





955  
A868  
TU











# Rulers of Kings

A Novel

By

Gertrude Atherton



Harper & Brothers Publishers

New York and London

1904

955  
A868  
YU

TO THE  
ALPHABET

Copyright, 1904, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

*All rights reserved.*

Published April, 1904.

PS

1042

R86

1904

To

**Poultney Bigelow**

one of the  
small band of American writers  
who dares at all times to tell the truth  
whose patriotism is genuine and useful  
and who has revealed to us so  
much of modern Europe



MAY it not be that in every family there are unborn children—souls that have come too late perhaps to find a medium, yet, in consequence of their hereditary particles, unable to seek it elsewhere? We know not what mysterious dissolutions and recombinations of spirit take place in the realm where the released forces go, with what deliberation the essences of families are remixed; oftenest, no doubt, with commonplace results; sometimes with intent to bring humiliation and disaster upon a house which has transgressed too many laws; yet again, combining the great characteristics of mind and soul and temperament of those who have distinguished themselves in history, with such weaknesses as must inevitably destroy all three—as in the notable instance of the last Rudolf von Hapsburg. Again, the best may have been remixed with only enough of human weakness and passion that love may be inspired instead of awe, that happiness without disaster may be possible. And yet the most fortunate of these fusions may be finished too late for its generation, and be forced to bide its time invisible; or perhaps, by some spiritual statute of limitations, is deprived of its earthly rights forever. Nevertheless, it may linger in spirit where it should walk in its servant of flesh, and unknown, unsuspected, take its part in the daily life of its kin, having its own influence perhaps on their destinies and on history. And the romanticist, so much of whose time is spent in the unreal world, may fancy, once in a way, that one of these belated souls has swum into his ken, and that his privilege is to rescue it, to fit it to the part for which Nature so tirelessly equipped it.



NOTE.—The dinner described in Chapter IV., Part II., occurred in 1897, but it being necessary that the action of the story should take place several years later, I have brought it forward. This of course could not have been done had certain circumstances arisen which might have given immediate historic results to the speech of the Emperor of Germany. Those circumstances not having arisen, it makes little difference whether the speech was delivered yesterday or six years ago. Otherwise, the dinner, the speech, its effect upon the Hungarian magnates present, its reception next day by the Hungarian press and people, were as described.

# PART I



# RULERS OF KINGS

## I

WHEN Fessenden Abbott heard that he was to inherit four hundred millions of dollars he experienced the profoundest discouragement he was ever to know, except on that midnight ten years later when he stood on a moonlit balcony in Hungary, alone with the daughter of an Emperor, and opened his contemptuous American mind to the deeper problems of Europe.

His ambition had been immeasurable, yet almost defined. His hopes had been the confident imperious extravagances of a youth in whom narrow circumstances and a high indomitable spirit had developed that ardent personal force which equips man to conquer life. His ideals had soared in stellar spaces—ideals created by passionate brooding on the careers of Washington, Hamilton, Napoleon, Nelson, Cromwell, Kossuth, the great Hunyadis, Alexander, Cæsar, Rudolph the First of Austria. How he had pored over the lives of this catholic assortment of heroes while his fingers froze and the winds roared through the Adirondack wilderness; on hot summer afternoons as he trudged behind his plough, the reins wound about one arm, his book in the bend of the other, vaguely wondering sometimes why his manifest delinquencies were never noticed.

As he looked back he marvelled at the bluntness of his observation. His difference from the other young

men of that high gallery of the continent must have been obvious, and whenever he thought of his dead mother it was to associate her with a magnificence of personal environment which in time he grew to believe he had borrowed from the *Arabian Nights* for the more loyal framing of a created memory; certainly in real life, even in those huge cities where men made money, even in the vast cold palaces of Europe, of which he had read, there could be nothing to-day like those splendors which haunted his young mind.

He had just investigated the interiors of the toys of his third Christmas when he was made to keep so quiet for four days that he became a miserable and obstreperous baby; on the fifth he forgot the troubles of his past in a twelve-hours' journey with his dotting father. His indulgent nurse had been dismissed, and a woman with a white cap and a firm admonishing eye formed the rear of his body-guard, and held him to the window when his restless legs sent his father to the smoking compartment. He could remember still his bewildered sensation as the train climbed slowly through dark forests, as hard black peaks travelled across his blinking vision. Of the night ride through the woods in a springless wagon he recalled little but the sharp accentuations of the "bull's-eye" and the deep sighs of his nurse. After that, life for several years was too monotonous for memories. He lived in a farm-house without toys and sweets—which he quickly forgot—and after the departure of his nurse at the end of three months his was the life of any mountain-boy; out of doors in the wildest weather, out of bed at six o'clock, cuffed, spanked, roughly petted by the farmer's mother, beside whose bed he slept during the remaining years of his childhood. Twice a year his father came and spent a day on the Nettlebeck farm. In summer Fessenden led him through

## RULERS OF KINGS

the woods, and exhibited his many treasures, expounded the forest lore to which he had instinctively applied himself as soon as he could run alone—unanticipative of the lore to which it would be the golden key in more difficult years. In winter they sat in the best parlor, close to a red stove, which made the boy, little used to the luxury of fires, sleepy and almost ill. Neither woods nor fire inspired Mr. Abbott to many words. He examined the boy in his studies, and took his physical measurements, comparing them with previous entries in a little red book. Then, after an interval of sound fatherly advice, and another of tender interest, he usually went to sleep; or remained motionless for hours, his weary eyes fixed and rapt, his lips and nostrils quivering occasionally, but stern, immobile, relentless, the lower lip raised, the upper drawn down and under. His little son fidgeted, coughed respectfully, yawned shamelessly, and finally stole away. Mr. Abbott, upon his arrival, always presented Fessenden with a box of books, several red sweaters, and, as soon as he was old enough, a new pair of trousers—for his Sunday use; the boy wore overalls on other days. Mr. Abbott forbade him to clothe his more conspicuous part in anything but red, that he might be found in briefer time if lost, and avoided with less effort in the hunting season.

The books were selected with a careful regard for his succeeding years, and under their insidious gardening his imagination developed and his horizon receded. He received his elementary schooling from a young woman on a neighboring farm. At the same time his body grew tall and strong and his temper fierce. He took as easily to fighting as to books; he was sometimes ignominiously whipped by hulking mountain-boys, sometimes he won against heavy odds, for he had an instinct for the scientific rules of the game, a long wind,

## RULERS OF KINGS

hard muscles, and the primitive delight of the small boy in war. The fights were not uncommonly for the favor of some baby minx, but oftener for the pure lust of battle. He was frequently mangled and battered when his father arrived, but Mr. Abbott merely laughed, and, on the whole, seemed to approve his appearance. So passed the uneventful years until his tenth birthday, when life began to ring its changes.

### II

Mr. Abbott sat in the rocking-chair by the hot stove regarding his son with his dreamy far-seeing eyes. For the first time Fessenden wondered who and what his father was. This man was like no one in the books he had read, like no one in the Adirondacks. He was a boy of direct methods, and was about to ask for information when his father spoke.

"I am more gratified at your physical development than you will ever know, my son," said Mr. Abbott, tenderly. "When I brought you here you were fragile and undersized; it was thought that your chance of becoming a strong man, or of reaching manhood at all, was perhaps two in ten. But I knew the magic of the mountains; I made my experiment, and I have succeeded. There are other things I wish to say to you, however, so sit down and listen attentively."

Fessenden, in a glow of expectation, fell upon a corner of the sofa, and Mr. Abbott continued.

"Originally I planned to speak to you decisively when you were thirteen or fourteen, but it seems to me that you are brighter than most boys of your age; I think I cannot begin too soon to prepare you for the future. Some boys are taught to say their prayers. I presume you have been taught to say yours by our good Mrs.



## RULERS OF KINGS

Nettlebeck, and I am sure I hope you say them; but I want you to repeat, every Saturday night before you lie down, these words I am going to teach to you; if you forget them, to rise in the coldest and darkest night, stand in the middle of the room, and repeat them twice. The words are these—write them down: ‘Life is a fight. Millions fail. Only the strong win. Failure is worse than death. Man’s internal strength is created by watching Circumstance like a hawk, meeting her every spring stiff and straight, laughing at her pitfalls—which in the beginning of life are excess, excess, and always excess, and all manner of dishonor. Strength is created by adversity, by trying to win first the small battles of life, then the great, by casting out fear, by training the mind to rule in all things—the heart, the passions, the impulses, which if indulged make the brain the slave instead of the master. Success, for which alone a man lives, if he be honest with himself, comes to those who are strong, strong, strong.’ When you have finished that I want you to repeat ‘No’ aloud for ten minutes. The time will come when you will rejoice that ‘No’ flies, instead of moving reluctantly, to your tongue. As for that prayer I have given you, you may not understand it all now, but you will as you grow older, better and better; you will analyze and ponder upon it. Life is choked and gasping with young men trying to get a decent living, with thousands besides struggling for a career, reputation. I shall do my best to educate you, but I want you to grow up with the distinct understanding that you must support yourself when that preparatory period is over. I may be able to help you to some sort of a position, but I may be dead—and I must do what I can for your sister—”

“My what?” shouted Fessenden. “You never told me I had a sister!”

## RULERS OF KINGS

“Did I not? I should have thought I must have mentioned it. She was born when your mother died, and her name is Alexandra. Do not interrupt me again, and listen attentively. I wish you, as I have just said, to grow up with the clearly defined idea that you must make your own way in the world, make every dollar you spend, owe your position, and the respect you may be able to inspire, to your personality—to the dignity of your character and the brilliancy of your mind. I shall keep you here until you are ready for college, where I hope to be able to send you; for, unlike many Americans, I believe in educating a man like a gentleman. I have just met with a piece of extraordinary good fortune: the other day an old friend called on me for the first time in many years; he told me that his son, a Harvard man, and a profound student, was so delicate that he might be obliged to spend the remainder of his life in the high altitudes. I called on the young man immediately—his name is Stanley Morris—and persuaded him to come here, for I realized what such companionship would mean to my bright little son. He was very glad of the suggestion, and agreed, for the sake of a small annual sum, to become your teacher—in time to prepare you for college. It was a great relief to my mind, for I want you to remain in this healthy mountain region until you are grown, and, of course, expensive tutors and schools are out of the question. He will be able to teach you German and French among other things, and he has a large library. Therefore, I shall not send you any more books. Fortunately you need only these rough clothes up here. I feel quite confident that I shall be able to afford the small yearly sum Mr. Morris demands. But you are never to forget that you are studying for equipment, not as the mere routine of youth. Do you understand?”

## RULERS OF KINGS

"Yes, sir." Fessenden was deeply impressed, but longing, nevertheless, to get away from the stove and steer the conversation to lighter topics. His young brain felt as if it had been hammered. "Couldn't you send my sister up here?" he asked.

"No; you will have little in common till you are grown. You would act detrimentally upon each other. Girls have such a different part to play in life," he concluded, somewhat vaguely.

"I'd like her picture."

"I will send it to you, but you are to promise me first that you will not write to her. I want no sentimental nonsense."

"I hate to write letters, so I don't mind promising."

There was a long silence during which Mr. Abbott dreamed and Fessenden squirmed.

"Are you a success, father, or a failure?"

Mr. Abbott jumped. "I?—well—I will let you judge of that for yourself when you are grown."

"Do you keep a grocery store?—or teach school?—or write books?"

"No," Mr. Abbott laughed. "But I get my humble living honestly. I am a lawyer by profession."

"What is a lawyer?"

"Dear, happy child! All in good time, my boy. Now run out in the air if you like. Your cheeks are very red. Perhaps you will find an apple in my bag."

### III

During the following week Fessenden read little and was too amiably excited for battle. He had seen few strangers in that primeval wilderness—no gentleman but his father; and Mr. Abbott had taken pains to admonish

## RULERS OF KINGS

him that he was never to forget he was a gentleman—to criticise his table manners, gait, and carriage. In the course of his last visit, after he had twice swept his son's elbows off the table and arrested his knife on its flight to the butter-dish, he had said, severely: "I am not raising you to be a congressman from a backwoods district. Without manners your morals might just as well be bad as good. I am no democrat. I believe in hard work, and above all things I despise the idle fools that rich fathers foist upon the world; but I equally despise the man who ever forgets he was born a gentleman. You were. One reason why I have persuaded Stanley Morris to come here is that you may be reminded constantly that you are not to grow up a country lout, and disgrace—your sister, when the time comes for you to meet. Do you think that small head can remember all this tiresome advice?"

"Youbetcherlife! But can't I fight any more?" Fessenden had asked anxiously. "I feel my *goodest* when I've wiped the face off'n a chap."

"Oh, fight all you like. Never take an insult. Never see a woman insulted. Never take a back seat. If you did I'd disown you. But put on no airs, even when you are being properly educated by Morris. I despise a snob as much as I abhor a weakling."

"What is a snob?"

"The snob is a man who furnishes comedy for others and tragedy for himself."

Fessenden's eyes were a hard blue stare, but experience had taught him that when his father was cryptic he did not intend to be questioned further.

Two rooms on the second floor facing the south were put in such order as young Abbott had heretofore associated with the unlicensed imagination of the story-teller. Not only were the walls covered with heavy red paper,

but a special car was switched off at a distant station, and its contents, when hauled the intervening miles and unpacked, proved to be worn but red and luxurious furniture, four bookcases, several heavy rugs, two stoves, and some nine hundred books. Fessenden unwrapped and shelved every book, his fingers tingling, unfaithful for the moment to his chipmunks and rabbits, his hidden places in the forest where he was the mighty leader of an invisible robber band.

When all was in order, Mr. Stanley Morris arrived. He was very tall and attenuated, with a bulging brow and long pale fingers. Nature had designed him for the ascetic and scholar, and doubtless had taken back a mere sufficiency of his lung cells to complete her purpose. On this shelf of the world he could live into old age, pack his avid brain with the master thoughts of other men, and one day, possibly, give to the world a thought system of his own.

"He kinder gives me the dumps," remarked Fritz Nettlebeck, as he filled his pipe in the kitchen that evening. "I don't take to people who looks as if their brains was distributed all over them. His head-piece is twice the size of an ordinary man's, but he looks as if he kept that for Sundays, and any other part of him would do as well for other days."

"You're gitten imagination," said Christina, with contempt. She was a sour and elderly virgin, hard-worked, now that her mother was growing old, and disapproving of her brothers in all their phases. Beaux were few in that vast and lonely wilderness, and these few had passed her by. Even the hired man had failed to succumb to the potencies of propinquity and the only woman. She was an uncommonly good cook for an American of her class—her parents were Hamburgers—and had won favor with the campers who ventured into this part of the

## RULERS OF KINGS

Adirondacks, Mr. Abbott among the number; but if her cake was delicate, her griddle-cakes light, her venison a culinary achievement, her temper had been bitter from childhood, her sarcasm a thing to make a strong man falter and slink away. Christina was very proud of this substitute for scholarship, and persuaded herself that it compensated her for all that lay buried in ligneous spinsterhood. "The young un 'll have to turn to now, I guess," she continued. "Much chores you'll git out of him if he's got to learn all them books. And he's real handy about the house, toc. He's mended a power of things for me."

"You're sweet on that kid," said Nettlebeck, with borrowed sarcasm. "It's about the only soft spot you've got. But if you make him sick again on cocoa-nut-cake, and his father finds it out, he'll be packed off, I give you that."

"Who is that father of his, anyhow?" Christina never argued when she was sure of defeat; and having sat up all night with Fessenden—who had stolen the greater part of the cake—she was not prepared to face the enemy. "I don't believe he's as poor as he makes out. The mortgage is paid off this farm, I happen to know—"

"And you're insinuat'in' that your two brothers ain't hard-workin' enough to pay it off theirselves!" cried Nettlebeck, bringing his fist down on the table with such violence that Christina's pile of clean plates rattled, and she gave a wholly feminine shriek. "If you ever insult me like that again I'll git a wife, and how'll you like that?"

This threat never failed to subdue Christina, for although she shrewdly guessed that no girl within a radius of a hundred miles had the courage to become her sister-in-law, she knew that a desperate man might make a



## RULERS OF KINGS

pilgrimage to some distant town which her fame had not penetrated. She sniffed, muttered something about not being minded to insult her own family, whatever she might think of folks in general, and carried off her dishes to their shelves.

"Mr. Abbott," resumed Nettlebeck, having given his wrath such time to cool as a female could expect, "is a generous and self-sacrificin' father, and he just worships that kid; he'd wear one suit of clothes a year to give him what he needed, and of course keep don't cost much up here. As for this here Morris, he's spent all his money on books and furniture, thinkin' he was goin' to be a college professor. Mr. Abbott must have got him cheap. And the little we git from the old man's regular. Just you remember that."

"I ain't forgettin'. Nobody asked you to make excuses for Mr. Abbott bein' alive. I s'pose he ain't payin' fur that canoe, either."

"That there canoe is a second-handed one, and I got it dirt cheap. Mr. Abbott consulted me about it when he was here last, and asked me to do the best I could, as he'd like the kid to have a canoe if one could be got inside his means. But Fess ain't to know it's here till his birthday comes round; so mind your own business till the ice goes out, if you can." And Mr. Nettlebeck slouched off to join his brother in the barn and avoid further questions.

"I ain't no fool," confided Christina to herself, as she "covered" her fire. "But I know which side my bread's buttered on, and the young un 'll git no hint from me. Then when our share in raisin' him is over, there'll be a big present all round, or my name ain't Christina Nettlebeck. There's been too many campers in these woods in my time, and I know a rich man and a gentleman when I see one. Mr. Abbott was the worst-lookin' tramp in the



woods I ever saw, and that's a sure sign. It's lucky, though, the kid's what he is, for I couldn't stand a hateful brat, nohow."

## IV

Like all invalids, Morris had little affection for any one but himself, but what he lacked in human sympathy he atoned for in courtesy of manner and nicety of conscience. He instructed Fessenden until that restless youngster besought Nettlebeck to find him many "chores." But Fessenden was still too small to chop down trees, to plough ice, or to saw wood, and there is little other work in the mountains in winter. There was no alternative but to accommodate himself to his new condition, and brace his endurance by repeating his father's advice and attempting to understand it. At the end of the long winter he was studying hard and fighting less. Now that he did not recite on the neighboring farm, there was no one to fight with, except on such rare occasions as when a boy came to borrow of Christina after some culinary disaster at home or some unexpected shortage at the mountain "store." Fessenden, no matter how deep in study, seemed to scent the messenger from afar, and was standing in the middle of the slippery road, his muscles bunched, his eye glaring like a tiger's, when his expectant foe, uttering a hideous war-whoop, flung his bag into a snowdrift and hurled himself upon the champion. Upon these occasions, Dolf, the younger of the Nettlebeck brothers, always dropped his work and encouraged the sport. When it was over, no matter what the issue, Christina invariably cuffed Fessenden, then made him a cake; and gentle old Mrs. Nettlebeck wept profusely as she sponged him off, convinced that it would yet be her mournful duty to lay him out. Her own sons

had the peaceful blood of the German peasant in them, and this enterprising American lad was a dear and perpetual mystery. Upon one occasion, when he looked like a blind puppy, and study was out of the question for two days, Morris improved the occasion in the interest of reform.

"You are a great fighter, Fess," he began, tactfully; "and it does my poor blood good to watch so much energy explode. Only it seems to me a waste. Why don't you concentrate your energy in your brain and become a leader by the force of superior will and intelligence?"

"When I fight with my head I fight with its outside," replied Fessenden dryly. "I've got to make myself understood, and I do, you bet. And I'm not complaining of the headache next day, neither."

"Think of what I've said, however. You have established your reputation as a fighter; you occupy the proud position of champion among boys of your own age and older. The raging hate which must saturate you when fighting like a savage would make me feel mean and terrified for days after. It is all very well to know how to use your fists, and no doubt they are of service to you here, and at your age; but they will play a small part in after-life, and your character will play a very great one. You are so constituted that if you would learn to control yourself you could command your fellows with little effort; and at least when you fight try not to hate so hard."

"How would you like Christina's puddings with all the raisins left out? Would you mind reading to me?"

"As long as you like." And Morris made him comfortable on the sofa, and read from the lives of ancient warriors until the heir of the ages fell asleep.

Fessenden's mind at this time was a virgin field into which seeds fell to rise again and be tended by a curious

young tiller. Those flung into a fertile crevice by Morris, who took the responsibility very seriously, put out their green heads in time. Fessenden nodded his recognition, and, although they were by no means his favorite products, between their insistency and a decreasing lack of opportunity, he arrived, in the course of another year, at the conclusion that it might be interesting to make boys follow his lead without resorting to primitive methods. "I suppose one might as well wait till one has a real call to fight," he remarked to himself with philosophy. "The animals don't fight till they have to—none, that is, but dogs, and perhaps that's living so much with us—we sickin' them on and all that. It's good to fight, though," he added, with a long sigh, "even if the headache does last longer than the fun—that's a point. Perhaps Mr. Morris is right, although I'd like to know what he knows about it. Maybe I'll try the other tack and see what there's in it, but there are some things will make my fists fly till I'm eighty. I guess I wasn't cut out for a Sunday-school teacher." Nevertheless, he worked himself into such a terrific rage the next time he was challenged—after an unusual period of virtuous abstinence—that he was thoroughly frightened at the result: for several days he felt flat and peevish, and more worn out in mind than in body. Morris came upon him in the forest where he was seated on a stump dismally chewing a cud, and embraced an obvious opportunity.

"After all," he said sympathetically, "what you fight for is supremacy, is it not? Why not get it some other way? Although you poison yourself with the hate you feel while actually fighting, hate is never the motive of battle with you. You like all these boys well enough, but you must find out who is the best man or burst. Find it out some other way—or rather, having decided that point, try others. Besides, the great man uses the

brute force of others, he rarely indulges in it himself. Did not Napoleon sit aloft on a hill while his hundreds of thousands of nameless minions did the fighting? So long as they could see that being whom they looked upon as an emanation from the divine intellect, they were willing to fight like fanatics, but if he had rushed forward with a musket and fallen, the ranks would have scattered in irretrievable panic. Are you cultivating your prowess to fight years hence when a great man orders you out?"

"Not much," growled Fessenden.

"Well, take me out in your canoe now. We'll talk it over further this evening."

Fessenden's twelfth birthday occurred a week later, and he persuaded Christina to give him a party and invite his enemies. They came, howling through the mountain passes, brandishing big sticks as a manifest of their readiness for the fray. But although, having been invited to dinner and birthday cake, they expected a respite of perhaps two hours, they were disconcerted, and privately alarmed at being received by young Abbott quite in the style of the grand seigneur. He wore a new white sweater and a new pair of trousers, and he had been scrubbed and brushed by Mrs. Nettlebeck until, to mountain taste, he was offensively godly. He greeted his weather-beaten guests with a hearty grip of the hand, insinuated his appreciation of the forgiving spirit so touchingly displayed, and when he had them all seated about the table in the large kitchen he entertained them brilliantly with anecdotes from his most exciting books, while they devoured Christina's substantial dainties. When he had gorged them into a state of sleepy good-nature, he led them out into the woods, and, mounting a stump, invited them to spin yarns of personal prowess. Each youth in turn told a tale of terrible adventure and

glorious triumph, which Fessenden applauded as a host should. When they were alert once more and ready for action, he organized them into a band of pirates, and they scuttled several ships with such demoniacal vigor that they worked off all the steam that was left in them and departed at nightfall vowing that Fessenden—who was now dirty enough to satisfy the most exacting standard—was the finest fellow in the woods, and that they'd never had such a Time since they were born.

After supper Fessenden untied his canoe, *Pocahontas*—whom he loved better than any mortal except his father—and pulled out into the evening shadows. The Nettlebeck farm was on a clearing of some fifty acres on the north and east shores of a large lake. Surrounding it on three sides was the virgin unkempt forest, as yet undesecrated by the lumberman or the logger. Just beyond the clearing the forest grew to the shores of the lake—a body of water so clear that in the early morning and evening, until the ice came, or except when the winds raged, the great spruces and pines, the beeches and maples, looked as if petrified in one of the old glaciers which had ground this vast region into form. Beyond the lake, beyond the surrounding forest, rose the encircling chain of gentle peaks, some barren rocks of eccentric shape, others black with woods. This evening their upper slopes were white with a late fall of snow. The Nettlebecks, like all American farmers, had done what they could to make Nature hideous, and their big house with its haphazard additions, the barns and boat-house, the ragged orchard and vegetable garden, were like a patchwork apron on the robes of a goddess. But Fessenden had turned his back on the Nettlebeck outrage, and not a shingle could he see—not a column of smoke. The blue shadows on the mountains were melting as the stars came out. The silence was so intense that Nature



seemed to laugh noiselessly at man's puny attempt to impress himself upon her higher solitudes.

Fessenden shot his canoe round a bend, and entered a long water-pass, irregular, half-choked with reeds and swamp, dark from the forest on the slopes of the gorge. It led to another lake, the second in a long chain of lakes great and small, on many of which some farmer had made his clearing and erected his monstrosities. But the gorge was long, and the next lake too wild and rocky to invite the attentions of man. Fessenden could paddle far, and fancy himself as alone in the great Adirondack wilderness as the first Red Indian. From the day when Mrs. Nettlebeck had allowed him to run unattended, much of his time had been spent apart. The nearest neighbor lived three miles away, on the farm where with several other boys he had attended school of a sort for four months in the year. The boys were kept busy at other times, and only sought him out when, like himself, they ached for a fight. Solitude had become as necessary in his life as his bed and his bread; and except when storms raged and the thermometer stood too far below zero, he left the house the moment his studies with his tutor were over, and took his reading into the woods or his canoe. On Saturdays and Sundays he was not permitted to open a book, and during the short summer there were no mental tasks. He spent these holidays in the woods or on the water, only returning to the house for his evening meal and his hard bed. Occasionally Morris accompanied him, and taught him much of practical forestry; but although the man and the boy were good friends, each preferred his solitudes—his long silences.

To-night Fessenden was in a strangely exultant mood which he was anxious to understand. He was tired, for he had played hard; but it was a pleasant languor beside

## RULERS OF KINGS

the exhaustion which followed his pitched battles, to say nothing of their accompaniment of gaping wounds and nervous depression. He had passed successfully through his first attempt at diplomacy and self-command; his fists had ached more than once, for Jeff Hunter was in fine fighting trim and invariably lashed his crimson tide; and he tasted all the sweets of power, of dominating in a new rôle, of discovering unsuspected talents, and of using them easily in the control of his fellows. He looked back upon his career of fists and blood, this youngster of twelve, with much the same disgust and contempt as might animate a debauchee crossing the threshold of reform. He did not return home until midnight, and in those lonely hours under the stars, in the profoundest stillness that America can give us, his ambition was born. He felt able to go out and conquer the world then and there; but he was modest by an earlier endowment, and the value of a sound education had been impressed upon his responsive mind. But his soul took a long flight, and met on high vague and beautiful shapes, which, when he was older, he knew men called ideals—looked down upon a wonderful world far beyond these mountains, wherein was stored the records of an eternity of great deeds, where greater still were doing; where, in the nebulous galleries of time, things beyond human imaginings awaited the quickening touch of men still in the making.

