing the Princess in all her bubbling youth and ingenuousness, dressed her rather in the pale colours of Colombina, the gentle, the frank, the happy. He took his handkerchief from his cuff and drew it through the cut steel of the sword-guard, then strolled towards a double door by which, supper over, all who came from the hall must pass. The Duke led the way, untrumpeted here in the intimacy of Brunswick, florid, but the better of his gout, his son's wife on his arm. He was cheerful, at ease. In his heart he regretted Louis XIV, who had set the pitch so high for princes, imposing expense and stiffness upon little courts where the first comer had been used to give the Duke his shirt, and the shirt itself had bleached on lavender bushes at the castle door. He could not lag behind others in formality, with an elector's bonnet waiting round the corner, and the throne of England on the horizon; he did his duty. But there were times when he thought that if prestige had allowed him to poke his nose into the affairs of his people, to ride about and know them, he might have found congenial occupation at less expense than that which wars and imported opera entailed.

The Princess wore a dress of white satin, and was made taller by the upward-sprouting laces of a *fontange*. She laughed and hugged her father-in-law's arm as they came through the door, looking up in his face, so that Königsmark, lest she should pass him unseeing, had to loosen the pin from the lace on his breast and drop it at her feet. She set her foot on it before she saw him; then, with a little gasp, looked up to his eyes, and down to his hilt with the handkerchief; blushed, and stood. The Duke observed the trodden pin, a miniature surrounded by diamonds: Love holding two hearts over a flame.

"A bad omen," said he, jovially. "Love gives you the slip, Count."

Königsmark laughed, picked up the miniature and quickly set it in its place. A prince's joke should never be capped; he had, besides, no rejoinder to make that should be worth while. He was alert to receive any sign the Princess might make, and even when she had passed he stared after her. Countess Platen, going by, showed no change in her expression of good-humour, but she had observed the scene, and recognised the pin. It was her gift.

The grandees went to their rooms to dress; with a turmoil of talk, laughter, and shrieking, the Brunswickers arrayed themselves in their disguises. In transports of fun they nosed, bearded, horned and otherwise travestied themselves, and having done with the mirrors—every glass in the Castle had been brought into one long gallery—they edged in groups into the garden over which a bland moon presided. The fiddlers were established on a balcony whence the Duke on State occasions was used to bow; the main dancing took place below, in the courtyard, where dancers formed into squares, into circles, into long lines down which individuals scampered. The fiddlers made wigged aldermen and their wide wives obedient as trees and the mountain tops to Orpheus' lute. They played known tunes; the first bars of any change came as an order to perform this or that evolution, to adopt this figure or that. They danced in parties, eight, twelve, or twenty. There was no clasping of individuals as in Venice, that place of iniquity, and the unpleasing forms of the masks invited no enquiry as did Italian yashmaks of black or white lace. The pastors might have spared their texts; intrigue and indecency found no place at the Duke's ball. The people looked forward to this yearly junketing; they had little with which to compare it, save its own predecessors; and when at last it came it gave a pleasure that needed no spicing.

Königsmark watched the door by which the grandees were to join their guests. A woman dressed as a peasant of the Harz Forest, but topped with a cat's head, came slipping out. He knew the walk, a quick sliding run unlike the stride of any peasant; Knesebeck, for certain. A group of women in the Venetian dress followed her, some of the Princess's women, he supposed; there was no guessing at identities among their black and silver. He could not see among them the purple ruff, the small hat with a purple feather, of Isabella. A soldier of Dürer's day, striped, plumed, with a great flat hat of three colours and one hand thrust into a baldric—that was Prince Max. The next comer he recognised; Countess Platen had told him to look for her as the goddess Diana and there she was in buskins; a hound's head, the jaws snarling, crowned her, a small crescent of diamonds between its ears. She halted to speak to him:

"Not changed your dress?"

"I am on duty to-night."

"Give me the pin from your lace." He hesitated, then rendered it, puzzled; from the hound's jaw came a laugh. "I'll give you something that will hold firmer. I don't care to see a gift of mine underfoot, even though it falls by chance."

She went down the steps on that word, and he stood looking downwards after her. The voice, he noted, had sounded thick and angry, but there were reasons for this, the mask distorted speech, or she was a little drunk. That his own manœuvre with the pin had been clumsy he would not suppose, nor that the Countess observed, gathered, interpreted his every movement. He retained a spy or two, in the fashion of that court, and was resolving to make use of these when he saw Isabella's purple feather go past, and down among the dancers. Königsmark walked after, through the crowd, towards his guard-room, looking like the prince in the fairy-tale who came to seek his love's stolen heart in a witch's castle. Beasts' heads bobbed at him, creatures with tall pointed ears or noses swollen into bulbs made forward to tease him. He smiled and went steadily on, his own hair blowing on his shoulders, his face the only one not hidden or drawn out of fantasy, until he reached the torchlight streaming from the guard-room door. Ensign Waldt took his orders, and picked up his sword; it was close on eleven. Königsmark ran up to his room, swung on a purple domino, drew the hood half over his face, and disdaining a mask went out, this time not into the feverish courtyard. The summer-house stood by a pool whose edge a clump of birches overhung, in that part of the gardens where ordinarily nobody walked; a private place. He had put off his sword, but he never cared to be without a weapon, and there was a stiletto stuck in his stocking. He halted to feel this lying flat along the calf-muscle, and went on as well as he could through shadow, or moonlight more perplexing than shadow. He knew his direction, though, and after a few minutes' walking the roof of the summer-house blotted out a triangle of stars.

Within it was dark, but he heard a rustle and spoke low, as the hour and the silence compelled:

"Isabella?"

The Princess answered in French; at the sound he was aware of the lifting of a foreboding, as though he had been expecting another voice, hollow and angry, to come out of the stillness.

“There’s a candle somewhere, Knesebeck brought one.”

“Don’t light it. This is safer.”

Her young voice had a catch in it, as though she were breathing fast. The excitement of the conspiracy, of this secret meeting by night with a man alone, had stripped it of the dignity she was accustomed to put on. She spoke quicker, more naturally, and Königsmark heard, as their talk went forward, the Highness fade quite away.

“We must hurry. Max is looking for me. Tell me what news you have.” He was about to put off decision, to say that he had not yet had the chance to ask questions; but she went on, the words coming coldly: “You were with Countess Platen this afternoon for two hours.”

He said nothing.

“And you have news, for you wore your handkerchief as we asked. Tell me, quickly.”

“Princess, give this matter up. That’s my advice. Let Max go on if he chooses. You don’t know the odds against you.”

“What has frightened you? I thought you were our friend.”

“Let it go, Princess.”

“But I promised Max. Why won’t you say what it is?”

“Max!” The blood began to hum in his temples. “What will your husband say when he finds you working against his chance?”

“I don’t want to be a queen.”

She said that in so small a voice that he put out a hand instinctively towards her. It touched her dress. He held the stuff lightly between his thumb and fingers. She had only to withdraw an inch or two, and the skirt could have been released. She did not move.

“Aren’t all women ambitious?”

“All Countess Platens, you think. What happened when you were with her to-day? Alone with her, for two hours.”

“Do you want the truth?”

“Yes.” But she spoke faintly.

“I made love to her. Didn’t your spies tell you that? Why did you set spies on me, Princess?”

“Your fortune’s made, then.” She tried to laugh.

“You don’t understand. What else is there to do with a woman like that?” He snapped fingers in the darkness. “What does it signify?”

“Nothing to you. That is what women are for, to you. That is how you think we all are.”

There was a silence. Neither moved; but he still held the fold of silk in his fingers, and now he gave it a little tug that she must feel.

“I don’t think that of you.”

“It doesn’t matter what I am.”

“You’re not happy.”

“Who’s happy, nobody’s happy, what makes happiness? None of us knows. I am no worse off than the rest.”

Her left hand made a little outward movement as she shrugged, and touched his as it came again to her side. He left the fold of stuff and caught her little finger, again so lightly that her least movement might have withdrawn it. She did not move.

“I want to say something. Will you listen?”

“You are holding me.”

He let the finger go at once. Remorseful, her hand came after his, caught it fully.

“What is it you want to say? I know you’re a true friend.”

“It’s said,” he answered, and put the hand to his mouth. “*Il est dit, il est dit, ce que je voulais dire.*”

She let him kiss it. At each kiss she whispered a protest: but the hand betrayed her, pressing itself on his lips, cupping the roughness of his chin, reaching to his neck under the hair, at last holding his head desperately down. When that clasp yielded he felt the weight of her against him, and the beating of her heart.

Suddenly she stiffened, he too; and they stood together unconscious of each other, all their lively senses concentrated upon an approaching sound of footsteps. As though the interrupter could see them they stood apart, and she put up a hand instinctively, first to her hot cheeks, then to her hair. The new comer made a false step, swore. They breathed, and turned to each other.

“Max.”

“I’ll meet him.”

Königsmark stepped out of the hut, and saw Max’s plumed hat, gigantic, against the white birches. Max spoke first, and loudly:

“Who’s that?”

“Königsmark.”

“You.” There was no civil greeting. “Is my sister there?”

Königsmark answered at once:

“She’s gone.”

“She was here, then?”

“I’ve already given the Princess my news and my advice.”

“Advice, have you?” Max halted to take that in. When he had considered it, he came a step nearer. They were standing some eight feet apart. “If you’ve anything worth saying, say it to me. I don’t like this running with the hare and hunting with the hounds.”

“Perhaps I don’t understand German well. Are you accusing me?”

Max paused, checked by the threat of the intonation and by the loophole the last phrase left him. But he was jealous, in some pain from his hand, and had been drinking.

“Keep out of this business. We don’t need your help. You’ve got a foot in both camps.”

Max’s tone was offensive. Königsmark heard the faintest rustle behind him, and took patience from it.

“You’re a foreigner, what’s it matter to you which of us has to beg? With my father’s coat on your back, and your hand in Platen’s placket—”

At that there was an intake of breath that Königsmark tried to mask by stepping forward. Max heard it.

“There’s someone there, you liar.”

He tried to shoulder past. Königsmark held him.

“What word was that? Again. My German is not good.”

“My sister’s there.”

“Ah!” Königsmark stood back. “You call me a liar, and you have an arm in a sling. You are a prudent man.”

“ ‘Coward’s’ as good as ‘liar,’ any day.” There was a rasping of metal; Max’s great sword came out and caught the moonlight it had first known two centuries before.

In fear lest the Princess should betray herself, aware that Max was dangerous, Königsmark found the only answer, a laugh. Max checked; as he stood puzzled, like a bull whose eyes suddenly miss the red cloth, Königsmark came to him, amicably took his arm, and led him a step or two away. His left hand gestured over his shoulder, he was smiling, his voice kept low.

“Hold your tongue, can’t you guess who it is in there?” Max turned to look, but the shadows held their secret. “The Countess, you fool. And now for God’s sake take yourself off. You’ve done mischief enough already. She has ears.”

Max immediately became sober.

“Did she hear? Did I say anything?”

“I’ll smooth it. Be off.”

Max was taking in all aspects of the matter, slowly, for that was how understanding came to him. His face changed, widened to silent laughter.

“Twice in one day.” He shook his head in wonder. “And that woman too; Charles used to call her the original bottomless pit. Nobody’d think it to look at you. Well, they put the strongest liquors into thin bottles. I don’t apologise, that’s not my way. But if you like to consider I didn’t say what I said—”

“Be off.”

Max gave Königsmark’s shoulder a slap which unbalanced them both, and turned back towards the Castle. Königsmark stood looking after him, using him as a skirmisher to know if the way was clear, listening if he made any encounter. Sophia-Dorothea came to stand beside him.

“I was afraid. How did you make him go?”

Königsmark did not answer that. Instead he made a statement.

“Max loves you.”

“He’s my brother.”

“I don’t mean *amitié*, what a brother feels. He desires you. He would have killed me when he thought you were there.”

“Oh!” She shrank at that, but for his danger, not the accusation.

“I have quarrelled with a man before, quarrelled over a woman before; do you think I don’t know how to judge?”

“You dare say that to me!”

“He was drunk, he couldn’t hide it. How long has this been going on? ‘Max,’ you said, ‘I promised Max,’ you said.”

“You are out of your mind. Do you think I care for Max? What right have you?”

They were standing now face to face, close but not touching, as in the few moments before the kiss. Their voices were low, as then. But the passion linking them had changed its quality to a jealousy and anger no less binding than love.

“You are to answer me, please. Has he touched you?”

“Why should I answer? No. Never.”

“You swear that? He watches you. That day on the journey, sitting together, I saw his eyes go over you. If I see that look again, prince or no prince I’ll kill him.”

“Poor Max mayn’t look at me, but you—you go up to that room of Platen’s with the great crimson bed—”

“You mind that? You hate it? You’re jealous of me. Say it, give me the happiness.”

“I knew a month ago you were her lover. Then I didn’t care. How has it come to be like this so soon?”

“You won’t bear me to go to her, it tortures you—Say it with this against my throat.”

The little stiletto was in his hand. He closed hers about it, unsteady with the trembling of her whole body, and felt the point prick his neck. But her voice was strong.

“I’ll kill you if you’re unfaithful.”

She turned the blade, holding it upright between his mouth and hers.

“Swear on this.”

"On this."

They kissed the blade together, feeling each other's breath warm across the steel. Then her hand sank, the weapon fell and was forgotten.

Above the Castle a streak of fiery light soared, slackened, and burst in softly dropping sparks. Another rocket followed, and another, their tracks crossing, their coloured rains mingling. Königsmark, lifting his head for an instant, taking through his nostrils the long breath that recompenses too strong a heart-beat, saw the darting fires, and through them, faint, infinitely swifter, a real star falling. When evil spirits come too near the gates of heaven, a Turkish officer once told him, angels fling these firebrands. He laughed, his cheek against Sophia-Dorothea's hair.

(VII)

News of the death of the Palatine Elector sent Ernest Augustus home next day. Personal mourning might be disregarded, but the demise of a crown, at this period of purchased loyalties and capricious alliances, was matter for cogitation. Cavaliers escorted the heavy carriages of the women as before, but Königsmark no longer rode by the Princess. Though their relationship was known to no single person, its existence lent innocent actions too high a colour. That which before was insignificant had become so charged with possibilities of bliss or disaster that they dared not risk even the casual companionship of a journey. There was, besides, that awkwardness between them which succeeds a first avowal. All the circumstances of silence and darkness that made it possible were withdrawn, daylight was upon them, and the realisation that love cannot always be scaling the peaks. Two notes passed, one in a tall soldier's scrawl, one in the neat running hand of Knesebeck.

"I am required to accompany the Duke. If this should mean speaking or riding with a certain person, you are to be sure that it is by no choice of mine. To be with you would be too much happiness. I should betray something of that which I would not have known. Is it possible that it is all true? I think we dreamed it. We—only to write that word is joy enough."

"Isabella has your letter, and thanks you for your thought of her. She will draw no false conclusions, so much she promises. She will write again, perhaps soon. She values very greatly your expressions of regard."

By ten o'clock they were en route, Max, as before, in the carriage of his sister-in-law. He looked liverish, small, and cross; the ogre who twirled a sword under the moon was gone. Sophia-Dorothea, regarding him under her lashes, was astonished to remember the fear that had stilled her when she heard his angry voice in the night. She pitied him, as sometimes she pitied George her husband in the grip of a fever his own indiscretions had brought on, or George her son after a birthday surfeit. Women, it seemed to her, though they made fools of themselves no less often than men, were rarely so naïvely surprised by consequences. This tenderness, that was in part contempt, she could feel very readily, and when it came upon her it effaced memory of injuries or treachery.

She had, therefore, no longer any apprehension of danger from Max, and could be gay with him. In her soft high voice she sang, looking sideways, a ditty that had found its way across Europe from Paris via the soldiery:

"*Je ne veux point des grands mots*
Etre la victime,
De la gloire des héros
Je fais peu d'estime.
N'ai-je pas assez vaincu
Quand j'ai su mettre sur cu
Ma pinte et ma mie, ô gué,
Ma pinte et ma mie!"

But Max was in that state of indignation which the physical inability to be anything but virtuous unfailingly ensures.

"Where do you get these dirty songs from? George-Louis can't sing."

She disregarded him, save for a beating out of the measure with one finger on his knee.

"*La promenade et le jeu*
N'ont rien qui me pique,
Un concert me touche peu,
Foin de la musique
Je ne veux pour m'amuser
Que remplir et renverser
Ma pinte et ma mie, ô gué—"

"Be quiet. I've got a head."

"You should learn that song, brother Max. It's all about your complaint. Too much to drink, and too many girls."

“I suppose Königsmark’s been talking to you. Look here; I want you to be careful of that fellow—”

Immediately apprehension was on her. A secret lover is like a rich man travelling; every shadow is an ambush, every sound a threat to the carried treasure. Two days ago she would have met this by an astonished repetition of the name: “Königsmark!” Now she was silent, unable to trust her voice to sound indifferent.

“He’s in Platen’s pocket.”

That hurt her, for all she was sure of him, and there sprang up in her mind a dozen jealous images of the big greedy woman taking casually and bawdily the homage of his body. She turned her exasperation against Max.

“It was your idea, you who said he could be useful to us. If you chop and change like this we’ll get nowhere.”

“What’s the matter with you?” She had, in fact, spoken with vivacity, and bitterly. “I’ve been thinking, that’s all. I was wrong to let you or anyone else come into this business.”

“Why, proud Prince? Do you think you can conquer all by yourself, like Alexander?”

Max’s answer to that was brief, and spoken without emphasis.

“I think it will fail. So I’ll go on with it alone.”

A week ago she would have seen in this declaration only lack of spirit, the loss of excitement. Now to be cut off from Max’s plans meant a dwindling of opportunity. Returned to Hanover, she could not without danger see Königsmark alone. There must be some link, some excuse for his presence which association with Max supplied. He was astonished to hear her pleading:

“We must have faith, we must work together. Don’t shut me out. I want to share with you. I’m your guarantee. They can’t punish me. Zelle and the money to come—they won’t risk offending my father. Let me be with you.”

Her voice was urgent, a genuine fear and passion informed it. Max recognised this urgency, and the covetousness which her gaiety had always repelled took strength from it. His right hand turned her head roughly towards him and in a second, blindly, he was kissing her. Her mouth closed by his, she screamed, an ugly animal sound, and beat with her fists against the side of his head. Still he held her. In her frenzy she struck savagely, again and again, at the wounded hand in its sling, till he grunted with the

pain of it and abruptly let her go. She said nothing, but eyed him. Max, puzzled and angry, his left hand encircled by the right as if he defended it, said:

"All right, all right, it didn't mean anything."

"One of your family's enough."

Max gave up the attempt to placate and comprehend her. He sat back, and a mile passed in sullen meditation, till they reached the post-house, when he suddenly implored her:

"Don't say anything to mother."

She laughed at that, and to torment him shook her head, which might have meant that she would not agree or that she would not speak; then leaning back with closed eyes allowed memory to draw close and trouble her.

Königsmark, meanwhile, riding in the Duke's cavalcade, found himself constantly by Platen's window, from which she signed to him gaily. The midday halt was called in a village past Sonnenburg, where the Duke, after a copious meal, was obliged to play the father once more, and to sit on a balcony watching the evolutions of country children, nodding his head to the hymns which they tirelessly sang. Countess Platen was not at his elbow. She had withdrawn without excuse to the best bedroom of the inn, where she loosened her stays, and having refreshed the colour in her cheeks with rouge, and her spirits with wine, sent for Königsmark. He came, stiffly, from the group about the Duke, and knocked at her door with a military air, to give the impression that she had sent for him about some matter of the escort. Entering, he found her lying alone, fully dressed, on the bed by which stood a small lamp in which hair-tongs were heating. He scowled at the vision.

"You have orders for me?"

She beckoned him over to her. She had the hands of a young woman, smooth, shapely, characterless, contrasting oddly with her face, over which strong passions had travelled, leaving their traces. Königsmark did not obey the gesture.

"Be easy, my little Colonel. I know as well, better than you do, what's prudent. But I promised you something last night."

He could not for the life of him recollect. He remembered only one hour's happenings of the previous night, but those incessantly and

tormentingly. The senses by which memory is most easily wakened, touch, hearing and scent, composed and refashioned again and again the scene in the hut by the birches. Eyes were left out of it, he had seen nothing of Sophia-Dorothea; he had learned her shape with his hands, her heart by broken whispering. When he closed his eyes the kisses, and only the kisses, lived. He was obsessed. What Countess Platen had promised he neither knew nor cared, but he had to pretend some concern for it, and sentences of gratitude came stammering out. She looked at him steadily.

"Not so rough this time, eh?"

He protested that he would be tender.

"I don't ask for sighs, and eyes turned up to the moon. I give my favours as you give your soldiers their watchword, to prove good faith and test treachery."

Still in the dark, he assured her that he did treasure her kindness; promised discretion; kissed her hand, even. She turned her fingers as he did that, caught a bunch of hair, and by this pulled his face close to her own. Looking into his eyes she said:

"You threw down the pin I gave you. Why?"

"It fell. An accident, pure chance."

She gripped his hair with her other hand, and swung this way and that his helpless head.

"You are not clever, my little Colonel. Not adroit. I know you. If it suits your vanity to turn the head of our little donkey of a Crown Princess, well and good. Amuse yourself; her too, for she has not much distraction, not much diversity, all the brothers make love as a pig makes fat—"

"Let me go."

"Don't like to hear that, do you?" She gave his hair a jerk that hurt him. "Romantic, still? George-Louis, Charles, Max—as like as three beer barrels. Poor girl! Whether Charles or George or Max gets her children, the Duchess don't care, nor the Duke. It's all in the family. But they won't tolerate outsiders."

Königsmark put up his hands at last to hers, brutally loosening the fingers. She gripped still, laughing while he hurt her. Her eyes did not quit the anger and dismay that showed clearly in his face. Abruptly, as though curiosity at last was satisfied, she let him go.

“I’ll give you another favour. This one won’t tumble on to the floor by chance.”

“Kind lady.” Freed from her touch he could be reasonable, and could try to disarm her. “I can’t risk that the Duke should know. That would mean ruin.” She smiled crookedly, and he remembered, with panic fear, how she had said that soon she meant to be quit of the Duke. He went on, however, despairingly: “I have to think for us both.”

The smile at that became a brief laugh; there was real absurdity in this picture of the inconsequent Königsmark calculating for a woman who held in her head the affairs of a couple of kingdoms. Her eyes did not relax their watch. He could not face them, nor stop talking.

“I only say that tokens are risky, they come into the wrong hands, they make for comment—”

“Understand me well. You are my lover. That’s a word meaning much or little. To me it means much—” She broke off, gnawing her lip. “You can anger and hurt me. That has not happened before. I must have you for myself, I won’t share you. Can you understand that, you handsome fool? I’m warning you, I love you. Can you understand that?” Surprisingly her big mouth began to turn down, the lip to quiver. She had a look that revolted him, of abasement, of fawning almost; the look of an old bitch that dribbles and stinks, and frolics with its head, using the antics that pleased when it was a puppy. She held up her arms to him, and though he knew he must play for safety, yet he could not stoop to that tremulous mouth hanging a little open, red stuff crusting the outline of the lips, the inner part pale. He took the hands and held them together against his coat, but even to do that there was hesitation. She pulled away, and in one clumsy yet swift movement snatched the tongs that were reddening above their flame; darting the points of them upwards she burned a cross upon his neck just under the jaw. He threw up his head, or the iron would have marked his cheek; swore with the pain, and with a fencer’s movement knocked the tongs from her hand across the room.

“That won’t drop off by chance,” said Countess Platen, panting.

Abasement had gone from her eyes, prudence from his. In rage they stared at each other, he fingering his burn; then his hand dropped to his sword-hilt, and he went out. Countess Platen lay awhile watching smoke rise from the pine-board on which her tongs had fallen, biting false red off her lip and true red into it. Then she rang her handbell, and prepared to resume the journey.

That evening the travelling Court put up at various inns in the town of Hamelen, which had been prepared for this honour by hard-riding couriers. Between the "White Eagle," where the escort was lodged, and the "Golden Cross," which harboured royalty, letters were exchanged, one in a scrawl, the other in a neat running hand.

"This day has seemed endless. I think, and I wish, and of all my wishing and thinking nothing comes but a sore heart. You did not travel alone. I understand something of the state of mind of your companion, and I suffered, not doubting you, but fearing for you. I have not known misery, that is to say, I have not known love, until now. I am not patient, yet I am condemned to patience as to a galley-oar. My mind is full of you, my heart admits no image but yours. I shall walk by your window to-night. Even if I do not see you, a night breeze may blow from your mouth to mine."

"Isabella cannot sleep without assuring you of that which is known to you already. She begs you to be sure that her good will increases towards you hourly. She will be by her window (which it is, you had best ascertain from one of her people) to-night after supper. A candle will be by her hand. When she snuffs it, that is as much as to say she wishes you well with all her heart."

Knesebeck, looking up from the dictation of this with a titter, would have it that a letter containing no warmer expressions than these was not worth writing. Sophia-Dorothea spoke briefly, she who loved to chatter and make a history of every dropped pin.

"That is enough. Have you done?" She looked with envy at Knesebeck's hand holding the quill, and made a movement as if to take it from her, to add something, or sign. Knesebeck slipped sideways from her seat, inviting the Princess to take her place. Sophia-Dorothea would not. But she put her hand inside the laced bodice, and thence, warm from the blood about her heart, flat on the paper. The ink was yet unsanded. It smeared, and Knesebeck made haste to fold the note, twittering:

"What will he think? Highness dear, it's all very well, but you won't be at the window, it wouldn't do."

"I'll be there."

"Highness, sweetness, let Nell do it for you. Let Nell sit up in one of your dresses, then if anybody's spying—"

"No!" Both were a little startled at the strength of that refusal. "Let him walk, and look, and think you me—I won't have it. Besides, I want to see

him. I must see him."

