KÖNIGSMARK

A. E. W. MASON

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KÖNIGSMARK

BY

A. E. W. MASON

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CHAPTER I

TELLS OF A REHEARSAL

CHANCELLOR SCHULTZ leaned comfortably back in his cushioned chair and crossed his fat little legs. He laid his fat little hands side by side and palms downwards on the big mahogany table in front of him. He slid them apart over the polished surface to the full reach of his arms. Not a paper remained to reproach him. It was half past eleven by the gilded clock against the wall. In a few minutes Duke George William, with his huntsmen and his dogs and his horns, would come clattering back from the moorlands. The day's work was over and, for Chancellor Schultz, his life's work too. The tablets of his service were clean now, and he was pleased to think that, though much written upon during twenty years, they had never been smudged.

He took a pinch of snuff, inhaled it slowly and struck a bell upon the table.

"Theodore," he said to the footman who answered it, "will you please tell Councillor Bernstorff that I shall be happy if he will spare me a few minutes."

But he wouldn't be happy. Chancellor Schultz was never even comfortable with Councillor Bernstorff. Councillor Bernstorff was suave but secret. He wanted to jostle and push. He pined for things to happen. Now for Chancellor Schultz the flash of those pigeons burnished by the sunlight as they swooped down from the cupolas above the castle's yellow walls to the alley of lime-trees beyond the rusty old bridge over the moat—that was all that he wanted to see happening in the Duchy of Celle. However, Bernstorff was clever—and there was no one else. Only—and a little spasm of doubt shook the Chancellor, not for the first time, in the wisdom of his choice of a successor—there was the shape of the ferret in Councillor Bernstorff's face, a sharpness to the cheek-bones, a needle-point to the nose, which his experience had taught him to link with a passion for land. Never had Councillor Bernstorff breathed a word to justify the Chancellor's suspicion. He was, in every detail of his conduct, the mere industrious servant of the Chancery, modest in his outlook, frugal in his life. Yet Schultz nursed that

suspicion and shook his head over it. A landless man hungry for land—who else in the world was so liable to the bribe? And what bribe could equal the feel of your very own clods of solid earth beneath the sole of your foot? But—but—there was no one else.

Chancellor Schultz heard the light tread of Bernstorff in the corridor and hurriedly adjusted his heavy peruke upon his bald head. This was an important moment in the simple history of Celle—though how important neither he nor anyone else could on that summer day foresee—and Councillor Bernstorff was a stickler for ceremony.

Bernstorff entered discreetly, a thin, tall young man in his twenty-eighth year, austere and correct from his top-knot to his heels. He bowed to his Chief.

"Sit down, Bernstorff." The Chancellor pointed to a chair and Bernstorff sat on the edge of it. "What devilish thin knees the fellow has!" Schultz reflected discontentedly. "But there's no one else."

Aloud he said:

"This afternoon His Highness will hand over to you the seals of the Duchy."

For a few moments Bernstorff stared at the Chancellor with incredulous eyes. Then the blood mounted slowly up his long neck into his cheeks.

"Your Excellency resigns?" he asked, subduing his voice to the hush which fits calamities. Inwardly he was saying to himself, "So the old fool's going at last and high time too!" And he himself was going to move from his dark little office in the court, overshadowed by the big lime-tree, into this spacious room which, across alleys of cedars and lawns smooth as emeralds, commanded and surveyed the town.

"I shall make some changes in the furniture,"—Councillor Bernstorff let his thoughts run on. "I'll have that fine table against the window, so that the light may fall over my left shoulder. Not that I mean to write much more than my name in the future. But I don't like doors behind me. And I'll have the great clock opposite so that I can't but see it when I raise my head and know if I'm wasting a minute."

There would be corresponding changes outside the great window. To use a phrase not coined in the year 1680, Councillor Bernstorff meant to put the Duchy of Celle on the map, and himself with it. In the great carpet of Germany, as it was patterned then, Celle never caught the eye, so quiet was its colour. Other principalities, Brandenburg, Saxony, Hanover,—yes, even Hanover, Celle's little next-door neighbour—claimed all the attention. They glittered with jewels and fine clothes, even if the villages were dark and the

villagers hungry. They were noisy with entertainments and, by the way, loud eating. They had country palaces and parks laid out on the model of Versailles. Had not Herrenhausen the highest fountain in Europe which flung a jet of water one hundred and forty feet high into the air? They sparkled, these Duchies, and if from time to time the sheen wore thin and offered a glimpse of dark passions and secret crimes—why, an astute Chancellor might easily turn such things to his profit. Whilst here, on the edge of these excitements and possibilities, Celle slept—placid, patriarchal, an everlasting Sunday afternoon!

At this point in his reflections Councillor Bernstorff was startled and alarmed. Schultz was talking: and after all he still had the seals of his office in his keeping. It could not be that the old fool was reading his thoughts as if they were printed in an open book. Yet he was saying:

"Celle was not always this quiet and contented little Paradise. When I first became Chancellor, there were speeches at the street corners, deputations to the Palace, refusals to pay taxes, plots of revolution, such a pother and uproar as no man can imagine to-day. His Highness was squandering the revenues with Madame Buccolini in Venice. He could make the money fly in those days, I can tell you! Talk of the Doge marrying the Adriatic once a year. The Duke and his young brother, Ernest Augustus, the Bishop, married all Venice twice a night and with something more than a golden ring."

Councillor Bernstorff sat back in his chair. Chancellor Schultz was only musing contentedly over the twenty-five years of his service. Duke George William had yielded to the remonstrances of his people. He had returned and had dutifully offered his hand to Sophia of Bohemia and, unable to face so incongruous a match, had passed her on to his brother at a price.

"We were well quit of that good woman," said Schultz.

"She is the granddaughter of an English King," Bernstorff returned, shocked at so disparaging a phrase.

"And always aware of it," said Schultz drily.

"She is a philosopher, learned, and the friend of philosophers," declared Bernstorff.

"She has also the tongue of a fishwife," said Schultz.

"Certainly she has used harsh phrases," Bernstorff admitted reluctantly. "But it would have humiliated even a lady of less degree than the Duchess Sophia to be handed from brother to brother with a handsome gift as the price of taking her."

Councillor Bernstorff was on delicate ground, for the harsh phrases by which term he mitigated the lady's Billingsgate, were all directed at the household of Celle.

"It was too big a price besides," Bernstorff added regretfully. For himself he would have liked to see the ceremonious and arrogant Sophia, the friend of Descartes and Leibnitz, and a possible Queen of England, Duchess of Celle instead of Duchess of Hanover. "First a promise by Duke George William that he would never marry. . . ."

"Ah! That promise was broken," said Schultz with a smile.

"At a big price too," Bernstorff retorted.

"One gets nothing from Hanover, my friend, except at a big price. You will do well to remember that," Schultz replied.

He was smiling. To his thinking the price had been well worth while. His musing had taken him back to the happy hour at Breda when the brown curls and flashing beauty of Eleonore d'Olbreuse, the young French Lady-in-Waiting to the Princess of Tarente, had netted the susceptible heart of George William, Duke of Celle, for good and all. A morganatic marriage had followed, a year later the beautiful Sophia Dorothea was born and Schultz's fifteen years' fight for the legitimization of the mother and the daughter had begun. He was hampered by the opposition of Hanover, the greed of its Duke and the hatred of Duchess Sophia. But step by step he had won his way. Eleonore d'Olbreuse became Madame de Harburg, Madame de Harburg became Countess of Wilhelmsburg, and Sophia Dorothea, when she married, would have the right to emblazon her note-paper with the Royal Arms of Brunswick. Finally, a delay in the supply of troops to the Emperor Leopold brought that hesitating man to a decision, and just four years before this day when Chancellor Schultz surrendered his office, the Emperor's envoy had attended the ceremonious re-marriage of Duke George William with his wife, had greeted her as Your Highness, and Sophia Dorothea, then a girl of ten years, as Princess. So Chancellor Schultz pleasantly recollected and still Councillor Bernstorff protested: "But the price was too high. Her Highness cannot inherit—no, neither she nor the Princess. When the Duke dies, the Duchy is joined with Hanover."

"Yes," Schultz agreed. "Yet there has been some advantage in that hard bargain. His Highness set himself to save. There has been no French company of players sucking the blood of Celle, no Italian Opera, no carnivals, no masked balls, no mistresses sparkling with other women's tears. A careful husbandry, instead, my friend Bernstorff. A home-spun prosperity in which all Celle has shared. And meanwhile a great fortune has been built up for Her Highness and her daughter. The Princess Sophia

Dorothea! There's not a Prince from one end of Germany to another but would think himself blessed if her pretty hand would rest in his."

The Chancellor had thus good reason for his complacency. He was looking backward. Bernstorff on the other hand was looking ahead.

"And which of them will it be?" he asked with every appearance of nonchalance.

Schultz shrugged his shoulders.

"She will choose for herself. You are shocked, my friend? Then you will find much to shock you in the pleasant state of Celle. A husband who loves his wife. A wife who is content with her home. A daughter who at fourteen is still a child, with a child's longings and a child's pleasures. In God's good time she will make her choice. It may be young Augustus William of Wolfenbüttel. Let us hope that it will be."

Bernstorff shook his head doubtfully over that prospect and Schultz rallied him with a laugh.

"What, you, too? Because the elder brother, betrothed too soon, dies in battle, the younger must not take his place? Superstition, Bernstorff. Beware of it! However, there is time and to spare. Let nature have her way!"

"Nature?" Bernstorff repeated. "At fourteen women are ripe for marriage."

"And at fifteen they are ripe for death. Let the Princess Sophia Dorothea play for a little while longer with her dolls."

"And amongst them," said Bernstorff slowly, "with Philip Christopher von Königsmark?"

The Chancellor sat upright in his chair. He stared at his companion.

"Philip Christopher Königsmark?" he repeated. "The page?"

"The page," said Bernstorff, nodding his head.

After that there fell a silence upon the room. That Bernstorff had some show of reason for what he said, Schultz could not doubt. All his complacency ebbed away from him. So much forethought he had taken to safeguard the little realm to which he had given every beat of his loyal heart, to stop every crevice through which an untimely wind could creep. And here suddenly was a danger which he had never taken into account.

It was the custom in those days for the cadets of noble families to complete their education as pages in Ducal or Imperial Courts. In neighbouring Sweden, no family shone with a brighter lustre than that of old John Christopher Königsmark who had captured Prague in 1648 and recovered the famous Silver Book of Bishop Ulphilas. His descendants had

stamped their names on every battlefield in Europe and left some fragrance of their passage in every boudoir. Great soldiers and great lovers, remarkable for the beauty of their features and the rare distinction of their manners, they would have been fabulous if they had not been real. Homeric stories were told of them and the stories were true. Charles John, swimming with his sword between his teeth, had captured a Turkish galley single-handed. He was the only Protestant who had ever been made a Knight of Malta. A girl of high family in England fled from her home and camped with him as his page from Vienna to the gates of Constantinople. Wherever there were battles to be fought, or women to be loved, one of that family ran, bright and ruinous like a flame through standing corn.

And here was a sprig of that breed in the quiet Court of Celle, where the greatest heiress of the day twisted her father round her child's finger and delighted her adoring mother by the quickness of her wits and the liveliness of her spirit. He, Schultz, should have known the danger and prevented it. He sat blaming himself: and the brightness of the day was dimmed. The very silence of the room became an oppression. It seemed to him that shadows were gathering in the corners, taking unto themselves life, an evil life, which spread like a miasma through the kindly Palace, setting it out as a scene fit for darkness and unknown horrors.

Chancellor Schultz shook his shoulders violently. He got up from his chair and walked quickly across the room. As he gazed out through the open window, the wide, orderly space of lawn and alley, sleeping in the sunlight, calmed the trouble of his spirit. From the market-place beyond the Church a drowsy peaceful hum reached to his ears, and away upon his right hand, he could hear the river Aller singing pleasantly over its stones at the bottom of the French garden. He grumbled at the ease with which he had let these dark and foolish fancies capture him.

"It's high time I went," he said to himself. "I'm getting old, and old men make catastrophes out of cobwebs. A page? A page can be sent away and the State still stand upright." He laughed and returned to his seat.

"Let me hear this desperate story of the page and the Princess, my good Bernstorff."

"There is to be an entertainment in the theatre on the occasion of Her Highness' birthday," said Bernstorff. "There will be interludes, recitations, songs by the citizens of Celle for the citizens of Celle."

Bernstorff could not check the sniff of disdain. In the Castle of Celle, high up on the top floor, was the most adorable little theatre in the world, a place of white and gold, lit by candles in glass candelabra—the daintiest little band-box of a theatre, perfect for a witty comedy played by that French

company at Hanover or for a charming operetta sung by that Italian troupe at Hanover. Here the burghers of the town, stiff in their best clothes, were to profane its daintiness with their uncouth gestures and clumsy speech. Of all the dreary entertainments conceivable, nothing to Bernstorff's thinking could equal the amateurish efforts of bumpkins dressed in clothes of their own making. And there would be three hours of it—three, eternal, tedious hours. Bernstorff grew so hot in his anticipation of them that he forgot his reason for mentioning them.

Chancellor Schultz brought him back to it.

"After all I am still Chancellor," he reflected. "I must make sure that there is some body in this story. If there is none, Bernstorff must whistle for his appointment. Shall I tell him about Stechinelli?"

Aloud he said:

"There is nothing new in such entertainments."

"There is to be an item which is new," Bernstorff returned.

"It will be the less popular," said Schultz.

Bernstorff leaned forward, nodding his head to underline his words.

"There is to be a scene out of a new play."

"Excellent!" said Schultz.

"The play is by Racine."

"I have never heard of him," remarked Schultz.

Bernstorff sat up in his chair and observed coldly:

"He is held in great esteem by King Louis of France."

"That is probably why," said Schultz.

There were moments when Bernstorff was profoundly shocked by the Boeotian contentment of his superior Minister. Louis was an enemy no doubt, but he was by universal recognition the arbiter of taste and the patron of letters. However, with ignorance so abysmal, there could be no argument.

"The scene is to be acted by the Princess Sophia Dorothea and Philip Königsmark, a page."

"But not a lackey," answered Schultz. "We will not forget that in the veins of the Königsmarks flows the royal blood of Pfalz and Nassau."

Bernstorff went about on another tack.

"It is a passionate love scene."

"To be played by babies," said Schultz. "It should be amusing."

"It is being rehearsed daily with fervour," objected Bernstorff. "I have stood once or twice under the gallery at the back of the theatre and listened."

Schultz was now a little more impressed than he wished to be or cared to show.

"Moreover the play's motive is the old fable of Iphigenia. Iphigenia is to be sacrificed with the acquiescence of her father. The scene is the one in which Achilles-Königsmark or shall we say Königsmark-Achilles seeks to dissuade the Princess Sophia-Iphigenia from her proper obedience."

Schultz twisted uncomfortably in his chair.

"But no doubt Her Highness supervises these rehearsals," he argued.

"She does."

"In that case the fervour you condemn will be no more than the scene requires."

Bernstorff smiled.

"And in fact the dialogue is declamatory," he admitted.

"Well then?"

Chancellor Schultz spread out his hands. The choice of the scene may have been unfortunate. But if there was no paddling of hands, no faces cheek to cheek, no knee pressing amorously against knee, there was no great harm done—nothing at all events to make all this pother about.

But Bernstorff had not finished.

"The rehearsals are discreet. But they have brought two young people, both of unusual beauty, into a close acquaintanceship. The rehearsals under supervision have inspired a desire for meetings under no supervision at all."

"And such meetings take place?"

"Every day," said Bernstorff.

Schultz drew a long breath.

"I should have been told of this," he said, but he had no doubt why he had not been told. Bernstorff would wish to make his assumption of high office memorable by some lightning stroke which would set his master in his debt.

"One of these days," he added thoughtfully, "I shall have to tell you about Stechinelli. Meanwhile, where do these meetings take place?"

"In the chapel of the Palace," Bernstorff replied. He explained with a note of acrimony in his voice: "A lime-tree grows in front of my office window. It darkens the room, which is inconvenient, but it makes a screen through which no one outside can look. Across the court is the chapel and the entrance to the chapel is from the court."

"Well?" said Schultz.

"At six o'clock in the afternoon Philip Königsmark comes alone to the courtyard. He comes carelessly, sauntering, with an eye upon the windows. As soon as he thinks that no one is overlooking him, he slips into the chapel. And there he waits. He waits in His Highness' gallery with the latticed windows. If you followed him in, a trifle surprised at so much devotion in a boy so modish, as I once did, you would see no one, you would hear no one. You would believe the chapel to be empty."

"And it is empty," Schultz insisted.

"Until the Princess comes. She may come soon. She may not come for an hour. But in the end—yes, the Princess brings the sins of her fourteen years to the same throne of grace,"—and Bernstorff laughed with satisfaction in the neatness of his phrases.

Schultz did not laugh. He was as glum as a man could be.

"And they stay long?" he asked.

"Half-past-seven is the hour for supper, as your Excellency knows," Bernstorff replied; "and young Königsmark must stand upon his duties behind His Highness' great chair. But he comes to the chapel already dressed."

"And doubtless," Schultz continued—and the irony had passed now from Bernstorff's voice into his, "you have been able, from that dark room which you are to exchange for mine, to hear something of their talk, perhaps to observe something of their conduct."

Bernstorff's sallow face flushed a dark red.

"My duty," he began, "bade me forget my dignity."

"You hid yourself," Chancellor Schultz translated bluntly.

"In the pulpit," Bernstorff admitted. "The young couple sat side by side on the chairs beneath me. It was—inconvenient. I suffered sharply from the cramp."

Chancellor Schultz was not sorry to hear that. He permitted himself even to utter a little grunt of pleasure. It was indeed the only tiny morsel of pleasure to be extracted from the whole of this untimely episode.

"You heard them then?"

"Yes, I heard them," said Bernstorff and he tittered at the absurdity of the conversation to which, with the cramp in his calves and the cold stone of the pulpit bruising his knees, he had been compelled to listen for a good half-hour.

"They talked like children, if indeed ever were children so serious. They were going to break down the barriers—he of course with a flashing sword

whilst she waited. Together they were going to do noble things—they were not quite sure what—but things which would make a lovelier world for other people——"

"Yes, yes, yes," Schultz interrupted roughly. Young people had dreams and were all the better for them. He felt uneasy, and a little ashamed at hearing their dreams profaned, ridiculed, made silly. He shook himself as if his clothes hung uncomfortably upon his limbs. Let the children laugh at their fine imaginings when they had grown up—but no one else, certainly not Chancellor Schultz who had many faults to reproach himself with, and certainly not Councillor Bernstorff who had more. They were sacred—the dreams of children—however quickly they might tarnish and fade. "And that was all?"

Bernstorff smiled.

"They were all soul," he said, summing up the conversations, "waiting unconsciously for the spark which would reveal to them that they were also—all body."

And again Schultz was silent. The sentence was like a blow between the eyes. There was too much force and truth in it for argument. Yes, the moment would come, the spark would kindle and pass from one to the other. He looked at Bernstorff and nodded his head. It was a gesture of surrender.

"We are in time," he said, drawing a breath of relief. "We are in time."

At that moment with a blare of horns, a great barking of dogs and a clatter of hoofs, Duke George William and his huntsmen swirled joyously into the courtyard.

CHAPTER II

PHILIP THE PAGE

HER SERENE HIGHNESS, the Duchess of Celle, began to doubt her wisdom in selecting a scene from the Tragedy of Iphigenia at just the same time as did Chancellor Schultz. She was sitting in a small three-cornered room at the top of the Castle's southern tower. The ceiling and the walls were heavily decorated with golden images of the acanthus flower, but it had the homely and comfortable look of a parlour much in use. One of its windows commanded the Park with its smooth beech trees and its grass as smooth; the other looked down a slope to the French garden of trim yew shrubs and glowing beds of flowers and horn-beam hedges, with a round pond in the middle, which shone in the sunlight like a mirror. Perronet had laid out that garden for her so that she might have at her elbow a piece of her native Poitou, but she had no eyes for it this morning. Neither for the garden nor the strip of embroidery which lay upon her knee.

She was forty-one years old in this summer; and whilst the beauty which had long ago captured Duke George William had ripened, she had gradually added to it a serene dignity exactly fitted to her new title and advancement. To Duchess Sophia over at Hanover she was "a little clot of dirt"; to her own people of Celle she was a Queen in the right of her devotion to their prosperity and happiness. However there was very little of stateliness in her look at this moment. She was watching her young daughter with a loving amusement which waited only for an exclamation to break into a laugh.

"In trouble, darling?" she asked.

Sophia Dorothea, her feet drawn back under her chair, was bending over a copy-book and breathing heavily. Her dark brows were drawn together in a frown. She put down a word and crossed it out again and sucked her pencil and looked at the printed copy of "Iphigenia" which lay beside the copy-book and finally threw the pencil down and sat up in her chair.

"Mother, let's talk treason. German—is—a—barbarous language." Her young voice rang out clear as the sound of a bell. She challenged the world to contradict her.

Duchess Eleonore stifled a laugh—a laugh which condoned the treason and was rather inclined to admit the pronouncement.

"Sh! Sophia, my angel. German is the language of philosophy. It is the language of sentiment. It is the language of romance. Fourthly and lastly, as our dear rector says in the pulpit, it is the language of your father. Continue to translate."

"Mother, I can't do it"; and suddenly the girl threw back her head and began to recite her lines in French. It was while she recited that Eleonore began to wonder whether she had been wise. Sophia Dorothea was fourteen years old and a lovely child. A mass of black burnished hair, with here and there the dark blue tint of a wild-duck's wing, rippled in curls about a face delicate in its features and joyous in its expression. She was a creature of flame, alert in a world of delight and responsive on the instant to every flicker of sunlight, to the perfume of every flower. An Ariel with a sense of fun. A spirit with a ripple of laughter.

But now she recited:

"Partez; à vos honneurs j'apporte trop d'obstacles;
Vous-même dégagez la foi de vos oracles;
Signalez ce héros à la Grèce promis;
Tournez votre douleur contre ses ennemis.
Déjà Priam pálit; déjà Troie en alarmes
Redoute mon bûcher, et frémit de vos larmes.
Allez; et, dans ces murs vides de citoyens,
Faites pleurer ma mort aux veuves des Troyens.
Je meurs, dans cet espoir, satisfaite et tranquille.
Si je n'ai pas vécu la compagne d'Achille,
J'espère que du moins un heureux avenir
A vos faits immortels joindra mon souvenir;
Et qu'un jour mon trépas, source de votre gloire,
Ouvrira le récit d'une si belle histoire."

As the child's fresh voice died away leaving its music lingering for a moment in the air, her dark eyes rested upon a very troubled face. Sophia Dorothea was not asking for applause, nor did she ask why her mother was so moved. For though she could not put it into words, she understood. And for the first time that she could remember, there had risen an embarrassment between them which held them both speechless. The embarrassment deepened when the mother dropped her face in her hands and a little dry sob burst from her lips. Eleonore had expected something rhythmical, a piece of elocution, a just emphasis; and she had heard the hard glitter of Racine softened, its rhetoric made human and touched with tenderness and sorrow. Iphigenia facing death that her father might not be ruined and shamed. Iphigenia bidding farewell to her lover and praying for his triumph, and whispering her longing that, though she were dead, her name might be

linked eternally with his—Iphigenia was here, in this little room above the Park and the French garden of Celle Castle. Eleonore was shocked as she listened. It was not only Sophia Dorothea's voice which tore at the strings of her heart. It was the quiver of her face and the look of submission in her great dark eyes, as of one who had dropped her plummet into life and found it salt with tears.

"My darling," she said, and she was answered by a smile, wistful and tremulous.

For a moment Eleonore dreamed that a changeling had taken the place of that daughter whose every thought she had shared—Sophia Dorothea of the light heart and the light foot, for whom the world was a playground—what had she to do with this—stranger, with passion in the mystery of her eyes, and immolation throbbing desolately in the clear notes of her young voice?

"Sophia, you mustn't take the play as real," she said, stretching out her arm until her hand rested on the girl's. "It's only a fable you know. A fable of old times."

But Sophia Dorothea did not answer the pressure of her mother's hand. Nor did she return it. She sat quite still, the wistful smile touching her lips to tenderness, and vanishing and shining again.

"But it has lived for a thousand years, my mother," she said gently.

"No doubt. Pretty fables do," said the mother unhappily; and now the daughter really smiled. Eleonore had a picture of someone almost drowning and now climbing back on to dry land.

"And after a thousand years Monsieur Racine has made a play of it?"

"Yes," said Eleonore. "And a play which all the world admires."

"Then I think——" Sophia Dorothea did not so much break off as just cease to speak; and seeing the strange look begin to creep back again into her daughter's eyes, Eleonore cried urgently.

"But, darling, what do you think?"

"That since the fable has persisted so long, there must be truth in it."

* * * * *

And so Duke George William and his huntsmen trampled lustily into the great space before the Castle and the blare of his horns was tossed about the walls. No sound was ever more welcome to Duchess Eleonore. Old heads on young shoulders she distrusted and disliked and pitied; and it was her continuous prayer that this pair of young shoulders in front of her should

feel no extra load a moment before the inevitable time. Sophia Dorothea shook back her curls, as she heard the horns, and forgot all her problems.

"Papa!" she cried. She clapped her hands. She was her fourteen years again. "Well, my papa, at all events, won't want to cut my heart out on an altar to make himself more glorious like Agamemnon. I'm sure of that."

It was their custom to join the cavalcade at the Castle door, and to go with Duke George William into his library. There he drank a big stoup of Rhenish wine, before he went off to change his clothes, whilst Sophia Dorothea perched on the arm of his chair: and in the intervals of drinking he described to his enthralled audience the behaviour of his dogs, the line which the quarry had taken, and the special incidents of the morning. Thus half an hour was passed, on which all three of them had come to count.

Eleonore was surprised therefore, on reaching the great door, to find that the Duke had already dismounted and disappeared.

"Is he hurt?" she asked anxiously of a huntsman.

"No, Your Highness. The Chancellor——" but Eleonore did not wait to hear more. She hurried with Sophia Dorothea up the great stone staircase to the first floor and along a corridor to the Library. She broke into the room and saw Schultz and Bernstorff standing side by side with grave faces, and the Duke, a little way off, leaning with his elbow on the mantel-shelf, and slapping his boot discontentedly with his hunting-crop. His lower lip was thrust forward and his red good-humoured face, now growing a little heavy, was dark with annoyance. For a second or two he looked at the newcomers without speaking. Then he crossed the room and took his daughter by the hand.

"Sophia, my dear, there's a stupid piece of business you needn't be bothered with. I'll tell you at dinner about the boar we killed." And he led her out of the room and shut the door. He turned back to his wife.

"Eleonore, Bernstorff, you know, is succeeding our very good Schultz to-day, and he begins his duties with an awkward little silly occurrence which wants careful handling . . ."

The Duke was an easy-going soul who loathed any interference with the order of his day. It should run smoothly from its beginning to its close according to its plan. And if any unexpected anxiety dislocated it, he was accustomed like many another man to resent, even more than the anxiety itself, the man who brought it to his attention. But at all events he was not going to be done out of his long drink of Rhenish wine. He struck a bell and only when his goblet was on the table at his side, with the yellow wine sparkling to the rim of it, would he allow the subject to be pursued.

"If only people would be sensible," he grumbled, flinging himself pettishly into his chair. "It's young Königsmark, my dear, and our little Sophia."

"Oh!" cried Eleonore with her hand at her heart. Was this the explanation of the change in her daughter? She could hear that young voice now with its ring of passion and its despairing patience. "Philip and our Sophia?"

"So Bernstorff says. Come, out with your story, Bernstorff."

The new Chancellor told it again, and Eleonore listened with paling cheeks, torn between anger against young Königsmark and sorrow for her girl.

She crossed over to her husband's chair when the story was finished and stood beside it, her hands trembling and the tears drowning her eyes. Duke William patted her hand.

"We mustn't make too much of it. Children playing at grown-ups! But it's got to stop of course. Sophia, with the wealth that we've piled up for her, can nowadays look as high as she likes for a husband. And anyway we have other views for her when her time comes."

Eleonore, with the picture of Sophia's rapt face before her eyes, could not take this mischief as lightly as her husband took it. Yes, it had got to be stopped, but Sophia Dorothea was going to suffer, and with much more than a child's sharp short suffering. Philip was a traitor. He had been welcome as much for the sweetness of his temper as for his good looks. They had treated him as one of their own family, supervised his instruction as much, and for a reward he had opened the gates of pain for their darling to pass through.

"Philip must go home, of course, at once," cried the Duke. "But he must be sent off quietly. There mustn't be talk. I don't want my stiff-backed sister-in-law in Hanover to get her venomous tongue round this story. A fine piece of embroidery she'd make of it. She'd write to the King of England and to her tittle-tattling niece, the Duchess of Orleans, and in a month they'd know all about it with additions from Constantinople to the Hague. There's work for you, Bernstorff"—and Bernstorff started violently at the abrupt address. A look of real fear flashed over his face.

"But of course, Your Highness, I am the first to agree. There must be silence the most complete."

"That's what I'm saying," replied the Duke easily enough. "You must see to it that there's silence."

Bernstorff drew a quiet breath of relief. He had no doubt that he could see to it, and without causing the least inconvenience to His Highness's

comfort.

"If Her Highness will keep the Princess at her side for the rest of the day," he said "and the life of the Castle goes on as usual, the affair will be closed by to-morrow morning."

Duke George William was very content to leave the troublesome business to his Chancellor, but Eleonore was a little disturbed. She was indignant with Philip Christopher Königsmark, righteously and justly indignant. He had been disloyal and false. But after all he was only a boy, and a boy without malice or unkindness. There was a note in Bernstorff's voice which alarmed her. It was too sinister. It was inhuman. With all their outward sheen, these Duchies were cruel places; and though Celle, under Duke George William and herself held cruelty in horror, was Bernstorff of the same mind she asked herself? He had a kinsman in office in Saxony. Eleonore looked at him closely, and did not like his ferrety sharp face. She moved her eyes to her very good friend Schultz.

"Do you approve?" she asked urgently.

She did not notice Bernstorff pinching his thin lips tightly together, nor the gleam of stark fury in his eyes. But with that one indiscreet question she set alight in him that personal enmity which, marching in a step so exact with his policy, was to destroy her happiness and the work of her life.

Schultz bowed to her with a trifle more of formality than he ordinarily used.

"I have no doubt, Your Highness, of my successor's efficiency."

Of what Bernstorff planned to do, Schultz had no idea, but he had listened to him in the Chancellor's office and for a second time in His Serene Highness's Library, and he did not doubt that that subtle man had some scheme worked out to the last detail which would at once solve this difficult little problem and hide it away for good. For himself he had finished. He would dine once more at His Highness's high table in the feudal homely style of Celle and then he would betake himself to the small house which he had prepared on a bank of the Aller, at the edge of the town. A little music, a little reading, a little gossip with old friends in the cafés of the town, and then a quiet passage to whatever Valhalla of the second class was reserved for faithful servants.

But ex-Chancellor Schultz dined at the high table of Duke George William and, much to his confusion, had to listen to a speech made by the Duke extolling his high services during his twenty-five years of office. He had to sit quiet whilst his health was drunk and could not but remark the

lofty condescension with which Chancellor Bernstorff raised his glass to his predecessor.

"I really must tell that man about Stechinelli," he said to himself.

Worse still, he had to make a reply without too much pride and too much emotion, and commend his successor to the high consideration of their Highnesses.

Yet the chief recollection which he retained of that dinner was not of the speech which the Duke delivered, nor of the reply which he himself made, nor of the friendliness of everyone except Bernstorff, nor of Bernstorff's disdain. It was of the boy of fifteen who stood behind the Duke's chair in the Duke's livery. Philip Christopher, Count Königsmark, was for this week on duty during the hour of dinner: and no hint had been given to him that this was his last day of service. No doubt Schultz had seen the lad before. But immersed in his state work, with his dinner eaten often enough from a tray at his elbow in his office, he had not once regarded him. He made up for that lack now, and setting in his thoughts Sophia Dorothea by the side of the boy, he could not but say to himself ruefully:

"But for my twenty-five years' work, never were a couple so matched by nature since the Garden of Eden closed its gates."

A mass of brown hair, which was to grow darker with the years, clustered about an open fresh face and curled down to his shoulders. Perukes were never in fashion with any of the Königsmarks. His eyes were dark and, between long black eyelashes, looked out with fire upon the world and found it very good. His red lips and white teeth advertised his health and he had the smile and the laugh of frank enjoyment which would win the good will of a curmudgeon. Philip Königsmark was of the middle height, but slender in figure and supple of movements. He had long legs and the slim hands and feet of a girl. And the Court livery which he wore might have been designed to make the best of him. A velvet coat of an almond green colour piped with a gold cord and ornamented with wide cuffs of black velvet fitted his shoulders and waist like a glove and from the waist spread out in a short square skirt. A cravat of muslin and lace was tied in a great bow round his neck. His waistcoat, breeches and stockings were of white silk and his shoes were of fine black leather with scarlet heels and flashing broad-rimmed buckles of silver. He was, Schultz noticed, certainly dressed with the care and precision which befitted a page or—the thought passed through Schultz's mind—a lover in the presence of his mistress. But as there was nothing of furtiveness or secrecy in his looks, so there was nothing of the *petit-maître* nor of the fop in the elegance of his dress. And he was happy. Schultz could not doubt it. Happiness radiated from him like warmth

from a fire; and if once or twice in the course of his service, his eyes met those of Sophia Dorothea, there was neither fear nor anxiety in the message they sent.

"However he surely must take his good-looks away from Celle," Schultz concluded and he fell to wondering what lot the future held in its secret casket for his beloved Sophia Dorothea. Had he been able to guess, there would have been a very unhappy man sitting for the last time at the Duke's table in the Castle of Celle.

"Young Augustus William of Wolfenbüttel no doubt will marry her," he reflected. "The Duke is a little superstitious, but he will get over his superstition."

There had been a foolish betrothal between Sophia Dorothea and William's elder brother Frederick, when Sophia Dorothea was only ten years old. Frederick had been killed while still in his teens at the siege of Phillipsburg.

"Wolfenbüttel and Celle will be an alliance of old friends, and though Celle must belong to Hanover in the end, Wolfenbüttel, with the Princess's wealth to sustain and develop it, will hold its own."

Thus ex-Chancellor Schultz prosed away to himself, sitting above the salt at His Highness's table; and dinner being over, he betook himself to his books and his music in his little house across the Aller.

CHAPTER III

BERNSTORFF'S FIRST TASTE OF POWER

AT half-past five on that same afternoon, Bernstorff was seated in his old office, withdrawn a few paces from the window. The great lime-tree, with its wealth of bough and green leaf darkening the room, hid him securely. For the first time he was glad of it. For he could see the mouth of the passage which led into the court from their Highnesses' living quarters as well as the three steps which led up to the chapel door. And yet no one, though his eyes were sharp as a hawk's, could be aware of the still watchman behind the small diamond window-panes.

It was very quiet at this hour in the inner court of Celle; so quiet, that the flutter of a pigeon's wings in the lime-tree was as startling as a rattle of musketry. There were shadows already upon the walls of the Castle. Bernstorff watched them darken from a film of grey into a solid black; and still no footstep rang upon the pavement. He was seized with a panic. Every afternoon, he had declared, the tryst was kept. Suppose that on this afternoon it was broken, that some vague suspicion had crept into the minds of the culprits, that they were now exchanging their dreams between the horn-beam hedges of the French garden! Bernstorff jumped with indignation at the thought that such a thing could be. They had outwitted him—not a doubt of it, that cunning pair. It was long after six o'clock, he was certain. It must be close upon seven. Why, it was as if young Philip Königsmark had broken a definite promise to him, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Celle—a promise to come and be caught, like a bird in a net. Bernstorff was by now in a fume of anger and apprehension. With what face could he meet his master and say, on the first day of his appointment to his office, "I promised Your Highness a proof. I have none?" He would be set down as a slanderer, a rogue ready to blacken even the young Princess, if, by so doing, he could give himself importance. Suddenly his fears died away. So great was his relief that the court swam for a moment before his eyes, and he doubted their good news. But what he had seen was there, in the same place, still to see—a flash of green and the flame of a silver buckle on a shoe. For a little while they remained, and then assured that the court was empty, Philip Königsmark flitted into the open, took the steps of the chapel at a leap, and

was gone. His bird with its jewelled plumage was in the net. Bernstorff restrained his impatience now.

"I must give him time," he argued. "An interval between the first arrival and the second is part of the plan. I must find him in his secret place."

In a little while he went to his door. Two soldiers of the Duke's Guard were waiting outside it.

"Ludwig Holtz," said Bernstorff.

"Here, Excellency."

"Heinrich Muller."

"Here, Excellency."

Bernstorff looked them over and was satisfied. Both men were middle-aged, strong, loyal, stupid.

"What you see and what you hear to-night, you must have forgotten to-morrow. You must never speak a word of it to your wives nor to your children," he said.

"It is understood," both men replied.

"Good! Now follow me quietly."

He led them by corridors round the court to that passage from which his green bird had flitted.

"Now quickly and quietly," he said and a moment afterwards they were within the chapel door, the three of them. Bernstorff closed the door with his own hands. There was not the whine of a hinge, not a rattle of the latch. He whispered to Ludwig Holtz:

"Stand on guard here! Let no one enter or go out, whosoever it may be. On your life be it!"

Straight in front of him a flight of steps rose to a narrow gallery behind the Duke's private pew. To his right an arch led on to the floor of the chapel.

Bernstorff with a gesture ordered Muller to wait where he stood and crept on tiptoe under the arch. He was looking now into a small sanctuary as exquisite as a gem chiselled by a Cellini. Its vaulted roof was starred with gold, and the artists of the Netherlands in the meridian of their splendour had decorated its walls. Imaginary portraits at half-length of the Saviour and his Disciples, the Apostles and the Prophets were carved in stone under the galleries and, separating each portrait from its neighbour, were angels playing upon different instruments of music. Below them again were pictures painted upon wood in glowing colours of green and grey, blue and gold, of scenes from the Testaments, the Flood, the struggle of the Church to live, the Sins and Virtues, the Last Judgment.

Over the communion table—the doctrine of Celle was Lutheran—hung a great triptych by Merten de Vos representing the Crucifixion in the centre piece, and Duke William the Younger with Celle as the background in one panel and his wife Dorothea of Denmark with the Castle of Copenhagen behind her in the other. Placed high up in the left hand corner so as not to break the symmetry of the building was the organ and on the right hand side in a diagonal line with Bernstorff stood the pulpit, a work of the early Renaissance, all of it from the scroll work of leaves about the rostrum to the Renaissance Masks on its single pillar carved out of one block of white stone. It was in this pulpit that Bernstorff had suffered so dismally from the cramp in his legs when he was listening to the ingenuous dreams of the young lovers.

There was no sign, however, of either of them in the chapel this evening. But Bernstorff only smiled. The Duke's private pew was to the left above his head—a great opera box rather than a pew, shut apart by a row of small latticed casements from the rest of the chapel. Two or three of these casements stood open, but no one at that vantage could see the arch under which Bernstorff stood, without leaning out, and no one was leaning out.

But he had his green bird safe in his net. There was not a mesh which would let him through again, until the fowler so willed it. He crept back to the main door where the narrow staircase mounted to a corridor behind the Duke's box. Beckoning Muller to follow him, Bernstorff went up the stairs as silently as a cat. He stationed Muller at the head of the staircase and stole along by himself to the door. He opened it quickly but without violence, and tasted at once a keen new pleasure.

Philip Königsmark started forward, his lips parted, his heart in his eyes, his hands stretched eagerly out. But at the sight of Bernstorff he stopped with a gasp. The joy died out of him, and then slowly there spread over his face a look of terror, and his knees shook. Never in his life before had Bernstorff seen anyone afraid of him. His pleasure was sharp, and all the sharper because the one afraid was this gay young spark with the fine clothes and the great name and the delicate breeding.

Bernstorff passed his tongue over his lips.

"I am not the friend whom Count Königsmark expected," he said smoothly, but the boy had recovered his poise.

"I expected no friend, Your Excellency," he said in a quiet grave voice.

"Indeed?" cried Bernstorff ironically. "I interrupt your devotions, then? So much piety in so pretty a youth—admirable—admirable." He paused, but

no reply came, no, not so much as a look of disdain for the clumsiness of his pleasantry.

"At the same time, modesty should go with worship. You choose for your orisons that part of the church which is reserved for His Highness and His Highness's family. What have you to say to that, my young gentleman?"

Again the sarcasm broke in fragments against the wall of the boy's quiet gravity.

"I have no right to be here, sir," Philip Königsmark agreed.

Bernstorff was making no progress in this style of attack. Even to himself the banter sounded crude, unworthy of his office and quite unhelpful into the bargain. He was all the more wrathful with the boy who withstood him.

"Let us have done with this quibbling," he cried in a rage, though who was quibbling except himself, not his greatest sycophant could have discovered. "Every night you come secretly to this chapel at six o'clock. Every night you wait hidden in this little room for half an hour——"

Did he see the boy flinch? The shadows were gathering in the shrine of grey and green and gold beyond the casements. Within the casements twilight had already fallen.

"And after half an hour——" Bernstorff continued, only to be interrupted by a loud passionate cry.

"No! No!"

"And after half an hour, another step falls ever so lightly on the stone floor below, and the tryst is kept," the Chancellor insisted.

Königsmark's hands fell to his side. He had been watched, then! These secret meetings, so treasured, so sacred, which made a long summer's day no more than an attribute of one wondrous hour, had been spied upon, talked of! He had a feeling that some very precious and delicate thing had been soiled by a touch from which it would never get clean.

"Whatever blame there is, is mine alone——" Philip began, and Bernstorff broke in upon him, savagely:

"Whatever blame!"

For a moment there was silence, and then Philip resumed.

"I do not wish to make light of it. I only claim that from beginning to end it is mine."

Philip Königsmark spoke quite simply, meaning each word. He was a year older than Sophia Dorothea. If he could not stifle the passion which the sight of her, the sound of her lovely voice, the chance touch of her hand, the

mockery of her high spirits and quick wit awakened in him, he should at all events have been able to conceal it. He reasoned like the boy he was, but very solemnly and seriously. He was by a year the elder of the two, and the year condemned him. But in truth neither of the two could have fixed on the moment when the barriers fell down. Neither could have told who spoke the first trembling word, and who the second. A miracle happened. The world turned gold. They fell into step upon a magic path.

"The crime is treason," said Bernstorff bluntly; and in spite of his efforts to hold himself with dignity, the boy in front of him shivered.

"Treason?" he asked, with a quick indraw of his breath.

"Of course," said Bernstorff, with a testy impatience that anyone could be so stupid as to doubt a fact so evident. The blood of reigning Dukes was sacred, a fountain to be guarded like the spring of Egeria with rites and punishments. Treason it was for any youth of lesser rank to profane it; and the penalties of treason were savage and secret.

"You will not be seen again in Celle," Bernstorff continued. "When the Castle is all asleep you will be—removed. Until then you will remain a prisoner here."

What did they mean to do with him? They were sinister and alarming words which the Chancellor had used. He, Philip Christopher Königsmark, was not to be seen again in Celle. Or—anywhere else? he asked himself. He was to be removed in the dead of night. To a prison? Philip saw his life dragging hopelessly along in some dark cell until his name was forgotten even by his gaolers. But he managed to answer, though his lips were dry and his voice quavered as he answered:

"I shall not try to escape."

Gottlieb Bernstorff laughed harshly and suddenly.

"I prefer to make sure of that."

Philip had been standing before the Chancellor with his eyes upon the floor of the gallery. But the utter contempt with which the words were spoken stung him to anger. His cheeks flamed. He looked up with a passionate reply upon his lips. But the reply was not delivered. As his eyes rested on Bernstorff's hand, he stood for a moment paralysed and dumb. Then he gave a cry of utter terror and his hand flew up to his throat.

"You can't mean that!" he whispered. "His Highness has never ordered it. Take me to him! It can't be."

As if to answer him, the door was thrown open and the soldier Muller strode into the room.

"I am wanted?" he asked.

Bernstorff did not for a second take his eyes from Philip Königsmark. "Wait!" he said, and the soldier stood at attention by the doorway, mute, the most frightening thing in the world, a living machine, stupid, powerful, and ready without a question to obey.

Bernstorff, with a smile upon his lips, was holding in his hands a thin strong cord with a slipknot at one end of it. Whilst he watched Philip, he passed the one end through the knot at the other end and, holding it up, but not too obviously and rather as though he sought to assure himself that the loop would easily slip down, and the circle of cord tighten and contract about a slim young neck, he let the slipknot fall down the cord. Bernstorff was not as yet very clever as a master of irony. His sarcasm was crude as yet —uncouth, he admitted it. But he could at all events frighten a boy. And to-morrow he would learn to frighten a man. And from that fear would spring authority, power and, at the end of it, land—acres of it, great possessions, and titles to match. Meanwhile here was the frightened boy to be still more frightened. Amusing!

He saw Philip Königsmark's eyes following the downward slip of the looped end and the contraction of the cord. Oh yes, the old secret punishment learnt from the seraglios of Constantinople—not at all unknown in the prisons of Europe when importunate offenders must be suppressed. Bernstorff let the loop slide very slowly down. Philip might clutch at his throat and feel the blood of his arteries pulsing there strongly, but his eyes followed the descending loop, full of terror, full of horror. He might try to comfort himself with the feel of the great bow of his cravat. But through cambric and lace, the cord would bite, the eyes would start from the head, the tongue, bitten through in agony, would project beyond the lips, the face would lose its beauty, would become black, ugly, horrible. Bernstorff had this much sense of power, at the moment. He knew that the boy before him was not only watching with staring eyes the contraction of the cord. He was feeling just what Bernstorff was projecting into his mind. He was taking into his consciousness the pictures of sheer physical pain which Bernstorff was imagining. Philip was being strangled, all alone here, helpless as a child—and suddenly Philip's legs gave way beneath him and he fell forward on his knees.

Sheer weakness? Or a boy's cowardice? An equal share of both perhaps, but Philip winced ever afterwards to remember the degradation of that moment. He tried to pretend that he had come to his knees through a mere slip or stumble and that once upon them the very subservience of his position had somehow outwitted him into accepting it, so that he remained on his knees. But in that attitude he had pleaded—oh most humbly—for his

life, in words which were broken with sobs and the taste of them was years afterwards bitter in his mouth. The recollection of them would come back to him at odd moments when he waked in the night or sat idly by his fire. He heard them, he saw himself in his fine dress and ignoble pose and writhed in shame and raged against the world. But the words were spoken in a stumbling haste.

"I am too young! . . . I've hardly lived . . . I have done nothing which death should punish . . . A few foolish pledges made, a few foolish dreams exchanged . . . A few half hours side by side, here, in this quiet chapel . . . The string about the throat for that . . . You can't be so cruel."

It was all heady wine to Bernstorff, the unconsidered Councillor of yesterday. No one had ever been afraid of him. He had wielded no authority. What had he been?—a clerk—at the best for a few hours a deputy. He felt his heart warm and his blood flow dancing through his veins. He could have listened for an hour, but all joys must end, and there was still work to do that night. As Philip stretched out his hands in a despairing appeal, he slipped the noose over them. The boy recoiled as though a snake had stung him, and Bernstorff's voice rang out above his head.

"Keep still!"

And Philip Königsmark dared not move again. Bernstorff turned back with a delicate slow deliberation the lace ruffles which edged the sleeves of the green coat and, drawing the loop tight till the thin cord sank into the flesh of Philip's wrists, he bound the hands palm to palm so that they were the hands of a Saint in prayer.

"Now stand up!"

Philip rose unsteadily and stood swaying. If any thought of resistance had lingered in his mind, it had gone from him now. He was as helpless as a sheep. Bernstorff took the lad by the elbow and led him a few paces to a chair. Philip did not struggle. He was a little dazed. Terror had so numbed him that he was obedient to a touch. Bernstorff pushed him down upon a chair. He took a second cord from his pocket. He stooped, crossed the boy's ankles and tied them together and then bound them securely back to the cross-bar of the chair.

"So!" he said, panting a little with the violence of his actions, as he straightened his back, "we have our fine young peregrine upon the jess; though upon my word, the peregrine has no more spirit than a pigeon. There and thus you will stay, Philip Christopher, Count Königsmark, until such time as those great ones whom you have wronged have decided on your punishment."

He knew—none better knew—the plain and simple way which the easy-going George William had chosen to end this embarrassment. But, to his thinking, there was no reason why Philip Christopher should know it before he must. Nay, an extra twinge or two would be no more than he deserved. "I leave you to your devotions," he added. "You have great need of them. But I warn you. If you raise a cry, no one except ourselves will hear you. But we shall. Come Muller!"

He led the way out of that enclosed and private gallery. He shut the door upon his prisoner and turned the key in the lock. Philip heard the feet of Bernstorff and the soldier trample on the stone steps of the stair. In a moment the clang of the outer door rang through the chapel and in that lock too, the great key rattled as it turned. What did it matter, he wondered, whether they locked the door or not? He could not move and no one in all Celle would come to ease his plight. The chapel was as silent as a tomb. The shadows were gathering over the chancel floor like a congregation of ghosts. In the enclosed gallery with its leaded casements it was already night.

CHAPTER IV

A NIGHT OF TERROR

PHILIP sat in his chair, his shoulders drooping, his head bowed and the heavy curls of his hair tumbling about his face. He was to vanish from Celle. He was to be disposed of when the Castle was asleep. How? He could hear Bernstorff's icy voice framing that enigmatic and appalling phrase. Disposed of! One disposed of things—not living people. Dead bodies were things—and Philip shivered.

He had been wrong, of course, in believing that Bernstorff and his man-at-arms were to execute judgment upon him, then and there. "They wouldn't strangle me in the Castle Chapel," he whispered to himself. But there was little comfort in that assurance. Terror was still at his elbow. He had only anticipated his punishment, dying twice, in the way of cowards.

"Bernstorff was playing with me, cat and mouse," he continued. "But the mouse dies in the end—and perhaps more easily than I shall"; and his heart melted within him, and the very spasm of death keeked aloud in his throat. At the sound he raised his head with a jerk.

"I shall kill myself with fear," he thought, and he called upon his recollections of his strength, his memories of the ardent vitality, which only this morning—was it possible?—throbbed within his young body from his head to his feet.

"It will only be prison—prison for perhaps a little while," he argued and, while he argued, he girded at the slavish contentment which the argument brought to him. But to such a pass he had come that he could not banish the contentment.

"I want to live," he said. "I want to go on living—even in prison, if that's the price of living." He tried to evoke before his eyes a portrait of the Duke, kindly, easy-going, indulgent—as he had known him through his few months of service. But he couldn't. His wits were all astray. He could only see a red, gross, swollen face glowering at him, dark with a mortal hurt to his pride of birth. And if he sought hope in an image of Duchess Eleonore, he found it an image of stone with a pair of living eyes in which hatred burned. The very tenderness with which they had dwelt upon her daughter,

smiled upon her joys and softened with her sorrows, was a measure to Philip now of the horror and bitter enmity in which she must hold him.

He made a despairing movement and a little cry of sheer pain broke from him. The thin cords round his wrists and ankles so wrenched and tortured him that he almost swooned.

"I must keep still," he warned himself distractedly, "quite, quite still." But his feet were so forced back against the bar of the chair that his knees were horribly cramped, and he must ease them if he could. And with that there rushed upon him, triumphing over his pain, a full consciousness of the ignominy to which he had been subjected.

He, Philip Christopher, Count Königsmark, grandson of old John Christopher who had captured Prague, nephew of Otto William, the Marshal of Louis XIV, son of Conrad Christopher, the Master of all the Swedish Artillery, who had been killed at the siege of Bonn, brother of that Karl John whose exploits were to-day in all men's mouths—he, Philip, had been mishandled and disgraced by a man who yesterday was no more than a clerk with his pen behind his ear.

"And I suffered it without resistance." He upbraided himself bitterly. "I held out my hands to the cord, glad that it was not tightening round my throat. I let him bind me in a chair—oh, shame!" And he was suddenly amazed at the temerity with which so decadent a bantling as he, had prated of his dreams and of his heart to the lovely Princess of Celle. He had snatched at a planet as though it were no more than an apple on a tree.

Hadn't he deserved all that had befallen him, he asked in his abasement? And all that was to befall him? This contemptuous treatment, the rings of fire about wrists and ankles, the cramped joints, the sharp stabs of exquisite pain which travelled along the nerves of his limbs in flashes of lightning. Thus his thoughts wove backwards and forwards, if thoughts they could be called, clacking shuttles in the loom of a young overwrought brain. And they wove but two webs in the end, a sense of littleness and a sense of pain. And by the time when night had come, pain had overmastered all.

It was pitch dark in the Duke's gallery, but a faint glimmer from the outer windows made a ghostly twilight in the body of the chapel. Philip raised his head and looked through one of the three casements which stood open.

"The dawn is near," he assured himself, but without any confidence. There were indeed many hours to creep by before the dawn shot with its colours that summer sky. They would have been more endurable no doubt to an older man. But Philip was a boy of fifteen and he was hungry and athirst.

The hunger weakened him, but he could brave it out. His thirst, however, was torture.

"Water! Water!" he found himself muttering in a foolish repetition. Even if there were water within reach, he could not reach it, and even if he reached it, he would need a cupbearer to lift it to his lips, and there was no one within his call, even if he had dared to call. This chapel was a House of the Dead; and as he framed the words in his thoughts, a tinkling as of tiny bells made a silvery noise in that silent place.

There was no fairy work in those chimes. From the arches of the roof gilded chains hung down with finely carved thin disks of copper dangling at the end of them. Any visitor to Celle may see them hanging down to this day, and wonder at the fancy which conceived so odd a decoration. But Philip Königsmark had never seen them, since his gaze in that chapel never soared above the face of Sophia Dorothea and the flowers in her hair. So when a faint waft of air from an open window set a few of the medallions swinging and chiming, they chimed also with a queer conceit which the stillness of the night and the desolation of his mind had evoked in the boy.

"This is the House of the Dead," he had said, and the clear tiny clinking of these ornaments sounded in his ears as a summons to take his place amongst them. He was too overwrought by thirst and hunger and pain to reason lucidly. He was only aware that a new fear and one more immediate and even more real was being added to those which already tormented him. He sat up and crouched forward, making himself small and praying with all his distracted soul that the utter darkness of this gallery would hide him from the dead. For he heard them now gathering in the chancel, with little whispers as of filmy, trailing garments. So many who had kneeled here and died thereafter! If he could look down from one of these casements, he would see them—he was sure of it!—and more and more of them crowding in from graveyard and tomb. And all of them waiting for the Duke's page in his Court Livery to join them. For a moment he was glad that he was bound tightly there hand and foot. And for another moment he rejoiced that the Dead have no eyes. But they were seeking for him, asking where he hid. The whispering of robes had changed now into the whispering of voices, tiny voices, no louder than a breath, but urgent. And then one of them was speaking at his side. They had found him. What the words were, he could not distinguish. But they were spoken quite close to him, and they were quite clear indistinguishable words, the words of a nightmare. Philip flinched away from them and, to cap his terror, once more the flow of wind crept through the open window, and once more the medallions tinkled. He had heard just that same sound in the streets of Catholic towns, when the

priest in his robes, and his acolyte with the little tinkling bell, went on their way to the bedside of the dying.

"No! No! I won't come with you. I won't," he cried aloud and he wrenched at ankle and wrist in a panic until the torture stopped him and the tears poured down his face.

Some centuries later, it seemed to him, heavy footsteps resounded in the little corridor behind the gallery, the key grated in the lock and the door was thrown open. Bernstorff, carrying a great lantern, was followed in by the soldier, Muller.

"It is time," said Bernstorff, but he received no answer.

He lifted the lantern high and saw Philip staring at him like someone daft and horribly frightened. To tell the truth, Bernstorff was a little frightened himself. When he had received no answer, and saw only a crouched figure with a head fallen forward on its breast, he had feared that his prisoner was dead. Now he feared that the long ordeal borne by a sensitive boy had driven him out of his wits. He turned quickly to the soldier.

"Set him up on his feet!"

Muller kneeled down and cut the cord from the boy's ankles, and Bernstorff watched Philip stretch out and bring back one leg after the other and flex the muscles.

"Oh! Oh!"

Philip moaned. But the moan of pain changed into a gasp of relief.

"You can stand?" Bernstorff asked.

Philip tried to lift himself up and sank back. He shook his head.

"Not yet."

"Help him, Muller."

The soldier set an arm about Königsmark and raised him up.

"Perhaps now," said Philip, and he stamped feebly upon the floor of the gallery.

But even then Muller rather carried than supported him, along the corridor, down the steps to the door, through the passage and up the great stone stairway to the first floor of the Castle. They turned into the passage on the right which led to the private apartments of the Duke.

"I can walk by myself now," said Philip, and the soldier let him go and fell in behind him.

For a second or two Philip tottered and stumbled, but he recovered his balance and bracing himself walked forward between the Chancellor and the

man-at-arms. The Castle was silent, its doors all shut and only a lamp or two burning at intervals on the walls of the passages. An usher was yawning at the door of the Duke's Library.

"One moment, your Excellency," he said as the party of three approached him. He knocked upon the panel and went in.

His Excellency looked round at Philip Königsmark and smiled. But for the colour of Philip's coat, it would have needed a sharp eye to recognise in this forlorn and dishevelled scrub the pretty stripling with the bright eyes and the kindly laugh. The new Chancellor had been paying himself back that night at Philip's cost for the little office darkened by the lime-tree, for his years of insignificance. He had rubbed the gloss off this modish young Adonis. The jewelled green bird had lost all the sheen of his plumage, and Bernstorff was well content.

The usher came out from the Library and held the door open. Bernstorff took Philip by the elbow and led him into the room. The usher followed them and closed the door. The room was brightly lit by oil lamps and wax candles in sconces. Königsmark, coming into it from the dark chapel and the dimly lit corridors, was for the first few moments blinded. As his vision cleared, he saw that the Duke was seated at a great table and engaged in affixing his seal to a folded letter. A big goblet and a jug of Rhenish wine stood at his elbow. Behind him, in a shallow recess by the fire, the Duchess was sitting with her eyes upon the burning logs. Neither of them threw a glance at Philip.

Bernstorff placed Philip opposite to the Duke on the other side of the table and himself stood away. Even then neither the Duke nor his wife had a look to spare for the prisoner. The one was busy, or, rather was making business with his seals. The other, by the fireplace, might have been reading her future in the kaleidoscope of the flaming logs, so completely was her face averted.

"To them both," he thought bitterly, "I am a Pariah brought up for judgment."

But he was in no state after his grim vigil to observe acutely. George William didn't look at him because he hated from the bottom of his indolent soul the business which it lay before him to do. He was annoyed by it. It was an interruption of the proper placidity of the day. He had now to rearrange his household and very possibly that work might stop him hunting in the morning. He was almost as much annoyed with Philip for causing him all this vexation as for making calf-love to his daughter.

"A couple of babies," he said to himself, pushing his sealed letter peevishly away with a finger.

Besides, he loathed delivering judgment and homilies. He was indeed uncomfortable, like the culprit in front of him, whom he wasn't going to look at. He'd be hanged if he would! He took a gulp of his strong yellow wine. Since the thing had to be done, he had better get it over.

"Philip Christopher, Count Königsmark," he began in a gruff voice with his head bent, like a judge reading his notes, "you will leave Celle and my Duchy to-night, and if you ever push your head into it again, I'll clap you into prison and keep you there. But for certain kindnesses shown to me at Breda by your mother in other days, I should do it now. I shall send a guard with you and he will not lose sight of you till he leaves you at your mother's house. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Your Highness," said Philip in a low voice.

"Now for the homily," said George William to himself. But he was a simple country gentleman to whom homilies were parsons' work. He took another drink of his Steinberger.

"I must say finally and lastly," he began and stammered and broke out with an oath, "I'm ashamed of you, Philip. Yes, that's what I wanted to say. A couple of babies holding hands in the moonlight. I'm ashamed of you. There! Take this letter which I have written to your mother and give it to her!"

He pushed the letter across the table.

"Take it and go!"

"I can't, sir," said Philip quietly.

"Can't? Can't?" bellowed Duke George William.

"No, sir!"

Bernstorff made a swift movement towards the table. George William was puzzled. The letter was no business of Bernstorff's. He held up his hand with a peremptory gesture and Bernstorff stopped. Then Duke George William for the first time looked across the table at Philip, and flung himself back in his chair, gasping. He took the whole picture in no doubt, but he was aware chiefly of two enormous dark tormented eyes burning in a face like a white mask.

"Great God!" he bawled, banging his fist on the table so that the wine shook in his goblet and the jug rattled on the wood. "You, Hugo, untie that boy's hands at once."

The usher stepped forward, but the knots were not so easily untied, and he must take a knife to it in the end. Meanwhile Duke George William sat in a rage, glaring at Bernstorff one moment, and at the usher the next.

But even when his wrists were free, there was for a time no diminution of Philip's distress. A spasm convulsed his face and he stood, his hands dangling at his sides like the hands of a puppet, and the room revolving in circles before his eyes.

"Here!" said George William, and he filled his goblet to the brim, splashing the table in his haste. The boy was going to fall. In another moment he would be down on the floor in a swoon. "Drink this! You, Hugo, hold it to his mouth," and he pushed the big glass across the table.

Philip had no more wish to make a scene than Duke William had to witness one. His lips curved in the ghost of a smile and "I thank Your Highness. I can hold the glass now," he said in the ghost of a voice.

The blood was beginning to run back into his numbed fingers. He took unsteadily the glass from Hugo's hand and drank. To his parched throat and overtried heart, the strong wine was the very elixir of life. He drank slowly and a little colour returned to his cheeks, and with a long sigh of pleasure he drew his breath deeply in. He was for setting down the glass still half-full. But George William rapped fiercely on the table.

"All of it! To the last drop!"

"I shall be drunk, sir," Philip pleaded.

"Well then, be drunk and be damned!" cried the Duke, and he sat and watched until the glass was empty.

"This is your doing," he said, turning upon his Chancellor. And that ambitious man saw all his new authority and his future honours crumbling away into dust.

"Your Highness so insisted upon secrecy," he stammered. "I was perhaps overzealous," and he shot a venomous glance at young Königsmark. He had despised the boy before; he had looked upon him as a footstool for his own ascendency; but the scorn had become hatred now, and a hatred which was going to increase and feed upon itself until one monstrous night years afterwards glutted it.

Philip picked up the letter and bowed low.

"I shall obey Your Highness' orders," he said.

So that's over, thought Duke George William, and he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief in relief. Philip hadn't swooned, and would be away from Celle in half an hour, and he himself could go hunting to-morrow.

But it was not all over. Philip, with a natural and pretty gesture, walked across the room to the ingle-corner where the Duchess Eleonore was seated. He dropped upon his knee at her side and, lifting the border of her dress, kissed it. But she only shook her head and still gazed into the fire.

"You cannot forgive me," he said. "It is my sorrow. For I am Your Highness' debtor for much kindness."

Philip was as wrong in the reason he gave for her aversion as he had been in judging the husband George William. Eleonore had set her heart, as women will, upon a great marriage for her daughter with young Augustus William, the heir of Wolfenbüttel. It would give Sophia Dorothea the high position in the world which her wealth and her beauty demanded; and in addition it would be a very tough nut for Duchess Sophia of Hanover to crack. But none the less once or twice during this afternoon and night certain doubts, even certain pangs of remorse, had troubled her. When George William had come to Breda, wooing the penniless lady-in-waiting, Eleonore d'Olbreuse, no one had given such valuable countenance to the lovers as Philip's mother, Amalia Magdalena, Countess Königsmark. What sort of return was that same Eleonore d'Olbreuse now making, she asked herself? And she was trying to stifle the shaming question by a show of extreme displeasure.