Fessenden returned and raided the pantry for a glass of milk, but it was some time before he sought his bed. In the depths of his soul the sleeping man still muttered, and he felt like Mercury poised for a flight and not knowing which way to turn, but half drunk with wondrous possibilities. The full moon hung low on the reflecting lake. The mountain-tops were white, their lower forests black. The deer came noiselessly out of the woods and



## RULERS OF KINGS

drank. The sublime and lonely scene murmured voicelessly of its greater kin in the highest valleys of the alpine world. Fessenden, standing on the upper veranda of the house, again saw only Nature, unchanged since a thousand years. Her silences might never have been broken.

"You—kid!" cried a shrill voice as a window flew open. "What on earth are you doin' up this time of night? Lands sakes! Git into bed this minute or I'll come out and cuff you good." And Fessenden, who had a wholesome respect for Christina, fled to his room and was asleep in ten minutes.

### V

But although solitude moulded unceasingly in the structure of Fessenden Abbott's character, and with coincident intellectual development opened Gothic spaces in his soul which made him lastingly different from the city-bred man, yet was his life on the whole much like that of any healthy youngster of his age who lived his boyhood in an American wilderness. He played pioneer to his complete satisfaction, and blazed trails in all directions through the forest. In company with the redoubtable Jeff Hunter, he built a hut on an island in a lake of wild and uninhabitable surroundings, and impersonated Crusoe to his old enemy's Friday. This social triumph was not won without another struggle, partly fistic, partly diplomatic; and Fessenden regarded the issue as his greatest achievement. After the first supper, cooked by Friday and eaten with the graciousness of royalty by his master, Jeff succumbed amiably and followed Fessenden on such adventurous tramps as his hard-working father would permit. They spent many days and nights, during the summer months, on the

## RULERS OF KINGS

island, from which they sallied forth into the forest or to the high peaks of the range in search of Nature's dearest terrors. They were once treed by a bear, whose cubs they stumbled over; but managed to escape, by climbing from tree-top to tree-top, when the bear was obliged to return to maternal duties; they had, with what discrimination was possible, selected trees too slender for the bear to mount. During one of Mr. Abbott's visits he was entertained on the island; and by the light of a camp-fire and to the accompaniment of ominous sounds in the surrounding forest was regaled by an account of this adventure, to say nothing of one with a panther, and yet another with a catamount, told by Fessenden in a direct unvarnished style which made his father tingle with pride and an echo of youth. Shortly after, Fritz Nettlebeck remarked to the boys that he had two shot-guns which "he guessed they were old enough to use, and he'd teach 'em and give 'em the loan of the guns provided they learned how to shoot straight and would promise to be careful." The immediate result was an indiscriminate slaughter and loud protests from Christina, who viewed an overstocked and gory larder with disfavor. When, however, they had riddled and dragged home a bear, they were thereafter too proud to kill small game for other than purposes of replenishment. In the hunting season they spent their Saturdays on the runs, and killed more deer than the law allowed. One fine buck was shipped to Mr. Abbott by Nettlebeck. Fessenden had brought it down, and it was the prize of the season. Having achieved this fresh distinction, Fessenden, who, if he now fought rarely, still burned with youthful ambitions, which had no relation to the swirling yet luminous desires in his soul, organized a canoe race in which boys from seven lakes competed. As his practice had been constant for three years, and as he applied

## RULERS OF KINGS

a very superior brain to the sport, he not unnaturally came off best man; but this he did not realize, and he embraced his canoe that night in a glow of complete happiness. He had named her after his favorite girl in history, and he loved her with his first boyish passion.

### VI

Fessenden shivered and sat up in bed. It was the first time he had ever heard sounds in the house at this hour, and even the birds and the cocks were still asleep. He felt more oppressed than curious, and, dressing hastily, opened his window and slipped out upon the veranda. The moon shone on vast fields of ice and snow, on white peaks sharply defined against the dark starry sky, on great stretches of woods whose heavy spruce and naked maples were laden and glittering. The lake was a sheet of ice several feet in depth. Fessenden had driven a team across it yesterday to the opposite woods, where the men were chopping trees blown down in a recent storm. The thermometer was very low, but the air so still that the cold had no sting in it. Without the house the world might have been dead; but not so within. Several people seemed to be moving about in a curious and stealthy manner. Suddenly some one ran down the hall and back again. Immediately after there was a scream from Christina, followed by a silence so sudden and complete that it seemed profounder than that without.

How he realized at once that Mrs. Nettlebeck was dead he never knew. She had not been a strong woman for years, and had spent more and more of her time in the big rocking-chair, looking out on the lake or reading her Bible; but when he had kissed her as usual the night

## RULERS OF KINGS

before, she had prodded him playfully in search of damaged bones, and told him in her broken English that she forgot she was too old to work while she watched him skate and turn somersaults on the ice. Fessenden knew that she loved him more than she did her own children, for he interested her and they did not, and he showed her much demonstrative affection, which they thought beneath their religiously acquired Americanism—if indeed there were any impulses left in those dry economical natures. And now Fessenden looked about vaguely as if in search of the fleeing spirit. For the moment it seemed to him that he vibrated in unison with the great forces beyond the Universe. It was several days before he was conscious of grief and his loss, but he tingled with cosmic curiosity.

Morris's window was open, and himself buried under so many blankets that he did not hear Fessenden enter the room. He sprang up when gripped by the shoulder, however, and after a brief visit to the death-chamber returned and endeavored until morning to answer his pupil's eager almost incoherent questions. He expounded every belief he had investigated. After Fessenden had concluded that he would prefer to think of his poor old friend in that Nirvana where there was no more work, he went out and spent the day in the woods by himself. This new idea of Death and its impenetrability to mortal light seemed to him magnificent; and Christina, hastily patching together a shroud out of sheets—old sheets at that—and Fritz and Dolf, not even assisted by the hired man—who was sent to chop wood as usual—hammering together a rude coffin, while a few neighbors stamped through the defiles to "help lay the old lady out," filled his ardent young mind with revolt.

The burial-ground was ten miles distant, close by a church, a mountain store, a post-office, and three or four

houses—a hamlet in a clearing through which a stage passed twice a week. Once a month the church was visited by an itinerant preacher. Mrs. Nettlebeck, to the satisfaction of her family, had accommodated her setting forth to the Methodist's returning flight, and, as there was no time to lose, her remains, on the night following her death, were placed on the "jumper"—a low sledge—and driven through the snowdrifts of the forest by torch-light. Fritz drove; Christina stood beside him, arrayed in fragments of hastily contributed black; Fessenden and his faithful chum tramped in the rear; and Dolf and the hired man lighted the way with great pine torches. The jumper was on runners; the men and the boys wore snow-shoes, for the snow was often five or six feet deep; now and then the rude vehicle plunged into a drift and had to be dug out, while the coffin was deposited beyond the reach of the plunging horses. Once the coffin disappeared, and as no one could remember exactly where it had been placed, and the pitch-pine was smoking heavily, it was some time before the treacherous catafalque was discovered. After the box had been dug out and safely hearsed, Fessenden let fly his wrath.

"Why on earth can't you bury the poor old lady in the forest?" he demanded. "You're treating her horribly, in my opinion; and I'd like to know what better church-yard any one wants than the woods."

"I guess this family'll git Christian burial every time," replied Fritz. "But I must say it's mighty inconvenient dyin' in the winter. Still, we can spare the time better than if we was sowin' or harvestin'; there's something in that. You can't for to git everything right in this world."

And the tramp went on through the forest, where the late moon rarely penetrated, and the wild torches peopled the caverns of the dark with the evil spirits which

had haunted the forests of the old peasant's childhood, and cast sinister shadows over the stark outline bumping close to the ground. Mrs. Nettlebeck had been a bit of a cynic in her way, for she had never been persuaded that the transit from her quaint comfortable village in the toy state of Hamburg to this souring struggle for existence in an aboriginal wilderness had exalted her second condition over her first; and Fessenden wondered if she were smiling grimly in her coffin at the hardships of her final journey.

They arrived at the settlement in the late sunrise, but although several neighbors had assembled to help them, neither pick nor spade made any impression on the frozen snow, many feet in depth, which covered the churchyard and its graves. The preacher managed to flounder through the drifts to his duty, and preached a long and dismal sermon on the platitudes of life and death, which further outraged Fessenden; and then Mrs. Nettlebeck was stowed away in a little room behind the pulpit to wait till the spring came and the "ice went out."

## VII

It was several days before Fessenden realized that he felt something more than natural grief at the death of Mrs. Nettlebeck. He knew that his father loved him, but Mr. Abbott's visits were brief and far between, and his infrequent letters rarely covered a sheet of note-paper. Fessenden now had his ardent following among the boys of his region, but boys manifest their liking by loyalty, not by sentiment. Fritz and Dolf treated him with good-natured indifference; he would as soon have thought of kissing one of the scraggy winter maples as Christina, in spite of her cross indulgence, and Morris



might have been a disembodied spirit. Mrs. Nettlebeck had been his one steady well of affection. She had petted and crooned over him since he had come to her, a baby in a chronic state of disapproval with his nurse; and the large measure of rejected love that was still in her she had lavished upon him daily. He had taken it as a matter of course, for he was lordly and masculine, and there was no sharp contrast of neglect and ill-treatment to fuse it into light. But now that the magic had gone abruptly from him, and there was nothing to take its place, he felt himself up against the barren rocks of life; for the first time the future seemed to hold vague and unknown terrors, the present to be less than the supremely satisfactory thing he had esteemed it. He went first for consolation to his canoe, whom perhaps he loved the more ardently as her responses held an exciting element of doubt. But *Pocahontas*, like the bears, seemed to "deaden" in winter, at all events to be coldly impersonal until she was skimming above the sunken ice before the first breeze of spring. So he left her to the chill repose of the boat-house, and poured out his lonely and frightened soul to his father. Mr. Abbott answered that he would go up to see him at once, and did manage to pay his son a flying visit in the course of a month. But by this time Fessenden was ashamed of his reckless exhibition of sentiment, and, like a true American, had jealously concealed his gushing fountains under a cool, alert, and practical exterior. When his father arrived his head was high, and his blue eyes keen and bright, his very muscles expressive of masculine impatience with the soft side of life. Mr. Abbott had brought him a fishing-rod, which appeared to afford immediate consolation; and then, somewhat to his father's relief, he began to talk about American history.

"Mr. Morris wanted me to wait until I had read more

## RULERS OF KINGS

of English and foreign history," he said. "But I couldn't, and I've been reading out of hours. We've a great country, haven't we?"

"Great."

"Up here they all think it's the greatest in the world. Is it?"

"That is largely a matter of experience. Personally, I see more in the future than in the present. We have never been whipped. That is fatal to steady and rounded development. A nation, like man, is full of vanity until life has trounced him more than once."

"I should hate it if we had ever been licked. And we have had such grand men to guide us—I have read the lives of Washington and Hamilton and Franklin; and we have such grand ideals—after I read the Declaration of Independence I went out into the woods and whooped and whooped. With that to live by we can't be in need of a trouncing; and of course all other men try to follow in the footsteps of our great ones—there are a lot of others whose lives I haven't had time to read yet."

Mr. Abbott turned his eyes to his son's flushed face, and opened his straight lips as if about to smile and speak. But he closed them quickly, and brought down his lids over his cold dreaming eyes.

He answered in a moment: "Our ideals, like our theories, are the best in the world. When you are launched out into the hustle, it will be time enough to know how they work. Meanwhile, don't worry about your country—it has an amazing power of taking care of itself; but develop your intellect and your strength of character. Do you repeat that lesson of mine once a week?"

Mr. Abbott invariably asked this question, and Fessenden was usually able to nod satisfactorily. He continued: "A man who came up here once said that this



## RULERS OF KINGS

was the rich man's country, that the poor man was getting less and less of a show, and often couldn't get justice. They all argued after that—it was down at the store; but it didn't seem to lead anywhere, and I'd like to know what he meant. Was he only talking? Is that the reason you are poor? You seem to me the cleverest man in the world—and even Mr. Morris thinks an awful lot of you—he's not much on admiring. Are you ground down by the rich? I should think you could sail into 'em, and send 'em all higher'n a kite."

Mr. Abbott opened the door of the stove and poked the fire. Its red glow was reflected in his face, usually the hue of leather.

"I cannot say that the rich have interfered with me," he replied, after a considerable pause. "I have chosen my own course, and have felt justified in pursuing it. Don't believe all this twaddle about the rich, my son. It is their enterprise that has made this country great, not the growling of the failures. It is they who encourage and promote industries, whether their employees like their manner of doing it or not. It is they who make the money circulate, find employment for millions, keep the fires crackling under the great boiling caldron. Moreover, most of them have risen from the ranks of these grumblers—who, one and all, dream of reaching their altitude and having their chance to dictate to those still below. Never forget that point. Every working-man on strike is a potential millionaire—in fact as well as in fancy—for this country offers equal chances to all. It is the brains of the men that are not equal; and every millionaire has only himself—in rare instances his immediate forebears—to thank that he is not still grovelling with the herd, close to the wall."

"Then of course the millionaires have the really great minds nowadays. Having done such wonderful things,

I should think they would feel as if all the rest of the world were their children."

"H'm! My son, I think it is time for you to go to bed."

## VIII

Fessenden, until his Great Love Affair, which occurred when he had rounded his seventeenth year, lived in his books and the future, finding less and less companionship in his now humble and devoted band of followers. This interval of four years was pricked out by two variations only: the gradually discontinuing visits of his father and the slight change incident upon a letter received from Mr. Abbott on his son's fifteenth birthday:

"MY DEAR BOY"—(this letter began, in the well-bred but curiously unexercised handwriting which sometimes made Fessenden wonder if his father never wrote to any one else)—"It may be some time, perhaps years, before we meet again. I shall give you no reason now for this additional separation, so painful to me. When the time comes I shall explain, and you will find the explanation satisfactory. Meanwhile, I shall write to you twice a year, remind you of all the advice and admonition I have given you, and ask many questions. I am very much gratified with Mr. Morris's accounts of you. It is in your blood to take naturally to books. I hope and pray that other things may come as readily to you in due course.

"I have now concluded that you are old and strong enough to support yourself—barring your tuition, which I shall manage to meet. I am writing to Nettlebeck to put you to work during the fine weather. As you know, I prefer you should not study during those months, and you will be paid what will more than meet your expenses the year round. You are quite equal to the work of a farm-hand, and it is time you knew how it feels to earn money. It will also be a very considerable relief to me, besides accustoming you to the fit of the harness before it is imperatively necessary to put it on. Your sister is well, and sends you her

## RULERS OF KINGS

love. I add mine, and I beg you to believe that in spite of appearances I love you devotedly—more than I have ever loved any one. You ask for my picture. I have never had one taken. I have my reasons. One is that a man always seems to me most of an ass when smirking on cardboard.

“Your very affectionate

“FATHER.”

“He believes in disciplining,” remarked Fessenden to Morris, with some acerbity. He was not enchanted at the prospect of being a farm-hand. “If I must I must, but somehow I can’t believe my father is as poor as he makes out. If he is poor, it must be because he wants to be, for it always seems to me as if a sort of power came straight out of him, and hit me hard. And up here, where all men are equal—quite unlike what you say it is in cities—the Nettlebecks show him more respect than they ever show any one else.”

“That is the mere force of personality. You can have the same experience when you are grown, if you make of yourself a strong and isolated spirit, not a mere creditable member of a type. As for your father, his opinions are worth their weight in gold. Obey him without question—therein lies the success of your future. He is not only a man of remarkable brain power, but he is between three and four times your age. He is helping you now out of his own experience. Be thankful that he takes so great an interest in you, instead of spoiling you in the usual criminal American fashion.”

“His interest appears to be more excessive than his love.”

“Cannot you take love on trust?”

“Does anybody take anything on trust? Can I eat nails and believe them bread? I know what I see, what I feel, what I am permitted to enjoy. I might say to myself twenty times a day, ‘My father loves me,’ and it

## RULERS OF KINGS

wouldn't make one-thousandth the impression that a weekly visit of ten minutes would."

"A weekly visit from Mr. Abbott—" Morris checked his laugh abruptly. "Your father is not too strong, and hates travelling. But you have brain and imagination; it is odd you should need the regularly administered pap of the ordinary youth."

"I am human," responded Fessenden dryly; and as usual he went to *Pocahontas* for comfort and counsel.

The world was green on this birthday of his, for the spring had come early. The snow had gone from the mountains, the young maple-leaves were fluttering in the forest, the fields were green, the golden sunshine flooded the lake. There was a light breeze, and Fessenden unfurled his sails and thought into the sympathetic soul of his canoe.

"Perhaps, on the whole, I like the idea," he admitted.

"With one or two exceptions, our great men have risen from the ranks—were hired men, grocery-store clerks, born in log-cabins, and all that sort of thing. To be sure, my favorites happen to be the ones who were not; still it seems to be the proper thing in this country, and as I intend to be a great man, old girl, I am contented to start at the proper place—no log-hut could be uglier than the Nettlebeck farm-house, and I am going to be a hired man, all right. I can't help being thankful that it isn't to be a grocery-store clerk. What am I to be? What am I to be? Can't you give me a hint?" He laid his ear to the spot where he fancied the heart of *Pocahontas* beat warmly, and for him alone. "When I read the life of a great warrior, I want to be one. Upon some other occasion I want to be a great statesman and orator, and spout the seventh-of-March speech in the woods, as exalted as if the world listened—and feel like a fool afterwards. Write? Morris says there are too

many writers now, and that my brain is that of the man of action. He certainly seems to know more about it than I do, and as for you, my beauty, you're a selfish hussy. When your sails are up you think of nothing but filling your belly with wind."

## IX

Fessenden was so preoccupied that even the voices and laughter of girls did not attract his attention for some moments. He was inserting the little nickel troughs called spiles into the trees of the maple orchard, and hanging the red buckets beneath to catch the sap. Dolf was in the sugar shanty near by, scouring out the vats, for the boiling would begin to-morrow, and maple-sugar was an industry from which the Nettlebecks derived a yearly income of several hundred dollars. This year Fessenden, who was now seventeen and tired of being a farm-hand, had stipulated that he was to work on shares, arguing that if he did two-thirds of the work he was entitled to at least one-third of the profits. Nettlebeck, after some demur, and a long growl over his pipe one evening, capitulated when young Abbott threatened to stake off a claim on government land and in partnership with Jeff Hunter build his own vats. Fessenden was feeling much elated over his rise in life, and his imagination was running riot in a great future to which sugar should be the stepping-stone—he had recently read several articles on self made men in magazines sent to Morris—when his house of cards came tumbling down, and the future financier rose from the ruins, a blushing, shivering, gibbering swain.

"This' here is Grace Morton, Fess," remarked the dry young voice of Mamie Hunter. "She's come to stay

## RULERS OF KINGS

with me a spell. Lives down to Malone, and ain't very well."

During this elaborate introduction Fessenden was gazing into the soft black eyes of the prettiest girl he had ever seen. Her hair was dark, her features fragile and regular; she wore a black frock and a red-peaked cap, red about her throat and tiny waist. Her complexion was sickly, her figure might have been that of the last woman, but Fessenden saw no defects. Neither did he recognize the vacant, the utterly commonplace mind that looked from that sweet unchanging face. She was a little beauty in her way, and wholly unlike the buxom rough-handed girls of his district; there pervaded her that neutral refinement which nature has lavished with such a curious lack of discrimination upon all classes in the United States; and to Fessenden, who had never seen even a village, she seemed city-bred and fashionable. She blushed under his devouring gaze, and then she looked like a wild rose of the woods; one barrier fell. She raised her eyes and glanced vaguely round.

"I've never seen the sap running before," she remarked. "It looks real nice. Is it sweet like what we eat on cakes?"

"You goose!" exclaimed Miss Hunter. "It's got to be boiled down first—the water boiled out of it; not that it's so bad now."

Fessenden had produced a tin cup and filled it with the running liquid. "Will you taste it?" he asked hoarsely.

She took the cup from him, and their fingers met. He trembled. She did not, and tasted the sap daintily. "Well, I like it," she announced. "It's real refreshing, and we had a long walk over here. I never walked so far before, and I'm all tuckered out. I guess I'll sit down."



## RULERS OF KINGS

Fessenden hastily cleared off a log, and regretted that he had no coat to fling upon it—for obvious reasons he could not remove his sweater. She seated herself with the fastidious little manner which pervaded her personality, and Miss Hunter, remarking that she guessed she was not wanted, strolled off to call on Christina. Fessenden, humbly craving permission, seated himself beside the beauty from Malone, regardless of the sap that was flowing from the punctured trees which still awaited spile and bucket. They talked disconnectedly of various things, no one of which could Fessenden recall later. Her remarks were pleasant and meaningless and she was utterly unmoved. She thought this young mountaineer very handsome and clever-looking, and she had a faint romantic preference for tall men; but her poor little body was not destined for reproduction, and her brain was too small for imagination and sentiment. She was vain and liked attention, but she was without guile, and as she had no immediate reason for marrying, her mother keeping a small store comfortably, she encouraged no one of her admirers, while accepting the homage of several as a matter of course. The wild tempest in Fessenden she could not have understood with the aid of a miracle.

“Is this your first visit to the woods?” asked Fessenden, who wondered dully why he was so stupid; he could think of nothing to say to this divine creature, and words, as a rule, came to him almost as rapidly as thoughts.

“No, I’ve never been before. I always wanted to.” Her voice was sweet and thin; it was only when she raised it that it escaped through her nose. To the infatuated Fessenden it sounded like the rilling of one of the minor streams in the woods.

“I hope you’ll stay a long while.”

## RULERS OF KINGS

"I guess I will. Most of our folks 've died of consumption, and I've had a hackin' kind of cough. But I guess I'll get over it here. I'm better already."

If there was a mutter of protest from the race in Fessenden's depths he let it pass unheeded. His suddenly conceived and violent passion needed but the lash of pity to transform him from the individual into the type, tumultuous with sentimental desire; the instinct of the strong to protect the beloved weak, keen and quick; pouring into a flimsy shell such an ideal as man knows only in his dreams—the determination to possess this inestimable treasure though the world stood still and the angels warned through brazen trumpets.

"I hope this log isn't damp," he said anxiously. "I'd better fetch you something from the house to sit on."

"Oh, I'd be afraid to stay here alone, and I can't walk another step. It's bad enough to walk home. I guess this log's all right. Have you ever been to Malone?"

"Never!" Fessenden for the first time realized his rude wild state. "I've never been twenty miles from here."

"My! you are a country bumpkin. I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings," she added contritely as Fessenden's sunburnt face assumed a purple hue. "I'm always saying silly things. You mustn't mind me. The boys always say I just rattle out anything that comes into my head, and they don't mind a bit."

"I'm sure I don't either," said Fessenden quickly; he was determined to equal the Maloner in insensibility. "I should think"—he blundered somehow through his first compliment—"that anything you said would be about right."

"Well, that's what they tell me," she replied complacently. "You can get me another cup of that sap if you like."



## RULERS OF KINGS

Fessenden held the cup to her mouth, which was thin and curved and scarlet. Then, partly because his emotions were rendering him speechless, partly because he was fired with the primitive desire of the male to show off before the female, he swung his axe to his shoulder and muttered that he guessed he'd better cut down a tree; he was wasting too much time.

His axe he always carried with him. It occupied a place in his affections second to his canoe, and preceding a more lukewarm passion for his gun. In a moment Miss Grace Morton, of Malone, was admiring a lithe strong back, the supple free action of two brawny arms as the axe swung as easily as a switch, cutting straight and deep at every stroke. The old tree was quickly brought to earth, and Fessenden leaned on his axe and dared once more to look into the soft eyes beneath the red cap.

"It was time that old tree came down," he remarked huskily, yet with a fair assumption of indifference. "It hasn't given any sap for two years, and has been bothering the other trees."

"Bothering? You talk as if trees was people."

"Well, they are in a way—that is, they've often seemed alive to me."

"My! You ain't crazy, are you?"

Fessenden laughed, and a term of endearment ran close to the tip of his tongue. "People who live much alone have odd fancies. But that doesn't mean they're crazy."

"I guess they're crazy enough if they're too different. But you look real sensible. I presume you're all right."

She looked adorable in her feminine attempt to console him, and Fessenden wheeled about and swung the axe victoriously into a fruitful maple. This time the young lady was bored. She preferred conversation, and this

## RULERS OF KINGS

mountain stripling certainly was handsomer than the Malone small-fry who worshipped at her shrine.

She coughed pleasantly but imperiously, and as Fessenden turned quickly the sun blazed full upon her, covering her bright hair with little golden sparks. Her eyes looked babyish and wistful; she had one of those mouths that quiver when pouting. The poor little creature was the more dangerous for being quite natural and sincere. She had neither the brains nor the energy for coquetry, and even to youths of some slight experience she seemed as perfect as she was pretty.

Fessenden threw aside his axe. "Let's go down to the lake," he said, with brutal abruptness. "It's not far, and I'll row you and Mamie home—here she comes."

He strode on ahead, and when the girls reached the shore he had one of the boats drawn up to the landing. He rowed with such swift strong strokes that the light craft fairly flew up the lake.

"My, Fess!" remarked Mamie Hunter. "You appear to be in a hurry—must have wasted time after I left you."

"Of course the trees have to be spiled, but Miss Morton was too tired to walk home. You shouldn't have brought her such a distance the first time."

"She didn't calculate on finding a nurse ready made; she's real fortunate. Perhaps you'll come over and carry her next time."

"I should like to." He smiled protectingly into the impassive expectant eyes; even in the throes he was the lordly male. Moreover, pride had shaken him into a temporary possession of his senses. "What do you think of our scenery?" he asked Miss Morton.

"It's real pretty."

"Pretty? Beautiful, I should call it."

"Yes, I guess beautiful suits it better." If he had

## RULERS OF KINGS

applied to it erudite and foreign adjectives she would have assented as amiably.

"Fess is a crank," advised Mamie. "You mustn't mind anything he raves over. You'll be the next thing, I suppose—he'll find it quite a relief after so much brain work." Mamie was an admirer and disciple of Christina, besides possessing a quick and observing eye of her own. She had a long, investigating nose, and no beauty whatever; but with the boys, whom she treated villainously, she was the most popular girl in the district.

"Have you read much?" asked Fessenden of his divinity, ignoring Mamie.

"Oh yes."

"What? Shakespeare? History? Biographies?"

"I guess so. I always forget people's names that write things."