"Well, but it's not like being at home, there's no privacy in this place, people staring all the time, they may notice something."

"I'll only snuff the candle."

"How you say it! Like one of those French tragedy queens in love with the wrong man."

"The right man."

Knesebeck looked at her inquisitively, made as if to speak; then, at a loss, held her tongue. Sophia-Dorothea had been standing, vaguely looking towards the window. Suddenly she became busy, ordered the silver mirror from her travelling case, and settled down to be plied with brushes, combs, toilet-waters, scent; to put on, and take off again, such jewels as she had by her; to hurry her maids and forget them; and all the while to prepare her heart. She would have liked to run to Königsmark in her shift, with a hedge-flower in her hair; that would have suited her mood of unwithholding. But in her, with this longing, worked that other incomprehensible conviction of women, that where most pains are taken most devotion is shown, and to this she yielded. The hour's toilette and bustling took on a character sacred as that of the vigil before knighthood. Each change of a jewel or a curl was a little act of faith.

At last she took her candle to sit by the window. Königsmark, still cloaked and dusty, watching from the shadow of a doorway, saw a little very fine lady lean forward with the snuffers. He thought, angrily, "Why does she dress? Who is there with her?" not understanding, taking for frivolity this ritual decking. Then, seeing how the flame trembled with her breath so close to it, he was shaken with desire for her, murmuring in his own language old simple endearments not used since childhood. He stood there long after the candle was out and the shutters had come together, and charitable passers-by let him alone for a drunkard.

(VIII)

In October George-Louis made his way home from Flanders. Fighting ceased by mutual consent with the first heavy rains of autumn; soldiers went into winter quarters in subdued or friendly towns, the countryside settled to its cold weather routine with such cattle as was left after the armies had eaten and spoiled; the officers, men of family and warriors only by tradition,

departed, leaving their regiments to obey sergeants and ranker lieutenants. The Prince of Hanover had spent an uninteresting summer shooting at Frenchmen across fields of corn, with no good pitched battle, no siege, to vary the eternal advances and retreats; a restless summer in whose intervals his luck at cards had been bad, and he had been prettily fleeced by a Dutchwoman with a businesslike husband. He returned, therefore, with relief if not with enthusiasm to his family, the snows and music of home.

Sophia-Dorothea was summoned by her mother-in-law on the twenty-first of the month, and told to expect him. After details of the welcome and the family dinner she came directly to matters more intimate.

"You should have the great bedroom made ready. You do not use it when you are alone, I think?"

"Such a great cold room, Serene Highness, and I like to be nearer the children. George-Louis too—he likes to be on the lower floor. It is more convenient."

"I am aware of his preferences. They do him no credit. However, from what I hear, this woman Schulenburg is failing in looks. She is ill, too, measles, or some such trouble, from which she will not be recovered yet. You, on the other hand, are at your best." Duchess Sophia measured her up and down with the eye of a stock-breeder. "This summer has given you back your bloom. Be thankful, and use it for Nature's purposes."

Sophia-Dorothea whitened.

"Serene Highness, we care nothing for each other, he goes his way—"

"Two children only! That's not security as this house counts it. When England is joined to our Crown we shall need another son. I have no patience, nor have the Germans, with queens. You must not fail now in your duty."

"It's hateful to me. I can't speak to you, his mother, of the things I've endured from him. Put on my best dress, smile at him like a woman in the street, accept him—I can't; no, I can't."

Duchess Sophia got up, and her lean hand, unused to caresses, crooked as for the holding of a book, took firm hold of the Princess's chin.

"Look at me. You say George-Louis goes his way. And you, do you go yours, by any chance?"

Sophia-Dorothea by an effort held her glance steady upon the old tawny eyes fading round the iris to blue. She did not answer, for her throat was dry,

and to swallow would have made that, with other things, clear to Duchess Sophia.

"You know very well that such a thing will not do. I am making no accusations, your good name is your own affair; but it is of value to others besides yourself, and is not to be blown on. I put no constraint upon you. I ask only that your conduct shall give the lie to evil thinkers. Reconciliation with your husband is the shortest way to make nothing of suspicions. Let me hear that you understand me. I require an answer."

So suspicions were about already. Her mind flitted in and out of possible treacheries, indiscretions—but hesitation was dangerous, there was only one answer, and she gave it, trembling.

"I will order the State bedroom to be made ready."

Duchess Sophia released her with a tap on the cheek. She offered no approval of this yielding, which to her, as to the Princess, seemed merely inevitable, and received the farewell curtsey with an indifferent stately nod. But after Sophia-Dorothea had gone the Duchess went to her writing table and took from one of its drawers a note, ill-written, dirty.

"Beware lest the Prince's offspring show the King's stamp. Brunswick, beware and awake!" The meaning was perfectly evident, the elementary play on words—*König, marke*—not to be mistaken. Whence such a warning could come was the only puzzle. Duchess Sophia, lifting the dirty paper without distaste to her fine nose, thought she perceived a scent upon it which gave some notion of the writer. She listened to no gossip, but that concerning Countess Platen and her latest favourite had been buzzed loudly enough to reach her ears. Was there not some story of a marriage between the Swedish Count and the woman's daughter? An ugly solution, but one by no means to be regretted if it should come to pass. Duchess Sophia knew less of women than of alchemy, but her own youth, remembered, told her how Sophia-Dorothea might have come by that second spring, that bloom of hers. She had yielded too readily to the proposal of a new understanding with George-Louis, waking suspicion by the very means taken to lull it. But —Duchess Sophia admitted it, with a shrug, of Eléonore d'Olbreuse's daughter—she was a good girl. Come next harvest, there should be another son.

In her pretty room, beneath the picture of Nausicaa, Sophia-Dorothea was desperately arguing out a plan of conduct.

“The Duchess suspects. We have been *sage*, we have not met, none of the letters has miscarried or been opened. How should it be known? But it *is* known, and she warned me.”

“It’s old Platen up to her tricks.” Knesebeck had a certain shrewdness, the necessary darting apprehension which many years of Court intrigue imposes. “She doesn’t know the truth yet. But she’s afraid, so she strikes first. They’re not lovers yet, she thinks, and if I put my wits to it they never will be. So some greasy tale reaches the Duchess by way of half a dozen whispers. She is loyal, the Duchess. Platen reckoned she would tell you, and a nod’s as good as a wink.”

“I must tell him what’s being said, what’s happened.”

“Now, now, Highness dear!”

“A letter, only a letter, there’s no harm in that, you can’t endanger the honour of the noble and well-born house of Brunswick by a letter.”

“Just at this time, when they’re all on the lookout?”

“I must tell him. It terrifies me, the thought of spies. They’ll denounce him, and the Duke will send him away. I shall lose him.”

“No, no, not if you’re sensible—”

“How can I be sensible? How can I tell what’s best to be done when all the time I’m longing, and frightened, and it’s all so dark?”

“The Duchess gave you your hint, you’ve only to take it.”

“That! I won’t. Never. Never!”

“Highness, my sweet.” Knesebeck took the striving hands, and holding them tightly against her breast spoke rapidly and gravely. She enjoyed a complication as much as anyone, but this had gone too far, there was danger, and she was alarmed for her own part in it all. It seemed to her small sharp mind that she had better now begin to play the intervening goddess, loose the spell that lay between the two and let all end in a masque of Hymen. She had not yet perceived the naked and shivering body of their passion through its Court tinsel.

“Listen. You know how stories go about in this town; one can’t let them run. You needn’t have anything to do with your husband, but you should seem to receive him. It looks better—he home from the war! And then perhaps if you were to share his room as before you might find—how

should I know, an old maid like me?" Knesebeck giggled. "You might find yourself not so displeased with him after all."

Sophia-Dorothea pulled her hands away.

"You don't understand what you talk of. You don't see that it's impossible."

"He's your husband. You've had eight years of it," Knesebeck answered wondering.

But Sophia-Dorothea was seized with that fierce chastity that will allow no touch other than the lover's; if not his, none. She had no words for the feeling which commanded her, and could only repeat, anguished, that she would not, that such a thing must not be asked of her. Knesebeck could perceive another way out of the maze, but offered her suggestion with diffidence.

"If not you, then he must do it. There's nothing else to be contrived, that I can see."

"He? Königsmark?"

"If he'll mend matters with Platen; if he'll be with her as before—"

A sharp cry interrupted that.

"Darling Highness, you're in love, but be sensible, be wise, think a little for him." That checked the Princess in her restless stepping about the room. "You know what will happen, must happen, you said it yourself, unless something is done. They daren't touch you; but they'll break him, and send him away."

"No, Nell, no!"

"They will, Highness, my dove, believe me, believe Nell who's older than you and wiser. There's only the one way or the other of stopping it."

The Princess turned quickly, with a little hissing breath as if a sudden pain had caught her. She began to walk as before, but halted.

"He stood here, you remember? That day when his coat was wetted, when he came to tell me of Charles. Here, was it? No, here, he laid his hand while he talked to me." She put her cheek to the top of the chair-back. "It's so long ago; I felt happy afterwards, I didn't know why. That's a strange thing, isn't it? That I shouldn't have known."

But Knesebeck would not play the game of sentiment now. She had often before been the one to start it, with little sighs, and the recollection of glances or touches. Now she was alive to her own interest, aware how her behaviour might be construed by the Duke and his advisers in council, and determined that this affair must be ended one way or the other. Cleverly she laboured, like some astute small rat-like animal, to be free of the net.

"You don't answer Nell, sweetheart. He goes back to Platen or you go back to the Prince. Now, which shall it be? For there's only these two things to be done."

"We'll escape. We'll go away together, somehow."

Knesebeck did not trouble to answer that. She merely shook her head slowly, once, twice. Give up two crowns! And though the Princess had spoken from her heart she accepted the negations implied by that turning head. Escape—that presented too many problems of money, of planning, matters in which she knew herself incompetent. For eight years she had hardly walked from one room to another without half a dozen persons being aware of her movements, and this casual vigilance of a Court seemed to her something not possible to put aside. She bit at her thumbnail while Knesebeck talked on.

"The Prince comes to-morrow. You'll think it over, you'll be my own good sugar Highness, because, you see, it's ruin for us all if you don't make up your mind."

"I must think. Don't torment me, Nell. Don't force me."

"My darling, come to Nell, your head here, that's right. (Does the brooch hurt your cheek? Away with the nasty thing.) It's because I'm so afraid for you. I'm kinder than you can understand now in your poor sore heart. But one thing I do see clearly; you shan't degrade yourself. It's Königsmark who must take the step. He must make it up with Platen."

"Go to Platen! I'll die rather than that. Don't ever speak of it, Nell, it's hideous, it's the one thing I won't bear." And vivid lascivient images beginning to form and couple before her mind's eye, she put her hands to her face as though the scenes were being lived in the room before her, shook her head violently, with an effort of the throat like that which tries to expel the taste of something foetid. "Never that! I'll take back George-Louis rather __"

Knesebeck suddenly pressed the head to quiet against her shoulder.

“There’s my good girl, that’s a sensible sweet. Darling Highness, it’s the only way, the best way.”

“I haven’t said—”

“You needn’t say anything. But it shall be so. I’ll see to it, I’ll give the orders.”

“I must write to him.”

Knesebeck was in charge now, she had won her point, and victory gives command.

“I forbid you. Write, with spies in every corner like spiders, endangering him, perhaps? I’m ashamed of you.”

“Nell, don’t scold, I’m so wretched—”

And with that came the first great fall of tears. Knesebeck held her, was tender; and when the paroxysm was ended, sent for amber, mace, and ale, which with her own hands she mixed to a calming drink that was fed in spoonfuls to her mistress until the quivering breaths drew more easily. When it was time to dress and dine she handed Sophia-Dorothea in to her bedroom and her women to let them lace her. Thence she went directly to her own room, where she ate alone and greedily little delicacies to the French fancy which the cooks prepared for her, bribes to obtain continuance of her good-will. She was in no hurry.

After the fricassee and the eggs in spun sugar were finished she found paper and a pen and wrote in the low running hand that was so like her way of walking:

“Isabella writes in great fear lest something should have been discovered. How this can be she cannot guess, but she has received circumstantial warning. She believes that danger threatens from one quarter only, where of late you have offended. She can see no way to quiet suspicion but one which is odious to contemplate. *Le Réformeur*[5] comes to-morrow, he must find waiting for him a dutiful complaisant wife. This is the one means whereby she can secure safety for a secret which is dearer to her than life. She must betray love to save it, and she implores pardon for a treachery which, were the circumstances other, she had rather die than commit.”

Königsmark was not on duty that night, but his house was not far distant. Knesebeck slipped on a hood and a pair of clogs and went out through the rain, to the astonishment of her abigail Maria. At the tall house she asked for the master. The servants had their orders to introduce any messenger who

held his fingers in a certain way, the middle crossed over the fore, and Knesebeck, pulling her hood across her eyes, kept them twisted in this manner. She found Königsmark staring into the fire, stirring from time to time with his foot a mastiff that lay sleeping and twitching by his chair. The creature bounded up as Knesebeck entered, and Königsmark caught it back by the collar, roughly; his slim womanish hands constrained it while he spoke:

"You here, *confidante*? You should not have come."

"When you have read what she says, you will see why she dared trust nobody else."

He took the letter, after a quick look at her, kissed it long and without self-consciousness, then laughed.

"It is your writing that I salute. I forget that. One day, when it is safe, ask her if I may not have something in her own hand, three words, just to keep about me—"

He had opened the paper by now, and his voice dwindled as he read, the sentence went unfinished. His face contracted; Knesebeck could see, beneath the lids cast down, his eyeballs flickering, right, left, right, left, furiously reading, getting at the heart of the letter. He held it in his left hand; suddenly with the right he struck the paper, looking up, and his voice, that always stumbled a little among the German phrases, found those the Princess herself had used.

"Never! That I won't bear. You know what she says here? I'll kill him. She shan't do it."

"That will not help her. Be reasonable. She thinks only of you."

"Will she think only of me in that sot's bed?" He struck his forehead twice with his fist; the ring of the thumb made a tiny cut, from which blood began oozing. "I must see to it that he is put away. My brother did that in England. Yes, it could be done—"

"You're talking wildly. Don't you see whence all this comes? The letter tells you plain enough. Platen; she is the enemy."

He picked up the paper again, read it, tossed it down, and put a hand unconsciously to that place on his jaw where a scar showed.

"She's too well guarded."

“Why must you always be thinking of blood? Make up your quarrel, that’s all you have to do.”

“That, no.” The dog growled, hearing his voice.

“Don’t you see her reason, have you never heard of jealousy? A jealous woman is a worse enemy than any man ever was or could be.”

He was quiet; then as if to get away from the dilemma, to breathe happiness for a moment, asked:

“The Princess; does she speak of me? What dress does she wear to-day?”

“She’s too full of crying. The State bedroom’s being put to rights.”

“Ah!” He pulled up his sleeve, thrust his naked arm towards the mastiff’s bared fangs. “Bite, slash with your teeth, give me pain so that I need not think!” The brute dropped to the floor, wriggled his tail, and rolled slowly over, slavering with idiotic devotion. Königsmark kicked him; he grunted, but still rolled, adoring.

“You can’t get away from it like that.” Knesebeck watched, admiring this extravagance, but there was her own skin to think of, her plan yet to be imposed. “You must face it, as I said to her. This isn’t a time for moonshine.”

“No. It is a choice of pains.” He spoke lifelessly, his spasm of extravagance over. “We know only the one way to be happy, she and I; but to be unhappy, to be in hell, a thousand ways!”

Knesebeck had no answer to that. She was beginning to see, in his haggard looks, in her memory of the Princess’s weeping, something of the truth. Love in the Court of Brunswick, despairs and raptures and thoughts of death; story-book goings-on, to the accompaniment of graduated curtseys, fourteen dishes to a course, and disputes about pedigree! Though she conceived it but dimly, she was at a loss. Königsmark spoke.

“She does this for me. She humbles herself for me. That’s sweet, to think of her tears.”

“Oh, very sweet indeed, a pretty picture; my Highness crying herself to sleep in that man’s arms while you amuse yourself striking attitudes over her misery—”

“You fool, do you think I will allow it? But that I, I have the power to hurt her so deeply”—He stood for a moment quite still, and shaded his eyes

like a man about to enter the torture-room, who puts up a plea for strength. “I’ll write to her. Sit there and wait. Balder will not touch you.”

Knesebeck sat, victory under her hand, but in a kind of fear, while he squared himself to the table and laboriously, in a foreign tongue, wrote to the woman who was his heart’s country and home.

“The determination expressed in your letter fills me with horror. If my love gives me any right to command you, I forbid such a sacrifice. If I may not command, then I drag myself to your feet, and there with tears flowing implore you never again to submit yourself to that man. More; if I learn that you have done so I shall somehow pick a quarrel with him, and one or other of us does not leave the field alive. I know, my sweet *brune*, your reasons, I hold your tenderness to my heart, but I cannot accept nor endure safety at this price. Better disgrace, better death.

“You have trusted me thus far. Trust me now. Leave it to me to discover a way past this besieging troop of miseries. Take no step on your own account. We shall meet on Tuesday, I shall be watching your card-table, and I cannot write when I think that perhaps I may touch your hand.

“I watch myself daily in the glass. I speak to my image and say, This is the man that she loves, over and over again. The image only stares and mutters at me. No, it is not real, it is not living when you and I are apart, then we are no more than shadows. But at a touch, no matter how brief, the flesh comes to life, we are warmed, we know ourselves.

“I beg you on my knees, by our love, to do as I desire you.”

He sealed the letter carefully, twice, and sat looking at the blank oblong; they risked no superscriptions. Then he took up a silver bell and rang it continuously, till three footmen came tumbling in as for an alarm of fire.

“My horse.” Two of the men departed, the other, seeing the letter, waited. “Why is my room full of stinking lackeys? This is not a pothouse, for you to come running half a dozen at a time. Get out of here.”

The man went rapidly, glancing swiftly under his lids at Knesebeck with the hood drawn across her face. Königsmark gave her the letter, and asked curiously:

“Does she show you what I write?” Knesebeck shook her head. “Tells you, perhaps?”

“She is jealous of anything that comes from you.”

“Listen, then; I’ll tell you what I do not tell her. I am going to Monplaisir to-night, but she is not to know it.”

Knesebeck gave a little skip, so delighted was she with her success. Both puppets back in their appropriate beds, and no more danger for Eléonore Knesebeck, who may finish her days at Court snug as a mouse in a cheese. But could these two be trusted to pose like a couple of the Elector of Saxony’s Dresden figures, piping and yearning at arm’s length for ever? They would forget. They must forget. We are not in the days of Troy, she reminded herself; and, consoled, found something to say:

“If it is not known, then it is worth nothing. Show yourself with Platen, seem to be her squire, make work for the tongues.”

He answered simply.

“I don’t know yet if I can do it. If I cannot, there is a third way.”

“Daggers and scandals, and all the rest of it. I’m ashamed of you—”

“No. To go away.”

Knesebeck gazed, unbelieving her good fortune. This was the best solution of all, for if he stayed, sooner or later the two might come together, and her trick be discovered. She had not much hope, however. It was unlikely that such a man should not be able to make his peace with an ex-mistress who had been dragging herself about like a cat in spring since his departure.

A knock came at the door, and a footman’s voice reported his horse. She stowed away her letter, and left the house, hardly observed by the grooms and linkboys gathered to mount their master. Turning the corner she heard hoofs begin to batter the cobbles behind her, and felt the wind of the rider’s passage.

Once more in her comfortable room, she took Königsmark’s letter out of the breast of her dress, broke the seals, read it carefully, and then dropped it among the flames. Its urgency alarmed her. For a little while she could not steady her heart. And an odd feeling, that might have been jealousy, or pleasure in the ending of a love-affair not her own, invaded her as she sat waiting for this agitation to die down, and the paper to be consumed.

It was an hour’s ride to Monplaisir. Königsmark was too good a horseman to vent his own perplexities on his mount; nevertheless, the pressure of his knees and voice was continued, and he pulled up at Countess Platen’s gates ten minutes this side of the necessary sixty. It was not late,

nine o'clock or a little after, an hour at which guests began to arrive from Hanover for play, and he was astonished to find the courtyard empty, the gate-keeper already in his nightcap. He asked the man no questions, ran up the steps, and was admitted by a footman brought to the door by curiosity rather than for service. The entrance was ill lit, but he could see that this man's livery was buttoned awry.

"What's all this? Where's the Countess?"

The Countess was poorly, the man informed him, and kept her bed. Königsmark stood, slashing his boots with his whip, adapting his plan of campaign to this new factor. At last:

"Ask if she will receive me."

"She will, sir," the man answered without hesitation or insolence.

"She will, ha! Since when has the Countess taken you into her confidence?"

"We have our orders, sir. The Count Königsmark to be admitted, any hour, always."

So easy was the way made for him, so readily would she be appeased. Hitherto he had seen their relation as a casual though frantic encounter between equals, the woman demanding what the man could give, the man lending the woman what she asked; either free at any moment to cock a hat and snap fingers and go. It was a link without sentiment, brittle, or so he imagined. This order to the servants proved clearly enough one partner's mastery of the situation.

"I'll go up, then. Bring a light."

They walked together up the elegant staircase, decorated with gilt trophies of music and war, and came to the corridor off which Countess Platen's bedroom lay. At the turn Königsmark took the candlestick from the man's hand and went on alone. Behind the familiar door he could hear sounds of talking. He knocked. A woman came to open and fell back with a small delighted scream.

"Who's there? What is it?" That was the mistress's strong voice; he knew that it came from her bed.

"Königsmark."

There was an instant's silence, broken by the sound of the bed-curtains being pulled, a chink of metal rings.

"You! A fine time to choose. Let him in, Maria."

He came towards the bed, speaking as he walked.

"I heard you were sick—"

"Nothing, a silly child's complaint. Don't come nearer." The bed-hangings were completely closed, he could see no trace of the bed's occupant other than a twist in the crimson silk that marked where her hand held the edges of two curtains together. "They say it's carried on the breath. And besides, I've no wish to be looked at just now."

"Smallpox?"

"Don't be afraid, my little Count, nothing to spoil your beauty. Sit there. Fetch a chair for him, Maria, and go on with the anointing while I talk."

Her waiting-woman picked up the bowl of yellow curdled liquid in which a couple of feathers rested, offered Königsmark the chair on which it had been standing, and went, carrying it carefully, to the other side of the enormous bed.

"What's that she's got there?"

"Women's secrets, vanity, vanity; cream curdled with saffron which Maria lays on the spots and then I lie in it. It gives me a clownish look, yellow on red, and so I'll keep the curtains tight, with your permission."

His mind was filled with relief, he was aware of a kind of weakness in his limbs as though a long strain was at last over. There would be no love-making expected to-night; a breathing space.

She was talking, and her strong voice sounded gay, despite a kind of hoarseness.

"But I'm less of a portent than Schulenburg. With this rash she looks like a traveller in Prussia after one night in an inn bed. That's enough of the measles. Talk; I can't see you, let me hear your voice. It gives me pleasure that you've come."

She said that with simplicity and feeling. He answered, trying to match her mood:

"I still carry your token."

"That! I thought of it afterwards, I was angry with myself; and to this day I can't explain it. That's not the way I go to work, with shrieks and red-hot tongs. It was like possession."

“Is the devil gone yet?”

“I think so. But don’t reckon on it. Wasn’t there a man in the Bible? They drove the devil out of him, and in came seven others, worse than the first.”

“Then I’m not safe?”

“No one’s safe in love.”

There was a silence. The hand which had been twisting the curtains let go, and came through between their folds. It was a little reddened with fever. The shapely youngish fingers beckoned him.

“Philip—why have you come back?”

He did not expect that, and though the answer came pat, he stammered it:

“You were ill. I was sorry.”

“Take my hand, don’t be afraid of it. Listen: is there something you want from me?”

“Only—for matters to be as they were.”

“Discretion, eh? The Prince is coming home.”

His hand shifted a little in her clasp; he answered a thought too quickly:

“What has he to do with us?”

“Is that true, Philip?” He hated her use of his name, an intimacy to which Sophia-Dorothea had not yet come, but he controlled himself to press her hand for answer.

“Speak; say it. A touch can lie.”

“What am I to say? I’m not easy in German——”

“Say it in Turkish, what you please, it’s the tone I want. Say that you come to-night having some affection for me, some feeling in your heart that’s honest.”

The hand that lay in his was not so unlike the hand of Sophia-Dorothea. It had the same plumpness and pointed fingers, it was smooth. He said, bending his mouth close over it:

“I swear that I come with true feeling in my heart, seeking kindness, wanting peace.”

Fear for his secret, relief that to-night no physical pledge would be demanded of him; these lent his voice conviction, even to himself he seemed to speak truth. He heard the Countess draw a breath, felt the fingers slacken in his, and brought them upwards to kiss them; but with the movement came a whiff of rancid cream and he turned his cheek instead.

The waiting-woman at the other side of the bed, with dipped feathers decorously painting wide reddened breasts, looked up to see her Countess lying motionless, bold eyes closed, and smiling. The kind light of the candles for once was pitiless. It showed deep lines from mouth to nose, an ugly horseshoe wrinkle cloven in the forehead, all the lines of the face blurred and swelled, yet grotesquely conveying abandonment, joy.

"This is something not like the others," said the woman later to one of her compeers. She had been bidden to escort the Count downstairs, to bring back word how he looked, what he said before departure; on her return to the bedroom there had been a ransacking of jewel boxes for this and that trinket to be sent off next morning to his house; it was one o'clock before she could quit the bedroom, and then she left the Countess waking. "No," said Maria to the women who were to watch the rest of the night, "this is quite another thing. She's silly for him."

"Old age."

"Better not let her hear you. It's pitiful to watch it."

"They say a woman only makes a fool of herself over the first and the last."

"Well, I know one thing I ought to do. Warn the husband."

Laughter.

"As if he didn't know all about it! Warn the Duke, that's more like useful."