"There can be no forgiveness, Count Königsmark. We both trusted you. You have behaved very wickedly," she began and was pleased with the firm tones of her voice. But now she turned to him and there was an end to the lecture. She uttered a little cry of horror. "Oh, Philip, my poor boy, what cruel things have they done to you?" And she stretched out a hand to him.

Duke George William swung about in his chair and saw what his wife saw, and cursed aloud. The boy's stockings were torn and his ankles bleeding.

"You'll never be able to ride from Celle with your legs in that pickle," he cried.

So here was this vexatious business deferred for another day. But Philip reassured him. There was no place for him any longer in Celle. Sophia Dorothea would be kept as far away from him as if he had the plague. The sooner he was gone, the better.

"I can ride, Your Highness, if I have my boots," he said, and His Highness' face cleared marvellously.

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

But how far could he ride? It seemed to Duke George William that the lad's strength had been failing ever since he had entered the room. His voice was weaker with each spoken word. And though he made a fine show of sufficiency, his slim body was wilting with fatigue.

"When did you eat last?" George William asked.

"At dinner time, sir."

"Twelve hours ago then," and for the second time George William shot a savage glance at his Chancellor.

"Hugo, see that supper is served to Count Königsmark in his room, whilst he changes into his riding-dress," he bawled, and the usher departed on his errand. Then in a gentler voice:

"That letter to your mother . . . Philip. You are holding it in your hand. Give it to me!"

Philip had no suspicion that the Duke was in his way, so long as it did not give him too much trouble, making some amends to him for the mishandling to which he had been subjected. He stepped forward, not very sure of his feet and laid the letter on the table. The Duke broke the seal and handed it back to him.

"Read!"

Philip read. There was not one word in it of his offence. Not a suggestion that he was banished in disgrace. George William wrote to his old friend Amalia Magdalena that Celle, being at peace and with God's help intending so to remain, there was nothing more of the arts of war or of the accomplishments of a fine gentleman which a young Königsmark could learn there. "We are Boeotians, my dear Amalia, contentedly dull, thriftily uneventful, without stateliness or opportunity. Philip wastes his time here. So I send him back to you. Boys of his mettle want a busier field."

The blood rushed into Philip's cheeks as he read and understood the kindliness which had guided the pen. No doubt George William's chief aim was to prevent any gossip which might tarnish the good name of his beloved Sophia Dorothea. But he might very easily have trumped up a scandalous charge against Philip which would have made the boy's true story look like a base exhibition of spite, if he were foolish enough to tell it. In either case his predicament would be serious.

Amalia Magdalena was devout, a strict mistress of her household and a fanatical believer in the curative virtue of discipline. Whether the Duke confided the truth to his friend, or invented another and more unpleasant reason for the banishment of his page, Philip would have got but a sour welcome from his mother. Why God punished her by giving her such a

brood as Karl John, Philip and Aurora the beautiful light-o'-love of Augustus the Strong, must have perplexed the poor lady to her dying day. Philip, aged fifteen, could look forward to nothing but a grim lean youth of penitence, had the Duke been of a less indulgent mind. There would have been no escape from it, inasmuch as his private fortune at that time was worth about as much as his silver shoe-buckles. It was in a very sincere voice that he faltered out his thanks.

Duke George William sealed his letter again and gave it back to Philip.

"There it is," he said with a nod of his head. "God be with you, Philip, but not in Celle!" and Philip took it and went away to his room in the pages' quarters, where his riding-dress and his supper awaited him.

CHAPTER V

BERNSTORFF RETAINS HIS POSITION AND PHILIP LOSES HIS

IN the Library Chancellor Gottlieb Bernstorff stood first on one foot and then on the other, and would have liked, had he dared, to dry the wet palms of his hands. The startling master-stroke which was to prove on this his first day of office his indispensability to the State had sputtered out like a squib in the rain. He could blame no one but himself. He had lost his bearings in a fog of wishes. He had mistaken Celle for the Hanover he wished it to be—all splendour and glitter and great dishes of sauerkraut, and the swift shuttles of intrigue and the sacred laws of etiquette which you break at your peril. There would have been none of this molly-coddling of young Königsmark in Hanover. None of this "Untie his hands!" or of "Poor boy, your legs are bleeding!" Now Königsmark would have vanished, with his beauty and his elegance, his slow sweet smile and his passionate eyes. He would have gone to cool his hot heart in some quiet dark prison-house until such time as a grey beard had made him tasteless to the ladies. And he himself, Bernstorff, would have earned a word of thanks from the Duke and, very likely, a new batch of acres of land to go with it.

"As it is," Bernstorff conjectured, "I shall get the same sentence as young Königsmark. God be with you, but not in Celle."

Duke George William, however, did not repeat himself that night.

"I'll see you to-morrow when I am back from hunting," he said shortly without a glance at his Chancellor and Bernstorff bowed and got himself out of the room. Since Hugo was getting young Königsmark his supper there was now no usher on the door.

Bernstorff drew it to, but did not latch it. He left a tiny little slit open and stood by it with one eye on the corridor behind him. He is not greatly to blame. For his career was in the balance, and it was dawning upon him that, even if the scales tipped on his side, he had a good deal still to learn of the ways of Princes and their wives.

The wife was the first to speak within the room. Bernstorff heard the quick rustle of her dress as she crossed the room from her seat by the fire.

"I am"—she searched for a word—"uncomfortable, George."

"My dear!"

George was solicitous. No one hated discomfort more than he.

"At Breda, before we married, we made some promises to one another," she continued.

"Darling, that is not unusual," said George William, patting her hand.

"But we have kept them, and that is," replied Eleonore. "You have had no Madame Platen throning it openly in Celle, and I have not had to seek my consolation among the philosophers."

Thus she compared the relations of Ernest Augustus and Duchess Sophia at Hanover.

"In other words," said George William contentedly, "we have been happy."

He held up his goblet of Steinberger to Eleonore's lips and she dutifully took a sip of it.

"I think, indeed," she said with a pleasant laugh, "that I hear a good deal of jealousy in that poor woman's abuse of me."

Outside the door Chancellor Bernstorff was scandalised. The Duchess Sophia, daughter of the King of Bohemia and granddaughter of a King of England, "a poor woman!" What blasphemy was he next to hear? Almost he forgot his own anxieties. Eleonore went on with her argument.

"We want our Sophy to enjoy a life as delightful and happy as ours has been, don't we?"

"Want!" cried George William confidently. "By God, we're going to see that she does."

"Well then! At Breda I was far below you in rank."

"The pertinacity of our good Schultz has made us equal," said George William.

Eleonore was not to be diverted from her theme.

"I was further below you than Philip Königsmark is below Sophy."

"Darling, the analogy is not complete," replied George William. "I was thirty years old when I fell in love with you at Breda and I am ungallant enough to remember that you were twenty-six. We knew our own minds. Moreover it is easier for a lowly wife to rise to her husband's rank than for a lowly husband to rise to his wife's."

Behind the door Bernstorff nodded his head vigorously. Eleonore within the room grasped no less eagerly at her husband's reply. For a moment she

had been debating whether after all a marriage with Philip would not in the end make for Sophy's happiness.

"I am sure that that's right," she said in a tone of relief. "I did so earnestly not want to make a mistake which might wreck Sophy's life. Now we can think, can't we, of Augustus William?"

Chancellor Bernstorff laid his ear yet closer to the chink of the door. If by any good chance he could retain his office, here was matter which touched his most cherished schemes. He rejoiced to note that the Duke answered without enthusiasm.

"Wolfenbüttel's son?"

"He is a charming youth."

"No doubt. But we must give Sophy time." George William was seeking excuses. He was even ready to make more than he believed to be true of Königsmark's boy-and-girl affair. "Yes! Sophy may be a little troubled. We must give her time to forget."

Eleonore however persisted.

"But Augustus William might come to us on a visit. Sophy has already met the boy and she liked him. Oh, it would be the perfect marriage!"

"Sophy's too young, my dear."

"Your cousin Ulrich's our best friend, and I know he looks forward to a marriage of his son and Sophy. I don't plead that we should press it on too sharply. But we ought to do more than keep it in mind."

"Perhaps," said George William. "Of course Ulrich's very dear to us, and Sophy, Duchess of Wolfenbüttel—to be sure. Two families which have been linked in the greatest amity would be joined by even a stronger bond." And with an explosion his real objection broke from him. "I am told I am superstitious. I am not. There's no one more free from credulity. But we did let Ulrich have his way before. We did betroth Sophy and Ulrich's elder boy when Sophy was ten, and the boy died of wounds within the year. I think it's unlucky to press on a second betrothal with the second son. Let us wait, my dear wife, for a year or two."

Gottlieb Bernstorff softly rubbed the palms of his hands together. He would have liked to have given Duke George William a hearty round of applause. Two years would make an excellent interval. He could make a good use of two years. But in the midst of his exultation he was thrown down once more into doubt and despondency by one little sentence.

"Schultz urged it," said Eleonore; and Duke George William's thoughts took just that turn which Bernstorff dreaded.

"Schultz! Yes, that is true, my dear. Our good Schultz! We have missed him to-day. There would have been more dignity and less cruelty. What had to be done would have been done in a more decent way. This young man Bernstorff now!"

Duchess Eleonore shook her head.

"I think that he is sly and ambitious," she said. "I dislike him and I am afraid of him."

In these words Bernstorff heard his dismissal. His face was convulsed with rage and disappointment. He had but one hope and that the faintest—a hope in George William's indolence.

"Yet Schultz urged him upon us," said the Duke. "Bernstorff was the only head on the Council with the brains. If we gave him time as well as Sophy."

Bernstorff's heart climbed up again into its proper place. To give time was the Duke's favourite phrase and favourite process. By giving time he was spared from the necessity of coming to an immediate decision and, as often as not, from the necessity of coming to any decision at all. Eleonore had unwittingly, and at a cost which she was only to appreciate in after years, saved Bernstorff that night. The Duke was in the mood to write with his own hand the order for the Chancellor's dismissal when he sent him from the room. But the Duchess had broken in with her talk of Sophy's marriage and the indignation of the Duke had had time to cool. The immediate dismissal of Bernstorff meant a search for another Chancellor, an examination of claims, a balancing of merits, and the initiation of the servant chosen into the affairs and policy of the Duchy; and all these duties meant in their turn, a whole big heap of tedious long mornings at a desk, whilst his horses stamped in their stables, and his dogs howled in the kennel.

"I must get Schultz to tell Bernstorff about Stechinelli," said the Duke, and he rose from his chair at the table. "Two o'clock in the morning! Even Hanover is going to bed," he said with a laugh.

Bernstorff was reprieved. Who was this mysterious Stechinelli who had now been twice commended to his thoughts? He would get the answer to that question on the morrow. For to-night he was content to know that he had rounded his dangerous corner. He stole away from the door on the tips of his toes. Bernstorff lived in a modest lodging by the side of the market-place. He picked up his hat and his cane in his new office and descended the stone staircase. There was a light in the guard-room at the bottom of the stairs and the great doors of the Castle stood open. He was still a few yards from them when the light quick footsteps of someone booted and spurred

rang on the stone slabs behind him. The sound startled him out of his pleasant dreams and he swung sharply round. As he swung round the sound stopped as sharply. He saw, in the shadows of the great porch, the slight figure of a boy in a riding-dress; and the boy flinched. The Chancellor laughed softly, but there was much pleasure in the laugh. It was not dignified. The Chancellor recognised that Her Highness Eleonore would have found in his laughter a justification of her indictment of him. But he was too new in his office not to relish a movement of fear.

The boy heard the laugh too. He straightened his shoulders and he marched straight past the Chancellor, his chin in the air and his three-cornered hat upon his head, as if there were no one in the porch but himself. Bernstorff followed him out into the open space before the Castle. A sentry at his elbow saluted him. The moon was in its third quarter and held the stretch of gravel, the glistening moat, the broad lime-tree walk, and the sleeping town beyond in the spell of a lovely silver light. Bernstorff had only eyes for a little group assembled to the left of the door—the porter of the gate with a great lantern in his hand, a soldier on a horse with his saddle bags stuffed full and a portmanteau strapped to the back of his saddle and Philip Königsmark, then in the act of swinging himself on to the back of a second horse. Not a word was spoken by anyone. Not by a look or a gesture did Philip betray his knowledge that Bernstorff was watching his departure. The planks of the drawbridge sounded hollow beneath the hooves of the two horses. On the chequered path of the lime-walk, now a stirrup gleamed and now was lost. Philip Christopher rode out from Celle on the first stage of his banishment to distant Breda. His disgrace was heavy upon his spirit. Heavier still was his sense of inferiority and incompetence. The shame of the long hours in the Castle chapel, the poor showing which he had made, his submission, the helplessness and pain and terror which were the consequences of his submission branded him with ignominy. He grew hot and cold as he thought of it. But heavier than his shame was the knowledge that he left behind him a finer spirit than his, and a heart as desolate.

Outside the town the land sloped northwards up to the moorlands and, at the top of a rise, Philip reined in his horse and looked backwards. He saw below him the Castle of Celle sleeping in its Park. There was not a light in any window. Yet behind one of them Sophia Dorothea was lying, her face perhaps pressed into a pillow to stifle the sound of her weeping. He was a boy and he suffered that night the overwhelming sorrows of a boy. Sophia Dorothea and he were never again to meet. They would carry their lonely hearts through dreary interminable years. This was his last view of Celle. He would never see its Castle again.

It would have been infinitely better for both Sophia Dorothea and himself if his expectations at that moment had proved to be true.

“Come!” said his guard impatiently.

Philip turned the head of his horse and rode forward over the brow of the hill.

CHAPTER VI

A MESSENGER TO HANOVER

THE dismissal of a page could not upset the routine of a State with as little parade as Celle. There were still five on the establishment and the number was more than sufficient to cover the easy duties required of them. His Highness went out hunting the next morning as he was accustomed to do on five mornings out of the seven. Chancellor Bernstorff walked into his fine new office and began his day's work with his secretary at the same hour at which Schultz had been wont to begin it. Sophia Dorothea carried her copy of *Iphigénie* into her mother's three-cornered boudoir at eleven of the clock as she had done every week day for a month.

There were however changes for the discerning curious to speculate upon. Sophia Dorothea brought a white face and a pair of tired eyes to a lesson up till now joyfully anticipated. Her mother Eleonore was embarrassed and distressed at the opening of an hour which had been the happiest for her of all the twenty-four; and she was engaged upon the reconstruction of the programme for the entertainment upon her birthday. Sophia Dorothea, as she embraced her mother, could not but see the erasure of the scene between Achilles and Iphigenia. Indeed she was meant to see it. The girl, however, asked no question, but took her place at the table, opened her copy-book and waited.

In a confusion, Duchess Eleonore, looking anywhere but at her daughter, spoke hurriedly:

"Darling, your father thinks that it would give greater pleasure to our good people if, instead of acting a scene in French, you recited a poem in their own tongue."

Sophia Dorothea, like all other children, in every age, knew that formula, "your father thinks." It is the last resource of mothers who have no satisfactory explanation to give. Put it on to father, saddle him with the unpleasant decision, make it a matter of dutiful obedience! At another time Sophia would have laughed joyously and rallied her mother with a dozen questions. Now she merely looked quietly at her and answered:

"I shall do what he wishes, mother."

Eleonore had dreaded a passionate objection. She sprang up in relief and took a book from the window ledge at her side.

"Ah! You have chosen the recitation already," said Sophia.

"I thought this, darling, would be as suitable as anything. It's a charming poem by Christoph von Grimmelshausen."

Eleonore moved round the table and placing the open book in front of Sophia, took up the copy of Racine's play. Sophia's hand reached out hurriedly to recover the book, but she drew it back again.

"You won't want this book again, my dear," said Eleonore gently and with a great deal of compunction.

"No, mother, I shan't," said Sophia. "For I know most of it by heart," and the last two words she drew out and spoke them with a tiny emphasis.

"Oh, my darling!" Eleonore cried suddenly and she stooped and kissed Sophia's cheek. Sophia turned quickly and caught her mother's arm. She held it tight and gazed into her face—steadily. But there was not a question in her eyes, and not even the hint of any trouble in their depth. They were just a pair of big dark brown eyes, inscrutable, and, to the mother, alarming. She would have welcomed an appeal, even some sign of pain at the moment. But these were the eyes of a stranger, windows upon an empty room, and of a stranger, older and better schooled than herself to hide whatever torments of sorrow and despair consumed her. It was the second time that Eleonore had been shocked by the revelation that her beloved daughter was now living in a mansion of her own with the blinds drawn and a sentry at the gates. Sophia Dorothea was the first to break the spell which held them. She took her hand from her mother's arm and only then did the mother realize with how hard a grip she had been held.

"And what am I to recite to the good people of Celle?" she asked and looked down at the open page.

She read the first line and broke into a harsh and strident laugh.

"Come, Solace of the Night, O Nightingale," she recited, and laughed again. "An ode to a nightingale! Mother, that's wonderful!" She read on again and again recited with derision:

> "'Sunset and we, though wrapped in night,
> Can sing God's goodness and His might.'

Could any poem be more suitable for a young girl? So much better than Racine! So much more innocent!"—Sophia Dorothea broke off suddenly. She saw that tears were standing in her mother's eyes. In a passion of remorse, she rushed across the room and flung herself down on the seat beside her.

"Oh, mummy! I wouldn't hurt you for the world. Would I? Would I?" and she clung to her mother. They were the first natural words which she had spoken since she had come into that room. "Let's go into the Park," she continued. "I'll recite the poem. It won't take me more than an hour to learn it. Come, mother, I'll race you down to the French garden."

The pair had just reached the French garden, when Bernstorff the Chancellor dismissed his secretary, took his hat and his walking-stick, and paid a visit to ex-Chancellor Schultz. He found the old man smoking a long curved pipe with a china bowl in an arbour at the bottom of his garden, the Aller singing over its stones at his elbow, and the sunlight glowing upon his flowers.

"Aha, my friend!" he said. "Do you need old Schultz's help so soon? Sit down by my side and let me hear!"

Gottlieb Bernstorff sat down.

"It is a phrase you used to me yesterday."

"Indeed?" said Schultz, puffing at his pipe.

"I shall be glad if you will explain it to me."

"I must know what it is first."

"You said: 'I shall have to tell you about Stechinelli.'"

Schultz smiled slyly.

"I see, my friend. Someone else has repeated that phrase to you since."

Bernstorff's face grew red.

"I am not admitting that. I did not interrupt you when you used it, for we were talking of more important things. But I laid it up in my memory to ask you for its meaning at a more convenient season. The only Stechinelli I ever heard of is Master of the Post House and a rich man."

Schultz blew out a cloud of tobacco smoke from his mouth and began with a trifle of malicious enjoyment.

"That's the fellow. Stechinelli was a beggar in Venice which, as you know, His Highness frequently visited in his younger days. Stechinelli's pitch was on the steps of the Church of Santa Maria della Salute and there His Highness used to give him money and talk to him. Stechinelli was a clever fellow with a sharp wit, and in the end His Highness took him to his lodging, sent for a tailor to dress him and carried him back to Celle. Here he advanced the man from post to post, setting great store upon the shrewdness of his judgment. But beggars on horseback, my dear Bernstorff, are apt to lose their heads before they have learnt to keep their seats. Stechinelli became a little overbearing, he took too much upon himself and, on these

occasions, His Highness would take him to a cupboard where his old beggar's clothes were kept upon a frame, ready for him to wear again."

Schultz left Bernstorff to make the proper application of that story for himself, and went on:

"There's a point which I should have recommended to your attention yesterday and I take the opportunity of doing it now. His Highness is, as we know, tractable and easy-going to a fault but, like all such men, he has moments of obstinacy over which no persuasion will prevail. Once he has made up his mind, nothing, not even the prayers of his wife nor the Princess will succeed in changing it. It is something to remember."

"Yes. For it might help as well as hinder," said Bernstorff thoughtfully and with a livelier note in his voice. It had been galling to hear old Schultz roll his tongue round that story of Stechinelli, but it had been well worth while.

Schultz shrugged his shoulders.

"You will hardly say so, when it happens. A weak man stubborn—he outmules the mules!"

Yet mulishness might help. Old Schultz never had seen further than the end of his nose. Mulishness—His Highness's mulishness—might be priceless, in such matters, say, as the mooted marriage of Sophia Dorothea and young Augustus William of Wolfenbüttel. His Highness was only vaguely uncomfortable about it now. A little work must be done, Chancellor's work, gradual, insinuating work, untiring work, work that slipped a word in here, an unhappy analogy there, and never misused an opportunity, until mulishness rounded and perfect, impervious to the tears of women and the persuasions of friends, laid its ban upon that marriage.

Schultz watched the thin face of his successor sharpen and his eyes gleam and a curious brooding smile flicker about his lips; and Schultz felt a chill creeping about his heart. "There was no one else to fill the place," he said to himself for the hundredth time but now for the first time in a panic. He had distrusted Bernstorff before; he was afraid of him now. So still the man sat, staring out into the garden and with a look so private.

Schultz's discomfort flashed a warning to Bernstorff's mind. He relaxed into an easier attitude.

"I thank you for the story of Stechinelli," he said holding out his hand. "You have helped me." Certainly he had taken too much upon himself yesterday, he had gratified his first taste of power with a violence too greedy, he had rushed like a bull, where he should have walked as daintily as a cat. "You have helped me too in another and even more important way."

Bernstorff took his leave. He had been in the mind to write with a running pen an irrevocable narrative of the late events in Celle, but he was persuaded now to a deliberate approach. He moved from his cramped quarters in the Kalandgasse to a house in the broad Schuhstrasse which took the sun and was more commodious. He set up an establishment more suitable to a Chancellor and bought a couple of steady hacks in that country famous for its horses. Then he sent for Heinrich Muller, the soldier, who had attended upon him in the Castle chapel.

"Heinrich Muller," he said, "you will have completed your service in a month's time."

Heinrich Muller saluted.

"I have need of a good servant who can keep his mouth shut."

"I am no gossip," said Muller.

"I have spoken to the Captain of the Guard. You can be seconded to me to-day;" and within a couple of days Heinrich Muller stood in the Chancellor's livery.

Thus a week passed and even so the letter was not penned. But it was composed sentence by sentence and corrected and reshaped in his mind whilst he went about this reordering of his life. So that one afternoon when the work of the Chancery was done, he locked his door and wrote it out without an erasure.

"A memorandum on the banishment of Philip Christopher, Count Königsmark from the Court of Celle with an account of a conversation bearing on a marriage between the Princess Sophia Dorothea and Prince Augustus William of Wolfenbüttel."

Thus he pompously entitled it. Then he sealed it and put it into his pocket, and at nine o'clock that night, in his own house, he summoned Heinrich Muller and bade him close the door.

"You will take this letter and button it in a safe pocket."

Heinrich Muller took the letter and fastened it within his coat.

"You will guard it with your life," continued Bernstorff.

"Yes, Excellency."

"You will saddle the best of my horses, and you will ride towards Hanover."

"Yes, Excellency."

There was not a question, not even a look of surprise in the face of His Excellency's new servant.

"You will pass the Palace of Herrenhausen and a mile beyond, half way between Herrenhausen and Hanover, you will come to a big house in the French style—Monplaisir."

"Monplaisir, Excellency."

"You can, with a reasonable care of my horse, arrive at Monplaisir at eight in the morning."

"Without doubt, Excellency."

"You will ask for Madame Platen. Fix that name in your memory, Heinrich Muller. For you must give that letter into her own hands."

Bernstorff was watching his messenger with a covert anxiety. Even that stolid creature must be aware of the reigning mistress of Ernst Augustus and of the great share she took in moulding the policy of the Duchy of Hanover. The Chancellor was awaiting a gleam of inquietude in the man's eyes, a movement of repugnance from so equivocal an errand. But there was not the quiver of a feature. He had the servant he wanted under his hand, a man without understanding and without curiosity—a living automaton. Bernstorff felt the pride of the Centurion in the Gospel. "I say to him 'Go' and he goeth." He laughed in his relief and explained his laugh, though there was little need that he should.

"You will have to wait, my friend Muller, before you present the letter and very likely for many hours. The lady does not go to bed with the birds, unless it be the nightingale."

"I am to wait for an answer?" asked Muller.

"And you will bring it back, as you went, by night, talking to no one on the way and being known of none."

Muller saluted and departed from the room. Within the half hour Bernstorff heard the hooves of his horse clack on the cobbles beneath the window, and, looking out, saw him pass steadily upon his way. He was lost in the shadows of the houses long before the clatter of his horse ceased to reverberate through the sleeping town.

Chancellor Bernstorff sat late that night, gaping with admiration at his own audacity. He was setting Celle under Hanover with deliberation and for his own game. Celle was to be the minister and servant to enhance the glamour of Hanover. Bernstorff had taken his first step in the long career of intrigue and treachery which was to bring him fortune and a dishonourable name. It culminated in the darkest tragedy of his age. Would he have hesitated on this night and sent another to recall his messenger, had he foreseen? Hardly. For within a week of taking office, he was betraying the master who had set him up in his high place. He was betraying him without

compunction, and with only a little fear lest he be discovered before he had made himself his indolent master's master.

He counted the miles which Muller was covering with "a reasonable care" for the valuable horse he rode. He would have left the town behind him now. Bernstorff heard the steady beat of hooves upon the dark and empty road.

CHAPTER VII

SOPHIA DOROTHEA GIVES A TASTE OF HER QUALITY

THE tiny spark of fear, however, became the next day a smouldering fire. He began to wonder whether old Schultz, smoking his big curved pipe in his garden, had guessed the secret of his policy. He imagined, when the Duke sent for him to discuss the peasants' right to cut peat along the road to Hanover, that he would find an order for his arrest and an escort of the Guards. On the second day, when Muller had not returned, the smouldering fire burst into a blaze. Madame Platen had scorned his proposal of an alliance between them. She was speaking of him openly and angrily as an impudent fellow who had grown, in a night, too big for his boots. Or she was making fun of him and reading aloud to her lover Duke Ernest Augustus, with a mock-pompous emphasis, passages from his pretentious memorandum. All that day when he was not shivering with fear, he was burning with shame.

His plight was the more unhappy since it was the night of the great Entertainment in the theatre and he must sit with Their Highnesses in their box on the first tier and pretend enthusiasm for the amateurish bleatings of the citizens of Celle. There was just one item which distracted his thoughts and gave him a minute or two of malicious gaiety. The recitation of Christoph von Grimmelshausen's "Ode to a Nightingale" by the Princess Sophia Dorothea.

Bernstorff enjoyed the recitation all the more because he heard in the girl's clear and lovely voice a little note of mockery which betrayed the bitterness of her spirit.

"I am not the only tormented wretch in this sparkling little theatre," he said to himself and found therein a trifle of consolation.

He turned to Duchess Eleonore.

"May I presume to felicitate Your Highness upon your choice of this poem," he cried. "Could there be sentiments more sweet and sensible? Or spoken with a more exquisite discretion? One must be a great poet indeed to

draw from the nightingale's notes so charming a lesson of resignation to the will of God!"

Duchess Eleonore looked sharply at the Chancellor. Was he daring to rally her? The Duke, for his part, received the little speech with entire contentment.

"You are right, my good Bernstorff. A worthy poem and admirable principles. Obedience and gratitude. Inspired, Bernstorff, and spoken with feeling. My dear," and his hand fell upon his wife's and patted it—"the most excellent selection. Ode to a nightingale! Ha!"

But it was the sharp glance of Duchess Eleonore which Bernstorff carried home with him from the theatre. The Duchess Eleonore was acute. The Duchess Eleonore was his enemy. And the Duchess Eleonore was beloved by her husband. To step between the Duke and the Duke's love for his Duchess, to snap the thread of it! That night it seemed to him an impossible task which required the strength and the arrogance and the divine birth of a Hercules to undertake. But the next morning it seemed to him easy. For on the next morning whilst the town was still opening its shutters, and there were no cries in the market place and no clatter in the streets, Muller returned.

He brought with him a packet which he refused to deliver to anyone but his Excellency in person. He was taken upstairs and found his Excellency leaning up in bed on his elbow and his face working.

"You have been the devil of a time," said his Excellency roughly.

"Maybe," answered Muller.

"You have something for me. Quick!"

Muller certainly had something for him, but quick was another matter. He carefully closed the door after the servant who had admitted him. Then he took three loud paces into the room, and three soft paces back to the door, which he threw open suddenly to make sure that the woman was not listening at the keyhole. Finally he came to the bedside and dropped upon the coverlet a sealed packet.

Bernstorff tore open the packet. A flat white cardboard box—that too sealed—tumbled out and there was a letter. Bernstorff cried:

"Throw open the shutters, Muller! How d'you expect me to read in this gloom?"

Muller strode to the windows, opened them and latched back the shutters against the outside wall. Muller expected nothing ever. Bernstorff read:

"I have kept your messenger for a second day. I had the honour to show your letter this morning to an August Personage and he bids me send to you

the enclosed present as a token of his high esteem. . . ."

Bernstorff read no more for the moment. His fingers were scratching too greedily at the flat white sealed box. But he composed his face and mastered his fingers, for his messenger was still in his bedroom.

"That was well done, Muller," he said. "I am pleased. I am very pleased. Go now and take your rest."

Muller took the praise as stolidly as he had taken the order. He saluted in the military style.

"Excellency," he said and turning right-about, he went from the room.

Bernstorff waited until the sound of his boots upon the stairs had ceased. Then he broke the seals and opened the cardboard case. A gold snuff-box, with a ruby set in a circle of diamonds upon the lid of it, dropped out. Bernstorff snatched it up with a little whoop of pleasure. He opened it and shut it and fondled it. He ran his fingers over the smooth gold and pricked them on the incrusted jewels. This was the beginning, the small beginning of a great fortune. Let him play his cards well, and land would come—acres upon acres, woodland and grainland, and land where great profitable buildings could be set up like that fine new tallow-candle factory of George William.

He tucked the snuff-box under his pillow and resumed the reading of his letter.

The August Personage desired nothing more than the closest understanding with the Duchy of Celle and welcomed heartily this confidential channel of correspondence now for the first time opened. Many secrets which it would be indiscreet to circulate through the Chanceries could be exchanged to the mutual benefit of both Powers. Let Bernstorff write with complete freedom, and the August Personage would express his gratitude with the generosity natural to him. And this section of the letter was extremely gratifying to the Chancellor.

Madame Platen thereupon turned her attention to the body of the letter. She had not read to the August Personage his Excellency's diverting account of the punishment and expulsion of Philip Christopher Königsmark.

"That *affaire du cœur* was an absurdity of children and it is advisable that the admirable secrecy with which your Excellency suppressed it should be preserved. There is, as your Excellency undoubtedly knows, an important Party in the State who allows no opportunity to escape her of heaping ridicule and derision on Madame the Frenchwoman and her daughter. The silly escapade therefore would be better forgotten.

"The August Personage agreed that the Wolfenbüttel alliance would be deplorable and he urged your Excellency to defeat it. A marriage between his eldest son George Louis and the Princess Sophia Dorothea would on the other hand be in the truest interest of them all. It would confirm indisputably the present contract that, at the end of the Duke of Celle's life, his Duchy should be joined with Hanover, and the accession of wealth which would come with the Princess's dowry would help forward the claim to an Electorate which the August Person was now pressing upon the Emperor."

On the other hand, the important Party in the State, in plain words the Duchess Sophia, had loftier dreams. George Louis indeed, had been persuaded against his will to solicit the hand of Princess Anne of England, and was within a few months to travel to London.

Madame Platen continued:

"But that arrangement will fail. Advices from London assure me that he will not be welcome there, nor is he of that engaging disposition which could triumph over so much ill-will. It will be a strange thing therefore if we, each of us working in our own way, do not in a year or two accomplish the other alliance."

Bernstorff locked the letter away in his bureau, and dressed with more than his usual ceremony. For the sharp glance of Duchess Eleonore caused him, even in the midst of his pleasure, a few twinges of discomfort. He must make his peace with her forthwith and he knew no better way than to proffer his congratulations on the success of her Entertainment. On reaching the Castle he sent a footman to ask her permission for him to wait upon her, and he was granted an interview in the small three-cornered parlour.

Sophia Dorothea was present during this interview and Bernstorff, wishing to make the most of the occasion, ventured to add his thanks to her for the pleasure which her recitation had given to him.

"It was the performance of an artist," he said and he saw the girl smile and the colour rise in her cheeks. "It is extraordinary," he added but not aloud, "that ever since the days of Nero, nothing gives so much pleasure to Royal people as to be told that they are artists."

But it appeared that Sophia Dorothea's smile was not one of pleasure, nor did her cheeks flush out of pride. For as he bowed with his fingers upon the handle of the door, she said quietly:

"Your Excellency."

Bernstorff stopped.

"Princess?" he said.

"Where is Philip?"

From the ease and quietude of her voice, Sophia Dorothea seemed to be asking the simplest and most natural question in the world. But her mother looked up with a gasp and the Chancellor jumped as if someone had struck him across the face.

"Princess, I . . . I don't understand," he stammered.

"Yet a minute ago your Excellency was congratulating me upon my admirable pronunciation," replied Sophia. "I asked: where is Philip?"

"You mean Philip Christopher, Count Königsmark?" he replied, still not quite sure whether he was on his head or on his heels.

"I do."

Bernstorff in circumstances however engrossing and important was never quite unaware of the figure he was cutting. He recognised with a natural exasperation that of the three people present two looked like school children on the carpet and that the real child was not one of the two. Duchess Eleonore was watching her daughter with startled eyes and a heaving bosom. He himself was havering and stuttering like an oaf. Sophia Dorothea sat behind her table, with her lesson books spread out on it, her eyes bent steadily upon him, betraying nothing of her thoughts, and holding him to her question.

"Doubtless Philip Königsmark is at Breda," he said.

Sophia Dorothea leaned forward.

"He is at home?"

"He should be at home."

The girl never took her eyes from Bernstorff's face. But she had now some difficulty in shaping with her lips the tormenting question in her mind.

"Your Excellency can assure me then," she said in a lower voice than she had used and with a little sharp intake of her breath, "that Philip is not still at Celle in a prison?"

A cry broke from Duchess Eleonore.

"My darling!"

All through this week, then, Sophia Dorothea had been tortured by this fear—that her playmate, her friend—oh, her lover if you will—stripped of light and sun and air had been hidden away in some secret gaol. And she had given not the least tiniest sign of her fear!

Bernstorff did his best to look quite stupefied by the question. But had he had his own way a prison is precisely where the boy would have been lying, with a pair of fetters on his ankles to make doubly sure that he didn't get away.

“I can assure you, Princess, that Philip Königsmark is not in Celle. A summons came for him. By the consent of their Highnesses he was released from his service. He left that night for Breda.”

“It is the truth, Sophy,” said Duchess Eleonore.

Such a wave of relief swept over the girl, sapping her strength that for a moment it seemed that she would faint. She lay back in her chair with her eyes closed and her face like chalk. The Chancellor bowed again and escaped from the room.

The girl’s mother rose and moved towards her. But before she could reach her, Sophia Dorothea opened her eyes. She turned towards her mother and something in the look of her, in the haunted depths of her eyes, held the elder of them still and silent. Sophia Dorothea threw back her head and recited with a quiet sadness which Eleonore was long afterwards to recall:

> “Triste destin des Rois. Esclaves que nous sommes
> Et des rigueurs du sort et des discours des hommes!
> Nous nous voyons sans cesse assiégés de témoins,
> Et les plus malheureux osent pleurer le moins.”

And for a second time Duchess Eleonore bitterly regretted that she had made her daughter acquainted with the sonorous verses of Monsieur Racine.

CHAPTER VIII

TAKES PLACE IN ENGLAND

THE big house at the top of the Haymarket was occupied by Monsieur Faubert, a Frenchman of considerable note. The curious may still read his name on the wall of a passage on the eastern side of Regent Street. For it was to the less noticeable quarter of Faubert's Place, as the passage is now called, that he withdrew after certain events had dislodged him from his house in the town's eye. But at this time—eighteen months had passed since Madame Platen and Bernstorff the Chancellor had concluded their unholy alliance—Monsieur Faubert's reputation was untarnished. He kept the most modish academy in England for the education of youths. Knightly accomplishments were his especial care. He taught the three languages which a gentleman should know, French, German and Italian, the mastery of the Great Horse, dancing, fencing, the laws of venery and good-manners. Under his tuition hobbledehoys learned to turn out their toes. He was the French polisher, *par excellence*. He rubbed the asperities off young gentlemen and sent them forth glossily equipped for Court and the polite professions.

A common-room extended across the front of the house with windows opening upon the Haymarket. But on this raw evening of February 12th, the curtains were drawn; and Monsieur Faubert, a smallish dapper man with a quick eye and a neat precision of gesture, was sitting at his ease in front of a bright coal-fire. His pupils were for the most part at their homes, but one of them was finishing an exercise at a table behind Monsieur Faubert's back. He was a lad of seventeen years, dressed in a brown camelot suit, fair-haired and pleasant to look upon though easy to forget. He was in a hurry to have done with his thesis, glancing now at his schoolmaster and now at the door, as though he feared that the one would depart, or the other open before he had said his say. He did finish it, however, without any interruption. He sanded it and folded it and then crossed the room to the fireplace where he stood with his back to the fire.

"Monsieur Faubert," he said, frowning. "I am uneasy."

"You will practise yourself in the French tongue, if you please," replied Monsieur Faubert.

"*Alors*," said the boy with an honest English accent, "*je souffre d'un grand malaise*."

"*Sans doute*," Monsieur Faubert answered. "*Mais consolez-vous, Monsieur Craston! On n'apprend pas à maîtriser le Grand Cheval sans de petites catastrophes*."

Anthony Craston laughed ruefully.

"Why, it's true, I took a toss in Hyde Park yesterday, and I am as full of twinges as an old buffer with the gout. But it is something quite different which is troubling me, and since I wish to be exact I must use the language I know."

Monsieur Faubert sat up straight. He now looked at the door but with a hope that someone would open it. But since no one did, he said guardedly,

"Speak then! I am listening."

"It's about Philip," said Anthony Craston.

"To be sure! It would be," Monsieur Faubert exclaimed impatiently. "It always is Philip. A year ago Karl John Königsmark brought his young brother to London and gave him into my charge. He said to me: 'Look you, young Philip wishes to follow my example—to fight here and fight there and between whiles to have much pleasure with ladies. But he cannot do what I do and live. He can only try to do it and die. He was not cast in brass which makes a great rattle and resists great thumps. Philip is of a more special and delicate mould. I cannot see him rushing up to a golden Virgin in a captured church and crying: "Darling how sweet of you to have waited for me," and taking her away and melting her down! My grandfather did it, I might do it, but Philip, no! He has scruples, he broods till everything is twice its proper size, he feels shame. Therefore I beg you to take him under your care and teach him, so that he may go up to Oxford and take a degree by his wits instead of by his sword arm as the rest of my family has done.'

"In this way," Monsieur Faubert declared, "Count Karl John pleaded. I took the boy, and ever since he came here with his slow smile and his pretty melancholy and his kind speeches, it has been nothing but 'How will this touch Philip?' and 'Has Philip got a headache?' and 'The best horse, if you please, for Philip,' as if he were a girl."

Monsieur Faubert fumed and fretted and fidgeted in a quite extravagant heat. He meant to ride off by the way of derision from a dangerous topic. All the more young Craston was unwilling to let him go.

"Sir, I should in nature hate Philip with a great jealousy, so easily he exceeds us all in our tasks," he said sturdily. "But I love him more than anyone in the world and I am sure that some very grave disaster is threatening him."

"Disaster! Here's a terrible big word!" cried Monsieur Faubert. "Define, Mr Craston!"

Again there was derision in the schoolmaster's voice, but none at all in his face. His eyes were wary and his face twitching with anxiety.

"To the particular, my young gentleman. Of what kind is this disaster?"

"A fortnight ago," said Craston, "a huge man smelling of rum came to this house."

Monsieur Faubert sat very still.

"He asked for Mr. Hanson, Philip's tutor."

Again there was no comment.

"He gave his name. Captain Vratz."

"How do you know?"

"I was in the hall when he came to the door."

"Continue!"

"A few minutes afterwards, Captain Vratz, Mr. Hanson and Philip left the house together. Philip had his face muffled in his cloak. . . ."

"Again how do you know?"

"I was watching from the window of this room."

"You are curious then, Mr. Craston," said Faubert with a sniff of disdain.

"When Philip is threatened, very curious," Anthony Craston answered softly.

"And perhaps you noticed which way the three went?" Monsieur Faubert in spite of his show of indifference, put this question on a tone of suspense.

"They went into the house next door."

"The house next door is a shop," Monsieur Faubert said sharply.

"Above the shop there are lodgings. A stranger has occupied them for the last fortnight. He does not go out. Vratz lodges with him. A German doctor has been to see him. Mr. Hanson waits upon him and carried messages backwards and forwards between him and the Swedish Minister."

Monsieur Faubert made a swift movement. He was on the point of jumping out of his chair. But he caught himself back. "And whence did you get all this gossip of the backstairs?" he asked languidly.

"From the backstairs," Craston answered sturdily. "A boy named Watts attends upon this stranger for sixpence a day. He is a sharp boy. So he earns ninepence a day."

Monsieur Faubert nodded his head and laughed not over pleasantly. "You intend, I believe, to serve your country as a Minister abroad. You should have a great success. A very great success."

Anthony Craston ignored the sarcastic speech altogether.

"The stranger calls himself Carlo Cuski, Monsieur Faubert, not a very probable name, is it? I think that I could give him another nearer to the truth."

Monsieur Faubert now did spring out of his chair. He began to walk about the room with a fine show of indignation.

"So!" he cried. "Because the exquisite Philip who is studying foreign languages is taken one day by his private tutor to meet a foreign gentleman, Carlo Cuski, and comes back disheartened, poor lad, by his own ignorance, as he has every right to be, there must be all this spying and bribing and fine talk of danger. To me it is all empty nonsense, Mr. Craston."

"Hear then the end of the nonsense, Monsieur Faubert," said Anthony.

"What?" cried Faubert in the utmost astonishment. "Is there more to it? Certainly let me hear all! Philip who is even now being coddled and spoilt and flattered for his beauty and fine dress by great ladies at the Duke of Richmond's, has no doubt invented some moving morbid story to secure your attention."

"Philip has invented nothing. He has not even answered one question and I have put many to him," Craston replied. "He would not even explain the strange thing which happened yesterday."

Monsieur Faubert glanced quickly at the boy out of the corner of his eyes.

"Well! Let me hear the end of it, since you'll never be content until I do."

"Yesterday morning, Saturday, I was talking to Philip in his study when a dark fellow dressed in rags burst into the room. He was seven weeks late, because his ship met with a great storm and was so nearly sunk that on shore it was given up for lost. He had asked for Count Königsmark, had been sent to Monsieur Faubert's house, and had the greatest difficulty in forcing his way past the servants. He was still talking when Mr. Hanson ran into the room and bustled him out. But not before he had told his name. He was Boroski, a Polander, and as ruffianly a cut-throat as you ever saw in your life."

Monsieur Faubert ceased any longer to sneer. He listened to his pupil with consternation.

"This rascal forced his way into my house? And I was not told!" he cried.

He looked upon Anthony now with friendlier eyes. Evil was afoot. That he had been sure of ever since the stranger, this Carlo Cuski, had come secretly to the house next door. What sort of evil he could not know, beyond that it would certainly be violent. Very likely it threatened Philip. Very certainly it threatened his school, his good name, his livelihood. Schools do not prosper if they are linked publicly with violent deeds and Monsieur Faubert's school was his pride and treasure.

Anthony Craston enjoyed the spectacle of Monsieur Faubert's agitation, as much as he could enjoy anything in this untoward business. There would be no more derision of his friend Philip because he was disturbed. There was another now hopping with both feet through fear.

"There's a great difference, sir, whether one brushes with the hair or against the hair," he said rather maliciously. "Now you, Monsieur, find it alarming when Carlo Cuski or—shall we say frankly?—Karl John Königsmark, who a year ago came to England with a train of carriages and walked arm in arm with the King, comes back and lies hidden in a mean lodging above a shop with the rum-drinking Captain Vratz and the out-at-elbows Polander as his only companions."

"Be quiet!" cried Monsieur Faubert in a panic. For there was someone on the stairs.

Both master and pupil turned with a frightened expectancy to the door. They were both wrought to so high a pitch that they waited stock still as though upon some convulsion of nature; and when the door opened they looked for Boroski or Vratz, or perhaps the redoubtable Karl John himself. But it was no dreaded intruder who entered. Young Philip Königsmark had come home betimes from the Duke of Richmond's party at his great house in St. James's Street. He bowed to Monsieur Faubert, exchanged a warm smile with Anthony Craston and, taking from his shoulders his long, dark cloak, sat down in a chair by the side of the schoolmaster, so that the firelight gleamed on his fine suit of white velvet and gold lace and lit up the dark brown hair clustering about his shoulders and his pale and beautiful face.

The year spent in Monsieur Faubert's Academy had released Philip from a good many of his inhibitions. He had gone away from Celle, grieving over his separation from his beloved playmate, distressed for the sorrow caused

to her and sick at heart for the ignominy of his expulsion. All through the days and half through the nights, as he rode homeward under the surveillance of the trooper, he exaggerated the distress and the disgrace until they clouded the wide sky and made a black waste of the earth. He lived over again the hours of fear and torment in the Castle chapel. He waked with a start to shiver over the pitiable figure he had cut as he dropped upon his knees before the upstart Chancellor, to hear the lamentable prayers he had babbled, to suffer again his indignities. Unhappy hours which men put aside, loom black and enormous in the memories of boys. Philip Königsmark convinced himself of worthlessness and cowardice and imagined them branded upon his face. The tedium and strict discipline of his mother's house offered nothing of interest to distract him from his brooding.

After six months Karl John, who had inherited their father's fortune, flashed, brilliant as a kingfisher, for a few weeks upon that gloomy house. He charged himself with Philip's future, and Philip, his spirits leaping to an unexpected rapture, for a little while nursed dreams of wild triumphs in battle and a name to match his brother's, a name which Sophia Dorothea in quiet Celle would hear with a smile of pride and Bernstorff with a pang of fear. Those high spirits were to drop to lower depths than ever before, when Karl John explained his plans.

"My life's not for you, Philip."

It needed a sturdier body, a less sensitive and impressionable mind. Schooling and books for Philip Königsmark. Monsieur Faubert in London and Oxford to follow, and a placid career at the end. And to Philip the whole discourse meant that he was unworthy of the name he bore and must be tucked away in some corner where there would be no opportunity to disgrace it.

At Monsieur Faubert's Academy, however, his conviction of his insufficiency stung him no longer. He had little to learn from Monsieur Faubert of the management of the great horse; and though his wrists were slight as a girl's, they were supple and strong as steel. There was no one in the school to match him with the foil, and to his surprise he discovered that books were not nearly as irksome as he had conceived them to be. Before the year was ended he could turn an ode of Horace into passable verse and write it out, too, in a round boyish hand to be sure, but with no more mistakes in spelling than a gentleman was entitled to make. But neither the new and busy world in which he lived, nor the astonishing place which he took amongst his companions, affected him chiefly. A passionate friendship sprang and bloomed between Anthony Craston and himself. They were of an age, there was something of hero worship in Anthony and much of gratitude

in Philip; the one could not tire of hearing of Breda and Celle, the other of hunting over the dykes and hedges of Essex from the house of his friend, and the long jog homeward afterwards, and the lazy interchange of talk before a roaring fire in the great hall. A day when they were not to meet was a day lost and there were few such days. They were very serious and settled the troubles of the world. They were very gay and set their lives to music. Anthony was one day to be the wisest of Ambassadors. Then why should Philip lag behind? There were laurels to be won in that field as fadeless as in the field of war. The same College should house them at Oxford, they would share the same troubles, the same subjects of study. Meanwhile there was Monsieur Faubert's Academy and long rambles on the days when they were free, amongst the woods of Highgate and the meadows of Kensington. Never had Philip's sky been so serene, never a day dawned but he waked to it eagerly and ended it with regret. The world was compounded of music and light, of magic and great dreams. It was Philip's *annus mirabilis*, but on this Sunday evening it came to an end. Philip was sitting back with his legs stretched out and his feet crossed, very modish in the new style of breeches fitting closely to the knees, but very primitive in his behaviour, for he was gnawing moodily at the cambric of his lace-edged handkerchief. Monsieur Faubert, however, was for the moment more concerned with his premature return.

"I understood, young gentleman, that His Grace of Richmond had honoured you with an invitation to stay to supper," he said severely.

"I was restless," Philip replied. "The rooms were crowded. It was insufferably tedious. I was not alone to find it tedious."

"Indeed?" Monsieur Faubert asked.

"George Louis, Prince of Hanover," Philip explained, "paced the rooms like a bear in a cage. He proposed, I understood, to marry the Princess Anne, but she would have none of him. Had Anthony been there, now, I would have stayed," and he smiled across the room at Anthony for a moment, without, however, ceasing from his work of destruction.

Monsieur Faubert shook his head.

"To endure tedium, Count Philip, with a smile of high enjoyment, is amongst the most necessary of courtly accomplishments," he said sententiously. He added, "Amongst which, by the by, the tearing of a costly handkerchief to shreds with the teeth is not included."

Philip, with a short laugh, dropped the handkerchief upon his knees and spread it out.

"It has as many holes as a sieve," said Monsieur Faubert, who had a French economy and was shocked by such unthriftiness. "I must ask you to consider seriously the alternative of calico. It would certainly not go so well with silk stockings and a velvet coat, but it will give the teeth a longer occupation."

"I beg your pardon for my ill manners," Philip replied in a low and pleasant voice. "I was thinking."

"Too violently," said Monsieur Faubert.

Philip answered slowly and gravely.

"Violence is the way of my family in all things, Monsieur Faubert, whether it be thinking or doing. I pray that it may not be so again to-night."

But he never finished the last word. Some sound for which he had been listening whilst he bit his lace handkerchief into tatters, reached his ears. So faint a sound that no one but he heard it. He sat up straight, his feet drawn back, his slender hands under the froth of ruffles clutched so tightly about the arms of his chair that the knuckles and fingers were white as ivory.

"Listen!" he said in a whisper; and now all three heard the sound. It was the sound of a cry, very faint but clear, such as one may hear at a great distance on a still winter's night.

As the sound reached them, Philip shot one despairing appeal for help—it was as clear as a cry—from a haggard face to Anthony Craston across the room. Then he rushed to the window and flung it wide open. He knelt upon the window seat and, grasping the sill in his hands, leaned out.

In a moment Anthony was kneeling at his side, his arm flung about his shoulders.

"What is't you fear, Philip?"

"Listen!"

In the darkness at the bottom of the Haymarket a hubbub was growing. Both boys were straining their eyes into the mirk at the bottom of the hill. But the lights were few and feeble, and that raw night of February black as the mouth of a cavern. They could see nothing, they could hear only a confusion of shouts, but Philip was shivering from head to foot as though he could distinguish every word that was shouted. As for Monsieur Faubert, he stood over against the fire, his face set in a dead man's grin, which showed even the gums above his teeth.

Philip leaned a little closer to his friend.

"Anthony, did you hear?" he whispered.

"A cry, yes."

"But before the cry?"

"Nothing."

"A shot was fired."

"Philip!"

"Listen!"

From the confused clamour a new and unmistakable sound emerged—the clatter of galloping horses. At the bottom of the slope, where the Haymarket makes a right-angle with Pall Mall, the two boys' young eyes distinguished not so much movements as a shifting of the darkness, a thinning of it here, an extra denseness there; and suddenly the beat of the horses' hoofs grew clearer and louder.

"How many?" asked Philip.

"Two, certainly," answered Anthony.

"Three," said Philip suddenly.

He thrust his shoulders farther out beyond the window-sill.

"I can see them. Two in the middle of the street and a third on this side, close to the wall—a shadow. They are bawling out a word. Listen!"

The three voices indeed overtopped the clamour, and as the riders galloped up the hill, the words broke clear:

"A race! A race!"

A race it was. There were people on foot in that busy street of warehouses and shops and homes, and they scattered on this side and that before the charge. A race! Philip breathed the word and sighed his deep relief. His hand sought Anthony's and he laughed with a pleasure his friend had not heard in his voice this fortnight back.

Anthony pointed towards one of the few oil lamps, which made a little pool of yellow light.

"We shall see who they are," he said eagerly.

They would be three young madcaps with a wager to settle. Very likely he or Philip would recognise one of them.

"They will keep to the middle of the road," said Philip.

"One of them may swerve," answered Anthony, and one of them did swerve.

Just before the lamp was reached, a big waggon with its country load was being unpacked. The horse nearest to it shied and bolted. It galloped directly under the lamp and the horseman's hat fell off. For a moment his face stood out clear and small, like a miniature; and with a sob Philip drew

sharply back. “Vratz!” he cried in a low voice, and he stared at his friend with eyes full of fear and a face as white as paper.

The horsemen passed beneath the window and, at the top of the Haymarket, scattered. Vratz rode away westwards into Piccadilly, the man nearest to them turned along Coventry Street, the third held on due north to Soho. A race? What sort of a race was this where the competitors went different ways?

The rabble was in pursuit, gathering numbers and gathering voice as it ran. Already sentences could be heard in Monsieur Faubert’s common-room.

“They went towards Portugal Street.”

“Only one of them.”

“They dispersed, I tell you.”

“Where’s the watch?”

And then loud and clear rang out the dreadful cry. “A murder! A murder!”

As the word was uttered Philip Königsmark sprang back into the room. He stood with his mouth open, an image of consternation. Whatever trouble he had expected to come out of this secret visit of his brother and the two scoundrels in his service, it was not murder.

“Oh!”

He uttered a faint cry and covered his face with his hands. Monsieur Faubert stepped forward and put out the lamps. For already the crowd was massed beneath the window.

CHAPTER IX

MURDER IN PALL MALL

WITH the extinction of the lamps everyone in the room seemed to hear with a greater sharpness. Amidst the general clamour a few voices began to assert an individual character, so that one at all events of those who listened in the darkened room fitted a mouth and a face to each. That one was not Anthony Craston. He sat in the window-seat, indifferent to the uproar outside. His thoughts were with his friend who stood there, his hands pressed to his face and the firelight gleaming upon his slender figure in the white velvet dress. He yearned to comfort him in his distress and felt a great contempt for himself whose life ran with so easy a motion between banks so smooth. Nor was it Monsieur Faubert. He listened with a savage fear for a moment when the mob would turn in fury upon this house of his to which Vratz had come, into which Boroski had forced his way . . . which harboured this noticeable fine blossom of the Königsmark garden. Monsieur Faubert would have liked to throw him out of the window just as he stood, for the mob to wreak their anger on, if that way he could save himself from the disruption and the danger which threatened them.

Philip was listening to the voices, separating them, embodying them. His brother's henchmen had committed murder that night. But why? But on whom? Surely that shrill, fanatical voice which overtopped the rest would tell him. It was raving now—against the Court and the King. Philip imagined the face which went with it—thin, convulsed with passion, the face of a partisan. It called upon Monmouth. What had the Duke of Monmouth to do with a sordid murder? And at last a name came clear—Thynne, Tom Thynne—Tom Thynne of Longleat—— Someone known then! From the "Tom," someone popular and of Monmouth's party.

To Philip the name was so much Hebrew. What mortal wrong had Tom Thynne done to Karl John Königsmark that Vratz and the Polander must be brought across the sea to murder him? Or had Vratz some private account with Tom Thynne of Longleat which he must settle in this barbarous fashion? Philip snatched up his cloak and slung it about his shoulders. Then he took his hat.

"I must go out," he cried, but he found Monsieur Faubert between himself and the door.

"You?" Monsieur Faubert asked with a sneer. He looked the boy up from his white shoes to the lace at his throat. "Into the thick of that rabble?"

"I must know the truth of this murder."

"Rest in ignorance whilst you may. Whenever you learn the truth, I have a fear it will be too soon."

"I must know now."

As Philip stepped towards the door, Monsieur Faubert locked it and dropped the key in his pocket.

"Before you had forced your way a yard's depth into that crowd, you'd be held, robbed, stripped to the skin and questioned. For all any of us yet know, your name may hang you on the first lamp-post and burn this house to the ground. You'll stay where you are."

For a few moments Philip hesitated. But even if he broke through the door, the servants below would not let him out. He flung his cloak back on the table and himself into a chair. Anthony Craston drew up a chair beside him, as he sat glowering into the fire.

"You'd have learnt nothing except guesses and wild stories," said Anthony, "even if nothing worse had happened."

Thereafter they waited, with their senses alert and their nerves on edge. Hardly a word was spoken. Once Monsieur Faubert crept to the long window and drew the curtains across it, taking infinite care that the rings should not rattle on the pole. But even then he did not relight the lamps, but returned quietly to his chair; and the three of them sat with the great fire leaping and sinking on the hearth and flinging fantastic black shapes upon the walls. To Philip it was the grim parody of happy hours in the Craston Manor House, when Anthony and he, after a long day's hunt, had between dusk and supper-time stretched out their legs to the blaze of the logs in the hall and rested in a companionable silence.

Gradually the uproar died down beyond the window, the mob dispersed, and only a rare footstep broke the silence of the street. But as a church clock struck the hour of eleven, the sound of someone running reached their ears and grew louder. Anthony Craston got up out of his chair and, pulling aside the curtain enough to let him through, looked out. The runner stopped at the door below and knocked cautiously. They could hear the bolts withdrawn, the key turned. Still no one in the room spoke, but Monsieur Faubert unlocked the door of the common-room and peered out.

"It's you," he was heard to say in a note of relief.

"Yes! Let me in!"

It was the voice of Frederick Hanson, the tutor speaking in a low and urgent voice. After he came into the room, Philip stood up and Monsieur Faubert closed the door.

"Well!" he asked.

Hanson wiped the sweat from his forehead. He wore a dress of ceremony and his stockings and shoes were cluttered with mud from his running. He looked only at Philip.

"I wanted to see you to-night, Philip," he said between deep breaths. And he took from his pocket a small package, which he handed to the boy.

Philip glanced at the superscription. It was in his brother's hand.

"Open it," said Mr. Hanson, and Philip tore off the covering. Within he found a formal document set out with seals and signatures. He looked towards Hanson for an explanation.

"Read it," said Hanson, and Monsieur Faubert lit a pair of wax candles on the mantel-shelf.

Philip walked to the fireplace and by the light of the candles read the paper slowly through. When he had done he looked again at his tutor with a puzzled expression upon his face.

"Well?" said Mr. Hanson impatiently. "What is it?"

"A Bill of Exchange for a thousand pistoles drawn by my brother on Messrs. Bucknell & Gowre, Merchants of London Wall."

"But when was it drawn and where?"

Philip looked at the document again.

"It was drawn at Strasburg on the sixth day of December."

"Very well," said Mr. Hanson, as though he were congratulating a child on the excellence of its pronunciation. "And when did you receive it from your brother?"

Philip stared at his tutor. Was he out of his wits? Was there some secret jest of which he, Philip, was to be the butt? But Mr. Hanson, with his fierce, troubled face and his bespattered dress, had rather the look of a desperado than a jester.

"I received it to-night," said Philip.

"You did not."

Mr. Hanson corrected him, watching him with steady eyes, and dwelling on each word with a curious finality.

"You received it, Philip, six weeks ago. It isn't necessary for you to remember the actual date or the actual day of the week. It's more reasonable, at your age, that you shouldn't. You received it early in January."

Philip made no answer. His tutor had no doubt some motive in this piece of mummery. The set urgency of his face and the remembered sound of his running feet, were evidence that the motive was serious. Philip waited, returning Mr. Hanson's look with no less steadiness.

"Why did your brother send you from Strasburg on the seventh of December a Bill of Exchange for nearly a thousand pounds?" Mr. Hanson asked.

Philip experienced the discomfort which a student might feel at a viva-voce examination on an unprepared subject. He glanced doubtfully towards Monsieur Faubert.

"No," said Hanson. "Monsieur Faubert's charges are met directly by your brother. From the same source Monsieur Faubert supplies you with your pocket money."

"That is so," said Philip.

"Then, if you please, account to me your tutor for this Bill of Exchange."

Philip began under this examination to feel that he had to defend himself against a charge of theft.

"But I can't," he broke out. "I know nothing about it. I haven't an idea as to what I should do with it."

Mr. Hanson's face relaxed from its sternness. It smoothed out into a smile, a friendly, insinuating, appealing smile.

"You have forgotten, that's all, Philip. As boys will who have more interesting things like friendships, and games, and studies, to fill their lives. You have forgotten that this money was to be laid out under advice on the purchase of horses."

"Horses?" Philip asked in a maze.

"Troop-horses," answered Mr. Hanson with a smile. "If an alliance were to be made between England and Holland and Sweden for a war upon Louis of France, you were to buy horses. Your brother Karl John meant to raise a troop. He would need horses for that troop—English horses. You were to wait for his word before you bought."

"But—but—" Philip stammered, his forehead knitted in a frown, "Karl John never sent me word."

"No indeed! How should he?" continued Mr. Hanson, apparently quite at his ease now. So baffled, so entirely at his mercy did young Königsmark

seem to be! "That alliance, so likely in December, was dead as a doornail in January. You had happily not bought any horses. You had the Bill of Exchange intact and at your brother's disposition. A most honourable piece of behaviour—such as the whole world would expect of you, my dear boy, and no one more confidently than your tutor."

Philip was still lost in a murk of conjecture and vague fears. In a hope to reach some sort of comprehension, he began to recapitulate the particulars of Mr. Hanson's discourse.

"This Bill of Exchange was sent to me by my brother at Strasburg on December 7th?"

"Yes."

"It reached me during the first days of January? I was to cash it and buy troop-horses, as soon as my brother sent me a second message."

"Continue," said Mr. Hanson.

"He would send that message as soon as England, Holland and Sweden had made an alliance against France."

"Precisely."

"But since no such alliance was made and the chance of war had passed, no second message was sent."

"In proof of which . . . ?" Mr. Hanson prompted.

"I produce the Bill of Exchange," Philip returned.

"Perfect!" said Mr. Hanson. He was pleased with his pupil and he spoke in the kindliest tone. "You must remember that simple story and tell it as clearly, if the occasion comes."

With a little wave of his hand he was for dismissing Philip. But Philip held his ground.

"I should remember the story better, sir, if I understood for what occasion I must remember it."

Mr. Hanson's voice lost most of its kindliness. "For all occasions, Philip," he said tartly.

Clearly Philip was dissatisfied. There was a stubborn look upon his face. He folded the Bill reluctantly, finding in the very feel of it under his fingers, a great threat, a great danger.

"It should be enough for you that you will be fulfilling your brother's wish," said his tutor severely.

Philip nodded his head slowly. Yes, he owed the enlargement of this last year, and all the joyous confidence which it had brought to him, to Karl John's generosity. It seemed a small return after all, this harmless lie which

he might have to tell. Yet he could not rid himself of the foreboding that it was going to mean for him a second shipwreck and disaster.

Anthony Craston in the recess of the window found an easy explanation of Mr. Hanson's rigmarole. Karl John Königsmark was likely to be brought to question in the matter of this murder since two of his dependants had committed it. Why, with so much money to his hand, was he living secretly in a mean lodging—he who, a year ago, had dazzled the Court itself by the magnificence of his equipment? He was wise to get rid of it, and how could he do it more safely than by entrusting it to his young brother? Meanwhile, there stood the young brother, mightily scared and distressed.

Anthony came forward and slipped his arm under Philip's. He had no liking for mysteries. They bred terrors because of the darkness in which they hid. The broad daylight and a man resolved them.

"Mr. Hanson," he began and stopped astounded by the consternation in the tutor's face. Hanson gaped. He looked towards the window. He should have looked there when first he came into the room, before ever he began to speak. The blood suddenly rushed into his face.