And even then the rosy halo swirled unrent. Fessenden returned home and viciously punctured his trees. At supper he was so incoherent that Christina arose and felt his pulse. He passed the greater part of the night wandering in the woods. During the ensuing fortnight he spent every evening at the Hunters'. Several times the girls came to the sugar shanty where he was boiling, and he rowed them home in the dusk. He lived aloft with the gods and the goddesses, one of whom was Grace, who gradually assumed heroic proportions. It mattered not that every interview betrayed her paucity the more pitifully; it mattered not that he never once struck fire in that meagre breast, that never once did her brain respond to the confidences, the ambitions, the aspirations he poured into her puzzled and oftentimes weary ear. He no longer loved Grace, little as he realized that world-old fact; he loved the ideal it was her limited destiny to quicken in his imagination. The great forces rushing through his veins and thumping in his brain had nothing

in common with mere facts and girls. They were having their first innings, and not even grateful to the cause. Nothing in the vagaries of nature is more inexplicable than nine-tenths of what, for want of a better name, is called love. It is a wanton waste of good energy and a lamentable waste of spiritual forces; for the passion moves the victim to all sorts of unselfish impulses, exalted emotion, and even religion, all of which, in the reaction when delusion is over, are finely scorned. That love which is composed of an instinct for companionship, and a complete honesty of emotions, and is lacking in sentimentalism and the tragic note, delays its arrival, to people of ardent imagination, until so late that they must have much richness of nature and large recuperative powers to dismiss into the past the memory of all they have spent. The theory that the blind passion of youth springs from the relentless instinct of reproduction is true only in part, for some of the maddest passions are inspired by anæmic and useless women, and the earth has its full measure of sickly children. If Nature has any well-defined plan she has as yet hesitated to reveal it, and it is probable that she is still amusing herself in her laboratory. Most love would appear to be a momentary fever of the imagination to which the body responds, and the soul, always struggling for utterance, tries its wings, flies a little span, and flatters the brain: when a man is in love then is he most pleased with himself; he never imagined that for heights and depths, within an apparently trite exterior, he was so remarkable a being; and until the wave recedes he bestows a like approval on the chance object who, in the prettiness of her hour, or by some trick of manner, bulged his ego into grander proportions.

Considering the issues, it was fortunate in many respects that Fessenden had the inevitable attack so early in life.

## RULERS OF KINGS

He was subjected to an unmerciful chaffing, to the most sarcastic achievements of Christina's tongue, and to more than one crude remark by Mr. Nettlebeck; in subject the eternal damnation tendency of young fools to fall in love with a bigger fool than themselves—in this case as useless a bit of furniture as ever littered the earth. Morris for a time ignored the episode, but after Fessenden, who scorned his tormentors, overflowed one day in the presence of the polite philosopher, and announced that he intended to marry as soon as he had a maple-grove of his own—college had no further charms for him—the tutor and Nettlebeck had a long and meaning conference. At its conclusion Morris spent an hour in composition, the farmer hitched up his buckboard and, in spite of the pressing duties of the season, drove thirty miles to the station and gave the letter to an obliging conductor to post in New York. Nettlebeck, not many days later, took a trip which lasted nearly a week.

### X

Fessenden, who had long since proposed to Grace and been listlessly accepted, started as usual for the Hunters' one evening, striking through the woods. The moon illuminated the recesses, in which the snow still lingered, and Fessenden strode along, idealizing even that beautiful forest; for would it not, in another hour, shelter two divinely selected beings? He still trod the upper ether, but even in that rarefied atmosphere he experienced a slight chill as he saw Jeff Hunter hastening towards him through the romantic reaches.

Jeff, who under Fessenden's training had acquired a direct and uncompromising method of speech, wasted no time in coming to the point.

## RULERS OF KINGS

"I've got bad news for you," he announced. "Grace's gone, and she won't come back, neither."

Fessenden, who had a confused sense that he was tumbling through space, merely stared at Jeff, who continued:

"Her ma came this morning and yanked her off—said she'd have no such nonsense with a girl who was not strong enough to darn her own stockings, let alone getten' married. Grace cried, of course—all girls do whenever they get an excuse—but soon dried up when her ma said she'd take her out West and show her something of the world. Grace told me to tell you she guessed it was all right, she hadn't felt much like getten' married, anyway; she'd only said yes because it wouldn't have been any use to say no; and the old lady told me to tell you that it was no sort of use to follow her, for she was coverin' up her tracks—she's a tartar, that one, and I guess you needn't cry that you ain't goin' to have her for a mother-in-law; and I guess she's got enough money to go 's fur 's she likes—she told me she'd be five hundred miles away before night. As for Grace, Fess, she ain't worth one of the ribs in *Pocahontas*—that's the reason I didn't warn you this morning."

"Good-night," said Fessenden.

The blood had rushed to his head. It remained there and confused him, until, after a brief sleep, he awoke next morning; then he burst in upon the astonished Morris and raged like a madman. He smashed a window and two chairs, vowed that he would walk to the West, that he knew Grace loved him, and that if she did not he had no use for life anyway.

Morris brought him partly to his senses by the ironic method, to which Fessenden was peculiarly susceptible, and then suggested that he put a sandwich in his pocket and spend the day in the woods.



“When you are a rational being once more I shall be glad to see you again and talk it over. I sincerely hope I may be able to help you in some way. But we all have to go through this, my boy. It is as inevitable as the phenomenon of man and woman itself, and must be taken as philosophically as the ills of the flesh, which under the proper diffusion of scientific knowledge will be obviated in time. It is to be hoped that puppy-love will prove an equally amenable microbe. Now take to the woods and think like a man.”

Fessenden took to the woods, but the time was not yet come when he could think like a man. Calf-love has furnished the mills of the wits since the first pen impaled the emotions; but it may be a hideous experience to youths in whom are the makings of strong and passionate men. The academic standard arbitrarily established by our literary powers has given the world an entirely false idea of the American temperament, which, in its masculine half, at least, is excitable and sentimental. It is their capacity for intense and powerful emotion, making them in mob capable of the maddest excesses of enthusiasm, which is the deep indestructible bond of unity in the American race; that has saved it from passing off long since in fireworks; that, when it has found the courage and acquired the brain-power to struggle through its artificial envelope, will permit it to become as great as it now thinks it is.

Poor Fessenden had not yet reached the analytical stage. He went out into the forest and suffered horribly. He wept and raved, and believed that so far as he was concerned the world had reached its finish. For the time he was primeval man balked of the first woman; later, when the acute stage had passed, and imagination had returned, every fine impulse and need of his nature which had leaped to assertion under the quickening

process of idealized woman seemed to have withered out of him under the sudden blight. He felt shorn, impoverished, hopeless; worse than all, helpless. To pursue would be less than folly. Only a fortune and a detective could have found the indifferent girl, hidden in the skirts of a determined mother; and he had not a penny. The little he made beyond what Nettlebeck charged him for his board went, after the replenishment of his rough wardrobe, to New York for books. His helplessness degraded his manhood, added to the sum of his miseries. He stood two days of this mental hell, during which he ate little and slept less, and then he shouldered his axe and put a sandwich in his pocket.

"I'm going over to the river to get a job driving logs," he said to Nettlebeck. "I've had fourteen years of this, and I'd like a change for a week or two. When the logging is over I'll come home."

The river was twelve miles distant. Ten minutes after he had started on his tramp through the forest he heard a shout behind him. He answered mechanically, and a moment later was joined by Dolf.

"I thought I'd come along," panted the younger Nettlebeck. "I 'ain't seen drivin' for six years or so, and it's good exercise; you have to jump so lively."

Fessenden shrugged his shoulders ungraciously, and declined conversation, but even here he did not recognize the ever-watchful spirit of his father. Nevertheless the thought of that sympathetic parent spontaneously occurred to him. He was the one person to whom he could have spoken, but he remembered his fiercely reacting pride at the age of thirteen; moreover, he was bound to respect his father's mandate of complete separation. He had puzzled deeply over the motive which had prompted this decision in a proud and affectionate parent, but had finally put the question aside, as so far



beyond his limited experience that he had better apply his inquiring mind elsewhere. He had perfect faith in both the wisdom and the love of his father, in spite of occasional outbursts of disappointment, and although the kind firm hand that guided his destinies and smoothed his path without weakening his spirit was too well covered to attract his attention, some spiritual emanation from it kept his heart from closing and the bitterness of neglect from entering his soul.

They reached the river in three hours, hearing from the forest the roar of the dam, the loud shouts of the men. On their side the woods grew down to the stream, but on the heights opposite and far beyond hundreds of virgin trees had been sacrificed that the people of New York might have their daily news. The gates had just been opened, the river was foaming and racing over the rocks, its surface already crowded with long sections of tree-trunks, while others were rolling down the hill. The boss was short of men, and Fessenden and Dolf were employed at once, for the logs were already becoming jammed. Fessenden had watched "driving" many times, and, jumping from log to log to avoid crushing his feet, while at the same time he pried refractory logs into position and relieved jams, he was soon so deeply occupied learning his new trade, to say nothing of preserving his bones, that Grace lay down among the memories. His passion for proving himself the best man replaced the other, and applying all his intelligence to the task, he was very soon the most expert driver on the river. This elated him and sent consoling rays through the dark recesses of his soul. At night he was so tired that, after the evening meal—a repetition of the two preceding ones of pork, beans, bread, and coffee—he was asleep before he had settled himself in his bunk; and although his spirit may have wept over the hearse in the back alleys of his mem-

ory, for he awoke depressed and rebellious, he sprang out of bed at once, ate his beans with a relish, and went to work.

As he tramped home at night two weeks later, he informed himself that he was cured, and when he reached his own comfortable bed he slept until late on the following day; moreover, he enjoyed Christina's savory dinner with a relish which, as a rule, associates only with an untroubled mind. Then he went for a stroll through his favorite haunts of the forest—a guilty sense of disloyalty had led him to avoid *Pocahontas* since the day he met Grace—and it all came back. As it rushed upon him, as he realized that he was still in bondage, he trembled in panic. The horror of returning into the torments of a fortnight since was as strong as the overwhelming passion itself. He ran back to the house, the blood pounding in his head, and searched the shelf over Fritz Nettlebeck's desk, where letters for the household and neighbors awaited the leisurely claimant.

There was nothing for him; and then he realized that, subconsciously, he had expected Grace to defy her mother and write to him—had believed the separation to be a matter of a few weeks; that the time would come when her demand would be as imperative as his own. He leaped up the stairs to his room and rummaged among the papers on his table; there were fragments of exercises in five languages, dead and alive, brief studies of public men, but there was no letter, even from his father. He returned to the forest, his hands and knees trembling, his brain whirling, his panic increasing, muttering vague phrases, filled with terror of the future, confusion, a mad desire for annihilation. Then, as his ego reached its depths and grovelled there, he straightened himself suddenly and, flinging his fist against a tree, exclaimed: "By God, what slavery!" What he had seen of religion as expressed by itinerant and ignorant

## RULERS OF KINGS

preachers had left him cold, but he had entire faith in some great force pervading the Universe, although he did not think it worth while to apply a name to it. He be-thought himself of this force, and by a violent effort put himself in relation with it, demanding imperiously that some of its strength should pass into him and relieve him from this intolerable state of slavery. His prayer was answered so quickly that for a moment he stood as dazed as if he had been transferred abruptly to another planet. Then he shrugged his shoulders, laughed at his recent self, went down to the lake, and took *Pocahontas* out for a long, confidential, and somewhat cynical conversation.

He half expected that the obsession would return, but it did not, even when, missing his agonies, he endeavored to evoke their ghosts. Finally he sat down and wrote a long letter to his father.

"It has taught me two things," he concluded: "the advisability of keeping a tight hold on the bulk of your energies until you are sure of having found the right woman, and the danger of praying for strength to annihilate unless you are quite sure you are not making a mistake. In this case it was all right, but she might have been the one woman; there might have been merely a misunderstanding, and the result would have been the same. I dragged the strength from out there into myself and blasted the thing to the roots. I am convinced that I can evoke that strength whenever I will, but it rather frightens me to think that I might have made this discovery at the wrong time."

## XI

The immediate results of Fessenden's enslavement and deliverance were a terror of women, which he called con-

tempt, an augmented interest in the great men of history, and a daily mounting ardor for his country. He had the usual school-boy's idea of the isolated grandeur of the American Republic, and a corresponding resentment against the rest of the world for having annoyed it occasionally. Mr. Abbott, who liked all healthy manifestations in a youth, had asked Morris to let him keep his illusions until he was old enough to accept their loss without bitterness. Fessenden, who had been patriotic enough in all conscience before he met Grace, now burned with a holy fire, built an altar in the depths of the forest, and solemnly devoted his life and energies to the service of the United States—thought of her, dreamed of her, poured upon her all the rejected passion of his nature. But as yet no light had been shed upon the manner in which he should best serve her, and one day he abruptly broached the subject to Morris. The tutor came to attention at once. He had been in correspondence with Mr. Abbott for some time, and was awaiting his opportunity to speak: Fessenden was a delicate subject.

"I have been thinking it over," he said. "Of course your father's wish—and mine—has been that you should go to Harvard, but in the few years since I left college things have changed so in America—I am not old as years go, and judging from the occasional newspaper and magazine that comes my way, the world seems to have run by me." He spoke hesitatingly, as if the subject had been presented to him too abruptly, after all; and Fessenden, who did not count patience among his virtues, beat a roll-call on the window-pane. The woods were green and warm; *Pocahontas* was making imperious little motions on the lake. A hint, a stimulus, was all he expected from Morris; the final solution would be found in solitude.

"Why not Harvard?" he asked, as Morris continued

to look out upon the world in mute reproach. "Of course I expect to go to Harvard. And my father says the world's all right."

"Whatever is is right. I am philosopher enough to believe that—but this is the point: the great universities, like Harvard, are for the sons of rich men, or at all events for those of that privileged class who do not have to enter into the great struggle the moment they graduate. If you had even a small income, and purposed to become a man of letters, if you had in you the makings of a professor or a clergyman, I should say Harvard without hesitation, even though you would have to skimp through in a manner that is very humiliating to a gentleman; but I have studied you closely now for seven years, and I cannot associate you with any of the old-fashioned callings. You are peculiarly energetic and practical. You have tremendous ideals, but you would never have the patience to angle for them in an ink-pot, and you have too much common-sense to stump the world as a propagandist. The way for you to achieve great ends is through the medium of money—no one in this country to-day respects anything as much—and through that medium you could make yourself understood at once, and have what following you chose. It seems to me that you could make money in very large amounts—you were born with concentration, obstinacy, and industry; you must excel in all you undertake or burn to ashes in the attempt, and you have an uncommonly good brain. Of course I have only been able to cultivate its intellectual part, and there are a thousand things you must study in the next few years—men, your country, other countries, the great industrial, financial, commercial, and political problems which make up the machinery of the world. Now, if you were merely to be a dilettante in these matters, I should again say

## RULERS OF KINGS

Harvard; but as it seems to me that you were born to take an active part in the great world problems, and as you have your living to make, I have thought it expedient to suggest the University of the Northwest—" He paused again and turned away his head; the polite scholar loathed the thought of the Western college. As Fessenden stared at him in earnest attention, he proceeded, in a moment.

"It is quite a remarkable institution in a way, and very cheap. As it is in a small Western town, living costs next to nothing; and as it is not patronized by rich men's sons, the scale of living is very low—there are no expensive clubs and other constant demands. Of course it is your duty to consider this, as well as the more complete freedom which it would give you. It is my private opinion that the great colleges are no place for a man who cannot spend money like a gentleman. If my father had lost his money earlier I should not have gone to Harvard."

"Well, what should I get at this Western university that would send me straight from the log-cabin to Aladdin's cave—it used to be the White House."

"That is what you would decide after you had been there a year or two. The point is that you would find there special courses on electricity, mechanics, banking, transportation, agriculture, international relations, politics, all the industrial problems. Through some one of these great modern avenues you will make your way to wealth, and you will have the inestimable advantage of starting from the ground up—of mastering, for instance, all the details of a machine-shop, of an engine, of railway tracks, of the progressive development of that most mysterious of all forces, electricity, while your mind is still plastic. There is still another reason for making yourself familiar with all these things while you



are young and enthusiastic—even if you happened to make your money in some field outside them all.” He hesitated again, but proceeded almost immediately, and in the tone of a man resolute to pursue any subject as far as analysis would take him. “Suppose, for instance, you should make a very great fortune, modern conditions would place you in the most complex relations with all the subjects which this university specializes. You would be elected upon the boards of companies without end, perhaps become president, vice-president, of others; and, as a rule, directors know next to nothing of the industries over which they preside; employers know too little of what is *a b c* to the men under them. Railroad presidents cannot know too much about mechanics and electricity if they want to pay heavier dividends than their rivals—in a word, it is the millionaire who knows most of those subjects of which most millionaires know nothing who rules all the other millionaires. You see, I have let my imagination run away with me—I already saw you aloft on a gold pedestal. Perhaps I am too sanguine for you—one dreams much when one lives the solitary life—”

“The millionaire proposition seems to me a good deal of a come-down after all my fine dreams and ambitions, but if it’s the short cut— I haven’t much patience— Is money really so easy to make?”

“There is nothing less easy to make. My argument is that you are one of the few who could make it if you would.”

“Well, the harder the better. I wouldn’t give a red cent for anything that could be had for the asking.”

Again Morris turned his head and stared into the fire. He heartily wished that Mr. Abbott had come up and done his own talking.

“Your life is likely to be strenuous enough,” he said,

after a pause. "When you are rich—if you ever are—you will work as hard, if not harder, than before. Will you think over what I have said about this university, and write to your father? He told me once that he should leave the matter to you; but, of course, he must know soon, as you could enter any college this autumn."

"I do not need to think it over. How long do you suppose it takes me to make up my mind? I shall go to the Western University."

## XII

He started early in September, accompanied by Morris, who now confessed that he had long pined for the orange groves, the perpetual sunshine of southern California; and as far as the station by the stoical but cheerless Jeff. Christina embarrassed him by a farewell embrace and a tear, while promising him a monthly box of good things. Morris requested him to take no clothes but those he was obliged to wear, but he stuffed his sweaters among his books; he could imagine himself permanently in no less elastic envelope. In spite of remonstrance he also packed his axe. He was quick and eager for the change, and, with the ingratitude of man, left even *Pocahontas* with little reluctance; his imagination pictured the great gates of the world at the foot of the Adirondacks; and at last he was to pass through them and into that infinite beyond where all dreams were realities.

Morris had chosen the night train for obvious reasons; and when they reached the station in New York he hurried his young mountaineer into a cab and drove to the best of the tailors, who met the immediate demand. The necessary autumn and winter wardrobe he bought for his charge called forth a vigorous remonstrance; Fessenden had never imagined such reckless extrava-



gance; but when his mentor had reassured him, he further indulged himself in several sweaters. He was the proud possessor of a hundred dollars, made in sugar, and his fingers tingled with the new pleasure of spending.

From the shop they drove directly back to the station to catch the morning train for the West. Fessenden grumbled, for he wanted to see New York; every nerve had sprung to greet the great city, and he hung out of the cab in spite of remonstrances and to the amusement of passers-by.

"I know how you feel," said Morris. "I should like it myself, but I dare not linger in New York an hour—its air is fatal to me—so near the Atlantic—you will see enough of New York in the future—I am sure you will not mind." And Fessenden submitted with what grace he could muster. As they were standing in the station awaiting the announcement of their train, Fessenden, to the alarm of Morris, suddenly darted from his side and disappeared in the crowd. Morris suspected the cause and turned pale with anxiety. The color the mountains had given him came back as he saw his charge returning alone. Fessenden's face, however, was flushed, his eyes were as bright as tears.

"I saw my father!" he exclaimed, with a complete disregard of the bystanders that was quite superb. "I know I saw him! Why does he act like this? I was sure he would come to meet me. Why should he look at me and go away?"

"It could not have been Mr. Abbott," said Morris soothingly, and taking his arm he hurried him through the open gates. "It is doubtful if he is in New York, and he is not the man to do anything so silly and sentimental. He is very busy working out some idea which requires all his energies—he dares venture upon no distraction—there, I have told you that much—your un-

erring instinct has kept you from doubting that he loves you."

"Is he an inventor?" asked Fessenden eagerly. "Is that the mystery? Is that the reason he wants me to study all these new things—that I may be of use to him?"

"Well, he is something of an inventor, and you certainly can be of great use to him—more than anybody on earth can be."

"Why didn't you tell me that before? Now I have a double object. I'll work like a logger. What's his line?"

Morris groaned; but as he disposed his hand-baggage neatly about him he had another inspiration. "All!" he announced. "That is to say, a combination of all this very modern university can teach you. The result may be extraordinary."

Fessenden fell back on his seat and stared out of the window, seeing nothing. His imagination was fired with the vision of his lonely potential devoted father experimenting in obscurity with a revolutionizing idea, whose bare elementary threads—awaiting himself in the Northwest—filled him with such excitement and exhilaration that he wanted to get out and race the train. Fortunately his deep emotions always rendered him speechless, and Morris was permitted to sleep peacefully during the greater part of the journey.

## XIII

Although Morris had never reached the heart-strings of his pupil, the youth was his one human interest—his father was dead long since; and as Fessenden fully realized his debt of gratitude to the capable and con-

scientious tutor, as well as being a person in whom habit struck long roots, the parting was unexpectedly affecting. As Fessenden returned from the station of the little town of Turbine, where he was to spend the greater part of the next four years, he suddenly conceived a violent antipathy for his new surroundings, and a desire to flee back to his mountains. This flat interminable prairie, this cheap town, not an elevation in sight, much less the mountains which had gone far into the modelling of his nature—there was nothing here resembling the great world of which he had dreamed. He longed for real solitude, feeling for the first time the miserable substitute the crowd offers; and suddenly understood how much closer to the great realities of life it brings a man than any actual juxtaposition.

But in a few days he was too busy and interested for either homesickness or dreams. Morris had drilled him so thoroughly in English, the dead languages, German, French, in history and mathematics, that he could have entered Yale or Harvard with sails spread, and in the younger university he took a rank at once which gave him the more time for the course known as "Training for Business." Almost immediately it seemed to him that sleeping things rose in his brain, things whose existence he had never suspected, and strove to put themselves in touch with inspiring forces without. Fessenden, who had made up his mind to place himself in a neutral receptive state, to give no more thought to the future and to ambition until he had learned all that the university could teach him, was some time recognizing that these new-comers were talents, and that they responded to all that was inventive and practical in his initial course.

He recognized them in time, however, as day by day he grew more absorbed in the mysteries of the engine and electricity; and the glimpses he had, in his first

year, of finance and political economy stirred him like old love-letters. His imagination idealized and personified the engine he worked upon as it had his canoe; and on the day when he finally mastered the difficult art of taking it to pieces and putting it together again without help or hitch, he challenged the strong man of the college to combat, and polished him off with such enthusiasm that once more he occupied the proud position of champion. This satisfied his masculine vanity, besides delivering him from the chaffing and petty persecutions provoked by his mountain hues; he was henceforth permitted to indulge his passion for sweaters and old hats, even on Sundays, unchallenged, while his remarkable abilities were as frankly acknowledged.

The military drill did not give him enough exercise, and he had promised his father he would waste no time on sport. "Your passion to excel," Mr. Abbott had written, "would make you neglect your studies; so be wise and get your exercise some other way." Fessenden was feeling nervous and somewhat confused one Friday afternoon when he suddenly bethought himself of his axe. He brought it forth, fingered it lovingly in a rush of memories, then shouldered it and started for the open country. He was not long finding a farmer who was willing to have his wood cut for nothing, and thereafter Fessenden spent an hour every evening and half of Saturday, either felling Mr. Lunt's trees or sawing his logs; and the exercise relieved his brain and kept his muscles hard.

The military drill not only dismissed his mountain slouch and gave him a free and upright carriage, but inspired him with dreams of war and glory. The martial music quickened his blood, and secretly he fancied himself very much in his uniform. It was not long before he became restless in the ranks and announced to the

West Point officer in charge his desire to become captain. The officer stared, laughed, then reminded him that military rank was—as a rule—or should be (he was a victim of politics himself), the result of superior accomplishments and talents, to say naught of hard work. Thereafter, three times a week during two of the afternoon hours, Fessenden dismissed books and machinery from his brain and concentrated that energetic instrument upon military drill alone.

But he spent the greater part of his time and thought in the shops and yards. Aside from the ambition and the superabundant energy which prompted him to excel in all he undertook, his imagination was absorbed in the rapture of unravelling certain mysteries of science—was at work on far-distant but great and picturesque results. He was in no hurry to invent, but even while signalling and switching at night he saw trains of unimaginable beauty and grace and lightness skim by in the dark, and great fleets of ships, invincible and terrible in war, forcing the Monroe Doctrine down the throat of Europe, perhaps annexing the rotten old monarchies altogether. That the red hair of a daughter of the Cæsars would one day entangle itself in his wondrous electrical stores, and jerk them far afield, he did not forebode then, poor Fessenden; he was happy in his dreams and ideals.

## XIV

As the college year was drawing to its close he received the following letter from his father:

“MY DEAR BOY,—I am sorry to be obliged to inform you that you must manage somehow to pay your own expenses during the remaining three years at the university. Five hundred dollars a year are a good deal, and you are younger than I am, remember. I can let you have a hundred, but that is all, and I

have every confidence that you will be able to make the rest for yourself. Perhaps you may imagine what it means to me to reflect that I have such a son to lean on in my old age! I know of no man living that I envy. I am informed of your progress, and I am proud of you beyond the power of any poor words of mine to express. Your affectionate FATHER."

For the moment Fessenden was shocked and bewildered; but not only did the subtlety of Mr. Abbott's letter begin its work at once, but his mettle flew to its opportunity. He promptly turned to with that absolute lack of doubt which, in a man well equipped, compels success. There were a number of relatively wealthy men in the university whose patriotism for the West and contempt for the effete East had led them, or their fathers, to patronize the home institution. Fessenden imperiously persuaded these men that they needed a course of practical lessons in forestry and longed for a summer in camp in the Adirondacks not far from the cooking of Christina. The summer was pleasant and profitable for all, but particularly for Fessenden, who found many hours to dream alone among his mountains and into the sympathetic ear of *Pocahontas*. She was haughty and evasive for several days after his enthusiastic arrival, turned him over twice, and took advantage of every abstraction to make for submerged stumps and shore. But having made him sufficiently miserable, she gradually restored him to favor, and the old happy bond was re-established. But although he was glad of the long hours of rest and of pondering over the world of science into which he had been precipitated by the intuition and foresight of his father, he was soon eager to get back to the practical application. He returned to the university with half the money he needed, and he could easily make up the remainder by coaching. The day after his return he walked out to Mr. Lunt's



and announced his intention of living with him and paying for his board with his axe, or in any other reasonable manner. The farmer was taken aback, and somewhat displeased at the idea of paying for what he had grown accustomed to accept as his right; but finally admitted the justice of Fessenden's argument, especially as he had no such enthusiast for hard labor on his farm. Shortly after, Fessenden, in a burst of adolescent pride, returned his father's contribution, having persuaded his forestry class that they needed private lessons in German, which in truth they did, although they enjoyed the study of Fessenden more. They never connected him with the author of his being, but they thought him unique and perennially interesting. Occasionally they marvelled at his sublime audacity, a quality as a rule born of the easy assurance of wealth and social position, particularly when well-bred and unconscious; but they never got beyond the conclusion that it was the result of an unusual brain and a gift for leadership. That he should become the captain of his company before the end of his first year, and prove an ardent disciplinarian, did not so much surprise them; but his talents were less easy to account for, and those interested in heredity approached him on the subject. Fessenden was determined to keep his father's secret, whatever it might be; and as he could be diplomatic when diplomacy seemed more advisable than throwing an impertinent man out of the window, he sent the curious away with the impression that he came of plain mountain people.