"There's no risk of an accident happening to the Duke."

Astounded silence, then a voice:

"What! Is she wanting to marry this youngster? No, now, that's unheard of—ridiculous——"

"I tell you, she's out of her senses about him."

"Well, for God's sake!"

Maria, satisfied with the stupefaction she had caused, ceased nods and becks, and made for her bedroom with a pleasant silver bowl full of caudle to sup before she slept.

---

[5] George-Louis.

(IX)

The Prince arrived next day, to receive such welcome as the windy streets and preoccupied townspeople of Hanover afforded. There was little enthusiasm. He brought back with him no captured standards, none of the illusions of victory, and left behind in the engulfed mud of Flanders a good many black-cockaded soldiers who might more usefully have been ploughing, baking, or unrolling cloth upon counters.

He went first to his father's house, where Duke Ernest Augustus kissed him on the forehead and asked with enforced jocularity how many men and thalers he had lost. Duchess Sophia, who wrote freely to her boys when they were absent, but knew no way to convey her pride and pleasure in them when they were at her elbow, was obliged to begin with enquiries after various respectable related princes, duke of this, raugrave of that, palsgrave of the other. George knew nothing of any of them, or even that they were relatives; he had no head for pedigrees. But he had been in talk with the King of England several times, and made the most of this, knowing his mother's anxiety that the English connection should be tenderly maintained. A little man, King William, in a wig too big for him. Not a bad soldier for a Dutchman.

"You were respectful to him?"

"He's not a man you can make free with."

"I should hope not. What news of our cousin the Queen?"

"No children still. She writes to him every day, but that's not the way to get them."

"Nor is that the way to speculate in such matters as the inheritance of a crown." He shuffled his feet; his mother's old-fashioned prejudices were for ever being forgotten. "You have had a wearisome journey. A bath with

pellitory and chamomile flowers is refreshing. Take it before you greet your wife."

He felt himself obliged to ask:

"How's her health?"

"Well. Her spirits, not so well. Your return will help to re-establish them." George-Louis gave a kind of grin, half deprecating; as usual, he could not make out how far his mother was in earnest. She went on, walking with him, one hand on his arm; "Our Sophy is a good girl, and she is willing to greet you very kindly. Take advantage of this, pay her some little attention. Your children are in fine fettle. I have only one regret concerning them"—he looked—"that there are not twice as many. Well, well, time yet." She clapped his arm in friendliness and let him go.

He was thus in some way prepared for the state of affairs which he found existing over the way, in his own house. The rooms to which he was accustomed were unlighted and empty, and his valets were carrying up luggage and lighting fires in the dressing room next to the State apartment. New furnishings, new curtains, a pot of late autumn flowers—it all looked, mused George-Louis, surveying the room without expression, like a damned bridal chamber. His wife, however, was nowhere to be seen, and he dressed himself for the family dinner without making enquiry for her. Half-way through, while he stood with his head bent back almost between his shoulder-blades so that a valet might fix the cravat of new Dutch lace, came scuffling and whispering outside the door, with at last a timid knock, low down upon it.

"Open," said George-Louis, not moving his head.

A bedchamber gentleman obeyed, the pinning of the lace tie was achieved, and George-Louis withdrew his gaze from the cornice to bend it upon his children, who stood before him hand in hand, dutiful but ready to run. Sophia-Dorothea, a hand upon the shoulder of each, urged them forward. All three faces were ludicrously alike in their expression of alarm overlaid with fictitious pleasure. George-Louis, who hated ceremony, nevertheless respected it, and was a little put about that his family should choose such a method and such a moment for reunion. It had, however, the advantage of precluding any marital scene between his wife and himself, and on the whole he could not regret that their first meeting should take place before witnesses.

The little boy, obeying a pressure of fingers on his shoulders, began a poem of welcome, written for the occasion by the palace librarian; his eyes were cast down, a frown of concentration wrinkled the round Brunswick dog-forehead.

"Not Rome in all her happiest pomp could show
A greater Cæsar than we welcome now.
Laying the sword aside, his mighty hand
Returns to scatter plenty o'er the land,
With god-like bounty recompensing all.
The warrior's blessing on his children fall——"

The wrinkle laboured, changed shape; the small head was turned to hear a prompting whisper:

"Domestic bliss——"

"Domestic bliss—bliss——" The frown smoothed, recollection came flooding, and the last couplet emerged at a gallop:

"Domestic bliss his labours still reward,
The Muse's darling and Bellona's lord!"

With a gasp of triumph the eulogy was completed, and the Muse's darling, taken thus unprepared, was obliged to find some sort of answer.

"That was very well spoken, very clear and pretty." He was in fact no little touched by the boy's four-square attitude, and there was a resemblance to himself which he had not before observed. The girl had her mother's eyes, and was looking at him without deference of any kind. He felt obliged to make mention of her.

"And Sophy, has she lost her tongue?"

"She has learned her welcome too." That was Sophia-Dorothea speaking for the first time. "Come, Sophy: 'To dear Papa our voice we raise——' "

But Sophy, who at first had seemed inclined to cry, was now overcome by some infantile joke. She shook her head, refused all cues, and at last burst out laughing, pointing her fingers at her father's breast, over which decorations were spangled.

"The pretty stars
I love to see
That shine upon
Our Christmas tree——"

sang the Princess Sophy. Over and over again, pointing at her father and dancing, she repeated it: “The Christmas tree, the Christmas tree——”

Dark green coat, snowy falls of lace, hanging stars; George-Louis’ appearance did in fact answer more nearly to this simile than to that of Bellona’s bridegroom. Sophia-Dorothea felt laughter coming upon her, and lest she should release it—an indignity which would not be forgiven—checked with a stroke of the hand by no means gentle her daughter’s exuberance. George-Louis, happily slow to suppose himself an object of amusement, and still warm with pleasure in his boy, became genial.

“Very good. You have not wasted your time in the schoolroom, I can see. Now, I believe I’ve got one or two presents for good children in my bags somewhere.”

“And for Mamma, too. Mamma taught us.”

“Well, yes, there is something too for Mamma.” He remembered in time a pair of gloves, an exquisite pair with cuffs of Mechlin lace that had cost a fortune and which he had intended for Schulenburg. Pleased with his own resourcefulness he repeated: “Yes, there is something very pretty, I can tell you, for Mamma.”

Orders were given, valets came staggering in and out with bags, until that which contained the presents was at last identified. A silver windmill to grind pepper, a tiny pistol gave the children pleasure, and dismissed them. Presentation of the gloves was a more awkward matter; George-Louis was suddenly oppressed with a notion that he had ordered initials to be worked into the gloves. Dubiously he brought them out of their silver paper, and had one bad moment when he saw that this was indeed so; but the initials, happily, were his own, with the crown above them. He liked to label that which belonged to him, and also his gifts; reminded by such outward tokens, he was rarely obliged to forget his own consequence.

The valets, the bedchamber gentlemen had withdrawn. It was the moment for a little warmth.

“So you see, Sophy”—to his wife—“I thought of you, though I doubt if you paid me the like compliment.”

“Indeed, I have thought of you very often.”

“Very flattering. My mother said something——” He halted, astonished at the sudden change, the whiteness of her face. “She said something, that you’d been low-spirited.”

“Her Serene Highness is always kind.”

“I don’t know so much about that,” George-Louis answered, with a grin. But the heinousness of appearing to criticise his mother, daughter and granddaughter of kings, in hearing of his wife, a bastard until her tenth year, brought his face straight again. “At any rate, she said you were ready to be civil.”

“I am. I am prepared.”

Even his lack of perception could not miss the overtones in this phrase.

“No need to sound as if you were going to be hanged.”

“I’m tired.”

She looked deplorable, but very pretty. She had her mother’s *flair* for a scene, and unselfconsciousness in distress. Eyes a little heavy, cheeks a little pink, were topped by dark hair carelessly dressed, amid whose curls diamonds hung sparsely, like tear-drops. The dress, however, was new and becoming; her French blood had not yet been so subdued as to quit all coquetry, even in sorrow. With the best will in the world to displease, and for that very reason, she was appetising to George-Louis, whose natural sluggishness of temper found no spur in indifference; an acquiescent woman was as wearisome to him as those fields of corn through which, all summer long, with never a shot fired, he had manœuvred his troops. Interest in his wife was now awake, as at the time of their marriage, and for the same cause.

He put out a hand, took her ear, and by it pulled her towards him. She came, after an instant’s involuntary resistance, with shut eyes, expecting a kiss; the lids trembled, as though she awaited a blow. George-Louis observed these tremors, laughed, and suddenly with his disengaged hand tweaked her nose.

Her face changed ludicrously. She glared at him, paused, sneezed. He had broken the mood, she could not continue her scene. Abandoning tragedy, she ran off the stage, clacking the door at her back, while her husband looked after her, then at himself in the glass. The prospect of a set-to with her after dinner pleased him. He summoned his gentlemen, shook out the lace over his fine hands, and went downstairs in a very good humour to dine.

His wife meanwhile, her nose still pink, was crouched over a table, writing, for the first time in her own hand, to Königsmark:

"I write because I must. Only to think of you gives me the courage of which I am at this moment in dire need. To look forward is misery; the past is no better, for there I discover moments of such happiness as it seems can never come again. At hours like this I can almost regret that we ever knew each other, so great is the wretchedness that separation imposes. Misery is more easily remembered, and longer, and more poignantly than joy. So at least it seems to me now, with joy so distant, and misery so near. I do not ask you to write, I know well that at the moment this would be folly, and though I do not care for myself, your life and safety are precious to me, and must by all means be preserved. But I must at least see you, though only for a moment, and with no chance of a word or a clasp of hands. To-morrow it is usual for the officers to come and pay their respects to *Le Réformeur*. Pray bring yourself to this duty, for I shall be present; and you can surely steel yourself for my sake to an ordeal by no means so terrible as that which I must endure for yours.

"This letter seems cold, ungrateful, and petulant now that I re-read it. Say to yourself that a sick creature tears the hand it loves, and let your good-will to me be no less, for if that fails me, I die."

This she sent by the hand of a young page, who adored her; Knesebeck knew nothing of it. The letter reached Königsmark safely, and set him striding about his room, ecstatic. He had his comfort at last, Sophia-Dorothea's own handwriting to kiss; and though the letter puzzled him, with its reference to an ordeal—surely he had saved her from that?—its evident pain, despair that even the chill elegant French constructions could not hide, gave him glad assurance that he possessed her whole spirit. George-Louis, that unimaginative prince, had been stirred by something of this same feeling when he watched his wife's eyelids twitch, awaiting his kiss. The romantic and the clod shared, delighting in it, the sense of power which the causing of pain confers; thus proving the contention of a French duke, that deliberate cruelty has less pain to answer for in this world than man's self-esteem, eternally demanding reassurance.

The dinner differed in no way from all the dinners of a century. Watching her daughter-in-law, observing how she ate little and daintily, Duchess Sophia was reminded of the girl's mother, sickened long ago by only watching the princely feeders at table consuming sausages, red cabbage, and a favourite Brunswick dish of ginger and onions. She remembered once—preposterous affectation—d'Olbreuse the lady-in-waiting sliding down to the floor on a faint during her two hours of standing in attendance; and a discovery reported by some abigail, that the

Frenchwoman cooked herself small messes on the wood fire in her bedroom rather than eat what contented their Highnesses. Sensibility! Duchess Sophia had little patience with it in women, though she admitted the right of men to fads and tantrums, those privileges of the weaker vessel. She hoped that the girl would behave herself, realising that with her, and not George-Louis, the issue lay. He was at his best to-night, so much she could admit; what clothes could do for him the Dutch tailors had done; and he talked to his brothers with emphasis and no lack of sense concerning the campaign and its commanders. His wife, however, did not look at him that the Duchess could perceive, save once, when he spoke of resuming the war in the spring, taking back with him a few companies of guardsmen "to stiffen our fellows in attack:" then she did lift her eyes, and the whole face took on a look of terror, instantly masked.

"She's fond of the children, though," mused Duchess Sophia, drinking ale; "that may hold her. We can't risk a bastard just now."

She was attentive to the girl when dinner was over; bade her sit at the ducal card-table, with:

"Advise me in my play; if I win you shall have a share."

But the evening went heavily. Countess Platen was not present to liven matters, the young princes were sullen at the return of their brother, Sophia-Dorothea's advice was worth very little to the partnership at ombre. There was the customary trumpet music, through which Ernest Augustus only was able to sleep. George-Louis sat, his feet thrust in front of him, sticking out his lower lip and from time to time passing his tongue over the upper, eyeing his wife. When the last hand had been played, and the trumpeters, with deep bows to serene unconscious backs, were shuffling out of their gallery, he got up almost with impatience, and walking over to her put a hand on her shoulder. Duchess Sophia marked an instant rigidity of the whole figure that followed. But the matter was out of her hands.

"There are times," mused Duchess Sophia, squaring the cards together, "when I wish I could swallow some of their Popish nonsense. How easy to light a few candles, and leave them to say your prayers for you while you sleep! But I doubt God's intervention when it comes to coupling. Pray the saints, whichever one's business it is, he don't drive her to some folly with his thick-headedness and temper."

She rose to receive their curtsey and bow, gave George-Louis a nod and Sophia-Dorothea a tap on the cheek that had in it something of a caress, something of warning. The girl made no acknowledgment.

They departed together. Twenty footmen with torches showed them to their carriage, six horses and five men drew and guided the gilt swaying monster down two narrow streets, a distance of six hundred yards or so; there ten further footmen ran out with lights to meet them, and they were home. During the transit nothing was said, but as they parted in the corridor, at the door of his dressing room he said, nipping her arm:

"Don't go to sleep yet."

She nodded and went on. He undressed quickly, obliged his valets to unpack a new nightshirt, a bedgown of crimson satin, and some elegant Turkish slippers. Of all these Schulenburg should have had first view; but they went unregretted the way of the Mechlin gloves, in his new curiosity about his wife. His head, shaved for the convenience of wig-wearing, looked knobbed and unsightly till he swathed it in a kind of silk turban. Thus attired he walked, with something of a strut, through an ante-chamber to the State bedroom, where on an enormous feather pillow, backed by folds of velvet bearing a coat of arms embroidered, Sophia-Dorothea lay waiting with a book in her hands. This fact struck him.

"What's this you're reading?"

She turned it so that he might see the name on the spine; a Bible. He laughed, finding it poignant and delightful that a woman about to offer intimate welcome to her husband should begin by filling her mind with texts.

"You're too young for that yet." In fact, she looked a plump eighteen with her hair on her shoulders. "Don't you know that's not at all a book for young girls? Give it to me." She abandoned it, and he began, with an expression to which the Turkish attire added something unpleasing, to search for the story of Lot and his daughters. It eluded him, however; he had not handled a Bible for long, and could discover, running the pages past his thumb, only strange explosions of metaphor, agony, or fear: "Cry, ye daughters of Rabbah, run to and fro by the hedges—the wheels were full of eyes—our time is a shadow—bondage—a fiery law——" He threw the book down impatiently, and putting his hand on the bed, vaulted up on to it.

"And what have you been doing while I was away?"

She began some account of the children, and of her charities, the progress of the garden at Herrenhausen, some new hangings sent by her father for the hall. George-Louis let her run down, and then repeated, wagging his head:

“What have you been doing? I said. You know what a man means when he says that. Any lovers?”

“No.”

“Be careful. I’ve had letters from Hanover.”

She was at once on the alert; a sense of danger held her still, while her mind trembled with conjectures.

“Letters from people who wish me well. I don’t need to give you names ____”

“I shouldn’t care to hear.”

“You might care to hear what the letters said; or whom the letters said. Perhaps you know, though. Eh? Guess now; guess whom they give you for a lover.”

“I am not concerned with anything liars may say of me. You should not believe them. You should have more thought for your honour than to believe them.”

George-Louis was just a little startled by her fierceness. Nobody had written to accuse his wife, it was his humour to tease her with a supposition of gossip. But this sudden flinging out, like a bird that swoops at the intruder too near its nest, put him on his guard.

“A man can’t look after his honour when he’s absent. Eh? Come, now, no secrets between husband and wife. Whom have you been hiding in cupboards?” She did not answer. “Or masking with at Brunswick? I know the fair; things can very well happen at the fair.” Her eyelids flickered; he was watching, and triumphed. “Ha, so it was there? Now we’re nearer the truth——”

She turned her head, so that he should not follow the movements of her eyes, but her breast was restless and it was at her breast that he looked.

“What sort of man would take your fancy, I wonder? Something like the French prisoners we’ve been making, all bows and boots, no fight in ’em; lap-dogs. That’s what would suit you, but there’s nothing like it in Hanover, thank God.”

“Why will you sit there talking? What have your French prisoners to do with me?”

“Nothing; they’re your countrymen, though, on the mother’s side; that’s where you get your fal-lal-las from.” The breaths were easing, he could see;

their talk was moving away from the danger point. With a right-about turn he was back. “But this fellow at Brunswick—”

Terrified, she could not let it pass. Silence would have baffled him, as stillness in a wild creature baulks the hunter. But Sophia-Dorothea’s thoughts were vivid with Königsmark, he walked lively through her mind; it was as though the flame within were for ever throwing his shadow outwards, in her speech, in her look; she imagined that even the blindest must perceive this shade, and put a name to the reality that cast it. Supposing George-Louis informed by some spy, and in fear for one secret, she could find no better way to distract him than to let fall the other.

“I don’t know what you’ve heard that happened at Brunswick; don’t mind it, it’s all so hopeless, there’s no danger. Poor Max and his schemes!”

“Max! This is new. What about Max? What scheme?”

“There’s jealousy of you, you know that. Your father’s will——”

“Discontented, are they? Let them; there’s no getting by it. Little King William, he made matters plain.”

She had effectively turned him aside from the other enquiry; this matter touched his having his handful of plunder.

He was serious now, suspicious and dogged. After a silence he began to question and to argue.

“What’s Max at? What’s his grievance? He’s my brother, I won’t see him lose by this arrangement. It’s to please the English. He’s only got to wait awhile; when I’m King there he can dip his hands in as deep as he likes. He can have a dukedom. Pooh! He can have Hanover, for all I care, if I get England.” She muttered that Max would never be his brother’s pensioner. “What? He takes from my father all the money he can get. My mother, too. Pensioner! You don’t know Max.”

“I know him better than you.”

“You do?” He looked at her shrewdly and angrily. “You know a great deal. What’s he been plotting? Out with it, you can’t tell me there’s nothing, you’ve said too much. What happened at Brunswick Fair?”

The repetition of those words, their nearness to her mystery, confirmed an apprehension that had been growing. She saw for an instant, but with terrifying clearness, just what she had done. As the bird’s swoop guides the seeker, she had, by this diversion, put her lover under her husband’s hand.

Königsmark was of the plot, the silly plot, without object, without chance of success.

She did then what she should have done ten minutes earlier, abandoned argument and suddenly flung herself towards her husband across the pillows.

"Won't you think a little of me, instead of all this asking and teasing ——" She put a hand to his bare neck. The touch set her shivering uncontrollably, but he might assign that to what cause he pleased. "Be kind to me. You're home again after so many months."

But George-Louis was now in no mood for her. His security, his pre-eminence had been touched, and she had a good word for the brother who threatened them. He pitched her away from him, and slid off the bed.

"That won't do. None of that with me, by God! I want the truth."

"What truth? There's nothing to tell."

He caught her wrist, twisted it brusquely sideways. She buried her face in the pillow while he hurt her; small animal sounds were forced out and smothered there; her body curved itself once or twice into an arc and fell. He was astonished, for he had used something like his full strength, and had known her squeal for the maladjustment of a pin; he let her go.

She lay, not moving, and heard the flap of his slippers across the room. The door banged. Her wrist gave her such pain that she was able to take refuge in its throbbing, and forget, or refrain from calculating, the certain consequences of this disastrous night. Nothing gained; one secret half opened, in which lay a key to the other; treachery had served no purpose. Though every beat of her pulse was faithful to her lover, though she had shuddered at the feeling of her husband's skin against her fingers, still the humiliation that went most deep was his refusal of her body. The martyrdom consummated with fire pays itself in ecstasy; the sacrifice found unacceptable gnaws wormwood.

She made her promised appearance two days later at the paternal palace, when stay-at-home officers called to pay their respects. This levee was an affair in the true Hanoverian manner, formality tumbling over into childishness, and ending cosily with cakes and wine. The Duke was not present, nor Duchess Sophia. George-Louis, in a breastplate, with his sword and soldier's hat upon a table near by, stood on a rich carpet at one end of the room. Behind him his wife sat on a faldstool with her eyes fixed on him, bowing when he bowed. Two ladies stood by her, who were supposed to

make no acknowledgment whatever of the presence of the officers; actually they chattered like pies over Sophia-Dorothea's head, exchanging scandals. When the last presentation had been made pages trotted up and carried off the military emblems, footmen swarmed in to cover the table with flagons and small cakes; and gentlemen who had been backing and filling in what might be termed a courtesy of wigs and coat-skirts became individuals again, chaffing each other and the Prince over wine-cups.

Königsmark was not among them. Sophia-Dorothea, achingly aware of this, heard his name spoken by a young man whom she knew to be one of his ensigns.

"I called at his house; they couldn't find him."

"He should know the etiquette by now."

"He's sick, I daresay. The measles——"

Both laughed; and the young man, the ensign, turned a little red, seeing the Princess so near. She went about her duty, grading her smiles in the proper manner, so that a major who was also a baron should receive a trifle more cordiality than a major whose father was burgomaster. She had strength not to speak with Max, figuring sullenly splendid among his brother's courtiers, beyond the word which was his Serene Highness's due. All the time her ears were quickened to catch the one name, and did not hear it.

When at last leave-taking began it was accomplished with soldierly promptness. In ten minutes the room was empty save for Max, who held his ground, and after the last bow came slowly to stand in front of his sister-in-law. George-Louis sat, and taking out a box and scraper began to grate tobacco for snuff. He heard their interchange, expressionless.

"Where've you been hiding?"

"There have been things to do."

"Since when have you given your servants orders not to receive me?"

"Never!" She was startled; involuntarily she looked at George-Louis. "You are always my friend."

"I see."

Max swung round. The eyes of both rested on the Prince of Hanover, who continued to prepare snuff to his liking, untroubled by their silence.

When his box contained a sufficient supply of black dust he looked up and spoke.

"I gave that order."

"You did. Give me a reason, will you?"

George-Louis rose deliberately, wearing an impermeable expression which Max recognised. He had seen it in war, at a council of general officers; it signified that his brother's mind was made up, that his plan was prepared to which he would hold though all the circumstances surrounding it might alter, and though persistence might lead to disaster. It enraged Max as no word could have done; it was at once contemptuous and content. He felt Sophia-Dorothea's hand on his arm, twitching his sleeve, pinching the flesh, but he was past assimilating hints.

"I'm going to know what you mean."

George-Louis surveyed him, and indicated Sophia-Dorothea with a turn of his snuff-darkened thumb.

"Ask the Princess."

Max answered, stammering with anger:

"You and your England! They'll send you back like they did before, with a flea in your ear. That is, if you ever get there."

George-Louis answered, pursuing his policy:

"There's one thing they won't stand, and that's a King's wife who takes lovers."

Max struck at him. The blow took some of its force from the memory of that scene in the carriage, her face of disgust when she had said that one of the brothers was enough for her. George-Louis took the fist on his forearm, and cast a quick look towards a chair for his sword; but it had been borne away by pages. Max, while Sophia-Dorothea wrestled to keep his right hand from his hilt, was blaring:

"Keep your tongue off her. She has more care for your damned honour than you have. Two days home, and last night with Schulenburg, you swine!"

George-Louis answered phlegmatically, snapping the lid of his box to and fro:

"I don't want you in Hanover. You'd better take yourself off."

“I won’t budge for you.”

“I’m going to tell my father you’ve been pestering my wife. Look at her now. Which of us would a stranger say was her husband?”

Max on this, with the blundering chivalry upon which his brother had counted, came out with the truth, dashing down her hand from his mouth.

“Tell father the truth. Tell him I won’t see our patrimony signed away, see you whistling us like dogs to come and take your leavings. Tell him I know what he’s been doing, he and Colt and Platen. The will; I know all about that. Tell him I know, and I’ll fight. I’d slit your throat now if you had your sword to stand up to me. Leave your wife out of it. If I get out of Hanover it will be to raise an army. The people are for us. I’ve got friends among your own guards——”

There was a rustling sound; Max felt a weight slide against him to his feet, and saw the curls of the Princess dark beside his shoe. He stooped at once, lifted her, and putting his fingers into a wine-cup left half full, sprinkled red drops on her face. His brother watched without moving, contemplating his own triumph. George-Louis had the primitive cunning of those hunters who tether a live lamb to lure wolves into a pit. He was not unskilful in the preparation of such traps, and had no pity to spare for the apprehensions and staggerings of the lamb. He had reckoned that the threat to his wife would certainly draw Max into an admission. As for Sophia-Dorothea, a good fright would keep her in order, sicken her of conspiracies, and perhaps bring her again to that mood of repulsion and hatred in which, when property was not threatened, she pleased him best. He looked upon them both, therefore, almost with approbation, as upon enemy prisoners after a battle, and with his own hand pulled a bell that would summon attendance and help.

The two young guardsmen whose comment on Königsmark’s absence had been overheard by the Princess went out together, and compared notes, walking away from the palace.

“The Prince asked for him. I said perhaps he didn’t understand the etiquette, a foreigner and so on—but that won’t hold water.”

“He doesn’t miss a great deal, the Prince. He never speaks at the time, but he keeps things in mind.”

“D’you think there’s anything in this story that’s going about?”

“No, I don’t.” But Major Eck did not ask what the story was or with whom it was concerned. “Here’s his house, down this way. We might see if

he's at home."

"I called this morning."

"Well; but that was this morning."