"You have been behind those curtains," he cried angrily, "quiet as a mouse, listening."

Anthony was puzzled by Hanson's violence. Was there another reason for the story which he had imposed upon Philip, than the simple obvious one which had occurred to him?

"I did not wish to interrupt," Anthony answered. "It seemed to me that you were in a great hurry, that you would resent being interrupted."

Mr. Hanson had by now recovered something of his prudence.

"What you heard was of no account. I imagined you to be deliberately listening. I beg your pardon. You had something to say to me?"

Anthony Craston, born of a line of Ambassadors, formed his question in indefinite diplomatic words.

"There has been a great commotion in the Haymarket. We in this room have heard rumours of a crime. We should like to know the truth."

Mr. Hanson looked and listened with a sincere respect. There was authority in this boy and a simple sturdiness which his friend beside him lacked; just as he, Craston, lacked the quick sensibility of Philip, and his fineness of nerve. The quicksand and the rock, thought Mr. Hanson as he saw the two youths side by side. There was more of bright flame in Philip, more of good earth in Anthony. They were the complement one of the other. There was something protective in Anthony, something solitary and aloof in Philip. Their very attitude demonstrated it as they stood with Anthony's arm

holding Philip close. Welded into one they would have made a man in a million of men. Apart one was doomed, the other second-rate. Thus Mr. Hanson, the tutor, ruminated whilst he chose the words of his answer.

"I was at the Court to-night"—Mr. Hanson had been the companion of the elder Count when he had come a year ago to London with little knowledge of the English tongue; and as his companion he had been given the entrée to Whitehall—"I was at the Court. At nine o'clock the news was brought that Mr. Thomas Thynne had been murderously attacked in his coach at the corner of St. Alban's Street and Pall Mall. Mr. Thynne was returning from the Countess of Northumberland's house and had the Duke of Monmouth with him. A footman with a lighted torch preceded the coach. Three men were following it on horseback. As long as the Duke rode with Mr. Thynne, no attack was made. But the Duke got out at his own house. As soon as the coach went on, one of the riders galloped up to the coachman and drawing a pistol cried 'Stop, you dog!' The two other horsemen closed in at the side. One thrust a blunderbuss through the window and fired it at Mr. Thynne. The four bullets destroyed him, and whilst the unfortunate man was being carried into his house, the three desperadoes galloped up the Haymarket and scattered."

"Are they known?" Anthony asked.

"Not yet," answered Mr. Hanson. "But before morning they will be known and laid by the heels."

"You are very sure."

"His Majesty was much disturbed," Hanson explained. "Tom Thynne was a Parliament man and of the Duke of Monmouth's party. His Majesty held that unless the criminals were quickly brought to book, it would be openly said that the murder was connived at by the Court. Sir John Reresby, the magistrate, happened to be present and the King was instant with him, and Sir John went away upon this business on the moment."

"And that is all?" Anthony asked.

"That is all," answered Mr. Hanson.

"Except that I wish you both, young gentlemen, good night," added Monsieur Faubert.

It was an order. The two boys made their bow and went out of the room. But what they had heard was not all. The door had hardly closed before Hanson was whispering in an agitation to the schoolmaster.

"That fool Vratz rode straight to Königsmark's new lodging in St. Martin's Lane."

Monsieur Faubert uttered a most unscholarly oath.

"He did. Rode at a gallop to the door, threw his reins to Königsmark's boy and went up to Königsmark's room. There I found him after I left the Palace. Luckily Harder, the German doctor, was present too and I sent Vratz off with him."

"Was anyone about?" asked Faubert anxiously.

"God's blood, there's always someone about when you have anything to hide. And this man, Reresby, has a sharper nose than any hound I ever met with. If he once gets wind that Count Karl Königsmark has been skulking in a mean lodging in London for the last three weeks, his Countship will be a meal for the crows. He's away to-morrow. But in time?"—and Mr. Hanson shrugged his shoulders for an answer to that question.

Monsieur Faubert edged his chair a little closer to Frederick Hanson's.

"Karl John is rich," he said.

"But Reresby is honest," Hanson answered.

"Even honesty may shut its eyes, if it wakes to find its pockets full."

"And the birds all flown," Mr. Hanson spoke very doubtfully.

"Let us see what the morning brings," he added.

Much the same words were being spoken at that moment in the upper storey of the house. Philip, stopping at his bedroom door, turned about and caught the border of his friend's coat at the breast. He held it tight and shook it, smiling wistfully, and let it go.

"Here's an end of our dreams, Anthony—Oxford, a life-time of comradeship. They were lovely, they—decorated an unforgettable year. But they were the cobwebs made by dew and to-night they are gone."

There was so much of sadness and so much of certainty in Philip's voice that Anthony Craston knew not how to answer him. Behind this foul murder of which they had learned, there were secrets no doubt as yet obscure to both of them; secrets which might so stain the name of Königsmark in English eyes that there would be found no single corner in Oxford for Philip.

"But for you and me, Philip, nothing has changed. Nothing can change whatever happens."

Philip shook his head. For a moment he could not trust himself to speak.

"I think everything has changed." He was holding the Bill of Exchange crushed in his right hand, but he smoothed it out now slowly. "The dreams, the pleasant schemes we plotted out so eagerly, work perhaps in the same cities, holidays together, they were the lesser part of it, reflections, shadows of the real true thing, our great friendship. But I believe this week will see

the end of that. I do, though I would give half my life to come to think with you."

Philip was speaking with a simplicity which could not but move and persuade his friend.

"For all the love you have given me," he continued with a smile, "and still more perhaps, for all the love I have for you, I thank you very much, whilst there is still time to thank you."

He held his friend for a moment against his heart and then saying in a quiet low voice "Good-bye, Anthony," he went into his room. Anthony looked blankly at the closing door.

"Well, we shall see what to-morrow brings," was all that he could find to say.

CHAPTER X

THE END OF A FRIENDSHIP

THE morning brought in a swift sequence the arrest of the three murderers. Vratz was taken in bed in Dr. Harder's house in Bloomsbury. He was awake when the officers broke into his room, a giant of a man with a sword ready to his hand on a table beside the bed. Yet he made not an effort to defend himself. Boroski and the third man, a Swedish Lieutenant named John Stern, were captured at the Black Bull Tavern in High Holborn. They were brought before Sir John Reresby and Mr. Bridgeman, Magistrates, on Tuesday and on Wednesday Mr. Hanson was summoned before the Privy Council, the King himself presiding. Although these examinations were held in private, the fact that Mr. Hanson had been sent for became public and set a whole swarm of rumours buzzing. It was known that Hanson was the private tutor of the young Count Königsmark at Monsieur Faubert's Academy. It was remembered that a year ago Karl John, the elder Königsmark, was a suitor for the hand of the lady whom a despotic grandmother had married, much against the lady's will, to Tom Thynne of Longleat. Here at once was an explanation of this barbarous and amazing crime. The Königsmarks were folk outside the computation of ordinary men. They were like the planets and moved in ways mysterious to behold. Also they were foreigners and, on that account, prodigious. A crowd sullen and dangerous gathered that Wednesday night in front of Monsieur Faubert's Academy and was only dispersed by the watch. There were people in that crowd who were not loth to believe that Karl John for safety's sake had changed himself into the shape and form of his younger brother and was behind those windows sniggering at them exultantly. On Thursday, however, it was known that Karl John had been secretly in London and had fled. For a Hue and Cry was issued against him and a reward of two hundred pounds set on his head.

Throughout these anxious days, Philip Königsmark kept to his rooms, and though Anthony Craston paced the corridor, hoping that the door would open and pestering everyone who passed him with questions, no one but Monsieur Faubert and the tutor were admitted.

On the night of the Friday, Anthony had come to the end of his patience. All that day there had been strangers coming and going with whispered messages. Hanson was wringing his hands and reproaching himself aloud like a man beside himself. He stopped in front of Craston and broke out, hardly knowing to whom he spoke:

"If I have brought my Lord into peril, it is the last thing I would do. But they asked and asked and put so many glosses upon my words that as I am before God Almighty, I cannot say I heard this or spoke that."

Monsieur Faubert laid a hand upon Hanson's shoulder and shook him into silence.

"Look you, there is a better way than talk! What is a man's wealth for but to shield him from the edge of the law? I shall see to it myself. I shall go to this Sir John Reresby and put him in the way of saving a good life with a handsome profit for himself which he can take all the more easily since His Majesty's wishes jump to the same end."

Anthony turned away from both of them, and running to Philip's door, flung himself against it. He would have broken it down had it been locked, but it was merely upon the latch and gave way under his weight so that he was shot without ceremony into the room.

Philip was staring into the fire, seeing I know not what horrid forebodings taking life and shape amongst the coals. He looked up with a start and a joyous welcome flashed into his eyes. But the welcome was against his will. He tried to compose his face to a look of cold dignity and his voice to an astonished hard question, "Will you explain, sir, this indecorous intrusion?" But he could not. Anthony had intended to carry the day by a warm affection, but he seemed merely to have been kicked into the room by someone who had caught him spying at the keyhole, and he wore so rueful a countenance that Philip began to laugh and caught him by the arm and pressed him down in a chair beside him and laughed again till the tears rose into his eyes, and Anthony must laugh with him. Chance had done the best turn it could to the two lads and for a little while they sat basking, as much in the renewal of their comradeship as in the glow of the fire.

"But I should not have let you in," said Philip remorsefully in a little while. "I am accurst. I bring nothing but unhappiness to the few whom I love. Unhappiness for them and banishment for myself."

"Banishment?"

Anthony echoed the word in perplexity. Unhappiness? What was friendship for except to share it, and by sharing lighten it? But the strange word "banishment" called for an interpretation.

Philip nodded his head.

"My brother was arrested to-day at Gravesend."

"At Gravesend?"

"He was disguised as a waterman. He was boarding a ship bound for Sweden. They are bringing him back by the river to stand his trial."

Anthony was startled. Flight in a disguise looked very dangerously like a confession of guilt. Only a few minutes back he had seen Philip's tutor in a piteous agitation. The Privy Council had plagued him into an admission which put Karl John in peril of his life: and Monsieur Faubert's confidence reposed on nothing more solid than bribery. But he said stoutly:

"They will have much to prove at his trial."

"And he much to deny," Philip returned. "And much that he can't deny."

"There's no motive," argued Anthony.

"Only marriage with the greatest match in England and perhaps in all Europe," answered Philip.

He had only within these last days learned the story of Elizabeth Percy, the child who owned the vast Northumberland estates. At the age of twelve she had been married by her guardian, the old and despotic Countess, to young Lord Ogle, the Duke of Newcastle's heir. It had been a marriage only in name and within a few months she was a widow. A little more than a year afterwards Count Königsmark, a figure of splendour and the King's chosen friend, had sought her hand, and had not been rebuffed. But the old dowager had more than a word or two to say. She dipped her hand into the deep money-bags of Tom Thynne, a middle-aged dullard who had nothing but a fine capacity for drink to recommend him, and bullied the child into a second loveless marriage. Elizabeth Ogle had fled from her new husband within an hour or two of the ceremony, and Karl John had carried his wounded pride, if not his wounded heart, to the siege of Tangier. He had returned secretly to London and here was Elizabeth Ogle now twice a widow and still a maid.

Anthony Craston listened to the story with a mind whirling between horror and awe. A certain amount of lawlessness, a tinge or flavour of it—yes, he was willing to concede that as a not undesirable element in a character. He could bring himself with a small effort to admire it. But lawlessness so barbarous that it did not shrink even from a deliberately planned cold-blooded murder—no, even in Philip's brother that was not to be endured.

"It's not to be imagined," he cried. "There's the man Vratz. It's he who is guilty."

"Vratz takes all upon himself," Philip returned quietly.

"Ah! What did I say?" exclaimed Anthony.

"Just what Vratz says—and no one else," Philip returned with the ghost of smile. "Vratz would have us believe that he took no order from Karl John, that he sent a challenge to Thomas Thynne because Thynne had spoken disrespectfully of my brother's horsemanship, that Thynne did not answer, that he stopped Thynne's coach to force him to an answer, that Boroski mistook his orders and fired when he should have threatened to fire. Too thin a story, Anthony, to explain Thynne's murder," he said with a sneer at his own miserable pun. "For there's the Polander still to be explained."

"Boroski?" asked Anthony in bewilderment. For he put him down as a mere puppet in the story, an instrument, a tool.

"Yes, we are all shipwrecked on the Polander—Karl John, myself——"

"You, Philip, no!" Anthony interrupted. "Even if——" how should he put it?—"all the rest were true, you are not even tarnished."

Philip looked for a little while into the fire without speaking. Then he said:

"But I shall be. I owe very much to Karl John. Oh, I shall be." He stood up and laid his hand upon his friend's shoulder. "Yes, we drive to pieces on the Polander, Karl John and I and our friendship. It has been lovely. I thank you for it, Anthony, from the deepest corner of my heart. But the Polander destroys it. A brute? Yes. It'll be gossamer to his claws."

Anthony was familiar with the extremes to which Philip's enthusiasms and dejections ran. But he was speaking now with a simple and quiet gravity which had the certainty of fate. The words sounded final. They were a prophecy of a disaster to come against which neither could contend.

"No, Philip, I don't accept it. I don't believe it," Anthony replied, but try as he might, he could not even persuade himself.

"You shall see for yourself," said Philip. "I prayed that you should not come to the Trial. Now I beg that you will. I believe that Karl John will be acquitted—yes," and he stretched out a hand to prevent Anthony from interrupting. "I believe that he will be acquitted through me. But we shall none the less have shipwrecked on the Polander, Karl John and I and the great love you and I have for one another."

Anthony Craston left him standing before the fire and now and then pushing moodily at the coals with the toe of his shoe.

CHAPTER XI

A CAUSE CÉLÈBRE

AMONGST many curious and abnormal trials of this period, not one is quite so fantastic as the arraignment of Karl John, Count Königsmark, and his three henchmen for the murder of Thomas Thynne. It began on February 26th and finished that night in accordance with the old rule that when the trial is once begun, the jury can neither eat nor drink until they have given their verdict.

"The crime works amazement in all English hearts," Sir Francis Winnington declared in opening his indictment; and long before the hour appointed the streets about the Old Bailey, what with the rabble, the barrows of food, the performances of tumblers and such like itinerant mountebanks, had the look of a country fair, whilst the little Sessions House itself was as gay with fine clothes as a bed of flowers. From a bench in the part reserved by the City Lands, Anthony Craston looked down upon the well of the court where Philip Königsmark sat at a table, a lonely figure amongst attorneys and interpreters. Anthony saw the Duke of Monmouth, jewelled and beribboned, swing in with Thynne's kinsmen all in deepest black behind him, all set to intimidate Judges and jury into a verdict of guilty. The Counsel for the Crown took their seats and spread out their papers on the desk in front of them; and a sudden hush quieted the buzzing voices, as one by one the prisoners filed up the staircase from the cells into the dock, first of all Vratz the giant, debonair, unabashed, conscious of duty worthily done for the family which had befriended him, then the Polander, a brutish fellow with the face of a pig, next Lieutenant Stern, nervous, a trifle agitated, insignificant, and last, after a small interval, he for whom all eyes looked, Karl John, Count Königsmark—and the hush was broken up by little stifled cries of disappointment. Anthony Craston heard himself quoting:

> "Is this the face that launched a thousand ships
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?"

Very probably all legendary heroes would lose a good deal of their gilt if we came face to face with them. Karl John Königsmark was twenty-four years old and he had behind him eight crowded years of triumphant

gallantry in love and war. But he didn't look his history. He had one natural ornament which was the envy probably of every woman in that Sessions House—a head of thick golden hair which swung down in heavy curls to his waist and should have turned all the black perukes to white in sheer despair. But for the rest he was short, too broad for his stature and too sharp in the nose. He had indeed nothing of the beauty or the elegance of his young brother; but he made up for his shortcomings by an assurance which the young brother could never have made his own in a hundred years. His eyes swept the benches with an easy composure. The glittering Monmouth held them no longer than a haberdasher might have done and the three fellow-prisoners who so incongruously rubbed shoulders with him in the dock caused him neither discomfort nor humiliation. He was simply unaware of them. There occurred to Anthony Craston's mind a question he had asked and an answer he had received from Philip in other days before this trouble had fallen like a dark shadow between them.

"He is a great lover of women?" Anthony had asked curiously and with a spark of envy.

Philip had shrugged his shoulders.

"Between campaigns," he had answered; and looking at Karl John now, watchful, yet master of every nerve and every expression, he began to understand something of that phrase. He could see Philip torn and tormented to madness by some luckless passion, reproaching himself one moment for his jealousy and his mistress the next for her levity, living on a sharp edge between Paradise and Hell, his tight-strung nerves for a few seconds a divine harp, for many hours the martyred victims of a rack. But for Karl John affairs of the heart would be amorous interludes between two battles, and out of both he would swing triumphantly without a doubt that in either he could have failed.

"They're the world's opposites!" Anthony cried to himself as his eyes went from the man in the dock to the boy at the table. But he was to take note of one curious resemblance between them before the trial was through. The officer who arrested Karl John at Gravesend bore witness that his prisoner, when told that Boroski had confessed to the crime, was mightily altered in his countenance and bit his clothes with his teeth. Anthony could not but remember the Sunday evening when Philip, back betimes from His Grace of Richmond's party, had lain stretched out in his modish dress before the common-room fire and had gnawed his lace handkerchief into shreds. But the trial was still to come; and Anthony was still obsessed by the utter unlikeness of the brothers when the usher struck three blows with his staff

and spectators and lawyers and interpreters rose in one movement of respect to their feet.

The three great Judges of the land, formidable in their scarlet gowns, marched in behind the Sheriffs and took their seats at the three tribunals; Lord Chief Justice Pemberton of the King's Bench in the centre, Sir Francis North, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas upon his right, Sir William Montagu, Chief Baron of the Exchequer upon his left.

"Charles Boroski, hold up thy hand," cried the Clerk of the Court and the famous trial had begun.

But there were still preliminaries. The jury was to be half English, half foreign, and interpreters must be sworn in. Königsmark, though he knew both English and French in the current idiom, was to use his own natural language of High Dutch; Vratz, who had some little knowledge of English but was not ready to admit it, was to speak in German; and as for the Polander, the Court must do the best it could for him.

"My Lord," said Sir Nathaniel Johnson, the chief interpreter, "he is a very dull kind of man. He knows not how to answer, nor what to say, nor won't say anything: that is the truth of it."

Once the interpreters were chosen, Königsmark put in a special plea.

"He desires that he may be tried distinctly from the others," Sir Nathaniel explained. "He desires to recollect himself and he does not understand the Law, my Lord, nor has had time to have any counsel to inform him."

To Anthony, in his ignorance, the plea sounded not unreasonable nor irregular and he was unprepared for the severity with which the Judges rejected it. He had as his neighbour in the sort of pew he occupied, an elderly man of the middle class with a cheery red face. This man leaned forward suddenly, and followed the debate as though life and death hung suspended upon the decision. Königsmark insisted, the Judges one after the other refused, and the elderly neighbour's eyes darted brightly from face to face whilst a smile of intense enjoyment broadened his face.

"Look you," said Sir Francis North of the Common Pleas, to Sir Nathaniel, "pray will you tell him, he is charged with matter of fact which none can instruct him in but himself. Counsel can do him no good in such a case as this. He knows what he is accused of and has known it a good while and has had time to recollect himself."

And Chief Justice Pemberton was even testier than his colleague.

"Here is but one indictment against the principals and himself," he cried, glaring at the interpreter, "and we cannot try this by piecemeals."

"They are for hanging the Count out of hand," thought Anthony, but the man at his side let out a great chuckle of delight and thumped the floor with his stick, noisily enough to turn all eyes upon him.

Anthony himself under his breath rebuked his neighbour indignantly.

"You come here, sir, as to a theatre, though men's lives are on the issue."

The man shook his head.

"No, young gentleman," he replied. "Were it a theatre, I shouldn't come at all. At the theatre there's a Lady Townley, a girl from the country who loves her husband, but thinks it old-fashioned to confess it, and a Sir Brilliant Fashion who tries to seduce her, and a Mr. Manly who, fine fellow, sets all right in the end, a Mr. Cutpurse a highway man and you have only to look at the names to read the whole tedious intrigue before the curtain goes up. But, look you, here are surprises, here's nature at its best and worst, and here are passages of comedy, like that now ended, which our playwrights, God mend 'em, would give a year of their dull lives to compass."

"What?" replied Anthony hotly. "You call this prisoner's prayer for a separate trial a piece of comedy?"

"No, young gentleman, be not so quick. I call their Lordships' 'hoity-toity' rejection of it the comedy;" and very good-humouredly he explained the true meaning of the scene.

"'Tis known that His Majesty wants Mr. Towhead there to go free. 'Tis known too that yon pig-faced fellow and the Lieutenant have confessed that Towhead set 'em on to the murder. Now so long as they're all tried together, nothing that any of 'em confess can be used against any other. But let one of 'em be tried afterwards, and all can be used. So Mr. Towhead was knotting the rope about his neck so tight that not even his gracious Majesty could have stopped him from kicking in the air. But His Majesty's Judges know the law better than Towhead, and so with a pretty show of anger at his insistence, they are cheating the executioner. Watch now how tenderly they rig a jury for him. Oh, there are no players on the stage who can tread a measure with 'em."

Anthony was horrified at such familiar irreverent talk. Those red-robed portentous figures mountebanks of a special subtlety? Never would he believe it. But he watched, nevertheless, and could not but note how strictly was any challenge by the Crown examined and how widely Königsmark was allowed to range. Amongst the English he would not have a certain Knight on no better grounds than that he only desired "indifferent persons." Another, he had heard, was a friend of Mr. Thynne's; and the names of those whom he accepted were written on a short paper which he held in his hand.

Amongst the foreigners there must be no Danes, since his father fought against the Danes and burned their towns; and no Papists since he and his father were Protestants; and no Walloons because they had always served against the Swedes; and in all these details he was allowed his way.

"He is a stranger," said the Lord Chief Justice with a shrug of the shoulders as if here indeed were much ado about very little. "Satisfy him in what we can."

Königsmark in the end got pretty much the jury which he wanted and at his request a chair was set for him.

Young Craston turned to his neighbour with a greater respect than he had shown before.

"You have no doubt followed the Law, sir," he said in an undertone.

"No, young gentleman," the elderly merchant answered. "I have spent the good years of my life between a counting-house and a warehouse. Invoices, Bills of Lading, Bills of Exchange on the one hand, and bales of silk and spices and strange ivories and delicate figures of translucent jade on the other." The old fellow's face lighted up as he spoke and his fingers caressed old jewels long since bartered—"glimpses of the East and sweet faded odours from far countries, but never a step from a ship onto a beach, never the drench of the sun in one's bones, and when I was free I was too old for such adventures."

The old boy drooped, looking back upon the lost colours of his life.

"But I strayed into the Sessions House one idle hour—I have a right to a seat in the City Lands——" he continued "and I found here my anodyne. A violent and pungent life, outlandish men, swift passions, sordid villainies and loyalties to the death all in a jumble and worked out in this little court into the pattern of the Law. But whisht, my boy! Here are the depositions of the prisoners. Watch now how the prosecution will strive to get all in and the Judges will keep all that might hang Mr. Towhead out."

And indeed it was prettier than any play to see how Sir John Reresby or Mr. Bridgeman the Magistrates, would strive to read the confessions and one or other of the Judges would stop him.

"I will read the examination," said Mr. Bridgeman.

"As to that, let it alone," said the Lord Chief Justice. ". . . Look upon it to refresh your memory and then tell us."

"What the Polander confessed, first," said Mr. Bridgeman.

"Speak only as to himself, for it is evidence only against himself," Sir Francis Montagu reminded him.

"My Lord, his confession is entire."

"But we must direct what is just and fitting," said the Lord Chief Justice; and all that was allowed to reach the jury amounted to no more than that Boroski fired the musquetoon through the carriage window, that Stern loaded it, and that Vratz bought it.

Vratz, indeed, when questioned took the whole blame upon his shoulders. He had heard that Squire Thynne had spoken lightly of his master, Count Königsmark, calling him Hector and sneering at his horsemanship. Vratz had written a letter challenging Thynne to a duel, but having no gentleman of quality to send it by, had sent it by the Post. He had received no answer. Determined to have one, he summoned his servant Boroski and a friend, Lieutenant Stern. They stopped Mr. Thynne's coach in Pall Mall, and Boroski misunderstood his orders and fired his musquetoon with its charge of four bullets into the body of Thomas Thynne.

"Now, Captain Vratz," said his Lordship, "you hear what is said against you by this gentleman." He referred to the Solicitor-General. "It puts you in such danger as no man can stand in greater."

But Captain Vratz owed his life and his advancement to the family of Königsmark.

"My Lord," he said with a simplicity which caught at the hearts of those who listened. "If it be so, so be it! I think God will treat me like a gentleman."

But all these questions and answers, as the Solicitor-General described them, amounted to no more than the killing of dead men. The only one of the four of whose conviction there could be a doubt was Karl John Königsmark, and at him the Solicitor-General and his Juniors now directed their arrows. They set Mr. Hanson in the witness-box and Anthony's heart sank into his shoes as he remembered the tutor's agitation on his return from the Privy Council. But Mr. Hanson made a better case of it this time. He had admitted before that Königsmark had sent him to the Swedish Minister, Monsieur Lienburg, to discover whether if he meddled with Thomas Thynne Esquire, the laws of England would be contrary to him in any pretensions he might have to Lady Ogle. But he recanted that story now.

"I say there was no direct message from Count Königsmark," he declared. "I, being obliged to pay my respects to the Swedish Envoy who had treated the young Count Philip and myself very civilly, I spoke with the said Envoy in a familiar discourse."

He was pressed by the Solicitor-General and his Junior, Mr. Williams. They did not wish for one moment to entangle him, but surely Count

Königsmark had spoken of killing or duelling Mr. Thynne.

"As I am before God Almighty I cannot say I heard such expressions," he swore.

"But in another place," said the Solicitor-General, looking down at Mr. Hanson's examination, "you made a statement and signed it."

It was high time for the Lord Chief Justice Pemberton to come to the rescue; which thing he did.

"Speak not what is in the paper," said he, "but what discourse, as near as you can, you had with Count Königsmark."

But Mr. Hanson was not going to commit himself. He had the most ingenious explanation.

"Count Königsmark spoke to me in the English language," he said. "I spoke to the Swedish Agent in French; and when I was before the King and Council I spoke in English. Therefore," said he, "if I should be upon the Gospel, I am sure I cannot tell what was the expression."

It was the only satisfaction the Solicitor-General could get from Mr. Hanson, and he thought very little of it. "You mince your words mightily," he said at one time and, at the end of the examination: "Well, I see you will give no reasonable answer"; and to the jury: "He shifts."

But the Lord Chief Justice would not accept the statement. "I do not see it," he said. "Nor do I believe any see he shifts in anything you ask him."

And the good merchant dug Anthony Craston in the ribs with his elbow.

"The old fox!"

The advantage swung to this side and the other. The crowded little court grew hot; and now and then a turbulent murmur rose from Monmouth and his friends when an answer by Königsmark was translated with a closer concern for his profit than the words warranted. But Königsmark was making a case for himself which it was easy no doubt to disbelieve, but impossible to disprove. Why did he lie hidden in poor lodgings in London? He had contracted a malady of the skin when he was fighting for England, "thinking to do the King and nation service." He could not drink wine nor keep company. He had tried the Strasburg doctors and he had no good of them. Dr. Harder bore him out in every particular. Königsmark must keep to his room and take physic. Certainly, Königsmark had brought Vratz into England with him. He had been dismounted in a sortie from Tangier. He was surrounded by the Moors. In another minute he would have been dead or a prisoner. But Vratz, whom he had not seen for years, suddenly appeared at his side and brought him out.

Williams, the Solicitor-General's Junior, in an unhappy moment made a joke of Königsmark's malady.

"And, of course, Vratz gave you physic," he said to Königsmark, and the sneer was welcomed with a burst of laughter and applause from Monmouth's contingent.

"No!" the Chief Justice interposed sharply. "The doctor gave it."

The Solicitor-General, in his turn, was unwise.

"Mr. Williams only asks a merry question," he said with a smile.

But the Chief Justice was impatient of such levity.

"We are now upon the life and death of a man," he said severely. "Pray let us have those questions asked which are serious, not such light things as are permitted in ordinary cases."

And the rebuke was followed by a little stir of approval.

Königsmark was questioned about his flight in disguise. He, an innocent and a sick man who had been keeping his room, had risen early in the morning after the murder, twisted up his fair hair about his head like a woman, covered it with a black peruke, dispatched his luggage to Windsor and, changing his clothes in the house of a fellow-countryman at Rotherhithe, had zig-zagged across the Thames in a sculling-boat disguised as a riverside waterman. How did such conduct consort with his plea of innocence?

Königsmark had his answer pat. There was a great hubbub over this murder. Passions were aroused. The crowd was dangerous. He was a foreigner and he was warned that the common people do commonly fall upon strangers. He would have been torn to pieces, without a chance of re-establishing his good name by a fair trial according to the English laws. In all that he said Königsmark was adroit and of an admirable good temper; so that opinion wavered, and like those councils of the Gods which Homer celebrates, was now for Argos and now for Troy.

The February light waned; the lamps were lit; pools of black shadow lay here and there upon the benches and the well of the court; against the wainscot the faces of the jury showed white like waxen masks; and when the Lord Chief Justice leaned forward to ask a question or make a comment, his strong face looked fiery red against the candle of his desk. To many in that Sessions House, as to Anthony's neighbour, a grim drama was being played out to its close in an apt and gloomy setting. No one could foretell the issue. Amongst all, expectation was on tiptoe. Question and answer were followed with a tension which now and then found relief in an uproar. Sooner or later the decisive stroke would fall. Would it be now? Some unanswerable

challenge? Or some fatal slip due to fatigue? Or perhaps some new evidence which could not be gainsaid and had been held back to the one deadly moment?

But to one in the court the dramatic give-and-take was of no account. Anthony brought a fuller knowledge than most of the spectators to the trial. He had not a doubt of Königsmark's guilt; and every honest element in his own nature, every tradition of the stable body of landed squires to which he belonged, clamoured for a conviction. Anthony was not concerned to choose between Karl John Count Königsmark and Tom Thynne of Longleat. He resented the insolence which had swollen a foreigner into thinking that he could use the laws of England for his convenience and pleasure. No, sentence first, then punishment, be he Norroy of all Christendom!

Thus one side of Anthony. Another and a gentler one pleaded for a year's great friendship and for a communion of dreams and half-seized visions which had lifted the edges of a curtain upon a lovelier world than he had ever imagined.

He was torn between these moods when the neighbour strained his head forward with a jerk.

"It is so, to be sure," he said, rather to himself than to Anthony. "All turns upon the Polander in the end."

Anthony was startled. He had heard just that same conjecture from Philip, and now the man at his elbow brought the experience of many trials to confirm it. He had been, to tell the truth, growing a little drowsy what with the heat and the staleness of the air. But he was wide awake now. Sir Francis Winnington had taken up the attack himself. He stood at the bench below Anthony with his face turned upwards towards Königsmark, and Königsmark stood at the corner of the dock with his face very watchful. He was bending forward, his forearms resting on the rail and his hair rippling over his shoulder and the pale grey of his sleeve. Sir Nathaniel Johnson, the interpreter, stood in the well of the court translating as exactly as he could the questions and the answers to the jury. But more often than not reply followed upon question far too swiftly and in words too precise and sharp for him to reproduce in a foreign tongue. Happily, no one was paying the slightest attention to him except, perhaps, as a tolerated annoyance; and Königsmark, though it had been decreed that he should speak High Dutch, answered frequently in English and flung a word or two in French at the foreigners on the jury to explain it.

Sir Francis Wilmington was bitter and passionate.

"I am granting you Captain Vratz, Count Königsmark. The faithful retainer ready with a sword and a lie to strike for the honour of his family. He's of the purest romance."

"He is a man," said Königsmark.

"Aye, the noblest fellow whom you've cozened to his death," replied Sir Francis savagely.

"You have not one fact to prove it," said Königsmark distinctly, and my Lord the Chief Justice interrupted:

"But you granted him Captain Vratz, Sir Francis. We all heard you."

"Yes, my Lord, I do," said the Solicitor-General, taking a hold upon himself. Then his arm shot out:

"But what of the man at your elbow, Count Königsmark? Boroski! Look at him well! Let the jury see you side by side!"

Indeed they made the strangest contrast, the favourite of the great Courts of Europe and the brute, a degree above the styes.

"You'll have some other fable to tell us of him."

Königsmark did not change his attitude by the fraction of an inch; nor did his face alter. But throughout the Sessions House there was a little stir, from the Monmouth men broke a jeer, and then all was hushed again.

"You brought the Polander over to England from Hamburg."

"It is true."

"He was seven weeks upon the way."

"Yes."

"And when he came to you you bought him a campaign coat."

"He was shipwrecked and thought to be drowned. He had little enough to wear when he reached London."

"And through Hanson you bought him with great expedition a sword from a cutler, Thomas Howgood of Charing Cross."

"I did not know who was the cutler," Königsmark returned, and since Sir Francis Winnington had announced the name and address with a great deal of emphasis, as though it were of the utmost importance, the calm reply raised a little titter amongst the Königsmark party.

"It was an extraordinary good sword."

"It cost me ten shillings."

"It had a basket hilt. It was a horseman's sword, two fingers broad, such as gentlemen of the Guards wear."

"Very like," said Königsmark, and the Chief Baron of the Exchequer interposed with a question asked in a harassed voice:

"But why must he have such a strong basket-hilted sword furnished him within the day?"

Königsmark had had three interpreters appointed to him, and it was one of the others who took Karl John's reply and translated it.

"It was no more, he says, than what servants of his bulk and making, use to wear."

Sir Nathaniel Johnson, however, was not content. He must add a little more on his own account.

"And, he says, all the servants of gentlemen in Germany wear such swords."

Lord Chief Justice Pemberton smiled amicably, as though he wanted just this extra piece of information to satisfy him.

"You know it yourself, Sir Nathaniel Johnson," he said. "You have travelled there."

Johnson drove the nail in with yet another stroke.

"Yes, my Lord, they do; and the Poles much broader and greater broadswords than the others."

Sir Francis had certainly not scored a gold with this arrow, but he was unwilling to acknowledge that it had but pierced one of the outer circles.

"The sword was bought on the Saturday night," he cried, leaning forward and thumping on his desk with his fist, "and on the Sunday night Mr. Thynne was murdered!"

"With a musquetoon," said Königsmark quietly.

"By your servant."

"By Vratz's servant."

And the Solicitor-General shot back. He was growing wary of his antagonist, as much on account of the readiness of his mind as on the favour shown to him by his Judges. Here was a new trap set for him it seemed.

"What is this?" he asked. "You sent for the Polander to Hamburg."

"Yes."

"Yet he is Vratz's servant?"

"On the Sunday," Königsmark returned imperturbably. "Boroski was delayed on his journey, being seven weeks at sea. When he arrived I had no such occasion for him as when I wrote for him and saw no reason to keep him. I bought such things as were fitting for him and gave him away."

The explanation was a little too steep even for Chief Baron Montagu of the Exchequer. He blurted out with incredulity:

"What, the next day after he comes over!"

"My Lord, it is a common thing in Germany," answered Königsmark, "it may be, it may not be in England—to give a servant away if there is no occasion for him."

Then Chief Justice Pemberton appealed to Sir Nathaniel Johnson who, as the court had heard, had travelled in Germany.

"What say you, Sir Nathaniel Johnson?"

Sir Nathaniel fell not an inch below his opportunity.

"Yes, my Lord," he explained smiling, "it is very frequent in Germany to give a servant away if there be no use for him, for these Polanders are like slaves"; and the very look of the Polander bore him out. For he turned from one to the other with so dull an eye and so meaningless a face that no one could dower him with the smallest spark of volition.

Sir Francis Winnington was stung to a sarcasm out of which he got no profit.

"You may observe, my Lord, how Sir Nathaniel, who is interpreter in the case is a witness, and argues for the prisoner too. We desire to take notice of Sir Nathaniel's forwardness, for it may be a precedent in other cases."

And at once the fiery Chief Justice broke out upon him, leaning out above his desk and shaking a forefinger in a righteous indignation.

"What! Do you talk of a precedent?" he bawled. "When did you see a precedent of a like trial of strangers who could not speak one word of English?" He flung himself back in his chair. "But you would fain have the Court thought hard for doing things that are extraordinary in this case."

There followed a pause whilst the Solicitor-General shuffled his papers as though he were in two minds whether or no he should retire from the prosecution and leave it to his Juniors to make what they could of it. But he swallowed the provocation in the end and, turning to the Count, asked shortly:

"Will you tell the Court for what occasion you brought Boroski into England?"

And at Anthony Craston's side, the man of the warehouse and the counting-room whispered with excitement:

"Aye, that's the question we are waiting for. Look to it, Mr. Towhead, and make your answer positive. For your neck's on it!"

Anthony looked about him. Wherever a face was visible it was turned eagerly and intently upon the dock. There was a hush as though the throng had but one throat to breathe with and held its breath. Even Monmouth's friends were silent. Here was the question of questions flashing out of the medley of accusation and denial and manœuvring and sarcasm and reproof. No favouritism could hide it away. Königsmark must stand stark to it. Why had he sent for Boroski, the man more animal than man—who had held the musquetoon and pulled the trigger?

Königsmark was perhaps the only one at that moment quite at his ease.

"He is a groom. He was recommended to me from Hamburg as a groom able more than most to dress horses in the German fashion."

"Why did you, my Lord, a sick man who must keep to his room, need a groom to dress horses in the German fashion?"

"Early in December," Königsmark answered, "I heard that a peace between England, Sweden and Holland was to be suddenly declared and the three kingdoms were to combine at once against the French."

"It is a far cry, my Lord, from that dream of high policy to the sending for a groom who can dress horses in the German style," said the Solicitor-General with a sneer.

"Not so far, sir," replied Königsmark, "when you hear that my design was to raise a regiment of horse here for the service of the King of England."

The reply was received with a great noise. There were exclamations of surprise, scoffs and loud jeers—no one had need to look for the corner of the court from which they came—and a swelling tribute of applause. England never had so many friends abroad that she would refuse a warm welcome to a new one. And the plan had this to commend it to his hearers as true. It was a Königsmark plan. It was in the pedigree line of the Königsmark achievements. John Christoph who sacked Prague, Konrad Christoph who perished at the siege of Bonn, Karl John himself and his uncle the Diplomat—all of them raised troops and commanded them and did not trouble their heads overmuch as to the corner of battle-scarred Europe in which they fought.

"I had sent over a thousand pistoles to be answered by the merchants here, in order to buy horses," Königsmark continued "when the alliance was sealed, but it all came to nothing, my Lord, and I needed neither the money nor the Polander."

Sir Francis Winnington was taken aback by the statement. It was probable, it was natural, and he had not a fact to confute it. Whilst he

paused, the Chief Justice Pemberton addressed Sir Nathaniel Johnson.

"Has my Lord any one here to prove it?"

In a silence so complete that the trial might have been over and the court empty, Königsmark bent his head and whispered two words to the interpreter. No one caught the words, so quietly were they spoken though all ears were strained to catch them. Another second and Sir Nathaniel spoke them aloud:

"My brother."

They were hardly uttered before Philip was on his feet. He advanced to the front of the court and stood there in the light of the candles, his face upraised to the Judges on their dais.

"My Lord I have a Bill of Exchange," he said simply in a clear young voice which reached to every corner; and he held a little forward in his hands, that Bill drawn upon Messrs. Bucknell and Gowre which Hanson had thrust upon him in the common-room of Monsieur Faubert's Academy on the night when Thynne was murdered.

The effect of the boy's intervention upon those present in the court was startling and unmistakable. In that ill-lit place of shadows, little was seen of him below the shoulders, but he stood between two lamps set upon desks and the light showed up as in a golden halo the pale and delicate beauty of his face, the dark-brown hair rippling over his shoulders, the eager parted lips, the wistful appeal of his eyes. To most there was something mystical in the grace of his presence. He was wearing a coat of blue velvet, very dark, like the blue of old Cathedral glass, with a white cravat in a bow at his throat, and he seemed to have stepped down from a Minster window, or out of the illuminated page of a missal—a spirit, an angel come at the end of so much thrust and parry, so much adroit and ingenious argument to clear all doubt away and make the truth known. The young timbre of his voice gave to what he said a purity and a candour not to be gainsaid. Thus in some remote chapel high amongst the hills, a young and saintly knight might have gleamed for a moment before the candles of the altar in the eyes of all the worshippers and vanished, never again to be forgotten.

Those who care to read the text of this old trial will see that neither Judge nor Counsel sought to put the lad upon his oath. What he said was said from this spot in the well of the court, clear answer to question gently put, and no one doubted, no one demurred.

There were two, however, on the high back bench of the City Lands who escaped the contagion of that emotional moment. The old merchant was thrilled and delighted, but as one may be thrilled and delighted by some

superb device in the crisis of a play. This was the decisive stroke, swift and sudden, which rounds all off and sends the audience home in amazed content. The retired merchant chuckled under his breath. He looked from Königsmark in the well of the court to Königsmark in the dock and gazed at the prisoner with admiration. That man might rage through Europe like a flame through a field of corn, capture ships single-handed, ride with a noble lady for his page—all these ornaments of the old Troubadours left him unaffected. But this subtle piece of stage management, as he conceived it to be, fired him with enthusiasm. The closing hour of a great trial, the little pools of yellow light in a place of gloom and shadows, and this sudden apparition of a gracious youth speaking vital words in a clear and melodious voice—there was enchantment in it. The merchant thumped his stick gently on the floor and turned a smiling face upon his companion.

But there was no enchantment there for Anthony Craston. He sat with his hands clenched between his knees and his eyes fixed upon his friend with a look of horror. He saw all that his neighbours saw and he too would never forget it. But side by side with this actual picture of red-robed Judges, white faces staring out of darkness, and the young knight, brilliant with the colours of a missal, there hung in his mind a companion painting of a tutor sternly teaching precise words and sentences to a perplexed and troubled boy in a rich white velvet dress who but an hour before had returned from His Grace of Richmond's rout.

Anthony did not need to put forth any effort to recollect the words. For he heard them now spoken for a second time and spoken without an error.

The Lord Chief Justice leaned forward, his strong lined face one smile, his voice the cooing of a dove.

"You received a bill of Exchange? For how much, my Lord?"

"For a thousand pistoles."

"Where and when was the Bill drawn?"

"At Strasburg. On the sixth day of December."

The Chief Justice lifted his head and looked towards the jury with a nod. Let them take note of that date! In the early days of December the conclusion of an alliance between the three countries was as predictable as anything in politics could be.

"And on what date did you receive it, my Lord?"

Philip hesitated, caught at a date eagerly, and with regret shook his head. Three little movements, and each so exact in its expression that they might have been practised before a mirror. Anthony told himself that they had been —so traitorous a hypocrite had his friend in this half hour become!

"I can't remember, my Lord, the day," said Philip ruefully. "It was early in January."

Anthony recollected in hot anger that Philip had been tutored to forget the day. "Boys have more interesting things like friendships"—yes, actually friendships—"and games and studies to fill their lives."

Anthony was daunted by the fierce old Judge upon the bench, but at this moment he almost surmounted his fear. He cursed himself often enough for his cowardice afterward, in that he had not quite. He was shocked by the very success of the trick, of the duplicity which had planned it, and of the natural ease with which Philip was performing it. A young Saint from a church window! Very well! But a young Saint lying like a trooper. Better still, lying like a Königsmark. Craston's heart and soul rose up against this insolent family which trampled over the laws and decencies of countries, as if, authorised by some unimpeachable parchment, it had right of way throughout the world. He had recognised but one circumstance common to the two brothers, poor fool that he had been! The Königsmarks were Ancient Pistols—the whole gang of them—young and old—from John Christoph who profaned the Prague Cathedral to young Philip who desecrated the laws of England.

Anthony, indeed, had half risen from his seat when his neighbour put out an arm and pulled him down. The Chief Justice was speaking. Anthony's moment of violence passed. Public interruptions, the attraction of attention to himself—no! The Königsmarks might have their fill of them! He sank back into his seat.

"You were to buy English horses, my Lord, with the thousand pistoles."

"As soon as the second message came," Philip replied. "But it did not come."

"No, nor could it," said Pemberton. "For half way through January the alliance was as dead as Michaelmas."

He dismissed Philip with a friendly nod, and Philip, as he turned away, for the first time since the trial began, looked up to the corner where Anthony sat. There was a yearning in his eyes, a prayer for forgiveness, a hope that he would be forgiven. But he met so hard a glare of indignation that no doubt of the answer was left to him. Karl John might go free, but he was sentenced. His feet faltered a little as he sought his place again and a wistful smile twisted his lips. It was as though he said aloud: "I told you thus it would be."

Karl John made a short speech, at once irrelevant and effective. It was a great happiness to him in all his trouble, that he a Protestant of Protestant

forefathers was to be tried by a Protestant court. If any of his former actions could give to any the least suspicion that he was guilty of the foul act, he was very willing to have his life cut off immediately.

"Against the wish of all my relations," he added, "I brought my young brother into England to be brought up in the Protestant religion and in the same love for this nation which I have myself."

The Solicitor-General followed him at greater length—all that Anthony remembered of it was the applause of Monmouth's friends, and the Lord Chief Justice summed up quite fairly and justly, making a new point. If Vratz had sought to avenge an insult upon Count Königsmark without Königsmark's knowledge, this could not in law lie against Königsmark. And so he dismissed the jury to their deliberations. Half an hour was enough for them. Vratz, the Polander, Lieutenant Stern were found guilty, Karl John Königsmark was acquitted.

Once more in a dead silence the Clerk of the Court cried:

"George Boroski, hold up thy hand!" and in a few minutes the Court was emptying.

Anthony was one of the last to escape. As he looked back, he saw the ushers putting out the lights. He marvelled at the silence and the emptiness where there had lately been so thick a press and so loud a clatter. Philip was standing alone amongst the deserted tables and, as the usher approached him with an order that he must go, he looked up suddenly. Anthony from the doorway saw that his face had grown bitter. It wore a look of bravado, which Anthony found very strange and new. The Chapter of Celle was closed. Outside in the streets there was uproar enough to warn him that so too was the Chapter of England. He threw his head back with a jerk. Anthony Craston could almost hear the words which were passing through Philip's mind.

"Well! Who cares? Not I."

CHAPTER XII

CLARA PLATEN FORGETS SOMETHING

CLARA PLATEN awoke in her darkened bedroom and lay still for a few luxurious moments savouring the softness of her bed and the caress of her silken sheets. The March sunlight streamed in through the crevices of the shutters and glinted on the implements of her toilet table and the gold tassels of a curtain. A long mirror against a wall had luminous black depths. On the painted ceiling a winged Cupid drew the shaft of an arrow to his ear. Monplaisir.

The sisters Meissenberg and their needy old father, Count Philip, had fought a desperate battle. If they lost, poverty, insignificance, oblivion; if they conquered, one of those equivocal high positions sanctioned by the usage of the times. Clara had been the strategist; Count Philip the necessary evidence of nobility; Catherine Marie, the younger sister, a pretty and obedient ally. For a long time the battle had been a losing one. The Court of Louis XIV had been found impregnable. It was impossible to crash the gates of Versailles whilst Madame de Montespan barred the gateway. In England Louise de Querouaille dropped a hint and the Meissenbergs fled from those unfriendly shores. And then in an auspicious hour, Hanover! The ample heart of Duke Ernst Augustus was for the moment disengaged; George Louis, the eldest son and his brother were this winter back from the Grand Tour; there were galas and festivities to welcome them; Platen and Busche their tutors, capable and ambitious men, were on the alert for new jobs; and Duchess Sophia, that strange woman, the most honest and most complaisant of wives, accepted without revolt and with open eyes the canons of her day. Her romance was the Crown of England; her husband was her duty; her love she gave with both hands to her children and her favourite niece; her intellect took its food from the correspondence of philosophers; and in the affairs of every day she was as practical as a tradesman, indifferent to what she couldn't help, so that she might have the greater energy for what she could.

The sisters Meissenberg had used their last opportunity with the skill of an old campaigner. The two young ladies composed and acted a little

pastoral comedy in a garden on a moonlit night. Shepherdesses of the Age of Innocence, Clara the elder danced and sang her way into the affections of Ernst Augustus, Catherine Marie the younger charmed his son. Indecorous but convenient combination! At hand were Platen and Busche ready to take the undignified rôles which the drama of the day allotted to husbands: undignified, but in this case profitable. For Platen and Busche—worthy firm of Purveyors to Their Highnesses—entered into the Ducal service and the bonds of matrimony on the same day.

The sagacity which had inspired Clara Meissenberg had not failed Clara Platen. She had strengthened her hold upon Ernst Augustus. She had made her boudoir the chief Council Chamber of the State; and half way between the pleasure-house of Herrenhausen and the Leineschloss, the official Palace in Hanover, had risen with the magic of a Fairy's wand, her superb mansion, Monplaisir, Clara Platen was at last secure.

It pleased her thus to lie for a few minutes before the chicaneries of the day began and revel in the fine anchorage she had reached after so many storms. A very few minutes sufficed her, for she had the mind which ran forward rather than looked back. Then she struck a little gong on the table by her bed side. The chime had hardly died out of the air, before the door was softly opened, the curtains of blue brocade drawn back, the shutters opened and Madame's chocolate and courier at her bedside. Clara Platen kept up a large correspondence with her friends abroad and her daily budget was heavy. But there was one letter for which she had been looking with anxiety for a fortnight past. This morning she found it and pounced upon it with a sigh of relief; a letter from England. "Now we shall see!" she said and she tore it open at the seal. It was a long letter with a good deal of gossip about the Court which she glanced through impatiently. Followed an account of Count Königsmark's trial.

"Nothing so barbarous or fantastic has happened within the memory of living man," her correspondent wrote, "Karl John was saved by the looks and the charming voice of his young brother, Philip, who was not even sworn, but testified from the floor of the Court. The one piece of common-sense in the whole affair was a saying of Monsieur Lienburg, the Swedish Minister. 'There will be no good living in England for any that meddle with Mr. Thynne.' And so it has proved, for the brothers were on the high seas by the morning and the unfortunate Monsieur Faubert has removed what was left of his Academy to a quarter less in the town's eye."

Clara Platen smiled as she read.

"The little Philip! He has not much chance. First scratched by the good Bernstorff's claws, and now drummed out of England. However, the third

time is the lucky one, as who should know but I?" She read on and with a little cry of delight reached the news for which she had been waiting. She read it a second time. She gasped. "Was there anything so English? Oh that people. They are *impayable*." And suddenly she began to laugh. It was true, as the good Bernstorff had told his servant Muller, that the only bird at whose bed-time Clara Platen went to bed was the nightingale, but she had none of Philomela's melancholy. She laughed roundly till her bed shook and the tears stood in her eyes.

"Platen!" she cried aloud. "Come to me! Platen!" and when her maid, startled by the joyous outbreak, ran into the room. "Ilse, ask Monsieur Platen to come to me. Tell him he must come at once. I have news which cannot wait. He must share it or I die. My sister too. Madame Busche! Quick! Quick!"

Ilse flew upon her errands. It was not often that she found her mistress in so good a humour. She ran to Privy-Councillor Platen who had been diligently at work these three hours past. She ran to Madame Busche. They were wanted urgently. Madame was in a paroxysm of laughter.

Privy-Councillor Platen walked gravely to the bedroom, but the gravity changed into a smile as he entered.

"What good news has tickled you, my dear?" he asked.

These two were without pretence to one another. They were partners in a first-class business with which sentiment had nothing to do, and they were very good friends.

"Let us wait for Catherine Marie."

Catherine Marie arrived, a shadow of her sister, already waning whilst Clara was in full bloom. She was followed by Privy-Councillor Busche, a staid and solemn man who assumed an ignorance of the particular kind of good fortune which had gained him his position in the State. He watched Clara bubbling with laughter in her bed with alarm. Things might be said which he must not understand.

"My dears," cried Clara. "Imagine it if you can. Your lover, Catherine, has been made a Doctor of Laws by the University of Cambridge."

Catherine clapped her hands; Platen guffawed; Busche had not heard a word.

"Think of it! George Louis! Who never opened a book unless it described a glacis or a new way to take cities—a Doctor of Laws. The poor man cannot have the hand of the Princess Anne. No, no! That is too much. He is sullen, he is gauche, he is a clumsy princeling from some little State the size of a shilling. But it is pretty of him to come and visit us. We must do

something for him in return. Ha! The University of Cambridge shall give him a degree. He shall go down to Cambridge and walk in a procession and listen to a Latin speech of which he won't understand one word. George Louis, Prince of Hanover, D.C.L. It is magnificent. It would be witty, if it were a snub. But it is an honour. Only the English could have thought of it."

"It is a high compliment," said Busche sedately, as he stood by the window. "There will be a red gown."

"You must make him parade in it, my dear," said Clara to her sister.

"Well, it will be a change from the nightgown in which I usually see him," said Madame Busche.

"I have my work to do," said Monsieur Busche primly and he stalked out of the room.

None of the three remaining jeered at him as he went. They were practical people who accepted the world as it was and plucked out of it what advantage they could. It was Busche's pretence to know nothing of his wife's amours and to ascribe his Privy-Councillorship to his merits. He was absurd and ridiculous, but since that particular hypocrisy was in the composition of the man, by all means let him have the satisfaction of it! They gathered closer about the bed.

"Sit down and let us be serious," said Clara, ceasing from her laughter. "George Louis is coming back with his tail between his legs. Good! William of Orange will be pleased, and I think—yes, I think"—she snuggled down in her bed and purred like a contented cat—"that we shall within the week receive some solid evidence of how very pleased he is."

"Oh!" cried Catherine Busche, gazing at her sister in a startled admiration. "It was you, then, who managed it."

"I helped, darling, that was all," said Clara modestly. "George Louis never wanted to go to England. Duchess Sophia harried him into going. He was certain to show himself at his worst, shy and tongue-tied and uncouth as a bear on a leash. A hint or two carefully developed that he was awkward because he found the person of the Princess Anne displeasing—yes, princesses resent that like other women—and had said so. I may, without flattering myself, say that I helped."

"But now?" said Platen, hitching his chair a little closer. Clara, his wife, nodded her head.

"George Louis comes back with his prestige lost. There is a marriage which will restore it. George Louis has spent in England a great deal of money and impoverished the State. There is a marriage which will make Hanover rich."

Platen sat up in his chair.

"The Princess of Celle!" he said.

"The little Sophia Dorothea, the French girl," Clara agreed with a smile.

"But, my dear!" Platen expostulated, thrusting back his chair. Clara lifted a white and slender hand.

"Wait! Let us, like good accountants make sure first of our advantages here. Ernst Augustus was inclined to the match before George went to England. He will be heart and soul for it now. There is a great affection between the two brothers of Celle and Hanover, though Celle is always paying and Hanover is always taking. We have a right to count that affection amongst our assets."

"But——" Platen interrupted in desperation.

Clara Platen took no notice of his interruption. She continued to tick off her advantages upon her fingers.

"In addition, this marriage will guarantee the fulfilment of Duke George William's promise that on his death Hanover and Celle shall be united. Celle is rich. Hanover is poor. Celle is thrifty, Hanover extravagant. But the two combined? Another Brandenburg? Another Saxony? Who knows? At all events"—and she paused to emphasise the words—"at all events, an Electoral Hat."

Platen was wont to admit to himself that Clara had more of a man's mind than he had. The fripperies of her life, the entertainments, the rich dresses and sparkling jewels, the envy of other women, the servility of courtiers—yes, she delighted in them but they did not content her. Even Monplaisir with its great staff of liveried servants, its horses and its carriages, its crowded reception rooms and its equipment of gold and silver plate, was more precious to her as a symbol of power that shall be than of power that is. She was ambitious for a greater Hanover. No doubt she saw herself recognized as its Providence and Creator, but that was not all the dream. Hanover must be a State to which Europe listened, which Europe must consider, and the first great step was a seat in that small Electoral College which chose the Emperor.

"Yes," she repeated, "an Electoral Hat, and the little Sophia Dorothea with her vast fortune and the Duchy of Celle in her pocket will help us to it."

Platen at last found a moment of silence for his objection. "My dear Clara, a dream! You are forgetting Duchess Sophia. She hates the d'Olbreuse. She calls her a clot of mud. Celle with its French manners, its delicate meals, its little refinements, is food for her contempt. She would as

soon marry her son to the daughter of her laundress as to the Princess Sophia Dorothea."

Clara Platen did not answer for a little while; but the little grimace she made showed that she was not persuaded. She lay looking up at her painted ceiling. Then she said slowly:

"Duchess Sophia is a great woman—greater than any probably in the world to-day. She despises the d'Olbreuse? No doubt. She worships her ancestry like a Chinaman. But she has the courage to swallow every foul insult she has uttered, if she is convinced that it will help her house and her family to do so."

Platen was silent. He knew that Clara Platen was Duchess Sophia's Mistress of the Robes, that the Duchess accepted her with courtesy, and he never understood it. Clara was wonderful—granted! Bright and clever and adroit—to be sure! But how Ernst Augustus' mistress could be tolerable as Mistress of the Robes to Ernst Augustus' wife was a problem which bewildered him whenever he thought about it. He could not fathom the composure with which Duchess Sophia faced facts, or that aloof and philosophic mind which enabled her to retain her dignity in spite of them.

"But how can you convince Her Highness that it will help her to swallow her insults?"

Clara Platen turned with a smile to her partner.

"I can't, Platen. But you can."

"I?"

The poor man started up from his chair. There was no one of whom he was more frightened than Duchess Sophia. She had learning at her fingers' ends. Religion, too! He remembered one dreadful day when she had set him at a Calvinist Minister and asked them to debate for her instruction and edification some abstruse differences between the Lutherans and the Calvinists. The sweat broke out upon his brow now as he remembered the mockery in her voice and the unintelligible questions with which she had plied him.

"I? My dear, have pity! How?"

"By emptying the Treasury. See to it, Platen, that when autumn comes, there's no money for the French comedy, no money for the Italian Opera, no money for the Carnival, and no money for Ernst Augustus to spend upon his pleasures. And—by the way—let us not forget him!—the excellent Bernstorff might have some of it before it is gone. A rare opportunity has occurred"—Clara turned towards her husband, to use the title with which the marriage ceremony had endowed him, with a glint of amusement in her eyes

—"it is remarkable how many rare opportunities have occurred to Gottlieb Bernstorff within the year."

Platen frowned and shrugged his shoulders.

"He is without moderation, that fellow!" he exclaimed.

Clara Platen laughed with amusement.

"So our pretty Philip found in the Castle Chapel of Celle," she said. "But this Bernstorff has a cousin at the Court of Dresden, and has no doubt learnt his lesson there from him. But on this occasion it will suit us to gratify him."

"And what is this rare opportunity?"

"A few acres on the bank of the Aller and enough capital to build a tobacco factory. It seems that flat-bottomed boats can go up and down the river between Celle and the big ships at Bremen at very little cost. I will speak to His Highness myself, so that an order may come to you from him."

She lay for a little while in a muse. The mention of Bernstorff had set her thoughts upon another aspect of her problem. Somehow this marriage must be brought about. By whatever shifts and tricks, "the little Sophia Dorothea" and her fortune must be trapped and boxed in a nice tight cage in Hanover.

"I think the real danger is not Duchess Sophia," she said, "but the d'Olbreuse in Celle. She cannot but know what the Duchess says of her. She is a harlot, she is of the canaille, but has a sickly French stomach which turns sour at the sight of an honest German meal. Eleonore d'Olbreuse cannot enjoy such sayings or forget them. Also, she favours young Wolfenbüttel."

"Bernstorff must see to it," said Platen.

"Yes, and on second thoughts," added Clara, "it will be as well if that rare opportunity is not seized by our good friend until he *has* seen to it."

She struck her gong again.

"My bath," she ordered of her maid.

It was a bath of hot milk, very good for the skin and very good for the poor of Hanover. Clara Platen was the soul of generosity, and the milk was distributed to the poor as soon as this new and tawdry Venus had risen from its creamy waves. Clara Platen was thirty-four years old and the pink and white which had ravished the experienced heart of Ernst Augustus had lost its native brilliancy. Late nights, intrigues too laborious and gallantries too casual, had told their tale where it is most easily written. In the clear March sunlight, her skin was sallow, her cheeks fallen. They would be pinker and whiter and plumper than they ever had been when she rose from her toilet

table armoured for the day. But time was needed for the metamorphosis, and the council was dismissed.

Catherine Marie was the last to leave the room. She was the stupid one of the three. She had sat silent through the discussion, knowing that she was stupid.

"No doubt I am wrong," she said to herself. "No doubt if I had interrupted, a single word would have shown me to be a fool. But I do think something was forgotten."

The something forgotten was Sophia Dorothea, the girl waking into womanhood, the creature of flesh and blood, presumably with a heart, and perhaps with a will. Would she come to Hanover? And if she came to Hanover, would she stay quiet in her cage there? Catherine Marie was not easy in her mind. "I know that I am stupid, and I've no doubt, of course, that I am wrong. But I really do think something was forgotten."

CHAPTER XIII

DUCHESS SOPHIA AND THE FORLORN HOPE

GOTTLIEB BERNSTORFF almost mislaid his tobacco factory on the banks of the Aller; it was touch-and-go. He had been Chancellor of the Duchy for two years this summer and had certainly confirmed his position since that evening when he had been so nearly discharged from his office. There had been one crumpled roseleaf in Duke William's comfortable bed which he had smoothed of its creases. The Guilds with their monopolies of corn and beer and cloth had begun to set up a patrician authority in the Duchy which threatened to conflict with the Duke's own power. This authority Bernstorff had destroyed under the excuses that it was corrupt and oppressive to the people. He had gathered control completely into the hands of the Castle officials. He had reorganised the army, so that it was now a strong, well-drilled fighting force, and therefore the more saleable to the Emperor Leopold or to any other monarch who bid high enough. But he could not persuade George William to make up his mind about the marriage of his daughter.

"The Princess is too young to be troubled with such matters," the Duke would say.

"Her Highness will be sixteen years old on September the fifteenth," answered Bernstorff.

"I don't need to be told that, since I'm her father," said Duke George William testily. Then with a little spurt of anger: "And I'll pray you not to forget that Duke Anthony Ulrich of Wolfenbüttel is one of my most cherished friends."

Bernstorff bowed his head.

"And Providence, Your Highness, seldom struck a blow more difficult for us to understand than when it directed the cannon ball which laid his elder son low at the siege of Phillipsburg."

George William grunted and turned to other subjects. Once or twice Bernstorff dangled before his eyes the prospect of an Electoral Hat and did

arrest the Duke's attention.

"So clear a proof that the two Duchies will be united would certainly give the Emperor grounds for very serious consideration," he said. "And to whom should the honour come but to the elder of the two brothers?"

"Ha!" said the Duke, looking up quickly. Ambition was not altogether dead in him; and "H'm," he said in a lively voice. "Elector! Elector of Celle!" He turned the phrase over on his tongue and found it not unpleasant.

But by the beginning of September, Bernstorff was no further advanced. During the first week he multiplied his arguments. During the second he remarked that the Duke avoided him; and two days before the birthday of Sophia Dorothea he went despairingly along the corridors to the private apartments of the Duchess, with a programme for the illumination of the Castle and the town. As he passed he saw the rooms reserved for the more important guests being opened and cleaned and aired. He stopped and asked of a servant superintending the arrangements:

"There are to be guests then at the Castle? I understood that the celebration was to be private."

"Your Excellency, Her Highness has only this morning given her orders."

"And who, then, is coming?"

"Your Excellency, we have not yet been informed."

Bernstorff passed on to the Duchess's parlour, where he was received very graciously. He submitted his programme and the Duchess ran her eyes over it.