## XV

During this year he took up modern history, the development of railway intercourse in Europe and America,



and pursued his studies and experiments of the previous year with unabated ardor. He likewise became violently interested in politics, and let off a good deal of steam in public speaking. He also took up the cudgels for the East, partly because his father was a New-Yorker, partly because in this attitude he stood practically alone. Privately he thought the West had cause for grievance in the absurd and ignorant attitude of the East; but it was impossible for him to run with the majority, and there certainly was much to be said for the older civilization. The question of strikes and all the manifestations of the antagonism between capital and labor did not engage his attention until the following year; and when it did his sympathies were entirely with the poor man, as he informed his father in long and impassioned letters. In answer, Mr. Abbott invariably reminded him that as yet he knew nothing of the rich, and advised him to suspend judgment. But although Fessenden by this time was an intolerant democrat, wore his oldest sweaters, and even persuaded Miss Lunt to patch his trousers, there was something curiously aristocratic in his attitude and personality, which his associates felt rather than analyzed. There was not a man in the college who would have dared to emulate his utter disregard of appearance, his indifference to comment on the streets of Turbine, the catholicity of his acquaintance, the manner in which he ignored the very existence of those he did not like, the recklessness with which he thought out loud, apparently unconscious that anything could affect his standing, popularity, and reputation, and the indefinable touch of patronage in his most extreme democracy. And although even at that period, when he was full of vanity, he did not swagger, still it was noticeable that he carried himself as if the world were his. He made enemies, but he either fought them or accepted

them with philosophy, and he had an army of disciples, who followed his imaginative flights and his most radical theories to the bitter end.

But his fellow-men interested Fessenden less at this period than the wonderful excursions he was making daily into the new realms of thought and research. It was during the middle of the third year that he gave himself up more particularly to the study of finance, the development of banking, and political economy. He pursued these studies with a curious sense of reviving old memories; he surprised himself at his love of dry details—that even here his imagination saw picturesqueness in the possibilities of concentrating vast sums of money and yet filling the veins of a great country with a life-blood of liquid gold. During his democratic madness he had seriously doubted whether his conscience would permit him to be a rich man; but now, with a chastened yet no less sincere democracy, he made up his mind that for a man of the people to acquire millions and then use them for the amelioration of his less-gifted fellows, to say nothing of glorifying his country, was both wise and poetical. Having satisfied his mind on this point, he astonished the university and Turbine by appearing at church in a suit of clothes not only of harmoniously assorted pieces, but manifestly made to order. He sustained the balance by looking worse than usual during the week.

In the vacation preceding Fessenden's fourth year the university received, from a source which was to remain unknown to all but the president, a large bequest for the departments of banking and finance. The bequest was accompanied by the condition that during the ensuing year certain eminent authorities were to be asked to lecture. Somewhat to the surprise but greatly to the satisfaction of the faculty, invitations to lecture were

promptly accepted by the Secretary of the Treasury, the President of the Pennsylvania Railroad, the owner of a great department store, and three leading bank presidents. These gentlemen did not confine themselves to generalities; they described the practical workings of their respective systems, enriched by a wealth of comparison with corresponding systems in other countries; they pointed out the defects and disadvantages of both sides, and analyzed the causes of the remarkable progress of so young a country as the United States; they emphasized the necessity of a sleepless alertness, and the demand for new ideas which should be bold without recklessness and safe without conservatism. Fessenden listened with tingling nerves and legs moving restlessly. He wrote to his father that he regarded this timely benefaction as a direct interposition of Providence in his behalf, and that although he certainly had to work harder than any one in the world, he believed that he had been born under a star of remarkable magnitude. His ambitions had revived long since. He had in his imagination a union of steel and electricity so madly romantic that he dared not confide even in his father. He must make a large sum of money first, for he would trust no one with his secret. He believed that he could make his country invincible, the ruler, if she chose, of two hemispheres, and he looked back somewhat patronizingly upon his old heroes. Other times, other gods! The pendulum in him was still swinging wildly, the balance was not yet; but the depth and tenacity of purpose, the clear creative intellect, quick and versatile in grasp, and of an extraordinary energy; the high enthusiasm and real capacity for the passion of patriotism were all modelling and biding their time within the exterior made up of their defects.

So passed the four years, with their intervals of moun-

tain-life, when, in spite of his ever-increasing classes, he drew renewed strength and courage from solitude and the invigorating air of high altitudes. Hard work told little on him, for his body was full of red mountain-blood and clamped with magnificent muscles.

He hoped that his father would come and witness his triumphs of Commencement Day, but he received this letter instead:

“MY DEAR BOY,—It is a matter of very great regret to me that I cannot be with you at this time, but I will explain my absence to your entire satisfaction when we meet. Thank God that will be almost immediately. At a very bitter price to myself I have relentlessly pursued a plan conceived the day after your mother’s death; and my compensation so far has been its entire success. Will you come to New York on Monday? It had been my intention to meet you in the Adirondacks and tell my story there, for I dislike anything savoring of drama, but business imperatively commands me to stay here, and I must ask you to come to me. I have sent for *Pocahontas*. I enclose a postal order for a hundred dollars. May I ask you not to arrive in a sweater? New York is not Turbine. Moreover, a natural weakness makes me wish to see you, after so many years, at the best possible advantage.

“Your very affectionate  
“FATHER.”

Fessenden pondered over this letter. It was enigmatic, and Mr. Abbott’s brief communications were usually remarkable for their clarity. He had made up his mind four years ago that his father was an inventor, and denuded him of all mystery. It also occurred to him with startling abruptness that he had never seen his father’s signature. As he stood staring at the paper, shadowy images, impressions, chance words, blurred pictures rose from some forgotten well in his mind, endeavored to sharpen, to cohere; but they faded away

impotently; the vital interests of the morrow rushed in and claimed place; he shrugged his shoulders and sent his father a telegram.

## XVI

"Fess," said Jeremiah Keene, on the night of Commencement Day, "what are you going to do with yourself? You are the most expansive—nay, sentimental and emotional creature on one side of you, and on the other the most secretive! I've turned myself inside out to you over and over again. You know all my hopes, aspirations, plans—who doesn't? What have I been digging away at this school of mines for? But you've gone in for everything, distinguished yourself in pretty nearly everything—and we are none the wiser. In these days you've got to be one thing—one thing—there's no chance for any but the specialist, and you are as well aware of that as any one else. So I know, we all know, that you must have made up your mind—that you know what you are about. It isn't only curiosity that prompts me to ask for your secret—there is no necessity for maunderings on my part. I'd like to know; we may not meet again for years—you go East, I go West—I've never taken a liberty with you before; forgive me this."

Fessenden made no reply for a moment. He was spending his last night in Turbine in the rooms of his chum. The day had been crowded with triumphs. He was dazzled, elated, a trifle bewildered. Compliments and flattering predictions had fallen thick upon him. The president had congratulated him publicly, invited him to dinner to meet the distinguished guests, and he had been the only student so honored. Among the guests were several of the eminent men who had con-

descended to illuminate the university during the past year, and they had singled out Fessenden and paid him such marked attentions, besides interrogating him so closely as to his interest in his more important studies, that both faculty and students, highly as they thought of their star, were astonished: the successful self-made American takes very little interest in unmade futures. It was a great and notable tribute to personality, and Fessenden's chest had risen and his head bulged more than once. He was feeling his strength at every nerve-point, he knew himself to be ready to go out and conquer the world at once; his mind had flashed back during the exciting day to the long course of training, from his babyhood until this last week of his twenty-first year, which had modelled his inherited forces in brain and character, slowly and safely, given him the physical endurance to keep pace with the restless energies of his mind. He was filled with gratitude for his father, but he also thought very well of himself. The self-made American was his type, the ideal he had set on high; whether born in a log-cabin, on a Virginia plantation, or a romantic British isle, was immaterial. All the great men of his country had started with a reasonable amount of poverty, and certainly the youthful record of none was more brilliant than his. He had had his disappointments, his disillusionments, even in Turbine; he had been deceived and tricked and tripped and hurt like all men; but he lived too much in imagination, in the future, and his application to study had been too severe for brooding on the shortcomings of the world. He still thought well of it, and his consistent admiration for his friend Keene had gone far to nurse his optimism. Life never did a kinder thing for him than in bestowing so abundant a measure of contentment in these last hours of his boyhood.



He stood up in a moment, turning over his chair. Keene was lying on a divan, smoking. The lamp was low. The windows were open, but to silence only. It was very late.

“Well—well—well—” said Fessenden. “I don’t know. I should have to tell you so much—and my ambitions are defined and at the same time rather nebulous. You see, I have to find out just what my father wants of me first—what he is—”

“What he is? There is a mystery, then? You’ve bluffed us pretty well.”

“I’m no maker of mysteries. I don’t know, myself—but—and you’re the only person living I’d say this to, and I’d break even your head if you gave a hint before he was ready—I think he is a great inventor and wanted me to have this training that I might help him.”

It was on the tip of Keene’s tongue to remark upon the uselessness of Mr. Abbott’s secrecy so far as his son was concerned, but congratulated himself a few moments later that Fessenden had given him no time for comment.

“I have not seen him for years, but not through lack of affection—he asked me to trust him and I have done so. I had a curious letter from him on Tuesday—I have thought a good deal about it since—and now that I am to see him and know all so soon, I may permit myself to indulge in curiosity. I’ll read it to you if you like.”

He held Mr. Abbott’s last letter to the lamp and read it aloud; then plunged his hands into his pockets, planted himself squarely on his feet, and told Keene of his peculiar relations with his father since his mother’s death. He made it all very vivid; the brief visits of Mr. Abbott, the concise pregnant conversations, the firm careful finger always modelling at the foundations of his character, the cleverness and foresight with which



his father had secured the services of Stanley Morris, who through seven monotonous years had pined for California. Much of this was revealed unconsciously in the narrative of his mountain-life. While he was in the midst of his story Keene sat up suddenly; a moment later interrupted him to ask for a description of Mr. Abbott. Fessenden had answered: "Small, thin, but with an immense lot of presence—even up there where one man is exactly the same as another, where there is real equality and no bluff about it—they all bowed down to him instinctively—even Morris, who is a deep scholar and thinker and belongs to one of the best families in the country—if you care for that sort of American rot. Even when I was a little chap and he used to pet and fondle me, I could feel the power come out of him, and I told Morris once that if he wasn't a rich man it must be his own fault—he made you feel he could be anything he chose. His face is beautiful to me, perhaps because I love him, for Morris remarked rather nastily once that he was not generally considered a beauty; but he has eyes that can light up, and his face always changed for me anyhow, if it did look rather cold—perhaps hard—at other times. Nettlebeck swore once that it was hard, but I never could see it. His features are well cut, too, his nose looks as if it could go through a stone wall, and there is not an indefinite curve in his mouth—there you have him, as well as I can describe anybody."

But Keene, long since, had rolled over and buried his face in the sofa cushions.

The next day, as the two men parted at Chicago, Keene, who was far more mature than Fessenden, having less of the eternal boy in him, put his arm about his friend's shoulder and said hesitatingly: "Remember—there are terrible disappointments awaiting you out here in the great world—as for all of us. Take every-

thing that comes along as philosophically as you can—everything is for the best, I suppose. Above all, don't let any shock imbitter you. I am sure, I am sure that your father is all that you imagine him to be—that whatever he does in regard to you—has done—is right. . . . I wish he were not so poor, however; I wish he were *the* Abbott."

"Who is *the* Abbott?"

"Of course you never read the newspapers, and it is odd how he manages to keep out of the illustrated magazines—I should think he must pay them. The Abbott, my dear boy, is richer than the whole Rothschild outfit condensed into the singular."

"Well, I'm glad he's not that sort of Abbott," said Fessenden indifferently. "Thank God I can show my mettle and start from the ground up."

The words left no trail in Fessenden's mind; the parting which followed affected him deeply, and he was too excited at the prospect of seeing his father again to recall what had impressed him as a mere chance remark.

## XVII

As Fessenden left the train on Monday morning and walked down the long crowded platform to the gates, he was nervous and happy and sentimental, but full of vanity. Not as the prodigal son was he returning to his father after these long years of disunion. Had not a telegram from the president of his university acquainted Mr. Abbott with his son's brilliant climax? Was he not about to relieve his parent of all further worries and responsibilities, to say naught of shedding lustre upon the family name? He was sure that his father, if he had chosen obscurity for his own portion, must still be in a

position to give him advice and immediate suggestion, of more value than gold.

He had arrayed himself in a new suit of summer gray, and with considerable satisfaction, for he had spasms of personal vanity, although only death could separate him permanently from the reprobates of his wardrobe. His long body was still very slight, but it was muscular and lithe. When his eyes were not hard or dreamy with concentrated thought they were ready to laugh their response into any friendly eyes they chanced to meet. Although as a rule he would have scorned to admit that he knew whether he was good-looking or not, he was in so gay a mood this fine summer morning that he frankly accepted admiring glances for what they were worth, and was glad to add such attractions as his ancestors had given him to the sum he was about to present to one doting parent. Not that Fessenden was a handsome boy; his present attractiveness lay for the most part in his youthful armory of glancing and glinting expressions; but his hair was brown and bright, his eyes were blue and dark, and his features cut by race, not by chance. In his most disreputable alliances with old clothes he never lacked distinction, and to-day, in spite of the eager restlessness of his muscles—he was seldom in repose—he was very naturally mistaken by the calculating feminine mind for a fledgling of the privileged class.

His progress in the dense crowd was slow, and his stride was naturally long. It was not in him to submit to impeded progress, and he jumped back into the train and made his way rapidly to the front car. As he sprang to the ground near the gates he saw his father's pale eager face, and he stiffened suddenly lest he utter a mountain whoop or imperil his dignity in the feminine manner. When he had forced his way beyond the barriers, he nearly crushed Mr. Abbott's firm bony hand,

then pulled it through his arm and started for Forty-second Street.

"Come on! Come on!" he said through his teeth, "we can't say anything here."

His father managed to steer him to the cab-stand, and, as they drove down Madison Avenue, talked rapidly and somewhat at random. It was evident that he was as nervous as his son, but equally manifest that he was full of paternal pride and delight. Fessenden gripped his hand two or three times, incoherent, but happy in the light of approval and the warmth of an affection so long withheld.

The hansom stopped before an immense brown-stone house on a corner, and Mr. Abbott descended, dismissing the cab. Fessenden wondered, but assumed that his father lived in a private hotel. It was his last moment of density. As the door was opened by an elderly butler, behind whom stood four footmen in livery, a band of ghosts seemed to race past his inner vision; as he entered the wide hall hung with tapestries, doors on the right and the left showing the splendor of delicate brocade and historic furnishing, his brain experienced a sharp and clarifying shock. He had a dizzying vision of a little boy, in the pride of his first trousers, flying down those massive banisters and followed by a soft protesting shriek. For a moment every part of the house seemed to be pervaded by that small child and the minor almost querulous chords of a long-forgotten voice. His hand shook as he gave his hat to a footman of preternatural dignity, as he met the stolid but recognizing eye of the butler. He had not the courage to think, and he was white and almost weak as he followed his father to the library at the back of the house. It was a great room, lifted bodily from a ducal castle—books, pictures, busts, weapons—in the devouring American

fashion. Fessenden, after one glance, fell into a chair and covered his face with his hands. He had torn up the papers on that table more than once, tobogganed his father in the deep chair opposite.

Mr. Abbott seated himself in the chair and grasped the arms firmly. His face was more sallow than usual, but his glance was unwavering. "I see that you are already beginning to suspect—to know," he said. "I will not insult you by circumlocution, but make my confession at once—"

Fessenden emerged suddenly from his lethargy, sprang to his feet, and glared down upon his father. His eyes were almost black, his nostrils were jerking, and the pallor under his tan made him look quite ferocious. "What is there to say?" he almost shouted. "I can see the cursed truth plainly enough. You are a rich man."

His father met his glare steadily. "I am the richest man in the world," he said.

Again Fessenden was inarticulate, and under this merciless assault even his anger fell. He stared at his father with paling eyes and coloring face.

"Sit down, will you not? I have a great deal to say."

Fessenden, bewildered with the knowledge that he stood on the threshold of an unknown world which even now mocked his years of strenuous endeavor, resumed his chair mechanically and fixed his eyes on his father's face that he might make sure he was hearing facts at least. The flattering attentions of the university guests suddenly arose in his memory, and he writhed in self-abasement. He felt the floor with the heel of his boot to ascertain if it were secure beneath his feet.

"I suppose I had better begin at the beginning," said Mr. Abbott. "I saw little of your mother after the first

year of our marriage. She was born in the world of fashion, was a natural and determined leader; and shortly after your birth she entered upon a career of extravagance which has seldom been equalled even in this town. It was a matter of indifference to me how much money she spent so long as she was contented—she was badly spoiled—and as she was a beautiful and clever creature I was very proud of her; moreover, too busy to regret that she had so little time for me. Perhaps I should go back a step further here and tell you that my father was also a man of large wealth—for his day—and of great importance in the banking world. I was trained as his successor from my earliest years, and fortunately took to it naturally. In those days the sons of rich men were more serious than they are now; but I sowed a few wild oats before I settled down, and, being of a delicate constitution, they permanently impaired my health. This fact will enable you more readily to understand my course in regard to you.

“But to return to your mother. Naturally she spoiled you — badly! You were never permitted to draw a breath of fresh air except in fine weather; you had whatever you cried for. There was every prospect that you would grow up—if you survived childhood—the average nervous dyspeptic American —worse still, the average worthless rich man’s son. The day after her death, as I sat alone here in this room, with you playing on the hearthrug, I had an inspiration, and determined at once to act upon it. I had known the Nettlebecks for many years; I was in the habit of going into camp with several of my friends not far from their farm. Only Fritz, who acted as our guide, knew that I was a rich man, and I knew his capacity for silence. I had a sudden vision of all you might become in that magnificent air, raised by frugal but well-living Germans, who would obey my



orders to the letter—removed from all the debilitating influences and the temptations of wealth—well! I did not wait to communicate with Nettlebeck. I whisked you off the day after the funeral, and without warning to grandmothers and aunts. I made Nettlebeck an offer which he accepted promptly, swore him to secrecy, and left you in that wilderness as elated as if I had scooped up Wall Street, hard as it was to leave you. Later came the fortunate episode of my conversation with Stanley Morris's father—”

Fessenden interrupted him with a sharp exclamation. “He, too, was in the plot! You chose your tools well. I never received a hint.”

“Morris knew all. It is quite true, however, that he was the son of an old college friend, suddenly impoverished, and that it was necessary for him to live in a peculiar atmosphere. He was bent upon California, but I offered him five thousand a year to live at the Nettlebecks' and prepare you for college; also twenty-five thousand dollars the day you entered. He did not hesitate; moreover, I gave him *carte blanche* at the best bookshops of New York and Boston, and offered to send to Europe for anything which was not imported through the regular channels—”

“In other words, you bought him body and soul! Well, he was not much of a man, anyhow. And no wonder he was so well fitted to impress me with the value of money!”

“I have bought bigger men than Morris,” said Mr. Abbott dryly. “I own twenty-eight members of Congress, seven of the most imposing figure-heads of the British aristocracy, one sovereign, and several minor presidents. But to proceed. So far, I have given you only my paternal reasons for your bringing-up. I will say little now of what the separation meant to me. I



had never been too busy to play with you, had haunted the nursery or had you brought down here during every hour I could snatch for home. As I saw you improve up there in the mountains, from a charming but sickly baby into such a sturdy, bright, manly little chap, it took all the will I possessed to leave you behind me when I returned. At last the effort cost too much, and I dreaded failure. I took the drastic course and saw you no more. The day you left New York for the West I stole a glimpse of you at the station. Since then I have not seen you until to-day. During this last year others have shared my secret besides Morris and Nettlebeck—the president of your university and the close personal friends whom you know only as prominent men who agreed to lecture on the subjects which happened to absorb you. They were tremendously interested in my experiment, and, as they are men who owe their success in life as much to their talent for keeping their mouths shut as to anything else, I had no fear that they would betray me. As for the president, of course I knew I could trust him fully. But enough of this personal side. I had another object in preserving you from the pitfalls, the physically and mentally debilitating influences of wealth, which I should have pursued had I been twenty times less a father. You were my only son, you must carry on the traditions of our house, become the custodian of millions, of the vast power they entailed—”

“And suppose your method has done its work too well,” cried Fessenden, setting his jaw exactly as his father did while he listened to his angry son. “You know something of the results of your—your intrigue, but not all. You know that I have developed strength, power, but not how much. You see only the obstacles I have conquered; you know nothing of the ambition

that discipline of yours has developed in me—the inspirations of lives of men of not dissimilar—so far as I knew—beginnings. And now! Good God, I feel like a mountebank!”

“Answer this question, and not too hastily: Have I done you an injustice? Nothing could alter the fact that I was a rich man. Do you regret that I did not run the risk first of your becoming a sickly spoiled brat, then a dissipated fool? A few, a very few sons of rich men in this country have turned out passably well—never what their fathers were: circumstances did not compel them to or go to the wall; and I dared not tell you—the risk was too great. I could see no other way; and, looking back, I see none now.”

Fessenden rose and mechanically started for the log in the grate, but it was June, and he kicked a stool instead. He was still seething; but even so, his sense of justice dominated his desire to indulge to the full his bitter indignation and disappointment. “No,” he said, after a moment, “you were right enough. Doubtless in time I shall be duly grateful to you. But that premonition does not mitigate in the faintest degree what I feel now.” His eyes met his father’s, which were full of affection and pride, and he suddenly descended a peg or two. “I don’t mind telling you, sir—I believe you will not laugh at me—but I felt—conceited ass that I was—that I was destined to become a great man. I felt it was in me to accomplish anything, be anything I set my brains upon. Of course it was all red blood—the result of precocious development in solitude, of the little successes which your watchful care enabled me to win; but the result was the same as if it had been the real thing. I feel like a peacock with its tail pulled out. And now please tell me what it has all been for. You say you need a strong man—is that nec-

essary for the custody of millions? An ordinary sober honest hard-working agent could do as well, I should think; you must have some estimable relatives."

Mr. Abbott laughed. "Not suitable for my purpose," he said. "Sit down. I have still much to say. I never blinded myself to the fact that I was running a great risk, my dear boy; that you might get far beyond me, refuse to conform to my ultimate plans—especially after you realized that I not only had been obliged to act a lie but to utter more than one. One source of my great power is that my word has never been questioned, and I can manipulate Wall Street by a simple statement. I may add that my word is as unchallenged in Europe. I have bitter enemies, and they have called me every opprobrious epithet except liar. But for once I determined to play the Jesuit; and as you have as truthful and honest a nature as one meets here below, I will add that the man who cannot lie when some great issue is at stake is too big an ass for this world. Well, to proceed. It does not so much matter about the destiny of the average millionaire's wealth; it is usually cut up among relatives and benefactions—bids for immortality in the third degree. At the worst it can be left in trust. But when I follow my father, only ten millions will go to—to—relatives. You must be the custodian of the bulk; and when I give you its present figure—reminding you that such wealth rolls up wealth unceasingly, by the mere force of momentum—it may dawn upon you that you still have it in your power to become as great and as mighty as ever your boyish imaginings dictated, and that you will need all the character you have put in storage. What is your idea of a great fortune—an American fortune?"

"I have thought very little about it. A million seems to me a huge sum. I have heard of fortunes of fifty or

sixty millions—I have scarcely believed in them, although I perfectly comprehend the wealth of nations. I am now prepared to hear you say you are worth anything."

"I am worth four hundred millions."

Fessenden gasped. The distant rumble of the streets came to his sensitive ears like the sound of crashing worlds. In a moment he laughed. "Go on," he said. "I anxiously await the dawn, the arrival of hope. I am utterly incapable of grasping such a sum. Have you got it in gold coin in the bank? If you could show it to me in that concrete form I might realize it—not otherwise."

"You will realize it when you have spent several months examining my papers; and when this natural bewilderment has passed you will recall all you have recently mastered of banking and finance. You can lay your hands on several millions in gold coin if you desire—and transfer them to your own account, for that matter; no wish of yours will ever again be ungratified by me. But the greater part represents the controlling interests in the leading corporations, industries, and railroads in this country, to say nothing of real estate, government bonds—of which I have the largest share of any man or combination of men—and the bank of which I am the president and principal shareholder. That is the skeleton; the details require weeks of explanation on my part and close application on yours. I have told you enough to demonstrate to you that the day approaches when you may be the most powerful man in the world if you choose. You will have heard that the Rothschilds dictate to Europe—that a nation may be unable to go to war if they refuse to advance the money. What the Rothschilds are as a family I am as an individual—and doubly so, for I can act on the moment; I

am obliged to consult no one. When the coffers of the United States Treasury are low I can fill them; if I refused, and lifted my warning finger to others, they would remain empty. I can reduce the President of this great country to a mere figurehead. When the right moment comes I can push the United States into the front of nations, or force it to continue to play a third-rate part. In time I can—and shall—make her the most powerful, the most feared, the most hated of all the countries on the globe—through such a concentration of capital as no one at the present moment has had more than a tantalizing dream of. Fifteen years from now this country will not only be the clearing-house of the world, but the autocrat of commerce. Do you begin to see light?"

"Yes, the dawn breaks; but by your leave I will go to my own room for a while. My brain must have a brief respite. Where am I to hang out?"

"The corner suite on the third floor. I have had a swimming-tank put in, a Russian bath, and a gymnasium. What you don't like you will change, of course."

"Thanks. I shall probably put a cot in the gymnasium."

"Don't fear that I am stifling you with luxury. I have my idea of what a man's rooms should be, and I doubt if you find that it differs from your own."

As Fessenden opened the door he turned with a sudden flash in his eyes. "Where is my sister?" he asked.