The servants, addressed in parade-ground voices, yielded. Looking at each other, they admitted that the Count was having his dinner alone, that he was not ill, so far as they knew. The major, who knew the ways of the house, with a very good show of authority pushed by both dubious footmen, and marched upstairs.

Königsmark was sitting alone, confronting a table spread with food; only one dish showed signs of disturbance, and the dog Balder, growling over the carcase of a bird, accounted for this. An inkstand and paper took incongruous precedence of partridges and woodcock, and the major observed that at their entry Königsmark, with a startled, almost a guilty movement, turned the top paper downwards. He greeted them quietly enough, called for more plates and wine, and received their scolding with good humour.

"I'm the Duke's man, I owe the Prince nothing. He would not look for me, I dare say."

"Don't deceive yourself——"

"I could not have been civil to him. I was better away."

"Well, but you failed a lady, too." The wine Königsmark was pouring halted its stream a moment. "Fräulein Knesebeck was asking for you."

"The Princess was there, then?"

"There, and blooming."

"At her husband's side, no doubt. All aglow with his home-coming."

"She looked gay. She took wine with him very prettily. They seem to have taught him some manners in Flanders."

"I don't know how he should learn. He frequents no honest women. The brothels must have recruited a few down-at-heel countesses since my time."

"He's a fair soldier, though. He can keep his temper—not like Max."

"For God's sake, Eck, have you come here to talk about these damned drill masters of ours? They don't interest me, nor anyone else. We have to put up with them, because the fools provide us with wars. But we needn't bring them up at table."

“Very good, sir.”

“I’m not speaking as your superior officer. You may disagree with me or let it alone.”

“I’ll let it alone, then, by your leave.” Major Eck was a Hanoverian born, and respected his rulers; obedience is easier if a man does not permit himself to question the right or the capacity of the power whence orders come. But he had affection for Königsmark, and being aware of a quality in the Prince which in any less sacred personage might suit with the word vindictive, he was concerned to put matters right between them. “You weren’t aware, perhaps, that it’s usual for the Guards to show him some hospitality on an occasion like this——”

“He’s done nothing for us; didn’t even give us the chance of Flanders. Here we rot, preserving the Episcopal-Ducal carcase from trouble that never comes.”

Major Eck cast a glance at Ensign Waldt, who, busy with his knife and glass, kept a face deliberately blank. What the devil’s the matter? enquired this glance. He persevered, however.

“Well, but unless we ply him we’ll never get a campaign out of him.”

“Ask him to dinner, then, any day you like. Get in a lot of girls, the poxier the better, and wine in a trough. Ply him! Well, if that’s the only way to get what we all want, let’s make him drunk as soon as we can.”

Major Eck put down the glass that was on its way to his mouth. He was uneasy.

“Königsmark, you don’t like this service. Why don’t you ask the Duke to let you be off? You’d be welcome in Saxony, and happier.”

He saw, without being able to interpret, the quick lift and fall of the eyes that received this suggestion. Königsmark took time to answer, and his hand thrummed the turned paper while he considered. At last he spoke quietly.

“It may come to that. But you’re right about the Prince. I’ll write in the regiment’s name.”

They fixed a day. That done, there seemed no more to be said, and the two officers obeyed a common impulse to leave their Colonel alone.

When the door shut at their backs he took up the paper by his plate, read what was written there, laughed briefly, crumpled and threw it to the

expectant dog. Then, taking a new sheet, he wrote in haste, careless of spelling:

"So you have gone back to him. I knew it already. I could not sleep that night, fever was in my bones. I slept and saw you together in my dreams. There was no question of necessity, so do not urge that. And don't urge duty. You knew that I had taken such steps as would safeguard you, and you gave me your word that you would rather die than endure him again. A woman's word! If she can't get one man, then she'll take another, and all this talk of repugnance, of hatred, is just so much flummery when her body is offered satisfaction. A hero home from the war is irresistible, I should have known that. I should have understood that no vows and no tenderness could prevail against instinct and habit.

"I swear now that I will respect my promise, though you have seen fit to break yours, for the sake of a lout who goes direct from your arms into those of a mistress. Did you know it? Schulenburg had him, sickness and all, not twenty-four hours after you. My promise was this, that if you received him again I would find means to challenge him. This I will do, as publicly as I can contrive. I do not care for my life. I know that it is forfeit, no matter which of us comes off best. But I should think my blood well spilled if it served to remind you that love cannot live deceived. A man suffers, suffers, in his bowels, in his brain, in the very marrow of him, when the woman he may not possess yields herself to another. It is a hell not to be told.

"I can find no words of farewell."

That sealed, he took another sheet of paper, and wrote, the pen spluttering under pressure:

"The officers of the first regiment of his Serene Highness the Duke-Bishop's Guards very humbly and loyally request the honour of his Serene Highness the Prince of Hanover's presence at dinner in the great hall of the Armoury on Saturday the ninth of this month."

The first letter reached Sophia-Dorothea as she sat alone in her room after the prodigious daily dinner. George-Louis had been polite to her all day, attentive even; when dinner was done he set out to play a dutiful game of cards with his parents, and requested her company. She would not look at him nor answer. The morning's scene, if it did not dispense her from public duty at his side, at least justified the excuse of migraine. He was pleased at her refusal, laughed, flicked her ear painfully, and said that he would be back by ten. He had every reason to be good-humoured; she, to apprehend a renewal of conjugalities, which this time she could find no reasonable way

to repel. Into this atmosphere the letter came like a cannon shot fired at clouds. Apprehension was ended, storm took its place, and for ten minutes it seemed to Knesebeck that the tormented creature shaking, wheeling, and staring about the room was in fact out of her mind. And when sentences began to shape themselves these were not reassuring.

"I must go to him."

"Highness, honey, that's wild talk, it would never do. We'll be having the Prince back in an hour's time."

"I must see him, I tell you."

"Write him a nice letter, and let Nell take it, that's the best way."

"How can I write, put down on paper, this?" Her two hands rapped her breast. "I must go."

"You shan't go. He'll despise you. What, go and seek a man out——?"

"Seek myself out, tear away this pain somehow."

Knesebeck, in dread for her own skin, aware of twenty possible disasters, held the beating hands firmly, and opposed to this fiery resolve barriers of straw. "You don't know the sign, and I won't tell it you."

"I'll go without."

"They won't admit you, his servants."

"Then I'll put back my hood, and say, 'Way for the Princess of Hanover.' "

"You wouldn't dare!" But Knesebeck, with horror surveying the fixed mouth, knew that she would. "Sweetheart, I'm not thinking of you, you'll ruin him if you go and are found there."

"He's in despair, he's ready to die, what more harm can I do? Better be found there, and die together."

"You're mad!" Knesebeck, in fear, shook her mistress roughly, as a nurse shakes a child to end an hysteria of crying. "No, no, you mustn't go; it's madness, I say!"

Sophia-Dorothea twisted out of the strong constraining hands and with a curious little access of dignity, the more startling since all dignity's trappings were gone, gave an order:

“Fetch the cloak you use. Give me the key of the gate. If the Prince returns, inform him that I have retired, and bid him not to disturb me.” Then, with a kind of tenderness quite dispassionate, involuntary with her at the sight of distress: “You are loyal, I know. Don’t fear for me. I must satisfy myself in this matter.”

Knesebeck, still tremulous, still twittering reproach and foreboding, had no resource but to fetch the key and hood. The Princess slipped the key into the breast of her fine flowered dress, donned the cloak, and with no other change, disdaining even to slip pattens over her shoes, went out into a misty night. It was not late, no more than seven o’clock, but dark already, and the streets were strange to her. She knew them only from a height in the centre of the road; their corners and alleys were unfamiliar, the smells from the gutter imperious, and the people jostled her in their concern to be quickly home and safe from the impending rain. She was aware of all those things with the surface of her mind above the anxiety which throbbed there like the drums of a regiment beating to a forlorn hope; but she made no mistake, and came soon on the house.

That gave her pause for an instant. It was the first time she had seen even the outside of his dwelling, though she knew it through Knesebeck’s eyes as she knew her own nursery at Zelle; she held to her heart, as she might have pressed a glove he had worn, the sight of the ancient leaning place that sheltered him. She stood, seeing it glorified; then came up to the door, stooping against the soft rain.

The servants recognised the unspoken sesame of her fingers, and made way, but with crossed glances over her head. She found herself in a passage whose panels each portrayed a discoloured saint carrying his gilded emblem; the light accepted only those golds, so that chalices, wheels, grids and swords stood out unaccompanied against the dark wood. An oldish man approached her, summoned by the lackeys; and looking downwards respectfully, so as not to be obliged to wear any expression, told her that the Count was not in the house, but that he would take any message or letter and give it into the Count’s own hand. She knew this man; he was the major-domo Nils, of whom Königsmark had spoken once with the casual affection of a young lord for an old servant. She need have no reticence with him.

“Take me to some room where I can speak.”

He obeyed, going before her with a sidelong motion; deference to her half-guessed identity would not allow him to turn his back altogether. She kept the hood about her face, and followed him to the room where

Königsmark took most of his meals and lived; bare, with strong wooden furniture, no pictures or mirrors, but a trophy of swords and flags on one wall. The dog Balder, who started up from the floor as they entered, sank again under the servant's voice and hand.

"I have a message for Count Königsmark. He must be found and brought here; make no excuses, it must be done."

"If the gracious one orders—but it will not be a matter of five minutes. The Count is not in Hanover town."

"Not——?" She felt certainty like a knife-thrust; but the need to have certainty confirmed gave her voice enough to finish the question: "Where?"

"At the Countess Platen's house, gracious lady. At Monplaisir."

She stood quite still. The servant, whose eyes had never once during their interview lifted higher than her knees, saw the folds of her cloak hang motionless as the Virgin's cope when the church statues were dressed for Easter. She said at last, breathlessly:

"Get me paper and a pen."

He discovered paper in a heap under some books, and pens, but the ink had dried. With an apology he departed to find some fresh, while she stood by the table, and unthinking began trimming a quill's point from broad to narrow, to suit her hand. The glint of the penknife held her eyes and thoughts for a few seconds; but its little blade could never reach the heart, no matter how desperately a hand might drive it. The man was long coming, her misery demanded instant and constant movement; yet she must leave some memory of her presence, some good-bye. With a sharp stab she thrust the little blade into her arm, and when the blood welled dipped the quill in it. A drop splashed on the paper. Underneath this she wrote one word, Adieu, and walked quickly out of the room, past the astonished returning servant, into the street, home.

Königsmark returned at some small hour after midnight. The Countess was still in no condition to receive lovers, and the sole tribute expected of him was this nightly visit, when he sat by the drawn bed-curtains answering her questions, spoken with a kind of harsh gentleness, of Sweden and his childhood. Talking thus about himself he found a kind of consolation, and was more than once within a breath, finding her so friendly, of brimming over into confidences; but the womanish and soldierly instincts that made up his nature ran forward to warn him away. They had spent the evening playing cards, she sitting up in bed, masked, for her face was peeling, and

playing with attention, playing to win, as was her custom. He was no match for her. He could never take cards seriously enough, not even the seven or eight villages of which they had robbed him could lend the fifty-two baubles an importance beyond that which they shared with battles and hunting as spurs to Time. At half-past eleven when the *parti* came to an end, he had lost, and felt for his purse to pay. She checked him.

"You owe me nothing. Do you remember the first time we played Cinq-Cents together? I reckoned the score wrongly."

"I remember."

"You take it quietly."

"Women always cheat."

She waited, looking at him through the mask's eyes, before she answered slowly:

"Think a while. Would you be a woman if one of old Sophy's alchemists could dip you in a crucible and change you? A woman, with privilege to lie, to cheat, to go underground towards ambition, to flatter your way up while you have looks, to die leaving behind you a name or no name, according as you have been wanted or unwanted by men? To be forgiven your lies, contemptuously, as an idiot or an infant is forgiven?"

He shook his head, laughing, but she was for the moment in no mood to welcome that young easy laugh.

"You are an ignoramus, my friend. Well, pray God you never grow wise. Good night; I'm tired. Don't kiss my hand."

But as he went to the door she called him back.

"I told you not to kiss my hand and you obeyed me. That was not very civil."

"I don't understand what you want me to do. Why can you never speak out clearly?"

"Because I've been a woman forty-four years. I shan't be a woman much longer." She twitched the curtains back, and the mask down, so that the reddened and haggard face, with a preposterous spangled turban on top, confronted him squarely. "I'll speak clear, then, for once. Let me bear a child of yours, Philip. I could carry it with joy."

He looked up quickly, then down, and stood nonplussed, a little sickened, while she gazed at him without any care to hide the eagerness and

demand in her eyes. He made, at last, a movement to kiss her hand, but she drew it away to slip the mask once more into place, and in her ordinary manner, the voice no longer urgent, dismissed him.

"Take comfort, my little Colonel. A man who understood women would be a hateful creature; but you are not there yet, nor half-way. I'll spare you the protestations of devotion. Good night."

He rode home through the mist and occasional cool curtain of rain disturbed, and thinking how he could best get out of Hanover. An exchange into the Saxon service—then he remembered what was planned for five days hence, when the Prince was to dine, and involuntarily kicked his horse into a canter. The problem would solve itself then, one way or another.

At his house he found the old servant Nils waiting and rated him familiarly.

"Be off to bed, I don't need wet-nursing."

"There was a lady, my lord. I took her to the west parlour, and she wrote something there when she had learned you were from home."

"Where is it? Give it me."

"I thought best to leave it where she left it."

Königsmark ran upstairs, snatching the candlestick out of the old man's hand. Holding this, and waiting for its wavering light to steady, he saw a white square patch on the table, and brought the candles down to it. The stain and the word had darkened in the hours that had passed since she stood there, but he knew that both were done in blood; the penknife's point was crusted. Nils, following slowly, found his master staring at this paper, one hand at his throat as if he were choking, the other hanging, and stepped forward to take the tilting candlestick. It dropped before he could reach it; the flame falling on a deerskin set the hair alight, made a stench, and went out. He knelt, bringing a flint and tinder from his pocket, but the wick was not rekindled before he heard his master blundering from the room, downstairs in the dark, and away.

Königsmark ran through the silent town, and by the route Sophia-Dorothea had taken, to the *Alte Palais*. He too had his key to the garden, though the soldiers on guard were of his own regiment and would not have halted him. He stole past yews cut to the shapes of birds, and a fountain whose thread of falling water was overwhelmed now by rain. He knew which windows had been hers; they were blank. He could not believe that the woman who had pierced her veins to write that word in blood could now

be sleeping, and waited an hour, throwing his will forward like a siege engine against their blankness. Only a light, or the shadow of her head on a curtain; a sound, a sigh! But nothing stirred.

On the ninth day of the month the officers of his Serene Highness the Duke-Bishop's first regiment of Guards assembled in the *Rüstkammer*, the ancient hall which for two hundred years had served for indoor drilling of volunteers, and to which burgomasters, flattered to find themselves in armour, had bequeathed portraits, banners, and ancient weapons, spoils of the sempiternal sixteenth-century wars. The officers wore no uniform; to equip an entire army with distinctive dresses was beyond the purse of Ernest Augustus, a luxury which none but magnificent show-kings like Louis XIV could afford, but there was, for all that, no great diversity of cut or colour in the coats and laces. A little more gold on the waistcoat or a little less; sword-hilts less ornate or more; an order ribbon here and there from shoulder to hip; in these details the chief differences lay. The faces, coat-skirts and wigs all were full.

The talk ran on professional lines, with a little banter, while they waited for their guest.

"—I say, and always shall, that we'll never get our men to march distances till we give up putting them into woollen stockings. Let them wear good shoes only, with gaiters of leather, and grease their feet well, and good-bye to blisters."

"We'd be a laughing-stock. I can see the Frenchmen——" with pantomime and accent the ensign portrayed the enemy's contempt —" 'Tallow stockings! *Ma foi, ça pue!*' "

"Appearance, appearance! You'll be asking us to leave off wigs next, Major. A good appearance in your troops is half the battle, self-respect——"

"The Frenchmen sole their shoes with wood. By God, there's something to be said for it, every copse your cobblers' supply, instead of waiting till the tanners are pleased to let you have skins."

"The French! the French! Why not take our notions of equipment from an ally for a change?"

"You've got to fight the devil with his own weapons. Now, when I was at Mons I saw——"

But trumpeters brayed that reminiscence silent, and to the tune, high-flung from brass and silver, of the ducal fanfare George-Louis entered, with three gentlemen. He wore the dark green coat which suited him, and his

pock-marked face had an expression sufficiently affable; the prospect of an evening with men, talking of war, and drinking late, was pleasant to him. The officers stood straight, then doubled as he passed them, swords lifting their skirts to the angle of a cock's tail-feathers. Königsmark, coming forward to greet the guest, halted ten feet away from him to make his bow. The first words were exchanged like musket shots, at a distance.

"Very gratifying, Colonel, to visit the regiment."

"The regiment is honoured."

"I hope to contrive for you to see some fighting in the spring."

"We look forward to showing what we can do."

Königsmark spoke as to an equal, using no titles of address. George-Louis may not have observed this; the officers did, and looked uncomfortable, for their Colonel had been two years in the service, and allowance could no longer be made for him as a foreigner. But Königsmark escorted the Prince civilly enough to a place of honour at the cross-table, and himself took a seat to the left of the guest. Wine was poured as they came to their places, the procession of servers entered at once, and soon in a rattle of pewter the unwonted greeting was forgotten.

Half-way through dinner, Königsmark puzzled them again. It was his duty to propose the toast to their service, to extol the Brunswickers' achievements, and predict future victories. He rose, and took a roaring welcome; manners or none, foreign or no, he was a fighter whom most of them had seen in action.

"Serene Highness——" it was his first use of the title as yet —"gentlemen. I speak your language badly; that must excuse what lacks. If you do not care to excuse, then you may call me to account for it, and you will find me ready to answer in a language we all speak." He touched his sword.

The clamour died down; there were glances. Only George-Louis sat unmoved, lifting his wine-glass with exquisite hands, his father's hands, to display which Ernest Augustus had, long ago, learned the guitar.

"I am to give you our health; that is the custom. But we are men enough, we don't need health. We need other things more; equipment, and good leadership. Before his Serene Highness the Duke gave me employment here, I had the luck in Dresden to see something of the Elector of Saxony's troops. No cheese-paring in Saxony. His soldiers are as fine as opera-singers. There

is always work, experiment, going on in his armouries. That is an army that keeps as an army should——"

But already murmurs were growing, and a phrase, spoken aloud, came to him from the right-hand table:

"They're no good to fight. Against the Turks they ran——"

"Right, Captain. And why? Because soldiers want leading, and leaders don't drop out of the sky. You can't make a leader as you make a field-marshal, with a yard of ribbon and a gilt stick."

The noise dropped again, quite suddenly. George-Louis' marshaldom was recent. This was a direct insult from host to guest, and every man in the room perceived it. Involuntarily faces turned towards the squat figure sitting sideways in a tall velvet chair, to find in its face no indication of any sentiment by which they might guide their behaviour. The squat figure, not budging, not changing expression, setting down a half-empty glass with deliberation, did speak, however:

"Our soldiers are kept for war, not to smell oranges on parade. Dresden, you say. If Dresden gave you such paragons to handle I'm astonished you ever left it."

"I left Dresden," Königsmark answered loudly, and measuring George-Louis with a fencer's eye, "because if I had stayed I must have served a prince I despised. He's a man who betrays his adorable wife for a dirty grasping bitch of a mistress."

It should have brought the rest of George-Louis' wine slashing across his face. The officers, half-rising, looked for just such an issue. But the squat green figure remained immovable, the face twisted to no pattern of resentment; only the voice, a little thickened, said:

"Well, Colonel. You obeyed your conscience. And now, let's have the toast."

Königsmark's hand went to his glass. He was furiously angry and restless, needing to release both fury and energy in quarrel. But his neighbour caught his hand, and George-Louis sat stubbornly, determined to resent no insult, taking patience from his blood. He was no coward, but he was Hanover's, perhaps England's heir, and by virtue of such dignity no longer a man; his honour was invulnerable, being the honour of a line of demi-gods. Spittle falls short of Olympus. Königsmark, becoming aware of this at last, sat down with a bewildered look, the toast uncalled, and a

captain with quick wits and a rich voice broke into their old song of the Black Brunswicker:

"I carried a pike when I was born,
That made my mother uneasy——"

They seized it, catching the tune away from him, letting out discomfort, amazement and dismay in a tumult of rhythmic noise, and for the rest of the evening songs went on, bawdy or sentimental, until the last stalwarts left above the table were roaring out hymns. Königsmark did not sing. He sat with a face grown perfectly white, looking before him. George-Louis, on his right, sang with the rest, and drank until he swayed off his chair, when the evening's entertainment, for him, was over.

Four orderlies carried him—an officer having loosened the tight cravat—out to his coach, where his own servants discussed among themselves, decorously, the problem of what next to do with him. After such bouts it was their usual custom to deposit him at the house of that noble lady his mistress, Ermengarda Melusina von Schulenburg. But it was known that she, having risen imprudently to welcome the Prince, had caught cold and was now at death's door, with tan-bark strewn outside her own. The footmen argued it out, and at last agreed very sensibly first to try what an hour's airing would do for his Serene Highness, and then, when he was a little more presentable, to take him home. One of them got into the carriage beside the limp personage to prevent his lolling head from being cracked against the coachwork as they swung round corners, and at a brisk pace the four horses set off. Round the town they clattered, down the high street, down by the Leine river, back again and round. At the end of an hour the supporting footman was able to report some signs of returning consciousness, enough, he thought, to enable his Serene Highness to put one foot in front of the other, if held up at the shoulders; and accordingly the equipage made its way home.

At the *Alte Palais* sentries stamped, wheeled, and presented weapons as field-marshal their Prince was borne up the steps, legs dangling—the footman's estimate had been too optimistic—muttering unintelligible complaints. The indoor servants were about, and alert with lights; it was not much more than ten o'clock, though the drinking had lasted six hours. They too held conference; and deciding that to bear him upstairs might cause noise, and disturb the Princess, it was agreed that the ground-floor bed should be made up for this night. The major-domo gave his orders, with the result that Sophia-Dorothea, descending from her children's nursery, where she had gone to be comforted and calmed by the sight of innocent sleeping

creatures, saw a procession skulking down the broad main stairway; one liveried man carapaced with a mattress, another with a feather bed, a third bearing reverently two Turkish slippers and a gown. She began to laugh, then caught her breath and came towards them.

"What's this? What are you doing?"

The eldest of the footmen and the least cumbered, he of the slippers, answered woodenly:

"Orders of his Serene Highness. The bed to be made up below."

Her first thought was that Schulenburg must be in the house. Then, recollecting the woman's plight, she corrected this supposition by another linked with the first; that George-Louis must be ill, sickening for the measles, in which case the children must be kept from him, and a doctor summoned. She would not ask the servants anything further. It was some relief to have a matter to deal with, a small immediate matter that would turn her mind from its round. She ran past the man, downstairs and along the chilly corridor that led to his old rooms. At one door his chief valet stood, and did not at once give way at sight of her. She had to order him to step aside, which he seemed to do with reluctance, and came past him to discover her husband in a chair, red-faced, and talking gustily like a man in delirium. She went to him; the valets, bowing, backed away, but looked at each other uncomfortably behind her shoulders. George-Louis looked at her, steadied his eyes to focus the apparition, and shot out a hand almost in her face.

"Say good-bye," said he loudly, slurring the words, "I've got to go. He's got to go, excuse me, that is. Go and be damned for a Swedish pup, that's what I say."

She was near enough now to perceive what was wrong with him. His breath was sickly with wine, nastily sweet. The servants expected her to turn, and be gone out of the room. Instead she dismissed them, and kneeling, holding the drunken head to face her, she spoke to it urgently:

"What have you been doing? Who's this that you speak of?"

The head rolled knowingly.

"I'm not going to tell you. I manage my own business. Max, I got Max out of the way. They can't get past me. I represent law. Law. It's the law that an insubordinate officer gets shot. You'll find that in all the regulations. Anyway, I say so. Shot, and no questions asked. That's discipline, that's what I stand for, keeping up respect for general officers, example to the rest, the silly Swedish pup—"

He checked this running speech, looked astonished and apprehensive for a moment, then vomited. She drew back from him sharply, put a hand to her own mouth, and fled upstairs, where she pulled at the bell-rope like one ringing for a bridal till a page came, the boy she trusted.

"Christian, what time is it?" The manikin on her clock answered, striking eleven, but she was too distraught to count it, and the boy had to give her the hour in words. "Christian, are you faithful, can you carry a letter? Say to yourself that you are saving one life, two perhaps, and think only that; indeed, there's nothing more."

He stammered, eyes on the floor, that he had no thoughts, that he would die, let alone carrying a message——

"Yes, yes. Wait then, I'll write it. You'll have to make haste, and you must find him, no matter where he is. Bring me a light and hold it here, so."

She wrote, while the boy stiffly held up a four-branched lustre, his eyes fixed on the opposite wall so as not to spy upon her letter. It was no more than a sentence or two.

"Come at once with the bearer to the place where he will bring you. Let nothing hinder you, it is a matter—" She hesitated, then used the lesser truth and the one more sure to bring him—"of my life and safety. I implore and command you."

She folded this, but there was no wax, and she put it so, without fastening, into the boy's hands.

"You took a message for me before. This is to the same person. Don't speak his name. Bring him to the door by the garden steps. You mustn't fail."

"I'll die first."

"Don't talk of death, you stupid boy, for God's sake." Then, made sorry by his flickering eyes: "I'll remember that you helped me, Christian."

He went, and for twenty minutes she paced, distracted, from the fire to the door, from the door to the desk. Königsmark must be out of Hanover by daylight. How to persuade him?