"You have been at more pains than was needed, Bernstorff," she said with a smile. "We shall be merely a family party for my daughter's birthday."

Bernstorff drew a step backwards. From the first he had set himself to undermine the Duke's devotion for his wife. It was to be Bernstorff and not Eleonore d'Olbreuse who was to direct the policy of Celle and sway the easy, indolent disposition of its master. He was her enemy as she was his; and in the smile with which she answered him now, he read something of amusement and still more of triumph.

"Yet, Your Highness," he objected, with a little stammer of fear, "as I came to you from the Chancellery, it seemed to me that guest-rooms were being got ready for a large company."

Duchess Eleonore shook her head.

"Duke Anthony Ulrich will, as he usually does when he comes to visit us, bring some of his household," she said.

Bernstorff's face grew pale. For a moment or two his very breathing was suspended.

"The Duke of Wolfenbüttel is to be here for the Princess's birthday?" he managed to ask.

"To be sure," said Duchess d'Olbreuse.

"I did not know," answered Bernstorff. There was a black look upon his face, and a harsh accent in his voice which declared plainly as words that he had been deceived.

"But, my dear Chancellor, why should we have troubled the Minister upon whom the grave burdens of the State are laid, with the work of the housekeeper?"

Was she laughing at him? The blood rushed into his face. Whether she was laughing at him or no, there was a question as yet unuttered, to which he must have an answer. But he was too angry to wrap it up.

"Does the Duke of Wolfenbüttel come with or without his family?" he demanded.

But so harsh was his tone that the words carried a menace rather than a demand. Bernstorff still trembled with rage when he thought himself disparaged, and forgot Stechinelli.

"Since when, Monsieur le Chancelier, have you gained the right to question me?" Eleonore asked with nothing but amusement in her eyes, nothing but gentleness in her voice. Undoubtedly, she was enjoying herself. She was paying herself for the slights and enmities of two years. Unwise she was, no doubt, and she was to suffer dearly for these few moments of enjoyment. But she felt sure of her victory now and must flaunt it in the face of her antagonist.

Bernstorff was stifling with anger.

"I beg pardon of Your Highness," he stammered. "I claim no such right. If I seemed to, I pray you to attribute my—zeal to a fear lest some proper consideration for your guests should be lacking on the part of His Highness's servants like myself, upon their reception."

It was awkward as an excuse, and pompous enough to justify the incredulous little laugh with which Eleonore received it. But she was not content. She should have kept her secret for another day and spared herself an old age of misery and humiliation. But the sight of Bernstorff, pale, his face disordered, the whole man abject with fear, drove her on.

"You need have no anxiety, Monsieur," she said pleasantly. "It is a private visit of old friends without ceremony. His Highness the Duke of Wolfenbüttel will bring his son Augustus William with him. The young Prince and my daughter are of a suitable age—and I am inclined to think—of a suitable affection."

Bernstorff bowed. How he escaped from the room, with what a dejected air, with how heavy a step, he could not have told. Once outside the door, he leaned against the wall of the corridor, despair at his heart. What would they think of him in Hanover? A braggart who had misled them? A fool played like a fish on a hook by the Frenchwoman? He stumbled back to his room with its wide prospect over the moat and the lime-tree avenue. But he had no eyes now for the scene which two years before had so gratified his ambitions. He sat with his elbows on the big table and his face buried in his hands. Augustus William and Sophia Dorothea! He might set the names apart one on this side, one on the other, but they would not stay apart. They flew together in his brain, even as the two who bore them would fly together —on the morning of the second day.

All his purposes and dreams had gathered about the marriage of George Louis and Sophia Dorothea; Hanover with its pageantry and Celle with its trade and saved wealth indissolubly united; himself the richly-rewarded statesman who had brought the union about. And now all the dreams were in the dust and himself the Frog of the man who wrote the Fables—a Frenchman, too. May the Good God damn him eternally with the Grand Monarque and all Frenchmen!

Bernstorff could have no doubt of the meaning of Eleonore's last words. Of a suitable age and a suitable affection! He understood now why George William, the weakling, had avoided him through the last week. The uxorious red-faced huntsman had been overruled by his crafty wife. Wolfenbüttel and his son had been invited secretly. He, Bernstorff, must know nothing of the invitation until it was too late for him to move a finger.

He looked at the clock. It was close upon noon. He had less than forty-eight hours in which to defeat a woman, reverse a policy and change and fix a weak man's wambling mind which fluctuated with the tides.

Bernstorff sprang up from his chair; he would make a last desperate appeal to his master. But with his feet already turned towards the door, he stopped. His Highness was still out upon the moor, hollaing on his hounds after some miserable stag with his antlers half an inch longer than the next one's. He had less than forty-eight hours! If anything could be done, it must be done in Hanover. There was one last desperate hope. In his disillusionment he could not believe that it would ever be acted on. It was

madness to think of it. Yet there were the minutes running away. If it was known that he had suggested so impracticable an expedient and the expedient was dismissed as absurd, or was tried and failed—he was ruined, he was flung from his place into those gutters where vanity and incompetence lie side by side. But was he not ruined if the Duchess Eleonore had her way?

He looked again at the clock. It was half past twelve. He had wasted thirty priceless minutes. He took his hat and his stick and hurried past the sentries—for how much longer would they salute him?—over the drawbridge and down the avenue to his fine house in the Schuhstrasse—for how much longer would he possess it? He called for Heinrich Muller and bade him saddle a horse; and sat himself down at his writing-table in the window, as soon as he had given the order.

This was not the usual hour at which Heinrich Muller was accustomed to be sent upon his missions, but he obeyed his instinct of blind obedience and walked towards the door. Heinrich Muller walked slowly though he rode fast. Heinrich Muller had also, being a good servant, imitated unconsciously the ways of his master. He had begun to think. Thus half way across the room to the door he reflected.

"Excellency is writing a letter in a great hurry. I am to carry it to I know where. Good!"

But a step or two further on he reflected again:

"But it is the middle of the day. I shall arrive in the dark, but I shall start in the light. It is not my business. Good!"

He went to the door, but at the door he stopped with his fingers on the handle.

"But it is not at all good," he reflected a third time, "and it is my business."

He turned his body and not the handle.

"Excellency!"

"Well, animal?" replied His Excellency impatiently.

"I am wearing your livery."

Bernstorff had his servants nowadays dressed in a noticeable livery the colour of cream with gilt buttons. Bernstorff looked up from his writing and nodded his appreciation.

"Change it, my good Heinrich!"

Muller saluted and went out of the room. Bernstorff was already deep in the composition of his letter.

"The French Madam has tricked us all," he wrote. "Duke Anthony Ulrich reaches Celle the day after to-morrow. He brings his son Augustus William. The betrothal of the Princess will be announced after his arrival. There is only one possible prevention"—and even when he had got to this point of audacity, he hesitated. But so desperate was the pass to which he had come that he must go on, however flagrant and impossible his proposal.

"If Her Highness the Duchess Sophia could be persuaded to make the journey, laborious as it is, and propose the alliance we so much desire privately to the Duke, before the Wolfenbüttels arrive, even at this last hour, it might be that we should succeed. The Duke holds his sister-in-law in so much awe for her wisdom and learning that any plea of hers must weigh heavily in his mind, and the fact that she, with her great pride, breaks the long estrangement between the two houses by making the first advances cannot but affect a man who is at heart a sentimentalist."

Muller was in the room, booted and spurred and dressed in inconspicuous brown before the letter was superscribed and sealed.

"When you are out of the town, Muller, ride fast, even if the horse founders. The letter is urgent. If needs be, Madame must be waked."

It was only a little after one o'clock now. Were the road at its worst, Muller should be knocking on the doors of Monplaisir an hour before midnight; and Madame Platen's hour for bed was happily as late as the nightingale's.

Bernstorff had endured two agitated days when, greatly daring, he had sent Muller upon his first treacherous mission to Hanover. But the hours he was now to undergo were even a greater torture. They were at once tedious and full of alarm. The hands loitered round the circle of the clock and yet at each loud noise, the clatter of a horse, a sudden rapping on the panels of his door, or even an unexpected cry, his heart was in his mouth. Muller was thrown from his horse and found dead upon the road with his letter in his satchel. He was sure of it! When the Duke slipped hurriedly away into his library, it was because he had read the letter and was summoning his guards to arrest the traitor. When, after a sleepless night, the morning dawned, it was Duchess Sophia who troubled him. He could see her lip curling at his insolence. She hurry, her coach rocking in the deep furrows of the road like a ship in a gale, in order to smile and court and curtsey to the woman whom she had loaded with a fishwife's abuse and made the butt of her broadest humours? She was more likely to send a message that the d'Olbreuse woman might marry her little French bastard to the pigstyman for all that she cared. And from that depressing fancy his hopes would rebound. He would look again at the clock's creeping hands and murmur.

"If she started this morning, she couldn't be here yet. And there would be debates and objections and persuasions and much humbling of pride first. She can't be here before midnight."

But Duchess Sophia had not arrived by midnight. Bernstorff stayed in his big room until the clock struck one and the usher outside his door was sleeping on his feet. He dared stay no longer lest if Duchess Sophia did after all arrive, he should be suspected of knowing it beforehand. But when he reached his home there was again no sleep for him. He tossed from side to side in a distress of mind and a fatigue of body which made him actually weep and filled him with so immense a pity for himself that he believed no one in the history of the world can ever have passed through so unhappy and so unmerited an ordeal. In the early morning, whilst it was still dark, he rose and throwing back his shutters gave his fevered head to the cool air. He was still leaning out from the window when he heard very far away the creaking of wheels. It was some trick of the wind, he said to himself, daring no longer to nurse a hope which a few minutes might prove vain. But there was no wind to trick him.

"Then it is a country farmer coming betimes to the market," he said. But the noise was louder now, heavier than a country cart would make. He leaned farther out, his heart beating in his breast so violently that he heard it and feared it would burst through the prison of his ribs. Then his ears distinguished the clatter of hooves upon the cobbles. Not one horse nor two horses could so wake echoes in the silent town.

"She is coming!" he cried aloud, his hands clinging to the window-sill; and round a corner a great coach with a postillion mounted on one horse and a servant on the box holding a lighted flambeau in his hand lumbered into view. The coach rolled away under his windows towards the castle; and he saw that the man holding the flambeau wore the blue livery and silver aiguillettes of Hanover.

Duchess Sophia had come to Celle.

Bernstorff flung himself back into his bed and slept until the sun was high.

CHAPTER XIV

SOPHIA DOROTHEA MARRIES

SHE had come, she had seen, but had she conquered? Bernstorff asked the question of himself a hundred foolish times as he paced towards the Castle avenue. But he dared ask it of no one else. He had cultivated a slow brooding walk and introspective eyes which suddenly came to life with a start and a smile as some prominent citizen greeted him; and that practice must be observed on this morning, as on any other. He must progress sedately buried in great affairs like a proper statesman and not speculating, as he certainly was, whether a tobacco factory was to rise on the banks of the Aller and perhaps a "von" precede the name of Bernstorff. He must be quite unaware of a heavy coach lumbering through silent streets in the grey of the morning. It was extraordinary to him and rather hard-hearted that people were going about their daily business—women with baskets on their arms, men hurrying between offices, or loitering to gossip on the kerb.

"My career, my fortune, perhaps too my liberty may have been decided this morning, yet Celle is behaving as if nothing whatever had happened!"

And Bernstorff was amazed at the selfishness of the world.

Under the lime-trees where the leaves though rusty were still thick, he could quicken his steps. At the Castle there was more bustle, more going and coming of ushers and servants, more soldiers in full uniform and more pages in their Court liveries of green and white than he had seen for many a day; but it was the birthday of the Princess and etiquette demanded some exceptional flourish and parade. Bernstorff had been snubbed already by Eleonore for poking his thin nose into matters of the household with which a Chancellor was not concerned. He mounted the stone steps to his office without a question.

Once in his room, however, he stood sheltered by the curtains at the window and peered eagerly out for a sign which would comfort him. He could see not one. It was odd, however, that Duchess Sophia's big coach stood in a corner with its horses harnessed in the shafts. Even she, remarkable woman though she was, must at the age of fifty-two want some repose after jolting all night along the road from Hanover—unless she had

failed! Yes, if Duchess Sophia had failed, she would shake the dust of Celle off the wheels of her carriage without a moment's unnecessary delay.

Suddenly there was a stir in the doorway beneath him. A footman ran towards the carriage. Two pages, bareheaded and glistening, stepped out into the open space, turned, bowed towards the entrance and stood erect and ceremonious.

"I am a ruined man," he said sinking down into a chair. "The d'Olbreuse has won."

And a voice which he knew cried roughly:

"Quick! Let us go! All this politeness! A fig for it!"

Bernstorff flung himself out of his chair. He threw open the window. Whether he was seen or not, he no longer considered. He craned his body over the sill. Of course—of course—the servants by the coach there! He had been blind. Those were not the liveries of Hanover. He looked down and, from the archway beneath him, Duke Anthony Ulrich came hurrying out, his face black as thunder.

"Come!" he cried impatiently.

Men called him "the Monkey" from his ugliness, and as he waved his long arms and scowled and cursed, he earned the epithet.

"Fine true friends we have got at Celle!"

He was joined by a lad of Sophia Dorothea's own age, a lad handsome and tall. His young face was flushed with shame and his eyes bright and a trifle fierce.

"Honourable friends," Duke Anthony Ulrich railed. "Cousins, be damned to them!"

The boy said nothing.

Both father and son wore travelling dress, stained with the dust of their long journey from Brunswick. They crossed the gravelled space towards their carriage with such haste that the glittering pages must mend their courtly paces to a run in order to keep up with them. Anthony Ulrich swept them aside as he wrenched open the door.

"Stand away! I can get into my carriage without a couple of mincing popinjays to help me. And you," he bawled to his coachman, "get out of this town. For, by God, I must hold my nose until you do."

He sprang in, his son followed him and the carriage clattered over the drawbridge and disappeared in the avenue of limes.

Bernstorff stepped back from the window. He felt the sweat running down his forehead and wiped it away with his handkerchief. The great

gamble had brought in its profit. His legs weakened under him and he dropped into his chair. He had a moment of wondering whether any reward could make worth while the torments of the last two days and nights. He painted for himself a picture of old Schultz smoking his big curved pipe in the arbour of his garden comfortably conscious of life's work honestly done; and whilst he dwelt upon this agreeable composition with a feeling of envy, an usher knocked upon his door.

"His Highness wishes to speak to Your Excellency in his Library," said the usher.

"I shall wait upon His Highness at once."

Bernstorff bathed his face and resettled his peruke upon his head. He found the Duke standing by his table, his head in the air like one about to deliver a speech, and his face beaming with rectitude.

"My dear sister-in-law Duchess Sophia reached Celle early this morning," he began. "The estrangement which has so grieved me is at an end. The ties, always close between my brother and myself, will now be strengthened. . . ." He repeated all the arguments which Bernstorff had used, as though he had first thought of them himself, but he repeated them like an orator rehearsing a speech. And Bernstorff knew that he was rehearsing one which must be spoken that morning into the unwilling ears of Duchess Eleonore. He added an argument which even Bernstorff had not dared to use, so fantastic it seemed in that year of 1682.

"My daughter will be the Queen of England, the mother of a line of Kings! A great destiny, Bernstorff! I know not whether to feel more humility or more pride."

He played for a few moments with a jewelled box which lay upon the table.

"The Prince George Louis with his father, my brother, will set out for Celle as soon as the good news reaches them. We must make the betrothal a public affair. Fireworks, Bernstorff, a banquet for the poor, perhaps a masked ball in the Palace——"

Duke George William was putting off as long as he could the distressing interview with his wife and his daughter which surely awaited him.

"Her Highness Duchess Sophia brought for my daughter from George Louis, as a token of his devotion, this miniature of him set in diamonds." The Duke took up the miniature and gazed at it with a smile which he strove to make soft and moving by its affection. "The dear fellow!" he murmured, shaking his head with a tender amusement at the loving ardours of the young. "I shall take it to my daughter now." He drew in a breath. "Yes, I

shall," as though Bernstorff had dared him to. "We will make a programme of our festivities this afternoon, Bernstorff. We must spend money, Bernstorff. We must be worthy of this occasion." He looked at the miniature again. "It is set with diamonds, Bernstorff. The dear fellow!"

It is regrettable to have to add that when a few minutes later he presented the miniature to his daughter, who was crying her heart out upon her bed in her darkened room, she snatched it from his hand and flung it against the wall with so much violence that the miniature itself was cracked and the diamonds scattered about the room.

* * * * *

Bernstorff wrote a gay and diverting little narrative of the upheaval in the Court of Celle and the marriage in the Schlosskapelle, which he sent off to Madame Platen whose attendance was not requested. He made much of the grotesque departure of Duke Anthony Ulrich and his son; told with good humour of his own agitations; touched lightly on the tears and the prayers and the inevitable submission of the d'Olbreuse and her daughter; and paid a pretty tribute to old Schultz who had first initiated him into the doctrine of the "weak man stubborn." Duchess Sophia had snatched the promise of Sophia Dorothea's hand from George William in his dressing-room at six o'clock in the morning. The door between the dressing-room and the d'Olbreuse's bedroom stood open all the while, but Duchess Sophia insisted that the conversation should be carried on in the High Dutch language which the Frenchwoman, poor slut, did not understand. The poor slut's bleatings from her bed to be admitted to the discussion and George William's petulant closing of the door were bright passages in the narrative.

"The financial arrangements equalled our wishes and exceeded our hopes," he wrote and indeed with Duchess Sophia to overawe him, his tricky brother Ernst Augustus to outwit him, and his Chancellor to betray him, Duke George William had very little chance to strike a decent bargain.

"He gives the Duke of Hanover fifty thousand thalers down, settles upon his daughter a hundred thousand thalers a year (to be paid into the Treasury of Hanover), and her estates, including the island Principality of Wilhelmsburg, (to be administered by the Treasury of Hanover) and agrees to pay off the Duke of Hanover's public debt." Sophia Dorothea was to enjoy a proper allowance of twelve thousand thalers a year if George Louis her husband predeceased her. He, Bernstorff, had most loyally seen to that, and no doubt a suitable provision would be made for her during his life time. This was a matter to be arranged, of course, between husband and wife.

Bernstorff described the wedding scene. The army in new uniforms, the pages and the servants in new liveries, the nobles and the gentry of the neighbourhood shimmering in velvet, sparkling with jewels, a bride slender and beautiful, the flush of excitement in her cheeks making up for the tired and unhappy eyes, the brilliant uniform of the bridegroom distracting attention from his clumsy figure and sullen face. Bernstorff made a charming picture of it.

He got his tobacco factory and his "von."

Platen at the same time became Baron von Platen.

Leibnitz wrote an Epithalamium in French doggerel.

But as the stupid Catherine Marie once did think; something had been forgotten.

George Louis was a fine soldier. He was twenty-two years old at the time of his marriage and he had already a military record which Generals thrice his age might envy. He had distinguished himself at Consarbrücke on the Moselle and at the siege of Treves seven years before. In the autumn of the same year he had taken Field-Marshal Crequi prisoner on the Rhine. During the next year his name was heard wherever the story of Maestricht was told. Two years later he led his troops with valour and skill at the siege of Charleroi and at the battle of St. Denis. His spiritual home was a soldier's camp. He had no wish to marry. He had no delicacy in his manners, no culture in his mind. He liked big coarse meals and big coarse women, and both of them German.

Sophia Dorothea stood at the opposite pole. She was of a dainty build, wilful, no doubt more than a little spoilt by the adoration of her parents, French in the refinement of her taste. She was of a quick and flashing mind. She loved pleasure but it must be draped in beauty. And she had depths of passion to which her husband was a stranger.

She wrote a letter to Duchess Sophia which in its dutiful humility might have moved to sympathy and kindness even a woman as cold and hard as she. Then amidst cheers and through crowded streets, she drove off with her husband to Duke George William's hunting-box at Brockhausen, there to spend their two days' honeymoon.

CHAPTER XV

BERNSTORFF QUOTES RACINE

IT was four o'clock in the afternoon and the light was beginning to fade. Bernstorff raised his hand to the gong upon the table, but before he could strike it, he heard a knock upon the door.

"Come in!"

And without turning he added, "Yes, it is time to light the candles, Christian."

But it was not Christian the usher who had entered. A younger voice answered.

"Your Excellency!"

Bernstorff swung round and saw just within the doorway a favourite page of Duchess Eleonore, a French lad named Raoul de Malortie. Bernstorff raised his eyebrows.

"And how can I serve you?" he said pleasantly.

The French boy advanced and bowed respectfully.

"Her Highness begs Your Excellency to spare her a few minutes when it suits your convenience."

Bernstorff turned aside to hide a smile. So humble a message and a page point device from head to toe to deliver it! Not thus had Duchess Eleonore been accustomed to require his presence. A footman and an immediate claim had been thought by her sufficient.

"I shall find Her Highness no doubt in her French garden," he said with a sly grin.

This was the second day after the marriage, and during the clear hours of those two days, the unhappy woman had been pacing alone the walks of her garden or standing at the edge of the pond, lost in the gloom of her forebodings. The flowers were all withered; dead leaves drifted across the paths with little whisperings of perished hopes and sad times come; the wind sighed through the trees; the yew hedges were black. The garden so gay with flowers in the spring-time and the summer, so melancholy now, matched the despondency of her mood. She had borne herself bravely enough through

the ceremonies and banquets which had garlanded the ill-omened marriage. But as soon as her loved daughter had driven away and the guests had gone, her grief and her fears had aged her by twenty years. She had sought the silence and the lonely places of her little pleasance by the river Aller. No one but had hesitated to interrupt her. No one but had shrunk with a sense of pity from gazing upon her eyes faded with tears and her face haunted by her despair. It needed Bernstorff to allude to them with a sneer.

The cheeks of Raoul de Malortie, the page, flamed and his eyes gleamed. But he had his orders. He answered simply:

"Her Highness has returned to her apartments, Your Excellency."

"I will wait upon her at once," said Bernstorff.

He found the Duchess alone in the small three-cornered room behind the theatre. The curtains were drawn, the candles lit and a fire burned brightly upon the hearth. She was standing with her eyes fixed impatiently upon the door and with an expression on her face which made plain her aversion from the task which she had set before herself. So anxious indeed was she to get it over and done with that almost before Bernstorff had closed the door, she had taken an air of humility.

"Monsieur le Baron," she said, forcing her lips to smile, "I have a request a little difficult for a mother to make. I beg you to be seated."

Bernstorff could not remember one occasion on which the d'Olbreuse had asked him to sit down. He bowed and obeyed. For a few moments she sat, her eyes upon the fire, her fingers twitching in a painful agitation.

"You and I have not taken the same view about my daughter's marriage," she said in a low voice.

"Madame, a mother's heart and a statesman's care cannot always speak with the same voice."

Bernstorff sat back. A moment which he had long been anticipating had arrived. On one occasion he had been made to wait for some minutes in the Duchess' drawing-room. During that time he had seen a play by Racine lying open upon her table and glancing over the pages—it was the play of "Andromaque"—his attention had been caught by a line. He had learnt it by heart, foreseeing an hour when he could use it with effect.

"No doubt," the Duchess said, forcing her lips to a smile.

"I shall be bold enough to quote to you, Madame, what I humbly think is a wise saying by a great French poet."

"Yes, Baron von Bernstorff?"

"*L'amour ne règle pas le sort d'une Princesse*," Bernstorff declaimed.

Eleonore d'Olbreuse dropped her head. She did not wish him to see—she could not afford that he should see—the anger which flamed in her eyes. She remained silent for a little while.

"Poets, Your Excellency," she said at length and, in spite of her effort to command herself, with a little bitterness, "inspire us with ringing words which we find greatly to our taste, until we test them by our own private dreams."

She made a movement with her shoulders and head as though she would shake all such dreams away from her for ever.

"But what is done, is done," she continued. "We must do the best we can with the world as we find it."

"Assuredly, Your Highness," he said coldly.

Bernstorff was watching her warily now. She had perhaps some clever ruse in her head, some trick which would entangle him. He had the advantage over her now. He had the ear of the Duke George William, He was not going to allow her to use upon him the wiles of Delilah.

"You have, of course," she continued, "close relations with people of importance in Hanover."

The remark was simply made, without a note of criticism, without indignation, without a suggestion of treachery. A statement, as it were, of facts which the world knew. Bernstorff, however, returned her look with complete bewilderment.

"I, Your Highness?" he exclaimed. "I have had the supreme good fortune of listening to the Duchess Sophia's opinion of the philosophers. I know more of Descartes and Spinoza and Leibnitz than I ever thought to know. I have also had occasion to discuss with His Highness the Duke Ernst Augustus business matters of importance to the two Duchies. But close relations with people of such high distinction I can lay no claim to."

"I was not thinking of either the Duke Ernst Augustus or Duchess Sophia, his wife," said Eleonore shortly.

"Of whom then?"

"Of Madame von Platen and her sister, Madame Busche," she answered, dwelling no doubt a little unwisely upon the sign and mark of Platen's elevation into the nobility, and a little too contemptuously upon the name of his sister-in-law.

"Madame," Bernstorff declared boldly, and let it be said at once that his declaration was the exact truth, "I have never spoken to, and more, I have never seen either of those two persons."

But though his words were bold, a good many troublesome questions were tumbling over one another in his mind. How much did Eleonore d'Olbreuse know of the secret share he had taken in the negotiation of the marriage between George Louis and Sophia Dorothea? Of the fine presents he had received? Had she spies in the household of Clara Platen? Had friends of hers in Celle remarked the nocturnal journeys of Muller, and traced him to Monplaisir? Was she seeking an admission which she could carry to her husband, George William? Or was it all mere guesswork, an arrow shot at a venture?

But Eleonore was not concerned with his profits and his treacheries. She hardly heard his protests. She was neither accusing nor reproaching him. She was seeking to avert from her beloved daughter embarrassments and humiliations which would hurt her more sharply than the cut of a knife into her flesh and might provoke her to perilous reprisals.

"Her Highness the Duchess Sophia made me a promise," she resumed. "It was the one small concession made to all my wishes and prayers. Prince George Louis has Madame Busche for his mistress," and as Bernstorff made a movement to indicate his surprise, Eleonore raised a hand. "It is so well known that I should not like to believe that our Chancellor, whilst negotiating this marriage on our behalf, was ignorant of it."

Bernstorff flushed and bit his lip. If he insisted on asserting his ignorance, he proclaimed himself either a liar or a fool. He tried to slip away upon an easier objection.

"Your Highness used the word negotiating, I think," he said as though offended.

Eleonore looked at him with surprise.

"Well, Baron? The marriage was after all a matter of commerce."

"A matter of State, Your Highness."

Duchess Eleonore shrugged her shoulders. Her voice lost its smoothness. She answered with a flash of spirit.

"With Duke Ernst Augustus, matters of state usually become matters of commerce, and, as in this instance, greatly to his profit."

Bernstorff had gained nothing by his evasion. He was on even more delicate ground than that which he had been treading before.

"But, as Your Highness yourself said, what is done is done. The Princess and George Louis are married. Bride and bridegroom are together at Brockhausen."

"And to-morrow they go to Hanover," Duchess Eleonore added quickly.

"They are to drive in state to their home where they are expected at noon."

"But I pray you, Baron, to note this difference. Hanover will be my daughter's home. It is already the Prince's. There he has his associations—his friends, and amongst those friends one who, as Duchess Sophia promised, is to be his friend no more."

"Madame Busche?"

"Madame Busche."

"Well then!"

Bernstorff spread out his hands. His face expanded in a smile of immense relief.

"Your Highness, this is the best of news," he cried. "I will not deny that I had heard something of the Prince's attachment to—to this woman. I will admit that I was distressed by it—grievously distressed. But since the Duchess Sophia"—he spoke her name with such reverence that she might have been a goddess holding in her hands the very reins of destiny—"the Duchess Sophia promises that the Prince will be troubled by her no more, we can be sure that the promise will be fulfilled."

"Can we?" Eleonore asked suddenly. "Duchess Sophia promised—yes. But to her it was a promise made about a matter of very little importance. Even when making it her mind was upon other things. I admit that I don't understand Her Highness. I need not remind you, Baron, that Madame von Platen is her Mistress of the Wardrobe as well as the mistress of the Duke. To Duchess Sophia that duplication of—shall I say?—services is apparently a matter of small moment. She can no doubt cite the example of most of the Courts of Europe; and frankly I have had, ever since she made me the promise, a fear that she may have forgotten it. It was in her eyes so trivial a thing."

Bernstorff secretly agreed that nothing was more likely. To him too it was a trivial thing. What, Duchess Sophia, the Queen of England and the Queen of France and the Electress of Saxony—to quote only a few in the like case—put up with, surely the daughter of a morganatic marriage in the little Duchy of Celle could endure without making a pother.

"We must hope that she has not forgotten it," he said, and he half rose from his chair with a prayer that he might be allowed to go.

"We must do more than that," said Eleonore quietly, and he resumed his seat. There was alarm in the strained look of her eyes, in the very quietude of her voice which he could not belittle.

"That promise, Baron von Bernstorff, must be kept," she added. "If it is not, the marriage is doomed, and, for all we can do, may end miserably in some appalling scandal."

It was necessary in Bernstorff's interests that the union which he had done so much to bring about should at all events have a fair outward seeming. In both Duchies it had been welcomed with an eager enthusiasm. It would give a fillip to trade. It would mean a greater importance in the councils of the Emperor. It would end the long estrangement of neighbouring principalities. Afterwards—well, it would follow the usual procedure of such affairs. Monsieur would find his diversions elsewhere, Madame would console herself with good works or the arts or philosophy, or one of the hundred ways in which she could occupy her leisure or deceive her pride. But at the first there must be agreement, there must be children. Bernstorff was as concerned in the success of the marriage almost as deeply as Duchess Eleonore herself.

Unconsciously he hitched his chair forward.

"Then the Princess Sophia Dorothea knows of George Louis's——" he could find no better word than the one which Eleonore had used—"of George Louis' attachment?"

"My daughter, Baron, is not an idiot. She knows very well, but she is dutiful to her father. She will forget her knowledge so long as the promise is kept. But she has been brought up, as you know, in this quiet place with examples of a purer kind before her eyes."

There was no boasting, nothing of arrogance in the unhappy woman's manner. She yearned for the felicity and contentment of Sophia beyond all else in the world. She hardly waited for the little bow with which Bernstorff accepted her claim.

"I ask you to remember that she has a spirit of her own, that as she is gentle in the face of kindness, so she is quick to resent an outrage. She will take her own way with it, and it would need a very wise person to predict or forestall that way. But it would be direct, outspoken, very possibly startling."

And leaving those words to sink with all their meaning into the Chancellor's mind, Duchess Eleonore rose from her chair to put an end to an interview which had already overtaxed her endurance.

"Therefore I recommend to you, Baron, with the greatest earnestness, that since you have friends in Hanover, you should see to it that from to-morrow Her Highness's promise is kept."

And this time Bernstorff did not protest that he was without influence in Hanover. He went away from the Duchess's apartments with slow steps and

a very troubled mind. It certainly would not do for this loudly-heralded marriage to disrupt as loudly and through the fault of George Louis. Yet—yet it was possible. Bernstorff recollected a few uncomfortable moments to which he had once been put by Sophia Dorothea. It was over the ridiculous affair of Philip Königsmark, a couple of years ago—when she was a child. But she had been direct, outspoken, and certainly startling. He had felt like a small boy before a schoolmaster. He had been very angry, he remembered—yes, but angry because he had cut so mean a figure. It began to look as if the good Heinrich Muller would have to spend yet another night on the Hanover road. Well, at any rate, Bernstorff reflected grimly, Heinrich Muller must be able to locate every morass and every hole which he would find in his way.

Bernstorff, however, was unwilling to send him off upon this errand. For one thing the letter which he would have to carry to Clara von Platen would be a delicate one to write. She might very well consider that his fears were exaggerated and that the sooner Sophia Dorothea learned the place she was to occupy in Hanover the better. Moreover, Celle was still excited by the unwonted pageantry of the last few days. The streets were still beflagged and the citizens still paraded in noisy hilarious groups until long past their bedtime. Muller would be noticed as he rode out of the town.

"Someone has spied upon me. That's sure," he said to himself. "Someone has known of Muller's comings and goings. For the d'Olbreuse knew. Well, he must start later and ride the quicker, that's all."

Muller, in consequence, certainly started later.

CHAPTER XVI

ANTHONY CRASTON TAKES A FALL IN HANOVER

IT was a night of misfortunes for Muller. At one o'clock in the morning he was waked in his attic by someone shaking his shoulder and, sitting up in his bed, saw his master at his bedside, fully dressed and holding a candle in his hand.

"Up with you, Heinrich, and quietly," said Bernstorff; and ten minutes afterwards, carrying his boots in his hand, Muller crept down to Bernstorff's study. Bernstorff gave to him a letter for Madame von Platen.

"This is of the gravest urgency," he said.

Heinrich Muller went to the stables, saddled his horse and rode away. The streets were now empty and only here and there a lamp shone in a window. The church clock struck two when he had left the last of the houses behind him. And if no mishap befell him, he should draw rein at Monplaisir between eight and nine of the morning.

But he was heavy with sleep and, as he rode, he began to nod and lurch forward and catch himself back just as he was falling. On such occasions he remonstrated with his horse.

"Hold up now! What are you doing? Going to sleep? What next?"

The horse, knowing exactly where the blame lay, hitched him up with its shoulder, gave a warning grunt, "You'll be off in a minute, Heinrich," and plodded along. It was the horse, nevertheless, which made the mistake. The night was dark. Heinrich lurched and recovered with more than his usual jerk upon the reins. The horse swung its head round to see what new stupidity was taking place upon its back, put its foot into a hole, came down and popped Heinrich Muller over its head as neatly as if he had been a tumbler in a circus. Heinrich lay still. The horse continued to show its sense by discovering some grass by the road-side and setting to work to crop as much of it as its bridle allowed him to do, before its master woke up.

Some minutes elapsed before Muller became aware that he was lying upon his back on as hard and knotty a bed as he had ever met with in the

roughest of his campaigns, and watching innumerable planets flashing across the blackness of the night. It grew obvious to him that the world was coming to an end. He was a Calvinist by religion and, since his fate was settled before he was born, he could do nothing about it. He might just as well lie where he was until the sky became a brazier and see what happened. He realised next that what happened was not going to be pleasant for him. For he became conscious of pain—great throbs of pain at the back of his head which shot down his neck, and a duller continuous pain in his shoulders. There was a great deal of roaring noise, too, in his ears.

Quite suddenly he understood that he was alive. He could not remember falling, but he remembered a horse. The horse, having eaten enough grass now, bent its great neck over his body and nuzzled him with its nose. So he couldn't be dead. The horse would be a mile away by now galloping in a panic if he had been. Heinrich Muller, after some cogitation, determined to get up; which he did, and thereupon was violently sick. That helped him. He recollected that he was out upon some urgent business. There was a letter—yes, he had it in his pocket—and he must deliver it in the morning to the painted lady in the big house.

He would walk a few yards before he mounted, since he was still a teetotum in a whirling universe. But he had hardly taken the reins in his hand before he knew that he would have to walk a great many yards. For the horse had wrenched a shoulder and one of its forelegs was, for the purpose of riding, out of action. It could hobble slowly, and Heinrich could only walk slowly. For each beat of his heel upon the road shot a pang of agony up to the top of his head and threatened to make him sick again. Moreover, his heavy riding-boots were not conducive to fast walking; and though his pains became lighter his feet became worse. He blistered his heels, and after he had walked for an hour he was limping as badly as his horse.

It was now five o'clock in the morning and he had still thirteen miles to go; and no help anywhere. Here and there along the road, to be sure, there was to be found the cottage of a farmer. But none of them would have a horse to lend him, or would lend it if he had. For he must not say who his master was or whither he was bound.

Brockhausen, the Duke's country house, should be no more than a mile or two away, lost in the woods upon his right hand. But this was the last place where he must look for help, since not one man in the Princess's retinue but would recognise him as the Chancellor's servant. There was nothing for it but to go on as best he could.

Every now and then he sat on a bank and rested, whilst the horse stood patiently by or rubbed its nose against his shoulder, as though it took all the

blame for the misadventure upon itself and begged him not to be angry. Every now and then he shuffled and hopped and limped for a mile. The sky lightened, the morning dawned, the intolerable night had ended, but he was still six miles from Herrenhausen and seven miles from Monplaisir. Those last miles were the most difficult for man and beast. Heinrich, with his feet burning as if they walked in flames, took off his boots and slung them about his neck, and so trod blithely for five minutes. But the stones cut his stockings to pieces and tore his feet; and when he tried to draw on his boots again, they wouldn't go on. He was in a worse case than ever; and it was close upon eleven o'clock when he caught his first glimpse of the coach-house and stables of Herrenhausen, a mile ahead of him.

"Ha! At last!" he said, smacking the neck of his horse with the palm of his hand. He could trust someone of the servants in the stables of Herrenhausen to carry on his letter. He himself could do no more. But as he took the next step forward, he heard the rattle of wheels behind him and, facing about, saw a postchaise turn a corner of the road. He led his horse to the edge, to make room for the traveller to pass him, but he heard a shout and the chaise stopped beside him. Muller noticed that it was piled high with the traveller's luggage.

A youth leaned out of the window and called to him.

"An accident?"

"Yes, sir. My horse is lamed and my feet in ribbons."

The traveller looked down at Muller's legs and uttered a cry of pity.

"You have far to go?"

"A little more than a mile."

"If you'll tie your horse up by the road, you can travel that mile on the step of my chaise."

Muller was cautious. He was near to the Palace of Herrenhausen. On the other hand, the road was empty. He was sceptical of strangers in chaises who offered him a lift. Suppose that he climbed on to the step and the postillion set his horses at a gallop? All that Muller could do would be to hold on. He would be at the mercy of this youth, and so would his letter. He pulled his heavy watch out of his fob and looked at it. The time was by a few minutes short of eleven.

"Well, what are you going to do?" the stranger cried impatiently; and Muller's eyes travelled quickly over the chaise.

"You are English, sir?" he said eagerly.

If he were English, he would have nothing to do with the politics of either Celle or Hanover. He would be the spy neither of one nor of the other.

“It seems that I speak worse German than I thought,” said the traveller, with his pleasant face in a grimace of chagrin.

Muller was now anxious to ride on the step.

“It is not, sir, the quality of your German but the amount of your baggage which tells me that you are English,” he resumed politely. “I am a servant. I know what is necessary for a journey and what is commodious. The English like their commodities.”

The youth was appeased by this tribute to the magnificence of his travelling.

“Yes, I am an Englishman making the grand tour, and my time is not my own,” he said with a flourish. He suggested that all the kings of Europe were standing on their doorsteps with programmes from the first to the last minute of his visit ready in their hands. “Tie your horse to a tree and hop up.”

Muller tied his horse by the bridle to a tree, but hopping up was quite beyond his powers. He stepped up very gingerly and clung on. The chaise rattled past the long front of Herrenhausen. There was a great deal of bustle in the courtyard, men in the Duke’s livery running hither and thither, coaches being drawn up in their order of precedence, and at every window flags were fluttering. It was just as well, Muller reflected, that he was to carry out his mission to the end. There was very little likelihood of his letter reaching Monplaisir that day if he left it to the care of any of those busy retainers at Herrenhausen. The traveller, meanwhile, was watching the scene with the condescending amusement of his race.

“The horses seem to be excellent,” he said.

“We’re in Hanover,” Muller replied.

The traveller leaned back, the chaise jolted on, a wide avenue of lime-trees stretched away on the right hand, a big house on the opposite side of the road came into view.

“Here, sir, my journey ends,” said Muller. “I am very grateful to you.”

The young man pulled upon the check string, Muller descended from the step, swept off his hat with a bow, and with his boots dangling over each shoulder, hobbled across the road.

Muller’s journey was ended, but his errand was not discharged. Clara von Platen, eager to be present at the ceremony of the bride’s arrival and reckless of what the bride might think, had departed with her sister half an hour before. When Muller delivered his letter in the afternoon, the harm which Eleonore d’Olbreuse had foreseen had been done, and Clara’s heart was so filled with rage and hatred that not even Sophia Dorothea on her knees before her could have availed to appease it.

The traveller in the chaise put his head out of the window and bawled to his postillion:

"The Inn of the Mitre."

A mile farther on the town began. It was beflagged like the Palace, which had been left behind two miles away, and was thronged with a great concourse of people. Just before reaching the town the chaise swept away to the left and, passing through streets which in this quarter were deserted, stopped before the Mitre. The traveller descended and stretched his legs. By a fortunate chance, he was told, a fine room on the first floor was empty, and the landlady, a stout, good-humoured woman, rustling in starch and ribbons, led him up to it. The young man dropped into a chair and sat there whilst two men carried up his trunks.

"Your honour is tired?" said the landlady.

"I reached Minden too late last night, and left it too early this morning," said the youth, with a yawn. "By the way, I passed a large house on the right-hand side of the road."

"That was Herrenhausen, one of the Duke's palaces," said the landlady with pride.

"Ah! I have heard of it," said the young man in a voice which conveyed that Herrenhausen might justifiably be proud that he had heard of it. The landlady, for all her good humour, was a trifle nettled by his indifference.

"The gardens of Herrenhausen have a fountain which throws a jet of water fifty yards high," she declared. "There is nothing like it in Europe."

"I must certainly see that fountain," the stranger answered politely.

The landlady was appeased.

"It is said," she added smiling, "that Versailles itself is jealous of it."

"But, being wise, it doesn't mention it," said the youth. He continued carelessly: "Hanover appears to be on holiday."

The landlady nodded her head vigorously, her face one broad and glistening beam of pleasure.

"Indeed, sir, it may well be."

"How so? Remember I reached Minden late and left it early."

"His Highness the Prince George Louis brings home this morning to the Alte Palace his bride, the Princess Sophia Dorothea of Celle."

"What's that?"

The young man, who had been tilting his chair back with his hands behind his head, brought the front legs of the chair to the ground with a bang.

The landlady repeated her information, rolling the lordly names over and over on her tongue.

"The Princess Sophia Dorothea of Celle," the youth said, and he sat for a moment or two silent. "Now, that is very interesting to me. Where is the Alte Palace?"

The landlady went to the window.

"You see the big church with the high red tower? Turn to the right when you pass it, and a little further on to the right again. But I doubt if you'll get near enough to see anything but the heads of the people."

The young traveller, however, was not to be dissuaded. So phlegmatic before, he was all in a fever now to force his way to the Alte Palace and watch the home-coming of the bride and her groom. He brushed his clothes and his hat and hurried down the stairs. To the porter at the door, he said:

"My name is Anthony Craston. Someone from the English Ambassador may ask for me. If anyone does, will you reply that I shall wait upon him this afternoon." And Mr. Anthony Craston plunged into the street.

It was by chance that he had come to Hanover on this of all days, although afterwards it seemed to him that he had been brought there by a fatality. After the trial of Karl-Johann Königsmark, he had taken a disgust of all the fine plans over which he and Philip had dreamed together. He had urged upon his Governors that a tour through Europe would be a more helpful prelude to his career than a few years at Oxford; and in the spring of that year he said good-bye to Monsieur Faubert and set out for Paris. In that age every Court was open to a man of polite address and reasonable credentials. He was all the more welcome if he was young; and Anthony, in the swift changes of his environment, soon lost the bitter taste of disillusionment which his broken friendship with Königsmark had left with him. The luxury of the entertainments at Versailles and Marly dazzled the unaccustomed eyes of the youthful squire from Essex. He shook hands with great statesmen like Colbert and great soldiers like Vauban. He saw the miracle of Venice on a blue night of summer and floated in a black gondola between high palaces with no sound to break the silence except the patter of drops from the blade of the oar or the murmur of some girl's caresses in his ear. He passed on to Vienna, and from Vienna to Dresden, where he was captivated by absurd and charming Masques and no one was serious. Great parties of ladies and cavaliers would ride out in gaily-caparisoned companies to be greeted by no less than the nine Muses. These, chosen for their youth and loveliness, issued to the soft music of violins from grottoes in the hillside and, crested with ostrich feathers and spangled with diamonds, they invited their visitors to an alfresco banquet. At every corner

some fresh opportunity of pleasure offered its allurement to the amazed visitor, some glittering diversion ravished him with its beauty. It was a domain where Phantasy was king and Prodigality his minister. No one was allowed to be just himself. At one time Craston dined as a Mameluke and was waited upon by veiled odalisques in turned-up slippers. At another he must dance with the best nimbleness he could muster as a shepherd piping upon Ida; until he began to wonder what it would feel like to walk in his own clothes in a sober world. As winter drew on he travelled northwards to Brandenburg, and so came at last to Hanover, thinking to round off his tour with the spectacle of its famous Carnival. He was surprised by the sudden marriage of the young Princess of Celle, whose beauty and slender grace had lived so vividly in the memories of Philip.

It was curiosity which had drawn him out of his inn the moment after he had arrived at it. So he assured himself, and certainly there was no more substantial reason that he could discern. But he thought it odd afterwards that he should be at the pains to argue the point even when he was making his way across the open space by the church.

"I have been for so many months passing from one distraction to another, like a man through a succession of rooms in a palace, that I must find a new one every day, and a different one. That's why I am hurrying along to see the Princess Sophia Dorothea arrive at the Alte Palace with her bridegroom. It's absurd. I don't know her. The chances are a thousand to one that I never shall. I am sure that I have seen girls more exquisite and lovely in Paris and Dresden and Venice. I should be much happier if I were hunting to-day in England. Yet here I am in a twitter lest I should not get near enough or early enough to see her step down from her carriage and disappear through a doorway. Curiosity is a very censurable fault. It leads to gossiping and malice and a sorry waste of time and—— That's the Alte Palace, for a thousand pounds, with the two painted women hanging out from the first floor window"; and he proceeded to twist and jostle his way through the crowd, as if fatality or destiny had nothing whatever to do with his impatience.

The crowd was in its best humour, as well as in its best clothes. Craston was obviously English. He had but to say "*Bitte*," and all within hearing were aware of it; and he naturally expected that everyone would make way for him. Everyone did. Where the crowd was thickest, by signs which were assuredly as intelligible as his words, he intimated that he had an urgent message. Finally, hot, his cravat awry, and his coat almost torn from his back, he reached a barrier of halberdiers, and there must stop. But he was now in the best position to satisfy his curiosity. On his left across the street

was a long and stately building with a garden of big trees at one end and a huge railed-in courtyard at the other. This, he learned afterwards, was the Leineschloss, where Duke Ernst Augustus and his wife lived in Hanover. Between the shoulders of the halberdiers in front of him, he could look straight down the road towards the lime-tree avenue and Herrenhausen. This road had been cleared of people and kept clear by lines of the Duke's Foot Guards. On Craston's right, and quite close to him, was the Alte Palace, no more than a large house of three stories with high, flat windows, closed in at each end by other houses. There was no portico to the door, and a broad strip of crimson cloth stretched from the doorway across the pavement to the kerb.

"Whatever there is to see, I shall see," said Anthony to himself, "and the women at the window will warn me when to expect it."

There was, none the less, something odd in the occupation of the window by those two ladies. They were ceremoniously dressed, both past the freshness of their youth, and both rouged and enamelled beyond the ordinary. Ladies-in-waiting on the young Princess? Anthony doubted it. On the other hand, they caused no surprise amongst the bystanders. Familiar faces evidently then . . . ! Anthony had been astonished by so many marvellous exhibitions during the last few months that he was well equipped to accept a new one without questioning.

"The Princess is probably to be welcomed into her new home by some little masque, and those two ladies are water-nymphs or Muses or Spirits of the Heath. When her carriage approaches, they will draw in their heads and take their places on their proper perches."

But they did nothing of the kind. A great cry went up. "They are coming! They are coming!" Children were lifted on to shoulders. In a moment every ledge of stone was occupied by some adventurous climber. Handkerchiefs streamed out in the air, hats were waved, eager inquiries were shouted from the ground to those who were raised aloft. "Do you see them, Paul?" "Jakob, why don't you tell us?"—and the two ladies leaned forward from the window until they seemed likely to fall out.

Far away between the shoulders of the halberdiers, Anthony Craston saw the procession approach, grow from the size of midgets to the size of ponies, and from the size of ponies to men mounted upon horses. First came a troop of the Duke's Horse, which wheeled into a line with its back to the Leineschloss, then a dozen pages on foot in coats of cloth of gold, and then, drawn by six cream-coloured horses, with the ducal coat-of-arms glistening on the panels, the carriage of the bride and bridegroom.

The carriage stopped at the door and a footman sprang from the boot and let down the step. A stream of flunkeys in the blue livery of Hanover issued from the doorway and stood bareheaded upon either side. Prince George Louis descended, and all the magnificence of his dress could not hide the clumsiness of his figure. He turned to the carriage door and bowed, and forth from it danced—or so it seemed to Anthony—with a step as light as Ariel's, the most exquisite and delicate being which it had ever been his good fortune to see. She was hardly of the middle height, but the slenderness of her figure gave her the look of it. A wealth of blue-black hair crowned her small head and the excitement of the moment had lent a colour to her cheeks and a sparkle to her dark eyes which set the crowd cheering with the pleasure of the sight of her. Her forehead, her nose and her mouth were pure as though cut by a Cellini out of alabaster, and as she turned towards the crowd of this new people amongst which she had come to live, she stretched out her slim hands with a wistful smile of appeal, as though she prayed them to bear her in their hearts and be compassionate when she failed.

Anthony Craston raised his hat with the rest, but he did not cheer with them. There was a lump in his throat which hindered him and for no reason which he could have given, the tears rose into his eyes and ran down his cheeks. This was no nymph, no shepherdess, no Muse from a grotto, but a girl in a shimmering white dress for whom it would be a glory to die, yet who besought you to condone her youth and bear with her for her trespasses.

Thus for a moment she stood, then she gave her hand to her husband and took a step forward to the doorway, looking upwards at the Old Palace as she did. Suddenly she stopped. The colour faded out of her cheeks, she stepped back with her eyes still upon that open window on the first floor in which the two women were framed.

Just as suddenly the clamour dropped. Something was amiss, and, by the telegraphic sympathy of people massed together, the knowledge ran backwards and forwards without a word spoken. In the hush Craston heard distinctly George Louis whisper a harsh order.

"Come you in! You're making a scandal."

But Sophia Dorothea did not move. The blood pulsed again in her face and her eyes were mutinous. At the window on the first floor, the two women held their ground. They could do no less unless they accepted defeat, and they were deliberately on view to assert their authority. But they were afraid. They had underrated the high spirit of their victim. What natural colour they had faded from their faces and left them white masks dabbed with vermilion like the faces of dolls in a shop window. There was a little stir in the crowd. It bent forward as though some fierce wind had blown out

of the back of the sky and bowed every head. But still no word was spoken, no cry was raised. Something so strange and unexpected had happened, that something still more strange must follow to resolve it. Anthony Craston held his breath even though he did not share the knowledge of his neighbours. And in that silence of wonder and suspense the voice of Sophia Dorothea struck clear and sweet as a silver bell.

"My lord we are too soon. I pray you to drive on with me for a mile and we will return when our house is ready."

A murmur low and full rose from the throng, a murmur not of anger against the women—they were so accepted an element in the life of Hanover—but of awe at this wisp of a girl's audacity. But it died away as George Louis answered wrathfully:

"We can drive no further. The house has been waiting ready for a week."

He stretched out his hand to seize his wife's and, with a gesture so rough that no one could doubt he meant to drag her within the doorway. But she had withdrawn her hand to her side and she held it clenched there.

"My Lord," she said and her eyes met his stare and again her voice was clear even though it shook, "a house is a woman's camp. There are signs which she can't misread. She knows that when the housemaids watch the show in the street that the cleaning is not done. I pray you to drive with me," and turning about with a quick movement which was so neat that it looked leisurely and deliberate, she stepped up again into the coach.

For a moment the crowd stood dumb. No single person probably in all that throng, except Anthony Craston, was unaware that the two women at the window were the mistress of the Duke and the mistress of his heir; or mistook Clara von Platen's power to avenge an insult. It was stunned by consternation. Then one more courageous than the rest threw his hat in the air.

"Well done, Dorothea," he cried leaving out that other name by which the Duchess was known, and the cry released all throats. It was as if a signal had been given. A roar of applause beat about the buildings like a hurricane. The girl's courage plucked from the hearts of young and old alike a welcome loud and ringing as artillery. For a couple of minutes it was tossed from the Alte Palace to the Leineschloss and back again; and then, moved by that swift flame which makes men act together as though one thought inspired them, all faces were turned upwards to the window. There would have been danger then, danger for the Alte Palace, danger for Monplaisir, but the window was empty. The painted women had fled and were even now,

with fear and hatred in their breasts, covering their rich dresses in the cloaks of servants. The threatening cries changed into yells of derision.

George Louis turned to the coachman on the box with a face as black as thunder.

"Drive on then, in God's name! Force your way! Use your whip, fool! The Princess wants to take the air!"

Since their new favourite wanted it, she should have it though bones broke and blood spattered under the weight of her carriage wheels. He sprang into the coach and damning all women heartily to hell, he slammed the door. The coachman swung his whip, the halberdiers turned and forced back the crowd, by some miracle a way was opened, and the coach lurched forward. But a corner of it struck Anthony on the shoulder and sent him spinning. Someone caught him, as he uttered a cry. He saw Sophia Dorothea lean forward from her seat, for a moment her eyes big with distress rested upon his, he answered with a smile and the coach rolled on.

* * * * *

When Craston returned to his inn, he found a letter from the English envoy to Hanover and Celle, bidding him that night to supper. The company was all agog with the events of the afternoon, and when Anthony described how he had pushed his way into the very front rank and only escaped by the skin of his teeth from being crushed under the wheels of the bridal coach, he became something of a hero.

"So it was you!" exclaimed Sir Henry Cresset, the envoy. "I had a message this afternoon from the Alte Palace upon the return of the Princess. She had a fear that a young Englishman had been hurt."

"Ah," said Anthony preening himself not a little, "she saw that I was of my race."

"Rather she heard that you were of your race," Sir Henry returned smiling grimly. "For in falling you used the oath which foreigners are accustomed to think we go to bed with on our lips and utter at daybreak as our morning prayer. You said 'Goddam!'"

"I did?" exclaimed Anthony in dismay amidst the laughter of the table. What he had meant to say was, "Your Highness may roll me over a thousand times if it will take the distress from your eyes and bring a smile to your lips."

"You did," said Sir Henry, "and you will have an opportunity to make your apologies for your bad language. For I am asked, if I come upon you,

to bring you into her presence so that she may be quite sure that you have not broken your neck."

"Oh!" said Anthony and for the rest of that evening he sat in a mist of gold, devising the most wonderful tender interview which had ever taken place between a rising young diplomat with a broken head and a Princess who had her whiteness from the lily and her eyes from the dusky velvet of a rose.

CHAPTER XVII

CRASTON MEETS A REDOUBTABLE LADY

THE interview in fact took place in the presence of Sir Henry Cresset and lasted for less than ten minutes. The Princess was anxious to be assured that no harm had come to a young gentleman on his first visit to Hanover. Anthony expressed in respectful terms his obligation that she should ever have given a thought to him. There was no trace of that anxiety or fear which he had seen flash into her face at the carriage window, to be found in her demeanour now. She was friendly, easy, and a little aloof. He was more conscious than he wished to be of the distance in rank between them.

"Mr. Craston must visit Celle before he leaves us," she said to the Envoy, speaking in French. "I will have letters prepared for him."

Anthony was suddenly aware of a great reluctance to visit Celle. He ought to wish to visit Celle, he thought, because there she was born and there until a few days ago, she had lived. But he did not and so strong was his aversion that he found himself making excuses.

"Your Highness, if only I had the time! But I have outstayed my leave. Within a few days I must set off on my way home."

The Princess was looking at him with a trifle of surprise and still more of impatience.

"But it's a mere step to Celle, Monsieur, for one who has travelled to Paris and Venice and Dresden and Vienna, as I understand from Sir Henry, you have done."

He was accused of belittling her beloved Celle. What? Make the Grand Tour and neglect Celle! Anthony grew red with confusion. He saw himself dropping like a plummet to the lowest depths of her contempt. He floundered pitiably.

"I have heard so much of Celle, Your Highness, I seem already to have visited it."

"You have heard so much of it!" she repeated. She smiled on him again. She begged Sir Henry and himself to be seated. Anthony took a seat but lost his head.

"Yes, indeed!" he cried. "The French Garden! The green and gold Chapel with the medallions hanging from the roof! The lime-tree avenue between the Castle and the town——"

"And from whom have you heard of them?" Sophia Dorothea asked leaning prettily forward; and Anthony Craston came to a full stop at the height of his panegyric.

Now he knew why he didn't want to visit Celle. Jealousy! She, the Princess Sophia Dorothea, was so unconcernedly civil to him, the stranger whom she talked to to-day and would forget altogether to-morrow; and she had lived there through such intimate sweet hours with somebody else—No, he'd be hanged if he'd go to Celle.

"And from whom have you heard of them, Monsieur?" the Princess repeated and again there was a little note of surprise in her voice.

He had got to answer, and the sooner the better. Otherwise it would seem that he had heard a story which needed a good deal of dilution before it could be told.

"From Philip von Königsmark, Your Highness."

He heard a tiny rustle of her dress, he saw her fingers jump upon her lap, but his head was too bent for him to see her face, since he did not wish her to see how the blood rushed into his. A pause just long enough to be remarked followed. Then she asked gently with a warmth which he had not heard before in her voice.

"Philip is a friend of yours?"

The warmth was obviously for Philip, not for him.

"We were together at Monsieur Faubert's Academy in London," he said stubbornly. But his mind was just—at that moment annoyingly just. If he stopped then, he made out Philip to be a mere gossip, a teller of tales out of school, the Sir Brilliant Fashion of the comedies. "Yes," he continued honestly, looking straight into her eyes, "Philip was the greatest friend I have ever had. I loved him dearly. We had few secrets one from the other. I think the happiest days which he will ever know were the days when he was His Highness the Duke's page at Celle."

He was rewarded for his honesty with a smile of pleasure. A faint colour rose up from her throat to her pale cheeks. There was warmth now for him, too, in the cordiality of her eyes. She rose to her feet.

"We must do what we can, Sir Henry," she said to the Ambassador, "to make this young gentleman's stay with us pleasant in his recollections."

She held out her hand, and as Anthony bent his head and kissed it, she added gently:

"I want all my friends to visit Celle." And she was gracious enough to thank Sir Henry Cresset for having brought his young friend to the Alte Palace.

Sir Henry looked at his young friend with a new interest as they walked back to his house.

"You'll have to go to Celle now, my lad, whether you want to or not," and he seemed on the point of putting some question. But he deferred it and remarked:

"For a beginner you did very well, but I have a more difficult ordeal for you to-morrow."

Anthony was a trifle uplifted by the manner of his reception and was inclined to make light of ordeals.

"They must be expected. Somehow one comes through them unsinged," he said airily.

"I will examine you more particularly upon that point to-morrow, when we have returned from Herrenhausen," said Sir Henry grimly.

"Herrenhausen!" exclaimed Anthony. "You will take me there?"

"Yes."

"I am glad."

"You are wise to be glad now. For even if you are sorry afterwards, you will have had some enjoyment out of Herrenhausen."

Anthony, however, was not to be alarmed. His few minutes with Sophia Dorothea had set him at his ease with all the crowned heads of Europe. He laughed confidently.

"There is a fountain, I believe, at Herrenhausen which throws a jet of water fifty yards high in the air," he said with impertinence.

"There is also a lady at Herrenhausen who does the same with whippersnappers," Sir Henry replied.

"A lady?"

"The Duchess Sophia."

"Oh!" said Anthony and having heard something of that lady's uncompromising conversation, his confidence dwindled. Have you seen an air-balloon dancing gaily on a string and then slowly deflating? That was Anthony Craston.

"I am to see the Duchess Sophia!" he said with a catch of the breath.

"She likes to hear news of England."

"Come! That's something," said Anthony.

"Not much," replied Sir Henry. "But no doubt you are well grounded in the theory of monads."

"Monads!"

"Yes."

Monsieur Faubert taught the management of the Great Horse and the accomplishments of gentlemen, but monads were not included in the curriculum.

"I have never heard of them," said Anthony with a little shriek of despair.

Sir Henry shrugged his shoulders.

"You may have the good luck not to find Leibnitz in her company. There are times when he isn't. In any case it would be wise of you probably to confine yourself to the Pantheistic theory of Spinoza."

The balloon was now completely deflated and wrinkled. But there was a way out. It occurred to him suddenly. He was pleased with it.

"I must go to Celle to-morrow unfortunately."

"You can't go to Celle until the day after to-morrow—and that at the earliest. It would be a breach of manners fatal to a young diplomatist not to wait for the letters which the Princess is taking the trouble to prepare for you," said Sir Henry severely.

It was in consequence a fluttering and uneasy Anthony Craston who drove with Sir Henry Cresset the next morning by the long lime-tree avenue to Herrenhausen. He had no eyes for the scenes which they passed, no thoughts but of the coming interview. The yellow orangery with its high porch and ornamented façade which Duchess Sophia was to make her favourite residence was not then built on to the end of the Palace. Sir Henry and Anthony were introduced into a long room with windows which overlooked the broad central path of the gardens. Hornbeam hedges fenced the path in and at the end lay the round pond from which the famous fountain flung its jet.

Anthony, however, was hardly aware of the prospect beyond the windows. He saw a lady with black hair, blue eyes, a high nose and the straightest back possible to see, seated in a chair and, opposite to her, seated in another, a stout Minister of religion. The lady was apparently enjoying the conversation, the Minister was certainly not. He was red in the face and flustered and he seized with agitation upon the entrance of the fresh visitors.

"Your Highness will forgive me," he began, as he rose to his feet, but Duchess Sophia shook her head.

"You shall put your case to Sir Henry before you go," she answered, as she graciously received the Envoy and his young friend. Sir Henry, however, was too old a bird to be caught. His young friend might dance for the learned lady's amusement—it might indeed do him good—but not Sir Henry Cresset.

"Your Highness," he answered as he bowed over her hand, "I find with advancing years a cowardly reluctance to express hasty views on any matters which are outside my domain. I leave such speculations to the eager youth of people like Mr. Anthony Craston, whom you do me the honour to allow me to present to you."

Anthony would have liked to sink through the floor, as he made his bow and finish it in the cellar. But the floor was solid, and he heard Duchess Sophia speaking to him in a pleasant encouraging voice:

"I am very pleased. You are from London? I look upon it as my home and I shall welcome what news you bring of it. Meanwhile, here is Dr. Moldanus, a famous Lutheran pastor from Osnabrück who is much concerned because a shoemaker in his parish has taken to preaching. Dr. Moldanus thinks that he is inspired like a prophet of old. My own poor opinion is that Ministers should preach and shoemakers make shoes."

Anthony Craston was in the same sort of quandary as that in which he had been the day before. He must answer and he must answer at once. He shuffled and blushed and stammered. Finally he said:

"Your Highness, if that view had prevailed at the beginning of the Christian Era, there would have been very few apostles."

As he made the remark, its inanity sounded to him prodigious. On the other hand Duchess Sophia seemed to weigh it carefully.

"Well," she said in the end, "I take the lowest view of the Apostles."

Dr. Moldanus bounced. He was startled. He was horrified.

"Your Highness cannot mean it," he cried.

"But, Dr. Moldanus, I do mean it," Duchess Sophia answered, sitting up very stiffly. "The Apostles had under their noses the answer to the great secret which through all the ages troubles the world and will trouble it to the end of time. Lazarus had come back from the grave," and she quoted with a remarkable purity of accent the words of the English poet—

> "The undiscovered country from whose bourn
> No traveller returns."