"She is visiting the Archduchess Ranata Theresia, daughter of the Emperor—"

But Fessenden had closed the door with force and was bounding up the stair. "Good God!" he thought, "is

the world I am to live in made up of superlatives? I feel like Gulliver fallen upon Brobdingnag."

## XVIII

He found no fault with his rooms. They were not those of a poor student with a great future, but they were severe, masculine, and entirely adequate. When he had taken a cold swim in his marble tank, and exercised for half an hour in his gymnasium, the blood which his father's millions had shocked to his brain receded and left it clear and logical again. But he was by no means reconciled to his lot; he feared the stifling influences of wealth, of which he had read in so many books. To make a great fortune in constant warfare with all the difficulties, acquiring a painful knowledge of the value of every dollar, was an achievement which might easily lead to greater accomplishment still, but to fling a man on his back without warning and pour gold over him by the ton—

He left his room abruptly and walked slowly downstairs. "What's the use of thinking about it? or about what was to have been?—my absurd impossible past, which I shall put away in lavender and cherish like a dead love. There is nothing to be done but to make the best of a bad business, re-adapt myself—mortals are always doing that, anyhow. I shall ask for a respite before settling down to it, however."

When he reached the main floor he turned into the reception-room and strolled through the several large and lofty rooms which ended in a music-room of immense proportions. He inferred that it was the largest in New York; and, still feeling sore and satirical, returned to a more appreciative inspection of the other rooms. That



their harmonies were exquisite he needed no telling, and he thought the pale soft tints, as faded and elusive as charming old memories, a pleasant contrast to his beloved Nature. That the few pictures were as great in art as they must be in price he also knew instinctively, and found consolation in the reflection that his father did not belong to the class of millionaires who furnished with a single check and leaned upon the agent and the decorator. The rich worn oddly built furniture looked as if brooding in cold aloofness upon an historic past, yet not wholly dissatisfied with its present. Where there were no pictures, bits of brocade, which looked as if a breath might waft them in search of their makers, had been inserted with such skill that they were a part of the background of tarnished gold. Not a chair, not a table, not a cabinet, was formed like anything Fessenden had ever seen, and there were numberless objects for which he had no name; but he approved of everything; indeed, they gave him a distinct pleasure—caressed the raw edges of his resentment, and inclined his mind more philosophically to his new condition.

When his eye had mastered the general effect, it took note of the exceeding repetition of one object, the photograph of a girl. There were perhaps twenty of these large photographs in the different rooms, framed in silver, in gold, in brilliants, in semi-precious stones, on tables, on easels, on shelves. One massive gold frame, incrusting with jewels, bore aloft the double eagle of the House of Hapsburg. Across all these pictures was dashed, rather than written, the name RANATA, followed by an inscription in German, French, English, or in another language for which Fessenden had no name. The girl herself was taken in full, in profile, on horseback, sitting in throne-like chairs, leaning on balustrades, at any age from ten to eighteen, and in as many different costumes



as there were photographs. Fessenden sniffed at the vanity of woman, but concluded that he had never seen such a seat in the saddle, and that she certainly looked as if she knew her own mind. Whether he admired her or not he was unable to determine. She had an antique profile, and her eyes were as American as his own—shrewd, alert, eager, powerful. One of the photographs was colored, and the hair blazed, but the eyes were gray. Fessenden thought it romantic to have a princess in the family, and examined the pictures with much interest. The greater number had been given to her much-loved Alexandra, but one was apparently the property of his father, and another of a Mrs. Abbott, of whom he knew nothing. He was not the youth to fall in love with a photograph, however, and as he walked towards the library the Archduchess Ranata Theresia made way in his mind for other matters which at that stage concerned him far more deeply.

## XIX

His father was standing on the hearth-rug, awaiting his return with some uneasiness. Fessenden gave his hand a mighty grip. "It's all right," he said. "I was born into this family, and that is the end of it. I'd never go back on you, anyhow. But if you don't mind, I'd like to go up to the mountains for a while. I'd like it awfully if you would come, too, of course—it's only that I can think better there than anywhere else—and it occurs to me for the first time that I am rather tired—the examinations were very stiff, and I went in for an unusual amount."

"The Adirondacks, by all means, if you prefer them; and I am badly in need of a holiday; but how would you like a yachting cruise for a change? I have a new

## RULERS OF KINGS

steam-yacht of 7000 tons that I think would interest—”

“A steam-yacht of 7000 tons!” cried Fessenden, his terrible responsibilities forgotten. “I can think of nothing on earth—what sort of machinery has she got? How fast can she go? Can I run her?”

While Mr. Abbott was answering questions, luncheon was announced, and he passed his hand through his son’s arm. “We are lunching earlier than usual on your account, and the time has run away,” he said haltingly. “I don’t wish to give you too many shocks in one day, but I must make another confession. You have—I married again some years ago.”

“My dear father,” replied his son dryly, “if you told me that you had married Queen Victoria and annexed the British realm—in fact I expect it. Are there—have I any more brothers and sisters scattered about among the palaces of Europe?”

Mr. Abbott laughed. “No, I did not marry another young wife. Your stepmother is ornamental in her way; but I selected her partly for companionship—I had known her always—partly because I wanted some one to bring up your sister with common-sense and care. I am perfectly satisfied with her; and, as she is a woman of infinite tact, I am sure you will get on with her whether you like her or not. She will probably be a little late for luncheon—she has so many morning engagements—charities—”

But this was not the occasion for Mrs. Abbott’s tact to fail her. She had given the father and son their uninterrupted morning; but to hasten home and preside at luncheon at the unseemly hour of half-past twelve, to make such a performance appear both natural and a compliment, was an occasion for subtlety too rare to be missed. She was standing in the dining-room as they

entered, one hand resting on the table, her eyes fixed in pleasant anticipation on the Gobelin which hung before the door. She still wore her hat, she was slightly flushed, her wrap was half removed — her whole appearance was stamped with delicate haste. As she shook hands warmly with Fessenden, smiling and talking rapidly in a very cultivated voice, her step-son wondered at her extreme unlikeness to any woman of her probable age that he had ever seen. She was tall, slender, as willowy as youth; her hair was as black as her eyes, her skin, although sallow, was without wrinkle or line, and her features were mobile. She wore a gown of light summer silk and a large hat, yet both were made and worn with such tact that the painful affectation of lost youth was not suggested: she looked what she was, a woman of the ever-receding middle age, fashionably dressed. Whatever use she might make of modern science to avert age, she employed no art to simulate youth, and as her year was various and crowded, both mind and face were plastic. Whatever her temperament may have been originally, she had made it equable long since; and while she escaped the stigma of amiability, her self-control carried her evenly through the smooth waters of her life. No one ever knew whether she were a really intellectual woman or a brilliantly superficial one, for she had a delicately masterful habit of changing the conversation, as if the end of living were to avert the monotonies. Even in the soft vagueness of chiffon and lace she looked well groomed, and on the promenade and in her carriage no one outshone her in distinction. Distinction, indeed, was the keynote of her personality; and it is doubtful if she would not have sacrificed all other possible gifts to this. An efficient housekeeper managed her twenty servants, her pin-money would have kept an ambitious family of the middle class in affluence, her life was far

more luxurious than royalty's; she was the leader of the most exclusive old set in New York, presided over the most important charities, and yet found time to read the foreign news and play with intellect. With it all she had the rare good sense to be content with her lot and to keep her health.

But in spite of this charming personage who diffused ease as with unseen wings, discontent had assailed Fessenden again. The immense dim baronial room, the automatic butler, the catlike footmen, absurdly tall in their livery, the gold and crystal and floral splendor of the table, made him long gloomily for *Pocahontas* and a "hunk" of Christina's bread. He was grateful, however, that Mrs. Abbott talked constantly, in her sprightly abrupt manner. She had been educated as thoroughly as an Englishwoman, trained in a deportment which was a nice mixture of reserve and graciousness—Fessenden inferred that she would treat a servant with the utmost consideration, and never permit a liberty from a friend—and she had cultivated the art of conversation, of appearing spontaneous—rarely finishing a long sentence—and of adapting herself to all men, from a reforming drunkard in the slums straight up to royalty. She presently divined her step-son's mental state, and diverted him by talking of his sister.

"Alexandra spends her winters with the Archduchess, with whom she was brought up, you know. She hates New York, but is fond of our home on the Hudson, and will go with me this summer to Newport—makes her *début*, you know—she is just eighteen, but went to court functions during the year preceding Rudolf's death. The Archduchess—they are the same age—came out at sixteen—the Empress being so much away made a difference. Alexandra has rather Americanized her, although in her way she is as much of an individual as

the German Emperor—if she only becomes American enough, I believe Europe will hear of her—do you observe your father smile? It's too bad, really—if you rush off yachting like this, you won't see Alexandra for months; she has remained later than usual this year, for the Archduchess is still in terrible distress over the death of her brother—a greater tragedy for Europe than for her, however! I wonder how you and Alexandra will like each other? How odd for you to meet for the first time at your age! She is most brilliantly educated, very clever, and a really remarkable linguist; speaks even Hungarian with fluency, and already has quite a knowledge of the world—foreign men are such an education; but I don't think she will marry early. She is a handsome girl—looks like your mother, but less beautiful; not in the least susceptible—has a remarkably level head; is singularly like your father in many respects. We hardly fancy she will marry a foreigner. If she does, her choice is sure to be a wise one; her head is very cool, and she is in a position to take any step with her eyes open."

Fessenden had all the young, or the untravelled, American's contempt for the foreigner. As his step-mother paused for breath, he elevated the nose that England had given him. "I should hope she wouldn't," he said emphatically. "Aren't there enough men in America? Why don't you make her live over here? I think hobnobbing with royalty is ridiculous for an American."

Mrs. Abbott laughed pleasantly. "If you could only be an American woman for five minutes! But don't worry; your sister is as good an American as you are—we have seen to that—and, as I have said, remarkably level-headed; Europe has merely improved, not changed her. I am positive you will be delighted with her, and

what she can't tell you of *la haute politique!*— She is tremendously interested in you—but I must run! I have an engagement with the housekeeper, and she has the vice of promptness. She is moving us to The Abbey, and we are late this year—I love New York; and as your father was going abroad, and Alex is so far behind time—you will excuse me, I know; and mind you come to tea with me in my own little room at half-past five. You are included in that invitation, my lord.” And, nodding brightly, she left the room with an elastic step that in no way detracted from the light dignity of her carriage.

Fessenden drew a long breath.

“It is not always so,” said Mr. Abbott, with a smile. “As I remarked before, she has great tact. She saw that you were bored, and was determined to entertain you; but when another wants the floor, I do not know any one who can yield it more gracefully. But of course she lives in an atmosphere of flattery—you must expect to find her rather spoiled; but if you really are a good American, you won't mind that. Alexandra is far less so; she has been educated in a severer school, and she has a far juster sense of proportion—knows exactly what the flattery of the courtier amounts to. That is one reason I have permitted her to be over there so much—one of many reasons.”

He lapsed into the dreamy condition his son remembered so well; but he emerged in a few moments, and waved his hand. The servants disappeared. Mr. Abbott concentrated his gaze on his son. “Fessenden,” he said slowly, “I will tell you my programme for the next year; and please remember, as you listen, that if you do not like it you are at liberty to follow one of your own. I shall never do more than suggest again; for I admit that I have had my day, and that it is your turn



now. To prove my entire sincerity in this respect, I shall deposit a million dollars to your credit to-morrow. That will make you your own master—”

Fessenden had flung himself half-way across the table. “I know what I will do with it,” he cried eagerly. “I never dreamed I could get to work so soon—but pardon me; go ahead, sir. Mine will keep.”

“I have no doubt that plans will come to you very thickly, but I want you to learn something of Europe before settling down. I shall take three secretaries on the yacht with me—I should break down if I relaxed altogether—and in the course of the journey you will learn a great deal about my affairs. After that preliminary course I want you to stay over there for a time, and apply yourself to the study of Europe. If churches and picture-galleries happen to interest you, polish them off as quickly as possible, and then get down beneath the surface. Study politics, governments, the financial and commercial conditions of the first-rate powers—make yourself master at first hand of national traits and idiosyncrasies; you will have letters that will carry you everywhere. There are going to be two controlling forces in the world in the next thirty years, yourself and William of Germany—if he lives!—if he lives! Keep a hawk-eye on him, and don’t make the common shallow mistake of underrating him. He alone can block the progress of the United States; all the other nations put together are not worth considering. He only needs certain conditions to scoop in Europe like another Charlemagne. It may be that he will create these conditions. It may be that you will help him to them, if you both happen to pull in the same direction. That of course is for the future. I will see that you meet him informally this summer. But if he fascinates you—as he probably will—make always this reserve: your future friendship



for him depends upon his course towards the United States. It is not too soon to begin checkmating him, and it can always be done by this country; but it must be done by the individual. Washington is blind by too much occupation with other things. Would you like to walk down-town and see our offices? Historical landmarks, too — Washington — Hamilton — Let me hear your plans.”

## XX

Fessenden walked slowly towards the rift in the great wall of rock which marked the land entrance to the fjord. *Pocahontas* was dancing just beyond that narrow gate, but although his fingers tingled for her sail, his step still halted; he knew that she would bring him swiftly within range of the keen thumping of a typewriter, possibly of more than one. He was dutifully and even deeply interested in his father's vast affairs, and there were nights when he went to bed with the sensation that the Earth was his pillow; there were days when he dared to hope the time would come when he could with pleasure embroider the scenery with figures and puncture the silences of Nature with a typewriter. But the time was not yet. Four days since he had awakened his father at three in the morning, informed him that he was off for a solitary tramp into Norway, and promised to return at the end of a week. Conscience was driving him home sooner than he had intended, for he had revelled in the stillness and solitude of his wild and lonely tramp. He missed at first the friendliness of the Adirondacks, the only other mountains he knew; but the harsh and terrible grandeur about him companioned his mood — finally inspired him with a passionate sense of gratitude. For he was in a desperate state of rebellion. The phi-

osophy he had invoked on the heels of Mr. Abbott's revelation had but deferred the inevitable moment. He did not doubt that the future presented to him by his father would bring him power, but that future was—he sincerely hoped—far distant, and at present he was little more than a glorified clerk in training. His inheritance and his education permitted him to grasp the stupendous details with a sufficient facility, and there were moments when he was staggered and overwhelmed with the thought of such world-manipulating power, at others intoxicated with dreams of a future when himself should be a ruler of many times the strength of any monarch in Europe. In such moments he felt arrogant, and contemptuous of sovereigns who were but the tools of a people or a cabinet, no matter what the euphemisms, longed for the time to come when he could demonstrate to them the absolutism of concentrated capital in the hands of an uncrowned ruler of a great republic. But reaction under the lonely stars invariably chastened him. What did he amount to now? Who would recognize in him more than his famous father's second? He was bursting with energy, with ambition for himself and the United States, and, in spite of his father's love and sincere indulgence, he felt like a prisoner on parole. It is true that when he had confided his cherished ideal, the great and beneficent conception which was to have worked his fingers to the bone and made him old in his youth, Mr. Abbott had waved his golden wand. A Western desert hummed and echoed, and even now a huge building was rising on its foundations, and the first of the world's electricians, for a yearly salary which made Fessenden's head swim, had agreed to occupy this building with a corps of assistants and work upon the idea which a youth had conceived. The author of the idea felt no temptation to take charge himself. The

mere fact that more experienced genius could be bought delivered him from the thrall of his ideal, although he still took a scientific and patriotic interest in its accomplishment.

Robbed of this dream of immortality, he had dropped the curtain upon his inner life and endeavored to fulfil his immediate destiny. As his powers of concentration were very great, he had succeeded for a time. During the fortnight before sailing, novelty and wonder had sustained him, and for a time at sea the long conversations with his father were agreeably varied by instructions in the science of yachting. But Fessenden was Fessenden—a personality, a young man bursting with precocious energy, ambition, independence. His reassertion was slow but persistent, and during one sleepless night alone on deck the naked truth confronted him that he was at the end of his endurance, that however he might conform to his father's wishes in the future, for the present he must not only have an interval of personal liberty, but arrange his nebulous ambitions and satisfy them. He restrained his impatience until three o'clock, then awakened Mr. Abbott—who smiled and slept again—and plunged without a guide into Norway.

He bathed in streams, he slept under the stars, he saw no one but peasants, he hardly uttered a word for three days; and he was completely happy. When he was not in mountain gorges he was in pine forests; everywhere he had Nature in her magnificence, and he was alone. For two days he refused to think—it was enough to forget, to feel the freedom of the years when he believed himself innocent of fortune, with a glorious and self-made future stretching through infinite horizons. But on the evening of the third day he turned his back on the scenery, sat down on the grass, and thought.

That the prospect before him was hateful and hideous

he admitted aloud, lest he should seem to blink any modicum of the truth. The abstract fact that he was a rich man instead of a poor one dwindled to comparative insignificance beside the million details which made up the sum of that fact. Had he been the author of those details, his inherited and financial instincts, so quick at college, would no doubt possess him and obliterate the dreams of his youth. But that mountain of particulars, massive and petty, had fallen upon him without a moment's warning, and he was not its illustrious author, but its future custodian. The youth in him was rampant, and his strong vein of romance unsatisfied. He admitted—again aloud—that he was as romantic as he was practical. He would train to succeed his father, but meanwhile would distinguish himself in his own manner. He would use the wealth at his disposal, but the manner should be picturesque.

Without admitting that he intended to demand a period of liberty, his imagination in the past weeks had toyed with many plans. At first, when he learned of the more than thousands in his father's employ, he had been fired with the desire to ameliorate the lot of the working-man; and in his enthusiasm had awakened his father from his afternoon nap on deck and talked to him for an hour. Mr. Abbott, who revelled in the very sound of Fessenden's voice, and would have attempted to give him the North Pole had he wanted it, listened indulgently; but when his turn came to speak he was smiling grimly.

"My dear boy," he had said, "what reason have I given you to think me a fool? There are those who will tell you that the day must come when the streets of our great cities will run red with blood, when not one stone on Fifth Avenue will remain upon another; that, in short, the great civil war between capital and labor can

be delayed only until a strong leader of organized labor arises who cannot be bought. I do not go so far as to say that I—or you—can avert that calamity, for our rotten municipal governments have destroyed the respect of the thinking laboring man for authority, and these tremendous aggregations of capital I have in hand, which will make the United States strong and feared among nations, may be carried to an excess which will lessen the chances of individual achievement and curtail personal liberty. If rich men—that is to say, the manipulators—make fools of themselves, and in their greed for wealth and power reduce wages and sow further seeds of discontent, there is no telling what may happen. But although I make no denial of my own greed for wealth and power, and although these concentrations of many small industries into one huge enterprise will double my fortune, I make no such mistake as that. I have always maintained that a man may get rich and still share a certain portion of his gains with his assistants; and my working-men all receive good salaries, perquisites, heavy Christmas presents, and pensions in their old age. I make no pretence at philanthropy. There is no man who needs friends as the rich man does; there are no friends so valuable as an army of employés. I know many of mine personally; at some time or other I have managed to come into contact with most of them. They like me. They are content. They never go on strike. They are the one formidable bulwark against united labor in the country. When you return, I wish you to go about among those men, show them your personal interest in them as human beings, make them love you as much as they like me; then, if an industrial war ever comes, you will make yourself their leader and take whichever side you think wisest. But the thing to do is to avert war and use that great following for another

purpose. Either with or without civil war the time must come for the reform of municipalities, the reduction of state power, and, possibly, an interval of benevolent despotism. There is the rôle I have cut out for you; but meanwhile work with me to avert the worst calamity which could visit this country—set it back a hundred years. My men are not overpaid; they receive strict justice, that is all. I have harangued for hours with almost every great employer in the country, appealing to his common-sense, even his cupidity, but in most cases in vain. The average rich man in the United States is lowly born. He has worked himself up from the ranks. There never was a real democrat who was not born an aristocrat. The risen plebeian is a tyrant, is insatiable in his greed, glories in the thought of grinding the life out of thousands of his own class, delights in the hatred and envy which are but another signal of his success; in short, he is a damned fool, and deserves to wake up and find his throat cut. I suppose all revolutions are the result of stupidity. Ours, if it comes, will arise from no other cause whatever. If you have the genius in you that I believe, you will avert this war or control it. Now I will sleep again if you will permit me.”

The words had kept Fessenden awake all night, but after several days his enthusiasm cooled. Again he was willing to take the helm whenever the time came, and with all his energies; but the idea was his father's, not his. His young ego, uniquely developed, demanded creation.

During the last day of his tramp he had looked down twenty avenues of possible greatness, and turned his back upon all. He was not discouraged, for he knew that inspiration comes suddenly, even if it be the final result of industrious raking. He was now returning to



demand a vacation of some months, during which he would tramp and study Europe in his own way. But inspiration was closer than he knew, and although he was to tramp Europe again and again with various and, in one case, extraordinary results, there were to be intervening years.

As he jumped into his canoe and set his sail, he saw that the *Alexandra* was no longer the solitary inhabitant of the fjord. Not half a mile from his father's yacht was what looked to be a miniature man-of-war. It was painted white, and had a heavily gilded figurehead. In a few moments he was close enough to see the colors and design on the standard. He whistled and experienced a glow of anticipation.

"The German Emperor! I hardly know whether I am more anxious to see him or his yacht. Ours is the biggest in the world—of course!—his is the most original; but that may only mean resource: he couldn't get the money voted any other way. The more I hear of Europe the rottener it appears, with the exception of Germany. This man seems to be making an American city out of Berlin, and to have plenty of sand all round. Some one has said of him that he is an autocrat with a Yankee head on his shoulders; and, if that is the case, he may be worth studying for future points."

Nevertheless, when a half-hour later his father told him that the Emperor had invited him to visit the *Hohenzollern* the day of his return, he sniffed with youthful Americanism.

"I don't fancy waiting till I'm spoken to," he announced—"for his high-mightiness to introduce every subject. He may be interesting in himself, but he is a monarch, and I have no use for any of them. They are a burlesque in the end of the nineteenth century."

"Tell that to William, if you like, and introduce what



subjects interest you—if you get a chance. He observes little formality up here, and less with Americans. Now please go and exchange that sweater and those pants—they are not trousers—for a suit of flannels.”

## XXI

Fessenden drew a long and audible breath. It had not occurred to him soon enough to keep tally, but he felt justified in assuming that he had answered eight hundred questions. The power and magnetism of the Emperor still impressed him, but the fascination had waned. When he had boarded the yacht early in the afternoon, excited with a sensation that was half eager curiosity, half aggressive fear of being patronized, and had received a hearty greeting from a man as informal as he was charming, Fessenden had promptly conceived his first enthusiasm for a contemporary. He had as promptly reminded himself that he too intended to inspire enthusiasms—that his was not the rôle of the follower; nevertheless he had beamed back upon his imperial host; and, in spite of a flinty reserve in the background of both pairs of eyes, a mutual friendship was conceived at once. The Emperor had taken care to cement his personal fascination by exhibiting the machinery of his new yacht to his curious young guest, and a twenty-minutes' argument on a subject of which one had much practical knowledge and the other almost as much by theory and observation, established a respect as strong as the sentiment. But when they were seated alone on deck, the Emperor's inquiring mind was no longer to be restrained. A conversation with Mr. Abbott the day before had excited his curiosity; his interrogations began upon Fessenden's babyhood; and then, with the rapid strokes of

a minute impressionist, never losing sight of causes and effects, he built up a complete picture of a self-made boy with a beneficent providence in the background. In three-quarters of an hour he not only knew the boy in the wilderness as well as the boy had known himself, but the history of the Nettlebecks, the size and condition of their farm, their attitude—or, as he discovered, their lack of attitude—towards Germany, the area of the Adirondack tract, the attention—or lack of attention—given it by the government, the inferior condition, as compared with Germany, of its forests, its roads, its bridges. His questions and comments showed such grasp and activity of intelligence that for a time Fessenden was as interested as the Man of Questions, and there were intervals when he was permitted to give a bit of thrilling description, notably of logging-camps and “driving,” which, as the Emperor’s eyes kindled and his horned upper lip twitched, flattered him for five or six consecutive minutes.

But from the Adirondacks, William passed swiftly to the Western University, and here his curiosity threatened to be insatiable. His questions indicated that Harvard and Yale could tell him no secrets, but of this more modern institution he had never heard until the day before; and an enterprise so novel, practical, and cheap appealed irresistibly to a ruler bent upon modernizing his country and making it the strongest industrially in Europe. He made no secret of the cause of his interest, and Fessenden sympathized heartily with the ambitious and energetic young monarch, and glowed at the thought of flinging a handful of American seeds broadcast upon the German Empire. But at the end of an hour and a quarter, when he had not only presented a picture of the university in all its complex details, from its methods of military drill to the last drop of grease in the machine-

shops, but had sketched the personalities of all the professors and the most notable of the students, the strident tones of the august interlocutor seemed to be banging about in his brain, the abrupt rapid firing to have torn his nerves to tatters. The impatient action of his lungs receiving no attention from his host, whose eyes were concentrated and glittering, he sprang suddenly to his feet.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "I really can't stand it any longer. I'll come back to-morrow, if you like. I think you are a great man, and I'm only too delighted to help you in any way I can, but if you ask me another question to-day I'll jump off the yacht."

For a second the Emperor's eyes had flashed with a haughty surprise which gave Fessenden a passing glimpse of outraged majesty, but he recovered himself swiftly, and before the plaint finished he had sprung to his feet and grasped Fessenden's hand, looking like a contrite school-boy.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "How inhospitable!—I never was so tactless in my life. But you have interested me so deeply. You are the most extraordinary young man—will you forgive me? and will you do me the honor to return for dinner? Mr. Abbott comes too."

A warm responsiveness rushed through Fessenden's veins and flashed from his frank impatient eyes; and he returned the hearty grasp of the other's hand. But although the two men were mutually and strongly attracted, almost to the point of effusiveness, they nevertheless, and almost unconsciously, stared hard and long at each other. For the moment, despite aggressive differences, they looked alike. Their personalities pushed aside the mask of their features and snatched the knowledge that for them it was love or hate, friendship or enmity,

mutual assistance or a bitter lifelong struggle, which might waste their energies and thwart their most passionate hopes.

William was the older and subtler. He laid his hand affectionately on his new friend's shoulder. "I have suspected something of your father's ultimate plans for you," he said. "Now I am sure. I can help you as much as you can help me. The next time we are alone, turn the tables and ask me as many questions as you like. There is no reason why you should ever remind yourself that I am an Emperor—why our friendship should not be as informal and sincere as that of your charming sister and the daughter of the Emperor of Austria."

"Do you know my sister?"

"Of course, and since she was twelve years old. But her chosen friend is my sworn enemy."