For she was aware of the curious pride of men, who would strip themselves of their dearest possessions, risk the loss of love or of country, rather than accept to be called not brave; as though this quality alone, which they shared with otters and game-cocks, were that which held them upright in the sun under God's eye. She tried to plan her persuasions: You cannot

fight twenty men, there is no disgrace in escaping from assassins; once you gave me your life, you must not throw away that which is not your own. But this last plea brought to her mind, not the scene by the birches, but the voice of old Nils, and his face looking awkwardly down as he told her that Königsmark was with Clara Platen. A woman in love can pardon one great offence more easily than many lesser treasons; Sophia-Dorothea only bit her lip, and halted her march a moment for this. He must live, though she never saw him more, though at the end of his life he might not be able even to recall her name.

The manikin struck midnight. Immediately afterwards a tap sounded at her door, and the boy Christian, brighteyed, stood beckoning on the threshold. She had forgotten to find or to put on a cloak, and her dress left arms and neck bare. The boy, observing this, swung his own cloak off, and put it about her still warm from his shoulders, happy to lend her something of the pulsing of his blood. They went together by a servants' staircase to the lower floor of the palace, keeping away from the main lighted corridor, and through that room with Brunswick portraits where Königsmark had waited, one rainy summer day. Her solitary travelling candle's light rose no further than the breastplates of these minatory princes, their staring eyes and sulking mouths that disapproved the venture remained unseen. The door was reached, Christian opened, bowed, closed it, and stood sword in hand on guard, his thoughts an astonishing confusion of imagined embraces, pleasure in his own selfless devotion, jealousy, and pride.

On the steps a figure was waiting. As before at Brunswick it was too dark for the lovers to see faces; they spoke to know each other, whispering and standing apart:

"Princess?"

"It's you."

The word of farewell signed in blood, the reproaching letter, at once were forgotten. There was nothing between them, neither memory nor future; they were solitary, out of time, learning each other newly with mouth, nostrils, hands. It was she who thrust him away at last.

"Listen. There's danger."

"Don't think, don't speak. How long is it since I've held you like this?"

"You must listen. He's planning to kill you."

"I can't think of anything but you. I don't care what anyone plans, I can take care of myself."

“Not against a regiment—”

“Yes, against a regiment. Sweet, sweet, why did we hurt each other so?”

“We can’t know the truth, separated as we are. I think a hundred miseries when I don’t see you; lies, but how can I tell? And then I want you to suffer, because I’m so wretched.”

“I know, and I torment you, but myself most of all.”

“You went to her.”

“To quiet all this talking. Not for love.”

“Say that again, swear it. I want so to believe it.”

“I hate her, the painted old madam. Do you suppose I wouldn’t rather cut my hand off?”

“I begged you not to go, I told you I’d take him back again.”

“God’s bowels, you didn’t do it?” She was silent; he stood away from her throwing both hands up to his head, a wild gesture that she could only guess at in the dark. “That night? I stood there, there under your windows till morning, praying, weeping my eyes out. But there was no sign. And all the time”—A frenzy shook him; his fists threatened the sky. “I’ll kill him now, the drunken pig, in the very bed.”

She caught him in both her arms; the frantic hands descended gently enough to hold her, but still he was groaning and swaying like a man in pain.

“Let that all go, it’s over, there’s another thing to think of—”

“No, that’s the way. Kill him and have done.”

“Murder!”

“I’d give him a sword. Make him fight. But I’d kill him, and there’d be an end. Women can’t know jealousy. They can’t possess, and so they can’t know what jealousy is.”

“Why won’t you understand? It’s real danger, and time’s so short—”

“Come with me. You can ride; I remember that from the old days. Come as you are to my house, I’ll lend you clothes, there are horses ready. You’ll be my page—”

She struck her hands against his shoulders, teased again by her indocile memory; Charlotte-Elizabeth’s letter read aloud long ago by Duchess Sophia came alive in her mind after years of quiescence. “As my carriage halted by

this inn, in front of which stood the young Swedish Count, flicking his dog's nose, the hostess came rushing downstairs and shouted for the whole marketplace to hear, *Monsieur, monsieur, votre page s'accouche!* At which nobody could help laughing, not even the young man himself, who stood treat to as many postilions and loafers as could get near the inn in honour of his paternity." She had been a Princess for twenty years, a lover some few months only. She could not throw those years aside; habit, the long discipline of her status, prevailed even over desire. True, it was Königsmark's brother of whom Charlotte-Elizabeth had related her story, but the squalid picture was one in which she could not bear to recognise any figure that might be her own.

"Don't talk so. I only want one happiness, to know you're safe."

"That's not my notion of happiness. I want to go out fighting, and if I can fight for you, that's heaven." He dropped the whole subject as suddenly as a child might, and went on, standing a little away from her: "Will you do something I want very much?"

She did not answer, but looked quickly and piercingly through the dark at his face, to discover there his meaning, if she could.

"Will you call me by my name?"

She spoke it on a half-breath:

"Philip."

"Again."

"Philip. What is it, what has hurt you?" He had dropped to his knees with his arms about her thighs, and she could feel him shaking against her. Her hand that went to his forehead pressed the eyelids and found them wet. "Don't, don't, it's not for you to cry. You'll set me off, and I mustn't, for if I do I shan't have strength." Strength in fact had come to her from that attitude of childish dependence and pleading to which he had fallen; all her courage and wit were concerned to be wise for him, and she spoke as she might have reasoned with her little son. "Now you mustn't grieve me any more. You mustn't put me to the misery of hearing that you are taken and put under arrest. Why are you afraid to go? Do you think I shall change? Do you think that? No, no, never; you know me too well. While I live I shall love you. But I must be able to think of you walking free, and see you in my mind laughing, or in battle, yes, in battle; riding bravely. I would not change, if I could, that which is in your blood. While I know that you're alive, I can

thank God daily. Give me just this happiness, I ask so little; only to know you're alive."

The bare trees about them had, once or twice, groaned with some pressure of wind; now to their plaint was added a murmur of light rain. Königsmark felt the drops as he lifted his face to her gentle, long and trembling kiss. He did not answer what she had said, but suddenly rose to his feet, and lifting her in his arms as he had taken the baby Sophy, carried her slowly up the stone steps and to the door. There he set her down. She put out her hand in farewell. He did not kiss it, but bowed his forehead to it in a gesture of submission that she understood, and turned away quickly as the door opened.

Christian by his candle's light saw that the Princess's cheeks and mouth were dead-white, and offered his arm at once, bundling away the sword he held. She looked at him as if she did not see his gesture; then intelligence came into her eyes, and with the small gracious nod of ceremony she accepted its support. But her twenty years of training stood her in better stead than the boy's clenched muscles during the walk to her room.

III

CLARA VON PLATEN

Oh, for a Curse
To kill with!

Pierre. Daggers, Daggers, are much better!
Jaffeir. Ha!
Pierre. Daggers.

—*Venice Preserv'd.* Act II, Scene II.

(I)

"My dearest Aunt," wrote Charlotte-Elizabeth of Orléans in 1692, "or rather, let me have the pleasure of writing it, Electoral Highness! I rejoice that the Emperor has at last awarded the honour of the bonnet to one who, for family virtue, so entirely deserves it, even though this should mean another enemy for the land of my adoption and exile. For exile it is, to dwell in a country where the King's brother's wife has no higher title than any fishwife that comes to her kitchen with a string of eels. Madame, indeed! It rings poorly beside your Highness's new appellation.

"I hear from various quarters that your Highnesses are well rid of that young adventurer from Sweden. My letters tell me of most intolerable doings in Dresden, where his sister Aurora presides, disgracing her sex and plucking her stupid Elector of money. What do you say to this, for example? A whole good Saxon valley filled with artificial waters, and boats in the shape of swans floating round this young person, who appeared like Venus rising from the sea, in a gilt shell, and with only the traditional draperies. It is a scandal. I told his Majesty here that I now took back anything I might have said about the immorality of the French, and blushed for my countrymen instead; to which he answered with a laugh that the Elector of Saxony's earlier diversion (bending horseshoes with his bare hands) was certainly far less expensive. The fact is, that since these Swedes have come into his good graces he has exceeded all bounds. Naturally! They feel no responsibility to a sovereign and a country not their own, and get out of him all they can.

"But I did not bring in Königsmark in order to reflect on the Elector, who after all is a good prince, and related to persons of high descent and value, but because he has been talking very indiscreetly and ungratefully of his sojourn in Hanover. I have heard, my dearest Aunt, though I have not troubled you with them, a good many rumours in which his name and that of your daughter-in-law were linked. Now it appears that these were ill-founded, and I am glad I gave them no credence, for what do you think? It was Countess Platen for whom he had a tenderness, and the stories he tells of her when he is in his cups are exceedingly funny. I hope her correspondents in Dresden have not such long pens as mine, for she would rage to be informed of such chatter, though the young man is evidently worthless, and I understand she keeps to none of her fancies very long. He

has lost a great part of his fortune at cards, they tell me, and a great part of his looks at—I will not guess what game."

Countess Platen had, in fact, correspondents in Dresden; and on the same day that Duchess Sophia received this letter from her niece was receiving at Monplaisir a young man, Baron Carl-Johann Vizthum, who acted there as her spy. He was a poor young man with his way to make, who, lacking the temperament for battle and the physique which makes for success in boudoirs, had adopted the profession of troubler of the waters. His eyes and ears were at the service of half a dozen people, who paid him highly, and reckoned not without reason upon his discretion. It was the custom among less scrupulous enquirers to sell information to one client against another, involving whole societies in a cat's cradle of mistrust. Carl-Johann avoided this temptation and never lost his patrons, who regarded him as a man of probity.

It was this person who sat in Countess Platen's parlour by a February fire, and read to her, from notes kept in a shorthand which he alone understood, his account of the doings at Dresden. She stood before the fire, straddled like a man, petticoats bunched up behind her in both hands to let the warmth come at her backside, and listened to the gossip she had paid for.

"I was in company with the Count during the whole of one evening spent in his sister's rooms. She has great influence with the Elector and her brother accordingly is very much in favour. The Elector owes him money, some debt contracted when they were together in Flanders, but does not pay. The sister, he says, has had the brother's portion. It is certainly true that Countess Aurora is most lavishly entertained there, but there is some doubt whether her ascendancy will last much longer."

"Why's that? Is she playing a double game?"

"Another lover? Nothing of that kind, she is very deeply attached to the Elector. But I have a certain acquaintance, a physician, who told me that she will bear the Elector a child six months or so hence—accidents apart, that is."

"Well. And won't that please him?"

The spy, when he did not read from his notes, spoke incautiously. He was upset, besides, by the thought of that generous and intimate expanse of flesh which the excitedly leaping flames were warming.

"Your experience, madam, will have told you that princes do not rejoice at the prospect of pleasure curtailed and a bastard to keep." He began to

stammer. “That is, I should say, the general experience, nothing particular—my meaning was only that this has been the general observation.” Countess Platen, whose only child had been just such a bastard as that which Aurora Königsmark was to bear, took no offence, but let out a great laugh at this; then sighed, for no reason.

“Well. She’s to bear him a child, and he don’t care for a sickly woman. Is that what it comes to? Well, a man with a couple of hundred children—”

“One hundred and ninety-one,” the spy corrected her.

“—can’t be expected to keep any vivid interest in paternity. So the sister’s star will decline. And the brother, the brother; what of him?”

The spy consulted his notes and was off at once, full sail.

“Count Philip is an ornament to any court. He is well-looking, dances, and dresses well, and sings a good song. He is, however, somewhat given to drink, and while in this condition is apt to carry a loose tongue. I have notes here of certain things which he has been heard to say with regard to their Serene Highnesses the Duke and the Prince—”

“Has he spoken of the Princess?”

The spy sought among his papers, and discovered a leaf; read it with pressed lips, and put it away to ferret again in the sheaf. Countess Platen watched, and behind her back one hand snapped finger and thumb together under the folds of silk stuff.

“I have this, and this, which may be taken to apply to the Princess, but since he mentioned no name, and since I am always careful not to report what may be irrelevant matter—”

“I’m judge of that. I know his sentiments and can apply them. Read what you have.”

“He said once, playing dice with the Countess Aurora: ‘I can only throw deuce to-day. It stares up at me like a pair of dark eyes that I left behind in Hanover. One day I’ll stake my life on that adorable deuce.’ As you see, this is not conclusive—”

“What else?”

“Another time I heard him say he didn’t care for tall women. His sister laughed, and told him his tastes must have changed. ‘They have changed,’ said he, ‘but they’ll change no more. Oh, the little women with ripe mouths!

They melt in your arms.' Once more there is nothing, except that the Princess undoubtedly is not tall, and her lips are very red and full."

"No name, ever? Even when he's drunk?"

"No, madam. It may be discretion, or it may be that—in short, you cannot drink from a glass unless somebody has first poured liquor into it."

Countess Platen would not argue this. She was glad to believe that Königsmark told nothing of the Princess because he had nothing to tell. Her inner mind, however, that mirror of experience, that ranger along the ways of men's motives, pricked her with the reminder that love sometimes, unthinking, will avoid the snares life sets for it; pain, wine, sleep. But she hushed that murmur.

"Now let me hear what he says of me."

Carl-Johann Vizthum shuffled his papers, and looked up from them quickly, once, with the glance of a dog guessing at the master's temper. The Countess perceived his hesitation.

"I pay for the truth, let me remind you."

"It may not be pleasant hearing—"

She let fall her petticoats, and a stride or two carried her to the table, on which glasses were set, with cordials. There she poured two full glasses, of which she gave him one.

"Take your courage in both hands and down with it. It's good Hollands; puts heart into Dutchmen. And I'll take my dose for company."

He drank the fiery stuff, coughed, waited till she was seated in a red velvet chair, and went on, reading more strongly:

"At a banquet given by his Serene Highness the Elector, Count Königsmark was called upon for a song. He made no demur, but mounted a chair"—How well she could see him, a little flushed, and his hair tumbled, with a boy's grin and the singing mouth open to show tiny sound teeth. "He mounted a chair and sang this song, which he assured the company he had made in your house, and to which he gave the tide, 'Lament of Count Platen.' It goes to the tune of 'Acteon once.' " Precisely uttering, and tapping out the tune with his left fingers on his knee, Carl-Johann Vizthum gave the song:

"Acteon once some dames espied
Ere they their naked charms could hide,
But chaste Diana shook her bow,
And planted antlers on his brow.
With hey diddle, high diddle, do.

Just Dian, heed! My spouse discovers
Her privities to twenty lovers.
Shake not awry thy rod divine,
They view the charms, the horns are mine,
With hey diddle, high diddle, do."

Without looking up, and continuing to read fast, the spy proceeded:

"On another occasion he has been heard to say that if a young man goes to the Countess Platen to plead his advancement, it is not to her ear that he must address himself. Again: 'She cheats at cards, but what of that? *Puisqu'elle vous laisse toujours payer de votre personne.*' At a great dinner, when he had drunk more wine than his head could stand, he announced very loudly that in Hanover lived the most charitable lady in Europe. 'Who is that?' the guests asked him. 'It is the Countess Platen, and I'll tell you why I praise her. She is no longer young, but she values her smooth skin and has reason to do so; for after all a face is nothing when the lights are out. This white body she preserves by bathing it daily in ass's milk, as empresses did in Rome. But the empresses were pagans, who poured the milk away when they had done with it. Not so Dame Clara, who at the end of her bathe admits a dozen poor persons with jugs and canikins, who may bale up the milk and take it away for their children, no charge made either.' This story caused a good deal of fun, and was the origin of a new name they have now for soap in Dresden, the Countess Platen's cheese—"

Carl-Johann looked up under his lashes and saw in the velvet chair four feet away a Fury seated. He began to stammer:

"I warned you, madam, that there was some unpleasant matter here, but you would have it. I hope you will regard this as a proof of my integrity, that I don't doctor up my news to make it palatable. What I hear, that I put down. It is not my fault if Count Königsmark—"

At that came explosion, a roar like a beast from the woman in the chair.

"Liar, liar, you are employed by enemies, you are bribed by men jealous of him. Be quiet! I won't hear you, I know the truth, I know the Count. You had better have watched him longer, and studied his way of speech before

you concocted this dirt, this turd, and fastened it on him. Get out of my house."

"My pay! There's a month's work here—"

"Get it from your other paymasters. If you stay six seconds longer I'll have you whipped."

"Madam! I'm a gentleman—"

"My men shall scourge twenty-four quarterings on your back, then. Go, and be damned to you, and get your double money where you can."

He could not stand his ground, and fairly ran from the room while she stood glaring, the nails driving into her palms. When Vizthum was gone she seemed to recollect herself, and after another glass of Hollands rang the bell twice, the sign to her women that she would come upstairs and to bed.

In the room hung with red Maria was waiting, ready with a silk turban to keep the dressed hair tidy all night, and some scented oil in a bowl with which to loosen rouge and powder from her mistress's cheeks. Clara Platen went direct to the mirror, as was her custom. There, standing, she surveyed her face closely, frowning, smiling, trying all its expressions, and turning with a hand-glass to have a clear sight of the profile, the thickened flesh below the chin. This done, she called Maria to unhook her bodice, and when it dropped let fall the shift too, so that she stood naked to the waist, below which a bell of silk flowed out, and viewed herself thus in the glass with the same particularity. A brief laugh ended the inspection; as she turned to thrust her arm into the bedgown sleeves she gave one order:

"Fetch the Jacob casket."

Maria went, reassured; for if the posturings had been unwonted this request for the casket embroidered with the story of Jacob was a nightly affair. In it were kept letters, and such trifles as Königsmark had touched or given, and it stood by the bed at night. Maria had never seen it opened, though she knew well enough what the contents must be. To-night when the mistress unlocked it with a little key that hung at her neck, and threw back the lid, Maria, peering discreetly, could see lying in it one or two papers, some dead leaves, a handkerchief, a jewelled pin, and a knot of ribbon. These her mistress tumbled out on to the table in a heap and looking at them steadily said:

"Clear this rubbish away. Put it on the fire."

"The letters, ma'am?"

“Hang them on a hook in the privy; they’ll serve some purpose there.”

“The handkerchief—it’s pretty lace—”

“Burn it. Burn everything. I’ve finished with you for the night.”

The maid Maria carefully turned into her apron the little hoard, and went out, respectfully curtseying. In the neighbouring room the other abigails read painfully, and craning over her shoulder, two notes in bad German, written stiffly in tall characters:

“I am happy, madam, to receive the token of your regard which you were so generous as to send me this morning. I shall wear it in memory of inestimable favours granted, and in hope of future kindnesses.”

“That was when she sent him the pin. Look, here it is, all bent. Now when did that come back?”

“He’s been edging away for a long time.”

“He’s off now for good. She’s in a terrible state to-night.”

“Hans says she was bawling at that little man, that Baron that was here. He says he thought there’d be murder done, and the little man came out with a face on him—”

“What’s the other letter, Maria? Read it out.”

“ ‘Madam, I have received your very gracious letter, but it will not be in my power to take advantage of the privilege you so amiably offer. I have this morning taken a purge—’ ”

Laughter, and half a dozen comments.

“There’s a love-letter for you. Thank the Lord my Klaus finds better things to say than give me news of his belly. They’ve no decency, the great people. It’s not respectful to any lady. What next, what else?”

“ ‘—this morning taken a purge, and could not take guard to-day for the same reason. I pray that I may continue to deserve your good opinion.’ ”

“And that’s all? No more, only the two letters? Well, I must say—Let me have the knot, Maria, it’s good ribbon.”

“She told me to burn them.”

“It’s a sin. Burn that good lace, and the pin with the picture?”

“I wouldn’t cross her to-night, I’d rather throw slops on my mother’s grave. You haven’t seen her. She’s half-way mad.”

"Well, for God's sake!"

The red room stank, in which Clara Platen lay awake. Dogs had been in it, there was a musky odour from some pastilles burning, and smoke from the fire, on to which hair-trimmings had been thrown, belched out as the wind in the chimney roared or withdrew. One of the small curly dogs, Angel, her favourite, who had been drowsing on his cushion, took the darkness and quiet as a signal that he might jump on to the coverlet. He scrambled up, making a leap from the footstool that served her to ascend, and landed by her side. She struck him immediately, full on the snout, so that his jaws opened to a howl, and he bundled off the bed, smarting. She heard, when he regained his corner, the beat of a tail, apologetic on the floor.

"Like a man," thought Clara Platen, "you only have to hit hard enough. But I don't want his penitence. I want—"

She did not, even in her mind, speak the word that held her meaning; but she tossed till almost morning, contriving how best to bring about that which she would not name.

At last her throbbing body slackened, slept, and had its fulfilment in a dream that came as the birds were waking. A man lay with her in this dream. He felt chill, and she said to herself, remembering old women's tales and the trial of a witch once witnessed, that this was the Devil. He was vigorous, but grew momently colder as they moved together. At last she put a hand to his heart when it should have been most urgent, and found no stir there, no beat at all. She thrust him from her, he tumbled sideways in a heap, and it was a dead man's face, Königsmark's face, that she peered at on the pillow. Her own choked scream woke her.

(II)

One of the Electoral displays of dining was held next day, and attended by obsequious Hanover even to the fifth grade of precedence. All went forward as in the past. There was a ceremonial entry to trumpets, Electress Sophia leading the procession on her husband's arm, wearing a magnificent ill-adjusted dress, no rouge, and the superb laces on her head contemptuously askew. George-Louis followed with his wife, she holding her fingers curved so that they barely touched his arm. After that there was a diminuendo. Charles was dead, Max in prison, Gustchen in Holland, and none of these had left wives or descendants to lend the show splendour. The Countess Platen, however, splendidly dressed and walking like an Amazon

as she knew how, brought up the rear with dignity. It was her first public appearance for some little time. She had been unhappy, and Ernest Augustus once more crippled with gout. They felt a mutual disinclination for each other's company, and since they were persons without false sentiment, had let each other alone. But on such an occasion as this, the gout having subsided and the sick heart solaced itself with planning, they met with pleasure and no sense of change.

The Countess Platen, dispensed by etiquette from the need for much talking, used her eyes and her wits to decipher the various Serenities' moods. Old Sophia was happy; she had an unfortunate English bishop on her left hand at whom from time to time in excellent English she flung such questions as: "And you, my lord, what significance do you lend to the wheels in Ezekiel?" The Elector too was cheerful, being newly released by his physicians from a diet. George-Louis did not trouble his wife with talk nor anyone else, but lifted his glass, it seemed to the calculating eye, somewhat more often than was his usual custom. The English envoy, Sir William Colt, was engaged in protecting his bishop as well as he could. The Princess—

Clara Platen looked long and steadily at the Princess. She saw a new thinness of the face; the stiff bodice did not cling so tightly as it used. She wore a dress of white brocade with gold flowers, cut very low. Once she put a hand into her breast and seemed to touch or move something that lay there, a letter perhaps, which, riding up as she moved, threatened to show itself and betray her. If a letter, then an unkind one; her eyes were a little swollen at the lids. Clara Platen, who liked to reckon truly the forces against her before she began any manœuvres, set down now such advantages as the younger woman possessed. Youth, yes; but with it ignorance, impatience, and credulity. Love, yes; but vulnerable everywhere. The right to sit in an armchair while Clara Platen stood or took a stool; power to bend backs, but not to shake swords, to defy, or even to flee.

The Princess, touching for an instant the letter folded against her side, remembered phrases from it:

"What, you have been listening to that talker, have you? Believing, what is more. Believing a man you never saw before in your life against the man who, since this is the way you treat fidelity, you shall never see again. A magnificent dinner and merry host, that is what he told you; and if I say that he arrived dead drunk, so that gloomy Pluto himself might have headed the board without his noticing, I shall not be credited. I save my ink, therefore. . . . It delights you to believe that I am faithless, heartless. At least,

I am obliged to think it gives you pleasure, for you make no effort to find out the truth. . . . After this, you can write lightly of some baron or other, so handsome, so attentive, with whom you have danced. Why do I care? If I am a drunkard and whoremaster, what can it matter to me? But care I do. . . . It is two o'clock, but I shall not sleep, nor attempt it, for fear I might dream that you were kind and loved me, and wake from that to reality. . . . I love, hate, desire, despise you. . . ."

Her eyes began slowly to fill with tears. The English bishop, leaning across with some compliment in unsound French, could not at first succeed in conveying his meaning; she kept down her eyes, and answered at random, to his praise of her, "*Oui, milord*." Clara Platen observed the troubled breathing, the bent head, and knew for one moment a kind of angry joy; this doll too suffered by reason of the young man in Dresden, singing, inventing scandalous stories about the women who had yielded.

The grandiloquent dinner ended, their Electoral Highnesses were brayed out of the great hall by a three-part fanfare, and repaired to another room free from gapers, where they could settle comfortably to cards. Lansquenet was the chosen game, for the reason that it admitted any number, and afforded guests an opportunity of swapping counters with royalty; also, because it demanded no skill at all of the players, who after two hours of mastication were apt to find their wits anything but lively.

"You'll play, my lord?" Electress Sophia asked the bishop. She knew him for a stickler, and the day was Sunday; knew him, too, for a man who liked to please his temporal betters, and was interested to know whether principle or politeness would come uppermost. But he was a slippery bishop, accustomed to polemics in Ireland, and he eluded her neatly.

"Madam, I made my wife a promise long ago never to play cards unless she were present. This," with a bow to Ernest Augustus, "is where we Protestant prelates score, for we may put off what we please on the shoulders of our wives, while the poor Papists, like Europa of old, have nothing to cling to but a Bull."

The Electress laughed, and left him alone with Count Platen. The table, therefore, when finally it was made up, held five players only; the Elector and his wife, the Electoral Prince and his wife, the Countess Platen. There was no cutting for deal, which went, not by destiny like hanging and wiving, but by precedence. Ernest Augustus possessed himself first of the cards, and laid out the primary four in their pattern. The *réjouissance* card upon which the stakes were to be laid was a knave of clubs. Something in the cut of the

hair or turn of the head reminded both Princess and Countess of Königsmark, but they said nothing, and it was Ernest Augustus who at last commented on the resemblance, inviting bets.