"The apostles, good Doctor, knew the one traveller who had returned and never bothered their heads to ask him a question. I am supposed by foolish people not to be very zealous in matters of religion, but if Lazarus

came to Herrenhausen, he wouldn't get away from me very easily until he had told me what had happened to him after he was dead."

She gave Dr. Moldanus a spirited nod of the head. The unhappy Doctor was torn between his respect for the Duchess and his horror of the woman's freedom of speech.

"But, Madame," he stuttered, "there are mysteries hidden from us."

"I know that," said the Duchess with a little smile of enjoyment at his confusion wrinkling her mouth.

"For our good," added the Doctor.

"I doubt that," said the Duchess.

But she had startled him and left him floundering. She had the same sort of malicious pleasure which an imp of a boy might have had who pushed an old gentleman in his clothes into the sea and watched him splashing. She brought Dr. Moldanus to land, however, with a few kind words about the edification his visit had given to her and let him go. Then she turned in her most agreeable mood to Anthony and plied him with questions about her native country as she was pleased to consider England.

"Your Highness," Anthony replied modestly, "I have no knowledge of great personages or great affairs."

But Duchess Sophia kept up a full correspondence with the King and the Court of England, as well as with the philosophers. What she wanted from Anthony was a picture of the daily life of a small squire in the country, and what were his politics and how deep his devotion to the Crown; and that picture Anthony was able passably well to paint for her. He could not but see how her hopes overleaped the obstacles to that distant inheritance of the throne and he discovered in that hope the explanation of the enigma of her life. The purity and dignity of her conduct, the continual sharpening of her intellect upon the acutest brains of her day, her disinclination to interfere in the small politics of Hanover, her humour, even the little falls she tried with such notable Doctors as Moldanus, suggested that she was fitting herself deliberately for that coveted place.

"She means to be England's second Elizabeth," said Craston, when they were driving back to Hanover; and Sir Henry Cresset looked at him sharply, only to surprise a new look of interest upon his face.

"What, sir, is that house?" he asked, pointing to one which they were passing upon the left side of the road.

"That is Monplaisir."

Anthony had been now for two days in Hanover.

"The house of Madame von Platen?"

"Yes."

"That's curious," said Anthony.

"Why?"

Anthony told the Ambassador of the man with the crippled feet and his riding-boots slung about his neck, to whom he had given a lift upon the step of his chaise.

"He got down here and went into Monplaisir."

The Ambassador listened to the story with an attention which Anthony could not understand. At the end of it he made Anthony repeat all that the crippled messenger had said and uttered a little grunt of disappointment.

"He told you nothing of himself?"

"Not a word," said Anthony.

"Not even whence he came?"

"No, sir."

"Yet I think you may possibly see that messenger again."

"At Monplaisir?" Anthony cried.

Was he to be presented also to the lady who held her court at Monplaisir?

"No, but at Celle. And, if you do, I shall be glad to know of it."

Sir Henry was silent as the long avenue of limes unrolled like a riband upon their right hand. Then he said:

"You know young Königsmark?"

"Yes," Anthony replied shortly.

"You were perhaps present at the trial of his brother?"

"I was."

"I have read an account of that trial. Amidst all the evasions and trickeries, a warning by the Swedish Minister Monsieur Lienburg stands out as a superb piece of common-sense. He said: 'There will be no good living in England for any who meddle with Thomas Thynne.' The words recurred to me when I heard of the scene outside the Alte Palace."

Anthony looked with surprise at the serious face of his companion.

"Why?"

"Because if you change the names, no saying could be truer here."

"How so?" asked Anthony.

“There will be no good living in Hanover for any who meddle with Clara von Platen,” the Ambassador said gravely. “I regret very much the outburst of the Princess.”

Anthony rushed to the defence of Sophia Dorothea.

“I consider it very proper,” he said hotly and Sir Henry broke into a delighted laugh.

“I am hardly surprised that the messenger knew you at once to be an Englishman,” he said, but his pleasure did not last. Anxiety again lined his face and weighted his voice.

“As you say, the Princess’s reply to the impertinence of those women was the natural act of an impulsive and high-spirited girl. But it was singularly unwise. No woman likes to be publicly mistaken for a housemaid, even if she knows that the mistake was deliberate.”

“It served them right,” said Anthony sturdily. “They shouldn’t have popped their heads out of the wrong windows.”

“But there are so many wrong windows that sooner or later everyone does,” replied the Ambassador drily. “It will be a bad day for the Princess Sophia Dorothea when her time comes to do it. She has offended her unamiable husband and made a deadly and powerful enemy of Clara von Platen.”

Thus Sir Henry summed up the consequences of her unwisdom. He might have added: “and she has stopped me from recruiting to my insufficient staff Mr. Anthony Craston of Four Winds House in the County of Essex.” For after Duchess Sophia’s favourable reception of the youth, that had been the Ambassador’s intention.

But Anthony was too open a partisan to suit an Embassy to a Court of such complicated politics. It was not until four years later, when Sir Henry Cresset had given place to another and Anthony had learnt a greater discretion, that he was promoted from the Hague to be Second Secretary to His Majesty’s Envoy to the Duchies of Hanover, Celle and Brunswick.

CHAPTER XVIII

PHILIP COMES TO HANOVER

IT was the second day of the Carnival. It was therefore the third day of January. The season had opened sedately with a French comedy in the Theatre, a Reception at Herrenhausen and cards in Duchess Sophia's apartments afterwards. But with the second day formalities ceased, and for six weeks Hanover, in the gaiety of its crowded streets and the freedom of its entertainments, transcended the great Fair of Brunswick and pretended to rival the allurements of Dresden. Visitors with fine clothes to wear and money to spend flocked into the inns; visitors with worn clothes to replace and empty purses to fill followed them and filled the meaner lodgings. The throbbing of violins, the pulse of feet and the clink of coins made the streets at night mere draughty corridors between ballroom and casino; and the flush of pink upon the snow from lighted windows changed without an interval of darkness into the cold pallor of the dawn.

On the second night there was Redoute, a diversion which long ago Ernst Augustus had transplanted from Venice. The great Assembly Room in the Town-Hall with its tier of boxes was hung with tapestries and thrown open for a ball. All night came staid citizens with their wives, visitors, soldiers, Ministers of State, men of the Law, the gallants of the Court, the squires of the countryside. The strict rules of Precedence and Etiquette were suspended. No invitations were needed until Shrove Tuesday had come and gone; there were only two conditions of entrance. A mask must be worn and all weapons must be left at home. Around this ballroom tables for Ombre and Piquet were set and a special room beyond was set aside for the game of Bassette where quiet was needed and the stakes were high. A third room was reserved for suppers of the more solid kind and a fourth led out of it where a *traiteur* behind a buffet served coffee and chocolate and liqueurs. Thus Hanover made merry on every other night from the New Year until Lent.

But in this year of 1689 not everyone had thrown his cares from his shoulders. On November 5th of the previous year William of Orange had landed at Brixham. In December James II had fled from England to the Court of France. In January Louis XIV was preparing with the help of his

one ally, the Sultan of Turkey, to restore him to his throne; Louis had invaded the Palatinate, destroyed the Elector's Castle at Heidelberg and burned the fair town of Mannheim to the ground; and the Grand Alliance against him was being slowly hammered into shape. William of Orange was its moving spirit, the Emperor Leopold its battering ram and little Hanover the spanner which might tighten up the nuts of the machine or be flung into the works and dislocate it altogether. There were many preoccupied minds in Hanover during this winter Carnival.

Balati, the French Ambassador, was using all his persuasions to secure the eighteen thousand trained soldiers of Celle and Hanover for Louis.

Duke Ernst Augustus was demanding his Electoral hat from the Emperor Leopold as the price of his joining the Confederation.

Madame von Platen was concerned lest Duke George William of Celle should refuse to throw in his lot with the Alliance and so halve the influence of Hanover. Her couriers could have ridden blindfold between Monplaisir and the house in the Schuhstrasse where Bernstorff sat fixing his price, the estate of Gartow.

Catherine Busche, now erased from George Louis' good books on the ground of age, and a widow, was wondering whether it would restore her credit if she married General Weyke.

Duchess Sophia was in a state of doubt where not Leibnitz nor Descartes nor Spinoza, nor any of the Ministers of religion whom she loved to set by the ears, could help her. If James II remained a dethroned exile, she was by a long stride nearer to the English sceptre. But if Louis XIV put him back, he would have Parliament under his thumb; and if she had meanwhile taken the field against him, she might find herself barred from the Succession altogether. So she spent that Carnival composing carefully cordial letters to William at the Hague and James at St. Germain.

Prince George Louis was torn between his delight in his big new beautiful cowlike mistress, Ermengarde Melusina von Schulenberg and his desire to lead his troops into Flanders and show those fiddle-faddle queasy-stomached Frenchmen what lusty soldiers properly fed on *sauerkraut* and sausages were capable of.

The English Ambassador, Sir William Dutton Colt, was watching with a feeling of despair the handsome presents which were flowing in a golden stream from the coffers of Monsieur Balati into the pockets of Ernst Augustus, the Platens and von Bernstorff in the far-away Schuhstrasse; and deploring the niggardliness of his own country.

The Princess Sophia Dorothea in the loneliness of her own apartments was seeking in the education of her two children, George Augustus and Sophia Dorothea, an anodyne for the aching humiliation of her position and not caring twopence whether Ernst Augustus was raised to the rank of Elector; or whether James II remained at St. Germain or returned to Whitehall, so long as she could go home with her children to the quiet place where she was loved. Her heart yearned for Celle, the company of her mother and the clean seemliness of her former life amongst cherished and familiar things.

And in the midst of all these griefs and preoccupations and ambitions, an apparently trivial thing happened of which only an unimportant second secretary in the English Embassy took note; and he rather from jealousy than from any foresight in the inevitable development of events.

Anthony Craston had been sitting for the last three months at Celle in a subordinate office of the Hanover Chancery with his nose between the leaves of the code-books. He had drafted and redrafted and ciphered and deciphered and done all the clerkly work which fell to him. It was the kind of work which none could do better, for he was exact to a figure and literal to a word. But even so, during much of it, his mind was free and often whilst Sophia Dorothea in her imagination was travelling with her children in a coach along the road to Celle, he, in his, was crossing her on horseback on his way to Hanover. He was actually there now on the first night of Redoute, with ten days of liberty in front of him. He sat in the Ambassador's box above the dancing floor dreaming of the hour next day when he would give to Sophia Dorothea the messages which her mother had entrusted to him, and listen to her eager questions and see her eyes grow kind. A chatter of voices in the box at his elbow waked him from his reverie, and he turned his head towards it. A woman, glittering with diamonds, in a dress of pale blue silk over white flowered satin with her hair piled high above her head in a Fontange, sat in the front of the box, paying no more attention to the gossip behind her than he had been doing himself. In spite of her mask Anthony had no doubt who she was. Anthony recognised the growing thickness of Clara von Platen's neck and shoulders and the outstanding majesty of her bust. He would have withdrawn his gaze, having no mind at that moment for her civilities, but for something violent in the very stillness of her attitude. She was leaning forward over the ledge of the box, staring down upon one corner of the floor, with all her rapacious soul in the stare. Her eyes moved as one couple danced, but nothing else of her moved, not a finger, not a foot. Craston had the notion that she was willing someone to look up.

Craston followed the direction of her eyes. That young tall milk-white creature with the hair like pale gold could only be Ermengarde von Schulenberg, but the stripling who danced with her? Anthony could put no name to him. He was dressed in a suit of pink satin embroidered with silver lace and cut close enough to give value to the slenderness of his shape, and he moved through the stately figures of a minuet with the casual elegance of France.

Anthony looked away dispassionately.

"Clara von Platen is forty years old if she's a day," he reflected, "and she likes her lovers young and tender and daintily garnished. That poor youth will be wooed and won before the night's out and what money he has got he'll leave behind him at Monplaisir."

Indeed it seemed as if his conjecture was right. For when he looked down upon the floor again, the minuet was at an end and Ermengarde von Schulenberg was presenting the stranger to Clara von Platen. Anthony watched the scene with amusement. For Clara was beginning her wooing there and then—so close she stood to him, with so much admiration she spoke, with such evident desire her fingers caressed the sleeve of his coat.

Anthony left her to it. He went out into the corridor and was welcomed back by his friends and exchanged the gossip of the season. But the memory of the scene upon the ballroom floor remained at the bottom of his mind and a vague uneasiness began to invade him through all the talk and laughter. He traced it to its cause. Clara von Platen was not in question. The advances of that middle-aged light-o'love increased in number and effrontery as her attractions diminished. This was one of them.

"Had she been directing her darts at some grave Minister from Vienna or Cologne," he reflected, "I might have been troubled by her eagerness. But Carnival is her hunting season and like other beasts with ageing teeth she likes her quarry tender."

Nor did the Schulenberg disturb him. She had neither the brains nor the inclination to meddle in politics.

"That large and dimpled carcass contains only one rapacity," he said to himself, "a passion for money."

It was the young stranger of the graceful movements and tempered richness of dress who was bothering him; and a fear which, ever since his first presentation to the Princess in the Alte Palace, had made itself felt within him like some dull uncomprehended ache, suddenly became clear, was suddenly formulated in his thoughts. He was standing outside the box of the Princess of East Frisia, one of the reigning beauties of the Court of

Hanover; and acting upon the impulse of a panic, he opened the door and asked her permission to pay his respects to her.

The Princess was whole-heartedly for William of Orange and the English party. She received him graciously and offered him a chair.

"You shall tell me to what side Duke George William leans at Celle," she said. "The Duchess Eleonore," and the Princess shrugged her shoulders. "We need not linger over her. She has so many French officers at her table that I wonder the Fleur de Lys does not float from her flagstaff. But the Duke must side with us."

Anthony Craston hitched his chair forward towards the ledge of the box. His one desire was to watch the floor of the ballroom and make sure. But he was caught. His own panic had betrayed him. Out of the corner of his eye he could see that a quadrille was being danced, and that the pink satin suit advanced and retired and set to partners in company with the blue and flowered white of Clara Platen. But he must keep his face politely turned to the Princess of East Frisia and his expression interested.

"His Highness has difficult neighbours," he explained. "Denmark and ——" somehow this other name stuck in his throat. It was too apposite to the real subject of his thoughts. ". . . And——"

"Sweden."

The Princess supplied the name.

"Yes, Sweden. Neither of those countries has as yet shown its hand. It is natural that the Duke of Celle should hesitate"—and to his dismay he saw that the quadrille had ended and those who had danced in it were streaming out of the door.

But the Princess of East Frisia was deeply concerned in this matter of Denmark and Sweden.

"They must not ally themselves with France," she declared. "Has Bernstorff no influence at Stockholm or Copenhagen?"

The unhappy Anthony Craston cursed himself for a fool. If he had thought for a moment, he must have realised that this was the last box which he should have entered. Admission was easy, departure as difficult as from a prison. He had to sit where he was and answer; whilst the ballroom emptied and filled again. He noticed with an increase of consternation that neither Clara von Platen nor her new acquisition made a reappearance; and he began to babble. He remembered the next morning the indiscretions which a second Secretary could commit when talking politics with a distracted mind, and his heart sank. But to-night he didn't care. Bernstorff, as all the world knew, would go where his bread was buttered. No doubt Charles XI of

Sweden would like to plunder a few more churches. Denmark would like the fortifications of Ratzeburg on its frontier destroyed. Well, why not—as long as it brought about an end to the great lady's questions and set him free. Political women were an abomination and an offence.

"I do hope, Monsieur, that your prophecies are wrong," said the Princess in some distress as at last she dismissed him. "I shall not sleep a wink all night. But I expect that you have been working with too close an assiduity and humours come from such application which tinge our thought with an excessive melancholy."

"She's telling me I'm bilious," said Anthony to himself in a cold rage as he bent over her careless hand.

"Madame," he said aloud, "I am a second Secretary, the merest register and compendium. I take plain words and make them nonsensical. I take nonsense and make plain words of it; and between the two I become myself a hieroglyph without meaning. I examine ciphers all day and I know no cipher so round and complete as the second secretary himself."

With that apology he got himself out of the box. He ran down the stairs and hurried to the card-room. The bassette tables were full and where the play was high, they were surrounded by people standing and wagering. Anthony pushed himself in among the groups. But not one of the three whom he sought was to be seen. He went on to the supper-room. They were neither standing at the buffet nor seated at one of the tables. He looked at his watch. It was a little after midnight.

"They have gone to Monplaisir," he said.

On any other night he would have gone home to his bed. But fear now had him in its grip. He understood now that he had always been afraid, that a foreboding had drawn his thoughts continually to Hanover ever since his first visit to the town, that his imagination, slow and pale though it was, had been picturing dimly behind the glitter and ostentation of this Court, dark places of savage crime and silent vengeances. He was torturing himself with fancies? Very likely. But he must make sure!

He had a hired carriage waiting for him, and he bade the coachman drive out towards Monplaisir. Fifty yards on this side of it he stopped and dismissed the man; and then, slinking behind the trunks of the lime-trees, he walked on. Monplaisir was keeping open house. Its big iron gates stood wide; so many carriages with smoking horses and gilt lanterns waited, so many grooms and footmen loitered about them, that it seemed there was not space left for a handcart. Yet more coaches swaying on leather springs, with painted panels and embroidered hammercloths, and lackeys standing behind,

clattered up and lined the kerb. The windows were ablaze from the ground floor to the attic, and a little crowd of people were assembled in the road, with their faces upturned as though they expected that the walls of brick and stone would crumble away and amaze their eyes with the splendour of the rooms within.

Anthony's thoughts went back suddenly to a night when a crowd was gathered beneath Monsieur Faubert's windows in the Haymarket and then leaped in a swift contrast to another palace a mile away where the blinds were drawn and no courtiers sought admission and a young woman, still hardly older than a girl, lay in the dark alone. He muffled his face in his cloak and joined the little crowd in the road. That he would recognise anyone in that hurly-burly, whether he entered the house or came from it, he could not believe. And he was not pliable enough to invent for himself some unimportant rôle and gossip with the grooms. Common-sense, in a phrase, told him that the night was cold and his vigil useless, but common-sense and he had parted company hours before.

The crowd began to melt away. No more carriages came, and the carriages which were there one after another took the road to Hanover. A clock struck three. There was no one left now of those who watched the house, but Anthony. He fell back behind the trees. The windows of Monplaisir darkened one by one like so many bright eyes closed in sleep. One only remained on the first floor above the porch, shining softly and veiled by blue curtains. One carriage alone waited a few yards along the road. Anthony leaned against a tree trunk. With the small hours of the morning the cold had sharpened and there was a presage of snow in the air. Anthony, whilst holding his cloak about him, could thrust now one and now the other of his hands in between his waistcoat and his shirt, but he was dressed for a ball and his legs and feet in his silk stockings and shoes hurt him intolerably. He dared not stamp some trifle of life and warmth into them, lest some servant of the house should be attracted by the noise. But he was obstinate. He was determined to see this last, this specially favoured visitor depart. A turn of luck might help him, a draught of wind might blow a cloak aside, a voice might speak aloud.

It was after the church clock had struck four when a couple of footmen came running from the courtyard and turning to the right stopped by the one remaining carriage. Anthony could hear them waking the coachman on his box. He could see them removing the rugs from the horses' backs; and then he recognised with a flare of indignation at his folly, the futility of his vigil. A coach! Footmen in livery to stand behind. Why, the stranger whom he feared to see lived upon his brother's bounty, lived well no doubt, was

generously treated, but not so generously that he could set up, for the space of a visit to a strange town at a time of Carnival, his own coach and his liveried grooms. Anthony had actually turned raging at himself for his wasted night when he heard in the distance a horse galloping along the road.

Anthony stopped and looked back. The sound grew louder. No creak of wheels, no thud of a carriage lumbering after it kept it company. Someone was riding and riding to Hanover through the night on urgent business. Anthony saw the horseman flit like a shadow past the lights of the waiting coach, and then a movement in the courtyard opposite caught his attention. The gates still stood wide. Anthony Craston saw the door of the house, which was raised by a few steps above the cobbles of the yard, open. A lantern hung over the door. By the light of it Craston looked into the hall. He saw a woman with a fur coat wrapped about her, very small but very clear—Clara von Platen. Behind her a man was wrapping a cloak about his shoulders, but he was in the shadows. Clara von Platen turned and flung her arms about his shoulders and drew his head down to her in a last embrace. Then the man pressed his hat down upon his forehead and ran lightly down the steps. Whether he wore a peruke or his own hair, the curls so clustered about his face and his cloak was hitched so high over his mouth that nothing of his face was visible. He walked quickly to the gateway and the swing of his cloak gave Anthony a glimpse of a pink suit beneath and a gleam of silver embroidery. Not for nothing had Clara von Platen leaned forward with so concentrated a longing over the edge of her box! She had made her kill and could point the night upon her calendar with a red mark.

Meanwhile the horseman was drawing near; and Craston learned that the end of his journey was not Hanover but Monplaisir. For the gallop had become a trot, and as he reached the gateway he stopped and flung himself from his horse. Craston remembered the morning of his first journey to Hanover six years before and the rider whom he had carried to this house on the step of his chaise. He was wondering whether this was the same messenger on another and more fortunate errand.

"He came from Celle," he recollected. "Cresset told me of him—gave me his name—Heinrich—yes, Heinrich Muller"; and at this moment an incident which he did not understand drove everything from his mind except the scene in front of him.

The rider, with the reins in his hand, came suddenly face to face with Clara Platen's lingering guest, and the guest flinched suddenly. He sprang back, the cloak slipped down from his face and from his lips broke a cry of fear. Then with a curse he flung the fold of his cloak across his shoulder and strode down the road.

But Anthony Craston had seen. All his forebodings were justified. Philip Königsmark had come to Hanover.

CHAPTER XIX

TWO OLD FRIENDS MEET AGAIN

ANTHONY CRASTON tramped home and went to bed with his thoughts in a jumble. When he awoke they were still in a jumble. He was a young man who liked his thoughts to be tidy. So he sent his servant for one of the two hacks which he kept, hoping that a ride in the sharp air would so quicken blood and brain that his difficulties would have sorted themselves out by the time he returned and given him a point of departure. He rode out past Monplaisir to Herrenhausen, made a sweep through the woods to the south and returned by way of the great Parade ground. It was his favourite circuit, for from the Parade ground he could look across the narrow Leine river to the windows of the wing of the Leine Palace which, since the birth of her first child George Augustus, Sophia Dorothea had occupied.

As he rode he formulated his inconsistencies. Thus:

"I ought to be pleased that since Philip has come to Hanover for the carnival"—he did not doubt that it was the carnival which had attracted him—"he has been captured by the dilapidated charms of Clara von Platen. He is now safely housed in the enemy's camp. He wears the von Platen label round his neck, and by to-night all Hanover will know it. He remained with her after all her other guests had gone and all Hanover, except presumably His Highness Ernst Augustus, will understand what that means."

"The Princess Sophia will understand as quickly as any other. It will accentuate his offence that he stood up to dance with the mistress who has supplanted her, the giraffe von Schulenberg. The affection in which her memories held him will receive its death blow. Moreover, should his memories prompt him to renew an old courtship, the voracious Clara will leave him little leisure and less money to pursue it with."

"Taking it for all in all I should be pleased. The situation is not the best in the best of all possible worlds, but it is the best that we can do in Hanover."

Thus the more rational side of his mind discoursed. But his emotions were not convinced.

"But I am not pleased at all," he cried. "I am against the giraffe. I am against the Platen woman. It is no business of mine and I am no doubt the world's prize fool. But I am heart and soul for the lovely girl who with her high spirit, her eagerness for the joy of life, her quick response to affection and her two children, should be the idol of this court, and is in fact subjected to public humiliation or neglected altogether. Philip Königsmark has behaved like a boor. He should have felt enough kindness for the Princess to prevent him from enlisting with her enemies. He should have learnt enough of good manners to stop him from flaunting his treachery. He may have grace in his feet, but he has none of it in his heart. And if I could catch him at some knavery I'd have him dry-drummed out of the town!"

At this point Craston shrugged his shoulders in contempt of his own futility. It was all very comforting and encouraging to talk of if this and if that and the fine big things he would do to prove to Sophia Dorothea that there was one at all events who gave to her the devotion which was her right. But what could he do—except sit at his desk and code his Ambassador's despatches?

Then, at the mouth of the street in which he lodged, he reined in his horse and sat still. Something had happened last night—no, this morning—early this morning—a little thing, rather odd—perhaps rather promising. A small spark of an idea glimmered amongst the dead ashes of Craston's hopes. If that could be blown into a flame big enough to dislodge Philip Königsmark from Hanover! Craston wondered. He was deluding himself, no doubt. But perhaps—if he could find out more about that queer little incident—it might be worth while trying to find out more.

He touched his horse with his heel and rode on. He had not noticed a little group of people gather on the side walk and stare at the rider sitting as rigid as a statue with his eyes set on vacancy. And he did not notice now that a painted coach with a footman standing up behind and another on the pavement by the door was drawn up close by his own house.

Craston's groom was waiting and led the horse away. Craston mounted the stairs, entered his sitting-room and called for his servant. As he unclasped his cloak from his shoulders a young man dressed in a suit of silver-grey velvet with a froth of white ruffles at throat and wrist rose quickly from a chair before the fire.

"Anthony!" he cried, and with a laugh of pleasure he held out his hand.

Craston stopped dead, his face set, his eyes like pebbles. He gave his cloak, his hat and his riding-crop to his servant. Then he asked of him: "I have the honour to receive . . . ?"

"Count Philip von Königsmark," returned the man.

"I thank you," said Anthony.

He was the pattern of stateliness and he was superlatively ridiculous. He was not, however, aware of his absurdity although the glimmer of a smile on Königsmark's mouth might have informed him of it. He was only aware for the moment—and with an unreasonable irritation—that Philip had seemingly lost not a jot of either his youth or his good looks since he had seen him six years before standing alone in the gloomy court at the Old Bailey. Youth and good looks had served a bad cause too well upon that day. They should not, if Craston could help it, repeat that service here.

He turned and looked at Philip. The long eyelashes shading the dark and liquid eyes lent again to his glance the hint of unfathomable mystery; the heavy curls of the colour of a ripe chestnut rippled and spread as thickly about his shoulders, the full and mobile mouth showed teeth as white or drooped with the same wistful melancholy, and the clear pallor of his face still made its strange appeal as for someone doomed before his time. He had the old nervous slenderness of limb and figure, and the hand which rested lightly on the back of a chair was as white and delicate as the lace ruffles at the end of his sleeve.

"I can't imagine what business Count Philip von Königsmark can have with me," said Anthony, still stately and still ridiculous. "It is no doubt too early for a morning call at Monplaisir and visitors to the Carnival must get rid of the empty hours somehow. But so fine a gentleman is really quite out of place in the drab lodging of a second secretary."

It just needed the backward toss of Philip's head and the look of challenge and bravado upon his face to carry Anthony straight back to the moment when he had turned away from him at the doorway of the Criminal Court. But now Philip did not accept his dismissal.

"As for my clothes, you must excuse them," he said. "I had the privilege of an audience with the Duke this morning and I must needs go dressed with due respect."

Anthony bowed.

"As for myself, I am not a visitor to the Carnival."

Anthony was startled. He had counted upon a short sojourn of Königsmark—say until Shrove Tuesday. But here was news more menacing. He took a step forward.

"You are not a visitor?" he stammered.

"No."

"I don't understand."

"How should you? I came indeed to explain my position to you."

Craston understood at all events that his pretence of ignoring Philip was fatuous. If he was to scheme against Philip, it must be on better knowledge than he had. With a gesture he invited Philip to be seated.

"I shall be obliged if you will."

He took his stand by the fireplace and with an elbow on the mantelpiece listened whilst Philip talked. For a little while he paid no great heed to what was said. Philip was telling his story from the day when he and Anthony had parted; and it seemed to have no bearing upon his position in Hanover to-day. But Anthony did not interrupt. For with every sentence he was learning that Philip, in spite of his looks, had aged, had changed. The banishment from Celle with its attendant humiliations, the flight from England with the mob upon his heels had, taken together, shaken his confidence. He had fled to Paris with a look of bravado upon his face and a sense of inferiority at his heart. In Paris he had found success easy—success with women, success with men, too. But there was always lingering at the back of his mind the knowledge that two countries had cast him out with ignominy. He had grown hard, bitter and a little contemptuous of his easy triumphs and very wary lest ruin should sweep him into the depths again. He had lost whilst still a boy the generosity of a boy's mind, its finer impulses, its courage.

"I studied in Paris. I was offered a commission in Louis' army under General Louvois. But I preferred to serve with my brother, Karl John, against the Turks. I left France of my own free will—remember that, Craston! I was with my brother when he died of fever in the Morea and I inherited his fortune. But you know that, of course."

"No, I didn't," Anthony replied coldly, "but I can now account for the two footmen on the dickey."

"When the campaign was over I went to Venice," Philip continued.

"Of course," said Craston suddenly.

There was merely agreement in the tone of his voice. Philip sooner or later would be drawn to Venice by some subconscious compulsion. Craston recognized an affinity and correspondence between his visitor and that magical city. Its romance, its appeal, and something sombre too. Its hint of mystery and swift eclipse in the silent gliding of a gondola out of bright moonlight into a chasm black as death between high palace walls. Surely Venice would whisper its invocation to Philip Königsmark in such clear sweet notes that he would hear it across an ocean and obey.

But Philip was telling with a curious insistence of his love affairs. There had even been a nun to whom he had laid a successful siege. Craston heard

underneath the spoken words a cry, "If I was driven with contumely from Celle, I triumphed at Venice."

"At Venice I made a great friend, young Frederick Augustus of Saxony," he went on, "and, going on to Dresden with him, I took service with his brother, the Elector. I had fought in Argos, in Hungary. I became a Colonel."

"Yes," said Anthony, wondering whither all this exordium was leading.

"And this year, my uncle Otto William died."

"It is the law of nature," said Anthony.

"I am therefore the last male Königsmark alive."

"You can repair that misfortune, no doubt, by a marriage."

"I was bequeathed my uncle's fortune in addition to my brother's," Philip continued imperturbably.

"All the more easily, therefore, can you repair the misfortune. For I believe that your uncle's fortune was large," said Anthony, not quite concealing a yawn behind his hand.

"It gave me complete freedom," said Philip. "I resigned from the Elector of Saxony's service."

"No doubt," said Anthony.

But he stood now erect. He no longer found the story tedious. He was afraid of what was to come. There was a moment's silence which Philip altogether misunderstood. For he said in a rush:

"I resigned entirely by my own wish. I could have lived my life out in Dresden."

Again there were evident in his thoughts the banishment from Celle, the expulsion from England, the challenge to any detractor to prove that he was marked with the stigma of defeat; and again Anthony was occupied by his own fears.

"It is natural that you should leave so small a field as Dresden," he said eagerly. "The world's yours for the asking."

Philip shook his head and smiled.

"I told you I was not a visitor to Hanover for the Carnival."

Anthony felt such a chill at his heart that he shivered. He looked at Philip with eyes in which fear showed stark. He was as one who sees an avalanche roaring down towards him in a mist of snow and cannot move from its path.

"I don't understand," he babbled with the accent of a child. "No, I don't."

He wouldn't understand. He would shut his ears to comprehension. He wouldn't listen. Yet he did, and so that no word escaped him.

"His Highness, the Duke, offered me this morning the command of his Regiment of Guards."

"But you refused it."

"No. I accepted it," said Philip and for awhile there was silence between the two.

Anthony was flung into a consternation which numbed his mind. Whatever he had dreaded, the fact exceeded it. One question came to the top in this confusion of his mind and clamoured for an answer. To what end had Philip accepted this appointment? Philip was twenty-two. He had such a conglomeration of advantages as hardly another man alive could claim. He had youth, beauty, talents, high birth, a romantic name and colossal wealth. There was no Court so magnificent but he must shine in it. There was no office beyond his reach. Why had he turned his back upon so much splendour to bury himself amidst the showy insignificance of Hanover?

"So you prefer Herrenhausen to Versailles?" Anthony asked drily.

"Yes," answered Philip.

"Even Dresden has more to offer than Hanover."

Philip was staring into the fire.

"That may be. I prefer the Leine river to the Elbe."

"Why?"

Philip Königsmark lifted his eyes from the fire. He let them rest upon the troubled face of his companion and for a time he did not answer. He looked back again into the fire and Craston saw or fancied that he saw a smile of amusement play over his face, destroy its beauty and make it devilish. Finally he turned again to Anthony and threw back his head, braving him, challenging him.

"I think that I will tell you," he said.

"Do," said Anthony.

"You won't laugh? You won't write me down a sentimental idiot? I should hate to lie under your ridicule."

Was Philip bantering him? Anthony had never been less inclined to laugh in his life. Moreover he was aware now that the Philip who was staring at him with the enigmatic smile playing about his lips was a man nursing a secret plan and dangerous.

"I shall not laugh," he promised.

"Very well," said Philip. He paused and added slowly, so that each word might reach its mark: "I left Dresden because I could not endure to see a Prince breaking the heart of an incomparable wife by preferring to her a greedy and trivial mistress."

Whether the accusation against the Elector of Saxony was true, Anthony Craston did not know. But whether true or false, it did not matter. The application of the words was to be found here—in Hanover. Anthony's face grew livid.

"For the same reason you have come to Hanover?" he cried.

Philip Königsmark did not profess any astonishment at the question. He kept his eyes on Craston's face.

"I do not say so," he replied.

Anthony's first impulse was to strike the man who had once been his friend, across the face, to lean down and hit with all his might, to ruin for ever those fine looks which had won so many easy triumphs. But there would be a meeting if he did and, whatever the result, there would be talk and the truth of it would out. Though his fingers clenched themselves and bit into the palms of his hands, he mastered his desire.

"So the first thing you did to make proof of your fine conscience was to stand up publicly in a minuet with a greedy and trivial mistress here."

Philip Königsmark nodded his head.

"Yes, I saw that you were watching from a box."

"And the second thing you did," Craston continued at a white heat, "was to go home to Monplaisir with the incomparable Princess's deadly enemy."

"I had my reasons for that," said Königsmark (and it was quite clear that he did not mean to give them). For the moment after he had spoken he got to his feet and crossed the room. Anthony watched him, feeling utterly helpless. On the chair against the wall an ermine cloak with a lining of grey satin which matched the shade of Philip's suit was carelessly thrown and a three-cornered hat trimmed with gold lace on the top of it. Philip was going. To-morrow he would be wearing a uniform. He would be Colonel of the Duke's own Regiment of Guards—and he would have the keys of the Leine Palace in his pocket—and Anthony could not do the smallest thing to hinder it. He saw Philip sling the cloak across his shoulders and fasten the clasps across his chest. Anthony tried to make light of his anxieties.

"I am probably making a fuss like an old hen when a fox comes prowling round the chicks in her coop. Philip mayn't have any plan in his mind. He mayn't have had any reason for going out to Monplaisir, beyond that a woman's a woman and the von Platen one of them. Anyway one can

manage to make sure that the Princess shall hear of it. I can do that myself since I have an audience with her this morning."

But he could not console himself so easily. Philip turned towards him. With his fine clothes, his slim and graceful figure, his dark eyes and his curious appeal as of one set apart for a tragic destiny, like some youth in an old play of Greece, he was the very man to capture the hearts of women. Add the memory of an early love violently interrupted! There was too much danger in him—if he stayed in Hanover. Philip took his hat and placed it under his arm.

"I must go," he said and he moved towards the door with a smile and a nod.

In another moment he would have gone. Anthony in a desperation caught at the tiny fragment of an idea which had come to him as he rode up to his door. He had no time to examine it. He must shoot his arrow at a venture.

"Just a word," he said quickly and Philip stopped.

"Well?"

He took his watch from his fob and glanced at it.

"Is your life safe in Hanover?"

A look of complete surprise came into Philip's face.

"As safe as another's," he answered.

"You are sure?"

Anthony made the very most of his question. Philip laughed.

"I can defend myself. You should know, Anthony. Even as long ago as when we were at Faubert's school, sword play was one of my knightly accomplishments."

Anthony was careful not to join in the laugh. He shook his head seriously.

"I am not thinking of an encounter according to the rules."

"No? Of murder then?"

Anthony did not answer directly. He tried to fill his eyes with great meaning.

"Haven't you an enemy in Hanover who would stop at nothing to make his account with you?"

Philip was puzzled. He reflected. He searched for names.

"Not that I know."

"Nor in Celle?"

There was a pause. Philip shook his head and smiled.

"Bernstorff doesn't love me, but he wouldn't wait at a corner in the dark to put a knife into my back."

"I was thinking of someone of a lower degree who would."

"I know of no such person. Why do you ask?"

"Because early this morning a man leading a horse met you in the gateway of Monplaisir——"

Philip's eyebrows drew together in a frown. All the good-humour departed from his face. He fixed his eyes upon Anthony with a savage glance.

"How do you know?" he asked sharply.

Anthony grew red. He had been so intent upon shooting his arrow that he had given no thought to the equivocal position he had been himself occupying in the lime-tree avenue. He did not answer.

"You were watching?" said Königsmark.

"I was watching," Craston returned. "I saw you flinch. I heard the cry you uttered. You were afraid, my Colonel of the Guards. You were terribly afraid."

Philip's face darkened as the blood rushed into it. His body shook but it was with rage; and the glitter of his eyes was the glitter of swords. For a little while he choked so that he could not utter a word. Then his hand went to his sword-hilt and came away again with a gesture almost of despair.

"I was taken by surprise," he said at length in a quiet sullen voice. "I once passed some terrible hours in the Chapel at Celle. I was a boy. I was helpless. I felt a bow-string tightening round my throat. I suffered such terror as I thought no one could suffer and live. I am tormented by shame when I remember it. The man leading the horse was one of the two men who held me at their mercy. When I came face to face with him suddenly in the dark of the morning and the lamp flashed upon his face, I was suddenly a boy again, the cords on wrists and ankles——" and he broke off with such a look of shame and fury upon his face as Craston had never seen on any face. Philip beheld himself on his knees again at Bernstorff's feet, cringing, pleading for his life with the tears wet upon his cheeks. He stepped forward and beat with his clenched fist upon the table.

"Yes, I was frightened last night, Mr. Craston," he cried. "Make the most of it. But, believe me, you never did a more unwise thing than to remind me of it."

He threw back his head. His lips twisted in a sneer. His eyes challenged Craston as they had challenged him in the Court of the Old Bailey.

"I must go," he said quietly. "I am to meet Prince Charles in a few minutes at the Leine Palace. He is to take me to pay my respects to Her Highness the Princess Sophia Dorothea."

Prince Charles, as Anthony Craston knew well, was the one friend whom Sophia Dorothea had amongst the five brothers of her husband.

"We shall meet then in the Princess's apartments," said Anthony. "For I am carrying to her some messages from her mother at Celle."

"A rivederci then," said Königsmark lightly and he went out of the room and down the stairs. A minute afterwards Craston heard his carriage roll away. Then he shouted for his servant.

"Quick, man! I must change my clothes. I have a visit to pay. Help me!"

CHAPTER XX

ACHILLES AND IPHIGENIA MEET AGAIN

PHILIP KÖNIGSMARK threw off his leisurely indifference as soon as he had closed the door behind him. He ran down the stairs and sprang into his carriage. To the footman who was holding open the door he said:

"To the Leine Palace and as quick as you can."

He leaned back against the cushions.

"The young diplomatist is smitten to the heart," he reflected with a chuckle. "The young diplomatist lurked jealously in the avenue and has a story which does not show me in the prettiest light. He is thinking that it will be good diplomacy to tell it. And it might be if he could tell it first. But the great God Etiquette stands in his way. Our morals may be loose but our etiquette is irreproachable. Anthony cannot present himself in his boots to Her Highness the Princess Sophia Dorothea."

So whilst Anthony Craston was hurriedly changing into a more seemly attire, Philip drove into the great courtyard at the side of the Leine Palace. Facing him was the long wing in which Sophia Dorothea had her apartments. To his left was the guard-room and the entrance. Philip was shown at once to the rooms of Prince Charles on the second floor which looked across the street to the Alte Palace.

"Charles, we must be quick," he said.

Prince Charles, a youth two years younger than Philip, with the face of a cherub, was standing in front of a looking-glass and carefully drawing a fall of lace-edged batiste over a cluster of satin bows at his throat.

"I have sent word that we are coming. Sophy is expecting us. There's no hurry," said Charles.

"There's all the hurry in the world," said Philip.

"I am ready."

Charles led his friend down to the first floor and through a succession of high rooms with painted walls and curtains of red velvet and ceilings decorated with gold, the throne-room, the council hall, the ballroom, the great parlour.

"I should lose my way without you for a guide," said Philip.

He was laughing now and a gleam of sunlight glistened on the gold of the ceilings and flamed upon the walls. But an hour was to come when all these rooms were dark and Philip was to blunder from one to the other with outstretched hands, like a man blindfold in a labyrinth.

"It is not as intricate as the Palace at Dresden," said Charles.

It was at Dresden that the two had met and begun their friendship.

At the end of the great parlour a door led into the wing of the Castle, and as he opened it, Charles stopped.

"I should like you to be a friend to Sophy," he said earnestly. "I hold no brief for the Platen woman. Sophy declared war and held her own for awhile —she had more spirit than wisdom—and for awhile after her boy was born, it looked as if she might win. But there's my father, you see," and he shrugged his shoulders. "The Platen woman holds the big cards and knows how to play them, damn her!"

He hesitated as if he had something more to say.

"I had the honour to know the Princess when I was a page at Celle a long time ago," said Philip. "She has no doubt forgotten me but— —"

"Oh no, she hasn't," her brother-in-law interrupted. "When I sent her word that I was bringing you, she replied that she had very pleasant memories of you,"—again he hesitated and again he flew off upon a different theme than the one he had in his mind.

"I haven't told her of your appointment here. I shall leave you to break that good news to her yourself."

"Thank you," said Philip.

He was anxious to move on. Anthony Craston would be dressed now. He might be hurrying to the Leine Palace. It was possible that he had already been admitted into Sophia Dorothea's presence. But Charles still held his ground, with his hand twisting the handle of the door and never opening it.

"Look you, Charles," said Philip. "You have something you want to say to me. Let me hear it!"

Charles nodded his head.

"I have, but it's delicate. You may say that it's none of my business. You'll have the right to. But I'm thinking of Sophy. You led out George Louis' lady in a minuet last night," he blurted out.

"I did," answered Königsmark quietly.

"It's said too, that you went out to Monplaisir afterwards."

"It's true."

"And lost a large sum to Clara."

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"Five thousand thalers."

"And remained after the last guest had gone."

Philip did not answer that accusation and Charles went on quickly.

"We might keep all that from Sophy. She would be—well—hurt. An old friend rushing off hot-foot to the enemy—d'you see?—to the enemy who's keeping open house on Sophy's money. Not too pretty! I was disappointed. There, it's out! You have made a name for yourself in the world. I'm nobody. I hope you won't resent what I've said."

And Charles, having rid himself of his rebuke with a good deal of flushing and shuffling and looking down on the ground and up to the ceiling —Charles at the age of twenty was little more than a pleasant boy—drew a breath and waited for an answer in a suspense.

Philip laid his hand upon the boy's arm.

"I am a little moved," he said gravely. "I like you all the better for your frankness."

Charles smiled in a great relief.

"That's the best of news to me, Philip. Then," and he looked eagerly at Königsmark, "we'll keep yesterday night a secret from Sophy?"

Philip shook his head.

"We can't."

"Surely," Charles urged. "The Platen woman won't talk. She has my good father to think about. And for the others—why it'll pass for the ordinary malice of the day."

"That won't do," said Philip.

"Why?"

"An old friend of mine is hurrying as fast as he can to carry the horrid story to Her Highness."

Anthony Craston would have recognised the bravado and the note of ironic banter in Philip's voice. To Prince Charles it was new and it troubled him. He looked anxiously at the new Colonel of the Guards.

"Philip, I was hoping that you would be a good friend," he said reproachfully. "Sophy has desperately few. Max, my elder brother, pesters her with his attentions. George Louis never goes near her if he can help it. My mother lectures her on English history and gives her formalities instead of affection. My father has a soft corner of his heart for her but it's not a

very noticeable corner. I think that Knesebeck, her maid-in-waiting and I are the only two in the whole Court of Hanover who are really fond of her. She doesn't belong to us you see." He looked Philip up and down. "We're earthier than she is, and I hoped you would perhaps help to equalise the scales."

"I came to Hanover with that purpose," Königsmark said; and his face was now very grave and very gentle.

"Yet you went to Monplaisir," Charles objected.

"And Mr. Anthony Craston is hurrying to tell Her Highness of my visit," Philip answered with a touch of impatience. "If she is to think of me as her friend, I and not another must be the first to tell her. Hurry, Charles, hurry, or Mr. Craston will outpace us."

Charles was persuaded. He opened the door and led the way into a corridor lighted by a row of windows looking on to the courtyard. At the first door he stopped and went in. A page sprang to his feet.

"Her Highness is expecting me," said Charles, and the page threw open an inner door. Charles followed him so closely that the page had not time to call out his name. Over Charles' shoulder Philip Königsmark saw Sophia Dorothea rise quickly out of a chair and come forward expectantly. He heard her voice, lower in tone than when he had last heard it, but with the same eager lilt.

"Charles," she cried and then stopped in disappointment. "Oh, you sent me word——"

"That I was bringing a friend to you. I have not broken it," and he turned in the doorway and held out his hand. "Philip!"

As Philip went forward, he heard Sophia Dorothea catch her breath and saw her step back so that the window was behind her and her face in shadow. She had been waiting for him all that morning, wondering what changes the six years had wrought in him. Yet now that he had come she was startled as though she had never expected his coming. She was even a little afraid.

Charles led his friend forward.

"This is Count Philip von Königsmark," he said gaily with a mock air of presenting a stranger.

Sophia held out a hand which in spite of all her efforts would shake. Königsmark kneeled in front of her and raised it to his lips and kissed it.

"Your Highness," he said, and she answered him in a whisper which no one heard but he.

"Philip!"

There was another woman in the room, older by a few years than Sophia, and taller. She had fair hair, was pleasant in her manner and handsome without distinction.

"This is my friend, Eleonore von Knesebeck," said Sophia. "Like me she comes from Celle."

Philip bowed to her and she dropped him a curtsey.

"So!" said Charles. "I have now done my morning's work," and he turned to von Knesebeck. "Shall we leave these aged friends to prattle of their vanished youth?" He nodded his head vigorously to the lady-in-waiting. "Philip, you dine to-day at my father's table. I shall come back to fetch you both. Mademoiselle?" and he turned towards the door.

Eleonore von Knesebeck hesitated. The good god Etiquette demanded that she should stay where she was, but he seemed to have retired into a cloud after the fashion of gods. Charles was nodding at her like a China Mandarin, and Sophia Dorothea gave her no instructions whatever. Philip had risen to his feet and stood, patient and respectful. Sophia was watching him with a tremulous smile upon her lips. For those two there was no one else in the room. Mademoiselle de Knesebeck had to make up her mind for herself. She followed her inclinations, which were romantic—and went. Charles closed the door of the antechamber behind him and sent the page out into the corridor.

"Listen to me, Mademoiselle!" he said. "A young English gentleman will come in a few minutes for an audience with the Princess."

"A Monsieur Craston."

"That is the man. You will be very polite to him for he is on the English Ambassador's staff and until we know whether we are going to fight for King Louis or for William of Orange, we must be sugar in the mouth to both sides. On the one side there's a hat and on the other a purse and my good father and the Platen woman between them must decide which they are going to have."

Fräulein von Knesebeck tried to look shocked, but she preferred her politics put in this frank and attractive way. They were intelligible.

"At the same time," Charles continued, "Monsieur Craston must not be admitted."

"But Your Highness, he has an audience," Eleonore von Knesebeck objected in dismay. "How shall I deny him?"

Prince Charles airily waved his hand.

"I leave that with complete confidence to your ingenuity, Mademoiselle."

"I shall say that Count Philip von Königsmark has brought to Her Highness an important letter from the Elector of Dresden," said Eleonore von Knesebeck, after a moment's thought.

Charles shook his head.

"Even a thick-headed Englishman would find it difficult to swallow that," he replied. "No, Mademoiselle, you will do better than that. And it will not be necessary to mention the name of Philip von Königsmark at all."

"No?" cried Eleonore in a greater consternation than before.

"No," answered Charles. "A simple, natural lie. What ailments do children have? The croup, say, and Her Highness is anxious that Mr. Craston should not catch it. Or the little girl is flushed and it might be the measles, but we shan't know definitely until this afternoon. I leave it to you Mademoiselle"; and Prince Charles sauntered out into the corridor, nodded to the page and went back towards the chief rooms.

Half-way along the corridor a staircase descended to a door opening on to the courtyard. Prince Charles, as he walked down the first steps, glanced through the window at his side. He stopped. In the courtyard below an usher was preceding a young gentleman dressed in mulberry velvet with silk stockings to match and a flowered waistcoat of white silk. Both were walking towards the door at which the staircase ended. Prince Charles chuckled.

"My friend, you have lingered for ten minutes too long before your dressing glass."

He turned back and walked again past the doors of Sophia Dorothea's apartment to a second and smaller flight of stairs. This ran down to a small private door on the side of the wing opposite to the courtyard. The door opened on to half a dozen broad steps above the Leine river. By the side of the steps a small footpath led along the bank of the river and climbed to an iron gate at the end of the river bridge. The gate was only locked at night and gave a private entrance to that wing of the Castle. Prince Charles passed through. He would give Philip half an hour in which to make his peace with his sister-in-law. There was altogether too much von Platen in Hanover.

CHAPTER XXI

A CONSPIRACY IS PLANNED

AFTER CHARLES had shut the door Sophia Dorothea held out her hand and drew Philip into the embrasure of the window. Her touch was almost careless and she laughed as she set him in the full light beside her. But there was a distinct anxiety in her eyes. She scanned his face to see how the six years of separation had dealt with him, whether they had marred him, whether they had made of him a stranger. But she was satisfied.

"Was it yesterday when I last spoke to you and you to me?" she asked.

Philip shook his head.

"For me there has been an eternity of yesterdays since then," he said slowly and with a little gesture he swept them away on to the dust heap. There was a touch of the theatre in his movement but Sophia Dorothea was not in the mood to notice it. She was back in her beloved Celle. That was the Aller not the Leine river which flowed beneath her windows. The flat parade ground shimmered and was changed into the French garden with its yew hedges, its beds of carnations, its gravelled walks between emerald strips of grass, its sleeping pool.

"It was on a summer evening. . . . We were in the Castle Chapel," he said, and with a little cry Sophia drew away.

Philip Königsmark's face hardened. He had been too abrupt, he thought; he should have revived those old memories more gently, more delicately. But there were newer memories which made the Castle Chapel hateful to Sophia. Where he wished her to see a quiet place in the shadows of dusk with a boy and girl sitting close in a loving companionship, she only saw a crowded glittering company in the midst of which she stood and listened like one stunned to the mockery of a marriage service. Philip had not at this moment the insight to understand her distress. He was only aware that his attack had gone astray. He sought another way.

"We were rehearsing a play for Her Highness' birthday," he began and she turned quickly towards him with such pain in her eyes that he stopped.

"Were we, Philip?" she asked gently. "I have forgotten its name." She added after a moment, in a whisper which was a prayer,

"And so have you."

Philip bowed his head.

"Thank you!" she said in the same low voice, and then with a change of note she hurried him into an account of his life during the long interval.

"I have heard of you, of course. Oh, I never doubted that I should."

"I was driven out of England, as I was driven out of Celle," he said bitterly with a flush of anger on his face.

"But the years afterwards made up for those defeats," she went on. "You had the fine ladies of Paris at your feet. You fought in Greece, in Hungary," and for a moment her eyes clouded. "I only breathed when I heard that you were safe. When your brother died, I was sure that it was you—so sure that I saw your phantom, with blood upon your face and clothes, coming silently along these corridors in the dead of night to tell me."

She had begun lightly with an easy raillery on his good fortunes with the frail ladies of Versailles, but when she spoke of his campaigns her voice faltered and when she spoke of his ghost flying from the battlefield at once to her, a sense of deep shame pierced his heart, shame for the high account in which she held him, shame too for the plan he had been so long nursing in his breast. For his ghost to have come speeding from the field where his dead body lay, she must have been living crowned in his heart, breathing in every pulse of his blood. No ghost of his had troubled her in the dark of the night. If it had been more than a thought of hers taking shape and a semblance of life—it had been his brother hastening to warn her of Philip's treachery.

"If I had died," he said slowly, "I would have tried not to trouble you."

"I should not have been grateful," said the Princess with a smile.

She had heard of him in Venice afterwards. "You and your friend from Saxony!" She recovered her light touch again. "The Duke took me there for a season after my boy was born," and she looked at him quickly and away again. "So I could picture you. The steps of some Palace on the Grand Canal, the lanterns swinging on the poles, and a gondola as black as night gliding up and you, with a dark cloak hardly hiding the gleam of your dress, stepping out as if the world belonged to you."

Philip Königsmark listened uneasily to her laughing chatter about his life in Venice. There was that graceless story of a nun whom he had wooed to her ruin and left behind. But the Princess had not heard of it, and he drew a breath of relief.

"And whilst you were there, I was here," she cried suddenly and her arms fell to her sides and a poignant sense of her desolation again touched

him to the quick.

"Sophia!" he said and he took a step towards her. But she held up her hands to ward him off and cried:

"I was here with my two children. You must see them, Philip, before you go back to Dresden."

"But I am not going back to Dresden," said Philip quietly.

Sophia Dorothea stared at him. No suspicion of the place which he was next to fill dawned upon her. She was sympathetic. He had held a high command in Saxony. There had been trouble. He had lost it.

"You quarrelled with your friend," she said regretfully.

"No."

"Some new adventure then?"

"Yes."

The Princess was puzzled. She drew her brows together in a frown and tapped upon the window pane and pursed her lips. Finally her face cleared and she cried out joyously like a child who has found the answer to a riddle.

"I have it."

"Let me hear!" said Philip.

"You have been offered a command at home."

Philip nodded his head with a smile.

"You have guessed it."

And a moment afterwards a look of fear came into her face. She was sunlight and blue sky one moment, and cloudy as a day of storm the next.

"But if Sweden joins with France against us, you'll be an enemy," she said in consternation. An enemy! Impossible word! Philip shook his head. The smile had not left his face, but it was now a smile of amusement.

"Nothing can make me your enemy."

They were boastful words uttered then merely to cajole her, but they were to mean what they said in the end and, meaning it, to cost him first his great fortune and afterwards his life.

Some glimmer of what he intended broke upon her disquiet, like a ray of light from behind a cloud.

"A command and at home," she repeated dwelling upon the last two words as though she were pressing their substance out of them. She turned to him with the colour flooding up over her neck and face.

"Here?"

She spoke the word as though she hardly dared and waited with parted lips for his answer.

"The Duke has appointed me Colonel of his Regiment of Guards."

That the Duke should make such a choice was nothing to marvel at. Adventurers passed from Court to Court offering their swords or their statesmanship. The doors were easy to force. A good address, a fine appearance and some pretension to noble birth had a ready market. Philip Königsmark was only twenty-two years in age. But he had come out of the Turkish war with a small laurel or two. He already commanded a regiment in Saxony. Moreover he was known for his wealth and his good looks as much as for his soldiering. He had descended upon Hanover with a great pomp of carriages and servants, horses and fine clothes. He was the very man whom a little Court would like to net with the lure of a high office and a paltry salary to go with it. The extraordinary circumstance to Anthony Craston in the affair had been that Philip Königsmark should have accepted his appointment. It was only not extraordinary to the Princess because he had made his reason plain to her. It was on her account, to be near her, that he had sought the small opportunity and the narrow life. She held out her hand to him in gratitude and, as he bent over it, she cried with a joyous laugh.

"I shall have two friends now in Hanover. I am rich."

Duke Ernst Augustus was kind and would not listen to slanders upon her even from Clara von Platen. But she saw him hardly at all. Duchess Sophia was tolerant to her, but held her at arm's length. Prince Charles was a friend and now she had another—one even dearer, one who made sacrifices so that he might be close to her.

Philip broke in upon her thoughts.

"You will hear from others no later than to-day something which I should hate you to misunderstand," he said gravely.

Sophia Dorothea laughed.

"No doubt I shall have a budget of lies to listen to."

"But this will be the truth."

A shadow spoilt for a moment this hour of sunlight. Philip was looking at her with eyes so serious, a face so anxious. She did not want to listen. There would be days enough for solemnities. But his eyes insisted.

"I will hear it then," she said with the pretty petulance of a child.

"Last night I went to the public Ball."

"Well. It's the custom on the second night of the Carnival in Hanover."

"I danced with Mademoiselle von Schulenberg."

She drew back. Her hand went to her breast.

"You, my friend?" she asked reproachfully.

"Towards the end of the dancing," he continued steadily, "I went with a party of other people to Monplaisir."

And now it seemed that he had struck her with a whip across the face. So this friend, lost long since and an hour ago recovered, was lost to her again. And he himself must tell her so. She turned abruptly from him, for her mortification had sent the tears stinging into her eyes.

"Your first night in Hanover!" she said in a low voice. "Oh, sir, it was well employed!"

Philip did not flinch from the bitterness of her voice.

"I meant it so to be," he said quietly, and then in a moment he was upon his knees before her. "I wanted everyone to think that I was her courtier. I wanted everyone to see me pay my homage to Mademoiselle von Schulenberg. I wanted no one to guess that I came to Hanover for the sake of you. I had heard in Dresden of those two women, of their sharp tongues and their bitter hatred because you outshone them when you cared to and turned your back on them when you were tired. Let them think that the newcomer had fallen at once at their feet, as I am heart and soul at yours! The more freedom for you and me! If I had met them with indifference and then sought you, I set their tongues wagging on the instant. Your friend? My dear, I could do you no worse service. If I turned my back at once upon Monplaisir, and at night our eyes met, or we talked together such words as we once talked, and shared such dreams as we once cherished, however carelessly our lips moved, should we escape their slanders? Every curious eye would follow us, every bitter tongue would spit its poison. Clara von Platen, Ermengarde von Schulenberg," and whilst his eyes were set anxiously on the face of the Princess, he muttered the names with so keen a ridicule that they had the very stamp of truth. "Their vanity is our shield! Let them prattle! You know, my Princess, on whom my heart waits," and then, with a cunning evocation of old days when they rehearsed a play they were never to act together, he poured out two lines of Racine as though his memory had always kept them fresh.

> 'A vous persécuteurs opposons cet asile
> Qu'ils viennent vous chercher sous les tentes d'Achille.'

There is no victory without attack. Philip the soldier knew it and Philip the lover shared his knowledge. The distress which had shadowed Sophia Dorothea's face lightened and softened into a smile of tenderness. The mere

rhythm of the lines made pinions of them to lift her back into the loveliness of untroubled days which never dawned soon enough and closed before their glow had changed to grey. Sophia Dorothea was not slow of wit. She would have found something too flamboyant for sincerity in Philip's ardour; she would have recognized that the years had not after all left him unscathed, that the hard rebuffs and the easy victories which followed upon them had stripped him of his eager generosity; but she was too glad of his return, she was too conscious of the alleviation of the slights under which she writhed, too grateful for the balm which his presence brought, to watch him carefully or to analyse his words.

But all his fine talk of the shield behind which they could live a private life of their own was the beginning of a conspiracy of two with its own secret language of glances and the touch of hands which must grow in peril with every move. Already the conspiracy was on foot. For as they heard the voice of Prince Charles in the ante-room, they drew apart, they became indifferent the one to the other.

"We thought that you were never coming back," Sophia Dorothea said as he entered the room.

Charles looked at Philip with a whimsical disappointment.

"And I who looked to do you both a service!" he cried. "There's a young man making talk with Knesebeck in the next room who shall show you a proper gallantry. Come Philip."

In the ante-room Anthony Craston was with difficulty sustaining a conversation with Eleonore von Knesebeck. He sprang to his feet as Prince Charles entered it with Philip close behind him.

"I am afraid that the Princess has kept you waiting longer than she would have wished to do," said Charles politely. "I too am afraid," Philip continued, "that some of Mr. Craston's news has already been told," and with the backward jerk of the head and the challenging grin which Anthony had now learnt so well to know, he followed his friend into the corridor.

CHAPTER XXII

AND HOW IT WORKED

THE conspiracy was put into practice that night. During the Carnival Duke Ernst Augustus kept open house. There were ten great tables set out for supper in the dining hall of the Leine Palace—Marquises and Marquesas from Italy, Counts and Countesses from Germany, Ministers of State, travellers making the Grand Tour—all were sorted out according to their rank and placed in their appropriate seats; and here and there some were especially favoured by an invitation to the Duke's own table. To-night Philip von Königsmark was bidden to take his place there. A few chairs away, Field-Marshal von Podevils gave him a warm welcome from the Hanoverian army. The Duke, now a corpulent and ageing man, had upon one side of him the fair-haired and lovely Duchess of Eisenach, on the other the shining beauty of the Princess of East Frisia. Sophia Dorothea was almost opposite to Philip. She had dressed herself with a care for her own distinction rather than the mode of the Court. Though her jewels were as splendid as her neighbours', they were of a lighter setting. They were a ripple of fire instead of a blaze and the soft folds of her gown gave to her a quality of daintiness which the stiff magnificence of the brocades about her could never achieve. There was a tender colour in her cheeks, her lips smiled and the little rivulet of diamonds twisted cunningly in and out of her ebony curls could not outsparkle the glances of her eyes.

Ernst Augustus liked to have pretty women about him. He thanked her with a kindly nod.

"When I was young we went to Venice for beauty. Now, my dear, we need not travel beyond Hanover."

Sophia Dorothea bowed with a smile of pleasure which quite transfigured her. But her eyes travelled round the table until they rested for the fraction of a second upon Königsmark's.

"Did you hear that?" they asked. "It was for you I spent two hours before my mirror."

The smile of pleasure too had been for him.

Madame von Platen and her husband were at the third table, and since Duchess Sophia preferred the quiet of Herrenhausen to the gaieties of Hanover, the Duke sent for Clara as soon as the company had risen from the meal. They played at the same table of Bassette in the big drawing-room next door, with Marshal Podevils and the Princess of East Frisia. Sophia Dorothea was carried away by Prince Charles just after Königsmark had paid his compliment to her upon the nice adjustment of her beauty and her dress.

"You run away Philip and find someone as rich as yourself to win money from," he said. "You can't play with beggars like me who have to go off to Herrenhausen and take a dose of English History if they lose a hundred pistoles. If you don't want to play, there's someone behind you, you can talk to."

Philip turned around with a laugh, but the laugh died on his lips—and in a fury with himself he realised that he had flinched. For the man in front of him was Bernstorff and Bernstorff was smiling. Bernstorff with his sharp little eyes had noticed that irrepressible movement of fear. He looked Philip over from head to foot. His jewelled green bird had been transformed into this most modish of young sparks, the page's livery had been exchanged for the adornments of a gallant, the silver buckles had become diamonds. But Diamond buckles were just as afraid of Chancellor Bernstorff to-day as Silver buckles had been six years ago.

"Count Philip von Königsmark!" he cried, his heart or whatever took its place quite warm towards the younger man. He had been sitting at the same table as the Platens and all through the meal had been consumed with a bitter jealousy of the greater people seated above him. He had not noticed Philip in the glittering company at the Duke's table because Philip's back was turned to him and he would certainly not have looked for him there. He saw with relief an opportunity to salve the pain of his jealousy with the pleasure of baiting a youth who had not outgrown a fear of him.

"It is some years since I had the honour of your company, Count Philip—let me see now!" and he screwed his brows together and pursed up his lips in a semblance of deep thought.

"Chancellors cannot be expected to remember pages, Monsieur Bernstorff," Philip replied.