That night, in the retirement of his state-room, Fessenden brushed his hair backward and his mustache upright. The Emperor at dinner had drawn his coils more closely. He had been brilliant, demonstrative, instructive, humorous, almost unegotistical. He had made Fessenden shine without asking a question, and he had toasted Mr. Abbott in the effusive rhetoric with which one ripened sovereign disguises his fear of another. Fessenden forgot his long array of self-made heroes—even those who had been cradled in purple and yet ridden victoriously through the pages of history. He took up an autographed picture of William, presented at parting, and studied it attentively, then regarded his own smooth young face with dissatisfaction.

"However," he thought, "in his earlier photographs he had even less character than I have. It's since he got his own way that he's put it on with a brush. I

suppose I can have that eagle roll of the eye in time, too, if I choose, and square my iron jaw, and look as if I were hewn out of finely tempered steel. He has a sensitive mouth, all the same."

In a moment he parted his short hair rapidly and brushed his mustache into a dejected curve. "I'd like to see myself!" he thought, with some irritation. "He *would* have the laugh on me to-morrow!"

He sat for an hour and pondered deeply on all that had passed between himself and the Emperor of Germany that day. Then he started up suddenly, opened the door of the adjoining state-room, and awakened his father.

"What does William want?" he demanded.

"Europe and South America," murmured Mr. Abbott sleepily.

## XXII

The tremendous walls of the fjord were black, but the moon poured in a flood of light. There had been a sharp breeze earlier in the evening, and Fessenden had invited the Emperor out in *Pocahontas*; then, perceiving the difficulty of keeping him quiet, had given him the sheet. The Emperor had accepted the invitation with alacrity—he was not only happy and at home in a canoe, but although he had now had several long conversations with the young American, something in this new personality evaded him, and he was determined to find it. Fessenden, on the other hand, was studying him attentively, his interest in the most remarkable specimen of living royalty quite distinct from his liking for the man. William had not refrained from questions during this past week, and Fessenden had been permitted to learn Germany from the Throne. When he had mentioned that he intended, a year or two hence, to tramp the Empire

and study it from another point of view, the Kaiser had promptly extracted a promise to bring the burden of his information to Berlin.

William expressed a lively sympathy for his young friend's desire for immediate distinction, and confided some of the difficulties of majesty in getting its own way. Nevertheless he felt that Fessenden, despite his romantic enthusiasm for himself, was frank only to a certain point. He thought of all in his own depths that he could give to no man, and forbore to press him too closely; but his abnormally acute brain suspected something in that deliberate reserve which concerned himself, and he had accepted the proposal of the lonely sail in the hope of an impulsive confidence. He had no suspicion that the younger man had brought him out for the purpose of making this confidence.

The wind fell, and they left the canoe to stretch their legs.

"Do you really believe in the divine right of kings?" asked Fessenden abruptly. "I mean *you*."

The Emperor stared, then laughed outright. "Certainly!" he announced in that harsh abrupt voice which conveyed the impression that he had not the patience to lie. Then, having his own reasons for expanding under the influence of the lonely moon, he added: "Is not a peasant a peasant by divine law? How much more a hereditary ruler with his terrible responsibilities! With our vast fund of inherited knowledge and traditions, our instinct for rule, our gift of commanding respect and obedience, we are far more successful as rulers than your presidents, chosen every four or eight years from all sorts and conditions of life, and more often for some unworthy political reason than for any merit in the man." He added deliberately: "The monarchs of the earth are the chosen deputies of God in Heaven; they



rule their people by right divine. The time will come when you will feel this as deeply as I do now. Of course my understanding is illumined with the torch of the centuries; but there must be a beginning," he added graciously.

"And you disassociate yourself absolutely from the race?"

"Certainly. So will you one day."

"I am a good democrat, and I believe in the principles of the American Constitution and the Declaration of Independence."

"Quite so—as long as they are permitted to hold; but when your revolution comes they will go down with the rest, and then you will no longer be a democrat." The pronounced roll of William's r-r-r-r's made him utter the last word as if he hated it.

"And I suppose you think the Monroe Doctrine would go too?"

"It would be as well to begin a new government on a sensible international basis," said the Emperor dryly. "That doctrine only maintains its fictitious life by the courtesy, or perhaps I should say the indifference—the present indifference—of Europe. It means nothing until you have established it by force of arms. It would be better to abandon it gracefully while there is yet time."

The two men were picking their way through an uneven pass. Fessenden halted and leaned against the wall of rock. He fixed his eyes, which in the brilliant night light shone like steel, on the imperious and searching orbs that swung round him abruptly.

"It is by converting the Monroe Doctrine from a theory into a principle of international law without a war with Europe that I propose to make my fame," he said.

William's pale face twitched, then settled into its hardest lines. He returned Fessenden's stare, and there was neither friendship nor good-fellowship in his eyes; he was a monarch on the alert in the presence of the enemy. It was a moment before he spoke; then he said coldly:

"It is a large and, no doubt, patriotic idea. I shall be interested to watch the method develop. When shall you get to work? When shall Europe have its first astonished glimpse of your purpose?"

"Europe will know nothing until it is too late to interfere; but I shall tell you the whole scheme now."

"Tell me!" cried the German Emperor in his astonishment.

"I owe the idea to you, and, crazy as it may appear, I shall confide it to you. I should be rather base if I did not; and I rely, if not on your generosity, then on your foresight, to let me alone. You can have Europe, and welcome, and when the time comes that you need my help you will get it; but you can't have South America—not an inch of it; and now I'll tell you why—"

"Suppose I decline to listen?"—and none but himself could know what it cost him to admit that possibility. But the excitable color had flashed into his face, and his eyes were glittering. "If I do listen," he added in a moment, "I decline to commit myself beforehand."

"It won't matter. Even if you betrayed me you could not obstruct my purpose. Of course I wish my secret kept. Only the fool takes the world into his confidence. I only tell you—well, not so much for the reason I just gave, as because you have given me your friendship, and I like you better than any one on earth except my father. You would have suggested the idea in any case; and if we had been cut out for enemies I'd

## RULERS OF KINGS

have left the next day, and it would have been a year before you would have known what I was up to."

The Emperor's face did not soften. He felt anything but sentimental. "Why are you so sure that Europe—that I—could not balk you?" he asked.

"Because I have a hundred million dollars at my disposal at the present moment, and the work will be done before you can cook up a war with the United States."

The Emperor turned gray, and let his temper fly. "Damn your American billions!" he cried. "If I could lay my hands on that amount—"

"Well," said Fessenden. "When the time comes you can have it."



PART II





## I

“ I WISH I had been born in Oshkosh or Massachusetts,” said the Archduchess, with innocent humor.

“What have you been doing with yourself?” asked Alexandra. “Your letters were long enough, but they seemed to say less than usual.”

The Archduchess Ranata Theresia took her friend by the arm and led her to the window. The fine lace which covered it, woven with the double eagle of the House of Hapsburg, concealed every detail of the room from the curious below, but was a mere veil to those behind it.

“Oh, I know this prospect!” exclaimed the American girl.

The private apartments of the Hofburg look down upon the Franzensplatz, an oblong court-yard of inconsiderable size, surrounded by flat and dingy walls, its bare surface relieved only by a bronze Hapsburg leaning upon all the virtues he knew not in life. Opposite is the guard-room. In the court-yard to-day were a few tourists staring at the bronze or the remains of the moat and the gilded armorial bearings on the eastern side. All sorts and conditions of people, from peasants with their market-baskets to the hurrying bourgeois and the member of Parliament, took the short cut through the Palace court-yards, while private carriages, with servants in mediæval liveries, and rickety cabs, driven by reckless shouting *kutschers*, awoke the hollow echoes of the

deep portals, and clattered across the platz. From two of the upper windows housemaids were shaking rugs, and the only ornaments of the dreary scene were the tall well-built house-guards, who, lackeys as they were, carried their all-round horse-hair plumes and glittering uniforms with the elegance and distinction so indiscriminately lavished by Nature upon the Austrian race.

"I know this scene!" repeated Alexandra. "And I usually turn my back upon it. Why—why—doesn't the Emperor have the private apartments on the Heldenplatz, where at least you might see trees and the tops of the buildings on the Ringstrasse? This would drive some people melancholy mad. You have not been standing at this window ever since I left you, I hope? Trotting solemnly round the riding-school is better than that. But you seem to have been in Vienna more than usual this year. I congratulated myself that this was the year I was detained in New York."

"That is brutal! I have only left this prison for two months at Ischl. Between the fire at Schönbrunn and various political reasons, we have been here since you left—now eight months ago! And as you are my only real companion—! I do sometimes wish I had been born an American."

"There is an asylum in America whenever you make up your mind to run. I have a handsome determined and adventurous brother—he has heard of you! You have only to say the word and his yacht will be in the Adriatic."

"Don't talk romantic nonsense. I'm not up to it."

The Archduchess turned her back on the window and sat down before a table in an upright chair. Alexandra took a rocking-chair—one of three she had long since presented to the Hofburg, that she might always be sure of a comfortable seat. Ranata had no idea what-

ever of comfort. Her morning bath was supplied by a procession of servants bringing the necessary amount of water in ewers—she had never seen water gush from pipes except into a fountain, and she privately believed that rocking-chairs were a relic of the North American Indian. But if her apartments were as high and angular and unhomelike as those of most royal palaces, she had a decided love of splendor, and originality enough to avoid crimson and white-and-gold. The morbid virginal face of young Ludvig von Bayern looked down from the wall opposite the windows of her salon, and although she made sport of his vanity, she gave the portrait a place for the sake of its beauty, and approved of one form his madness had taken. The walls and windows of her salon were panelled with blue velvet lightly embroidered with gold. The tables, most of the ornaments, several chairs, and even the window-seats were made from blocks of *lapis lazuli*. On one side of the lofty room were her books—English, German, French, and Hungarian—bound in flexible blue-and-white morocco, an unconscious tribute perhaps to her humbler Bavarian blood. Scattered among the embroideries on the walls were many miniatures. In the small writing-room adjoining was a large desk of gilt and *lapis lazuli*, with furnishings of gold and blue vellum. In this little room was one picture only, a small painting of Rudolf in the costume of the Transylvanian sportsman. The frame of this picture was eternally hidden under a wreath of green or flowers.

The walls of her bedroom and breakfast-room were panelled with the Gobelins of which the Hapsburgs have the monopoly in abundance and splendor. Her ancient narrow bed, surmounted by the insignia of her house clutching at a mass of yellow brocade and lace, was high on a dais. Alexandra declared that it looked like a cata-

falque, and was haunted with the *ennuis* and miseries of a hundred princesses long since forgotten. When Ranata, sleepless and in want of sympathy, demanded companionship, she was forced to transfer her imperial person into the enamelled and inlaid but wide and modern bed of her American friend, who did what she could to banish ghosts. Alexandra had diplomatically refurnished her apartments by degrees, until now they were those of a young American who, while extravagant and luxurious, was studious of music and books and a devotee of light and air. Ranata never felt at home in them, but they exercised over her a certain fascination, for they breathed the freedom of their owner's personality.

"I am told," continued the Archduchess, still with an inflection of bitterness, "that there are people who envy royalty!"

"That is your safeguard — the glamour. It is that blinding halo more than any other cause that has made this country rise serenely after six crushing defeats in one century. The Lord's anointed—genial yet remote—afflicted beyond all men, yet carefully preserved to his state and people—alive yet dead—kind and just yet—"

She paused abruptly, for although Ranata was at times extravagantly informal and confidential with the one friend to whom her rank meant nothing, Alexandra, with all her audacity, never ventured beyond a certain point. There were moments when Ranata's ancestors rose in her soul and peremptorily ordered up the drawbridge which the lonely princess loved to fling recklessly at the feet of her American friend; to taste the sweets of girlish intercourse, unrestrained by the fear of imperiling her royal dignity or untainted by the suspicion of self-interest. There was no honor that the House of Hapsburg could bestow upon the American, and Ranata

knew that court life was too old a story to offer any further attractions to Alexandra. If the Archduchess had not been fully aware that the Austrian Court was the dullest in Europe, Alexandra would have enlightened her: her lively friend could rehearse every word that would be uttered at a function, the tidbits of scandal that would be murmured at royal dinners after the terrible interval of no conversation whatever. But for Ranata she cherished a deep and almost romantic affection, and believed her existence to be the most tragic in the world. Had it been possible—and it was a possibility of which she never despaired—she would have carried her off to New York; but for the present she spent six months of every year in Austria, and sowed seeds of which the Emperor and his court knew nothing; for outside the privacy of these rooms she was more European than American. Although she was now accepted as a matter of course, for several years the haughtiest and most exclusive people on earth had tolerated her with ill-concealed resentment, by no means unexaggerated by jealousy; and Alexandra, feeling that the pride of her country was involved, to say nothing of her own comfort, had succeeded in obliterating all trace of the alien. Only an American can imagine the force of the reaction. And this morning, returning after a long absence to find her friend more than ever in need of the diversion she knew so well how to provide, she was forced to pause suddenly and bite her lip. But Ranata's ancestors were slumbering, and the atmosphere of freedom came subtly to her nostrils.

"If possible, my father is more of a machine than ever," she remarked dryly. "I sometimes think that his very remarks to me at dinner—I see less and less of him anywhere else—are dictated by his ministers. I don't blame him, poor man, for being afraid to love any-

body again. If he wants to be a machine, I should be the last to deny him, and I really believe that he now feels nothing, and is a mere automaton from four in the morning until he goes to sleep peacefully at nine in the evening. I wish I were a machine myself. It must be the only refuge this side the grave. But the stupid physical fact is that my nerve-cells are still stronger than my fibrous tissue, and I must wait thirty years or so for Nature to do her work."

"Your afflictions have been shocking, poor dear—"

"I am not thinking of my afflictions. No one experienced in sorrow will ever whine. It is the future I am thinking of—to say nothing of the present. I am twenty-eight. Except when you are here I am utterly without companionship, unless, to be sure, when I am in the country on a horse. Here in Vienna, as you know, I rarely leave the Hofburg—leave these rooms only for the riding-school or some other part of the palace; for my father—or his ministers—seems to dislike more and more the attention I attract whenever I show myself abroad—"

She paused abruptly and gave a curious sidelong glance at her friend.

"You have been thinking of matrimony!" exclaimed Alexandra.

"Yes—twice during the past year. I have been almost tempted to consider it—almost, but not quite. The change would be too temporary. If there is one thing that must surpass the eternal boredom of unmarried royal women, it is putting up with a wired automaton and bearing his sickly children. And liberty! Now, at least, I can lock these doors, and even my father would not force them, and my ladies are only too glad to be relieved of my society. But perhaps I have spoken too strongly. In solitude I have found much



happiness. I can dream and dream, and forget that not the least of my dreams can ever come true."

She had spoken flippantly, quite brutally, but she finished with an accent of profound sadness.

"You will become morbid if you are not careful," said Miss Abbott seriously. "Only the deliberately cultivated reasonableness with which you have accepted this deadly—and ridiculous—life of yours, and the superhuman control you have acquired over your natural impatience and impulsiveness, have saved you so far. But thirty is a dangerous age. I am beginning to feel it myself—wasted emotions, opportunities, passing youth—all that sort of thing. You, my dear, grow more beautiful every day, and your beauty has done you so little good! Gasps and murmurs as you trail down between the tapestries of the Great Hall of Ceremonies in the most gorgeous white gowns ever seen, or ride once a year or so in the Prater!" She paused a moment, and then added deliberately: "Why not cut it? It is incongruous and monstrous to see the most intelligent women in Europe cramped in a three-by-six cage like one of Louis XI.'s victims. What keeps you? Nothing but the silliest superstition in the world to-day, drivelling out its precarious existence. You have your own money. My father can double and treble it. My step-mother would preserve you from all scandal. You could exercise your gifts and have a career, or marry and be happy. Come along—don't be an idiot."

"There is just one thing you never can understand. I know you think we are fatuous, if not mad, to believe ourselves heaven-born, divinely appointed; but here we are, we have our inherited duties, and here we must remain. Ourselves are the last we are permitted to consider from our coming to our going. We come into this world with a birthright of obligations to millions of



people whose ancestors permitted us first to mount the throne—in our case eight centuries ago! We Hapsburgs have been threatened with annihilation, we have lost much that was precious, the German Empire overshadows and threatens us, and God knows what will happen when my father dies. But although our star has often turned black, it has never gone out. It has a way of flashing up from its embers and disconcerting Europe that suggests eternal fires—if they are carefully watched. And it is the hearth fires that need watching. William's ambitions will come to nothing if our people stand firm. I have no illusion regarding the real danger. So long as my father lives we are safe against the worst that revolutionists can do. But Rudolf is dead! Both Austria and Hungary detest the Heir, that cold bigot, who has never a smile for the people. And court life will cease when he comes to the throne, for it is not likely he will divorce that woman and marry a princess. Only the most watchful care can save us. The Hungarians are straining at the bit all the time, and the moment disintegration begins William will find some pretext to march in. He will lose no more time than Frederick lost when he saw a woman ascend a tottering throne. Although I am permitted to take no part in politics, I still have a rôle to play which is of almost as much importance to my country as my father's. One of my obligations is to make the world believe that a princess is above ordinary temptations and weaknesses—a tradition which the Hapsburgs have done more than any royal house to obliterate—and that makes my personal duty the more obvious. Another thing, as you know—to the world I am not even the individual. During these last ten years my study has been to persuade my father's people that I am the conventional, safely stupid, and normal princess, to make them forget

my mother's supposed gift to this House. If I should do what you propose, Austria would either assume that I was as mad as Ludvig and Otto, or, were they convinced that I had a better brain than my sort, they would accept my act as a deliberate insult to the monarchical idea. In either case I should loosen one more stone in these rotting foundations of ours. Marriage out of class, elopement, a whispered intrigue—they are accustomed to all! But a deliberate renunciation, based on non-sentimental grounds, a flight to America—that would be the new thing with a vengeance, and it is only the innovation that tells. Oh, if Rudolf had lived. If Rudolf—Rudolf—”

She pushed back her chair violently, banished the seriousness from her face.

“Enough of this infliction. I have opened the safety-valves and feel better. Come, show me your new frocks. Are they finer than mine? What have you brought me from New York? And the bonbons! the bonbons! Do you know where we go two weeks from to-day? To Hungary, for the autumn manoeuvres. I am so glad! I have not been to Budapest since I was a child. I long to go. I love Hungary. It dares to rebel, and sometimes it gets what it wants. And our dear cousin Willy is to be our guest. He's bound to come with a sensation up his sleeve. Sometimes I regret that I was not old enough to marry him, for although I fear and sometimes hate him, life with him might have been interesting, for he at least is a man.”

## II

When Alexandra was twelve years old Mrs. Abbott had taken her to Vienna to consult a famous surgeon

for a threatened deformity. He had commanded that the child be left under his care for at least five years, and Mrs. Abbott, whose devotion to her husband amounted to a mannerism, left her with an old friend, a Hungarian, whose infinite quarterings made her one of that small band so closely allied with the court that they have never learned to snub, since nobody has ever dared to take a liberty with them. This lady, who had married one of the Princes Windischgrätz, had formed a friendship with Mrs. Abbott in her impulsive youth when the American's father had been minister to Austria, renewing it when she returned as the wife of a secretary of Legation. The young husband had died in Vienna, and the Princess had shown a sincere and spontaneous sympathy which cemented their friendship into an intimacy where each might dare to accept a favor from the other. She also extravagantly admired the American's toilettes, having a natural and exquisite taste, and rebelling at the frequent necessity to wear an old gown, soiled and frayed, perhaps, under her load of family jewels. After her friend married the chieftain of millions, she visited her in New York and Newport, and was deeply impressed with a style of living far more comfortable and luxurious than anything in Europe, and quite as magnificent. Immobile to a world whose existence she barely admitted, with her own class she was simple and natural; and Mrs. Abbott having acquired the same tactics in an early experience of European courts, there was no marked external difference between these two exalted dames, and much in common. The friendship never waned, for Mrs. Abbott was frequently in Europe, and was the first American to dress in Vienna; when, therefore, she was for once in a way confronted with a serious problem, the Princess came gallantly to the rescue, and Alexandra

for three years lived in a palace immense and chilly, but as full of old furniture and pictures as a museum, and often of gay Hungarian relatives who played high and slept late.

The "Princess Sarolta," as she was known to the elect, was a woman of much heart and cynicism, of strong loves and stronger hates. Without children of her own, one of the deepest affections of her life had been for the Archduke Rudolf. Her pet aversion had been the Empress, whom she denounced as a mixture of the country girl and the mystic, wholly unfit to wear a crown. She never forgave her for being, not von Bayern, but in Bayern; and when, in addition to the comparative insignificance of her birth, the sweet and gentle but shy and unhappy Empress treated a throne with contumely and sought the consolations of the inner life, the Princess became her most contemptuous enemy.

To Ranata the Princess transferred the affection she had given to Rudolf, although it was unmixed with the enthusiasm inspired by the brilliant if reckless hope of a house to which she was loyally devoted. When Alexandra was left on her hands Rudolf was still alive, but she was much interested in the rebellious little Archduchess, who in looks and temperament was unlike her mother or any of the recent Hapsburg women; and partly out of sympathy, partly because it pleased her to do one original thing in her life, she brought the two children together on all their holidays.

They promptly gave to each other their hoarded stores of affection. Alexandra, lively, fearless, without awe of rank, yet with too much inherited and inculcated taste to take the wrong sort of liberty with the humblest of her friends, seemed in the nature of a divine gift to a princess who was never permitted to forget her rank by the children of the court circle. These little girls came,

when invited, with phrases and sentiments carefully drilled, their small minds already agitated by the possibility of future favors. They bored and exasperated their intelligent, if imperious and highly strung, hostess; the more so that her courtesy must be unwavering, lest she remind them of their inferiority in rank. But Alexandra slapped her when she was angry, and hugged her when the tide of her young and ardent affections rose, indulged in ribald merriment at the rigid Spanish etiquette of the court, the chill magnificence of the ceremonial rooms, of the army of splendid guards and chamberlains and lackeys, and the many other inconsistencies with the daily democracy of the court-yards and the general external dinginess and internal discomfort of the wealthiest house in Europe. But to the Emperor she accorded an unwavering respect, and she always amused him. When, after the terrible loss of his only son—a tragedy which practically banished his wife from his homes—Ranata was first ill, then melancholy, clinging to her chosen friend day and night, he had given his indifferent consent to the American remaining in the Hofburg until his daughter could live without her. That time had not yet arrived, and although the incongruity of an American inmate of the Hofburg sometimes entered the carefully occupied brain of a monarch whose traditions would not permit him to receive the bourgeoisie wife of the greatest of his subjects, and bade him ignore the distinguished in art and letters, yet was he so grateful for any cause that might lessen the problem of his youngest born that he deferred indefinitely a half-cherished protest. He believed Alexandra's influence to be wholesome, and he dreaded the scene which he knew must follow any attempt to reduce the friendship to a more formal footing. Ranata had pounded shrieking on his door more than once.

## RULERS OF KINGS

So the years had passed, the children had played and studied together, and been satisfied with their lot, and no specific excuse had ever arrived to interfere with an arrangement to which even the Emperor became too accustomed in time to question.

After Alexandra's physical trouble was over, Mr. Abbott had insisted that she spend her summers on his Hudson River estate, where he could see her daily, make sure she passed the greater part of her time out of doors, and preserved her Americanism. He had no objection to her close friendship with the Hapsburg, for he had a far-seeing eye, moreover fully appreciated the education she would have under the royal tutors, the simple food and habits, and, not of the least importance to this erratic American father, the strict discipline to which the heiress of many millions would be subjected. But he invariably informed her, every year when he escorted her to the steamer, that the first time she returned with any "airs," any reduction in the sum of her Americanism, that would be the last she would see of her beloved Ranata. Doubtless the advice was salutary, as all advice is; but Alexandra from the first had perceived the advantage her Americanism gave her over the born subjects of royalty. Not only did her national exemption from the courtier's deference and her unconscious indifference to future favors exercise a wild and picturesque charm, but her exciting yarns of Western adventure, spun for the most part out of a fertile imagination, her astonishing games, labelled "American," won her the unswerving admiration of Ranata and almost conquered the jealousies of the other little girls. As she grew older she became fully aware that her influence over the Archduchess, aside from the deep mutual affection, lay in her fine careless independence and her utter unlikeness to anything in Europe.



## RULERS OF KINGS

The influence of the girls on each other was of mutual benefit. The deep serious nature of the Archduchess, with her centuries of storied impressions, her lofty sense of duty, even in her most rebellious moments, did much to remodel the lighter nature, the slenderer mental and ethical equipment of the American girl. On the other hand, the absolutely fearless outlook of Alexandra, her unswerving American point of view and republican ideal, combined, as she grew older, with a close knowledge of European politics, her habit of thinking for herself, her mere tolerance of Old World standards and traditions, her eager interest in new thoughts and movements, early awakened emulation in the brilliant Austrian, made her eager to lengthen her vision, to comprehend the thought of the more sensible of the liberated women out in the world; finally taught her to project herself beyond the royal horizon, to feel and to know how it was with humanity in its multitudes.

Alexandra watched the two personalities in her friend grow and flourish coincidentally; the one uncompromising, traditional, bigotedly loyal to her house and condition; the other tragically human, womanly, broad, generous, passionate, sympathizing with the masses in their struggle for happiness.

As Ranata grew older, the two women in her held many an excited controversy; there were hours of profound depression, discouragement, rebellion, abhorrence of the royal treadmill, and a wild pagan love of mere existence. Encouraged by Alexandra, she had taken an early stand against matrimony. Twice, however, she had submitted to her father's wishes, and permitted herself to be affianced; but one of her princes dying before the wedding-day and the other disgracing himself, she announced that she had now done all that could be expected of her, and should be permitted to remain single.



The Emperor acknowledged the justice of her argument and bided his time. Of his daughter's intense inner life he knew nothing, but he recognized that he had an individual, not a mere princess, on his hands, and he humored her as far as was in his power and consistent with her conspicuous position. Liberty beyond palace walls or royal enclosures was not to be considered; tradition was tradition, even to the toothpicks on the imperial table; moreover, although she bore no resemblance to her mother, fate had spared her the growling visage of the Hapsburgs, and, unlike most royal women, she looked born to crown and purple. To the world she was the princess, the goddess, a valuable asset for any reigning house; and, tradition aside, the glorified ideal of a vast and restless people must not be vulgarized, nor even dimmed. But although she had her separate household and a large income to spend on her wardrobe and private fancies, the Emperor and his ministers had no intention that a young, healthy, and beautiful princess should carry out her romantic programme of being an old maid. Happy in their ignorance of her resources, they occasionally frowned over the shrinking list of eligible princes. Early plans to place her on two of the highest thrones in Europe had been frustrated by a method so simple that neither the Emperor nor his advisers had ever penetrated the mystery. Ranata had treated each of the visiting young princes to a furious exhibition of temper, which, taken in connection with her red hair and American influences, appeared to them to be of alarming domestic significance. The impression was ineradicably fixed by the ingenious and terrible tales poured into their ears by the fertile Alexandra.