"Who'll put money on this rascal? God bless me, he has a look of somebody. I have it! Who'll stake on Königsmark? You ladies, come along with your counters, we all know your weakness."

Sophia-Dorothea obeyed without comment. George-Louis looked at her sideways for an instant, then tossed down the minimum stake. The Electress stood aside. Countess Platen said jovially as she laid down her counter:

"I'd stake my life on him. Handsome, brave, faithful—that doesn't often come a woman's way."

"I don't know," said Ernest Augustus slowly, beginning to deal, "he's got plenty of impudence. But courage—that's another thing. I don't like foreigners; there's no proper loyalty."

He was dealing as he spoke, and turning the cards upwards. The game, an artless one, consisted only in this: that the company betted against another knave turning up in the next ten cards. Ten of hearts, ace, a king, two sevens, nine of spades, two of spades—

"He wins!"

"Not yet, not yet, Countess. Three cards yet to play. Now"—addressing the pack—"out with another boy, another king's son!"

But the next card was an eight of spades, and the next a queen. Sophia-Dorothea watched the plump white hands with superstitious fear, afraid for no reason, awake to omens. The tenth card was turned. Ernest Augustus flung it down with a laugh, and triumphed.

"Knave of spades! Aha, your fine young man doesn't get it all his own way." He began to scoop the counters in, having no eye for the whiteness of his daughter-in-law's cheeks. "He meets his match, does Königsmark. Now, Countess, what have you to say?"

"I can only lament, Electoral Highness. He's carried off plenty of my money."

"And your heart too, eh?"

"Oh, hearts! He has those at his belt, by the dozen, as the Indians of the new world carry scalps. Let it go, it's in good company."

Ernest Augustus laughed, and handed the pack to his son, who took it and shuffled with dexterity. The swift motions of his hands accorded badly with his expressionless face.

"Give us an eight of hearts, Electoral Highness. The gipsies call that card success in love. Let us forget the dangling scalps, and try our fortune anew."

Sophia-Dorothea could not be silent.

"That is your notion of love, Countess? To change inclinations as you change your linen—more often, perhaps?"

"Why, Princess, real love, troubadour love, you may compare to the apparition of ghosts. Everyone talks of such things, but mighty few have seen them—"

"The cards are waiting. Nine of diamonds. Stake, if you care to."

"—and for my part I'd rather take what the world offers."

"I cannot emulate your philosophy, and would not if I could."

"Countess, Sophia, the cards are waiting. What is this nonsense you talk?"

"We were lamenting together, Electoral Highness, that all marriages cannot be like that of the Doge and the sea; a prayer, a ring, and good-bye for another year."

"I don't understand you. The nine of diamonds is up. What offers?"

They played, and George-Louis won. Countess Platen paid with a good grace, but sighed.

"I don't win at cards. It is my misfortune." She glanced at the Elector, who stifled a "Mine!" in his cuff. "There's a proverb about it in English: 'Luck at the tables, none in bed.' "

The Elector gave a loud laugh, and enquired of his wife:

"Is it true, Sophy? You're the dispenser of proverbs."

"There is such a saying. That it's a true one I shouldn't care to vouch."

"True! No. For that would mean that his Electoral Highness, who has just won a pocketful, was not lucky in the other respect; a conclusion which nobody will allow."

The Countess smiled across at the Princess, a bow underlining her compliment. Sophia-Dorothea, that reckless and unhappy letter burning her

breast, unable to bear more of the woman's mockery, started up from the table.

"Your Electoral Highnesses will excuse me. I don't care to play longer."

Ernest Augustus looked at her astonished, and would have ordered her to take her place again but for the Electress's hand on his arm.

"Our daughter finds the heat of the fire disturbing. Change your game, let Count Platen join you and play quadrille a while. Our daughter will help me to entertain his lordship of Derry."

George-Louis got up at once, saying that there was no betting at quadrille, and without more explanation went out of the room. Count Platen knew better than to join his master and his wife after a sign had been made him to mind his own business, and pretending to have heard nothing of the Electress's suggestion, engaged himself, with an apology, in reading certain papers from his pocket. Electress Sophia, one hand on Sophia-Dorothea's arm, guided her to a stool by the bishop. Herself she sat near, very upright in a tall carved chair, her hand still laid delicately upon the younger woman's wrist, wherein she could feel the hurry and then the slackening of the blood. This was meant as penalty and protection in one. For if the Countess had behaved inexcusably, the Princess had too clearly showed her wounds, had lacked *tenue*. Thus she must sit upon a stool to remind her that backbone was important, and must compose herself to be auditor of a theological discussion if she could not without tantrums take part in a game at cards.

But Sophia-Dorothea perceived only that the Electress had delivered her from the tormentor, and with a sudden childish impulse turned her hand to grasp the knotted fingers tightly. Electress Sophia did not reject this small tenderness, but smiled on the bent head and made some answering pressure, while the bishop began deferentially to treat of the late Bishop of Lincoln's pamphlet, 'Episcopacy Not Prejudicial To Regal Power.'

At the card-table Countess Platen and the Elector played piquet; he had the better luck, and had settled into a fairly constant good humour. She watched him, judged her moment, and spoke:

"I hear from Dresden that the Elector is to give our young man high command in the spring campaign."

Ernest Augustus looked up from his reckoning of points.

"Young man? Königsmark? He's still in my service."

“You don’t make use of him, and he’s ambitious, like every youngster. The Elector gave him a wing at manœuvres, and he did marvels, it seems. The Saxons are looking forward to taking chief credit in the spring, their preparations have gone forward at speed.”

“Saxony can’t take my man. I pay him still.”

“Then use him yourself. Give him the cavalry. That will save letting Max out of prison.”

“That’s true. But then, you see, George-Louis is in command, and he won’t have Königsmark about him.”

“The Prince must learn to put private enmities last, when it’s a question of your glory.”

“Enmities? I don’t know about that. Königsmark was insolent one night —and then there was that story you told me.”

“I told you? What was that?”

“This rumour that he’d been plaguing my daughter-in-law. Can’t have that. It’s difficult enough as things are.”

Countess Platen laughed, and if the sound had a harsh quality it sufficiently resembled her usual guffaw to convince. She answered the Elector with something not unlike truth, her face flushing under the rouge:

“That was a passing fancy. He’s not the man to keep any woman six months in mind. I was civil to him, as you know; a stranger and with credentials, one had to receive him. There was a moment when I thought that he was eager to make our relationship somewhat closer—”

“What, the young puppy!”

“—but that passed, and now he makes fun of me in Dresden with his sister and her boon companions.” The flush on her cheek-bones held, for there is a secret shame in loving still and being loved no longer, but she was not the woman to let any such vanity come in the way of a plan, and she went on steadily enough: “He tells them that I bathe in milk, and give the milk to the poor. He makes songs about my husband—”

“I’ll strip my coat off his back. By God, Clara, you’re an extraordinary woman. This is how he speaks of you, and yet you’d have him in Hanover, give him a better command.”

Countess Platen answered seriously, and with no pretence at languor or lover-like cadences:

“I think of your glory first. That alone is important to me, all must give way to it. Do you suppose that when a prince honours me with his affection the spite of a boy can have any meaning?”

The Elector heard truth in that. He knew something of her appetite for power, knew himself for the channel through which power flowed; it followed that he might not unreasonably expect her fidelity. She went on:

“Bring him back, therefore. You may put the other matter out of your head. My information is, that he has spoken no word of the Princess in Dresden, though he has made free with the names of a dozen other ladies, including my own. The affair is forgotten, if ever it existed, and now he will have other things to do, besides sighing after the moon.”

“George-Louis remains to be dealt with.”

“Are not you the master?”

“I’ll consider it.” He looked once into the corner where the Electress sat. “Do not return to-night to Monplaisir. Your rooms here are kept in readiness.”

“I’m honoured,” said she, looking full at him. “I am at your Highness’s disposal.”

Thenceforth, for half an hour longer, they played piquet, with no further lapse into conversation save for the necessary declarations of quint, terce, or quart. The Electress was enjoying her bishop, but she felt old, not able for him, and longed for some wily Popish canon, or dialectical Lutheran pastor to pit against him, that she might sit back in her high chair and watch the battle like one of Jove’s daughters surveying the plain of Troy. There was, happily, a fixed hour for departure to bed, and when this struck it was with relief that she rose to receive her daughter-in-law’s curtsey, the bishop’s bow —she did not ask his blessing, nor did he dare accord it unrequired; taking the Elector’s arm punctiliously held ready she went away through double doors, the Princess following after alone.

When the bishop had been despatched, Countess Platen said to her husband, folding up his papers and yawning:

“I’ve a letter for to-morrow’s courier. Have you the cabinet key? I’ll dictate.”

“It must have his signature.” He recollected the trick which had sent Ilse to gaol and embarrassed a number of functionaries. “I can’t lend myself—”

“Never fear, good man. I don’t return to Monplaisir to-night.”

They went together to the cabinet where Ernest Augustus worked by day. There Platen sat at the great table, selected a pen, and made ready, while she walked, her arms wrapped about each other, the flesh on them rising into little points with cold.

"Are you ready? Direct it to the Count Königsmark, at the house of the Countess Aurora Königsmark, at Dresden."

Platen obeyed, writing slowly in a fine clerkly script, characterless, legible.

" 'Sir, I am commanded by his Electoral Highness to recall to your recollection that the period of your leave has now expired—' "

"He had no leave. He went off one morning without it, in a very insolent manner."

"I know what I write. Have you taken it?—'has now expired. Circumstances, which by reason of your absence cannot be familiar to you, have obliged his Electoral Highness to remove his son, Prince Maximilian, from the command of the cavalry, which he proposes to send this spring into Flanders to serve under the King of England. This being so, he can think of no person more fitting to succeed to such a post than yourself, and accordingly requires you to return as soon as may be possible to Hanover. His wishes with regard to you have been made known to the Electoral Prince, who is prepared to respect them, and to afford you such opportunities for distinction as may be in his power, during your service in the field.' End with what flourish of trumpets you please."

Platen wrote carefully, sanded, and sat back, laying the pen in its tray after drying.

"Clara, what's this you're doing? Those two have been in correspondence; does the Prince know that?"

"Nobody is to know. I don't buy knowledge to share it."

"You'd better keep them apart."

"Friend Platen, absence kills a fancy, but kindles love. It is like a strong wind, that blows out candles, but drives fire."

He shrugged his high shoulders, and held out the paper to her. She took and folded it.

"A courier must be waiting to-morrow at eight. I shall have the signature by then."

He made a note of that, and stood up.

"Is it true that the Prince concurs? Is that what you're working for, to bring them into conflict? He won't fight; he's heir to two thrones, and a man of principle."

"Let me alone. You had better know nothing. What's the hour?"

He looked at his watch, a heavy thing, on whose back the death of Sarpedon was raised in gold; she, hearing him say that it was close on midnight, huddled the letter into her dress, and fled.

Two couriers set out next morning. One bore the Elector's letter, signed and sealed with black wax and three inches of tremendous arms—chequers, leopards, an eagle displayed, two lions' paws couped, a horse and a stag in full course, and two antlers, or attires of a stag, all under the frown of the electoral bonnet; the other, sealed with a sunflower, and a motto, *Mon cœur vous suit toujours*, had been written at the same hour, tearfully.

"It is not possible to live like this. Do you think my lot is so easy, that I can bear reproaches lightly, and forget them soon? I must live as my condition commands. I must dress, show myself, smile, and take part in Court diversions for which, God knows, I have little heart. I should be glad enough to shut myself up, dress in black, and speak with nobody, but do you suppose that it would not cause talk, or worse? There is no such compulsion upon you; you may retire to a forest and live in goat-skins lamenting, nothing forbids you, but you do not do it. You are the life of Dresden, all travellers come back with tales of your beauty, gaiety, and extravagance. I cannot understand, and so cannot pardon you. You do not, in your heart of hearts, doubt me. You know that I am faithful, every breath that I draw proves it. Yet you are for ever tormenting me, and I am helpless. I write that I have wept all night and am wretched; this does not please you, for you say that it tears your heart to think of me so. Then, trying to console, I tell you that I have been for a drive, or found a pleasant partner for dancing, and at once you are up in rage, accusing me of having forgot you. Your letters are those of a madman. It would be better for me to try and forget you indeed. But I cannot, I cannot, and my one consolation is that I shall never see you again; for if you were near, I should run to your arms, and find there a happiness that neither reason nor loyalty can justify. Adieu. God help and guard us both. I shall write no more."

(III)

Seven days later Eléonore Knesebeck sat in the window of Sophia-Dorothea's boudoir reading aloud a romance newly come from Paris, and stumbling not a little over the French.

" 'The widow's age was thirty, but to judge by the freshness of her cheek and the neatness of her waist this sum of years might have been halved; while by her show of prudence it might have been doubled. She mourned her husband with great propriety. Her servants were dressed in the best black that Paris afforded, the funeral oration was as gratifying as it was truthful. Only after these duties had been duly performed, did she permit herself to join in certain Court distractions, and prepare to defend her heart against the delicate attacks which many gentlemen of quality were honoured to deliver __' "

"Nell, do you think there's any harm in that?"

"In what, sweet soul? Taking lovers after the husband's death? Indeed I don't, but you need to have him safe underground first."

"It's folly, isn't it, to break one's heart being faithful. I'm nearly thirty now, and all the savour, all the spring has gone."

"Highness dear, what have I been preaching this past six months? Love's not a thing to take so seriously, it ought to be a distraction, not the business of life."

"I know it, but feelings aren't always to be commanded." She put her hands to her waist; the silk bodice puckered, fitting her loosely. "I don't write, I won't write, I'll be brave; but something still makes me restless."

"Sit down and think of something sensible; your dress for Colt's masquerade."

"I can't go, not to a masquerade." Sophia-Dorothea shook her head violently and her hand went beat, beat, beat, on the chair. "I'll stay at home, I can never put on a mask again."

"Don't wear your Isabella, if it reminds you. I know! The Venetian dress. That's becoming, and all we'll have to do is freshen the gold on the hat." But the Princess still stood, looking recalcitrant. "Highness dear, have you made up your mind or not? Have you finished with Tercis or not?" (It was their name for Königsmark.) "Very well, then, do as he does, go about, enjoy what conquests you can. There's plenty ready to make these—what's it the book calls 'em?—delicate attacks."

“It’s a strange thing. When I was first married all I wanted was to dance and be admired. Now I’d as soon go into a convent.”

“That won’t last. Don’t fix your mind so.”

“I ought to be glad to have done with it all. No more waiting for couriers, and trembling, and being reproached. No more apprehension. Nothing to be discovered.”

“Nothing but amuse yourself from this time onwards.”

“No more tears for unkindness. No more jealousy. All ended.”

“Only laughter, and dancing, and twenty pretty men instead of one.”

“Fetch the Venetian dress, Nell. I’ll try to wear it.”

“That’s my darling lady.”

She had both hands at her bodice pulling the hooks undone, and Knesebeck was making for the door, when with hardly a tap this opened to discover the page Christian. The Princess turned away, holding a neckerchief across her breast. Knesebeck, standing to shield her, found words for the intruder.

“Are you in a lodging-house, do you suppose? You’ve no fingers to knock with, I dare say! And not your day for service either—prying and peeping. Be off!”

The boy Christian did not budge, but this rough greeting spoiled the scene as he had planned it; no stealing in upon the Princess alone, no whispering, no tender glance of gratitude for him now. He was indignant at the charge of prying, and came out plump with the news which was his justification:

“Count Königsmark’s in Hanover! I saw him just now ride up to his house.” To Knesebeck: “I put on my livery, anyhow, to come and tell.”

Knesebeck gave one quick look at the Princess and muttered some angry words under her breath. Sophia-Dorothea still kept with her back to them, standing motionless. When she turned it was to show a look of entire distress and timorous hands.

“What does it mean? It’s a trap. Christian, go to him.”

She gave no other instructions but gestured him away, page’s livery and all, to go to her lover through Hanover’s observant streets. Knesebeck caught Christian’s braided arm and shook it.

“Don’t you dare. What, go running off in that rig, so that everyone sees where you come from!”

“Don’t hinder him, Nell. I must know.”

“Know! You must be quiet, and remember what you’ve been promising all this morning. As for making yourself ridiculous, I won’t allow it, I’ve more care for your state than you have—”

The boy interrupted her, after a glance over his shoulder down the corridor.

“Somebody’s coming. The Electress!”

He stood in the doorway ice-still, in the posture prescribed for pages by their ceremonial, a little more easy than the attitude expected of servants. Knesebeck ran to the Princess and hooked her gaping dress. The Princess herself, passive after her momentary terror, faced the door, and drooped to the necessary curtsey as Electress Sophia came in.

“Your health, daughter?”

“Your Electoral Highness’s health?”

Neither question was answered. It was the ritual beginning to conversation.

“Pray ask Fräulein Knesebeck to leave us. And the young man.”

Sophia-Dorothea nodded them both away. The Electress took up, as was her custom, the book lying on the table and looked at its title-page: *La Reine d’Ethiopie: Historiette Comique*. She turned the pages with a steady right hand.

“There seems a great deal of nonsense here.” Sophia-Dorothea did not answer, and the Electress began to read aloud in her deep voice, cracked now like an old bell, the passage where Knesebeck had folded down the page:

“ ‘*Elle y remedia par les divertissements de la Cour, et par les soins continuels de defendre son cœur contre force gens de qualité qui s’en proposoient la conqueste*’—Is this whence you take your rule of conduct?”

“It is a silly tale, Highness.”

The Electress laid the book down, gently, as was her way even with the most frivolous printed stuff. “Are your preparations made for the English Minister’s entertainment?”

“Is it necessary that I should go?”

“You know the reason for this fête, to celebrate a victory at sea over the French. We have not, of late, had so many successes that we can afford to neglect such an opportunity.” She turned towards the Princess, but looked down, and her fingers were not quite still. “You have not heard perhaps that Count Königsmark is recalled. It seemed to me better that you should learn this news privately.”

At that she looked up suddenly; and Sophia-Dorothea dropped to her knees by the old woman’s skirts, childishly.

“Ma’am, it wasn’t by my wish. I didn’t send for him. While he was at a distance I could keep a good face. Now he’s here I’m afraid.”

“Girl! What do you say?”

But the Princess was wrought past discretion; she was obsessed by her own problem, thirsty to confide, and so far as the Electress’s intention was concerned, mistaken wholly.

“Won’t you let me go? Your son hates me. I’ve served my purpose. Let me go back to my father at Zelle. You don’t know what it is to be so helpless as I am, and I can feel plots moving—”

“Is this man your lover?”

“Not yet, I swear it. If you knew how I’ve struggled—You must help me, you’ve been kind to me. Let me go away.”

“To be with him?”

“I’m too unhappy, I can’t go on like this.”

The Electress twitched her skirt away and rose.

“Happiness has nothing to say to conduct. You are strangely mistaken if you suppose you can make me a party to your intrigue. I knew of it; I have watched. I thought it possible that news of the man’s return might come on you in some public place, and what then? The Princess of Hanover turning red and white, God knows what disgraceful behaviour. To avoid such a scandal I came here in person. You ask me in return to play procuress. Get up. Once for all, I won’t have bastards brought into this line.”

The Princess was on her feet before she was bid, in rage.

“Then you should look to your son, ma’am. What of Schulenburg’s child, and half a dozen others for all I know? And Countess Platen’s girl,

whose daughter is she? And your own daughter with her lovers. I never thought to laugh at you, but I laugh now. No bastards!"

Electress Sophia checked this hysteria with one stern word.

As the sobs dwindled, she went on coolly, but the bridge of her nose was pinched and white.

"Your mother, base born and intriguer as she is—you might well take example by her. She gave no scandal, if she brought no lustre." She thrummed with the back of her hand upon the little book. "You take too many of your notions from fribbles like these. You are not a woman of intelligence, you have not the means to drive a fantasy to success. Understand your position, and live within it decently. While you attempt this, you'll find me your friend."

"Friend! friend! when you force me back to subjection, to misery!"

"Listen. The sole wisdom of the fool is to allow others better qualified to judge for him. Show this wisdom at least. And do not talk of a sentiment as though it were some inescapable convulsion of nature. It is a fever, and passes as a fever does."

"Passes, or kills."

" 'Men have died, and worms have eaten them—but not for love.' That's the saying of an English poet; you may read him with profit when you're sixty, sitting on the English throne."

"I hate you. You made me speak, and now you scorn me. Tell the Elector, tell George-Louis! I shall get my freedom then."

"Do you suppose I would play so into your hands?" The Electress smiled, then jerked up her head. "Good God! If you were a private individual I should let you drop back into the gutter. But you are a princess, and may be a queen. Therefore I humble myself to such interviews as this. I repeat: my son's wife may count on me to preserve her good name. Attend me to your door."

"Ma'am, wait awhile. I'm distracted, I don't know what I say. Don't go in anger. Have I lost my only friend?"

"Sentimental talk. I have neither leisure nor patience for it. I am your friend while you conduct yourself as you should. Attend me, pray."

(IV)

Sir William Colt, kept short of money as a rule by his cheese-paring King, was determined for once, let the expense be what it would, to do England honour. He had planned, ingeniously, a garden masque which the distinguished spectators should behold from indoors, the warmth of fires at their backs and of good liquor at their hearts. A thousand torches lit his lawns; and from the lake, wherein fish and frogs lived amiably the year round, water-lilies had been cut away to leave a free surface on which miniature ships of battle might ride, exchanging broadsides of rockets. He was astonished to find the Germans ingenious at such contrivances, to see how pleasantly they fitted up the ships, and built little ports upon the lake's shore. The ships had no more than twenty feet in which to manœuvre, but they stood so majestically up from the water, the details of their pennons and rig were so clear, that their engagement had the look of a veritable battle viewed through the wrong end of a spyglass. Colt was glad to have this entertainment to offer, for he was a man who cared little for play, food, or music, those staples of German existence, and he had found the Hanoverians not conversible. He walked among his guests, very fine and very civil, pleased to view their excitement at the movement of the ships, but writing them down barbarians in his mind. There was no man present who could cap the neat quotation from Horace that presented itself to his memory: *Nil pictis timidus navita puppibus fidit*. The Electress might have obliged him, but she was not present, the only star lacking in his constellation; the Elector was there, the Prince and Princess, the Prime Minister and his wife. All these, wearing fantastic and magnificent costumes, but not masked, their effulgence undimmed, stood in his broad windows and exclaimed as did lesser men and women when the toy ships shocked each other and heeled over, smoking. The night, though chilly, was clear. There was a victory to celebrate. A little complacency was understandable.

Sir William, nevertheless, kept his eyes open. He was prepared to be interested, for example, in observing the meeting, after many months, of that gay creature the Princess with the man gossip lent her for a lover; but the fellow, though invited, had not been announced by the time midnight struck. Then, however, when the twelve strokes were tolling, the fireworks ending, and watchers turning from the windows, there came from the courtyard in front of the house a hideous sound of yelling, and along the corridor, into the saloon, raged a troop of young men waving scimitars, surrounding a robed figure that bestrode a white horse. He must have ridden it up the staircase, for the saloon was above ground level.

While applause sounded, the cavalier tossed his reins to a turbaned groom, leapt down, came towards the exalted group; and there, dropping on

his knees before the Princess, handed her a scroll. Colt observed her. She stuck out her lace-covered hand like a doll, like a doll's red and white her cheeks appeared. She accepted the scroll unsmiling, and unrolled it with a kind of timidity, as though she thought to find in it some fateful sentence; but there was nothing, only a parody of Eastern writing. The Turk, still on his knees, brought both hands up to his forehead, and bowed forward in an attitude of prayer until he kissed her shoe, muttering some words, gibberish or seeming so; only Sir William Colt, that discreet and travelled man, made out something that sounded very much like an endearment in Swedish. His salaam ended, he bounded up, and disclosed Königsmark's face, laughing; it was thinner than when he left Hanover, Sir William noted, the eyes sunken yet bright. To pay this homage openly, kissing his lady's foot as a bashaw before a whole society, that would have spitted him had he attempted the same thing in his true guise as a soldier of Hanover—Sir William liked his impudence, and was preparing with a hand-clap in the Oriental manner to summon refreshment for the invader, when Königsmark ran to his horse, that stood near an open window, swung on its back, and spurred it through the window out into the night. The drop was nothing, the effect spectacular. Sir William's whole company crowded to gaze, and saw for their pains the horseman, cloak flying, galloping straight for the lake at its narrowest, where the last of the little ships were exchanging rockets. Over these he went, with a leap curved like a scimitar; the rockets' fires reddened the horse's belly a moment, their smoke obscured the rider, and he was gone, save for the sound of hoofs thudding on grass.

Sir William as an individual was amused; as an ambassador disquieted. If only the Princess had laughed or clapped! But she had stood still, save for a hand that jerked to her throat as the horseman plunged through the window. He mistrusted her already by reason of her French blood; suspected her of bringing influence to bear upon the Elector, so that he joined only with reluctance and after bargaining the coalition against France. It was not the moment, but discovering the Countess Platen in an ante-room he offered his arm and made speculation.

"That's a youngster with spirit. When Prince Rupert was young he had something of that look; but he sat more down to his horse."

Countess Platen did not immediately make answer. When she spoke it was bluffly:

"This is some of the Dresden behaviour. We may be thankful a seraglio did not accompany him."

“Ah! He leans that way, does he? Women—”

“The women lean his way. You are not to blame them. Consider what we must make do with here; buffoons or blockheads, there’s no other choice.”

Sir William Colt said, with a naïve cock of the head that sought to convey his extreme unconcern:

“I fear all the shouting, and the appearance of the horse, may have startled the Princess. She had a look almost of faintness when she received him.”

“You keep your rooms too hot, Sir William. What’s in your mind? Are you suspecting too great an interest in that quarter? Disabuse yourself.”