The semblance of deep thought became in an instant a glare of real annoyance.

"Baron," he corrected sharply. "Baron von Bernstorff."

Philip bowed.

"You must pardon a wanderer. I had not heard," he said politely, and was for turning away. But the Baron was in no mind to forego his minute or two of amusement.

"It comes back to me," he said quickly. "It was in a darker place than this—yes—and you, I think, had not the gay and sprightly look you wear to-day."

"On the other hand," Philip replied, "Your Excellency's raillery is just the same blunt weapon that it was."

"Alas!" Bernstorff agreed, though his face darkened. "Raillery, Count Philip, should be as biting as a cord." He dwelt upon his comparison with a smirk. "I have not the knack of it, and between the two must choose the cord."

Again Philip tried to break away from this tormentor, but the tormentor had seen the blood rush into his victim's face. He took Philip by the arm and was amused to feel it shiver.

"May we hope to see you again in Celle?" he asked. "I remember that His Highness was disinclined to offer you a second welcome. But there is no longer a reason of any kind to hinder you. And there is much in Celle to interest even one who has been there before. Our chapel, for instance, though, to be sure, you have spent some quiet hours there . . ."

But Philip had had enough of the clumsy banter.

"This is very heavy work, Your Excellency," he said. "I cannot put you to the strain of it. It is unlikely that I shall be able to revisit Celle. My duties will keep me here."

"Duties?" cried the Baron, stopping in his walk.

"Duties," Philip answered. "Your Excellency did not remark, I think, that I had the honour to-night of dining at His Highness's table."

The Baron was bewildered. He was also annoyed.

"I did not," he answered shortly.

"And, indeed, from the position which you occupied it was hardly likely that you should," Philip continued suavely.

And there he should have stopped. He had Bernstorff blinking at him. The little page whom he had turned out of Celle in disgrace, dining cheek-by-jowl with the greatest ladies of Europe at the table of the August Personage who was the fountain source of his own prosperity? Incredible! Confounding! What was the world coming to? Bernstorff stood, oblivious to the little reminder of his position in the hierarchy of the banquet, with his mouth open and his throat uttering the queerest spluttering sounds.

"Yes," continued Philip, and he was persuaded by the grotesque appearance of the Chancellor to offer himself to the most obvious and tingling retort. "Yes, His Highness has given me to-day the command of his Regiment of Guards."

Chancellor Bernstorff gaped. Then a recollection of a boy pleading at his feet in an agony of fear came swiftly back to him; and on the top of that another recollection of a spick-and-span young exquisite who only five minutes back had flinched like a coward at the mere sight of him. And the boy on his knees and the young exquisite in the satin coat was now the Colonel of His Highness's Household troops!

Chancellor Bernstorff sniggered. The snigger grew into a broad smile. The broad smile expanded into a laugh.

"Count Philip," he said with a low bow, "no one can fear now for His Highness's safety. The great Generals of France will hurl themselves in vain against the frontiers of Hanover."

Philip's cheeks flamed. He tried to remember that he had played his part on the battlefields of Greece and Hungary. But he had flinched to-night from this little pettifogging statesman—just as at four o'clock this morning he had flinched—and with a cry which had been heard—from Bernstorff's man-at-arms Heinrich Muller. Was he never to get rid of the two obsessions which turned him into a babbling child—his banishment from Celle and his flight from England? He threw back his head in a gesture of despair, and he caught the troubled and inquiring glance of Sophia Dorothea as she took her seat at the Bassette table.

Chancellor Bernstorff, his crude raillery apart, was a clever man, but he could not understand the look of peace and the tranquil smile which suddenly transfigured Philip's face. The man whose weak point he had found stood armoured before him.

Philip strolled over to the Bassette table and stood for a moment or two behind Sophia Dorothea's chair. She was aware of him, she played a false card and lost fifty pistoles by her error. Prince Charles pounced joyously upon her stake.

"Philip," he cried, "I was down to my last thaler. You have brought me luck."

"And I meant to bring it to the Princess," said Philip ruefully.

For a moment her eyes rested upon his. "You have," they said to him. She threw down her cards and turned to Field-Marshal Podevils, who was standing near to her.

"I beg you to take my hand, Monsieur le Maréchal. I hold the best of cards and make the worst of them. You, however, can snatch a victory with all the odds against you."

The old Marshal had a passion for cards. It had survived the love of women. It competed with the love of war.

"If you will, gracious Princess," he said, and he put on his spectacles as he took Sophia Dorothea's seat.

"I find the room hot," she said to Philip. "I place myself under the care of His Highness's troops."

The doors of this big room stood open, and from a pair of them set in the middle of the wall a short flight of shallow steps led down to a winter garden. On their way to it a little crowd was gathered about a table where George Louis was playing with Ermengarde von Schulenberg for a partner. Fortune was against them. The milk-white placidity of Mademoiselle was ruffled and George Louis was openly scowling.

"They are the devil—these cards," he cried. "We will have a new pack," and, looking up, he saw his wife looking on from the opposite side of the table. He leaned back in his chair.

"No, it is not the cards," he said loudly with a sneer upon his face. "The cards will do very well. They are good German cards. I must look for my ill-fortune elsewhere."

He was staring straight at Sophia Dorothea without any recognition of her in his eyes. His face was red and swollen with overeating, his hands were thrust deep in the pockets of his waistcoat. On both sides of Sophia Dorothea the bystanders shrank a little distance away, so that she stood alone in a little empty space. Her face was pale, but she held her small dark head high and a smile was on her lips.

"And it shall pass from Your Highness, when Your Highness wills," she said in a quiet, clear voice.

There was a little movement in the group like a breath of wind across a field of corn. There were few there who were unaware that Sophia Dorothea had pleaded for permission to retire to her parents with her children and that the great income which her dowry brought every year to the Duchy forbade the granting of her request. Then everyone stood motionless—except Sophia Dorothea. Since no answer came from her husband, lounging uncouthly in his chair, she sank before him in a slow curtsey of an exquisite grace and, rising again, moved away. As she moved, the little crowd, now twice its size, broke into voice again. Amazement that etiquette should be so flaunted. Had respect fled from the world! Were Princes of the Blood to be bearded by

their wives in public, their words taken up and mocked? Above these shocked voices rose the gross laughter of George Louis.

"Gentlemen! Ladies! Now that the ballet is ended, we can go on with the play."

Sophia Dorothea walked down the steps into the winter garden, with Philip close behind her. It was his cue to keep silent. Had he taken her part, he lost her. Had his fingers touched the hilt of his sword, as they had tingled to do, he would have been dry-drummed out of Hanover in the morning. And she would have lost him. He had held his tongue, but a new recognition of her high spirit and courage had made reticence almost unbearable. But it wasn't new. He understood that, as he followed her down the steps, watching the proud carriage of her head and the easy lightness of her step. It was remembered; and a sense of shame at his forgetfulness made him now hot, now cold. Shame at his forgetfulness? Philip during these few minutes, so near to this fine revelation of her imprudent soul was trying to be honest with himself. "Shame at my scheming! That's the truth, isn't it? Shame at my pursuit of her, just to get rid of a few obsessions, a sense of inferiority, a mortification—just to make the mask I wear my real face!"

There were others of the company seeking a refuge from the noise and heat of the reception room in the quiet of the winter garden. They rose as Sophia Dorothea came down the steps, but with a gesture and a shake of the head she asked them to be seated. She crossed the room towards the window and, drawing the curtain aside, raised a small white-gloved hand to the side of her face as if to shut out the glare of light behind her, and peered out across the Leine river. Königsmark stepped up to her side. Both seemed to be gazing at something dimly seen in the darkness beneath them.

When by her strategy she had set him in a natural position at her side and in a sort of privacy, she said in a low voice:

"Bernstorff was harassing you?"

Königsmark drew in a breath of surprise. He had expected some bitter word of her husband's effort to humiliate her. She was giving her thoughts to his small troubles. She was glancing at him with an anxious care as though they quite outweighed her own. He answered her lightly.

"The story of an old wound."

Sophia Dorothea shook her head.

"I was watching you, Philip."

"When our eyes met, I felt the sting no more."

A little smile of pleasure made her lips tender.

"A pretty compliment?"

"The truth."

And it was true. Philip recognised it with joy. He forgot the remorse which had troubled him a minute since as he descended the steps. The queer conviction which he had nursed for so many years that with Sophia won he would be free of his obsessions rushed over him again. What would that night in the Castle Chapel, its indignity, its pain, its fear, mean to him? What power would the shame of his flight from England have to sting him? He had the answer. The mere meeting of her troubled eyes had been enough to arm him against all Bernstorff's clumsy banter.

"We should go back," she said regretfully—and lingered where she was.

"I leave my heart with you," said Philip.

"Ask for it back and I have lost it," she answered softly.

They mounted the steps again. The card tables were still full. The great room with its statues of shining gold, its hangings of scarlet velvet and its throng of gorgeously-apparelled guests took them and blent them with the company. Sophia Dorothea held out her hand with a formal dignity.

"Count Philip, I am much beholden to you for your conversation."

"Madame," said he, no less formally, "would it had been more worthy of your ears."

But as he bent his head over her hand, she almost spoilt the fine show of her condescension and his respect. For she began to laugh, with a joyous ripple of music in her voice which no one yet had heard in Hanover.

The game of pretence was amusing for its own sake. She had her friend back, and she played a game with him which set the whole day to a lively tune. She could be stately and formal and aloof and all with an intense and secret enjoyment, because at some moment just for a second their hands would touch or their eyes meet. Philip as Colonel of the Guards had the freedom of the Castle. He could choose his moment and wait upon the Princess in her apartments with the romantic Knesebeck to stand watchdog in the ante-room. If there was a quadrille in masquerade and he was Orpheus and she the Spirit of Music, there would be a moment when he would abandon Eurydice for her and she would become the handmaid Prose to wait upon him. It was all in full view with Silenus close at hand making fun upon his ass or a Vizier of Turkey leading in his kettledrums. Or there would be the Opera with a whispered meeting in a dark corridor whilst Borosini or Salvadore held the house in his spell. And nights must be arranged when he must lose his money at Monplaisir. They kept their secret well during these weeks and had their enjoyment out of keeping it. It was as yet a cherished possession and not a galling fetter. They played a game and for them both a

dangerous game. For it was one of those games which when passion runs high become desperately real and has death as the penalty of the loser.

Then, in the spring of the year, Ernst Augustus was privately promised by the Emperor his Electoral Hat. Hanover was ranged upon the side of the Emperor in the Great Alliance against France. There was a beating of drums and a drilling of troops from morning to night on the parade ground across the Leine River. George Louis was to lead his Brigades to the Rhine and a letter came to Philip von Königsmark from Duchess Sophia bidding him to wait upon her at Herrenhausen.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE GARDEN THEATRE

PHILIP drove out in his coach to Herrenhausen. It was towards evening in the month of May. The lime-tree avenue was in leaf and the birds jubilant in the darkness of the branches. The earth smelled fresh, the light was warm and golden, and there was a blitheness in the air which told that the world had taken off its overcoat. Philip, in his fine coach, however, had no lift of the heart to match the land's welcome to the summer. He could not imagine any favourable reason for Duchess Sophia's summons. He had met her, of course, often enough in the discharge of his duties and had found her always courteous but quite indifferent. Why should she send for him now unless some whisper of the secret which he shared with Sophia Dorothea had reached her ears? If it had, he could expect little forbearance from that proud lady. He was no more than twenty-two years old. The thought of her sharp tongue made him quake, the dread that she would demand his resignation from his command cast him into despair. Was he for a third time to be banished in disgrace, and this time with no possible reparation to plan for and dream of as a solace?

He was prompt to the hour, and was admitted at once to that long book-lined room with the windows looking down the broad path to the distant fountain where it was her pleasure most to sit. The twilight was stealing into the room, and Duchess Sophia sat very upright and still, with her back to what light there was.

"Your Grace did me the honour to send for me," and Philip bowed low.

For a few moments no answer was made to him. There was no change in the marble stillness of the lady in the high-backed chair.

Philip's heart sank into his shoes. It remained there when at last she spoke, for her voice was broken, as though rage strangled her.

"Count Philip von Königsmark?"

"At your service, Madame," and Philip's voice was no steadier than her own.

"My boy, Charles——" she began, and broke off and began again. "He's Blondel to your Richard," and she stopped again.

Philip drew no encouragement from those words. She was scoffing at him. He cut a fine figure with his beauty and his French clothes at the Court of Hanover, but he felt a very humble small animal in the presence of Duchess Sophia.

"Then he oversings my praises," said Philip timidly.

The old lady, as in those days she was accounted, though she was only fifty-nine, broke out with the petulant frankness which sooner or later all about her must expect.

"Come nearer, sir! God bless me, you are not Daniel and I'm not a lion. Let me see Charles' friend! Nearer, sir! Here, with me, in the window!"

And Philip's heart leapt with a bound into its proper place. He stepped forward to the window with a smile. But the smile died out of his face as she turned towards the light. He understood the broken, strangled voice. For her tears were streaming down her face and she made not the slightest effort to hide or check them.

No doubt Philip was moved by the sudden revulsion of his feelings. But the frank display of grief in a woman so aloof, so beset by her royal lineage, touched him, too. He sank on his knee in front of her.

"Madame, how can I serve you?"

Duchess Sophia leaned forward quickly. She was eager to make sure that the warmth of his voice was matched by the sincerity of his face.

"By serving with Charles."

Philip rose to his feet with his anxiety dispelled. Was it for no more than to ask this easily-answered question that she had sent for him so urgently? Why, he would serve with Charles with the greatest happiness in the world. Where could he find a more likely companion for a campaign?

But she held up her hand.

"You must hear all before you decide," and she explained to him with a timidity which in so forthright a character made a doubled appeal to him, that the Emperor Leopold had called for a contingent of the disciplined troops of Hanover to strengthen his forces in the East against the Turkish allies of King Louis.

"Charles is to go with them," she said, "a boy of twenty. He will be far away and for a long while. There will be greater hardships than in Flanders or on the Rhine. More dangers, very like. Of all my dear sons, he is the one I love best—shame on me for saying it! My old heart would be easier if I knew that you were at his side, Count Philip."

"We are to go—whither?" he asked.

Duchess Sophia seized eagerly upon that "we." But again she hesitated.

"To the Morea," she said at last, speaking the name on an anxious question. "You have bitter memories of the Morea," she went on in a rush. "Your regiment will march to the Rhine with George Louis. There will be greater opportunities of distinction. It will be nearer home. You have the right to lead it. Charles would not ask you to give it up and make so great a sacrifice. But mothers may plead where their sons can't."

"And Field-Marshal Podevils . . . ?" he began.

"Consents unwillingly."

Duchess Sophia struck a gong and lamps were brought into the room and the curtains drawn over the windows. She meant to be honest with her son's friend. He was little older in years than Charles but experienced in war, as Charles was not. He must know all that he would lose—the easier progress, the wider field, the opportunity of leave if the troops went into winter quarters, the avoidance of a more barbarous enemy in a savage country of lamentable recollections. She would not trick him into consent.

Philip heard her out. He must give up, besides, a much greater thing of which Duchess Sophia had not a suspicion, but he did not waver. He had inhibitions, a certain sensitiveness of mind, a delicacy, all things which were strange to the Königsmark family but he was of their stock. It was not in him to turn his back on fighting when it came in his way, and the more he remembered that his brother had fallen in the Morea, the more passionately he desired there to avenge his death. His spirit was high as he faced Duchess Sophia and a smile of anticipation was on his face.

"I shall go with the greatest goodwill," he said, "and what a man may do for his friend's sake, I will."

It was simply and modestly said. "You have taken a burden from my heart," Her Highness was graciously pleased to reply and Count Philip bent over her hand and kissed it.

It was quite dark before he left the audience chamber, and when he was half way along the corridor, Eleonore von Knesebeck slipped out from the door of a room and stopped him.

"Are you here, Mademoiselle?" he asked in surprise.

She put a finger to her lips. Between the usher at Duchess Sophia's door and the footmen in the lobby, the corridor was empty. But Eleonore was a romantic and must imagine spies in every corner.

"Stop your coach, Count Philip, a little way beyond the gates on the way to Hanover. There is a door in the park fence," and with frowns and warning gestures and enough mystery in her movements to rouse the suspicions of

the village idiot she glided out of sight. Philip got into his coach at the great door and drove straight on out of the gates. He passed the Palace wing and by the light of the lamps saw the little door in the high paling about the gardens on his right-hand. He stopped the carriage and got out. It was of dark blue lacquer, but his arms were painted in gold and red upon the panels.

"Put out the lamps and wait under those trees," he said to his coachman in a quiet voice, pointing ahead to where a great clump of beeches stretched out their foliage above the fence. The coachman drove on. Philip drawing his blue cloak close over his shining dress of embroidered satin pushed upon the door. It yielded at once. Within Eleonore von Knesebeck was waiting, out of breath with her run from the Palace. She locked the door, and taking his hand led him between the tall horn-beam hedges. There was no moon in the sky but a vast panoply of crowded stars, and when they passed a cascade of water splashing into a stone basin, they could see long wrinkled beams of light, very slender and delicate, plunging down to reach other stars which danced to the cascade's music. The air was fragrant with the smell of flowers and mellow as a night in June.

They passed between high gates of wrought iron and descended some steps into a green amphitheatre with white statues glimmering on either side. In front of them was a raised terrace of grass over which the boughs of great trees met, making the place a theatre, though with a depth of stage no indoor theatre ever had. For the terrace within the avenue ran far back into the darkness, and from the end of it the splash of falling water came faintly to their ears as though it was the echo of the cascade which they had left behind.

On both sides of this dark stage big white statues made the pillars of the proscenium and by the side of the one upon the left something white fluttered as though the statue had shaken at their approach. Eleonore fell back. Philip ran across the centre of the amphitheatre.

"Philip!"

It was no more than a whisper and then she was within his arms, her face hidden against his breast, her arms about his neck, and her breath coming in great sobs. The game had become real. There was no longer amusement or laughter in it. The secret had become a fetter.

"Philip, you won't go."

"Dearest, I must."

Her hands linked themselves more tightly behind his neck as though they would keep him there, and hold him so through the night till the morning dawned.

"I lose both my friends then and all my heart." She took her hands away from his shoulders and drew him into the shadow of the trees.

"Oh, you must go! I know it. But when? Not yet! Oh, not yet!"

"Sophy!"

"It will be soon then?"

"Very soon."

She held him away from her. By the light of the stars he could see her face upturned and very pale, and her dark eyes glistening with her tears.

"Philip, listen! We have only a moment. You will write to me?"

"Whenever a post goes."

"You must send your letters to Eleonore."

"I will."

"You must call me by a false name. Oh, my love! My love," and she wrung her hands together in anguish, "If we were back in Celle!"

Philip smiled bitterly.

"No, I should be hiding in the Chapel!" and her hands dropped to her sides. Yes, in Celle as here, there had been secrecies, precautions, fears. Sophia Dorothea shivered and he drew her close to him and took her within his cloak. In the tree above them a blackbird suddenly poured out upon the night its clear sweet melody. Sophia Dorothea lifted her head with a start. For a moment they stood with his arms about her, listening in a rapture to the liquid notes. Then he bent and kissed her lips.

"Sweetheart, before I go," he began in a low voice, but she interrupted him eagerly.

"Yes, before you go, I must come once to your house," she whispered. "I have thought of it for so long. If it is only for a minute. I must see the room in which you sit. I must touch and hold the little things you use," and she uttered a small tremulous laugh. "I shall steal one Philip when you're not looking, so that I may have something of you whilst you are away!"

The thought of his absence caught at her heart again, and behind the thought was the dreadful knowledge that where he was going his brother had fallen; and the dreadful fear that where his brother had fallen, he might fall too.

"Oh come back, come back," she implored. "You are going, my dear, when most I need you. You must come back——"

A low whistle reached them from the darkness towards the house and her words were cut off sharply as though the shears had closed about her throat.

“I am asked for,” she cried on a note of fear. “I must go! Philip! Oh Philip!”

For a second she clung to him passionately and then her white figure flitted across the grass as noiselessly as a phantom and she was gone. Fear was at her heels. From that night in the garden of Herrenhausen fear was to keep her company.

Philip Königsmark remained for awhile hidden in the shadow of the trees. For this night he had planned and schemed. Victory was to free him from the bondage of his obsessions and victory was at his door. But the obsessions were now dragged out into the light and shown trivial and beneath contempt. Because he dreamed of himself flying on and on before a mob which never slackened its pursuit nor lessened the fury of its cries—down narrow alleys, along broad streets, and always, always towards the lighted windows of a house before which an impassable throng stood absolutely silent, absolutely still; because he must start back with a cry at the sight of Heinrich Muller or flinch at a sudden word from the Chancellor of Celle; to spare himself these paltry terrors he must put this one who so loved him to a torment of pain and fear.

Philip walked back to the little gate. His coach was waiting under the trees. He bade the coachman light the lamps again and drive on. In a few minutes the lighted windows of Monplaisir blazed out upon the night. He had proposed to himself to halt there on his return. Now more than ever prudence counselled it. To keep Clara von Platen from guessing his secret—her secret—was there anything now more necessary than that?

“But I can’t do it,” he said to himself. “The look on my face would warn her of a change. Besides it would be a sacrilege,” and he bade his coachman drive straight on to Hanover.

Sophia Dorothea might well take flight across the lawns and between the horn-beam hedges in fear. The chief protection of their secret was thrown down by Philip Königsmark that night.

CHAPTER XXIV

A DANGEROUS HOUR

THE camp was pitched five miles away from Hanover; and on the night before the march to the South began, everything being ready to the buckles on the last knapsack, Philip mounted his charger and rode in to Hanover. He left his charger at his stables, and after ordering his head groom to have the animal saddled by five o'clock in the morning, he walked to his house which had its wide front upon a narrow street and a great garden behind it stretching down to the Leine river. He rapped upon the door and was admitted by an old servant who had served his father before him. It was then ten o'clock of the night.

Philip stood for a moment in the hall.

"All the baggage has gone forward, Johann?" he asked.

"The last of it, my Lord, was sent to the camp this afternoon."

"And the servants?"

"They have gone back to their homes."

"Then except for you and me the house is empty?"

"Yes."

Philip stood for a moment listening. Now and then a tread of the stairs cracked. Now and then a distant foot knocked upon the cobbles of a street. Unconsciously he subdued his voice.

"You can put out the lamp here, Johann."

A great lantern hung on a chain from the roof of the hall. Johann lowered it and blew the candles out.

"That will do, old friend. I must be up betimes to-morrow. Will you knock upon my door at four in the morning and knock until I answer you?"

"I will. Is that all?"

"All," said Philip. A door was open upon the first floor and a yellow light streamed from it and flung a bright panel on the floor and wall of the corridor. "I shall be writing letters until late Johann and I don't wish to be disturbed."

"Very well, my Lord."

The old man walked slowly up the stairs. When he reached the landing he turned.

"I beg your lordship to remember that you are the last of the Königsmarks. If your lordship were to fall, a famous race is gone, beloved of many but by none more than its servants. I shall pray God night and morning to keep you safe."

"I thank you, Johann," said Philip very gently. "Good night!"

He waited in the darkness of the hall until Johann's footsteps died away. Then he unlocked the door into the street and setting it an inch or two ajar went up to the lighted room. It was the room he generally used and it was furnished in a light French style with couches upholstered in pale silk, glass candelabra ornamented with gold in which wax candles burned, and tables of satin wood. Curtains of lavender satin draped the windows and a big writing table with an armchair faced the fireplace. A silver lamp burned on the writing table and on a side table a bottle of Rhine wine stood with a set of drinking glasses; a case of Dresden china stood against a wall enamelled in white and here and there a gilt-framed mirror hung. On the mantel-shelf a clock, the work of Gille Martinot, shone like a jewel and chimed the hours, and the white carpet was soft underfoot as moss. Philip set light to a small wood fire upon the hearth, and then carefully put out all the candles against the wall, leaving only the lamp upon the table burning in the room. He passed into his dressing-room beyond and changed from his uniform into an easier dress. When he came back into the room, he noticed a small package which lay upon the great table. He seized it eagerly and tore it open. Within was a shagreen case and unfastening the clasp, he saw a miniature of himself most delicately painted on ivory. He laid it down with a smile of relief. Then he sat down at his desk and drawing a paper from his pocket began to copy it. It was a paper with a column of names and figures on the one side and a column of names only corresponding to the first column over against it.

Thus, on the left hand, he wrote "Leonisse" and against it "The Princess Sophia Dorothea." Then again on the left hand "Tercis" and on the right hand "Philip Königsmark." A number followed "100" and opposite to that he put "Duke Ernst Augustus." It was a cypher which he was copying and although he had invented it himself, he was not trusting in so important a matter to his memory. He copied it slowly, his eyes glancing from sheet to sheet; and since the list was long and he wrote in a large schoolboyish hand with a good deal of puffing and heavy breathing over his task, he took a long time to complete it. At times the names were apt enough. For instance Duchess Sophia became "*La Romaine*," and Duke Ernst Augustus, since he

was perpetually hoodwinked by Clara Platen, "*l'Innocent*." Clara herself only deserved and got a number like a convict. She became "202." Eleonore von Knesebeck was admirably connoted by the title of "*La Sentinelle*," with "*La Confidente*" for a variation; and his own sister the famous Aurora figured appropriately as "*l'Aventurière*." Some of the names however were merely picked out by chance from the last romance of the day; and by an unhappy accident which was afterwards to do the Princess an infinity of harm, he had applied to her father Duke George William the displeasing pseudonym of "*Le Grondeur*."

However the copy was finished before the clock struck eleven. Philip counted the clashing stroke of the Church clock in a fear that midnight had caught him before he was ready. He sat listening intently for a sound in the street or the slight jar as a door was closed. But the town was asleep now and nothing broke the stillness of the room but the fall of a burning log upon the hearth and the ticking of the clock.

He folded the copy of the cypher into four and fitted it with the miniature of him into the shagreen case. That done, he set it by his side and wrote to his sister Aurora then staying upon an estate of his at Hamburg. This letter was midsummer madness, even for lovers in much less peril than these. The letters which were to pass between them were to be sent to Aurora—oh after they had been laughed over and wetted with tears and kisses and re-read a hundred times. They were to reach Aurora in the end and she was to keep them as the most sacred trust.

"I adjure you, my dear sister, that not one of them be lost. Each page will be a drop of heart's blood which in after years we shall gather up again. Reading them we shall revisit old scenes and refresh our lives with yesterdays."

At this point he made a short flight into dithyrambics and brought the letter to an end. He had hardly sealed it when without a sound the door was opened as by some breath of wind. Philip sprang up and ran to it. Leaning against the wall of the corridor with her hand pressed against her heart was Sophia Dorothea.

"You are alone?" she whispered.

For answer Philip drew her into the room and gently lifted her hood back from her face. He shut the door.

"It is you," he said and he gently turned her face up to his, holding her chin in the cup of his hand. "I hardly dared to hope for it."

He smiled.

"Oh I could bathe your feet with tears of gratitude. I ought to pray that you should forget me. I am too much your friend not to know that I should. But I can't!" he cried passionately. "If I won the Ottoman Empire I would forego it all for this moment. Did ever a woman give a more courageous favour to her lover. . . . ?"

"Or a more foolish one?" she answered with a little laugh of tenderness which belied her words.

With his arm about her he led her to the table and picked up the shagreen case.

"Look, sweetheart! You asked in your kindness for this."

"Your picture!" she cried in delight and she stretched out her hands eagerly towards it. Then with a little shudder she drew them back.

"Wait! Don't open it, Philip. Let me!"

She was wearing a pair of delicate white gloves fringed at the gauntlets and embroidered with gold. "I picked them up at random," she said. "But for Eleonore I should have run here without a cloak. I was in so high a fever," and she began to strip the gloves from her hands as if the touch of them poisoned her. Her fingers trembled.

Philip Königsmark laughed joyously. Extravagances are the natural food of lovers. To him it was just a pretty fancy that she should wish to take his gift in her warm bare hands.

"You'll tear the gloves and they are beautiful," he said. "Give me your hands and I'll unclasp them."

"No!" she cried with passion and said no more. Philip was not to know that for the last week Ermengarde von Schulenberg had been flaunting a pair of emerald bracelets which George Louis had sent to her from Flanders, and that by the same post he had despatched as a sop to his wife this pair of embroidered gloves. And she was wearing them! She had her hands free of them at last and tossed them on to the table.

"Now," she said and she took the shagreen case into her palm as carefully as if it was a sacred chalice. She pressed on the spring and the case fell open.

"A letter too," she cried. It was a double gift he made to her.

"The cypher for a letter," said Philip, and she gave out a delighted gurgle of laughter. For a moment she was carried back to the first days of their love-making when there was still more of amusement in it than passion, more of a game that children play than a secret intrigue with death and honour in the balance. Then she held the paper aside and her eyes grew dewy and her lips trembled as she gazed at the miniature.

"And just when I need him most, he goes away from me."

She shut up the case slowly and held it against her breast. "I must teach my heart," she said woefully, "that it must share you with your love of glory."

"My dear!" he answered. "Glory? Yes, I want it. I want a great name, won by myself, to make me more fit for you, to justify your condescension." She was close to him. The fragrance of her hair, the perfume of the flowers entwined in it, was in his nostrils, the folds of her dress touched his legs, he felt through its soft texture her limbs and her body against his. "Were all else equal," he murmured, "I would rather be a sentinel. For I might be posted below your window. I should see the light flame when you came home and I should know that you were near. And when you went to your bed, I should see the light extinguished—so."

His voice had sunk to a low deep note of passion. Holding her close with one arm he reached out the other towards the lamp and began to turn the wick down.

"No," she cried, and then, "Not yet!"

Was it in panic? Was it that at the last moment she must hesitate before the step which could never be retraced? Or did she see in the gathering shadows a grim spectre waiting for their approach? Philip, startled by the sharpness of her cry, stayed his hand.

"There is nothing to fear, sweetheart," he whispered. "It will be so long after to-night before I again feel your heart beating against mine."

"I must see your room," she went on. "When I look at this portrait, I must know where to put you. I must see you living—where you sit and amongst what colours and graced with what delicate possessions. For a moment, Philip! My dear, only for a moment."

The Princess was nervous. Yet she was not making an excuse. In the garden theatre at Herrenhausen she had used almost the very words she was using now. She did want to see the place in which he lived.

"For a moment then," he said with a smile, and he turned up the wick so that the flame burnt bright.

But Sophia Dorothea had hardly the time to handle a book that he read or to touch the porcelain comfit box on the table by his chair before a great clatter broke upon the narrow street. There was a sound of people running and a hubbub of uproarious voices.

"Phi-lip," shouted one descending from a high note to a bass. Sophia shrank back.

"That's Charles," whispered Philip, "celebrating his last night in Hanover."

But above Charles's voice rose another, less hearty but more piercing.

"There's a light in the window. He's there. Let's have him out," and he gave a drunken parody of the winding of a hunter's horn.

"That's Max," exclaimed Sophia in terror.

Maximilian was the firebrand of the family. He quarrelled with his father over the primogeniture of George Louis. He made friends with the Catholics. He conspired with Ulrich Wolfenbüttel. He made love to Sophia Dorothea. He was deliberate and malicious. To be found here by Max—she would be at his mercy and mercy he did not know.

"Turn out the lamp."

It was Sophia who called for that now with her hands clasped and her body shaking. But it was too late.

"Phi-lip! We are coming up," cried Charles.

"God's name, but the door's on the latch," Philip exclaimed in a low voice. He ran to the window and leaned out. "Wait!" he shouted. If only he could keep them out for a minute! "I'll come down and let you in."

As he turned back into the room, Sophia caught him by the arm.

"Eleonore's on the stairs," she whispered, her face white as wax.

But Eleonore was no longer on the stairs. She was now in the room with the door shut behind her, and she had a hand clutching the handle to keep herself from falling.

"We are lost," she moaned.

"No!"

Philip ran to her.

"Quick, Sophy!" He nodded towards his bedroom. "Through the dressing-room beyond. There's a door on to the stairs." Whilst he spoke, he was half-carrying, half-supporting Eleonore von Knesebeck across the room.

"Wait till you hear me cry 'Run!' Then go!"

Sophia Dorothea gathered up her gloves. Königsmark thrust Eleonore von Knesebeck into his bedroom. Sophia followed upon their heels. "If only the confidante doesn't faint," Philip prayed, and to Sophia who in the midst of her terror still kept her head, "Well done!"

At that moment Maximilian's voice rose from the street.

"Why, the door's open!"

"Phi-lip!" shouted Charles.

There was a sound of bodies falling and feet stumbling in the darkness of the stairs. A burst of uproarious laughter shook the house. Philip had just time enough to shut the bedroom door, when four youths, the young Prince of Brandenburg and a Monsieur de la Cittardie, led by Charles and Maximilian, burst into the room. They were all flushed with wine and riotous. The young Prince of Brandenburg lurched over to the small table and seizing the bottle of wine by the neck, filled a goblet to the brim.

"Wine!" he cried, and holding the goblet high he splashed a good half of its contents upon the floor. He took a great gulp. "Gut!" he exclaimed and with a drunken bow to Monsieur de la Cittardie. "Bong! It's a most extraordinary thing," he continued, slurring all his words into one and gravely conscious of a gigantic problem, "I have been drinking the whole evening and I'm thirstier than when I began. Philosophy—there's a difficult word for a gentleman—" he nodded his head and tried without much success to refill his glass—"philosophy'll have to deal with it. Leibnitz, Charles, Leibnitz, Max, good old Leibnitz, Monsieur. I'll put it up to Leibnitz," and he sat down heavily on a couch.

"Here's one of them safe at all events," thought Philip. He filled two more glasses and carried them over to Charles and Maximilian. Maximilian was standing with his nose in the air, sniffing.

"I'll give you a toast," cried Philip quickly. "Drink to it Prince Maximilian! The Turks on the run!" and he pronounced the word "run" loud enough for it to be heard all over the house. Charles drained the glass and repeated the toast, but Maximilian continued to sniff with his nose in the air. Charles stared at him. Then he slapped his thigh.

"I know," he cried with a roar of laughter, "Philip's got a girl in the house."

Philip laughed. He could afford to now, for even while Charles was speaking, he heard the front door close with a tiny jar. The Princess and the confidante were away.

"You can search for her," he cried.

But Charles fell to sniffing the air too, and Charles was Sophia's familiar friend and might well recognise the scent she used; and indeed an odd look came over his face. For a moment he stared at Philip with his mouth open and apprehension in his eyes. But Maximilian seized on the permission to search. He was as malicious as a monkey.

"But I will," he said.

"No," Charles exclaimed valiantly and seized Maximilian by the arm. Maximilian tore himself away and ran to the bedroom door. There, however,

he found Philip waiting for him, very civil and polite.

"Since you do me the honour, Sir, to wish to see my house," said Philip respectfully, "I beg your leave to let me show it to you," and he opened the door.

Maximilian pushed past him. There was no one in the bedroom. But on the other side of the bedroom was a door. Maximilian darted forward and opened it. He was in Königsmark's dressing-room. A lamp was burning low. On the floor were Philip's riding-boots, scattered on chairs and on the floor too were the linen and the uniform which he had discarded. The door closed behind Maximilian, but after a few seconds he reappeared at the door of the parlour which opened on to the stairs. He was smiling with a quite vicious contentment.

"Charles, the birds have flown," he cried.

"And Philip's yawning enough to crack his jaws," Charles returned.

"I'm on duty, sir, at the camp before six," said Philip.

"And I too," added Charles.

They went at last, rioting down the staircase into the street. Philip was left alone staring with moody eyes into the flame of the silver lamp.

It was at this hour that Sophia Dorothea, safe in her apartment in the Leine Palace, searched for but could not find one of those fringed and embroidered gloves which George Louis had sent to her from Flanders.

* * * * *

The winter of that year was the harshest known for a generation. The Opera, however, at Hanover, exceeded in magnificence any which had gone before. All the voices came from Venice and visitors acknowledged that Italy could show nothing to equal it. The Carnival opened on January 1st with its usual glitter and the windows of Monplaisir blazed upon the night. Sophia Dorothea received a few letters from Philip. He had grown a beard like a hermit's; it was bitterly cold; the army was marching immediately from Prestina in Albania and would be in touch with the Turks in a week or two. And then silence.

It was half-way through the Carnival when a rumour began to spread through the town. By what breath it was brought no one knew. But it was a rumour of disaster and all the more therefore it ran from mouth to mouth like a fire. The army had been destroyed. Charles was dead. Königsmark was dead or a prisoner. For three weeks Hanover waited in suspense. Then followed definite news. The Hanoverian forces had been overwhelmed.

Prince Charles had been cut to pieces by scimitar strokes in hand to hand fighting. The fate of Königsmark was not known. It was thought that he was either killed at Charles's side or that he had been taken prisoner. It was believed that a small remnant of the troops was making a desperate effort to cut its way back into friendly territory. Then once more silence shrouded the Duchy like a dark cloud. Duchess Sophia took to her bed heart-broken and physically ill. Sophia Dorothea had a double cause for grief and under the one which she could avow, she must hide as best she could the one which was forbidden. Festivities came to an abrupt end, the Court arranged to go into retirement at Luisburg, and Sophia Dorothea carried away her sorrows on a visit to her parents at Celle. In March, however, her gloom was lightened. For in the first week of that month, one hundred and eighty-three men, all that was left of the army of eleven thousand, forced their way back after desperate marches and attacks under Philip Königsmark's command on to the friendly soil of Austria.

Philip, on his return to Hanover, drove out to Herrenhausen and presented to its heart-broken mistress what few belongings of Prince Charles he had been able to retrieve. On his way back he stopped at Monplaisir, where Clara von Platen received him very graciously. The public mourning had thrown a pall over the gaieties of Hanover; the reception rooms of Monplaisir were all the more crowded and Philip was the hero of the hour. He was young enough for pallor and fatigue to add a romantic appeal to his beauty rather than to tarnish it, and dressed in black with his brown hair tumbling properly trimmed about his shoulders and the curious stamp of fatality which even so indifferent an observer as Anthony Craston had remarked in his face, his bearing and his presence, he had the air of some seventeenth century Hamlet. He was flattered and cossetted and implored to tell of his adventures. The Turks—there was never a masquerade at Hanover, Dresden or Vienna, without a quadrille of Turks with their jewelled Viziers and lovely slaves—were exciting. Fine ladies could never hear enough of their politeness and their barbarities, their wealth of precious stones and their vast harems. But Philip spoke chiefly of Charles and his gallant death. He did indeed contrive to lose some hundreds of pistoles to Clara at ombre but his heart was not in the game.

"I came first to you, Madame," he said, smiling wistfully, "since here I knew that I should find balm for my wounds. I pray you now to excuse a man harassed by grief and the lack of sleep and to accept him again when his vigour has been restored to him."

Thus he spoke to the reluctant mistress of Monplaisir, who made a little grimace which threatened to crack the red and white enamel of her cheeks.

"You are going?" cried Monsieur de la Cittardie, scandalised that anyone should desert the great lady of Hanover before midnight had struck.

"Yes," Philip returned. "I have Countess von Platen's pardon. I have been granted leave for a few weeks and I go to-morrow to my estates at Hamburg, which have fallen into sad neglect."

"Ah! You go to Hamburg?" said Monsieur de la Cittardie slyly. Philip bowed to him and certainly on the next morning he sent forward his servants and baggage, and a few hours later rode out himself along the road to Hamburg. He was alone.

CHAPTER XXV

ANTHONY CRASTON TURNS SPY

IN the Castle of Celle the lights were extinguished one by one. It still kept early hours and by midnight only the great lamp burned below the roof of the archway at the main entrance. The mass of the building towered dark against a sky of stars; even its cupolas were hidden. The man watching among the beech trees on the slope above the French garden had more than half a mind to abandon his vigil. It was the month of March and the cold as sharp as a knife. This was no business for a young gentleman engaged in the service of King William, who must be in his office in the morning, ciphering and deciphering despatches for the action of his betters.

"I am doing something desperately mean out of sheer jealousy. I shall catch the worst possible cold in the head. I am a fool into the bargain. For I am arguing that what I the humble scrivener would do, the lordly Count Philip will likewise do. I certainly, returning from a long and dangerous campaign, would rush to spend the night sighing beneath my mistress's window. But Philip would argue that though the lady might feel flattered, she would esteem him the less. And probably Philip would be right."

Yet Anthony Craston stayed on. For though he thus took himself to task he was not one little bit honest. He did not for one moment believe that if Philip came to Celle Castle to-night, it would be merely to sigh under his mistress's window like some troubadour enamoured of a star. Indeed he did not seriously believe that Philip would come at all. He had only yesterday reached Hanover. There would be reports to make, ceremonious duties to fulfil. It would need an ardent lover to clear his desk in so short a time and then set out on the tedious road to Celle, and Anthony reckoned that there was more of calculation than ardour, more of vanity than passion in Philip Königsmark's love-making. No, Philip was sleeping soundly in his bed at Hanover, as Anthony would be doing in Celle, if he was not an idiot.

Yet he stayed on, as he had once stayed before outside the gates of Monplaisir. His body was chilled to the marrow of his bones and his head was getting hot and heavy, and there was a separate ache in every limb. He was of those jealous unfortunates who must go out of their way to seek still

more food for their jealousy, and invent it if they can't find it, and revel luxuriously in their torments. So he lingered, blaming everyone but himself and Sophia Dorothea above all for his obstinacy; and just after the church clock had struck the hour of one, he heard behind him and below him the rattle of a chain. Anthony Craston jumped. A bitter sort of satisfaction brought a smile to his frozen lips. He had been right to wait. The thing which he never really believed would happen, was actually happening. Someone had unfastened the mooring chain of a boat on the farther side of the Aller.

He heard no one stumble into the boat, but a moment or two later he did hear the wash of sculls and the patter of drops as the blades were lifted out of the water. He counted the strokes—they were just short of a dozen—and then a tiny clatter of wood upon wood came to his ears, as the rower raised the sculls from the rowlocks and laid them along the boat. Once more silence followed and it lasted so long that Anthony had time to wonder whether he had really heard any sound at all. But it was broken and almost at his side by someone whistling—whistling cautiously and clearly. Anthony pressed himself against the bole of the tree by which he stood. But there was no need for his precaution. For the man who whistled was quite invisible to his eyes, strain them as he might. Anthony recognised the tune which was being whistled—half a dozen bars of the fashionable song of the year—"Les Folies d'Espagne." The newcomer whistled them twice and the second time on a louder and more urgent note. Anthony Craston felt an impulse to snigger. No one was listening for the troubadour, and he had come such a very long way to troll out his little salutation in the darkness of a March morning.

But Anthony was premature. The tune had hardly died upon the night for the second time when in an upper window the curtains were thrust aside. He saw behind the glass a woman holding a lamp above her head. She moved the lamp three times up and down. Then she drew back again and the curtains closed, like the leaves of a leather case closing upon a miniature. The whistling ceased. Anthony heard a swift brushing of feet through the grass. He followed, and he followed a man who had no thought for a pursuer. As he turned the corner where the back of the castle looks towards the great beech-tree park, he heard the hinges of a window creak and whine. He was in time to see that the window was on the lowest floor. It stood open now for a lamp shone out and the light fell upon the lattices. It fell, too, upon the face of the man who clambered in.

Almost at once the window was closed again. For a moment the light hovered, then it disappeared.

Anthony Craston stood like a man turned to stone. He had seen what he came out to see, yet what in his heart he had longed not to see. The woman who waved the lamp thrice was Sophia Dorothea, the man for whom the window was opened was Philip von Königsmark.

At what hour Anthony Craston reached home he could never say. He had a memory that he tramped about the park in such a desolation of spirit and so bottomless a misery as no man to his thinking could ever have known before. Personal beauty and glitter and splash had won the day. What woman could resist them ever? And what sort of rivalry could he set up—he without wings and of the dull colour of earth?

He reached his lodgings whilst it was yet dark and stripping off his clothes flung himself shivering into his bed and slept at once until the sun was high.

CHAPTER XXVI

STEALING ACROSS THE TRAPS

WHEN PHILIP had climbed in he latched the window and turned to his Leonisse with his heart in his eyes. But she was parsimonious of her happiness, she had so little store of it, and she would not rob this first tryst after so long a separation of its bloom by snatching at it hastily.

"Wait!" she whispered with her face lowered from his. Philip would have felt that she regretted his coming but for the curve of her smile upon her cheeks and the thrill in her voice. She blew out the lamp and reaching out her hand in the darkness found his. Having found it, she held it as though never again for even one minute during the rest of her life could she let it go.

"Follow me!" she whispered again. "There are stairs."

"I know them," Philip answered with a gurgle of laughter no louder than her whisper. "That window was the pages' private entrance when they came back after hours."

They climbed a narrow staircase to the third storey of the Palace, turned along a broad corridor where they could walk side by side and stopped.

"Here."

Sophia Dorothea opened a door within which a soft light glowed. She drew him into her bedroom and noiselessly latched the door behind them.

"Stand here," she said.

She placed him where the lamplight must fall full upon his face. She unclasped his cloak with its high collar and let it slip from his shoulders to the floor.

"Philip!" she spoke his name slowly and with delight. She looked round the room as though every curtain, every piece of furniture had been miraculously so embellished that she no longer recognized it.

"It was a room. It is a temple," she said with a laugh of divine contentment. She clasped her hands together behind his neck and leaned her cheek against his heart, and felt the pulse of its blood pass into her and repeat itself in her. But she could not stay thus for long. She must hold him

off and search his face anxiously and the corners of his eyes for the deep lines and the tiny wrinkles which the year's hardships and disasters had surely graven there. But Time keeps his tombstone tools for older years than twenty-five.

"And the beard!" she cried, laughing low and happily, as she smoothed his cheek with the palm of her hand. "The hermit's beard which should brush your feet! And your nails? Let me see them, sir, this instant!" and he held out obediently a hand, brown but as slim as a girl's and as carefully tended as a girl's. "Oh!" she reproached him with just a touch of seriousness in her tone. "What! They were long enough to dig up your grandfather? Oh shame! And there were twelve grey hairs your servant found combing your hair!" She ran her fingers through his thick brown curls. "Where are they?"

"He pulled them out. I sat and suffered for your sake whilst one by one he snapped them off."

Sophia shook her head.

"They were never there. Oh, unkind so to practise on a poor woman's heart! Twelve grey hairs that were brown cost me twelve sleepless nights and twelve pillows drenched with tears."

The laughter vanished from her voice and her face.

"But I forgive you all for bidding me to expect you privately to-night. Lover of mine, I could never have dared to meet you this first time after your return with other eyes upon us. I could not have spoken to you but my voice would have trembled. I could not have looked at you but my eyes would have flown my happiness like a banner."

He bent down to her and their lips met.

"You are silent, my Tercis," she said using the name with which his letters were signed.

"What else should I be?" he said slowly. "With your love a miracle and a wonder? Let me tell you something that is the very truth of me!"

"Yes, tell me," she said eagerly.

It was not only that she had the lover's yearning to know every little detail of the loved one's life. There had been a note of remorse in the sound of his words which alarmed her.

"Blame no one, sweetheart, neither yourself nor me," she whispered passionately. "Every night I prayed for you upon my knees. I was listened to. Have no doubt of it! For after the long months of danger you are safe and mine."

Was Philip on the point of blurting out the whole story of his pursuit of her? It was oppressing him and clamouring for utterance. But to-night, this first time when they were really alone together since the vanished days when they had sat side by side and fashioned a golden world of dreams in the Castle chapel—to-night with her dark eyes looking up to his, her tender lips within a hand's breadth of his he could not utter it. Yet just a little he did say.

"As I crossed the river and came through the French garden and up the slope, I was back again as a page in Celle. I remembered the terror and the ignominy of my last night here and how it remained in my mind a nightmare, something that made me horrible to myself. I behaved like a coward on that night. Then another nightmare, another ignominy was added to the first, the flight from England. All the years since then I have lived, turning upon myself like a wounded snake, stinging myself. Well to-night, as I saw your loved face at the window, all that horror dropped from me and forever."

"I am glad," she breathed.

"It seems to me amazing that I should have so suffered. I who have been lifted out of the ruck of men by you."

He clipped her close to him.

"For you do love me?" he demanded passionately.

Sophia lifted her hand and stroked his face tenderly.

"My dear, you may find others more lovable but never one more loving."

Her voice dropped so that he had a fancy that her words were just her heart-beats made audible. "You are loved to idolatry."

They were standing close by the table on which the lamp was set. Philip reached forward and slowly turned it out; and this time Sophia did not stay his hand.

CHAPTER XXVII

ANTHONY TELLS

ANTHONY CRASTON woke up the next morning a sick mean man. Sick in spite of himself but quite deliberately mean. His head was a hot heavy leaden bullet, his eyes streamed and his nose barred him from the society of his fellow-men. These unhappy symptoms he could not help. People who undertake long vigils in cold parks must expect them. But whilst he dressed in the raw of the morning, he brooded over what he had seen, a woman signalling with a lamp and a man climbing in at a window. He hated the man with all the bitter envy of the second-best; and his thoughts did not spare the lady. He did not of course put the case to himself in that simple truthful way. He was moved, he asserted to himself, by public considerations. A respectful recognition that great Princes may have mistresses but that their wives must not have lovers was the first law of stability. Without it thrones tottered and decorum became a byword and a scoff. All credit, therefore, to the man who by a little useful word slipped in on an appropriate occasion secured the punishment of the wrong-doer, the male one of course, and left the other of the pair to the reproaches of her conscience—and the consolations of her more honest friends.

At this branch-Chancery in Celle, however, Craston found matter to distract his thoughts. He was a conscientious worker and the new business to which he must put his hand was at once delicate and responsible. The campaign in Flanders during the past year had been on the whole bloodless and without consequence. There had been no great battle; no town had fallen; the armies had marched and counter-marched and retired to winter quarters. But now a new danger for the smaller fry of the Grand Alliance was beginning to show its head. There had been hostility for a long time between Denmark and Celle. The great fortress of Ratzeburg stood on the very edge of Denmark and was a perpetual menace to that country. The King had again and again called for the demolition of its walls and its reduction to the status of an open town, and no less often Duke George William had refused. But now Sweden had added its remonstrances and the King of Denmark emboldened by the support of his new friend had quite changed his note. If George William would not do the proper friendly thing and pull

down the bastions of Ratzeburg, he would pull them down himself. The King of Denmark was in a peremptory mood and had excellent reasons to justify him. The troops of Celle were famous for their fighting qualities. They had been hired out year after year to this or that potentate. They were hard practised soldiers and in the ordinary way the King of Denmark would have thought more often than twice before he engaged them, even with the support of Sweden at his back.

But they were now part of the army of the Grand Alliance. They were brigaded under the command of George Louis in Flanders. Duke George William had applied to his cousin Ulrich of Wolfenbüttel. But "the monkey" had not forgotten George William's cavalier treatment of himself and his son. Even if he had been willing to help, he hardly could, so many of his soldiers had perished with Prince Charles in the Morea. Duke George William was, in consequence, leaning more and more to the idea of recalling his army to the defence of his Duchy, and it was to dissuade him from this momentous step that Anthony was now charged.

"I must see Bernstorff," Anthony reasoned after a fit of sneezing; and he sent a messenger to the Castle asking the Chancellor to receive him that morning.

Meanwhile he re-read his instructions. There was an argument which he could use. Denmark would surely hold its hand until it saw to which side fortune was inclining in Flanders. Let the Grand Alliance make a successful campaign of it and the threats of Denmark would become courtesies as smooth as honey.

Anthony followed his messenger and was received with smiles in that fine room overlooking the drawbridge and the lime-tree avenue where old homely Schultz had once discoursed to his successor on the wisdom of keeping clear of Hanover. There were more papers now on the big table, more secretaries bustling in and out of the room than Schultz had ever needed in the course of a twelvemonth, but Bernstorff was happiest in a great swirl and turmoil of affairs, whether they were of consequence or not. He received Craston with both hands extended and a beaming face.

"My master, the Ambassador, is detained at Hanover, Your Excellency, and has deputed me to make an appeal to you," said Anthony.

"I am honoured," replied Bernstorff drawing Anthony towards the fireplace where a great fire of logs was burning. "The wishes of England must always command the highest consideration in Celle. But you have a cold, young sir. I beg you to draw close to the fire."

He swept his papers away into a heap with a flourish of contempt. “Little domestic matters which can wait their moment.” He dismissed his secretaries as cavalierly. “We must not be interrupted.” He drew up a chair when they were alone.

“The English Ambassador,” he continued, “is no doubt a trifle anxious because there are French influences at this Court. That, as we all know, is so. But you can assure His Excellency that they do not affect the policy of the State. There was a time when they did. But I am happy to say that time has gone. His Highness has learnt that a warm heart is but a poor statesman,” and Baron von Bernstorff ended with a smirk which left Anthony in no doubt as to who the teacher was. “You have an appeal to make. I am listening.”

Anthony sneezed three times and described the anxieties of his Ambassador.

“Ratzeburg,” said Bernstorff nodding his head gravely. “To be sure, there is a problem which has caused us all the gravest anxiety. His Highness especially was in a great disquiet. But for the moment the danger is warded off. Hanover is with our agreement sending a mission to arrange a treaty with Sweden, and Denmark will not move whilst these negotiations are in progress.”

“Our Ambassador has no knowledge of that mission,” Anthony retorted.

“It was only decided upon within the last few days,” said Bernstorff.

Anthony got up from his chair.

“This will be good news. I thank you for it Baron von Bernstorff,” he exclaimed. He was a little elated. He could send back to his chief information of value. He would have earned good marks.

“A mission to Sweden?” he repeated. His face lit up; a slow smile separated his swollen lips. Here was a chance of obtaining some compensation for his dreadful vigil in the Park of Celle. “Then a Swede of course will be sent upon that mission?”

“A Swede?” exclaimed Bernstorff. He was completely at a loss. “There is no Swede in Hanover who could be entrusted with so difficult a negotiation.”

Anthony Craston nodded his head.

“Your Excellency knows more than I do of Hanover. I was counting names.”

“And at what name did you stop?” Bernstorff asked. He was still quite perplexed.

"At the name of Count Philip von Königsmark."

Bernstorff stared for a moment at Anthony; it seemed to him that his young colleague was an idiot. He laughed contemptuously.

"Philip von Königsmark! My dear sir! But some years ago he passed through my hands. Even now he does me the honour of trembling when I come face to face with him."

The mere notion that this boy who had pleaded on his knees for his life in the Castle Chapel could have grown into a man fit for such delicate and important work, sent the Baron into a paroxysm of laughter.

"Philip von Königsmark! Oh my dear sir! That pretty piece of frippery?"

"He brought back a name for courage from the Morea," said Anthony.

"And left his friend, Prince Charles, behind him," added the Baron, smiling unpleasantly. "Oh no, we can leave Philip to decorate the boudoirs, and lose his money at the gambling tables."

Anthony bowed.

"No doubt Your Excellency is right," he said. "I made a foolish guess. I was misled by a glimpse of Count Philip yesterday."

"Yesterday?" cried Bernstorff. "Nay, you were in Celle yesterday."

"So was Count Philip."

For a second the Chancellor was puzzled. He was supplied each day with a very complete list of who in Celle moved out of it and what strangers came to it. There was no Count Philip on the list. He looked at Anthony and laughed jovially.

"It's that cold of yours, my young friend. Nothing so blurs the vision as a rheum. It's seeing the world on the other side of a fountain. The little Philip"—he used a phrase from Clara von Platen's first letters—"was more likely to be sighing and fondling in the salon of Monplaisir."

"It may be—nay it must be if Your Excellency is so informed," Anthony replied with submission. "Yet—I could have sworn I saw him. If it was not he, it was his very likeness. I wondered what he was doing in Celle. If there had not been something secret in—I hardly know what—his dress or his manner, I should have accosted him."

"Something secret?" Bernstorff repeated sharply. He walked away to the window.

Anthony Craston was trying to give him information whilst escaping the reproach of a tale-bearer. It was clumsy work. Craston was not a man with any subtlety in the manipulation of words. But the intention was obvious. He

conjoined too elaborate an indifference with too determined a persistence for Bernstorff to entertain a doubt.

"Philip Königsmark!" the Chancellor went on with a curious dwelling on the name. "Secretly in Celle! Ha!"

Bernstorff had a difficulty in taking Philip into his consideration seriously. He had enjoyed his first rapturous sensation of power in the Castle Chapel with Philip as his victim and the taste of it was still fresh in his mouth, the picture of it still vivid in his mind. Speak Philip von Königsmark's name and at once Bernstorff saw a boy crouched at his feet in his smart page's dress, his head bent, his hands bound with a cord and the sobs bursting from his throat in an agony of fear. Bernstorff stood at the window, striving to disembarrass himself of this vision. The boy was a Colonel of the Hanoverian Guards, he had fought as bravely as any of his name, he had such fame as a lover that women had lied away their good reputation so that their names might without truth be linked with his. Yes, and there was that old story of his first love, the stolen meetings in the Chapel, the rehearsals—Bernstorff turned back into the room. He was now startled.

"When was it that you thought you saw Philip Königsmark?"

"Last night," Anthony replied. "I had been working late. I wanted to clear my head. I took a walk."

"In the town?"

"No."

Anthony was conscious of a most ignoble meanness. He had once despised Philip because he foreswore himself to save his brother from the hangman. How much lower had he now fallen? He was devoured by shame but the greater his shame, the more he persisted in it.

"It was near here. Along the river bank. Opposite to the French garden."

For a moment or two Bernstorff stood with his eyes intently fixed on Craston's face, and Craston began to shuffle his feet. Bernstorff smiled and passed his arm under the young man's.

"Show me at the window," he said in a quiet and even voice. But there was a spark of excitement in his eyes and the hand he laid on Craston's arm shook with his eagerness.

From the window they looked along the façade of the Castle to the bank with the beech trees where Craston had kept his vigil. Beyond the trees the ground fell to the French garden which was hidden. But beyond the garden there was within their view a glimmer of bronze where the sun struck the Aller river.

"There!" said Craston pointing. He hesitated for a second. "There was a boat moored to the bank. The man I mistook for Philip was bending over it when I first saw him. There was no moon but I could see that he rose up very quickly when he heard my footsteps and moved back from the path. That's what I meant when I said there was something secret in his manner."

Bernstorff stood stock still at young Craston's side. Not by a gesture nor a word did he interrupt. But his very immobility spoke for him.

"You have not finished your story," it said. "Continue! Every word of it!" and Craston continued.

"He had the movements of Philip, the swiftness and the ease of them, as though each muscle obeyed upon the instant the message of his brain. But I couldn't distinguish his features. I was obviously misled—" and here Craston's jealousy sprang out into the open and his voice grated—"by his dancingmaster's elegance. I could not, had the moon been up, have distinguished his features. For he held a muffler close to his face. For that reason, too, I thought that his visit was secret."

"And you walked on, of course?" said Bernstorff.

Anthony detected or imagined that he detected a hint of irony in the question. His face grew red, he drew himself up stiffly.

"No, Your Excellency, I turned back at that point."

"And heard no more," said Bernstorff.

He turned back into the room, speaking the words no longer with a question mark at the end of them, but as though they rounded off the story.

"No," Anthony Craston replied slowly. "I did hear something more as I walked back. I heard the splash of oars."

Bernstorff swung quickly round.

"The drip of water from the paddles and the drive of them through the water," Craston continued; and then he threw back his head with a laugh.

"Of course I should have known at once that I was mistaken. It was some belated servant, some truant page finding his way home to the castle after hours."

"That, to be sure, is the explanation," said Bernstorff.

But he sat for a long while after Craston had taken his leave with no thought for his morning's work. A smile was on his lips, a pleasant sense of amusement in his mind. Some of Craston's story was false, no doubt, was invented to harm Königsmark. But some of it was true—the drip of water from the paddles, the drive of the oars through the water, the recognition of Philip and—yes—and the place which he sought and where he was received.

Bernstorff had always hated Eleonore d'Olbreuse and her daughter. They had been his enemies from the first moment, they had striven to hinder his ascendency over George William. They were for France, not Hanover. If they had had their way, there would have been no handsome presents from Duke Ernst Augustus, no Gradow estate, no flourishing tobacco factory, not even a Barony. But if this hinted story were the truth, the proven truth, he had mother and daughter at his feet.

He walked home at the dinner hour scattering the friendliest smiles. As he sat at his table, he sent for Heinrich Muller and, leaning back in his chair with his glass of Burgundy to his lips, he spoke jovially as one who had caught a good servant napping.

"Heinrich, the best watchdogs sleep with their nostrils quivering."

"Even so, Excellency, at times someone will have the wind of them," said Heinrich Muller.

"The worse watchdogs they! Last night a secret visitor came back after many years to Celle!"

"Count Philip von Königsmark," Muller replied stolidly, and Bernstorff brought the feet of his chair down upon the floor with a bang.

"You knew!" he cried, and now the reproach was stern.

"I learnt it this morning when I came face to face with him. I made some inquiries," Muller replied, and he added in an angry bewilderment: "Excellency, I do not understand that man."

"How so?"

"He came to Celle after dark without a servant and he put up at a mean little inn, 'The Golden Lantern,' in the Schwarzer Weg, under the name of the Count Tercis. He had his supper and went out again on foot, and returned as the dawn was breaking."

"Where was he meanwhile?"

"No one knows, Excellency."

"Ah!" said Bernstorff with a dry smile. "No one knows."

"No one. He was very secret. And yet—explain it to me, Excellency—he rides through the main streets on the Hamburg road at eleven o'clock to-day, his head in the air as though he had won all Europe by a throw of the dice. Another thing! Two years ago I came suddenly face to face with him in the gateway of Monplaisir. Excellency, he was frightened. He shrank away from me with a cry, a cry of fear. He was the pretty boy of the Castle Chapel all in a second. I meet him again this morning and he laughs me in the face. I am no longer a figure of terror. No, I am a worm without a sting."

It was the longest speech Muller had ever made in his life, and he stumbled through it with a great heat. Bernstorff's smile broadened.

"And you do not like it, my good Muller! No! It is not pleasant after you have been terrible, to be ridiculous."

"But explain these changes to me, Excellency!" Muller urged. "Once it was enough for me when Your Excellency said 'Do this! Go there!' Now it is different. I ask myself questions. I am puzzled. And I serve you the better when I have answers clear. Why does the Count Tercis sneak after dark into Celle, and a few hours later Count Philip von Königsmark in broad daylight ride out of Celle as bold as brass? Why was he shaken out of his wits at one time and grinning derisively the next?"

Bernstorff was highly amused by his servant's perplexity. He twirled the stem of his wine glass in his fingers and stretched out his legs under his table.

"I can only give you this explanation, good Muller," he said. "Love is a very complicated emotion. Meanwhile let us not forget the Count Tercis. We may with good fortune find that name used again."

Meanwhile Philip rode northwards, having planned to join his retinue and his baggage that night at Lüneburg. A long day's ride but no day could be too long, provided that he rode alone. So high his spirits soared, so deep a spring of gratitude welled up in his heart. If he had not won all Europe, he could plead that he had won all that Europe had of worth for him, its Flower, its Crown. One regret he had, and he felt its ache for the first time that morning, that his great passion and Sophia's sweet response must be hidden from the world. He wanted to shout it aloud so that the very birds might carry the news of it over forest and town. He would have liked every dullard on the road to see Sophia's image on his forehead and in his eyes and stand dazzled and marvelling as he passed by. The old paralysing obsession that he was a pariah, that all men, however politely they might talk to him, knew it at the back of their minds, was lifted from him for ever. How could he ever have been troubled by it—he whom Sophia invested with her love and sanctified with the pressure of her lips! Why, he trod down the stars!