Men had loved her, but as men love a picture or a character in history; they hardly knew her better, for she was too proud for intrigue, and conversation in the presence

of a watchful court is neither sympathetic nor enlightening. Moreover, her Obersthofmeisterin, the Archduchess Maria Leopoldina, was the most anxious duenna that ever had princess in charge, and the boldest officer dared not brave that protecting wing.

Ranata had her dreams, her ideals, but she found her heroes in history; a few ballroom flirtations completed the sum of her interest in mere mortals. Knowing that earthly love and passion were not for her, she did what she could to forget their existence, occupied her mind and wearied her body. The cruel afflictions of her family chastened her somewhat, but she still had her hours of intense rebellion, caught her imagination on the wing in a future which never before had risen on the horizon of what is technically known as "the Great."

### III

"This is certainly an improvement on the Hofburg," said Alexandra. "It is the only palace I have ever seen that looks like a palace, not a museum, barrack, or hospital; and Budapest is as picturesque a setting for the kings and queens one reads about in books. The Danube is not blue, but it moves—it moves—and its islands are certainly green. The illuminations last night looked as if the stars had come down to kow-tow to the *Hohenzollern*. He has indulged in much affectionate rhetoric, but has not yet broken loose. I wonder if he will to-night?"

"He is sure to, I should think. And I understand that he fell on Count Andrassy's neck this morning with a rhapsody of Count Julius—to whom we certainly owe the strongest tie that now binds Hungary to us. What children the Hungarians are to be so flattered by this

visit! They could have shown no greater enthusiasm for a Charlemagne."

"He is the one picturesque figure in Europe, my dear."

"And the one man who could have outshone him is dead! The Hungarians worshipped Rudolf; the peasants will not believe that he is dead; but this romantic hot-blooded people must be enthusiastic about somebody, and my father is too old. William is young; he looks the Emperor; he is as ambitious as Napoleon; there is an idea abroad that he dangles the scales of Europe in his fingers. Oh, if I had been born a man!"

The two girls were standing on the balcony of the private suite of apartments formerly occupied by the Empress Elizabeth when playing the part of Queen of Hungary. Down on their left, beyond the Danube with its mighty bridges, was the beautiful and busy city of Pest. Opposite them, on the most precipitous height of Buda, were the ruins of the citadel. The palace, a vast and symmetrical pile of nearly a thousand rooms, crowns the lowest ridge of a mountain-range which slopes in irregular masses to the river. Behind rises the long shoulder of the Schwabenberg, its arm curved downward in the north to grasp the Danube.

The great hills were brilliant with autumnal color; many boats were on the river; the world was promenading on the corsos; the flags streaming from every window were gayer than the woods. Far below, at the foot of the Palace Hill, in one of the cafés on the quay, the girls could hear the music of the Chardash, and held their breath as its wild note of longing changed to furious appeal.

"This is living!" said Alexandra. "I feel romantic for the first time in my life. Can't we stay here?"

"It is perfect. I should be happy—almost; content if

he were not here. But he must have taught the very Hungarians the hollowness of their fictitious love for my father. They have too much to forgive! They never will forgive it. He is old. He has suffered greatly. They pity him. That is all. And William knows that. He has chosen this moment of uneasiness in Europe to come here, looking the invincible young monarch, bursting with arrogance and daring and the success of his reign. No wonder the susceptible Hungarians think him the chosen of God, and assured of infinite conquest. Did you see the *Pester Lloyd* this morning? *'Till now it is the minds of the Hungarians which, with its own mind, Emperor William knew how to conquer, but he evidently knows as well how to conquer the hearts. This he proved to-day once more, and we can only give him the assurance that of all the languages in the world, it is the language of the heart which in Hungary is best understood.'* Oh, if I were a man!"

"I wouldn't let a little thing like that stop me. Your brain is as good as his, and you have all the courage of all your ancestors. In more ways than one you are like him who prompted the old bishop to cry, 'Sit fast, Lord God, or Rudolf will occupy thy throne!' Times are times, but I don't believe that all your talents were given to you for no purpose."

"I believe in the blind law of cause and effect. It is only in my wildest moments that I have dreamed that the first Rudolf and Maria Theresia circled low when I was born and shook a bit of their golden dust into my brain-cells—I hate to talk nonsense! Here come two carriages across the bridge, the first of the guests, no doubt. We had better go in, it is a quarter to five. Mind you are careful not to allude to my father here as 'The Emperor.' That is a great point in Hungary."

"If fate ever should whirl you to the throne, Ranata,

for Heaven's sake have dinner at a Christian hour. I have indigestion for a month every time I come back from America."

The girls, who had stepped out on the balcony in the broad light of afternoon, ignoring the protests of Maria Leopoldina, who, rather than carry the mausoleum of her charms into the sunshine, had retired in dudgeon, were dressed for a great banquet to be given at five o'clock to the guest of the King of Hungary, the German Emperor. The Archduchess, who, with some reason, had come to the conclusion that life with her was to be a sequence of weeds, interrupted by intervals of uncertain duration, varied her black with white only. Nevertheless, she was one of the best-dressed women in Europe, and only her patient tire-women knew the infinite range of her wardrobe. "I often sigh for color," she confided once to her American friend, "but I am too superstitious to venture. And perhaps it is as well. My rôle is the princess of the antique, the traditional pattern. In white I look ready for a memorial window or a bas-relief in the Augustin." To which Alexandra had replied practically, "To say nothing of the fact that it makes your own coloring twice as strong as it would be above a brilliant plumage."

Certainly the gown of white velvet embroidered with pearls and silver which she wore to-day in honor of her enemy enhanced her statuesque appearance, and gave her sharp black brows, the scarlet of her lips, and the brilliant masses of her hair an insolent effect of being able to supply all the color that a dazzled beholder could endure. The almost fierce incongruousness of her coloring might have defeated her attempt to convince the world that a mere princess dwelt within that virile shell, had it not been for the cold regularity of an Egyptian profile carried loftily above a form of antique

height and mould, and a skin so white that despairing man had vowed there was sacrilege in the thought of its being put to mortal use. Her gray eyes were alert and so expressive that she had formed the habit of holding them half closed, and her black lashes were very thick. She had inherited her hands and feet from her Spanish ancestors; while not out of proportion to her great height, they were so finely fashioned that they looked too small for serious work. Her trick of eyebrow and shoulder, when animated, may have indicated the persistence of the French blood brought in by Francis of Lorraine. Nature, unspiteful for once to royal women, had given her the infrequent best of her ancestors, and even modified the not unpleasing nose that Elizabeth of Brunswick had presented to the Hapsburgs. Ranata had immense strength, had been ill but once in her life, hardly ever had experienced the sensation of utter fatigue. Her horsemanship was as remarkable as her mother's had been; and when she appeared in the Prater beside the equally accomplished Emperor, it was a sight that no man ever forgot. She broke in her own horses; when in the country, frequently groomed and saddled them. After Alexandra, they were her only intimates, and she had known her keenest happiness when riding eight hours of the day through the forests of Upper Austria.

Alexandra never accompanied the Archduchess on her longer walks and rides. She was an accomplished horse-woman and a resigned pedestrian, but she had the frail physique of her race, and had been born of a hard-working fashionable mother with none of that profound sense of parental responsibility so ingrained in the European from queen to peasant. She was handsome rather than beautiful; her eyes were too analytical, her mouth betrayed too pronounced a scorn of the



shams of life, her whole expression was too keen and humorous to compare victoriously either with the lofty exalted style of the Archduchess Ranata Theresia or the impassive harmonies of fashionable standards. But her eyes and hair were the brown that took lights from the sun, her features were delicate, high bred, full of character and energy. Her figure was light, round, active; when compared with any but Ranata's it was sufficiently tall. In her way she was as complex as her friend of the tremendous and conflicting elements drawn from every civilization in Europe, but her salient and unquestioned characteristics were loyalty and sincerity. She dressed exquisitely, and the thousands she spent yearly in Vienna had long since established her popularity.

## IV

Alexandra pressed her hand on the table in a flutter of nerves, to which she was little accustomed. But they had vibrated painfully more than once during the dinner, although, with all her experience of courts, she had rarely been present at so magnificent a scene. The immense Throne Room, or Great Hall of Ceremonies, of perfectly simulated yellow marble, relieved only by white wood heavily incrustated with yellow bronze, seemed to quiver in its flood of amber light. The three chandeliers were huge inverted stacks of golden leaves, with no false note of crystal. The few women present were superbly dressed, and covered from crown to waist with the jewels of centuries, but they made an indifferent showing beside the barbarous magnificence of the Hungarian magnates. Every other man at the table, except the cardinals, was in uniform: the King, the Archdukes, and the Emperor's suite, in the Prussian;



the few members of his household whom Franz Joseph had ventured to bring to the jealous capital of his most uncertain possession, and the Grand Stewards of the Archdukes, wore an Austrian uniform; and the Ambassadors were in fullest dress. But it was evident that the fiery independent spirit of the great nobles of Hungary recognized no uniform except that of a glorious extravagance. Their fancy ran riot in color, in textile, in form. But whether in thick brocade, delicate or gorgeous of hue, in cloth of gold or silver, in white satin fitting like a cuirass and studded with jewels, or in silk so heavily embroidered with gold that it creaked like an armor; whether the long velvet cloak, trimmed and lined with priceless fur, its embroideries representing years of labor, its buttons and chains of big uncut jewels, was worn, or used carelessly as a background, there was nothing in Europe, not even in Russia, to compare with them. The headpieces of fur, the plume fastened with a jewelled rosette, were under their chairs, their high boots and silken small-clothes were likewise eclipsed for the hour, but there was more than enough of them to make the great golden room look like a page of old Hungarian history. So their ancestors had sat at Árpád's table a thousand years ago. The hair of these men might be shorter, but it is doubtful if they varied in another external detail. Their faces were mobile, excitable, sometimes very clever. A few looked like men of the great world, although in that costume it was difficult to look like anything but the feudal lord ready on an instant's notice to blow the trumpet in his villages and lead his bondsmen to battle.

As their fiery glances wandered from the Archduchess Ranata Theresia to the German Emperor, from the beautiful woman who reminded them of their lost Rudolf to the dashing young monarch they so passionately ad-

mired, a man after their own indomitable Hungarian hearts, they seemed to create an atmosphere of uneasiness, of premonition. Alexandra could imagine their swift transition from extravagant courtesy towards their aged King into the wildest excitement of which the modern man is capable; and endeavored to hope that William would behave himself. The young magnate on her right, Count Zrinyi, was evidently a very excitable person. He had from various causes approached the verge of explosion several times. Never having met anything like this cool American girl, he had fallen madly in love with her; the blood flew to and from his face, his jewelled armor creaked, and twice he dashed the tears from his eyes. Alexandra would have imagined herself in one of the Nights of Arabia had it not been for the intervals of rational conversation, when, seeing himself mirrored in the clear eyes beside him, and fancying, as many a wiser man has done, that it was a kindred soul he saw, he had talked of the grievances of the Hungarians and their determination to have their own way in their own country. At present they were engaged in the extermination of the hated German language and the universal substitution of the Magyar. It mattered nothing that less than half the population of their country spoke Hungarian, that the spirit of Roumania still hovered over the land beyond the Theiss, that there were whole villages where the language was never heard, and that Croatia and Slavonia hated them; the intense national pride and spirit which had endured for a thousand years, weathering every conquest, every humiliation, as ardent under the two centuries of Turkish rule as during the climax of their glory under Matthias Corvinus, had gathered fuller strength since the Revolution of '48; and the determination was growing daily to give emphasis in every possible way to the in-

dividuality of this most individual of European states. Let those pitch their tents in Hungary who would, but they must learn and use the Hungarian language or feel themselves the aliens they were—Austrian officers not excepted.

Alexandra yielded to an impulse, not so much of coquetry as of curiosity; she expressed approval of his patriotism in the beautiful Magyar tongue. She had avoided German instinctively, and they had talked in English—like most of his class he was accomplished in many languages. For the moment she regretted her experiment. He trembled violently and turned white. It was then that he shed his first tear.

“You are *not* cruel!” he murmured. “You have enraptured me! How kind—how wonderful. It is said to be the most difficult of tongues. Did you learn a few words, perhaps, before coming to Hungary, knowing our greatest weakness—”

“Dear me, no. I studied Hungarian, as one of many languages, with the Archduchess. She studied it as a matter of course.”

“That is a very practical explanation,” he said sulkily. “If I had had time to think I should have known. Queen Elizabeth,” he looked as if he would have raised his plumed and jewelled *kalpag* had it not been under his chair, “bewitched Hungary upon her first visit by speaking perfectly the Magyar language. She took a great fancy to a young Hungarian girl and invited her to become a maid of honor, but when she discovered that she had been educated in Paris and had almost forgotten her native language she sent her home to learn it, and would not receive her into her household again until she was proficient. We have never forgotten that. And Rudolf! it *was* his language—we refused to believe that he knew how to speak German.”

## RULERS OF KINGS

“Do you regret Rudolf?” asked Alexandra, in the tone she might have used to demand his opinion of the soft music in the gallery. Again she had touched powder with her wicked torch.

“Regret Rudolf?—*Rudolf?*” He took himself in hand and proceeded more calmly in a moment. “Mademoiselle, I regret the Crown Prince, like many others, for personal reasons, and, like the whole of my country, like all Europe, in fact, for grave political reasons. He was so warm, so genial, so fascinating—the best of good fellows, the most simple and unostentatious of princes, and, what all princes are not—we have one at this table, mademoiselle—a gentleman to the core. He loved Hungary as much as Hungary loved him. Had he lived there would be no straining at the bit now; we should be content to wait. Had he lived, there would be in Europe to-day no uneasy anticipation of our poor old King’s death. And not only could Rudolf make himself beloved by everybody, but there have been few better brains born to thrones—or in spheres where brains are more abundant. He would have sown his wild oats, poor chap!—and have made a great ruler. Then our guest would have had a rival worthy of his mettle. Now he has none.” With one of his abrupt transitions he continued: “And such tact! In all the years that he came to us and held his little court here in Buda, or was a mere sportsman in his hunting-castle, he never made a mistake. Do you know that the King actually has his drinking-water brought from Vienna? And the very food we are eating—and the cooks! Bah!—I’ll eat no more. It is your fault, mademoiselle, that I did not think of it sooner. I never go to Vienna. When he is here—our King—I honor him, for he is old and good and kind—now!—but you will acknowledge, mademoiselle, that he insults us unnecessarily when he brings with him

## RULERS OF KINGS

water and meat, vegetables, fruits, to this land flowing with milk and honey.”

“Well, perhaps he does not like milk and honey. I detest both myself. And while I am willing to admit that your language is the most beautiful in the world—a union of velvet and steel, of music and running water and of the sonorousness of distant thunder—yet, my dear Count, still will I give the palm to Vienna for water. It always tastes and sparkles as if it were gushing still from its springs in the mountains, and I am delighted that the Emp—King brings it along.”

The Hungarian looked at her speculatively. He was not a fool, and recognized her difference from the women to whom he was accustomed, although he did not pretend to understand her. The mystery, and her curious treatment of his love-making, made him more thoughtful than usual. He was about to feel his way towards a new channel of attack when his eyes encountered the heavy black-framed visage of the King's heir, and his ardent brain leaped in a new direction.

“Do you know what that man has done to-night?” he murmured furiously. “He has left his wife at the station in a railway carriage, while he dines here as the guest of the King! I only pretend to touch his hand! Do you call that a man—to make a woman his wife, the mother of his children, and treat her like his mistress? If he had not the courage to renounce his pretensions to the throne and live like a gentleman, why did he marry her? Would such a thing be done in your great country?”

“Oh, well, we do not have morganatic marriages,” said Alexandra soothingly. “It certainly was inconsistent of him to marry her.”

“It is very awkward for us. We acknowledge no difference between husband and wife in Hungary. If

that man ever does come to the throne, his wife will be our Queen—”

“Rise!” said Alexandra, “the King is on his feet.”

And now the King had made his pleasant toast to the illustrious guest, the room had rung with enthusiastic “*Élyens*,” and the German Emperor was facing his audience in a stillness so profound that others besides Alexandra longed to have him begin a speech which all knew, from the defiant almost impish light in his eyes, was to be something more than the voluble rhetoric commonly heard at royal tables. He had been in the highest spirits all the evening, joking with the King, at whose right he sat in the middle of the long table, and with every one else in his neighborhood, temporarily charming even his avowed enemy, the Archduchess Ranata Theresia, who sat on his right. In the light-blue and white uniform of a general of the Austro-Hungarian army, his breast covered with orders, he had never looked handsomer; and in the atmosphere of approval that he loved he was ready—everybody felt who knew him—to do and dare anything. But the most expectant were unprepared for his actual performance.

He began at last, turning with deep respect to the King, and a slight excitement was perceptible in his strident tones.

“It is with a feeling of the deepest gratitude that I receive the hearty welcome of your Majesty. Thanks to the invitation of your Majesty, I have been able to visit this splendid town, whose grand reception nearly overwhelmed me.” He paused as if again overcome by the memory, then launched his first thunderbolt at the tempestuous hearts of a people who but half a century before had almost succeeded in wresting their great kingdom from the monarch whose guests they were tonight—a people whose fathers had died cursing the



name of Hapsburg, and petitioning Heaven for the success of the Hungarian arms.

"We are following at home," announced the German Emperor, "with *sympathetic interest* the story of the knightly Hungarians, *whose patriotism has become proverbial*, and who in a glorious past did not hesitate to sacrifice their blood—for the holy cross," he added with pious haste. "Names like Zrinyi inspire the hearts of German youths to the present day. We witnessed with *sympathetic admiration* the festival of the thousandth birthday, which the Hungarians, surrounding their beloved King, celebrated with such astounding pomp. The proud architectural works of your great city give evidence of her artistic spirit, and the bursting of the bonds of the Iron Gates has opened a new way for commerce, and *has ranged Hungary as an equal among the great and the most highly civilized nations of the Earth.*"

By this time the Hungarians were heaving like the sea. They had left their seats and were pressing towards the Emperor, silently, that they might not lose a word of his utterance; and it was evident that only etiquette restrained their emotions. Never before, not in modern times at least, had a monarch so flattered them. Not for centuries had they been saluted as a practically independent state, unhyphenated, for once permitted to stand alone under the crown of St. Stephen, the hated double-headed bird brushed lightly aside. The air seemed shaking with deep political import; more than one man was trembling violently within his barbaric splendors. The Emperor pulled himself up abruptly, and turned once more to his host, whose face, indignant and aghast, composed itself suddenly to courteous attention. William's tones had been rich with sympathy for a race passionately admired. They now softened with filial affection. "But what has made the deepest



impression upon me, particularly during my reception in Budapest, is the enthusiastic devotion of Hungary to your Majesty. And not only here, but in all Europe, above all among my own people, does the same enthusiasm for your Majesty glow—an enthusiasm which I venture myself to cherish, in looking up, after the manner of a son, to your Majesty as my Fatherly Friend.

“Thanks to your Majesty’s wisdom, our union stands firm and unquenchable, a blessing to our people; for it has meant the peace of Europe for many years, and it will continue to do so for many more.

“Enthusiastic devotion to your Majesty—of this I am sure—dwells as firmly now in the hearts of the sons of Árpád as when they cried to your Majesty’s great ancestor, ‘*Moriamur pro rege nostro!*’”

He paused a moment before crying the hurrah for the King, which all present expected as a matter of course would be given in German. But William, under that apparently tactless exterior, capable of the profoundest diplomacy, had a still surer bolt in store. Raising his goblet on high, his eagle glance flashing from end to end of the pale company, his passionate tones thrilling the most antagonistic heart present, he cried:

“Giving expression now to these sentiments, we will put all we are capable of feeling, thinking, and praying for your Majesty into those words which every Hungarian utters with his latest breath—*Élyen a Király!*”

As the words rang out in the Magyar language, so jealously beloved and preserved, from the lips of a monarch whom duty had never commanded to cope with its difficulties, the tongue the King, his host, ignored, there was an instant of almost stupefied silence. Then some one gave an *Élyen!* as wild and abrupt as a battle-cry, the spell broke, the hot blood of the Hungarians

leaped to their heads, they forgot etiquette and crowded about the Emperor, shouting until the marble walls rumbled the echo. Their wild glances never wandered to the convulsed face of their King, nor from the triumphant eyes of the German. Several of the younger men and equally excited women stood upon chairs that they might see him better. Then for the first time in that old palace there rang out the word most hated in Hungary, "*Élyen a császár! Élyen a császár!*" (Hurrah for the Emperor!) Then again that most musical and thrilling of vocatives, "*Élyen! Élyen! Élyen!*"

Alexandra took her Count firmly by the arm and pushed him into a chair. "You don't look very strong," she said, "and you will faint if you are not careful." Her own knees were trembling as she took the chair beside him, but she proceeded coolly, "What an infant you are to be taken in by the cleverest man in Europe—"

"He is the greatest man living," stammered Zrinyi. "This is a great moment in the history of Hungary, mademoiselle. It should be painted and hung beside Munkacsy's *Árpád*, or the *Sally of Zrinyi from Szigetvár*. He is the man for us!—the man for us!"

"I don't doubt every mustache in Budapest will stand on end to-morrow. What a pity you have none."

"Mademoiselle!" he cried, outraged at her flippancy; but she was moving away.

She had looked once at Ranata during William's speech. The Archduchess, as the Hungarians pushed forward, had withdrawn from the Emperor's side and stood leaning against the wall, her head bent, her arms rigid. Her face was expressionless, but, Alexandra commented, her hair had never looked so red.

William, as the King, experiencing satiety, led the way to the reception-rooms, turned his head rapidly in all directions, taking a final survey of the scene of his latest

triumph. His glance roved over faces angry, approving, terrified, adoring; encountered the amused stare of the American with haughty indifference, then rested suddenly on the face of his young hostess. The Archduchess had dropped her mask. Her head was thrust forward, deliberately waiting for the moment when William's eyes must meet hers. When they did they lingered. The Hapsburg's eyes blazed with a hatred so implacable, with a defiance so reckless and contemptuous, that the Almighty's best-beloved experienced a shock. It seemed to him, for the first time in his triumphant career, that he heard the steel of another will clash menacingly with his own. Sustained in his dizziest flights by his honest belief in his earthly mission, insolently aware that he had the best brain in the royal hierarchy, the most splendid energy, a capacity for work never surpassed, he was fully convinced that he had but to develop his gifts, use all his vigilance and what patience he could find in him, to realize his vast ambitions. But for the moment, in the presence of another human will, and that the will of a woman, he experienced a chill rising of the imperial flesh. He forgot his majesty, flung his head high like an irritated stallion, glared back his defiance, and jerked his eyes away. In a moment he was reminded of his manners.

"Your arm, your Majesty," said the cold voice of his hostess; and in silence, but with an impressive exhibition of royal self-control, they walked side by side through the first circle-room into the blue drawing-room. He was mightily uncomfortable, however, for in some subtle feminine way she made him feel as if she were towering above him by nearly a foot. It seemed to him that she grew an inch with every step, that her little crown of black pearls was rising higher and higher; and when he finally shot an apprehensive glance upward, almost

laughing aloud at his folly, he was relieved to find that her nose was still on a level with his brow. But she was making the most of her height, which, with the diadem on her lofty head and the immense train dragging behind her, would have made a man of her own inches look insignificant. It is doubtful if William ever breathed deeper relief than when, a few moments after arriving in the drawing-room, he was informed that the carriages were waiting to take himself and his suite to the train, and that he must make his adieux.

The guests had scattered through the long line of rooms. Many went out upon the balcony to watch the royal carriages and mounted escort cross the illuminated bridge, and the roar of cheering thousands seemed storming the hill. The royal party retired almost immediately, and Alexandra followed the Archduchess to the sitting-room of her private apartments. Ranata's ladies had been dismissed, and she had closed the dressing-room door on her tire-women. She was standing alone at the window sobbing convulsively. The room was ringing with *Vivats* and *Élyens*, for it was too hot to close the windows.

Alexandra pushed her into a chair, removed the pins and pearls from the heavy mane of hair, and sprayed her head and wrists with cologne. In a few moments the Archduchess had commanded her tears. She threw back her head and looked down upon shouting Pest with a sullen glare.

"What wouldn't I have given to be able to wring his neck!" she said in a moment. "How dared he! At my father's table! What insolent cruelty—he, who need fear no one living—to come here and fling his dynamite into the weak foundations of this poor old Empire! I wish to God I were on the thrones of Austria and Hungary. I'd pit myself against him without a qualm.

It would be two of our ancestors over again and joy in the fight—I believe that in one of his exalted moments he enrolled Frederick the Great among his ancestors.”

“Well,” began Alexandra, but Ranata did not hear her. She had risen and was standing in the middle of the room, her long hair flaming about her. To the American girl, her quivering slender figure looked ready for a coat-of-mail, her head for the helmet. “I can’t help admiring the brute for flinging his designs in our faces,” she exclaimed furiously. “Did my father understand? The Hungarians?—The Emperor dies. Franz Ferdinand—*Franz Ferdinand!*—succeeds him. The Empire, bound together by rotten threads, begins its disintegration with my father’s corpse. Do you remember the rapacity of Europe, that greedy horde of vultures, after the death of Charles VI.?—Frederick’s swoop upon Silesia? William, ‘in the manner of a son,’ only awaits the death of his ‘Fatherly Friend’ to devour Austria to the gates of Vienna. And Hungary? Could you not see his bait? Hungary quiescent—Hungary once more an independent kingdom, or with himself as its nominal and indulgent ruler!—Oh, for another Pragmatic Sanction!”

“I have a plan—if you will sit down quietly for a few moments and listen to me. It is a practical plan, and I know it will appeal to you.”

The Archduchess resumed her seat. “Well? Tell it to me quickly. I am panting for a practical idea. But the blood is blazing in my head.”

“William has made a deep impression on the Hungarians, and no doubt they understood him plainly enough. But impressions can be counteracted. He leaves here to-night, and your father will be in no hurry to invite him again. Do you remain here this winter, instead of returning to Vienna with the Emperor—announce that you have found no city so fascinating, that you

cannot tear yourself away; entertain constantly and brilliantly; let loose all your bottled personal charm—show them that you are the sister of Rudolf; be seen in public; make a royal pilgrimage through the villages. The Hungarians resent unceasingly that the Emperor spends but a few weeks of the year in Budapest—and they look upon Austria as a mere annex of the great kingdom of Hungary. They will be flattered—your slaves; with your personality, if you will come down off your high horse, they will end by adoring you—especially if you give them a royal good time. So much for the present. When the time comes! When the time comes! When the Empire shakes and William threatens, all you will have to do will be to have a King's Mount ready, fasten the crown of St. Stephen securely on your head, ride up the mount, and wave your sword to the four corners of the earth. All Hungary would break into deficient Latin and shout, 'Long live our Lady and King!' The dust of Maria Theresia would quiver at that old war-cry—and she is no more forgotten here than in Austria. You will be a fool if you throw away the greatest opportunity ever offered to a woman cursed with royal blood."