“Indeed, do you assure me so? I heard rumours. I had a hint from England urging me to prevail upon the Elector to dismiss the young man. But then he departed for Dresden, and I thought it unnecessary to—in short, I believed him gone for good.” His eyes slid sideways to her face. “Do I understand he is here now with the Elector’s good will?”

“You understand, Sir William, that he is here now with my good will.”

“I see, I see.” Sir William assembled certain other rumours that recurred to his memory, of encounters and withdrawals at Monplaisir, and supposed himself not far from the truth when he deduced from these that the Countess was faithless to her Elector. Delivered from one problem, another rose. If she deceived her paymaster with this pretty young man and were discovered, she would be dismissed and England lose a good friend. Love where he would, the young man was a danger. Sir William sighed, but in face of that bold declaration of interest could press the matter no further. He said, however:

“Ah! As a fighter no doubt he’s well enough.”

She appeared not to hear him. Her eyes fixed themselves for a moment upon Sir William’s sword; expression vanished from them, they became dull and stony, looking at the bright hilt under his hand. She spoke at random:

“Do they have a custom in England, when there is a marriage by proxy, that the false bridegroom and the wife be put to bed, but a sword lies between them?”

Sir William laughed, and answered that he had never known such a thing.

“We are not a trustful people in such matters. We think it takes more than a sword to keep lovers out of mischief.”

“I don’t think so,” said Countess Platen. “I believe it might be enough.”

And at last, with a shake of the head, her gaze broke away from the hilt.

(V)

Her lover’s challenge, his public homage, broke down Sophia-Dorothea’s resolve to write no more. She was afraid. In their carriage rumbling home from Colt’s house, that lay a little way out of Hanover among fields, she was disconcerted by the silence of George-Louis. She could not see his face, but she guessed at the expression it wore, a kind of patience in malignity. It was the ill luck of her temperament that she could not take comfort from silence; it terrified her, and she must break it even though worse things came. When they had driven a mile without speaking she broke out with a direct question, pitifully casual:

“Did you not think the Turks played their parts well? Look, this scroll —” she was still clasping it, beside her fan—“it is in Turkish writing, though I don’t know what it says. And the horse stood so quiet, until he spurred it. He must be a good horseman.” George-Louis did not answer. “Don’t you think so? Were you not entertained?”

“It’s of no consequence what I think.”

“Don’t you like to see new things, to be made laugh, and to wonder what will come next?”

“I’ve not much patience with foolery of any kind.”

“It was brave, what he did! And his men looked so odd. Some had their faces blacked.”

He turned so that his voice came directly on her ear, and she shrank at the sound of it.

“I don’t know what their game is. I’ve had my orders from my father, so I hold my tongue. Else I’d have something to say.”

“Why do you speak so angrily?”

“Making a fool of you with his antics, kissing your shoes—”

“You said you’d had orders. What orders?”

“Don’t ask questions.”

“What do you mean, why do you look like that?”

“You can’t tell how I look.”

“I hear it in your voice, you’re grinning, that horrible look you put on when you’re going to be cruel—”

He laughed. But she was now fully alarmed, sure that some mischief was intended to Königsmark. They sat beside each other swinging together as the carriage rounded corners, inclining away as the road straightened, minds contriving and busy, bodies passive. Trees gave place to houses, and the clack of hoofs echoed from masonry. Two o’clock swung out from Hanover’s invisible belfries. They spoke no further word all the way.

In her room, undisturbed, for George-Louis was back in his old quarters below stairs, she wrote in haste, the Venetian hat lying by her elbow, tumultuous laces dragging after her hand across the page:

“How foolish you were to-night, with all eyes on you, to kiss my foot! I could make no sign, but you must believe that in my heart I was glad, even while I feared for you. They talked afterwards of war. Is it only the chance of leading a regiment that holds you to Hanover? Would you set this duty, which for you is supreme enjoyment, against another claim, less honourable, and perhaps less dear? I am come to an end of that which I can endure. I have no friend here now. I am alone, for during this past month the Electress has given my son over into a governor’s hands; it is the custom, they say. If my cruel letters or my silence have not killed in your heart that feeling which once dwelt there, lend me your help. I ask no more, not love, not even the tenderness of a friend; only your help to escape from this bondage in which I live, and which will surely destroy me. I have nothing, neither money, nor advisers, nor so much experience of the world as to know which way the postroads lie. All this I must borrow, and I turn to you. If you deny me—and I have used you ill, I know it—then I will walk out of Hanover by night and beg my way back to my father’s house. If you will so far forget my unkindness, pray let me have word; and speech with you if you can contrive it. I do not seek anything but what I might ask of a brother, or a friend if I had one. My women are as ignorant and helpless as myself. Nevertheless, do not hold yourself bound.”

The letter reached Königsmark sprawling on his bed at midday, still in the Turkish clothes of last night’s masquerade. He had, when he leapt from the window, no plan in his head, but only the hope to still anguish by

motion. That sight of his Princess standing so decorously by her small sullen husband, Clara Platen behind her, all the watchful intolerant faces of Hanover about her, put him in mind of a story heard from his nurse in Sweden; a little girl who went, seeking her lost toy, into the trolls hill, and never again saw the sun. This was the rhythm to which he rowelled his horse's sides—"She shall see the sun! She shall see the sun!" To its tune he went lathering blindly across fields, over a ditch whose further side he could not see, past farms, to a village, Kirchrode, which he remembered by its spire, dark against the sky's darkness. There he knocked with the hilt of his scimitar against a door above which whined an inn-sign; roused the people, who at first would not open, fearing his turban, but after parley let him in, and gave him the strong spirits he asked for. The women crowded at the stair-turn to peep at him and wonder. He took no heed of them except once, gravely, to drink their health, and to charge them (in Swedish, some remainder of prudence dictating) that they should never fall in love.

"You see, ladies, the pity of it. You behold a victim. Yes, a victim, for all he's got a bottle of liquor inside him, and a pair of trousers big enough for a platoon. A man who knows what he wants, too; that's the wretchedest spite of Fate. If you don't know, then your heart's desire may still be round the corner, or even under your hand. But when you know, know, know—" he struck his breast thrice, and lapsed into German again. "Your health, ladies. Much good may it do you, drunk in rot-gut. Get to bed. Here's money. I've business to do. I've got to find a way out of hell. Good night. Pray for me."

He got up, staggering a little, and went out again to his horse. The inn people heard the beast cry out as spurs went into its hide, then a mad departure, with singing. They were a pious family, and though by no means sure that this visitant was not the Devil, they did not neglect his injunction to pray. A candle was lit under the Virgin's statue, and down they went on their knees, a child of four drowsing against the mother's shoulder.

"Mother of dolours——"

"Pray for us."

"Thou who didst find no room at the inn. Who wast forced to take refuge in a stable. Who didst lay thy first-born in a manger——"

"Pray for us."

"From immoderate sadness. From a cowardly spirit. From the snares of the Devil. From hardness of heart. From impenitence. From sudden and unprepared-for death. From eternal damnation——"

“Queen of martyrs, deliver us.”

“That thou wouldst vouchsafe to bring consolation and help to all who call on thee. That thou wouldst succour us in our last agony. That thou wouldst vouchsafe to obtain for us a happy death——”

“We beseech thee, hear us.”

Königsmark was not too drunk to stay on his horse, but he could not give the creature direction. The stars, by which at night he was accustomed to ride, were often obscured, and danced before his puzzled sight when they showed through cloud. He was out of the riotous stage of wine, and coming to that in which the drinker stands alone before an indifferent world, guiltless, but troubled by inopportune barbs and misunderstandings. He wept, sagging on his horse, which progressed at a good rate towards Hanover town, and lamented his lot to the night.

“I ask so little. I want to fight, just a little battle now and then. I want a woman—one woman, only one. Nobody can say I’m extravagant in my desires. The wrong people, that’s what it is. The wrong people love me, or want to fight me, and the ones I want—— But he won’t fight, can’t get rid of him. How’s the world to be run if a man won’t answer you, and still you’ve got to take off your hat to him? That’s not just. Horse, I tell you, that’s not just. You don’t have to put up with that—well but, poor devil, you’ve been gelded. Apology. No reflection on you. For all we know you’re better off. What’s that? A shooting star.”

And he halted a moment to recapture a memory that sprang into being, lit by that streak of light. A Turkish officer—and something about the angels throwing their spears at those mortals who came too near heaven. But he could not recapture the memory, any more than he could have read a sentence of print by that fleeting light, and the fact of being himself dressed as a Turkish officer bewildered him. His tears continued to flow, until all recollection of their cause had departed. The horse maintained a steady pace. Nils, waiting sleepless, helped him to tumble off its back at his own door.

The Princess’s letter, which he was waked to receive, pulled him back to sanity, and sent him striding in his ludicrous half-dress to scan his own face in a mirror, and discover eyes reddened a little, cheeks pallid. This little foppish inspection made, he sent for the man who barbered him, and while he lay with his head back, yielding to the pressure of fingers now on this cheek, now on that, he contrived a meeting with his love as he might have planned an attack upon some town whose defences and resources were known to him.

The question of flight; he summoned a map to his mind. North lay Zelle, and the dubious protection of her parents. East, Wolfenbüttel, where she might, through no fault of her own, have reason to dread the long memory of an old Duke. South—too long a ride into Hesse or Thuringia. Westwards; Prussia offered the best chance, for all a Brunswick Princess shared that coronet. There, owing to the fact that westwards lay war, and troops must move quickly, the roads favoured a flight. No river lay between Hanover and the frontier, once its own Leine was passed. The forests of Blumenausche, the wooded rides of Schauenburg, would be kind to fugitives, and when they came to the bridge over the Weser at Rintele they were out of the last dominions of his master and hers. Good, so far. But chance must be allowed no meddling. She would need a carriage to save her from a fatigue which might be fatal to the plan. At once, accepting the need for this carriage, his mind was busy to discover what other use could be made of it, to what tactical advantage it might be turned. It might be stored with food, so that during the whole fifty miles they need call at no inn, show their faces in no house. Horses, though! They must travel day and night. Four horses at a time, and four relays—that should do it; with an outrider to lend his help, should one of the team go lame. These relays must be their own; thus, no weary post-horses, no hanging about inn-yards, no question asked.

The barber had done. Königsmark dismissed him, and sent for Anders, the chief groom.

"How many horses have we that can draw a carriage?"

"Well, my lord, they're riding beasts mostly. We've no call for a carriage since Countess Aurora left us."

"Twenty?"

"Nothing like, my lord."

"Get twenty together, and don't let it be known I'm buying. Examine them yourself for soundness. What about a carriage?"

"There's your own, my lord. It wants a lick of paint."

"Let it alone, only paint out the arms on the door. Have new cushions put to it. When the horses are bought I'll give you orders for provisioning. But the upholsterers must go to work at once."

"I'd better engage more stabling. We're nigh on full."

"Where's your wits, good God? Not a soul is to know I'm buying them. Get them here and there, one by one. The first five go to Münder with two

fellows and then wait. (No livery for the men.) The next batch of five likewise to Lawenau, the next to Lutersen. The last lot may come here, but no questions encouraged, you understand me? Let me know when you have carried out these orders and make as good time as you can."

"A week, my lord?"

"At most. Don't spare money. See that your men hold their tongues. If any word gets out, I'll crucify the fellow that talks with my own hands against that wall." He knocked his hand against the panelled wood. "Is it understood?"

The man hesitated.

"Germans, or our own men, my lord, to go with the horses? Our own fellows can't, all of them, talk the lingo. I'm thinking, if your lordship doesn't want to be recognised, better have men who won't draw attention to themselves. They're wonderful curious about foreigners in these small places."

"Germans, then. Tell them what I've said."

Anders made his bow and departed to consult with Nils, and get from him the money to carry out orders. Königsmark, passing the mirror by chance, saw with satisfaction, a strip of colour on his cheek-bones, eyes no longer dull. He laughed aloud, and lifting his arms bent them to swell the muscles.

Anders, conferring with Nils, met a shake of the head and lift of the eyes.

"Twenty horses! Ready money, that means. I haven't got it. I haven't got above five hundred thalers in silver, and here he comes asking enough to set up a regiment. No hope of money from Sweden before harvest's in, and then it takes time to get here. A week? That's madness."

"I'm only telling you what my orders are."

"Try what you can do on credit."

"It's not to come out who's buying. He'll crucify anyone with his own hands, he says, that lets it out; he looked it, too."

"Wait here. I'll go to him."

The ancient Nils made his way to that room to which he had led his master at some hour of the morning when light, a little thickened, began to make the sparrows restless. There had been mutterings then, tears, to which

he had paid small attention. In no way did they foreshadow the liveliness which greeted him now.

"The man I wanted. Come here. What money can you get together? I leave Hanover in a week."

"Anders spoke to me. I tell you plain, my lord, Saxony broke us. I haven't the price of a week's living in the house."

"Old grumbler, old close-mouth, don't try to frighten me with that tale ____"

"It's true, my lord. I don't know what scheme you have in your head. If it must be, it must. But unless you'll sell some jewels, there's not the money."

Königsmark sprang up from his map and papers, shook the old man till his wig loosened, flipped his nose, and sliding an arm round his shoulders, hugged him.

"Hold your tongue. There's always money. Don't play that old comedy with me now."

"Before God, my lord."

Königsmark held away from him; saw the lip trembling, a little round tear in the eye's very corner; and stood back, looking suddenly grave.

"But I tell you I must have it."

"Unless you'll sell a jewel, or dun your debtors at cards, you must want it."

"You old fool, how can I go to the Jews with a pocket full of diamonds? What becomes of my credit? How can I press gentlemen for what they owe? There must be money somewhere."

Nils stood, his hands hanging by his sides. There was something of resignation in the attitude that touched the young man.

"Old Nils; I know you hate to cross me. Get a Jew here, then. But I can't haggle."

"My lord! As if I'd let you do your own business!"

Königsmark had on his thumb the great diamond that had been looted in Prague. It was a jewel with a history; St. Stephen had worn it. Legends of Hungary said that it was the original male diamond of the world; if only the female could be rediscovered and set beside it there would be such a

propagation of stones that mankind need never lack protection against poison, which diamonds give; besides being the means of reconciling lovers, subduing evil spirits, and disclosing conspiracies. Königsmark cared for none of these things, but only for the fineness of its water, that must compel a good price even from careful hucksters of the trade.

"Take this, then. Put a cloak on you, and another wig, and see how much you can get."

"He'll ask whence I had it."

"Then tell him, by God! And tell him I'll string him up by the ears over a brazier if he talks."

The old man gone, Königsmark returned to his table, and there wrote, joyfully, easily, in bad French:

"I never knew happiness till now. Your letter wears thin with the kisses I have put upon it. At last, at last, you run to my arms, and for ever! I knew it must come to this, unless we died first of longing. I had a mind last night to catch you up and make off with you lying across my saddle. You would not have been afraid, for I should have held you close to me. But this is better. This is the whole of desire.

"Listen. Can you be ready in a week's time, Monday night? I set this limit, and give this date because I know that the Electress will be at Herrenhausen, by the orders I have to provide a guard there. Moreover it is the night of one of the great suppers, when they are all safe till midnight at least, and stupid after. You must plead illness. Bribe the doctor if you must, but stay at home that night. Send Knesebeck away between then and now, I do not trust her. She thinks of herself, she loves you not with her heart but with her head, as a Princess, not as a woman. To write such words intoxicates me, when I think that so soon the Princess will be put off, and the woman remain, to be adored, to be the delight of my soul and body till death.

"I must see you soon, that the details of our plan may be considered. Have you strength for an interview in public? That is safest, and there can be no suspicion if I come with Major Eck, you know him well, on your reception day at the hour when you drink chocolate. We shall be surrounded by eyes and ears, but I shall give myself the pleasure of outwitting them, as I have gone disguised, before now, through enemy lines in war.

"Shall I write your orders, as for some young officer? I who am your slave, let me act the part of commander awhile. 'The retreat is fixed for five

o'clock on Monday. You will make no sortie, but keep close within your trenches until that hour. Send to the rear any person you suspect. All baggage to be left, save that which is indispensable. By abandoning our present position triumph is assured.' How sweet it is to write to a dear lover in the language of war!"

(VI)

The Countess Platen, in a magnificent bedgown of red velvet, her head bound round with a kind of turban of the same stuff, was questioning her spies. It was early in the day; for her own pleasure, the pleasure of being awake to a world she could guide and subdue, she often held these morning courts, to which, almost as soon as it was light, came men and women with stories for her ear, merchants, and an occasional tailor. She did not trouble herself to look well for them, her cheeks and lips were left to nature, but she had all the same, in her negligence, a kind of splendour.

A man of the Princess's household stood in front of her, expressionlessly answering questions.

"Nothing at night? No goings or comings out of the way?"

"None, gracious lady."

"You've been sleeping. Can't you sleep in the day? God knows you've little enough to do."

"I've waked for five nights, gracious lady." His look spoke for him. He had the dragged look, white with a reddish nose, of the man short of sleep. "The Princess has not altered her way of life. The only happenings of this week your ladyship knows."

"What visitors?"

"The usual ladies yesterday to drink tea. One or two gentlemen, the Count Königsmark and some other of the Guards officers."

"Ah! Were you on duty in the room?"

"Handing the cups, yes, gracious lady."

"Did Count Königsmark speak with the Princess?"

"Not apart. He spoke as twenty others did, making himself agreeable; later he sang one of his songs. He was very gay."

"What song?"

"They used to sing it when I was with the regiment—'The Brief Courtship.'

'Thursday meet, Friday's sweet,
Saturday sigh and pray.
Sunday rise and bake the pies,
Monday's marriage day.' "

"I know that song, it's an old one. But it starts with Monday—'Monday meet.'"

"The Count's a foreigner, gracious lady. He started off with Thursday and made Monday the marriage. Who'd make pies of a Sunday? But maybe it's different where he comes from."

"Monday!" She paused before the next question. "How did the Princess look while he sang?"

"A nice colour in her face. She clapped when he ended, but so did all the ladies. Ladies make a great ado of the Count always."

"Off with you, and keep your eyes open still."

She pondered this information, adding it to that which already she possessed. First, an attempt to dismiss Knesebeck, countered with such a storm of tears, such pleadings, that the decree of banishment could not hold. Why dismiss her, the bosom's ally, unless some plan were in project which her attendance might hinder? Why take back the dismissal unless she knew what she should not, and had threatened? Now this rendezvous for Monday; how lay the significance there? "Sunday rise and bake the pies"—that was the night of the Electoral supper. Escape next morning? Or, during the meal another raid, such as that made upon Colt's house, in disguise? An alarm, perhaps, of fire, of conspiracy, and in the confusion Princess Featherweight carried off? There were stories of horsemen in Königsmark's pay going out of the town secretly, westwards. And the Prince was away, in Berlin with his sister. Could any woman be such a fool as to give up a crown? And this one loved her children. Clara Platen could not square what she suspected with what she knew; her mind went here and there, patiently travelling down blind alleys, while she listened to the blandishments of Röhrig the goldsmith, and decried his wares.

"Yes, yes, I have money to spend, but your stuff is not good enough. Great heavy salt cellars, clocks, what use are these to me?"

“What does your ladyship want? I have some ear-rings from France that look very showy, the designs are very well, but any goldsmith will tell you, when you come to sell again, what makes the price is weight of metal, and that only. French stuff is light stuff.”

“When you can design as well as a Frenchman I’ll listen to you. If the weight is everything, let us wear nuggets strung round our necks on a deer sinew, like the Indians. Be off, Röhrig. You waste my time.”

The jeweller looked at his stock: a gold cup, a round gold watch set with diamonds, pendants of grotesque pearls shaped like sea-horses, hearts, and swollen limbs. His face became a little red, for he was son-in-law to the Burgomaster, and by no means used to being thus dismissed.

“If it is a question of price——”

“I’m not bargaining with you. This is the stuff innkeepers buy for their wives. Come back when you have something worth my while.”

Röhrig answered angrily, putting his hand into the breast of his coat:

“And what does your ladyship say to this?”

It was the diamond from Königsmark’s thumb. Clara Platen, who had seen it a hundred times, and once unsuccessfully begged it, knew the ring immediately. She took it in her hand; the facets flickered blue against her red gown.

“How much?”

But the jeweller’s moment of temper was over, and he was alarmed, remembering too late his vow of discretion.

“It’s not for sale.”

“Not your property, then?”

“My property, yes.” He could not resist that boast. She looked carefully at the setting, then deep into the central bevel, and restored it without comment, save to say:

“When you want to sell, I may bid.”

And dismissed him to close her eyes and lie back, quiet with the ecstasy of triumph to come. The stone was her proof. Money, much money, must have been needed and urgently; no time to wait for help from the all-powerful sister in Saxony, from peasants sweating too slowly over their sheaves in Sweden. Monday! She breathed deep.

That night, playing piquet with the Elector, she won; as he fumbled for his purse, not too willingly, she stopped the gesture.

"Grant me a favour. Something that will cost you nothing."

"That sounds a good bargain. Let me hear."

"To sign this."

He took the paper, and holding it away from his nose, for he was growing long-sighted with age, read the few words half aloud:

"The bearer is authorised to command the attendance of four grenadiers of H.S.H. the Elector's guard, to execute without question such orders as may be given to them: the bearer to be answerable, that such orders in no way conflict with their duty to H.S.H. and to his State." He put the paper down, and with a shrewd round eye, head a little to one side, surveyed the Countess, who returned the look, easily smiling. "Now, now, what's this? What can you want with four of my grenadiers?"

She eyed him very steadily a moment; shook her head, once to the right, once to the left, and continued to look at him until he dropped his gaze, uncomfortable as a dog that is stared at.

"D'you assure me it's nothing that will make trouble?"

"No woman on earth, nor man either, can give that guarantee."

He was silent, pursing up his mouth, and wrinkling the round Brunswick forehead, smooth for all his years, having none of the horizontal runnels of thought, but only two upright anger marks between the eyes. At last he took up the paper, went to the table that held ink and pens, and there signed it; Ernest Augustus for the man, and a great flourish, figures of eight, loops, dots, trails like the tendrils of a vine, for the Elector, Bishop and Duke. He came back slowly to the small table littered with cards, and stood a moment. Without lifting his eyes he said:

"The young man's safe with you. He may thank his looks for that."

And without waiting for an answer to his comment gave her the paper. She observed the signature closely, was satisfied, and put the document away.

"You don't often lose so cheaply, Serene Highness." The clock struck eleven. "Am I to have the happiness of expecting you in my apartments?"

"I'll go to bed. I wish the Electress was here. She'd read to me, and I'd sleep. Talk of wine—there's nothing like theology for sleep."

Clara Platen made one of her curtseys, body held stiffly by the V-shaped board in front, skirt swelling and sinking into coloured bosses and valleys. When she stood upright again he was gone, and she heard him walking heavily, with an old man's tread, down the corridor.

(VII)

Knesebeck on Monday morning found her Princess ill. She seemed to have a fever; she was petulant and refused food.

"My honey lady, let me bring the doctor. He'll take a cup or so of your blood, and your precious body will set to work to make something without humours in its place."

But the Princess would have none of this. She had a great opinion of the infallibility of doctors, and it seemed to her that no pretence could avail against their wise glances, their skilled fingers.

"The Electress, then. She's got a shelf full of remedy books. She'd come in gladly from Herrenhausen."

But the Princess had for the Electress's prescience a respect even greater than that which she accorded to doctors. She muttered a No, groaned, and tumbled the bedclothes about. Knesebeck, suspicious of this sharpness, aware and resentful of mysteries, ventured a motion of authority.

"There's something; all this week you've been different. Who knows? It may be some nasty sickness that should be seen to, for all our sakes. Nell's anxious, sweetheart. I must have advice, whether you like it or not."

Sophia-Dorothea at once was out of bed, gripping the wrists of her lady-in-waiting with cold hands.

"Be quiet. You're troublesome, you won't obey me, already this week I've wanted to have you gone."

"Highness darling, it's Nell, your own Nell! You can't speak like that ____"

"I don't trust you any more."

"Ma'am!"

"No, because you're afraid of being blamed. You're afraid that if I go away there'll be no place for you, and perhaps they may punish you."

Knesebeck answered, growing pink with anger and dismay:

"It's that man. You never said such things, never thought them, before he came. I'm sorry he ever showed his nose back in Hanover, the two-faced beast!"

Sophia-Dorothea loosed one wrist, drew back her hand, and struck. Knesebeck screamed, wrenched her other wrist free, and turned to run. The Princess, desperately following, caught her again.

"Where are you going?"

"To tell the Elector, to warn him. You've got some wickedness in mind, you and that man."

"You shan't betray me. I'll kill you."

"You're not ill, you're shamming for some purpose. I know my duty ——"

The Princess ran to her bell-rope, and tugged it. Christian, the page on duty, came to the summons.

"Stand there. See that this woman does me no harm."

"Cruel! I have a message for the Elector, the Princess cannot hold me here——"

"Before the door, so. Have you your sword? Don't listen, or heed what she says."

"I'll save you, despite yourself. If it kills me I'll tell."

Knesebeck ran for the window, from which there was a twelve-foot drop on to grass. The Princess, astonished, was not quick to perceive her intention; the boy, though, was across the room in an instant, and caught her round the waist as she bestrode the sill. They struggled; but the Princess was watching, and his arms were steeled. Knesebeck's resolution dwindled, she faltered, and stood still, weeping angrily, and rubbing her wrist where a bracelet had chafed the skin. Christian looked at his mistress for orders. She, seeking distractedly, thought of the dress-closet off her bedroom, windowless but airy, and with a good lock to the door. Into this Knesebeck was carried, and the key turned upon her. Christian, panting a little, stood to be commended, but Sophia-Dorothea, pressing her hands upon her closed eyes, had nothing for him but an order:

"Wait awhile; I have letters for you to carry."