But as the evening drew on his raptures declined and he fell into a deep melancholy and remorse. He loved Sophia passionately—now. Last night had set an eternal seal upon them both. But it was not for love of Sophia that he had sought to win her. He had tricked her, he had gone about with her, driven on by a monstrous belief that winning her would set him free from the haunting sense of his inferiority. He had gained his end, he would not again start up in his bed, the sweat pouring from his body as he fled screaming with fear through the streets of London. He would not watch

himself again babbling like a craven at the feet of a Jack-in-Office. He had won, but by a shameful treachery to the adored woman whose love had enabled him to win.

He would have to confess that treachery. His heart sank as he forecast the moment of confession. Delay it, as he might, it would have to come. He had reached that point of honesty. She might forgive—she had so much tenderness. She might banish him—she had so much pride. The dreaded moment did come but under no conditions which he could foresee, and at its own fitting time.

Perhaps his soul went to its place the whiter because it went confessed.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LETTERS ARE THE DEVIL

TO the worthy Bernstorff's disgust, Philip was entrusted with the business of opening up negotiations with Sweden. His instructions reached him whilst he was trying to bring some order into his neglected estate in Hamburg, and he was as surprised as Bernstorff was disgusted. But he was at a convenient spot, he was a Swede, and he carried a name from his forefathers and a reputation won by his own sword which must commend him to the leaders of a great military nation. It was his task to prepare the ground for the Commission of lawyers and statesmen which would follow. Philip accepted his charge with alacrity even though it must keep him from Sophia's neighbourhood.

"If I desire anything for myself, to win renown, to push myself to great estate, it is only for the love of you and in the hope that you may love me more," he wrote to Sophia. "For an insignificant lover without high employment cannot hope to be long in the good graces of a lady of your rank."

He travelled accordingly to Stockholm, shedding lover's letters behind him like the trail scattered by the hares in a paper chase and receiving through this and that agent tender and adoring replies. They were at this time as sure of each other's eternal constancy as children at the very first blossoming of passion. They were at once humble and proud. He was making her quite devout; she prayed to God so continually for him. She dreaded the moment when she must return to the busier life of Hanover. Here in Celle she had solitude which she preferred to all the pleasures in the world since it gave her more time to think of him.

"I dream of you," she wrote, "with infinite pleasure, thinking I am with you. Then I wake to inconsolable grief."

At Stockholm in the midst of the discussions over the treaty a most serious problem occurs to him which she alone can decide. Should he cut his hair and wear a peruke like other men, or keep his own tumbling about his shoulders? She resolves his doubts by the first post. He has the most beautiful hair in the world. It would be an offence against God to cut it, even

if he ransacked the markets of Paris for the silkiest women's tresses wherewith to replace it. They had no fears at this time. Even a visit which Königsmark received one morning from King Charles the Eleventh's Chamberlain gave him no warning of trouble to come. Yet the warning was clear enough if his mind had not been filled with the vision of a room in Celle Castle and of a pair of dark eyes which shone with mystery and longing as the light of a lamp slowly sank and died.

"His Majesty," said the Chamberlain, "views with regret the continuance of a young Swedish nobleman of wealth and distinction in a foreign service. His Majesty commands me to point out that Sweden itself has enemies and the first claim upon its own citizens."

Königsmark was taken aback by the unexpected complaint. He stammered a word or two about the tradition of his family which had always inspired its members to crusades against the infidel and in support of the Protestant religion.

"His Majesty recognises that admirable inspiration," the Chamberlain continued coldly, "and notices that it can be obeyed by service to Protestant Sweden, with the added advantage that the great wealth of the Königsmarks would be spent in Sweden rather than in countries which have no reasonable charge upon it."

Philip Königsmark gasped. To live where Leonisse was not, where no tree had ever shaded her when she walked, where no river rippled through her dreams and no birds had piped for her delight, was not to live at all.

"I'd sooner bury myself in the Indies," Philip thought, but he had prudence enough not to speak his thought.

"My humble duty to His Majesty," he began, and the Chamberlain interrupted him.

"I have not finished the Royal Message," he said superbly, and Philip bowed.

"His Majesty, recognising your experience in the conduct of war, offers you the command and the rank of General in the Swedish Army."

Philip had not a moment's hesitation in answering. He desired power and fame and the high consideration which this promotion would confer upon a young man still in his twenty-fifth year—nay, he longed for them. They would lift him nearer to the pedestal on which his mistress stood. But they meant absence, separation, banishment.

"His Majesty honours me beyond my merits," he replied very respectfully, "and I pray you to convey to him my deep gratitude. But I have

pledged my sword to the service of the Duke of Hanover. His need is great and I must keep my word or be dishonoured."

His honour, indeed, was not concerned. His own sovereign claimed him as he had a right to do. It was Philip's one chance to save both Sophia Dorothea and himself from two nerve-wracking years and the ghastly tragedy which ended them. But he turned his back upon it; and it never occurred again.

Königsmark made his report to Duke Ernst Augustus on the morning after he had reached Hanover. It was not very hopeful and he ended it with an account of King Charles' attempt to detach him from the Duke's service. The Duke thanked him cordially.

"For so much depends upon our campaign in Flanders. Namur is threatened. I am told that King Louis himself will lead his troops. Would that I could do the same!" For he was grown to so gross and corpulent a bulk that he could hardly rise from a chair without help or sit in one without his whole body tumbling in a run. "My army will march in the first week of June. You will command my Regiment of Guards. But you will see Podevils."

Philip, upon leaving the Duke's presence, passed through the great Rittersaal where the banners of the Knights hung from the high roof. At the end of the Rittersaal a circular staircase led down to a garden which flanked the Palace upon one side as Sophia Dorothea's wing flanked it on the other. He ran lightly down the steps. It was April, the daffodils were in flower and the fragrance of carnations in the air. He was in Hanover, he had the right of entry into the Palace by day and by night, and the adored lady was home from Celle. It was as much as he could do not to sing aloud in that august place, and as if to crown his happiness, as he reached the last tread a child's laughter came to his ears. Sophia Dorothea and her little daughter were framed in the bright square of the porch. Their backs were towards the sunlight, but he saw Sophia Dorothea waver and her hand go to her heart. Philip bowed low before the daughter.

"You have all my respects, little Princess," said he, and passing her, he raised her mother's hand to his lips. It was trembling. Before he could speak, she breathed a warning so low that he hardly heard it.

"Be careful."

Over her shoulder he saw the flutter of a dress behind a shrub. Someone was watching. He laughed. He took a step forward towards the shrub, but before he could discover who it was that watched, the child uttered a

plaintive cry. Philip turned and saw the little girl looking up the steep circular staircase.

"Mummy, I'm so tired," she said.

"I'll carry you, darling," her mother replied.

"Nay, your Highness," Philip protested gaily, "all good soldiers are good nursemaids. A tender heart and a lusty arm, will guard a small Princess from harm," and to the rhythm of his doggerel he swung the six-year-old Sophia up on to his shoulder and mounted the stairs.

The child clapped her hands and crowed with delight.

"Mummy, look at me!"

"Yes, darling!"

> "Little Princess, with your head in the sky,
> You're up in the blue where the angels fly.
> Don't put your head through or the stars will fall,
> And there won't be any at night at all."

Philip chanted.

"Oh, Mummy, poetry!" squealed Sophia, drumming on the breast of her bearer with her heels. "About me!"

Philip reached the landing at the top of the stairs and Sophia Dorothea a moment afterwards. For a second they stood looking at one another in silence, Sophia with her eyes dewy and a smile of great tenderness upon her face. In both their minds was a vision of old days at Celle when Schultz was Chancellor; if only he had been the Duke's son instead of the page and she the maid of honour instead of the Duke's daughter, the youngster on his shoulder might have belonged to both of them.

Whilst they stood thus, Madame von Platen came in from the garden up the stairs, made a deep and ironical obeisance with a look of fury upon her face and passed on to the Duke's apartments.

Philip pulled a grimace. Outrage had been done to the great god Etiquette. Complaint would be made. He would be carpeted, reprimanded. But he was not in the mood to care.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," he cried, and he carried the little Sophia through the gorgeous reception rooms and only set her down in the corridor at her mother's door. He turned with a smile towards his mistress and saw with a shock that her face was troubled and her eyes full of fear. Sophia Dorothea opened the door for her child to pass through and when she had gone:

"I must see you to-night," she whispered.

There was fear in her voice as well as in her eyes.

"At eleven I will be here," he answered and sought to reassure her with the confident accent in his voice.

But he was no longer confident. For months, at Hamburg and in Sweden he had been walking in a mist of dreams and vague hopes and vivid recollections. But meanwhile, here in Hanover, something had happened—something untoward. He had run down the staircase from the Rittersaal with all the spring singing in his blood. He walked slowly down this staircase at the opposite end of the Palace, into the great court, apprehension clutching at his heart and washing all the colour from the world.

He had hardly taken a step before the old Field-Marshal Podevils came out from the big porch by the guard-room and called to him. Philip advanced quickly and saluted.

"Just walk a yard or two with me," said the old man very seriously. "We are now in the last week of April."

"Yes, sir," Philip agreed.

"And you go into camp with your regiment in the first week of June."

"So His Highness informed me."

"Between the last week of April and the first week of June there is time for much to happen," the Field-Marshal continued.

He stopped suddenly in his walk.

"I have been your friend, I think, since you came to Hanover."

"Sir, I have been very grateful for your friendship," answered Philip.

"You have a friend more powerful than me in Her Highness, the Duchess Sophia."

Königsmark was surprised, and flushed with pleasure. He could not have at this moment too many powerful friends in Hanover.

"Her Highness's philosophy has not destroyed her æsthetic appreciation," Podevils continued with a smile. "She admires your good looks, she speaks of the charm of your manner. She notices a modesty in your address. It would be unwise to lose her goodwill."

"I shall do all that I can to retain it," said Philip.

"Will you?" the old man asked suddenly. "It is certainly within your power if you will."

He pushed his arm under Philip's and they walked thus to the gates of the courtyard, Philip uncomfortable and embarrassed, the Field-Marshal silent and anxious. At the gates he stopped again.

"My dear friend," he said with a warmth of friendship, "may God guard you! But take this advice from me! Do not let your love hinder you from

thinking of your fortune."

He clapped Philip on the shoulder and walked quickly away before any answer could be returned to him. Philip indeed had no answer to give. He had turned his back upon his fortune in Sweden a month ago. He was not troubled by the sacrifice of ambition, but he was gravely concerned by the Field-Marshal's warning. Someone had guessed his secret. He stood watching the dwindling figure of old Podevils and wondering who had guessed and how. Had he been careless? Had Sophia herself let slip his name in a quarrel? He smiled rather grimly as he turned away to his own house. He would attend the Duke's Court after supper to-night, as his position gave him the right to do. He would have a good chance there of finding out from what quarter this unfavourable wind was blowing.

His entrance caused a trifle of a stir. A fan was dropped, a card misplaced, and a few curious pairs of eyes shifted their glances from him to George Louis and back again from George Louis to him. But that was all. His Highness Duke Ernst Augustus sat apart with Clara von Platen and did not even reprimand him for his breach of etiquette that morning. George Louis gave him his usual cold greeting. The greeting was the recognition of one good soldier by another. The coldness expressed his distaste for what he called a Frenchified elegance. Philip passed from group to group. Here one whispered and stopped guiltily at his approach. There another took courage from the conventionality of his reception and took him into its conversation. Philip got no nearer to the solving of his problem and towards eleven o'clock, slipped away from the assembly.

The apartment of the Princess had a deserted look. The corridor was dimly lighted. No sound of laughter, no buzz of talk swelled out from behind the closed doors. Eleonore von Knesebeck admitted him to the ante-room. The Princess's page had been dismissed from his duties. In the inner room he found Sophia Dorothea alone. For a little while, in the joy of this meeting after so long a separation, their troubles were forgotten. Each had so much to say—how the same thought had come to them both miraculously at the same moment, how she had been afraid of she knew not what on the day when King Charles's Chamberlain had summoned him to abandon Hanover, how she had thanked him with many tears for the sacrifice of his ambitions and yet had regretted it for his sake with many more. He had to laugh her regrets away and recompense her for her tears by his adoration. But in the end Sophia Dorothea took a letter from a locked casket and put it into his hands.

"See!" she said. "It was closed by a red wafer—nothing more."

"But I sealed it," cried Philip staring at the torn wafer. "With the special seal I had made for my letters to you. I am sure I did."

"My dear, you did. The outstretched hand with the heart upon the palm. I know that very well, for the seal was enclosed within the letter."

"What!"

He opened out the letter. Yes, the wax seal was within it. He began to read the text.

> *I love and I am loved. Is there any happiness in the world approaching mine . . . ? You have never appeared to me so altogether lovely as on that night. . . . The memory of it blots out trouble itself. With crossed hands and bended knees I thank you.* . . .

There was more in the same strain—pages of it, extravagant, at times fantastic in their extravagance. He had been near to swooning when he thought of her and had not his servant brought him *de l'eau de la reine d'Hongrie*, he did not know but what he would have died.

In a hurry he turned to the superscription and exclaimed with relief.

"But it's addressed to Knesebeck. Look! Not to you. And the letter's written to Leonisse. And it's signed Tercis. Eleonore has a lover. We must congratulate her upon her conquest. My pretty heart, you're afraid without a reason for fear."

But Sophia Dorothea gently took the letter from him and pointed to the signature.

"You signed it, Tercis. Look closely at your signature."

Philip bent his eyes to it.

"Someone has drawn with a pencil a loop round the name," he said slowly.

"Yes."

"You!" said Philip forcing a smile.

Sophia Dorothea shook her head.

"The one who opened this letter."

"But no one but you and I know that Tercis stands for Philip."

"Someone does," the Princess insisted.

Philip was at a loss. Never had he spoken of himself as Tercis. The only clue to the cipher, he carried always about with him when he was awake, and when he slept it was hidden beneath his pillow.

"Someone? Who then?" he asked.

"Clara von Platen."

Philip stared at his mistress aghast. Clara von Platen? How in the world could she have guessed? Sophia had allowed her fears to outrun her judgment.

"Ever since your first day in Hanover, Clara von Platen has hated you," he said.

"Yes, ever since that day," the Princess admitted. "Oh, she had reason enough. I was younger than she was, I refused her friendship. I insisted upon her deference, I tried to outshine her with my jewels. I was as foolish as a young girl can be. But it was a sort of sleeping hatred, a Vesuvius of a hatred. Every now and then it rumbled. Every now and then it exploded. But for the rest of the time it left me alone. Now it's more active, more virulent. You saw her face this morning on the staircase. She would have struck me dead if she could. She's jealous, Philip. Jealous of you. And she knows that my heart answers to yours as the waves of the sea to the moon."

"Dearest!" said Philip with a smile and sank back again into his questioning. Certainly he had remarked the wild fury of Clara von Platen that morning. There must be some reason for that. Certainly his good friend the Field-Marshal had gone out of his way to warn him. There must have been talk and conjecture. But knowledge?

"I can't believe it," he began and broke off before he had finished the sentence. "Wait, sweetheart!" He picked up the letter which lay between them on the couch and looked at the signature again. His mind went scurrying back through the days of his journey to Sweden. He had received his mistress's letters at this stage and sent his answers back at that—and suddenly he knew how the secret had escaped. He sat staring in front of him at the streets of Celle.

"God's blood, but that's the truth," he said in a low voice. "It's I, I alone, who have put you to this torture."

"You, Philip?" She leaned her cheek against his shoulder with a little laugh. No hurt could be done to her by him.

"You? How?"

"I stayed at the Golden Lantern at Celle. A pot-house. It was a mistake. The mere choice of so vile a place was suspicious. I gave my name as Count Tercis."

"Oh!" said Sophia with a moan.

"It was madness. The next morning as I rode away, I came face to face with—what's the fellow's name—Muller—yes, Heinrich Muller—Bernstorff's servant in the Zöllner Strasse. My dear, I was out of my wits with pride. Nothing in the world could touch me to my hurt. I felt your love

about me like armour. My happiness was glorious. He had terrified me once. I grinned at him with derision like a schoolboy. The fellow was astounded. Yes, that's it. I'll wager that within the hour Bernstorff knew that I had lain hidden for a night in Celle under the name of Tercis. And what Bernstorff knows, Clara von Platen knows too."

For a little while the lovers sat huddled together silent and aghast. Then Sophia Dorothea—she made no reproaches—said in a small voice.

"I think Maximilian knows too."

"Maximilian? No!" said Philip violently.

Prince Maximilian would have asked his price for his secrecy, had he known. He had so pestered Sophia Dorothea that she could not visit Herrenhausen itself until she had made sure that Maximilian slept in a quarter of the house far removed from hers. But some delicacy hindered him from giving that reason for his conviction. He had another at his hand.

"Maximilian and Clara von Platen are at daggers drawn. Don't you remember? He had been told that water in which peas had been boiled was an infallible test of rouge and he squirted some into Clara von Platen's face when she had a party at Monplaisir. It was just the sort of monkey trick Maximilian would play. He was arrested for it and locked up in his bedroom. He and Madame von Platen never speak."

"They do now," Sophia returned. "She and Maximilian and Monsieur de la Cittardie."

"Cittardie!" cried Philip recalling the little fat friend who trotted at the heels of Maximilian. "That hogshead! That barrel of lard!"

"They are always together. They are plotting something. I am frightened," said Sophia with a shiver, and Philip caught her close to him.

"My dear one! The pain I cause you! But listen! They have no proof. It's guesswork and prattle. The name of Tercis must disappear. I'll call myself the Chevalier. We'll think of another name for you—a lovely one to fit you. And we'll face them boldly. That's the way."

Facing people was his way but not hers. Love had made a coward of her. She saw peril in each dark corner and read an accusation into each whispered word.

"I'll give a great party in my garden and ask all Hanover," he cried.

"Clara von Platen too," urged Sophia.

"Clara von Platen and Max the monkey and the barrel of lard. No one shall be left out," and then he sat leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and his hands covering his eyes. He sat so long in that strained

attitude, so motionless, so lost in unhappy thoughts that Sophia forgot her own distress.

"Dearest, so long as we are faithful, what else matters? I love you to madness."

Suddenly Philip rose to his feet and catching her up in his arms kissed her passionately.

"Beautiful mouth, I love you. And I want the world to know it. I want you side by side with me through life, through death. If ever I do anything worth doing, I want men to say, 'Without her it would never have been done at all.' Secrecies! Shifts! Dear God if we could be free of them! You and I together always! What couldn't we do?"

An old theme for baffled lovers. But probably no pair ever debated it so vainly as this luckless couple in the Palace at Hanover. Already suspicion was penning them in, fear had come to them and, so far from striving to make a glorious record of their united lives, they were already at their wits' end to avoid discovery and avert disgrace.

CHAPTER XXIX

A PLOT FOILED

KÖNIGSMARK'S great party was given during the last week of May and followed the fashion of the times. The cost of it was colossal and put a strain even upon the Königsmark fortune. His sister Aurora, whose beauty was already a theme for poets, acted as hostess for him and she and Philip were the only two unmasked and dressed in the current mode. The guests included all who were of mark in Hanover and many of Philip's old friends from Dresden. Prince Frederick Augustus, the heir to the Electorate of Saxony and Philip's crony of the days in Venice came as Orpheus—an Orpheus with a lute, in a full-bottomed peruke, silk stockings and high red heels. Marshal Podevils was Nestor, George Louis his great ancestor Henry the Lion, the Princess Sophia Dorothea Diana, and Clara von Platen most appropriately Fredegonda. Ermengarde von Schulenberg for once made a profit out of her height for she came as the young Endymion and with her fair hair and her coat of white ermine to do service for a sheepskin she could hold her own against anyone even in that galaxy. But whether they came as gods of old Greece, shepherdesses, gypsies, Turks, sultanas, slaves or Romans, they came spangled with diamonds and gleaming in velvet and satin.

The party began with a dinner, the couples for which were arranged by the chances of a lucky bag, and it happened that Frederick Augustus of Saxony drew as his partner Aurora von Königsmark and thus began the long association which filled so great a part of the *chroniques scandaleuses* of the next generation.

After the dinner was finished the guests found twenty card tables laid ready in one room with a large buffet at the end of it. Beyond was a dancing-hall with a chosen orchestra. In a music gallery a concert, for which the finest voices—Ferdinando, Nicolini, Salvadore and Borosini—had been fetched from Italy, only waited its audience to begin. And beyond the blaze of the windows and glass doors, the wide garden steeped in the cool blue dusk of a summer night spread out its invitation. Lanterns burned dimly and discreetly. Arbours fragrant with the scent of flowers half hid themselves

cunningly. Smooth lawns were interspaced with lime-tree walks; and at its boundary the Leine river rippled by, now whispering against the bank, now laughing over the stones.

By midnight Philip could feel that his duties as host were sufficiently discharged. He stood outside one of the glass doors in the garden with his handkerchief to his forehead. From the windows near to him came the rattle of coins in the card-room. Farther away the rhythm of feet and the swoon of violins pulsed out into the air. He had hardly spoken to his mistress all that evening and as he looked about in the hope of snatching if only half a dozen words with her, a voice spoke at his elbow.

"Sir, will you give me your arm?"

He turned and saw a woman masked and shrouded from head to foot in a white domino. She spoke in a counterfeit voice, but it was not the woman for whom he looked. Some leap of the heart would have told him, had it been. He bowed and thought that below the domino he saw the hem of Fredegonda's billowing dress.

"On one condition," he said lightly. "That your Majesty is pitiful to-night."

It seemed to him that his playful phrase had struck a note more apt than he expected. For the woman started and spoke again with a change in her voice.

"And why to-night should I be pitiful?" she asked and a pair of dark eyes boldly challenged him.

"Because others have the armour of a mask to protect them. I alone am at your mercy and Queen Fredegonda was more famous for her cruelties than her gentleness."

The woman laughed and slipped her gloved hand under his arm.

"Your history is at fault," she answered. "Were I Queen Fredegonda, as you imagine, no one should be more at ease than you."

"And, prithee, why?"

"Because that great lady had a kindly eye for a handsome spark, and kept her cruelties for the punishment of her rivals."

There was a savage little note of anticipation in the woman's voice which made Philip shiver. He had no doubt now that it was the one who had taken the character of Fredegonda who was with him and that that one was Clara von Platen.

"In that case the ladies in my garden shall walk without fear," said Philip. "For if I may judge from a pair of eyes, this Fredegonda can have no

rivals."

Fredegonda sighed with satisfaction and leaned her hand upon his sleeve with a tender pressure. Philip's piece of flattery was as witless a thing as the veriest dunce could utter. But he knew there was no need to polish it. Clara von Platen was not particular for verbal refinements. Praise was praise and she liked it slab and thick like the red and white upon her cheeks.

They came to a little summer-house about which the path wound and Queen Fredegonda commanded.

"Let us rest here for a little while."

Her voice cooed, her eyes made the kindest promises, but the grip of her hand upon his arm was the grip of a jailor.

"We are alone," she said in a whisper as they passed into the shelter and she drew him down onto a bench beside her. She sighed. "Surely a fine summer night is the most alluring circumstance, and when privacy adds its opportunity what poor woman but must tremble lest her defences crumble."

Philip was beginning to feel singularly uncomfortable. Clara's addresses were as he knew direct.

"It is so indeed, Madam. A fine night as you say and privacy," he stammered, "though to be sure there is little real privacy where at any moment we may be interrupted," and to himself he added, "And how the devil am I going to extricate myself here?"

He was in a double quandary. For whilst he had nothing but repugnance for the Lady, he was in doubt whether she had not some cunning trick in her mind which she had prepared for his undoing. For she was listening, though she leaned against him and sighed like some amorous wench in the very extremity of passion. Was she listening for that very interruption which he had pretended to dread? She certainly was not listening to him. And she still held him by the arm with a strength which only violence could overcome.

The interruption came. Two voices were heard, two men walked into view from behind the pavilion. The path ran close by the front of it, and one voice had the thick note of George Louis, the other the mincing tone of Count von Platen. With a little cry of assumed terror, Clara von Platen sprang to her feet—a cry just loud enough to be heard by those two upon the path.

"I am lost," she exclaimed, and she flashed from the pavilion in her white domino and fled towards the house.

"Who's that?" cried the Prince with an oath. Franz von Platen let out a thin laugh.

"Egad, Your Highness, this is a dovecot and we have driven one of the doves away. Most impolite and unseasonable of us upon my word."

George Louis in a high good humour bellowed.

"By God, then, we owe the other one our apologies. Let's see who it is!" he exclaimed, and he ran forward into the arbour with von Platen at his heels. There was no escape for Philip nor could he remain unnoticed. He was wearing a dress of satin embroidered with diamonds, the coat the palest shade of blue, the waistcoat and the breeches white. Even in the gloom of the little pavilion he stood out shimmering against the brown of the walls.

"Ho ho! Our noble host!" cried George Louis, as Philip bowed to him. "We've been spoiling sport, have we? Who was the wench?"

"Nay, Your Highness, she wore a mask," Philip replied.

George Louis burst into a loud guffaw.

"That be hanged for a tale! You'll not fob me off so easily. By the way the filly kicked up her heels and ran, you had undone more than her mask, I warrant you."

Was this a chance encounter, Philip wondered, or the good Queen Fredegonda's contrivance! Mere chance if he looked only at the Prince, for George Louis had drunk himself into a boisterous sort of joviality which had nothing to do with plans and trickeries. But contrivance if he looked at Franz von Platen. Clara's partner and coadjutor was too aptly on the spot for Philip to accept his appearance as an accident.

"Come! Out with her name, man!" bawled George Louis. "We'll keep your secret. Egad, you're as nice as a confessor."

And suddenly with a little whoop which was as poor an imitation of surprise as Philip had ever come across, von Platen darted forward and stooped. Under the bench on which Queen Fredegonda had languished something—a piece of lace?—a handkerchief? gleamed white.

"Oh ho!" and again the Minister's mimicry of high spirits alarmed Philip by its utter poverty. "The lady has left her gage behind." He stood with a fringed glove dangling from his fingers. "She defies us to name her."

But he had not finished the sentence before the Prince with an oath had snatched the glove out of his hand.

"Good God!" he cried, all his joviality gone in the second. He bent his eyes to the glove. "Von Platen, fetch me one of those damned lanterns off a tree and you, my lord"—he flung a black glance at Königsmark, "I pray you to stay with me."

Franz von Platen was out of the arbour in a flash. The Prince stood silent and scowling with the glove crushed in his hand. He was as sober now as if he had touched nothing but water for a fortnight. Philip was silent too. Some devilish trick had been played upon him by Clara von Platen and her obedient scullion of a husband and the less he said at this juncture, the better.

Von Platen came hurrying back with the lantern tossing in his hand.

"Keep it steady, man!" cried the Prince and he held the glove to the light.

At the first glimpse of it, he saw his world—that is himself and she who made his world—girdled in a blaze of ruin. He had watched Sophia Dorothea strip with a curious repugnance that very same glove from her hand in his house. It was on the night before he had marched for the Morea. She would not even touch the miniature he had had painted for her, whilst that glove was between her hand and it. The glove was Sophy's, but Clara von Platen had secured it. Clara von Platen had dropped it; and he might claim Clara von Platen to have been his companion in the arbour from now on to Doomsday, the Prince would never believe him. And indeed why should he? Or anyone else? What! Clara von Platen, who flaunted her amours, run away in a panic like some poor doe with the dogs at her heels, lest she be discovered in a summer-house with Philip Königsmark! And buttoned up to the chin into the bargain! He could see all Hanover splitting its sides in derision.

Prince George Louis raised his eyes to Königsmark's face.

"A glove," he said.

"And a charming glove," returned Philip.

"You applaud my taste."

"If your Highness bought it."

"I thank you."

At this point the Prince's voice began to tremble with rage.

"Who wore this glove, Count Philip von Königsmark?"

"I cannot tell Your Highness."

"But the wearer was with you?"

"I think that most unlikely."

"Why?"

"I should have picked it up and returned it. That glove may have lain here for an hour or more."

"You have an answer for every question."

"I trust that I may never have any more difficult to answer."

George Louis' voice grew rougher with each question that he asked. Philip replied on a calm level of politeness and respect, which increased the Prince's exasperation.

"I'll give you one," he cried now in a fury. "Stand to it! Who was with you? Who ran away when we approached?"

If Philip answered "Clara von Platen," Franz von Platen would know it to be the truth, but George Louis would believe it to be the least ingenious of lies. He replied.

"I have already had the honour to inform Your Highness that the lady was masked."

"Very well."

George Louis turned to von Platen.

"Will you find the Princess of Brunswick-Lüneburg," he ordered, giving his wife her official title, "and bring her here to me?"

Count von Platen set the lantern down upon the small table in the Pavilion and with a little smile of malice for Philip, went off as eagerly upon his new errand as he had gone to fetch the lantern.

Philip's heart sank within him. Sophia had not been with him, that was sure. But she was to be taken unawares, confused, in some way made to look guilty.

"Her Highness, sir?" he cried. "How can Her Highness be concerned?" Philip asked incredulously.

"How indeed?" George Louis answered with a sneer. "Yet this pretty glove is embroidered with Her Highness's initials and Her Highness's coronet and is one of a pair which I sent to her from Ghent."

In the distance there rose a sound of voices, and a few seconds afterwards the flare of a torch. Oh, Count Franz von Platen had known very well where he could lay his hands on the Princess. She was coming along the path now, asking questions as she came. Why did her husband need her and so instantly. Von Platen waved his torch. His Highness himself would explain. A third voice joined in, a voice shrill and hysterical, the voice of Prince Maximilian. Philip Königsmark's face went white as he heard it. Maximilian and Clara von Platen had buried their enmity in a common hatred of Sophia. They were always together—they were working out some plan to ruin her. Here and now it was to be put to the touch.

The Princess entered the pavilion her head erect and a bright spot of colour in each cheek. She wore a gown of white satin. George Louis looked

at it with a sneer. In the darkness it might well have been mistaken for the white domino which he had seen flitting hurriedly along the path. Just outside the little building Count von Platen held high the torch and at his elbow Maximilian stood with a mischievous grin upon his face.

"You wished to see me, sir?" said the Princess. She at all events was not alarmed. "I am here."

George Louis had been holding the glove behind his back. He suddenly held it out to her.

"You can tell me where you lost this, Madam," he cried in a brutal, harsh, triumphant voice.

Sophia Dorothea did not answer. She looked at her husband in sheer perplexity. Then she turned her eyes sharply upon von Platen and held them there until he shifted his feet and hemmed a little and ha'aed a little with every appearance of discomfort. Then she took the glove in her hands and turned it over, and "This is a very astonishing and ill-natured thing," she said with a quiet show of indignation. "Will Your Highness tell me who amongst my friends brought the glove to you and what lying tale he told?"

As she spoke she tossed the glove contemptuously on to the table. But George Louis had heard and seen enough. With an oath he strode past Sophia and out of the pavilion. He thrust von Platen and Maximilian roughly aside and went his way along the path. Sophia Dorothea was wearing a pair of white gloves embroidered in gold thread with her initials and her coronet, and in every detail the counterparts of the third glove tossed upon the table.

"Perhaps Your Excellency can explain the mystery?" she asked turning her eyes again upon von Platen.

But His Excellency was standing with his mouth agape and such an expression of bitter disappointment upon his face as brought a smile to her lips.

"Or Your Highness, perhaps!" she continued turning to where Maximilian had stood. But Maximilian had chosen the better part of valour. He had fled.

Sophia Dorothea opened the door of the lantern, held the glove to the flame and then dropped it on to the metal. She stood watching it burn and blacken and writhe and crumple up like a living thing in torture.

"Would that, Your Excellency, be too severe a punishment for who so planned this evil trick?" she asked, but now Count von Platen had gone, torch and all in pursuit of Maximilian. Sophia Dorothea turned for the first time to Philip.

"Will you give me your hand, Count Philip, back to the house?" she said in a loud clear voice. But the hand was trembling and clung desperately to his.

"Dearest, you were wonderful," he exclaimed in a low tone. Sophia shook her head and as they walked along the path where none could steal upon them, she answered.

"I was prepared. I lost my glove the night I came to your house. In the early morning you had gone. I was alarmed. I sent by the courier to Ghent and had another made. When I heard that Clara von Platen and Maximilian were reconciled and plotting something against me, I wondered whether he had found my lost glove. But I felt as if we were under the outspread hand of Death."

Up till this evening Sophia Dorothea had repelled Philip's dreams of flight, of a free and open life in a foreign and friendly country. The thought of the two children whom she must leave behind, her solace and comfort through these years of loneliness and humilation, had checked her, if for a moment she yearned to share his dreams. But under the stress of this night's danger her spirit wavered.

"One day we shall make the irreparable mistake," she said. "Philip I can't lose you. . . . I am yours up to the throne of God. Yet—yet——" but she dared not think of the hard choice which one day she must make. The violins were throbbing in the ballroom, and the money clattering on the card tables and all the lights ablaze. She must set her best foot forward and tune her lips to their liveliest smile.

CHAPTER XXX

A COTTAGE IN ARCADIA

THE campaign of that summer was disastrous for the armies of the Grand Alliance; and it needed the naval victory of the English Admiral Russell at La Hogue to save it from disruption. Namur after a siege of eight days was captured by the French and at Steinkirk an attempted surprise by the Allies was, owing to the incapacity of the Dutch General who commanded the English troops, converted into a defeat. The Hanoverian army was held back in support and took no part in that engagement. But Philip volunteered and was lent to the Prince of Wurtemburg and fought in the very hottest of the fray; for which unnecessary valour he was bitterly reproached in a letter from his mistress in Hanover.

"My plight is pitiful," she wrote. "It seems to me that every gun is pointed at you. . . . *Grand Dieu* if any hurt were to happen to you, what would become of me? I could not conceal my grief nor be mistress of my emotion."

That was the trouble with both of them. They wrote foolish passionate letters, now full of jealous reproaches, now imploring pardon. If a post came and brought them nothing, at once they were sure they were forgotten and must write off in a fever to explain that they wished they were dead. When an assurance arrived that a letter had been mislaid in the post, then they jumped to the conviction that it had been seized by their enemies and that their secret had been discovered. As a fact, some letters were from time to time stolen and louder and louder grew the whispers gossiping of their intrigue. Neither of them was naturally discreet; both of them were quick of temper; and through three months of danger and separation they were living upon their jangled nerves.

When the troops went into winter quarters, Philip was refused leave to return to Hanover. He could have leave for the Hague, for Brussels, for Hamburg, for wherever in reason he wished to go, but not for Hanover. Philip poured out imprecations upon von Platen.

"Everybody plots against me, men and demons, and even old women who are worse than demons."

Sophia Dorothea could only assure him of her unalterable love. Letter writing had become difficult, for Aurora Königsmark who so often fulfilled the function of a post bag was away with her sister in Hamburg. Neither of the lovers had the patience to understand the true meaning of that circumscription of Königsmark's leave. Up till this autumn Duke Ernst Augustus had refused to take seriously Clara von Platen's accusations. He had a soft corner in his capacious heart for his beautiful young daughter-in-law. Philip with his rare good-looks, his great fortune and the splendour of his establishment was an ornament to the Court and a fine soldier besides. But now Ernst Augustus was listening, now he was taking notice.

Philip, half mad with anger and love, betook himself to Brussels, where he drank, and railed against the von Platens, and gambled, losing great sums of money one night and winning great sums the next, which were as often as not never paid. Thus at one sitting he won thirty-two thousand crowns from his old friend Frederick Augustus of Saxony and Frederick Augustus went back to Dresden the next morning with the debt undischarged.

In Hanover Monsieur Balati was busy with King Louis' money. The von Platens and Bernstorff at Celle shared in the largesse and Ernst Augustus used the opportunity to make sure of his Electoral hat. He and George Louis paid a visit to Duke George William at Celle to obtain his support and in a moment of madness Sophia Dorothea wrote to her lover to come to her during their absence, whatever the risk. Königsmark left the camp at Dist without leave and in disguise. He traveled all day and half the night for a week. He arrived in Hanover an hour before midnight and, still dressed as a common sailor with all the dust of his journey upon him, he made his way through the private garden and up the circular staircase to his mistress's apartment in the opposite end of the Palace.

For an hour or so their troubles, their small jealousies and quarrels were forgotten, but when their raptures were allowed a pause, each had only a melancholy story to tell. Sophia Dorothea was surrounded by spies. She could trust no one but the faithful Knesebeck; and she lived in terror lest each post should bring her news of her lover's death. Ernst Augustus was cold, and her one consolation was that George Louis was still so infatuated with Ermengarde von Schulenberg and so doted on the little daughter he had by her, that he had not a second to spare for even a sneer at his wife.

"When Aurora comes back to Hanover," she said smiling, "I shall at all events have someone to talk with about you."

But Philip fell back in extreme discouragement.

"Aurora's never coming back," he answered.

"She has married?" cried Sophia.

"No. She was in Hamburg seven weeks ago, and Marshal Podevils called upon her. He had a message for her from the Duke. The Duke had the highest regard for her but she and all her house had seen their last carnival in Hanover."

"She and all her house," Sophia repeated, catching her breath. "That can't mean— — Oh no!"

"It can't mean me?" Philip added the word which her lips refused to speak. He was giving a natural little illustration of a difference between them. Sophia Dorothea was inclined to play hide and seek with her own troubles. Philip, on the other hand, had learned to formulate his difficulties and perils as the first step towards defeating them.

"I shall know to-morrow," he continued.

"How? Philip, how will you know?" she asked, plucking anxiously at his sleeve.

"The first thing to-morrow morning," he answered, "I shall put on my best uniform and report myself to Field-Marshal Podevils."

"Philip!"

Sophia caught her breath. This was putting their fortunes to the touch too audaciously for her liking.

"I must. I am in Hanover without leave. Podevils is the good friend," Philip explained, using the phrase by which they named him in their letters. "If he has no definite orders from the Duke, he will find an excuse for me if he can."

"And if he has?"

"If he has," said Philip slowly. "Let us face it, *mea anima*! It will be either arrest and imprisonment— —"

"No!" and Sophia wrung her hands in her distress.

"Or dismissal from the Duke's service and banishment to Hamburg."

"Even so I lose you," she cried, and then with a bitter self-reproach. "And, my dear, I sent for you! It would be my doing. Imprisonment! You? Oh, I would never forgive myself!"

Philip caught her to his breast and closed her lips with his hand.

"Hush! Never say it! Clara von Platen was never so glad to receive a bribe as I was to get your summons. Sweetheart, I was hungry and thirsty for the sound of your voice, the touch of your hand, the tender pressure of your lips. Oh, if we could be together always."

And they fell to painting once more the walls of their cottage in the fragrant Arcadia of their dreams. There would be no inhabitants but themselves. There would be flowers and the freshness of dew and the moonbeams' silver. There would be no outbursts of jealousy, never would she have to drench her pillow with tears because he charged her harshly with her coquetries, never would he have to run off and get drunk because she accused him of inconstancy. No one would open their letters, for they never would write any. And never would he wake up with an ache at his heart and the sound of a bugle in his ears, nor she with the tears running down her cheeks and her children calling from the garden beneath her window.

Leonisse told him how one night when she was ill and re-reading a letter of his, Duchess Sophia had come into her bedroom and a page of it had slipped down upon the floor. Philip told her how a batch of her letters in Eleonore von Knesebeck's handwriting had actually been handed in mistake to her husband, George Louis. What terrible risks they ran!

Wouldn't it be wise, she asked, if he at all events tried to make friends once more with Clara von Platen? But he would have none of it.

"If I were lord of creation," he cried, "I would give that jade of a Platen to the bears to eat. Lions should suck her devil's blood, tigers tear her cowardly heart out. I would spend night and day seeking new torments to punish her for her black infamy."

The tirade did not offer any substantial help to them in this crisis of their affairs, but it was a great comfort to Sophia Dorothea.

"Thank you, darling," she said with a smile; and the dawn almost caught them unawares.

Philip put on his best uniform the next morning and reporting himself at Headquarters, asked for an interview with the Field-Marshal. The old Field-Marshal received him with friendliness.

"You have leave to remain in Hanover for a month," he said, and Philip was overjoyed. He had a month. Why, the world might end in a month. But the next words of Podevils took all the savour from his enjoyment.

"After the month you must return to your camp at Dist, unless you wish to resign from the Elector's service."

"Resign," Philip cried in consternation.

Podevils nodded his head regretfully.

"It is rumoured that a higher post is reserved for you in your own country."

"I have already refused it."

"If you would ask for the offer to be renewed," Podevils insisted, "His Highness the Elector will put no obstacles in your way."

"It is too late," said Königsmark.

The Field-Marshal sat for a few moments in silence. Then he added: "There is no future for you in the army of Hanover."

Philip was very white but very stubborn.

"I am not ambitious, sir."

The old man changed his tone. A note of appeal came into his voice. It was the good friend and not the commandant who spoke.

"You keep a great house, Philip. You play high. You spend a great deal of money. It may be—I have no right to say as much, but my regard for you pushes me—that if you continue your present service you may find yourself in great straits."

Philip was at a loss. Undoubtedly his old friend would not have spoken so frank a warning without good reason. And perhaps at another time when the charms of his enchantress were less visible and immediate he might have understood more clearly the nature of the warning. But he was a man distraught.

"I have no debts, sir, that I cannot pay," he said and Podevils threw up his hands.

"That is my last word," he said, and Philip saluted and withdrew.

The month had not elapsed when Podevils' monition was justified to the last particular. War was declared by Denmark and Sweden against Celle and Hanover, and Königsmark must leave for the camp at Dist without respite enough for a farewell word with his Leonisse. From Dist he marched with his regiment to the Elbe, whilst the King of Denmark razed the hated fortifications of Ratzeburg to the ground. At the same time Charles of Sweden estreated the great revenues of Königsmark, and the Colonel was left high and dry at the head of his regiment on a bank of the Elbe with his bills rising from the floor of his tent like winter snow in the Alps and nothing but his slender pay wherewith to settle them. For months the two armies watched each other across the river, whilst negotiations for peace were begun and broken off and begun again. There was no fighting. The brigades of Celle had been so cut up at Steinkirk the year before that it was in no condition to fight. But the armies glowered across the river at each other and no man could leave his post. At the age of twenty-six, in prospect as in fortune, Philip was sunk in ruin.

Meanwhile events as disastrous to his mistress took place in Hanover. The Electoral Prince George Louis returned from Flanders and so

resounding a quarrel took place between him and his wife that you could hardly have matched it in the old days of Billingsgate Market. Sophia Dorothea reproached him with Ermengarde von Schulenberg and he taunted her with Königsmark. If he was a scandal to the title of Prince, she was a byword as a Princess. As the voices rose there was a commotion in the corridors and in the height of his fury George Louis took her by the throat. In reply to her screams ladies-in-waiting, valets, pages, housemaids, burst into the room and the Electoral Prince flung his wife half-throttled to the ground.

Sophia Dorothea, without taking her congé, drove off to Celle with the marks of her husband's fingers on her throat and throwing herself at her father's feet, implored him to demand a divorce for her and to provide her with a separate maintenance.

She could have chosen no moment more unfortunate for such an appeal. George William, impoverished by the campaigns against King Louis in Flanders and with an as yet unsettled indemnity to Denmark hanging over his head, was at his wits' end for money. Sophia Dorothea and her mother Eleonore might harass him with their tears and their prayers, he had not the means to content them. And with Bernstorff always at his elbow, he had not the will.

"Wives must be obedient to their husbands," he said sententiously. "You must go back to Hanover and your children, my daughter, and take for your example that great lady, the Electress Sophia. Does she fill the air with complaints of the Countess von Platen? No! She accepts her with a proper dignity."

All his old idolatry of his daughter had gone from him. His wife could no longer move him. They meant vexation and discomfort and troubled days and spoilt all the enjoyment of hunting. He was the weak man stubborn and worked himself up into a great heat of indignation against the intolerance of Sophia Dorothea.

"Go home," he cried. "And be dutiful! There is a sad name for such wives as you."

"Iphigenia," said his daughter, and by no other word could she have done to herself so much hurt.

She was trundled back over that heart-breaking road from Celle to Hanover as poor as when she came. Her great dowry belonged to the Treasury of the Elector. The painted cottage in Arcadia had dwindled into a shack in a land of dreams.

CHAPTER XXXI

GOSSIP FROM DRESDEN

MONSIEUR de la Cittardie had returned from Dresden. Monsieur de la Cittardie belonged to a curious small class amongst the lesser noblemen which has no parallel to-day. Possessed of a respectable name and a small allowance or income, they wandered from capital city to capital city in search of a job at Court. Baron de Pollnitz, he of the Memoirs and the Letters, is the outstanding example. Monsieur de la Cittardie followed a long way behind. He had not so far been very fortunate, although he nursed a hope that by clinging to the skirts of Clara von Platen he would sooner or later be wafted into the Paradise of office-holders. To such a man the deaths of the Elector George of Saxony and his mistress the Countess von Roolitz within the same fortnight offered a compelling allurement. George's brother Frederick Augustus succeeded unexpectedly and the Court suffered a complete transformation. Monsieur de la Cittardie hurried to Dresden and following the usual procedure sent a letter to the Chamberlain petitioning for a presentation to the new Elector. Monsieur de la Cittardie's credentials were satisfactory and his petition was granted. His address was polite, he ate heartily and could sit in his chair drunk when most of his neighbours were under the table. These were great qualifications for admission to Court circles and Monsieur de la Cittardie found himself a welcome guest at the feasts and entertainments which accompanied the inauguration of the new Elector. But the glittering prize of a small office with big perquisites was still withheld from him; and he returned to Hanover with nothing to show for his labours but a rounding of the tub of his corpulence and a poison bag of chronicles. He carried them both to Madame von Platen at Monplaisir on the night of Saturday the thirtieth of June.

It happened that only a small party was assembled there, Clara von Platen herself, Madame Weyke, once Catherine Marie Busche and George Louis's mistress but now married to a General in the Hanoverian army, Ermengarde von Schulenberg, and a few gentlemen of the Court, Baron Stubenfol, Monsieur Chauvet and Captain Harrenburg being amongst them. For a time Monsieur de la Cittardie kept the company on tenterhooks. It was clear from his smiles and his grimaces that he had some fine scandals to

relate. But he was giving himself importance by withholding them, and he described with a detail which exasperated his audience the splendour of the late Elector's obsequies, and the magnificence of the new Elector's inauguration. Finally he let fall as though it were a matter of no consequence, the remark to which all this while he had been leading.

"Count Philip Königsmark was in high favour."

Clara von Platen sat forward with a quite definite little jerk. After peace had been made with Denmark, the Hanoverian troops had marched back from the Elbe, but Philip had obtained leave and was not with his regiment. Rumours that he had stayed in Hamburg, that he had travelled to Berlin, that he was seeking to make his peace in Sweden with his offended King, had been flying about the town. Here was the first authentic news.

"So he was in Dresden," said Clara von Platen slowly, "and in high favour, you say?"

"The Elector invited him to return to the army of Saxony with the rank of Major-General," said Monsieur de la Cittardie with a sly smile.

Clara's face suddenly flushed even through its enamelled mask of white and red. She was close upon her fiftieth year, and though still rapacious for lovers, she found it more and more difficult to assemble them about her. At one time they must lose their money at her card table before they could win her favour. That stage in her amatory history had been passed. As Monsieur de la Cittardie, whose tongue spared no one, said, the only "ombre" she asked for now from a lover was his shadow on the wall of her bedroom. She was indeed forced to contemplate yet a third stage when she would pay for the satisfaction of her passions either by services at Court or in cash down. And in this contemplation she had bethought herself of Philip Königsmark. He was clean out of favour, penniless and harassed by debts. It would be a triumph to have that pretty fellow dangling behind her like a lap dog on a lead; and it would be the bitterest sort of humiliation for the hated Sophia Dorothea. She had taken care through her obedient friend Bernstorff that the Princess should not get from her father the means to relieve Philip in his necessity, and lo! he had found a way out of his troubles for himself! A Major-General in the army of Saxony with the perquisites and pay attaching to that command! Could anything be more provoking? No wonder that the enamel cracked!

"A Major-General!" she exclaimed angrily. "God bless my soul, I must petition for a regiment for my scullion."

"But Philip Königsmark refused the appointment," said Monsieur de la Cittardie smoothly.

"Refused it?"

Clara von Platen's eyes narrowed. Then Philip had found a gold mine somewhere else or—or—and she disliked the alternative even more intensely—or he chose bankruptcy and the love of his mistress to a comfortable living at the beck and call of Clara.

"It seems that he prefers the air of Hanover," said Monsieur de la Cittardie, "to the air of Dresden."

"Yet he went to Dresden," argued Madame Platen.

"His friend the new Elector owed him thirty thousand crowns from a bout at bassette a year ago in Brussels."

"Did Königsmark collect them?"

Cittardie shook his head and Clara von Platen drew a breath of relief.

"The moment was not auspicious," said Cittardie. "His Highness acknowledged the debt in the handsomest way. But he had just buried his brother with all the splendour suitable to the occasion. And he had just been enthroned as Elector of Saxony and King of Poland. The Treasury was empty. However the little Philip, as you used pleasantly to call him, was luxuriously entertained. There was one supper party which obtained a great celebrity in Dresden. I had the good fortune to be invited to it . . ." and Monsieur de la Cittardie broke off with a look of consternation. "Oh no, that is neither here nor there. My foolish tongue runs away with me."

At once, as Monsieur de la Cittardie had foreseen, his audience was in a fever to hear the account of this famous supper party.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Cittardie. "I couldn't! Upon my soul I couldn't. A trumpery affair, ladies! And not fit for your delicate ears!"

He looked at Madame von Platen and from her to Mademoiselle Ermengarde von Schulenberg in such a fright that both were sure that they had been roughly handled in the conversation.

"But you said that the party was famous in Dresden," they exclaimed.

"Did I?" Cittardie asked, more confused than ever. "Did I now? Well, no doubt the gossips made the most of it. And after all, it was the Elector himself who was to blame. Everybody had drunk too much, and Count Königsmark was in great distress. There are reasons, are there not, why, if he could not get money, he should be a trifle overbalanced? Certainly I was surprised. . . . But I must not say more. . . . He had been received with great kindness at Monplaisir. Yes, that's why I was puzzled. Such a singular quittal! But upon my soul, I must say no more." He looked up and saw the placid face of Ermengarde disturbed with the effort to follow the devious track of his conversation.

"And Mademoiselle!" he cried as though at that moment he had first become aware of her presence. "Mademoiselle who has always had a pleasant word for people behind their backs! Mademoiselle with the many friends and herself all kindness. Why?" and he spread out his hands. "Now why should she suffer from any man's tongue? No, you see, I can say nothing. The supper party! Let us forget it."

Monsieur Chauvet sniggered. He was not very pleased that Cittardie should hold the stage so long.

"Yes. Obviously gentlemen of breeding would find it quite impossible to repeat the words spoken on so private an occasion."

Monsieur de la Cittardie who was dying to repeat, and indeed with embellishments, a little more than anyone had said at the famous supper party, pursed up his lips.

"Private?" said he. "Ah, private. I wonder. It was certainly all over the town the next morning. 'Madame von Platen!' they said. 'Why should that great lady take to heart a few salty innuendoes?'"

The great lady, however, did take them to heart and insisted that Monsieur de la Cittardie should tell his story without delay.

It was an age when reticence was held in small repute. Men babbled of their triumphs and lied about their defeats and toasted their mistresses by name. Women were as frank. There was no stigma upon the woman with many lovers. Duchess Sophia, whose reputation was unsullied, received Clara von Platen without hesitation and Duchess Sophia's daughter the Electress of Brandenburg could not count her affairs of the heart upon her ten fingers. And all the world talked. Hanover talked of Paris and Vienna and Berlin and Dresden. Dresden talked of Berlin and Vienna and Paris and Hanover.

It was the Elector himself who called the tune at his supper party. He described as many of his amours as he remembered and then called upon his neighbour. It came to Philip von Königsmark's turn. If he was silent he was suspect. On the other hand there was Clara von Platen ready to his tongue. She was notorious, a tireless harlot, a woman with energy and brains who only needed a larger stage to play a great part in the refashioning of Europe, and a constant subject of speculation to the Ministers of neighbouring States.

Königsmark made Clara Platen the theme of his ungenerous muse. She had been a vindictive enemy of the Princess, from the Princess's first coming to Hanover and he did not spare her. Her milk baths, the violence of her red and white complexion, her cruelty to her servants, her rapacity and her lusts. Upon all these traits Königsmark dilated with a pungent humour

which Monsieur de la Cittardie with an air of great regret reproduced. How she had whipped and flung into prison a young housekeeper with whom Duke Ernst Augustus had trifled for five minutes in the garden of Monplaisir. How she had cheated Königsmark at cards on the first night of their meeting and fairly ravished him afterwards, and a hundred stories. His audience laughed. Oh, to be sure and the Elector more loudly than any of them. And Clara von Platen listened white with fury and her fingers extending and clutching her dress like talons. All her desire for Philip turned to gall and hatred as she listened. She would have liked to have his beautiful face at that moment beneath those talons of hers, so that she could rip the flesh from his cheek and tear his fine dark eyes out of their sockets.

"Did he rail at other women?" she asked.

Monsieur de la Cittardie shook his head.

"At none, Madame."

"Did he praise other women?"

"Only Mademoiselle," said Cittardie with a bow to Ermengarde.

"Oh, he had a word for me?"

"To be sure. Mademoiselle was a good kind placid mountainous creature, who wanted nothing from anyone but his money."

"I am beholden to Count Königsmark," she said with tears of anger starting from her eyes.

"But did he not praise his lady love?" Clara von Platen interrupted. She had no tears to shed, she sat in an icy rage, shivering like a woman with the ague and with her painted cheeks and glaring eyes looking twice her age. "Had he no soft speeches for the Princess?"

"He never mentioned her, Madame," and that omission angered Clara von Platen even more than his ridicule of her. Sophia Dorothea must be sheltered in the sanctuary of his heart. No boasting of her favours, no sly dig at some defect of her form which only the sharer of her bed could know! Her very name must remain unsullied by its utterance amongst those topers at the Elector's table.

As Monsieur de la Cittardie reached the end of his loquacity, there came a knock upon the door.

"Heinrich Muller asks for a word with your Ladyship," said the servant and Clara von Platen sprang to her feet with a cry. Her eyes were wide, her mouth open. A miracle had taken place. A prayer had been answered.

"Send him in!"

Clara von Platen waited with her eyes fixed upon the door. There was a sound of heavy footsteps. Heinrich Muller in the dress of an artisan with a leather apron hanging from his shoulders to his ankles appeared in the doorway.

"Well, Heinrich?"

"He is here."

"Since when?"

"A few minutes, my lady. The moment after the lamps were lighted in the house, I hurried to Monplaisir."

"Half an hour then."

"No more," said Heinrich.

Clara von Platen passed the tip of her tongue across her lips. She smiled secretly. She sat down again and giggled. But there was no humour, no friendliness in the giggle. On the contrary it frightened the little band of courtiers who heard it. It was all malice and triumph and meanness. A very wicked child with a long score to settle and, suddenly, the opportunity to settle it, might have gloated in just that way.

"You will go back to your post, Muller. You have men with you?"

"One at each end of the street. One in a boat at the bottom of the garden."

"A messenger may be sent from the house. Or a messenger may come to the house. Or he himself may go out."

"Whoever it is will be followed," said Heinrich Muller stolidly.

"That is well," said Clara von Platen and Heinrich Muller with a bow went out of the room.

Clara von Platen looked from one to the other of her companions, quietly smiling, quietly savouring some exquisite pleasure to which they had not the key.

"And so Count Philip blamed me for my cruelty," she said softly.

"He was absurdly censorious," replied Monsieur de la Cittardie.

"Was he? We shall see," cooed Madame von Platen, and the smile became a grin and through the mask of glaring white and flaming red a skull, a head of death seemed to thrust itself forward.

"Philip has come back to Hanover," she went on. "Very discreetly wrapped in a big cloak."

Ermengarde von Schulenberg smote her hands together. She was a creature of tears rather than of violence. She bleated where Clara snarled.

But her blue eyes flashed with a mild fire.

"He shall leave Hanover again to-morrow," she said with trembling lips. "I'll see to it."

But Clara von Platen laid her hand on Ermengarde's knee.

"My dear, I beg of you. His Highness the Electoral Prince is in Berlin. It will take time for a letter to reach him. Say nothing! You shall give me right of way."

Monsieur de la Cittardie made a pretence of doubting Clara von Platen's capacity to deal with the position.

"He will slip through your fingers, and not for the first time. We thought that he was cornered in the arbour of his garden," said Cittardie.

Clara von Platen was not offended by Cittardie's doubts. She recapitulated in her mind all the precautions she had taken. She had borrowed Heinrich Muller from Bernstorff at Celle. He was not known in Hanover, he had no liking for Philip, he could be trusted to keep an inexorable watch on Königsmark's house. Sophia Dorothea could not help her lover. She was to have no separate maintenance. Duke George William's embarrassments and Clara's insistence between them had made certain of that. Clara indeed had passed through some days of anxiety when first the Princess had rushed off to Celle with the bruises on her throat. A separate maintenance meant a separate home in a country where Clara's claws could not reach her; and Clara had as little intention to let her go as a cat has a mangled helpless mouse. Happily the good Bernstorff was filled with a great yearning to become a Count. Let him lift a finger to loose the Princess from her shackles and there was no Countship for him as long as Clara von Platen had her mouth to the ear of Elector Ernst Augustus. But the Fates had been kind to her. Sophia Dorothea was as penniless as Philip; and she had them both here under her talons in Hanover, the girl who had driven her from the window of the Alte Schloss in shame eight years ago and the young lover who had made her his butt yesterday at Dresden.

She sat and thought over her plan and could see no flaw in it. Her guests took their leave with the exception of Monsieur de la Cittardie.

"It might be," he suggested, "that Count Philip sent no message and received none. It might be that he meant to burn his papers and slip out of Hanover as secretly as he slipped in."

"Well?" Clara von Platen asked with a smile.

"Would it not be well," he asked, "to make sure that a summons to the Palace did reach him?"

"From the Princess?"

"Yes."

"A forged letter?"

Monsieur de la Cittardie did not like these frank and uncompromising phrases. He preferred equivocations and stratagems and hints.

"Something of that kind," he answered uncomfortably.

Clara von Platen shook her head with decision.

"I thought of it. But there's no greater folly than to invent when nature will do your work for you. It does it so much better. The Electress is at Herrenhausen. The Elector is ailing and keeps his bed. The Prince is at Berlin. The children are at Celle. There is no Court. The Princess has the Leine Schloss to herself. Of course she will write. Of course the little Philip will obey"; and her hands closed tight so that her finger nails bit into her palms.

Monsieur de la Cittardie stood up and bowed.

"There is a small circumstance, Countess, which intrigues me," he said.

"Indeed?"

"It was observed at Dresden that Count Philip carried about with him, as though he feared lest it should ever be out of his sight, a small yellow casket of wood tied up with a ribbon."

Madame von Platen looked up with a sharp interest.

"Did you yourself see it?"

"Often."

"Did you handle it?" she asked with a sly laugh.

"I had never the chance," replied Monsieur de la Cittardie. "But it looked as if it might hold letters."

Clara von Platen nodded her head.

"A yellow casket—tied up with a ribbon. I thank you"; and as he bent his head and kissed her hand, she added warmly, "There will be some new appointments to complement His Highness's new dignities. An additional Chamberlain will be wanted. Whatever poor influence I have, Monsieur de la Cittardie, I hold at the service of my friends."

Monsieur de la Cittardie walked upon air back to his meagre lodging in the city. Clara von Platen stayed alone in her great reception room with its glass chandeliers and its golden draperies. Was there a single flaw in her scheme of revenge? One possible outlet from the net? One miscalculation? There had been a miscalculation but Clara was not aware of it and indeed it did not modify the event. She sat adding up the score item by item against the two lovers, until the summer morning poured into the room and the birds

sang upon the lawn. Sophia Dorothea and Königsmark. Twenty-four hours and they would have paid their bill in full.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE NIGHT OF JULY 1ST, 1694

CLARA VON PLATEN

MADAME von Platen had never felt either the ecstasy or the humility of a great love but she knew better than Monsieur de la Cittardie how great lovers behaved. At eight o'clock of the same morning, the first of July, Eleonore von Knesebeck in the dress of a servant with a hood drawn forward over her head, left a letter at Königsmark's house and with a glance over this shoulder and another over that, took a roundabout way back to the Leine Schloss. The news was brought to Clara von Platen at Monplaisir by one of Heinrich Muller's watchmen a quarter of an hour afterwards. Madame von Platen ordered her coach and drove in to her town house in the Schmiede Strasse. Her arrangements were complete, and she had all of the long day in front of her with nothing whatever to do except to rehearse again and again delightedly the pitiless expiation with which the dark hours of the night were to provide her. She was so occupied with that rehearsal and she so tingled with pleasure from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot that the shadows of the evening took her by surprise.

Philip, though he too stayed at home, was busier. This was to be his final day in Hanover. The Opera house, the Parade ground, the Assembly Rooms, the horn-beam hedges of Herrenhausen, its cascades, and its famous fountain—he had seen the last of them. But in the course of five years such a heap of dusty papers had accumulated in his lodging as would occupy the tidiest householder for a week. Philip did his best with them. There were old bills paid to be collected into one heap, old bills unpaid into another, letters from business agents and lovelorn ladies to be destroyed, letters to be written to his brother-in-law Count Lewenhaupt for the forwarding of such of his possessions here as he wished to retain and for the disposal of the rest. Then there were orders to be given to his staff. A travelling carriage without any indication upon its panels, and with his four best horses harnessed in the shafts was to be in waiting before eight o'clock in the morning at the corner of the Marktplatz and the Brunswick Road. His personal servant would be

on the box and his luggage would be in the boot. Philip was writing these instructions down when he was told that a visitor waited upon him below.

"A visitor?" cried Philip.

He had slipped into Hanover at a late hour the night before. Who knew of his return?

"I expect no one," he said.

"It is a Mr. Craston of the English Embassy," his servant replied.

"Anthony Craston," Philip repeated sullenly.

Anthony Craston had tried to push himself forward in the way between Philip and the Princess. Anthony Craston had denied him, years before that occurrence, when he had saved his brother from the hangman and his family from disgrace. Anthony Craston, once his dearest friend, was now a bitter enemy. And Anthony Craston knew that he was in Hanover. How did he know? And why did he force his company upon him? A spy perhaps? Very likely Clara von Platen had enlisted him. Philip thought it prudent to make sure.

"Let him up," he said.

Philip was sitting at his writing table when Craston was shown into the room. He was as cold and aloof as on that day when Anthony burst into his study at Monsieur Faubert's Academy, and Anthony was just as nervous and troubled.

"How did you know I was here?" Philip asked abruptly.

"I passed through this street last night. There were lights moving across some of the windows. It was late. I thought it likely that you had returned," said Craston.

Philip drew a head upon the sheet of paper under his hand. He was not really aware that he was drawing it. A note of remorse had inflected Craston's sentences and Philip was trying to adjust its value.

"Did Judas speak with that bitter note of self-reproach after his treachery? Had Craston somehow betrayed him?" he asked himself; and the head which came to life on the sheet of paper was the strong aquiline bearded face of a Jew.

"You saw the lights in my windows late last night?"

"Yes."

"It is now six o'clock in the evening."

"Yes."

Philip laughed scornfully.

"You have not been idle all the day, I take it," he said. He was, indeed, expecting Platen's police to enter upon Craston's heels. A charge of treason would be brought against him. Bernstorff had used his power at Celle with less justification than Platen had now in Hanover. And Philip, hemmed in by his sudden poverty, was just as helpless now as he had been in the Castle Chapel. "You have made your arrangements, I suppose?"

"As completely as I could," Craston answered ruefully. He did not notice the harsh irony of Philip's voice. He was too occupied with the recollection of a shameful hour in Bernstorff's office.

"I had not much time," he continued "I had to be careful, besides, of the reason I gave for borrowing. I had not enough myself to be of much help."