She sat, her dark hair falling in curls over her face, so that one hand must constantly push them back while she wrote. The boy looked at her with tenderness wholly innocent of desire or reproach. His love was a springtime thing, a flower, which might die, but could never turn bitter. She was writing:

"To H.S.H. the Elector, with all haste. Sir: being this day incommoded and obliged to keep my bed, I humbly require your Serene Highness's permission to absent myself from your table to-night. The indisposition is slight. My chief concern is that I am deprived of the honour of waiting upon your Serene Highness, who shall always find me his affectionate daughter."

The second letter, longer, took less time to write.

"To-night at eleven, come. I cannot feel that happiness is so near, or to be so easily attained. I do not fear for myself, but I am so inexperienced, more so than a peasant's daughter; I dread lest some mistake of mine may bring us both to ruin. Knesebeck has some notion of what is afoot, and would have hindered it. I had to struggle with her, and now she is safely out of the way. I cannot talk with her nor the other women, yet I cannot wait alone until five in the morning. For God's sake, then, if it is not dangerous for you, let me see and touch you, and so be assured. I have lived in fetters so long that it seems to me inconceivable that they should not always hold me; like your dog you told me of, that when his chain is put on will not budge, though the chain is fastened to nothing. I am beset by fears for which there is no cause. All goes well. But I pray you to come."

The boy must deliver this with his own hand; the other might find its way to the Elector by the usual means of a manservant. Such a man Christian found snoring on the lackey's bench, rapt in a deeper sleep than is usual by day; but the fellow sprang up quickly enough, and respectfully took the billet, with which he hurried to the rooms of Countess Platen. She read it without comment, and bade him not be all day about his errand; but she found a gold piece for him, and after he had gone sat a quarter of an hour motionless in her chair.

(VIII)

Sophia-Dorothea had been sitting with a book, *Les Voyages de Cyrus*, reading the narrative of the philosopher, and had come to his lament for the death of Sulima: "Woe is me! This bliss of mine was brief. Our love, delicate, generous, the admiration of men, found no favour with the gods,

and their chastisement brought upon me that most dire of all misfortunes, separation from my beloved—”

A whistle came to her ear, very soft, the tune broken; a blackbird will drop it thus, to resume and repeat a minute later the half-dozen notes it knows. She stiffened, but did not stir. Christian was at the door. She heard it open, and though after that no sound reached her she could make pictures; two figures walking with precaution upstairs, one holding a lamp high to guide the other; the stiffly braided dress of the page and the loose jacket, the wide weather-worn cloak of her lover. Her thought followed each footstep, and when the knock came at her door it chimed with anticipation. She stood; then, remembering that she herself had pushed the bolt, ran to the door and spoke through it.

“Who’s there?”

“Tercis.”

She thrust back the bolt; let him in, and did not immediately go to his arms.

“There’s nothing—no hindrance? All these hours I’ve waited; I’m terrified.”

He took her hand gently, as if for a dance, and paced with her towards the clock. The manikin was still, but the clock’s hands were almost upon each other.

“Not yet twelve. Has it seemed so long?”

“It is easy for you, you have plans to make, orders to give. I, for hours I have seen no one; I dared not. My only company Nell, crying in the cupboard.”

He laughed. She was indignant.

“You think me a silly woman, because I’m not so well accustomed as you to these adventures. Despite myself, my heart beats, my hands tremble, the time seems long. If you were the fifth or sixth, it would be different. Countess Platen would not trouble herself.”

He took her hands.

“I’m your first lover, then?”

“I’ve not said so.”

“A thousand times you’ve said it. Your eyes when you look at me; your hands, they don’t know yet how to caress.” He kissed their palms. “You’re quivering.”

“It’s not fear.”

“It’s because I touch you.”

She bowed her head to that. He caught her roughly, hurting her, and held her while he spoke urgently in her ear.

“Let me stay here all night. You daren’t sleep. Let me keep you waking. Let me be your lover; I’ve had you so often, dreaming.” She muttered a No in the stuff of his coat. “Tell me why. How can you deny me when I can feel your heart?”

“Not in all this hurry and danger.”

“The danger’s the spice. Who’s to surprise us? The boy’s on guard.”

“Every sound——” The clock’s first beat struck her rigid. “Even that. No. When we’re safe.”

“I’ll hold you so gently, and my sword by my right hand.”

“Not here. He’s been here.”

George-Louis, he took that “he” to mean; and though it would have given him pleasure to cuckold the Prince of Hanover in his own bed, he was sensitive enough to know that he must be gentle to this scruple. He insisted no more, but lifted her to the long caned couch and sat on the floor beside it, his head under her hand.

“Talk, Philip. I daren’t be silent, I think I hear sounds. Tell me what we’ll do, when we’re in—what place is it we go to?”

“Through Westphalia to Holland. At Amsterdam we take ship for Göteborg——”

“Tell me about your house. Who lives there? All this time I’ve never asked you; is your mother living?”

“Not now. You’ll be mistress. We live much among our people, not like the landowners here; not like Electoral Princesses. My grandmother knew all the people for ten miles round and doctored them. There’s a great old book in her handwriting that my nurse was afraid of; there were spells in it.”

“Yes, yes.” She looked at her small useless hand as it lay on his hair; a hand that had never carried keys, nor written but for her own pleasure, nor

even swaddled a child. “How shall I understand such things? They will hate me and I shall be lonely.”

He hardly heard that. He was thinking of the house where he had been born, square, with fortified cupolas at each corner; even the wall that protected the kitchen garden was pierced here and there with loopholes, and there were cannon set by the gates which were fired on feast-days. The house was ferocious, like an old man who has passed his life at war; yet, remembering it, Königsmark saw nothing of this. He saw women going about their never-ending business, heard the whirring of spinning-wheels, and perceived very sharply the smell of wild strawberries brought in, heaped on leaves, from the woods. He said, slowly:

“I too shall be a stranger.”

He lifted his head, and looked at her face, just below his own; traced the shape of it with one finger, a square rounded; touched her hot mouth; closed her eyes by stroking down the lids; and at last, as though she had been a child asleep, with gentleness kissed her between them.

“Philip, no! Not yet, don’t go. I may sleep, I may miss the hour.”

“The boy will wake you. Trust him. I’ll come back at dawn.”

“Hours yet!” She clung still to his hand.

“Let me go, you little fool, for God’s sake!”

It came out roughly; he bit his lip and stooped to be pardoned, but she was smiling, and without more ado loosed his hand.

“While you were calm I said to myself, he has done this sort of thing so often. Now I know in your heart you are trembling, just as I am. Ah, why can’t we take horse now?”

He looked at the open window. There was no sign yet of dawn; a greyness against which trees stood black came from the sinking moon.

“We must wait for the light. At four o’clock. Be ready.”

She showed him a little bundle, jewels, stockings, a comb, all in a napkin tied by its four ears.

“And you, is your packing done?”

“I take nothing with me.”

He went to the door, beckoning her near him. She came running, and stood by to shoot the bolt again. He took up the guttering lantern, and

walked with precaution along the corridor, by the wall. When he turned the corner she still did not shut the door, but waited until his light ceased to tilt a shadow up and down the wall. The windings of the corridor cut off from her all sound, but she followed him with her mind, and when he must have come to the Rittersaal she did at last bolt the door.

(IX)

As he entered the Rittersaal, Königsmark, from the instinct which makes a soldier watchful when he must cross an open space, loosened his sword in the sheath. He had to make his way diagonally, from a door at one end beside the hooded fireplace, to one half-way down on the left, by which the servers entered. His lantern spluttered and flared, then died, smoking, but already he was at the door, and had only to put out his fingers to the handle. He found it, turned, and gently pulled. The door held, resisting in such a manner that he knew it to be locked.

His sword came out, with no care for the noise it made, and he wrapped his cloak quickly about his left arm to make a shield. There was no answering rattle, but from near the hood of the fireplace came a sound as though the steel ring of a guardsman's baldric clinked on body-steel. The rasp of the blade had given away his position, and at once there was a stir of feet. He stepped, more lightly than ever he had danced in quadrille, to the left again, five, six paces, making for the room's angle, where he would have cover for back and sides. While he moved he tried to calculate by the movements and shufflings how many were against him. Now that the feeble particular rays of the lantern no longer blinded him, the incomplete darkness of a summer night was revealing shapes that moved, shadows within shadow. Nobody challenged; by this he knew that he had to deal with an ambush rather than the execution of any warrant.

He took three more steps to the left. The third brought him against a fire bucket that hung at shoulder-level, filled with water; his head knocked the bucket so that it swung on its hook and a little gush of water came over his neck. He drew in a sharp breath that, with the noise of the impact, betrayed him. At once the seeking feet turned in his direction, and straining his eyes he perceived that the attackers were four. He waited, crouching, and when they seemed to be near enough lunged at the man on the right. His point struck full on steel, and all at once the sword-hand was lightened, so that he knew his whole blade had broken and fallen.

At once the four men pressed on him. The wrapped arm kept one point from his face, but others struck lower, and he felt a blow like that of a fist upon his ribs, which was the pommel following through a stroke that glanced from the bone. He felt himself falling, yet supported. The transfixing blades upheld him a moment, then he was down with blood coming from his mouth. He spat, and tried to speak, but he was failing, and the blood flowed tirelessly.

"Innocent. The Princess—"

He got that out, or seemed to, speaking upwards towards a light which appeared, with a woman's face above it; immediately this face became distorted, a grimace exposed the teeth. A woman's heel came down upon his mouth and trod out the words.

When he had no longer eyes for the light, one of the four men stooped, looked closely, and spoke with a gasp: "Lord Jesus! Look who it is."

His companions stooped. They eyed each other, and dropped their eyes immediately again to the figure on the floor. It was Clara Platen who spoke, stamping her stained shoe:

"Finish, then. Half-done's damnation."

The men still looked. One went on his knees and put the clean steel of a dagger under his Colonel's nostrils. It remained unclouded. The kneeling man muttered that it was all very well to talk. If he'd known he'd have cut his own right hand off——

"The executioner may save you that trouble, my friend. Now for what you are to do. Wrap him first in his cloak; the blood runs no longer. Take him downstairs to that place where workmen have been, you know it, you passed it to come here. They are walling up an old privy, the bricks are laid to within a foot of the top. They'll finish to-morrow. A foot's enough for him, you may easily pass him through, he's slender. Take a good light. See no blood shows on the bricks. After, come back to me here."

The men did not move. She said, reining back her voice, that was apt to thunder in anger, to a hoarseness more threatening:

"Ah, so you think you'll sell me? But you'd carry to the Elector a piece of news that's stale. Under whose hand is this warrant? No, no. This is a murder by four discontented soldiers. If they're discovered, they'll hang, and lose their bowels first."

They said nothing, but the kneeling soldier took off his own cloak, and beckoned with his chin to a comrade to help him. They lifted the dead man with tenderness, wrapping him, and moving carefully not to tread in the blood, of which there was much. At last the first man hoisted Königsmark across his shoulder, two others sheathed their swords and fell in behind him. The fourth carried a lantern. As they went out, walking in step from mere habit of discipline, they had the look of men mourning a commander mortally stricken in battle. It was almost dawn.

Sophia-Dorothea did not dare to sleep. She added a handkerchief or two to the medley in her bundle, read and let the book fall, marched about the room to keep her eyelids from drooping, watched the hands of the clock. When at last it struck four she put on the cloak with a hood that she had worn on the journey to Brunswick, and took up her bundle to be ready. Her shoes were ridiculous, with long toes and great bows. She had no sensible footgear such as the Electress donned to wander in wet weather through her gardens.

The clock's hands moved on. Outside her window she thought once she heard the whistle, but it was only a bird waking. She leant out, and saw the head of the boy Christian standing upright on guard.

"Christian!" He looked up, and came out a little way from the door to hear her. "Nothing yet?" He shook his head. "Go to the gate by which he comes. Listen there. Find out."

He went off. She noticed even in the grey light how bright with sleeplessness were the boy's eyes, and with an odd little movement of coquetry drew back into the room to view her own eyes in the mirror. They looked large; but she was ten years older than the boy, and had been ridden by emotion for days; there were lines about them, and lines running downwards from the nostrils. She quitted the mirror and went over to the clock. With her elbows on the carved wood below it she watched the minute-hand. A weight on a chain pulled it forward smoothly, almost too slowly for the eye, and would pull so till the chain was wholly unwound, when it would stop. That men, hanging for so short a time between two abysses, should have courage thus to measure out the thread that sustained them! The clock terrified her. She moved away.

By six daylight was established in all the ceremony of a triumphant summer morning. Thrushes made sallies across the grass, marking it with thin parallel lines where their feet broke the web of dew. Long shadows of trees were sucked back as the sun mounted, whose warmth drew scent from

the heap of yesterday's cut grass at a corner of the lawn. Soon, in the lower garden, scythes would be swinging, slowly and in rhythm, like the pendulum of a clock. Nowhere did a footstep sound; nowhere was there any movement, other than that of the lime leaves languidly turning to a faint wind.

Sophia-Dorothea ran from the window to her dress cupboard and turned the key. On the floor, with a primrose satin skirt under her cheek for a pillow, Knesebeck lay asleep.

"Nell, Nell, wake up and be with me. Don't think how I was unkind to you. Something's happened, and I'm afraid."

(X)

"I never thought," wrote Electress Sophia to her niece, the Raugrafin Louise at Frankfort six weeks later, "to find this little town of ours at the head and front of a scandal. And such a strange scandal too, without beginning nor end to it. In the Wood Market here, to which all our news finds its way, they say that the witches have made off with Königsmark. There is no shutting the mouths of the people, and for that matter their guesses may be as good as my own, for we are all in the dark. His servants can give us no clue, though they say he was behaving in a very strange manner for a week before this disappearance, alternately depressed and frantic. I myself make no conjectures, for what I know is enough to keep me in thought. In my opinion, if a woman cannot bear her husband she is better away from him. It gives bad example to see young people at cross-purposes, and the fact is, the Blessed Virgin herself could not have made a success of marriage with my eldest boy. Knowing your discretion I speak so.

"But you ask for an answer that you may make to questioners. Very well, then; say this: The Crown Princess could not endure her husband, and therefore her father and his thought it better that she should separate from him, and live by herself, as she has the means to do, at Ahlden. One of her father's officers will attend her, which is a very good thing for him, for he will have a pretty house and full pay, besides obliging the Duke of Zelle and thereby improving the prospects of his baker's dozen of children. *A quelque chose malheur est bon.* This must be your answer. It will be enough to keep all but the most impertinent quiet."

The Electress ended her letter with affectionate wishes, and having sealed it laid it upon the pile for the courier, and rang her silver bell. A

secretary came.

"My letters are ready. What hour is it?"

"Midday, Electoral Highness. The Princess has been waiting this last half-hour."

"Usher her in when I ring. And give her Electoral Highness her proper title when you speak of her."

The old woman sat again in her red velvet chair, and put one hand over her eyes. This farewell tired her, she dreaded what she must do. But she understood that reason and good sense rather than pity must be allowed to set the price of behaviour, and that condolence should never be thrown in as make-weight, when extravagance has made a bad bargain. She composed herself, rang, and turned her chair a little to face the door.

The eyes are incapable of expression unless surrounding muscles lend it, and Sophia-Dorothea's eyes stared out from the paint that held her face smooth like those of the saints in mosaic that stare from walls in Ravenna. She did not speak, curtseyed low, recovered, stood; all this was etiquette.

"You had better sit. I have to speak with you. That stool."

She obeyed the hand that stirred briefly to point; sat, was silent.

"You may imagine that it is not for my own pleasure, nor yours either, that I send for you. Certain matters are to be understood. Soon you leave this country."

"Of my own will. To live on my own estate and be free."

Electress Sophia went on, measuring her speech very exactly.

"Ahlden was part of your dower, truly. My son restores it to you as a gift, for you must understand that you have no claim except through him. Very well. Now, it is the Elector's wish, that you hold no further communication with this family."

"I understand and gladly submit."

"Nor with your children."

Sophia-Dorothea sprang up from her stool.

"That is not the judge's decree. George-Louis is freed of all blame, he may marry, I may not. I accept that, and to live apart. God knows I have no great will to live at all. The title, the succession are his. I'll put off all that and thank him. But the children are mine."

“You are not to see them, write, nor be in touch with them in any way. That is the decision.”

“Whose decision? I swore on the sacrament that I’d never been unfaithful. I’ll swear again, here at your feet——”

“No theatre, pray. I am not to justify this order, but to inform you of it.”

“They are all I have, the only creatures left in the world that love me. I pleaded with you once, ma’am; you taught me so that I shall never ask again. But you can follow my heart here by your own, you grieved when you lost Charles in war. Speak for me. If you will not, then I’ll manage in spite of you, I’ll see them, I’ll write——”

“Da, da, da! A compliment in one hand, a threat in the other, then one has both hands full. Listen to me. I think you are not a bad woman, but I will not have my house, and that of England, disturbed by your goings and comings, and the children worked upon to pity you. What can you give them? Neither money, nor connections, nor interest, but only intrigue, and to teach them hatred of their own people. In return they give you—what? A caress or two. You may get as much from a spaniel.”

“No, no. I’ll never submit to it. I’ll dress as a servant and find my way to them——”

“You will be under surveillance in the castle of Ahlden. A gentleman has been appointed to watch over you. His own future and that of thirteen children depend on his vigilance, so you may suppose that he will not easily succumb to temptation.”

“A prisoner, then. Say it, make it clear. A prisoner—for how long?”

Electress Sophia did not answer. She had found the interview difficult enough; now she could not bring herself to say the last two words, For ever. It was Sophia-Dorothea, not ordinarily skilled to read thoughts, who breathed them, tapping her breast as though to drive the terror home.

“For ever.”

Silence. Then Electress Sophia spoke abruptly, and at random.

“You will need some distraction. It would be well if you could take to the study of gardens; I believe there is a pretty one, though neglected, where you are going. There is not the care paid to flowers here that you may find in England, or in Holland where I was a child. A garden is an exercise in hope, you labour and plan for the future; and yet not wholly, for the labour pays itself in health, and in good fatigue. Besides, the properties of plants may be

studied, and their good qualities put in use; they are not thrown about this world only for the eyes' delight, but to comfort our stomachs and keep us humble. A mere weed, decocted, will serve to lay any man, heaven's godson, in the grave; and the same weed, though a king trample it, he cannot tell how it grows." She got up and walked to the shelves where a folio lay on its side, heavy, six inches thick; her old hands strained at it, to lift it. Sophia-Dorothea, obeying that Court instinct which ordered that the lesser in rank must wait upon the higher, came forward and took the weight of the great book.

"Lay it on the table," the Electress told her; and when she had done so, turning over the pages fondly, said: "This has been a solace to me while I have possessed it. *Theatrum Botanicum*, you see, the Theatre of Plants; good players too, better than Pantaloon and his mates. I give you this, for I think you need comfort more than I do, and have longer to wait for it. A moment; I'll write."

She found her pen, and stooping, wrote in her hand that showed as yet no tremor: *Fatigatis humus cubile est*. She read it aloud when it was done, translating as she saw blankness in the younger woman's eyes:

" 'To the weary, the bare ground is a bed.' An old saying, none the less true for that. There is not, I think," said the Electress, looking at her rings, "a great deal of happiness to be had in this world. The secret is, to abandon hope of it; at once all things come to your aid. Without observers, vanity dies; without power, the wish for it. Nature is wiser than ourselves; little by little she takes away desire, and then, with a body at rest, comes hope of quiet for our souls. I am older than you. I know what I speak of."

The Electress shut down the book's cover upon what she had written, and rang her silver bell. Sophia-Dorothea was weeping. She put up both hands to her face, on which the colours now were sadly streaked and mingled, held them there an instant; then let them fall and stood, making no attempt to shield her distress from the Electress's eyes, yellow and bright as those of an eagle.

"I wanted to be beloved. I wanted kindness."

The Electress suddenly bent, and without touching hands or shoulders put her lips to the younger woman's forehead just where it joined the hair. She said nothing, and after the touch stood away. A servant in black livery entered, obeyed a gesture, took up the heavy book, and went out, stepping very straight. Sophia-Dorothea curtseyed, and made a half-movement, a stretching up of her hands, but the Electress had turned away towards the

window, whence she saw for the moment very little; her hearing, however, was not misted, and in a little while she heard short faltering steps going away.

One duty remained. She had, as she told the Raugrafin, her own notion of the truth. Ernest Augustus's looks disturbed her. He had refused to see Saxony's envoy, Colonel Bannier, when this gentleman came to demand an account of Königsmark, and went off hunting, though his gout was so troublesome that he had to follow the stag in a carriage. But more revealing than his retreat was the advance, the marching and counter-marching of Countess Platen at Court in a series of new dresses, her thumb bearing a ring whose bright water the Electress knew. "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thy horn iron and I will make thy hoofs brass, and thou shalt beat out many people." No more: no more brazen stamping, no more exalting of the horn.

The Secretary announced:

"The Countess Platen desires your Electoral Highness will remember she was commanded to attend."

There had been a delay, necessary for the summoning of strength; the Electress touched books for this, as Antaeus touched earth. She put away the Bible in which she had been reading, a good Royalist English compendium with the prayer for martyred Charles, and answered:

"Let the Countess be admitted."

Clara Platen came in, dressed in the colour she had favoured this last month or two, a red deep as the slow inner blood of a wound. She made her reverence respectfully, but spoke before she should; she had taken wine, though it was early.

"Your Electoral Highness sent for me. How can I be so happy as to serve?"

The Electress answered at once, with directness:

"I once spoke with you on the subject of your sister. That was some years back. No doubt, however, you remember it."

Countess Platen answered, warily, with a question:

"My sister has not again offended?"

"You recollect the reasons I urged for her withdrawal?"

"I believe I do."

“That is fortunate; I need not repeat them now. I require you to follow her example.”

Countess Platen was standing; she had not been offered the usual square stool by the old woman regarding her so steadily. Two months back, had this happened, she might have kept her temper, weathered whatever tempest threatened. But she had been drinking hard during those weeks, besides dreaming so that she sat upright through all the dark hours, to be waked from nightmare by the jerk of her own head falling forward. She had enough liquor in her now to unbalance judgment. Without waiting to be bidden she pulled forward the stool and sat squarely facing the Electress.

“Ha! So I am to go. And for what reason, and how will it come about?”

“You are a subject. Your excesses reflect scandal upon your Prince. You take money, you maintain spies; and you have blood on your hands.”

Clara Platen laughed.

“You think a State is like your chair; a leg’s rotten, off with it, and nail on another. All that is, of a chair, you see. But a State is like a tree, that lives by what it thrusts out underground in the dark, among worms and dead bones. Cut its root, and the gay leaves, the strong branches, are good only for firewood.”

“Are you saying that you are necessary to my house? Speak clearly; defend yourself if you can.”

“Your house! What do you bring to it? Blood; the chance of a throne. And you think, because there were crowns on the sheets you were got in, that God will care for the rest. Nenni! Put such thoughts away.” She surveyed the old woman’s thin nose, hands knotted like the vines that grew for her ancestors’ pleasure. “Do you think—now that the English succession is sure—do you think it was done by sitting still, and looking like a picture in a gallery? It was done by watchfulness and bribing; by lying; by killing. It was done by me. And when your son is on that throne, George the First of England, Scotland, and the rest of it, my wits will have set him there, and not your blood.”

Electress Sophia sat still, unblinking. When the woman ended she waited, and spoke:

“Princes have power over men as over money; when they choose, their stamp may give dross the value of gold, for in this world is no reality, and a Prince’s word is God’s at second hand. You have been struck, like a coin, for a purpose; given a value above that which lies in your own essence. This

your value pays a crown, a throne, things of gold and wood, symbols which your exchanges put into our hands. Shall we thank you? I tell you, my mother's brother with his head on the block was king then as truly as when he first sat on Jacob's stone in Westminster. And I should still be a king's daughter though to-morrow I sold apples in the street." She put her hand to the closed Bible, rapped with her knuckles on it. "We owe you no debt, therefore."

"As you please. I have had my pleasure out of what was done, and only a fool expects gratitude from courts. Well, the sentence?"

"I am considering," answered the old woman, hand against cheek. There she sat, all thought withdrawn from her fixed eyes, as though the ancient diamond on her enemy's thumb had entranced her. Still gazing at this she spoke:

"You must leave Hanover. Whether you do so heels first is what I have to decide. I too have grenadiers."

Clara Platen laughed her great horse-laugh, that burst out of her like a bray from a trumpet.

"Do you think to frighten me with your death's-head held up like a turnip lantern? Do me this service. Despatch me and let me sleep. I don't fear anything but sleep—that, and growing old." She rent away red satin, bared one breast to show a new wound healing below it. "I tried my hand but the steel snapped, and I can't bring myself again to it. Feet first, Electoral Highness, only don't let them strike at my face. Give that order and I'll kiss your hand."

She dipped, catching up a fold of the Electress's ample skirt to brush her mouth across it. Words and gesture were mocking, but the Electress was not affronted. She was accustomed to hear women plead for life; a week since one had been brought her from the Spinning House who had murdered her child, and she remembered the eyes, swelled with tears, starting, all the whites showing as she yelled for mercy to live. Countess Platen's grin, above her stubborn plea for death, was more troubling. She spoke briefly and dryly.

"What request is this? You are drunk, I believe. I am to murder you, am I, for your convenience? Get up, and cover your body. Why are you such a noddy as to suppose that to run out of life is to escape judgment?" She held her eyes upon the face, whose mouth now was being drawn awry, and suddenly got to her feet. "Some sins ride hard, sink their spurs deep. I pity

you. Yes, and whore that you are, and troubler of my house, by God I'll pray for you!"

When the woman in red had dragged her dress together and gone, the Electress took up her Bible and opened it at random to learn heaven's verdict; guidance she never asked.

"Wherefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold I am against your pillows, wherewith ye there hunt the souls to make them flie, and I will tear them from your arms, and will let the souls go, even the souls that ye hunt to make them flie. Your kerchiefs also will I tear, and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand to be hunted, and ye shall know that I am the LORD."

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Saraband for Dead Lovers* by Helen de Guerry Simpson]