As he spoke Craston lifted from a big pocket in the flap of his coat a heavy canvas bag and placed it on the writing table in front of Philip.

Philip thrust his chair back in his astonishment and the legs grated on the floor.

"Money?" he said, staring at Craston.

"Two hundred and fifty pistoles," Anthony answered. "It's all in gold. It will take you into Sweden—or wherever you wish to go. I'm not asking any questions."

Philip rose to his feet. He touched the bag as though he doubted its existence.

"But why?" he asked. "You of all people? Why?"

He was not aware that on the night when he had rowed across the Aller river and climbed the slope above the French garden to his mistress's room, there had been someone who watched and the next day talked. He only recollected that here in Hanover he and Anthony Craston had quarrelled bitterly and that since that day there had never been more between them than the most formal greeting.

"There was a time when we were friends—Philip," said Craston awkwardly. "It is said that you are hard pressed for money. I know that you are in danger here. I hope that you'll take it."

Philip was moved by the revulsion of his feelings and for a moment he could not speak. Then he put out his hand and all the coldness had gone from his face.

"Thank you, Anthony," he said and Craston wrung his hand warmly and fled from the room.

Philip smiled with a wistful recollection of those past untroubled days at Monsieur Faubert's Academy in the Haymarket and told his servant to pack

the bag in one of his portmanteaus. It was quite true that he was pressed for ready money and the two hundred and fifty pistoles reached him at their most serviceable moment. But the unexpected revival of an old friendship moved him more than the actual gift and he took heart from it as from a promise of excellent augury.

He took his supper at eight o'clock and seasoned it with the pleasant fancy that this was the last time in his life when he would eat it alone. This night too was to be the last night when he must creep secretly into the Leine Palace to visit his adored mistress. With a flourish of defiance he arrayed himself for the visit as delicately as a bride for her bridal. He had so often slunk in with the grime of a long journey on his face and hands and the rough clothes of a peasant on his body. He was minded on this night which was in truth not the night at all but a golden dawn to show her every circumstance of honour.

He put on a fine shirt of batiste with lace ruffles at the breast and the wrists. He tied about his throat a cravat of white satin in a great triple bow and drew carefully over it the lace-edged fall of a cambric steinkirk. He dressed himself in a suit of flesh-coloured velvet with diamond buttons, silk stockings of the same shade clocked with gold, and red-heeled shoes fastened with big diamond buckles. He combed out the tangles of his thick brown hair till it hung in orderly ripples to his shoulders, but—alas for him! —he only girded his waist with a fragile dress sword, a pretty toy with a gold hilt and a white scabbard of cordovan leather. He slung about his shoulders a white cloak with a hood and walking down his garden to the water's edge stepped into a flat-bottomed skiff moored against the bank.

The heat of the day had brought up a white mist which lay low upon the river and in his boat gliding noiselessly with the stream he passed like a wraith. Once it seemed to him that he heard a faint splash of oars near to him, as though someone else was out upon a secret adventure like his own. But he saw no one, and no one hailed him and in a few seconds the sound died away. He passed under the bridge and guided the skiff to the stone steps which led up to the small private door below Sophia Dorothea's apartment. Philip made fast the skiff to an iron ring bolted in the stone. A moon in her first quarter lit the upper storeys of the Palace with a silver radiance, but here the river, the steps, and even the door to which they led were still as hidden below the mist as the world is when looked down upon at daybreak from an Alpine peak. Philip left his cloak behind him in the boat. Though the mist might have vanished, the moon would have set before he needed it again. He ran up the steps. The door gave as he turned the handle. He went in and closed the door behind him. In front of him the narrow staircase rose

steeply, dimly lit by a lamp upon a bracket just beyond the bend. To his right a long straight corridor ran to the offices on the ground floor. This too was faintly lit by a chain of small lamps. Königsmark stood by the door and listened. Not a sound reached his ears. He might have been standing in some ancient palace of dead Kings. But above white arms and tender lips and the warm slow smile of love most lovely awaited him. He went up the stairs quickly, stealthily, two steps at a time and his heart beating like a boy's upon its first adventure.

But whilst Philip was fastening his skiff to the ring-bolt, another boat was driven ashore at the foot of the Beginen Tower; and whilst Philip hurried up the dim staircase to the apartment of the Princess, a man was racing as fast as his feet could carry him to the house of Madame von Platen on the Schmiede Strasse. When he reached the door, he saw a carriage drawn up at the kerb and the coachman ready upon the box.

The man who ran was Heinrich Muller. Since nightfall he had kept the river watch. The river was the most secret approach and therefore the most likely. He was admitted to the house without question. He burst into the parlour unannounced.

"Madame, he is in the Palace," Muller cried, his features working, his stolidity all lost in excitement.

"By what door?"

"The little postern on the water."

"Keep watch on it, good Muller."

"Have no fear."

Madame von Platen was out in the Schmiede Strasse and stepping into her carriage. Muller shut the door, the coachman had his orders and drove off without a word. Muller went back to his boat under the Tower and pushed out again into the stream. He was doing more than serving his master and his master's friends to-night. Heinrich Muller had a grudge of his own to satisfy. One night a fine young gentleman had recoiled from him with a cry of terror and in his dull way he had enjoyed it. On a morning afterwards the same young gentleman had stared him down with a grin of derision and, again in his dull way, he could not forgive it. The mist still hung low over the water. He let his boat glide down to the Palace steps, unfastened Philip's skiff from the iron ring and towed it back behind him up the stream. He dropped the blades of his sculls into the water very cautiously. No one was on the watch. When he was opposite to the garden of Königsmark's house, he drew into the bank and moored the skiff at the spot where it had lain all the afternoon. It would be cold before his watch was ended. With a chuckle

of amusement he took the white cloak out of the skiff and set it at his feet. Then he rowed into the middle of the stream and lay upon his oars just above the bridge.

Meanwhile Madame von Platen drove through the Marktplatz and down the Grupenstrasse to the great pillared entrance to the Leine Palace. It was eleven o'clock at night but Clara von Platen's comings and goings were not challenged at the Leine Palace at any hour. She hurried up the grand staircase to the Elector's apartment. Outside the great double doors two halberdiers stood sentinel. They saluted her and she passed into an ante-room where a Lieutenant of the Guard, his coat loosened and his heavy sword on a table beside him, drowsed in a chair. He rose to his feet and with a bow opened an inner door. In the room beyond, a valet and a nurse were on duty.

"His Highness is sleeping, my Lady," said the nurse.

"He must be wakened."

Two doors led out of this room on opposite sides. Madame von Platen walked straight to the door on the left hand and opened it gently.

Followed by the nurse she passed into a bedroom. A small lamp under a shade shed a dim light. In a great four-post bed covered in with heavy curtains the Elector lay in an uneasy sleep. Clara von Platen drew the curtains aside and with a gesture dismissed the nurse. When the door was closed, she bent over the Elector and shook him gently by the shoulder.

"Ernst!" she called in a low urgent voice. "Ernst! You must wake up."

Ernst Augustus awoke. He looked at his mistress for a moment without recognition. Then he smiled:

"You, Clara?"

He stretched out a hand, patted her arm and turned on his side. In another second he would have been asleep again. But Clara von Platen was pressed for time. She shook his shoulder again.

"Ernst, you must listen! Philip von Königsmark is in the Palace."

Ernst Augustus was awake now. But he was an old and ailing man and his mind sluggish.

"He has right of entry. He is my Colonel of Guards."

"But he's in the rooms of the Princess."

The Elector started up on his elbow. A little gilt clock stood on a table by the bed. He looked at it quickly.

"At this hour?"

"He's alone with her."

Clara von Platen might have been purity's only prop in an obscene world, she spoke with so virtuous an indignation. The old Duke looked at her fixedly. He shrank nowadays from swift action. Second thoughts and even third ones were best and the night was a hasty councillor. Moreover Clara von Platen had always been jealous of Sophia Dorothea, jealous of her youth, of her beauty, of her jewels—had always been forward to set him against his daughter-in-law with stories of her indiscretions, her contemptuous epigrams, her intrigue with Königsmark—above all her intrigue with Königsmark.

"Are you sure of this?" he asked sternly. With his night cap half pushed back from his bald head, his heavy face shining with perspiration and his gross corpulent body thrusting up the bed clothes, he had yet enough of dignity to compel a truthful answer from his visitor.

But Clara von Platen had to-night no need to embroider.

"Philip Königsmark arrived secretly from Dresden late last night. To-day Eleonore von Knesebeck brought him a letter. To-night he rowed from his garden in a boat to the Palace steps. The little private door upon the river was open. He went in by it."

"He shall be arrested to-morrow."

"And the talk, the scandal!" cried Clara von Platen.

She was prepared for the Duke's hesitation. She had ready the one argument which would persuade him. "Before noon all Hanover will have the story on its lips. But take him to-night quietly, as he leaves the Princess' apartment, no one need know one word more than they know already. Lend me four of your halberdiers! Order the Captain of the Guard to lock all the Palace doors!"

The old man leaned towards her. Though there was no one in the room but those two, he subdued his voice to a whisper.

"Clara, what would you do?"

"Seize him! Arrest him! Hold him imprisoned here in the Palace, until you have decided upon his punishment."

Ernst Augustus pushed out his heavy lower lip and never took his eyes from his mistress's face.

"That is all?"

Was there a note of disappointment in his voice? Clara von Platen made a shift to hear one. She nodded her head at him eagerly.

"That is all."

"You promise me secrecy."

"Yes."

"And no . . ." he lowered his voice until it was no more than a breath "no execution."

Clara von Platen held up her hands in horror at the thought that she should take so grim an authority upon herself. Ernst Augustus said:

"Will you call the Lieutenant of the Guard?"

Madame von Platen was in the ante-room the next moment. She had wasted no time in her interview with the Duke. But there was no time to waste. Lovers' meetings after long absences might, to be sure, seem miserably short to them and yet be surprisingly long if measured by the clock. But there was no average of time to be assigned to them. Lovers were unaccountable people. They quarrelled for the mere spice of quarrelling, they abandoned each other eternally to-day for the thrill of to-morrow's reconciliation.

"If you are dealing with people in love, you must allow yourself wide margins." Clara von Platen reckoned and she was abrupt with the Lieutenant of the Guard.

"His Highness wants you."

The Lieutenant buttoned his coat and replaced his sword in his belt.

"I will follow you, Madame."

His Highness was almost as abrupt. He had told Clara the conditions on which he lent her his authority. He had been quite explicit—brief but quite explicit—and if she overrode them the blame was not his.

"Lieutenant Hansen," he said, "a crime has been committed. An arrest must be made. You will take your orders to-night from Madame von Platen and you will be as secret as the dead."

Lieutenant Hansen saluted and turned upon his heels.

"I am at your command, Madame," he said and he and Clara von Platen went out of the room.

The Elector fell back upon his pillows. He had cherished a liking for Sophia Dorothea. She was young and lovely and of a blithe spirit and certainly George Louis had treated her abominably. But she had taken her revenge too flamboyantly and Königsmark—well he had liked Philip Königsmark too—Philip Königsmark had been a distinction to Hanover—but he was dangerous now—dangerous to the good name of the House of Brunswick-Lüneburg. He must disappear or there would be worse to come.

Clara von Platen led the way out of the Elector's apartment and along a corridor to the great Rittersaal with the banners of the Knights projecting

side by side from the walls. A single lamp lit dimly a small space before the great hearth. Beyond the room was cold and empty and full of shadows. The high roof was lost in darkness, the banners swinging beneath it with every breath of air, seemed not so much the emblems of the Knights as the pale ghosts of Knights who had died. The back of the fireplace yawned black as a cavern and about the hearth lay a litter of bricks and trowels and mortar ready for mixing. A new heavy iron fire plate engraved with the Elector's arms was propped against the side of the chimney.

A sly smile flickered over Clara von Platen's face as she saw these preparations. But she spoke as though she was puzzled and a little put out.

"I didn't know these repairs were being done," she said doubtfully.

"They were necessary," said Hansen. "The wall was broken through this morning. It was crumbling. There is a great cavity behind and a possibility of a fire."

Clara von Platen bent down and stared into the hollow. It was large and black as a coffin. And again she smiled. But the face she showed to Lieutenant Hansen was disturbed.

"You will not be disturbed, Countess," said Lieutenant Hansen. "No work will be done here till to-morrow."

"You are sure of that?" she insisted. "You heard what His Highness said? What happens in the Palace to-night must never be known by a soul outside these walls."

She saw Lieutenant Hansen's face grow pale. He was a young man, little more than a boy and this woman with the cruel face ghastly beneath its mask of paint, and the fierce restless eyes searching the dark corners of the great hall, lest anyone should be hidden there, daunted him.

"I am quite sure," he replied and the quick nods of the head and the grin with which she welcomed his answer added abhorrence to his fear. Smiling and nodding her head, she was like an old witch with the palsy. His stomach turned over as she laid her hand upon his sleeve. He felt that her touch fouled him like that of some unclean beast born in the slime before man was.

"I want every door leading out of the Palace locked and the key removed from the lock," she said.

"I'll bring you the keys," said the Lieutenant.

"It must be done quickly and quietly."

"I'll see to it."

"There's a small door opening on the river."

"I'll begin with it, Madame."

The Lieutenant turned away upon his errand, but Madame von Platen stopped him.

"Wait! As soon as the doors are locked I want all the lamps in the corridors and the public rooms extinguished."

"The Palace is to be in darkness?"

"Complete darkness."

"As you will," said the Lieutenant doubtfully. "But the man to be arrested may suspect."

"It is better that he should suspect than escape," said Clara von Platen. "Choose four men from the guard to help you, amongst them one Luders."

"Luders?" Hansen asked. He repeated the name again. "Luders?"

"Yes," said Clara von Platen impatiently. "Choose four men you are sure of, but one of them Luders."

"If he is on duty here to-night," said Hansen.

Lieutenant Hansen was a young officer who took a pride in knowing as much as he could discover of the men he commanded. But Luders? He could not fit a face to the name.

"He is," said Clara von Platen shortly. "When the doors are locked and the lights out bring the four to me here!"

Lieutenant Hansen saluted. He was generous enough to dislike his task intensely. There was too much of the ambush and the trap for his taste. He had moreover an inkling as to the man for whom the ambush was set. But he had his orders and he went off without delay to carry them out.

There were few corners of the Leine Palace with which Clara von Platen was not familiar. She could have found her way blindfold from the still-room to the servants' attics. And long before Lieutenant Hansen had completed his silent work, she was back in the Rittersaal with a silver kettle, a spirit lamp, cloves and spices and a jar of strong wine. When Hansen returned with the four soldiers treading softly behind him, she was already mulling the wine in the kettle.

"These are the men, Countess," said Hansen in a low voice. "Luders, Bushmann, Marten, Sachs."

Clara von Platen looked them over by the dim light of the single lamp. They were all four, men of brawn and muscle, burly, broad-shouldered fellows armed with swords. Clara von Platen smiled running her tongue over her lips. The modish Philip with his slender form and beautiful face would

have a rough awakening when he stumbled, warm from the embraces of his passionate mistress, into the arms of these lusty fellows.

"They know their orders?" she asked.

"To obey you without question," Hansen replied.

"And after they have obeyed me?"

"To hold their tongues."

Clara von Platen heard the reluctance in the young Lieutenant's voice and realised his repugnance from her midnight ambuscade. But she shrugged her shoulders and uttered a callous little laugh. Of what account was his disapproval? He was an impudent boy and she would remember to break him in the morning.

"That will do then, Lieutenant. You have other duties," she said and with the ghost of a bow he turned on his heel and made his way back through the dark corridors to the Elector's ante-room.

Madame von Platen called softly to the four men.

"Come near to me!"

They gathered about her with something of young Hansen's reluctance, twice his age though every man of them was. They were all peasant-born, and in this vast shadowy room the woman with her piercing eyes and her paint-plastered face had the look of a goblin, malevolent and older than nature itself.

"You are Luders," she said to the biggest of them all.

"Yes, Madame."

"Show me your sword," and as he stretched it out towards her, her fingers felt the strong blade with a horrible amorous touch whilst a long low hiss issued from her lips. Luders seemed to hear the sword cutting through flesh, and hardened as he was by a hundred battles, he shivered.

Clara von Platen looked at his face sharply.

"A traitor will come this way to-night. You are to arrest him. If he resists, strike without fear. Fling him to the ground and bind him hand and foot. I want his confession before he dies."

She made them each drink a cup of the strong mulled wine.

"There shall be another brew to hearten you if he keeps us waiting," she said with a gruff laugh. But as they passed the cup about, not one of the four could find a laugh to answer hers.

"Now, come with me."

She led them from the Knights' Hall to the lobby by which they had entered. At the end of the lobby on the left hand, two great doors stood open. Beyond them the Palace stretched black and silent and empty, room after room, a Palace of the Dead. Luders and Marten she placed on each side of the doorway.

"You will not move until the traitor has passed you," she ordered.

Opposite to the entrance to the Rittersaal a fireplace was built and a great chimney stood out from the wall. In the angle of that chimney, hidden from the entrance into the lobby, she set the two remaining soldiers.

The lamp was still burning in the Hall of the Knights, and enough light came from it through the open doorway to show the two soldiers like statues beside the door; and to shine on the white faces of the two in the angle of the chimney. Those two, at all events, were still uneasy and afraid. Clara von Platen rallied them impatiently.

"Are you children?" she cried. "You are four to one and there's not a man amongst you but could with his own hands break that one across his knee."

Clara had forgotten the soldier who had won a name for gallantry and courage on the battlefields of Flanders and the Morea. She was remembering only the silken courtier with the winning smile and the dark, brilliant eyes, "the little Philip" who had once begged Bernstorff for mercy on his knees.

"You have nothing to fear. Wait without a word, without a movement till the moment comes. Then strike and strike hard!"

She left them and went back into the Rittersaal. She relit the spirit lamp and then extinguished the candles burning in a sconce against the wall. There was no light now in the corridors of the Leine Palace but that one faint blue flickering flame over which Clara von Platen bent as she heated her brew of wine. And the silence was as deep as the darkness. Clara listened and the lines on her face grew sharper and her eyes more anxious. There was no outlet which she had forgotten. "He must come this way," she assured herself. "He must!" But the minutes passed. Once a floor-board creaked. "It will be Philip," she whispered with a sigh of delight. Once the panel of a wall cracked like a pistol shot. "He has killed himself," she thought with despair that her vengeance was thwarted. Then again came silence—hours of it, years of it creeping one after the other like mutes at a funeral—whilst voices whispered in her ears and the ghosts of men crept about her. At last the sound for which she waited came. In the distance someone stumbled against a chair.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE NIGHT OF JULY 1ST

PHILIP'S APOLOGY

THERE could not have been a pair of lovers more carefree than were Count Tercis and his Leonisse upon that first night of July. Philip ran up the stairs, a boy again. Eleonore von Knesebeck was on the watch in the corridor, Sophia Dorothea within her little drawing-room with its walls of pale blue and its golden hangings—was she waiting for the moment when the page would be released from his duties and the rehearsal of "Iphigenia" begin? She stood with shining eyes and parted lips and the years had fallen away from her. She knew Philip was at the door before she heard his step. There was a sudden mist before her eyes and he came through it to her arms with the light of the new dawn upon his face.

"Dearest, I love you."

There was no music in the world for her which could match the passion in his voice. She pressed her face against his breast, her breath breaking from her throbbing heart in little sobs of happiness. He tried to lift up her chin with his hand.

"No!" she whispered and he kissed her hair. There were small white carnations caught in its dark wealth.

"They are like stars shining in an ebony sky," said Philip.

"A poet!" she cried. She stood away from him holding his hands, her cheeks dimpling and her dark eyes bright with laughter.

"To be sure," he answered stoutly. "But blame yourself sweetheart! Who made me one but you? Even on the march in Flanders—have you forgotten?"

For a moment her eyes were veiled.

"Forgotten," and a wistful smile made her lips tender. She was living again those long anxious days when any post might bring her news that her lover had fallen at the head of his battalion or in some wild unnecessary exploit for which he had volunteered. She recited a verse which he had sent to her before the battle of Steinkirk.

"La beauté qui le jour se couvre
Pendant la nuit ne cache rien
Les yeux fermés je vis un bien
Qui disparaît quand on les ouvre.
Dieu pour soulager mon amour
Faites que je dorme toujours!"

It was not verse which could challenge the pre-eminence of Monsieur Racine and its grammar was faulty as a gentleman's should be, but Sophia Dorothea spoke it from a full heart, her eyes upon her lover; and her voice gave a melody to its faltering rhythm and a yearning to the meaning of its words which would have made it enchanting to a Professor of Poetry.

"I used to cry myself to sleep whilst repeating those lines," she said and she threw back her head. "To think that those woeful days are gone forever! A miracle, Philip! You will never again have to wait for sleep and a dream before you see me. You will only have to stretch out a hand. I shall be at your side."

"Sophia!" he cried and caught her close to him. "The letter! You must show it to me, so that I too can be sure. The letter, sweetheart! Our passport to Arcadia."

Sophia set the palms of her hands against his breast and laughing tried to push him back.

"And how shall I show you the letter, sir, if you hold me so?"

He let her go and opening a drawer in her writing table, she brought out a letter. They sat down together on a couch, he with his arm about her waist and she leaning her cool cheek against his and held the letter between them.

"It was the most wonderful thing," said Sophia. "There was I sent back by my father with a flick on the ear like a truant child to school, and there was my dear love in Dresden twisting round and round like a bear in a pit—and suddenly the letter. Read!"

The letter was from old Ulrich, Duke of Wolfenbüttel, the monkey. News had come to him which caused him great distress. He had always loved his little Sophy——

"And that's true," said Sophia Dorothea. "He was a darling to me."

His little Sophy had only to make her escape to Brunswick. He would never give her up. She could make her home in his Duchy and secure a divorce from George Louis and then marry again according to the message of her own heart. Ulrich von Wolfenbüttel put his offer of service all down to the account of his love for his little Sophy; and no doubt that love was its chief incentive. But he had never forgiven George William of Celle for his cavalier treatment of himself and his son at the time of Sophia Dorothea's

betrothal to George Louis. And he was always pleased to put a spoke in the wheel of Ernst Augustus's chariot, especially since Ernst Augustus had been granted the Electoral hat. He had thus three reasons for his letter. But the two lovers were not concerned with his reasons. Here was their passport to Arcadia fluttering down from the Heavens to their feet.

"To-morrow then at eight at the corner of the Market Place," said Philip.

"We drive straight to Brunswick?"

"We should be there by nightfall."

"And whilst I seek my divorce, you will go to Sweden and make your peace with the King."

"When I have left the service of Hanover, that will not be so difficult," said Philip.

There was not a flaw, it seemed, in that smooth sunlit sea upon which they were to embark at eight o'clock to-morrow morning for the Islands of the Blest. Yet when the Princess had replaced the letter in her drawer and turned back to Philip, she saw that the expression of his face had quite changed. The confidence and the happiness had passed from it. It was grave —nay troubled and Sophia's heart sank within her breast. She had a foreboding that once more and for the hundredth time all the mass of their dreams and hopes was poised upon the tiniest fragile point. A boulder fixed on the crest of a ridge by the thinnest pin of rock; the rising sun is enough to split it off and it goes thundering down the precipice, starting a whole avalanche of ice and stone to carry destruction in its train. Philip was sitting with his eyes set upon the wall in front of him conning over something that must be said, forcing himself to meet a moment long foreseen and dreaded.

Sophia Dorothea set herself quietly at his side.

"Tell me, dear heart."

"Yes."

Philip did not look at her. He spoke to the wall over against him.

"I must be honest with you whilst there's still time for you to draw back."

Sophia Dorothea shook her head resolutely.

"That time has past."

"Wait," said Philip; and he began to speak to her, so tuning his voice that it should be neither cold nor passionate but a simple, clear machine for her better knowledge: and using the plainest undecorated phrases to describe unmistakably the stages through which his spirit had passed.

"When I came to Hanover six years ago, I came deliberately to win your love—more than that—to make you my mistress. It was not for love of you. I had a boy's first love for you at Celle, the awakening sharp, brief passion. But what I really carried away from Celle was a deep and abiding shame. I had grovelled at the feet of a man whom I despised—Bernstorff. I had whined for my life to be spared. I had held out my hands for him to tie. I had suffered—willingly—to my everlasting disgrace every indignity. That's what I carried away with me from Celle—and what I lived with for a year afterwards, I, a Königsmark, in the house of the Königsmarks. I used to lie in bed sick with shame at my cowardice, shivering at it like a boy in an ague. I used to see my grandfather John William and my father Conrad Christopher and my uncle Otto William standing round my bed and nodding to each other and saying: 'He's a changeling.' I used to see my brother Charles John, the Knight of Malta, join the group. I used to hear him say: 'No, sirs, Philip's a Königsmark but he's soft and cowardly and I must see to it that he wears a gown instead of a cuirass and writes with a pen instead of cuts with a sword.'"

"All through that year—I was very lonely at Breda—I lived, brooding myself down and down into the depths where men skulked in corners and lived mean frightened lives and wore out their knees rather than the soles of their boots. In a frenzy I appealed to Charles John, my brother. 'Take me with you on your next campaign—to the Morea, to Tangier, against the Turk, against the Moor—anywhere so that I may cease to be ashamed.' But Charles John looked at me with a friendly and smiling refusal. 'Leave rough work, Philip, to rough fellows! The gentle life for you!' he said and he took me to Monsieur Faubert's Academy in London.

"There I made a friend," Philip continued. "You know him."

"I?"

"Anthony Craston," Philip mentioned the name with a smile. "He thought better of me in those days than he thinks now. But because he thought well of me and admired the things which I could do and he couldn't, such as riding the Great Horse, I began to climb out of the pit of shame and self-distrust. I no longer said 'I am a pariah.' I said 'I have a friend and he sets me high.' I held my head up in those days for a year—yes, for a whole year."

"And then?" Sophia Dorothea asked as he paused.

Her face had gone very white. She was terribly hurt but her surprise was even greater than her pain. In the estimation of her world, Philip von Königsmark had been up to the last six months or so, the most enviable of men. His beauty, the grace of his movements and the urbanity of his address

had given distinction and even excitement to any assembly where he was present. He bore a great name and was worthy of it; he had a great fortune and spent it magnificently; he was courted by a host of friends; he had every attribute which made for serenity of mind and contentment; she herself had been a little dazzled and more than a little flattered by his favour at the beginning of their renewed acquaintanceship. It was difficult for her to identify him with this picture of a lad tortured by a sense of defeat and scorning himself for his inferiority to his fellows. She must hear the last word of this confession and that she might hear it, she attuned her voice to his, smoothing out of it every intonation which could betray resentment or distress.

"And then?" she asked.

Philip told her of the trial at the Old Bailey and the lie by which he had saved his brother from the hangman.

"I lost my friend by that lie," he continued. "He passed me as if I was a stranger after I had told it. And I was hounded out of the country with a rabble at my heels."

"Your brother too," said Sophia Dorothea shrewdly.

"Charles John," Philip exclaimed with a laugh of admiration. "Charles John was different from me. He strutted out of England with his nose in the air. He had flourish—what's the word?—panache. I slunk out with recollections of a great crowd silent and menacing—terribly menacing—in front of Faubert's school, and of another—this time filthy and murderous, which besieged the miserable lodging in which I had taken refuge. I was flung back again into terrors. Oh, I wore my mask cleverly enough perhaps, but I never knew when it might slip, and the real Philip Königsmark be exposed, the craven blubbering for mercy to a Bernstorff, the fugitive running like a rabbit through the alleys of London. And one day it would slip! I was sure of it, and the longer I was sure of it, the longer I brooded over it, the surer I became. Then at Dresden I heard of you and your unhappiness."

His voice had, in spite of his intention, taken on a gentler note and Sophia Dorothea moved sharply. But her voice was level when she spoke.

"Yes? Go on."

He was mad, he told himself, ever to have begun. She would never forgive him. No woman would. But he owed it to her that there should be the truth between them and not a lie.

"I got an idea that if I could win you for myself, all that had happened between the time when we were together at Celle and the day when I won

you would be wiped out of my experience. I should find myself confident again, master of my fears, scornful of them, proud. The idea grew into a conviction. I came to Hanover and set myself to cozen you. It was easy enough at first," he explained with a bitter laugh, "to deceive Clara von Platen. I was pretending to you. I had all my wits at my disposal to hoodwink her. I was playing very carefully a game, and the prize if I won was—what? Not you, dearest, but my own selfish salvation—a salvation worse than damnable for it was to be gained by cheating you."

Sophia sat by his side without a movement, without a word. Was there one touch to be added which would make him less odious and yet be true, he wondered? Perhaps one.

"But the plan didn't remain unchanged," he continued. "For I was changing. I couldn't be with you and not change. There was a night when His Highness George Louis was at cards when you bore yourself with so fine a pride that myself and my trumpery obsessions became of no account. There was an evening when I bade you farewell in the garden of Herrenhausen. I was no longer pretending. As I drove back to Hanover I passed the lighted windows of Monplaisir. I was expected. I drove on. I could not sully those few stolen minutes by the white statues under the trees. The memory of those minutes was a wonder, a glory all through my campaign in the Morea. I could not have endured but for it, but for the promise it held out. . . . And on a night in Celle a spark was struck, a flame was kindled, a soul was born in me."

"That night?" his mistress whispered.

"Yes. Before that night it was all yearning and adoration. I lived in moonshine. Afterwards it was knowledge that without you I was a log of wood on a stream, that however we might quarrel," and he laughed a little at memories of jibing letters which they had exchanged, "we must be together. I won my own miserable little victory—I had proof of it the next day as I rode out of Celle—but I won something more, a soul. Earth to earth, my dear, flesh and blood beating with flesh and blood, and a soul sprang to life. And the first fruits of it were on the tree the next morning—the sure conviction that I must make to you my confession as I have been doing to-night."

With a sudden movement he dropped upon his knees in front of her and laid his head down upon her lap.

"Forgive me!" he pleaded. "Shrive me!"

After a little while he felt the touch of her hand upon his hair. She stooped over him. In a voice between laughter and tears she said, "Philip,"

in a low voice, and then; “Since that night is there one thing men honour which you have not given up for me?”

Ambition, wealth, ease of mind, the world’s regard—all indeed had gone. There was but one thing more which he had to give and he gave it before the night was out.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE NIGHT OF JULY 1ST

THE HALL OF THE KNIGHTS

THE ante-room was in darkness, for Eleonore von Knesebeck had betaken herself to her bed. Sophia took a lighted candle in her hand and led Philip to the outer door.

"To-morrow then," she said smiling.

But as she unlatched the door the smile vanished from her face. The corridor was as black as a cellar. She laid a hand upon Philip's arm to detain him and peered out holding the candle high. Usually a few lamps burned at intervals throughout the Palace until morning. To-night, whether she looked to right or to left, there were none. She turned back to Philip with a shiver of dismay.

"All the lights are out," she said in a whisper.

"You must not lose your sleep for that," Philip answered lightly. "The Palace is empty but for His Highness and yourself. A servant has been too officious, or too careless."

He was thinking:

"Fear is too often the unwanted third with us. It is always at our elbow spoiling our lives. Thank God we take leave of it to-morrow."

He added aloud,

"I could find my way, dearest, blindfolded."

But Sophia was not content.

"I'll light you to the stair," she said.

"Quickly then," Philip answered.

They passed along the corridor to the stair head.

"So," he said and she held the candle out over the balustrade as he went down the steps. At the bend he looked up.

"Go back, darling."

For a moment she stood looking down upon her lover, the heavy coils of her hair tumbled about her face, her dark eyes shining, her rose-red mouth

smiling tenderly. Then she turned and went back to her rooms. Königsmark waited until the light quite died away and he heard her door gently closed. Then feeling for the treads with his feet he descended in the darkness. The little door upon the river faced the foot of the stairs. A few steps and his hands touched the panels. He found the handle and turned it, but the door did not open. He pulled upon it harder and it still remained shut. The same patrol which had extinguished the lamps had locked the door and taken away the key.

Philip was annoyed rather than alarmed. His skiff was moored to the steps just outside that door and his cloak was in it. The moment he reached his house he must row down in another boat and tow the skiff back. It was tiresome.

He climbed the stairs again and felt his way along the corridor, treading very lightly. If he disturbed his mistress and she came to the door, he would see her lovely face once more grow haggard and dim as fear rushed into it. He must pass it without a sound. In a little while he knocked against the door which closed in the corridor and this door opened at his touch. But beyond it was still pitch dark. Philip closed the door behind him quietly and stood still whilst he counted up the long rooms he must cross, the arrangement of the furniture and the positions of the doors. First came the Concert Hall, next the Red Room, beyond that the Gold Room, so called from the heavy decoration of its ceiling. A smaller ladies' drawing-room, the Light Blue Room joined that and led to the Thistle Room, which got its name from the inlay of thistles in the parquet flooring. Farther on the great Throne Room stretched to the Dancing Hall and once there, he was almost at the end of his itinerary. A turn at a right-angle leftwards and he reached the vestibule of the Knights' Hall. Half-way down the vestibule there was a great chimney on the left hand and facing the chimney the door of the Knights' Hall. Inside that door he must turn sharply to the right and walk the whole length of the hall. But just beyond a circular staircase wound down to a porch giving on to the garden. Once in the garden he had but to choose his moment and climb the wall into the Leine street and so to his house. If he met anyone on the way, no doubt his appearance would seem odd. It was not usual for so well dressed a gentleman to be seen tramping the streets in the middle of the night without a hat for his head or a cloak to cover his finery. But he must take his chance of that.

He advanced cautiously. Heavy curtains shrouded the windows. The moon had set. There was nowhere a glimmer of light. But for the closeness of the air, he might have been wandering in some illimitable desert. He reached the Thistle Room without misadventure, but when he was half-way

across it he bruised his leg against a heavy chair and stumbled on his knee. The noise of his fall sounded in his ears loud as the crack of thunder. He stayed on his knee, his heart hammering at his breast. He expected a clamour of torches, the gleam of swords in the red light. The noise must have roused the sentries at the Elector's door, nay the Elector himself in his bed. But the seconds passed. It had roused no one.

Philip got on to his feet again and now he used even a greater care than he had used before. He crossed the ballroom and at last away upon his left a light glimmered. He turned towards it and stopped. In front of him was the lobby of the Rittersaal. Its high doors stood open but the light was not burning there. It was burning in the big Rittersaal at the side, an unearthly, bluish, flickering light like nothing that he had seen—like the soul of a man at the point of death. As that strange image crept into Philip's thoughts, he shivered and felt the hair stir upon his scalp.

But by a natural reaction the mere knowledge that he shivered restored his courage. Terror, then, was as close to his elbow, as it was to Sophia's? It leaped at them from every obscure corner. Together they could meet and defeat it. Alone each one was its prey. A dark corridor assured his mistress of disaster, a wavering pale flame set him quaking in his shoes. Then the sooner his coach was carrying them side by side down the road to Brunswick, the better for them both. But to fetch that desirable moment he must cross the Rittersaal, where no doubt some torch had been left forgotten to gutter down to its socket on the wall, or some expiring lamp in a broken glass was fluttering in a draught. For however intently he listened he could not hear a sound.

He walked forward noiselessly, but as he approached the lobby the light colour of his dress began to gleam. He came out from the darkness, first a mere patch of whiteness against the black, then the wraith of a man, the wraith which he was so soon to be, and finally the man himself, splendid and young. On the threshold of the lobby he stopped again. He had a fancy that quite close to him there were people breathing very quietly. But he knew that if a man stands in the dark, even in the emptiest space of earth, long enough he will hear not merely a sound of breathing but voices, faint as sighs, whispering at his ears. Philip took two quick silent steps into the lobby and learned that to-night he was wrong. For behind his shoulder he caught the unmistakable flash of steel. The dark corridors—the locked door—the flickering blue light, a will o' the wisp to lure him on! He had fallen into a trap.

He turned with the swiftness of a snake and his sword was already in his hand. He was as cold as ice now. Illusions of darkness, forebodings—they

had gone like smoke. He had two men between him and the lobby doorway. Well, he was not going back that way. They had heavy serviceable broadswords, he only his dress-rapier, a pretty, slender toy with a jewelled hilt. His only chance lay in the speed of his attack. He sprang to one side, avoided a thrust and lunged. The point of his rapier pierced an arm just below the shoulder. He heard a cry of pain and one of the great swords clattered on the floor. He parried a cut by the second of his assailants and sprang forward aiming at his throat. But the soldier whose arm he had pierced lurched against him and his thrust rang against a corselet. At the same moment he saw two others rush out from the angle of the chimney. They were behind him and as he turned towards them, one of them beat down his guard, and the blade of his rapier snapped close in his hand. With a cry of rage he tried to dash the hilt into the man's face, but his companion caught him from behind by the arms and drew him back, whilst the second of the two at the lobby door drove his sword deep into his chest.

All through the few seconds of the attack, Philip had been aware of a woman shouting from somewhere near in a hard shrill voice.

"Strike, you cowards! Strike hard! Down with the traitor! On the ground with him! Bind his arms and legs!"

Philip staggered. He was flung down upon the floor, the hilt of his rapier was wrenched from his grasp. He lay for a moment stunned, with the blood welling from his chest, whilst two of the soldiers stooped over him busy with their cords; and all the while this woman kept up her frenzied cries.

"Don't let him escape! On your lives! He's the lowest of criminals. Twist the cords tighter round those arms."

As Königsmark felt the bite of the cords, he struggled and writhed and lifted himself on to one knee. But he was flung down again with a violence which forced a groan of torture from his lips.

"Now in here with him! Be quick! I never saw such clumsy fools."

Philip was dragged across the floor into the Hall of the Knights and tossed down at Clara von Platen's feet, as if he had been a bundle of draperies for her inspection. He was dazed and each breath that he drew hurt him like the stab of a knife. He saw a woman—or a witch—darkly robed, holding a lighted candle above her head and stooping down over him. She was watching with an atrocious glee the blood bubbling out through the velvet and lace at his breast and dripping into a little red pool upon the floor. Fredegonda! The name floated into Philip's confused mind. Fredegonda the Cruel—yes! Once he had seen Fredegonda. And yet how could he, since she had died centuries ago? If only that heavy sword hadn't cut so damnably, so

agonisingly deep! It was very important that he should solve this problem of Fredegonda—although he was in such outrageous pain that he was inclined to wonder whether that or anything else were worth the trouble of trying to think. Fredegonda in an arbour? Of all the strange places . . . and then suddenly the whirl of his brain ceased and he saw with clear eyes.

"You!" he gasped. "Viper!"

Clara von Platen held her candlestick so that the light shone upon his white face.

"You are dying, Philip," and the tip of her tongue came out from her mouth and wetted her lips. "Confess your crime! You have come hot from the Princess's bed to die for your treachery——"

And in spite of his pain and the cords which bound him, he raised himself upon an elbow. Yes, the four soldiers were about him, one with a bandaged arm. To them he spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"The Princess is innocent. I charge you to bear witness——"

Clara von Platen wanted no dying statement of that kind.

"Liar!"

She spat the word at him and pointing a shaking finger loaded with diamonds at him she screamed to the guards.

"Gag the liar's mouth. At once, you brutes! You, Luders, kneel and obey me!"

Luders kneeled, but whilst he was still stretching down a hand to tear the neckcloth from Königsmark's neck, Clara von Platen cried again in a startled voice:

"Wait! Listen!"

Philip's head had fallen back upon the floor. Beads of sweat were standing on his forehead, his face was the colour of wax, his eyes were glazing. All the soldiers stood like statues. And in the silence which held them as though the witch with the candle in her hand had bound them in a spell, a faint and distant sound was heard. It grew louder as they listened. Someone was running—running with swift pattering feet—running in the darkness. For there was the sound of furniture being overturned. Someone was blundering against tables, against doors in a desperate haste. Now the runner fell to the floor and with a sobbing cry got up again and ran again.

"Close the door! Hurry! Are you lumps of earth? Close it quietly! Now lock it! So!"

The door shut the lobby from the Rittersaal and the grim tragic scene which in agony and blood was drawing towards its end there. But it was to

be an end more pitiful and more packed with horror than even Madame von Platen had conceived.

"Once more not a word, not a movement."

The four guardsmen were clustered about the door. Madame von Platen stood alone, the candlestick shaking in her hand, the wax dropping now upon the floor, now upon the body of Philip as he lay bleeding at her feet.

The sound of the footsteps had ceased. Perhaps the runner had turned back, or swooned, or lost the way. There was not even a flickering blue flame outside to make a guiding light. Suddenly the silence was broken in a fashion so unexpected that all those standing in the room shook. A pair of small clenched fists was hammering and clattering on the thick door as if it would break it down and a young and desperate voice was crying:

"Open! Open! Open!"

The sound of that voice, distraught and passionate, brought Königsmark back from the black gate of death. His eyes opened, he listened, a smile curved his parched lips even before he was conscious that it was Sophia Dorothea who bade them let her in. But the voice changed. It lost its imperative note. It became an appeal gentle and most pitiful.

"Philip! Philip! Philip!"

And now Philip knew who called to him and called to him in vain and why. Two small clenched fists, bruised and bleeding and almost as helpless as he was, were battering upon that inexorable door. The prayer was repeated, a wail, a moan broken by a sob.

"Philip! Philip! Philip!"

The carriage waiting at the corner of the Market Place—the safe refuge in Brunswick—the dream cottage in Arcadia—the lovely years unspoilt by fears or jealousies—were never to be. He knew that his wound was mortal and his hopes had narrowed down to one. But never in his life, in the thrust of battle or the urgency of passion, had he longed for anything so much as the fulfilment of this one last hope—a voice strong enough to carry through the barrier of that thick door a message of farewell:

"I am dying, dearest, with your face in my heart and your name on my lips."

If she could but hear those words, he argued with the divine selfishness of lovers, she would have a talisman against disdain and a solace in all unhappiness. Slowly he gathered up all that was left to him of nerve and strength and when that husbandry was done he lifted his head. But Clara von Platen was watching him. She had read the hope which suddenly gleamed in his eyes and quite transfigured his face.

"No!" she hissed, "No!"

And whilst he opened his mouth to shout, she lifted her foot and drove the high red heel of her shoe between his teeth. With all her weight she trod his mouth down.

"Philip! Philip! Philip!" Sophia was pleading, her voice broken by her sobs and the tears raining down her face.

"Philip! Philip! Philip!"

Philip struggled but the blood only burst afresh through lawn and velvet, and no answer even faint as a whisper from the grave could reach to his beloved's ears. Clara Platen held the candle lower, watching with a monstrous glee the death-changes on her prisoner's face.

"Listen, Philip!" she whispered with an atrocious mimicry of the young rival beyond the door. "You can still hear, can you? She shall never know how you died—never—nor what dog's burial I shall give you—no, nor in what ignominious grave your body shall rot until eternity."

And as she talked she worked her foot to mar the beauty of the face which had lured her and cheated her. But Philip was not listening to her. He was listening to the cry of the unhappy lady beyond the door.

"Philip! Philip! Answer me! Let me in!"

Folies d'Espagne! That was the tune he used to whistle beneath the window of his mistress. There would be no whistling of it now, with this witch's heel tearing his mouth and throat, and the sole of her foot trying to break down his teeth. If he could die there now, in a puff of the breath, easily, as old men die. But Count Philip von Königsmark was to be spared not one fraction of his atonement. For as he listened to the dear voice growing fainter and more distant, as though she was being carried far from the reach of his hands and the sight of his eyes, her cry halted and broke.

"Oh, Philip!" she moaned in the most utter disappointment. "Oh, Philip," and the voice died away, and the crash of someone falling to the floor shook the room. The sound of his beloved mistress dropping in a swoon with her piteous call to him unanswered, was the last sound her lover was to hear on earth. When Clara von Platen turned her eyes from the door to the tortured prisoner at her feet, her face took on a sullen discontent. Philip was out of her reach and dead.

CHAPTER XXXV

CLARA SEES IT THROUGH

MADAME von Platen stepped back.

"He is dead," she declared, and taking a wax taper from the mantel-shelf, she lit all the candles within her reach on the mantel-shelf itself and in the gilt candelabra on the walls. She needed light for the work which must be done and quickly done. But to the four soldiers muttering uneasily together by the door, she seemed to be making in some spirit of devilry a chapelle ardente of the Hall of the Knights for the body of the man she had murdered. Luders, indeed, who would have been hard put to it to name the denomination to which he belonged, crossed himself devoutly. Clara von Platen noticed the movement and laughed. But Luders was the last of the four to endure ridicule easily. He stepped forward, he waited until Madame had lit all the candles she could reach. Then he said sturdily:

"Yes. Count Philip von Königsmark, my Colonel, is dead. But what is coming to each of us for this night's bad work? Tell us that, Madame!"

"A farm is coming to each of you," she answered, "and money to stock it with if you hold your tongues. But let one of you breathe a word of what has happened in this Rittersaal, to his wife or his children or his priest—and I pity him. He had better not have been born."

She seized a torch from a bracket by the chimney and lighted it at a candle. She was so calm, she moved to so precise a plan that all the four took a little heart. She walked to the door, unlocked and opened it. In a crumpled heap Sophia Dorothea lay upon the ground. Madame von Platen held the flaming torch above her, but the Princess did not stir. Her eyes were closed, she hardly seemed to breathe. Madame von Platen said:

"Good! You, Luders, and Sachs, carry Her Highness to her apartment and lock her in. Sachs will stand on guard at the door and let no one enter or go out until he is relieved."

She handed the torch to Sachs and Luders picked up the Princess from the floor. Clara von Platen watched them go softly away into the dark cavern of the Palace. The torch flaming and smoking cast its shadows and its glare over the tiny procession. The Princess in her white gown was like a sleeping

child in the great arms of Luders. The figures grew small and vanished and only the red heart of the torch shone far away like a jewel. Then that too vanished.

Clara turned briskly to the two soldiers who were left. Bushmann was sent to fetch cloths and water. Marten to Lieutenant Hansen in the Elector's ante-room.

"His Highness must be told," she commanded. "He must be awakened and told. Lieutenant Hansen must post a sentry at the Princess's door. I need Sachs here."

It was half an hour before the Elector came wrapped in a dressing-gown and leaning heavily on his Lieutenant's arm. He found his soldiers washing the floor and Königsmark's body covered with cloths which had been used.

"Good God, Clara," he cried horror-struck by the sight of the still body under the blood-stained cloths. "You promised me no—no hurt should be done. He was to be arrested, not destroyed."

"And so he would have been, sir," Clara answered contritely. "But he drew his sword. He attacked. He was as dangerous as a boar at bay. And in the darkness a thrust miscarried. See, sir, he wounded Marten."

Certainly Marten was standing there with his arm in a sling. As for the pretty bauble of a sword which had wounded him, its shattered blade was hidden with Königsmark's body under the cloths and the richly jewelled hilt under Madame von Platen's cloak. One could trust Clara not to let a valuable thing like that escape her.

But old Ernst Augustus was not to be appeased by her excuses.

"A Königsmark," he insisted. "A man of a great family with friends in every country in Europe! The scandal of it! The disgrace! A Königsmark killed secretly in the dead of the night in the Royal Palace of Hanover."

The Elector had lost all of his dignity and importance. He had his nightcap on his head, a flowered dressing gown about his gross fat body and his legs were naked. He was any old man with pendulous heavy cheeks, shocked out of his wits by a shameful crime which must for ever dishonour his house. He dropped into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

Clara von Platen crossed the room to him.

"Listen, Sir," she said. "There are seven people here, Your Highness, myself, Lieutenant Hansen and the four soldiers. Outside these seven no one will ever know the truth of what has happened here to-night."

She spoke with so much assurance that Ernst Augustus lifted up his head hopefully.

"Philip Königsmark came from Dresden to Hanover yesterday. He visited the Princess in her apartment in the Leine Castle to-night. When he left her, he disappeared," she continued. "That is all that will be known. Whatever questions are asked, none will be answered. He disappeared."

With a wave of his hand the Elector brushed the story aside.

"But that——" and he pointed a shaking finger at the body underneath the cloths and the word not yet spoken sprang from his mouth and struck Clara von Platen like a blow in the face——"—that murdered thing won't disappear."

"It will," said Clara.

She called Luders towards her. And Lieutenant Hansen learned now why she had named Luders as one of the four soldiers she needed. Luders had been a mason, a layer of bricks, before he had been called up into the Duke of Hanover's army. He had even been employed at Monplaisir in other days.

Clara von Platen gave him his instructions. The repairing of the chimney in the Rittersaal had been a lucky chance of which she had been quick to make her profit. She would have found another way, no doubt, had this one been closed. But it was to her hand. Luders, under the eyes of the Elector, set himself to work. The body of Philip Königsmark wrapped in its blood-stained cloths was thrust far back into the broken recess. With the help of his three companions, he laid the bricks one upon the other, morticed and shaped, in front of it and built in the great iron fireplate at the last.

It was three o'clock in the morning when the work was completed and the day was beginning to dawn. All the four soldiers were to be sent to their homes in the morning, sworn to secrecy and rewarded with grants of land. A guard was placed over the great fireplace to make sure that none should approach it until the mortar was set. There was not a stain of blood left upon the floor of the Hall of the Knights in the Leine Palace. There was not one atom of evidence forgotten which could bring any one of the five guilty of murder before the bar of justice.

"I will write to my son in Berlin to-morrow," said the Elector when all was done. "He must return at once. Until he comes the Princess will remain under arrest in her apartment."

But Clara von Platen had not completed her night's work. As Ernst Augustus turned to go back to his private rooms, she said respectfully:

"When Your Highness has retired, I shall need Lieutenant Hansen and two of these soldiers."

The Elector turned upon her gloomily.

"God in Heaven, Clara, haven't you brought me trouble enough for one night? What would you do?"

"Lighten the trouble, Sir. There will be letters in Königsmark's house which the world must never read."

"Letters!" cried the Elector. "Letters from Sophia?"

"Yes, Sir."

"He will have burned them."

Clara shook her head.

"Women burn letters. Men keep them."

She had a reason beyond her hatred of the Princess for her eagerness. It was likely enough that in any correspondence between Königsmark and his beloved lady, her name would appear too often for her comfort. She must have the first sifting of those letters before they were submitted to the Elector's eyes. She had her way in the end, and as soon as His Highness was brought to his rooms, she drove away in her coach with Lieutenant Hansen at her side, as unwilling an assistant as could have been found in Hanover, and Luders and Bushmann on the dickey behind.

It was clear daylight now, but the streets were still empty and the houses shuttered. Lieutenant Hansen beat upon the door of Philip's house until a head was pushed out from an upper window.

"In the name of His Highness, the Elector," said Hansen and with a gasp the head was withdrawn.

"There is a yellow box bound with a ribbon——" Clara began, but the young Lieutenant cut her short.

"Madame, you must do your own searching," he said shortly. "I am a Lieutenant of the Guard not an agent of Police."

Clara turned upon him with a baleful face, but the bolts within the door were already being withdrawn. She could not quarrel with Lieutenant Hansen in the open street, even if the sun was hardly up and not a neighbour awake to hear. She was suddenly aware with a pang of regret that she could not now quarrel with Lieutenant Hansen anywhere or at any time. He knew too much. The door was opened and taking Luders and Bushmann with her she entered the house. The yellow casket was soon discovered in a drawer in Königsmark's bedroom. His other papers were left as she found them, and dismissing her escort she drove away with the casket to Monplaisir.

It was now four o'clock in the morning and the day bright. But Madame von Platen felt the chill of that long night deep in her bones. She had a great fire lit in her private sitting-room and breaking open the box began her

examination. The box contained nothing but letters written by the Princess recently to Philip—passionate letters for the most part, recalling hours packed to the brim with bliss and dreaming with delight of untroubled years to come. Clara von Platen laughed with pleasure as she read. Here was the ruin of the Princess under her hand. She made them up into a package for the Elector.

But there were some amongst the number which dealt in plain rough words with Madame von Platen, her vulgarity and her amours and her violent jealousies. Every one of these Madame von Platen burned there and then in her strong fire. But she made a third division. There were letters, foolish letters written in a temper, denouncing her father. Sophia recalled a word she had uttered to her mother when the two of them were studying Monsieur Racine's "Iphigenia."

"My papa would never treat me as Agamemnon treated his daughter," she had said: yet that was exactly how he had treated her. Sophia quoted that old saying of hers and complained of her father bitterly, deploring his servility to that rogue Bernstorff. She used, moreover, one hard phrase difficult to forgive. She was writing of her failure to obtain from him a separate settlement so that she could free herself from her husband George Louis.

"My father's affection for me turns out to be *une amitié de singe*."

Madame von Platen gleefully made up a second package of these particular letters.

"Poison! Rank poison," she declared; and she directed them to be carried by Heinrich Muller the next day to Bernstorff at Celle for Duke George William's perusal. "Let that once get into the good George William's blood, there isn't a doctor in the world who'll cleanse him of it."

Then she had done. It was seven o'clock in the morning. She took her coffee and went to bed very well contented with that night of July the first. George Louis would seek and obtain a divorce. The Princess would be punished. Her lover was dead and the mystery of his death would never be revealed.

* * * * *

But all the world knows the story of his death nevertheless. One of the seven broke the oath of secrecy. Who? Who but Clara von Platen herself? Years afterwards, when Ernst Augustus was dead and George Louis was King of England, and she herself an aged blind hag with a face eaten by disease and the flames of Hell roaring in her ears, she told the story to her

confessor and bade him publish it to the world. Later still there were more repairs needed for that chimney, and the skeleton behind the bricks bore testimony to the truth of her confession.

CHAPTER XXXVI

GEORGE AUGUSTUS, PRINCE OF WALES, MAKES A PILGRIMAGE

THERE was a man in Hanover sunk fathoms deep in remorse whilst Clara von Platen was still exulting.

Mr. Anthony Craston had been the first to betray the woman he worshipped and the man who had been his friend. He had betrayed them in an ignoble jealousy to Bernstorff their greatest enemy. It was in vain for him to argue. "The affair was notorious. Others would have told." He *had* told and he slunk about his work thinking that he must bear the mark of Judas upon his forehead. His misery was made the greater in that it fell to him to prepare the précis of the affair for his Ambassador's signature. He must follow step by step the long process of the divorce. He must read the passionate refusals of the Electoral Princess Sophia Dorothea to defend herself. He must record her condemnation to lifelong imprisonment in the Castle of Ahlden. He even went beyond his duties to suffer a needless torture. For on the morning of her departure, he crept after a pitiless night of vigil to the corner of a street and saw her close-shut carriage surrounded by an escort with gleaming swords drive her away to her lonely prison in a little village on the edge of a moor.

Nor did his punishment end with his self reproaches on her account. Philip Königsmark was not. Rumours ran the town, wild as a winter storm. Königsmark had escaped to Sweden; Königsmark had fled to France; Königsmark was in the dark of a dungeon in the Leine Schloss; Königsmark was dead. No one knew. Philip's sister Aurora rushed to Saxony and obtained the help of Philip's friend the young Elector. Even he got no answer to his enquiries. The English Ambassador took the disappearance in a lighter spirit.

"Our Prince, you must remember," he said to Anthony, "has often visited Italy and may have learned the humour of that country of despatching people without noise. I am told that Königsmark's sister raves like Cassandra, but they answer her like Cain that they are not her brother's keeper."

Philip Königsmark was not; unless the pale spectre with the red gash above the heart which stood o' nights at Craston's bedside and talked to him of the dreams they shared and of the love they had had for one another not so many years ago, was something more than the fabric of Anthony's contrition. In those days, he recalled, he had looked upon himself as the sturdy earthen vessel and Philip as the silver flame which it was his business to protect.

But time brought its anodyne. Craston was promoted to Berlin, passed on to Vienna and after some years became the Minister of Queen Anne at the Hague. He retired from that post with a knighthood in 1712 and gave himself to the pleasures of a country life in his Manor House in Essex. So for four years. But in the summer of 1716, when George Louis had reigned in England for two years, he received an unexpected summons to the house of George Augustus, Prince of Wales, in St. James's Square.

Sir Anthony Craston was surprised and disturbed. He had not seen the Prince of Wales since the days when His Royal Highness had been a child playing with his mother Sophia Dorothea in the garden of the Leine Palace. But he knew of him as a peppery little round man, very military and formal, who hated his father with a hatred which was returned with interest, and adored his imprisoned mother. Sir Anthony had a foreboding. He was comfortable and had reached that later period of middle age when the troubled events of youth are becoming biography and ceasing to be emotion. He had no wish to breathe into life again the embers of remorse. However, the summons of so august a personage was not to be neglected. Sir Anthony travelled to London and on the appointed day presented himself at the door of the Prince's house. He was mystified rather than alarmed now. For there was a concourse of carriages in the road, and mounted guardsmen and a cloud of powdered lackeys about the steps.

Sir Anthony gave his name and was unceremoniously shouldered into a small room at the back of the house.

"If you will have the kindness to wait here, sir——" said the footman and shut the door upon him softly.

There Sir Anthony remained for the best part of an hour, during a portion of which hour it seemed to him that two royal voices were having a royal row. At the end of the time there was a great stamping on the stairs, a great clatter of horses in the street and at last silence. In a little while, a servant with a staff and a chain of office opened the door. He was a hot and flustered man.

"His Royal Highness regrets that you have been kept waiting," he said. "His Majesty paid an unexpected visit upon His Royal Highness this

morning. Will you be good enough to follow me?"

He preceded Sir Anthony down a corridor and ushered him into a fine big room looking on to the square.

"If you will wait for a minute longer," he said and he looked about the room, thrusting back a chair and pushing forward a table. Then he drew a breath of relief and sent it whistling again from his mouth.

"Yes," said Sir Anthony drily. "I seemed to hear the sound of a disagreement."

The servant became human. He wiped his forehead with a handkerchief.

"There's been such a howdyedo as nobody ever did hear outside a laundry," he said. He suddenly walked across the room. Against the wall hung a picture covered with a shawl.

"'Tis fortunate that I remembered to hang up this piece of drapery in time. His Majesty cannot abide the sight of this picture"; and removing the shawl, he revealed a portrait of Sophia Dorothea in the loveliness of her youth, her mass of dark hair threaded through with white flowers, her red lips smiling, her eyes lustrous and gentle, her white shoulders rising with the gleam of satin from her gown.

Anthony Craston was taken aback. He didn't want to look. He could not but look. The overlay of the years was swept from his memory like dust from the cover of a book. He was in the reception room at the Alte Palace making his first awkward obeisance to that young and gracious lady. He was in the Park at Celle on a bitter night of March listening to the "Folies d'Espagne" whistled softly a few feet away and seeing her face lit by a lamp at the window. And alas! he was in Bernstorff's room babbling out the story of his vigil between his sneezes.

The servant had gone from the room. It was his business to cover the portrait before the King came to the house and to remove the covering as soon as His Majesty had gone away. There was no magic in the picture for him. But for Anthony Craston it made a temple of that sunlit, quiet room. It was hung nobly in the place of honour, the picture of a radiant, lovely girl painted on the eve of her ill-fated marriage thirty-four years ago. And she was still a prisoner in the Castle of Ahlden—graciously permitted to drive as far as seven miles in any direction so long as an escort of soldiers surrounded her carriage.

An equerry came into the room in full dress.

"I am Captain Holmes," he said pleasantly. "His Royal Highness wished to receive you in person but an unexpected honour has disordered his

morning. He asks you to do him a service, Sir Anthony, which may cause you some inconvenience."

"I am at His Royal Highness's commands," Anthony replied.

Captain Holmes, thereupon, repeated the instructions which he had been given and Sir Anthony returned to his home.

A week later, Craston ordered a valise to be packed and a horse saddled and left ready at eleven o'clock of the night. He then sent all his servants to bed and waited up alone in a room at the side of the door. At one o'clock in the morning he heard the trot of horses and a riding-crop tapped gently on his lighted window. He put out the lamp, took up his hat and went out. Captain Holmes was the rider who had tapped upon his window and a little apart from him a second man wrapped in a cloak with his hat pulled forward over his brows, sat on a great charger, as still as a statue. Craston fetched his horse out of the stable and the three men rode away without a word spoken. They came to Harwich in the morning and embarked on a small ship which was waiting for them in the river with her mainsail hoisted and her anchor short. They sailed with a fair wind and on the morning of the third day reached the mouth of the Weser. They waited for the tide and carried on to the town of Bremen. There they landed. Horses were already waiting for them and under Craston's guidance they rode by heath and byway, stopping late at night at small unconsidered inns and starting again in the cool of the morning. Throughout all this time the Prince had addressed no word at all to Craston and the fewest possible to his equerry.

On the afternoon of the second day the travellers reached the village of Ahlden on the edge of the Lüneberger Heath. Hanover was no more than ten miles away, Osnaburg a day's journey, Celle little more. Yet on the border of the great Heath they were as remote from the business and hurry and the unfailing entertainment of the world as if they had been dropped from the clouds into the middle of an enchanted forest. Anthony Craston left his companions in a private room of the one inn the village possessed and was absent for three hours.

"It is arranged," he said on his return to Captain Holmes. The Prince of Wales was sitting apart in a window, seeming not to listen but listening with both his ears. Craston knew not what title he should use in denominating the Princess of Ahlden, but he took a risk. "Her Majesty is so beloved by these villagers that no arrangements could be easier. At ten o'clock!"

They snatched a meal and a few hours' sleep. At ten o'clock Craston led them from the inn. A hundred yards away, the entrance of that old red-brick castle faced them beyond a moat and a tangle of trees. The drawbridge was down but sentries paced in front of the closed doors. Craston led his

companions away to the left. The Aller river cut them off from this side of the building. Below the bank a boat was waiting with a boatman in the bows.

"Have a care, gentlemen," he said in a low voice, and he had reason for his warning. For lying along the thwarts was a ladder against which anyone might stumble and raise a clatter.

The travellers climbed down into the boat and were slowly and silently rowed across the stream to the farther bank. It was but a strip of earth between the river and the sheer wall of the Castle. But half-way up the wall a light shone in a rift of the curtains. Very carefully they disembarked and lifted the ladder against the wall. It needed the efforts of all four men to raise and settle it. But as the topmost ends of the two uprights grated against the wall just below the lighted window, the curtains were drawn aside and shading a lighted candle with the palm of her hand a woman looked out.

It was as well that Anthony Craston had finished his share of the work with the ladder. For he staggered back and could hardly repress a cry. It had been reported more than once by travellers that the Princess of Ahlden had retained surprisingly throughout her long captivity, the lustre and beauty of her youth. Craston had ascribed the reports to the inclination for the fabulous which misleads all travellers. But in this case at all events he was wrong. For the woman who looked out of the castle window was in lineament and colour, the woman who had looked from another Castle window in Celle on an unforgettable night of March.

The next moment the light was extinguished. There was a noise of a window thrown open and out of the darkness a faint cry floated down to the little group at the ladder's foot.

"George! George Augustus! It is you?"

George Augustus was climbing the ladder whilst the words were spoken. No one of the three by the foot of the ladder looked up. No one of them heard what sacred living words passed between mother and son, or saw how for a little while they clung together. A caricaturist of the day might have tried to raise a laugh by making the scene ridiculous, but to those who witnessed it, it was too homely and poignant for anything but tears.

When the Prince descended, he spoke apart with his equerry and the equerry turned to Craston.

"His Royal Highness says that he will wait whilst you receive your due."

Field sports had fortunately for Anthony Craston kept his head steady and his joints limber. He mounted the ladder in his turn. A white hand was

extended to him. As he bent his lips to it, he heard Sophia's voice gentle and kind.

"I thank you. But I remember you and you were always my friend."

Her friend! He whose treachery had first set her enemies snapping at her heels!

He climbed down the ladder with a most pitiful prayer in his heart that never in an after life when all things are known, he might stand face to face with her or with Philip Königsmark his friend.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled 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 *Königsmark*, by A. E. W. (Alfred Edward Woodley) Mason.]