"It would almost be like meditating an act of usurpation," muttered the Archduchess; but her head was thrust forward, her eyes were glittering. "But the alternative!—who knows? It might be for the best. It may be my destiny. These Hungarians! There are no people in the world so easy to arouse by appealing, not to their nerves and passions, but to their chivalry and highest ideals." She stood up again in her excitement. "Do you remember when Maria Theresia, desperate and almost helpless, with Europe sucking at every vein of the Empire, the Austrian army an army of corpses—do you remember when she came here, young, beau-



tiful, pregnant, eloquent, and appealed to Hungary to save her, how the magnates not only went off their heads and cried that they would die for her, but inspired more than their own retainers with their enthusiasm?—until from every mountain, from regions so remote that William had never heard of them, there poured down tribes so wild and terrible that Europe fled in dismay. If Austria exists to-day, she owes it to Hungary—and no Hapsburg since Maria Theresia has ever acknowledged the debt. And again—when Napoleon bribed and my great-grandfather appealed, how they spurned the one and poured out their blood for the other—who was neither picturesque nor grateful. Throughout their history the Hungarian character has been astonishingly consistent, their nationalism has been as unwavering, in spite of conquests and immigrations, as that of your own countrymen. They are as independent as republicans and as loyal as the British. But it makes them the easier for tact and diplomacy to manage. If I convinced them that I really loved them, that I was capable of the right sort of rule—oh, go now. I will think all night. Come down early, will you?”

## V

When Alexandra presented herself at the door leading to the apartments of the Archduchess at ten o'clock on the following morning, she was informed by the groom of the chambers that her Imperial Highness awaited her in the “Hungarian House.” Her arms were full of newspapers and her eyes sparkled with excitement. She ran down the little staircase just beyond the door and out upon the first terrace, blinking in the brilliant sunshine, but pausing to look at the cool gray Danube, the splendid bridges, the gay city opposite; then wan-

## RULERS OF KINGS

dered about aimlessly for a few moments, her enjoyment still keen in the freedom of the Hungarian atmosphere, the unapproachable beauty of Buda, ancient city of kings. The hill which the palace crowns is so abrupt that its many terraces have the effect of the hanging gardens of old; and its pillared galleries of white stone, its wide and narrow flights of steps leading down the steep hill-side, through parterres of flowers or thickets of green to the great gates on the Danube, its upright unshaded lawns and winding ways lost in romantic gloom seduce the imagination away from the crimes that have been committed within the fair walls above, the prisoners that have languished in the dungeons beneath. When the most dazzling of suns floods the tremendous white front of the palace, with its carved and pillared rotunda, its straight and stately wings, the one bit of color in the crown of St. Stephen above; when the statues of kings seem quivering with life and the water of the fountain flies upward in an eager bursting of its bonds to leap outward on all sides and rush back as eagerly, in a confused and glittering mass of foam and spray, then must the most casual sojourner in the city of Pest, smoking his cigar in the shades of its corso, comprehend the proud spirit of Hungary. The royal palace of Buda is the embodiment of that pride, personal and national, the glorified symbol of a thousand years of steady and upward persistence, while battling with every misfortune that can assail a devoted nation.

“No wonder Kossuth lost his head when he was lord here for a few minutes,” thought Alexandra. “If he hadn’t—if he had sent Görgei on to Vienna—well, may I be in at the next death!”

She descended a wide flight of marble steps on the left of the palace, then another, and approached the little “Hungarian House,” built into a portion of the ancient

wall, almost hidden by trees as old. It was a gay little tea-house of primitive Hungarian architecture, its inner walls decorated with panels of native embroidery, the whole effect light, Oriental, frivolous.

Two of Ranata's ladies were reading under a tree nearby. The Archduchess was alone in the one room of the house. Her eyes were heavy. It was evident that she had slept little. They flashed, however, and she suddenly sat erect as she saw the newspapers.

"Ah!" she exclaimed sharply. "What do they say? I did not care to send for them, myself."

Alexandra threw herself into a chair and rattled the journals viciously. "I have come to read you a few select extracts. Oh, he hit the mark—hit it in the bull's-eye! I am told they are in such a state of enthusiasm and excitement over there that if he hadn't left last night he wouldn't have been able to get out of Hungary at all. Here's the first gun: 'The majestic words will find an echo in all parts of Hungary, which will ever remain in the debt of the great Hohenzollern, who has forever conquered the soul of every Hungarian; . . . the love and gratitude of the Hungarian nation will follow the guest of our King wherever he goes.' But that is mere rhetoric. Listen to this: 'In every line there is so much heart and so much sympathy with the Hungarian nation, its glorious past as well as its promising future, that it seems not the language of politics only, but of a loving friend, on whose well-meaning we may ever rely! Perhaps it will give cause for reflection in those parts of the German Empire which have been prone, without cause, to cast blame upon Hungary, now that they see with how great a sympathy the German Emperor expresses himself in our behalf.' Here is another: 'As a political assurance it is the grandest which ever came from the lips of the Emperor William himself. . . . Many wounds

## RULERS OF KINGS

are healed by those words, which put an end to such calumny.' There are two more. Of course there are columns, but I have marked the significant extracts. 'The toasts of yesterday will be written in the annals of the nation with letters of gold, and sustain and rejoice the soul of future generations. No Hungarian will read the warm and inspired words of the German Emperor without a joyful and a burning heart. No strange monarch has ever spoken to our nation with so much feeling.' This is the last: 'Where did the German Emperor find those colors for his palette? Why, they are our own colors! Where did he find that tune? It is the pulse of our own hearts! God bless this great monarch, who knows so well how to appreciate our striving country! We utter these words of parting to him with a never-dying gratitude!' There you are!"

"I tasted gall with every word, but I am glad they have been printed, for they will help me to accomplish my object. I need strong arguments—my request to remain here alone will be a tremendous innovation. I shall send these to my father at once, that he may have read them before our interview. They may or may not have been shown to him. If I personally request it, he is sure to read them, no matter who is at his elbow."

"The sole consolation," she continued after a moment, "is that William is not a Catholic. I doubt if the Hungarians would ever accept a Protestant king. Perhaps if Kossuth had been a Catholic he would have been stronger in his exile."

"William may have to turn Catholic yet, or Socialist, to keep his throne and get all the other things he wants. Surely religion—the incidental husk of it—cannot mean much to a brain like that."

“He would never let the Jesuits rule him,” said the Archduchess bitterly. “They have been the curse of the Hapsburgs, and their restoration constitutes Metternich’s chief claim to infamy. But their power over rulers in this enlightened age is incredible—perhaps, however, royalty is not so much enslaved by the Church as by its ancestors. Even I, to whom the Catholic Church is but one of many inherited forms, long since rejected by pride and reason—even I am sometimes the victim of that ancient sea of superstition that murmurs in the soul. I can see my father wash the feet of the poor and feel nothing but amusement. I can see him march bareheaded in the Corpus Christi procession, and only fear that he will get a sunstroke—his face was purple last June. But there are times in the cathedral, on great occasions of ceremony, when the mysterious colored dimness, the long sonorousness of priests, the glorified pageant, the divine music, and the intoxicating incense seem to liberate all the ghosts in my soul and send them to my head. Then I have a confused sensation of being in a past century—old doors are opened, old ecstasies, terrors, desires, creep forth. I long to prostrate myself and grovel, to scourge myself into a spiritual delirium, to feel the foot of the Church on my neck. Then creep out the old lusts of cruelty, of tyranny, of torture—what a mere ghost of power a civilized monarch has to-day! Can you imagine that there have been moments in my life when I regretted that?—when, under the spell of Holy Church, I have, for a moment, been a composite of the worst of my ancestors?”

“You are always picturesque, and you always make me rejoice that I am an American and not descended in the royal line. But I am astonished that you ever permit your reason, your personality, to be submerged

## RULERS OF KINGS

in such a fashion! I should think if there was one woman who could seal up her ancestors and leave them to moulder where they belong, it was yourself. You are not morbid, except in erratic, incidental, ancestral streaks."

"I don't think I am morbid in the usual sense, for I have too good an appetite and take too much exercise. But I am bound to have deeps and fissures in my soul, for the centuries have cut them there; and what *must* be in them sometimes affects my imagination. And my ancestors have a curious fascination for me—the idea that they may or may not have the power to shape the destinies of the living. There have been moments when I have been disposed to prostrate myself amid the remains of their mortal part in the crypt and demand their intercession. Did you know that Maria Theresia used to make her daughters, on the eve of marriage, go down into the crypt alone at night and pray among the coffins of their ancestors? There have been times—very rarely—when that idea has appealed to me with an almost irresistible force."

"For Heaven's sake stay here in Budapest, where you can live in the sun. You have grown mouldy in the Hofburg this last year, and your ancestors have had it all their own way. I thought you had got over that sort of nonsense long ago. This is the result of William and a sleepless night."

The Archduchess laughed. "Perhaps. I am willing to suppose that my predecessors have troubled me less all these years than they might have done without the fatal antidote of your American humor. Nevertheless, I have no right to be faithless to them, and I would not forget them if I could. And I find them much more satisfactory to contemplate than most of my living relatives, who, as a rule, have neither morals nor brains."



## RULERS OF KINGS

"I agree with you there. When Death lays his iron hand upon a mortal's power to bore, his virtues rise and sit upon the corpse. That is the secret of the superstition which makes us think kindly of the dead. Do you mind if I read a letter from Fess? I have been too excited even to open it."

"Pray do." Ranata smiled with both sympathy and interest. Then she sighed. "I believe your brother is the only person I envy—I mean the only person I'd be if some fairy would bid me choose. He has his destiny in his own hands. He has done such wonderful things! He is famous and powerful; his future holds the most astounding possibilities—and he is only thirty-one! Oh, your America! Where will you stop? And what will you do to poor old Europe?"

"Now you're talking! Come down out of your niche, with the worm-eaten past behind it, and identify yourself with us. Therein lies your only salvation. William and my brother have some great scheme on foot; I don't know what, but I know that much from a few words I happened to overhear between Fess and my father. William and Fessenden! They could turn the world upside down if they chose! Well?"

The Archduchess was leaning forward, her eyes blazing. "An alliance between William and your brother?" she exclaimed. She composed herself with a manifest effort, and added: "It is really remarkable—I know your father and Mrs. Abbott so well, and yet your brother—I have never seen him—not even his picture. You say those cuts in the newspapers during your war with Spain—"

"Were probably a composite of Roosevelt, John Jacob Astor, and Cervera. Fess, like my father, has

never had his picture taken. He hasn't the patience, and says he has no desire to display his weak side to the world—that the weak side of a man is more likely to come out in his photographs than not. It is hardly remarkable that you have not met him. First those years in South America, putting blood and iron in place of wind inside the Monroe Doctrine; since then he has had too much to do at home to come to Europe, except for two months in summer, when he brings a canoe and a knapsack. About his only other recreation has been the Spanish War. But this letter has the Berlin post-mark. I thought he had gone back. Let me see what he has to say."

She glanced through the short letter. "He is not going back at present. He has one of his periodical attacks of disgust for business and details, and will tramp over here for a month or two longer."

"Ask him to come here—to Budapest," said the Archduchess sweetly. "It is high time we met. And as he is the most distinguished of young Americans, I should like him to be one of my court. I intend to have the illustrious of all sorts about me here, in art, in letters, in music, and irrespective of noble birth. I intend to show Europe what a court should be."

"You *have* thought it out! And the Emperor? Are you sure? It is my turn to have misgivings. He will see many objections. There is no one so rigid in his traditions."

"I shall stay," said Ranata shortly. "He would never go so far as to follow some illustrious examples and shut me up. If the worst comes to the worst, I'll threaten to go to America and live there."

"Good! At last my seeds are showing their little green heads. Now I know you will succeed in whatever you put your brain to. You may count on me. I'll even

engage to help you alienate Fessenden's affections from William, and he is devoted to him."

## VI

The private apartments of the King, at the southwestern extremity of the palace, correspond with the suite on the southeastern corner, which had been furnished for his wife, and was now occupied by Ranata. He had sent his daughter word that he would receive her alone at four o'clock, and when she was announced he was standing on the balcony, looking down into the distant street behind the palace. There were excited groups of people in the street, and he guessed of what they talked. From the many old houses, fine and simple, on the still loftier hill which faced him, and from neighboring slopes above and about, from the villas on the precipitous heights of the Schwabenberg, the flags still floated, and it seemed to him that the German outnumbered the Austrian in the ratio of three to one. As he turned to greet his daughter, she saw that his face was more harassed than usual, but he advanced with the grace and courtesy which, even in his old age, were unsurpassed in Europe. The years which had robbed his heavy Hapsburg features of what beauty youth may have lent them had spared his light erect figure, his exquisite hands and feet. His genial eyes kindled at sight of Ranata, but he kissed her lightly and handed her to a chair. Had she been born twenty years earlier she might have been his idol, and as it was he admired no woman more and was proud of her. But not only had misfortunes, humiliations, reverses of every sort, and the cruellest personal afflictions that in number and degree have ever assailed a monarch atrophied his heart,

but he feared to find even the eidola of happiness in this gifted creature, lest the knife be driven into the responsive breast and his own earthly expiation of the sins of all his ancestors be the more complete. His ancient habit of temperate affection for his older and married daughters excited no misgivings. But if Ranata had never been permitted to know him intimately enough to love him, she sympathized with and admired him. If enthusiasm, hope, passion, were dead within him, he was equally without bitterness, without resentment, without jealousy, and in theory, at least, without indifference to the least of his subjects. Even the cruel insult of the day before had not stirred him to anger. He had lost and lost and lost from the day he had ascended the throne, and the driving of Austria from the Germanic Confederation, and substitution in supremacy of Prussia, must forever be associated with his name. In William's brief career Germany had been reorganized, strengthened, incredibly promoted in industrial importance. William received an occasional snub and reminder that he was two-thirds mortal, but to associate the idea of failure with him was as unthinkable as to imagine him in the robes of a monk praying for humility. Personally the Emperor and King could afford to pass his pyrotechnics by with a smile, but there was more to consider than his own sensations, and he was meditating an early retreat that he might consult with his Austrian ministers.

The room, with its olive walls and its lowered awnings, was cool and dim, but Ranata deliberately rose and placed her chair where the light would fall fullest upon her. Then she turned her powerful gray eyes on the Emperor, and he moved slightly; like the rest of the world, he usually saw his daughter's eyes through their lashes, and it was now at rare intervals that he was

## RULERS OF KINGS

reminded of the problem of his youngest born. He suddenly remembered that when he was, the laurels fell from his brow, and involuntarily he braced himself.

“I need not ask you, sir,” began Ranata, “if you recognized the calculation under William’s impetuosity last night. There is no doubt that he made the deepest possible impression on the Hungarians, that, if present conditions continue, no other subject will be discussed for months to come in this dissatisfied country, even to its remotest villages. At first I was merely humiliated, enraged, terrified. But I have thought all night, sir, and I have reached the conclusion that I have it in my power not only to obliterate the impression he has made, but to create one deeper and more persistent. His, he may not have the opportunity of renewing—you certainly are under no obligation to ask him here again. This is my plan: let me live here and keep the Hungarians, from magnates to peasants, constantly reminded of the great love they bear you. If I can make them love me, so much stronger will the bond be between this restive country and Austria.” She leaned forward and spoke as solemnly as if taking an oath of allegiance. “I know that if I am given my way I can preserve this state to the Empire, avert the calamity which all Europe expects to follow your death. I am willing to pledge every hour of my life to this great mission. I believe that every human being is put on earth to be of use in some form or other. Assuredly usefulness—to the uttermost moment—is demanded of us. So far I have accomplished no destiny whatever, and I do not for a moment believe that I had so many of the characteristics of my house concentrated in me for no purpose—although in endeavoring to find reconciliation to my lot I have sometimes argued myself into a belief of the blind law of cause and

effect. But I do not believe in it. I am here for a purpose, and the time has come for the accomplishment of that purpose. *I will not marry.* I am quite well aware that it is your intention to arrange an alliance for me before my thirtieth birthday; but there is no mortal power, sir, that can force me to the altar. I make no threats. I have no intention of resorting to any desperate measures. I am strong enough in myself. I simply will not marry. But I now represent a sinful waste of high usefulness. Moreover, the emptiness and monotony of my life have become quite unbearable. I ask that I may be permitted to exert, for the good of my country, the best of those qualities which have come to me from yourself and my ancestors."

The Emperor stared at her for a moment without speaking. He was as astonished as it was in his power to be at anything. Then he gave her the answer she expected.

"It is a subject for deep thought on my part, my dear child. A week from to-day I will give you my decision. Meanwhile there is no reason why you should not remain here if you desire it." Then, as Ranata merely continued to transfix him with her determined eyes, he continued hastily: "It is a great and generous idea, and I am much gratified to learn that you take so deep an interest in your house. I had thought you absorbed in books and horses. But are you sure you would not pine in this strange country? Remember, you would be obliged to send all your Austrian ladies home, and surround yourself with Hungarians. I, as you know, hardly dare to bring an aide among these people, so fierce in their national pride. The women are as proud as the men, and very independent, quite unused now to leadership of any sort. Every Hungarian woman in the higher aristocratic circles is a sort of queen, is a social



law unto herself. You are accustomed to the courtier, to the flexible—”

“I am sick of it! And as tact is one of the prerogatives of royalty, I hope you will give me credit for my share. As for being lonesome, nothing on this earth can ever approach the suicidal ennui I have experienced in the Hofburg. As for Schönbrunn, I loathe the sight of it. This change is necessary, sir. Moreover, Alexandra will be with me. And if there were drawbacks—do you think your daughter is the person to consider trifles when a great object is to be gained?”

The Emperor's eyes happened to rest on her hair. It flamed against his green walls. “Red-haired women are dangerous,” he thought. “It is well to keep them occupied. Why on earth doesn't she marry?” Aloud he repeated, “A week from to-day, Ranata, you shall have my answer.”

Ranata, having spent her first round, was content to retire. She knew that a definite answer was not to be thought of until the Emperor had asked the advice of his ministers. “But the idea made an impression on him, no doubt of that,” she informed Alexandra, whom she met in the garden. “And so did I. If I didn't tell him I would stay here whether or no, I don't think he has any doubt of my intention. If he won't give his consent, I'll spend all my money and all yours; and his refusal of the necessary allowance is the worst he would do, for he wants no more scandals. To remove me by force—and I'd leave Hungary in no other fashion—would be to make the world believe I was mad, and he has had enough of that. Besides, poor man, I made him think I should go mad if I didn't have my head for a while.”

“We are a wicked unprincipled sex when we want

our own way," commented Miss Abbott. "But to get it—that is the main thing; especially when there is a good and great end in view."

## VII

On the following Thursday Ranata was not surprised to receive a note from her father asking her to grant an audience to his minister Count von Königsegg, who went to Budapest for the purpose.

"Now for it!" exclaimed Alexandra. "Of course he's brought a corkscrew. Are your brain-cells hermetically sealed?"

"His corkscrew will do him no good. Nevertheless, I feel a certain apprehension—feminine, I suppose. He is the one person who has done me the honor to believe that I might play with politics in a manner to disconcert his clever manipulation of my father, and I have shown my dislike of him by ignoring his existence, as far as possible. He detests me; nevertheless, if I am able to convince him that I have no purpose behind the one I have advanced, I believe he will make no opposition to my plan: he has no desire to see William in the Hofburg and himself in obscurity. He will not have the least objection to using me—he is the sort to feel quite sure that a woman can be disposed of the moment a man sees fit. But if he thought that I had any ulterior design—"

"Try American diplomacy on him if you get in too deep—speak out bluntly and agitate his guile. Let him squirm himself into a corner, and then tell him to speak out or get out."

"I sometimes feel half an American," said the Archduchess Ranata Theresia.

Down the long front of the southeast wing of the palace is a suite of some ten or twelve rooms, large and small, beginning with the private dining-room and finishing with the red reception-room. The yellow Throne Room, or Great Hall of Ceremonies, runs parallel, occupying the width of the circle room and audience chamber, which flank it at one end, and of the circle room and blue drawing-room of its southern termination. From this last circle room opens another, which in turn leads to the private apartments occupied by the Queen of Hungary when there is one. The windows of these apartments, closed during the clouded last years of Elizabeth's life and since her death, were now open to the sun; the hangings were losing their musty odor, and the numerous belongings of Ranata had already obliterated the little individualities of the Empress. Ranata, whose strong soul had little in common with the unhappy woman who had permitted life to crush her, had tender pity for her mother's memory, but no great amount of sentiment. Not only were the rooms dingy and oppressive, but her own individuality was too strong to exist comfortably in surroundings stamped throughout many years by that of another; she had made up her mind that the day after her father's decision, whatever it might be, she should refurnish the four rooms of her suite; and when the Emperor's letter arrived they were full of stuffs, sent up from Pest for the approval of her Imperial Highness. Some pieces of curious brocade were pinned into the panels, and the dusty old rugs had vanished. The girls, ordered to remain in strict seclusion during this week of deliberation, had entertained themselves in their own fashion.

"I cannot receive him here," said the Archduchess, when she received the humble petition of the great minister for an audience. "Besides, I don't want to. If

I could help it no one should set foot in my personal surroundings — atmosphere — who was even uncongenial to me.”

“It is a family failing,” said Alexandra dryly. “But I always admired Ludvig for putting his head out of the window when he had to have his tooth pulled rather than have the royal atmosphere polluted by a dentist. It may have been uncomfortable for both, but it was magnificently consistent.”

“I am not Ludvig, and I have no intention of making a fool of myself,” replied the Archduchess, also with some dryness. “I’ll receive him in the tea-room; I like the blue walls. Shall I wear black or white? I look more imposing in black.”

“Oh, look your guileless best—white, by all means.”

Therefore, Ranata caused herself to be arrayed in a bewildering gown of a pellicular Eastern stuff, much embroidered, and billowing about her feet in the fashion of the moment. She wore her heavy hair in a gold net, and a string of pearls about her throat, exposed to the base. She looked girlish, if not ingenuous, and very lovely.

The Archduchess Maria Leopoldina, Obersthofmeisterin, or Grand Stewardess, of Ranata’s Household, together with one of the ladies-in-waiting, the Lectrice, and Alexandra, disposed themselves just beyond the door of the tea-room as the carriage which had been sent for the minister appeared on the bridge below the palace.

“It is fearfully hot, and he’s probably cross,” said Alexandra from the balcony. “Better begin with iced coffee and predispose him to amiability of a sort.”

And thus it came about that the subtle and wary minister tarried for a few moments beneath the youthful presentment of his sovereign in the brave uniform of the Hungarian Hussars, while four women smiled upon him

and flattered him with many little attentions. Then he went in to his fate.

Ranata had carefully arranged her features before the mirror, and had succeeded in banishing the expression of haughty dislike evoked by the mere mention of her enemy. When he entered her presence her eyes were half closed as usual, but their visible surface was soft. She dared not receive him with cordiality, but a frank admission of an enemy's stewardship of the plums she desired involved a certain amount of graciousness.

"This is very kind, your Excellency," she said gently, giving him her hand to kiss. "Had you permitted any one else to bring me the Emperor's decision, I should still have been tortured by many doubts; but now I shall know my fate at once." She leaned forward slightly and deepened her emphasis, her lashes lifting a little. "Of course I shall abide by what you and my father think best; but remember it is little less than life or death to me. No one knows better than you the dreary monotony of the lives of royal women. You know how my mother stood it! You who know men, and must know women so well, must have suspected that had it not been for the constant scandals which seem to be the peculiar curse of my house, I might have taken my life in my own hands before this; but the very years of suppression I have endured, ordered by a sense of duty to the dynasty, has strengthened and deepened that feeling until it rules my life. Now, for the first time, I have had an inspiration, which, if permitted me to act upon, will fill my days with no dishonor to my house. Of the good I may accomplish by remaining here I will not insult your understanding by dwelling upon. But, although we never seem to have been friends, I am so well aware that I am now in your power that I have given you this glimpse of my inner self—so be merciful," she added, as

if with an attempt at playfulness, while a smile rippled through her eyelashes.

For a moment the minister did not reply. He was not a man easy to nonplus, but he had come to test his strength with the haughtiest woman in the Empire, and he found himself staring at the loveliness of a softly impassioned girl. He had come to flatter, and his very spine thrilled at subtle compliments delivered in a voice whose cold music had become as sweet as a harp some one was playing in a distant chamber. He had come to sound with the elastic skill of time-honored methods, and his scornful Archduchess had thrown wide a window of her soul and left him blinking. He had entered with the smile and the supple backbone of the courtier, but quite aware that he might retire with his tail between his legs, and a fully matured enmity in his fertile brain. He was by no means sure of her even now, and he studied her face—she had lowered her eyes that he might; but there is no influence so potent, no wine so heady, as the flattery of royalty to courtier. And the—perhaps unconscious?—flattery of this woman of all women, of whose coldness those nearest to her complained, seemed to rise like a rosy mist to his brain. He swept it back, however; there was too much at stake. Although he did not hate her as much as she imagined, for he was philosophical where women were concerned, he had recognized in her a powerful individuality, a violent will, which, if given its head, might deprive himself of the sweets of existence.

“I am deeply flattered and grateful, your Imperial Highness,” he said finally. “Truly, like his Majesty, I had believed you to be absorbed in the purely intellectual life—”

“Oh, I was! I was!” exclaimed the Archduchess, with sad ardor. “But pardon me.”



## RULERS OF KINGS

“His Majesty is deeply moved by an idea as great in conception as it is indicative of an ardent loyalty to the dynasty. He was overwhelmed when you advanced it, and could give you no answer at the time. But he has thought of little else since, and has deigned to consult his ministers on the subject. As it was manifestly impossible for his Majesty to return to Hungary within so short a space of time, he did me the honor to appoint me his messenger. Even my visit will probably attract more attention than is desirable, but fortunately Count Zichy had invited me for the shooting, and I have taken pains to speak freely of the ostensible object of my visit to Hungary. Of course, it is my duty to kiss your hand in passing.” He paused and looked at her with a frankness which rivalled her own. “Your Imperial Highness,” he said impressively, “personally, I am deeply in favor of your remaining here. I believe you can accomplish all you so nobly and intelligently have conceived; and the time will come when we shall have need of the strength and loyalty of Hungary! More than three hundred thousand of the army are drawn from this state, and there are no better fighters in Europe. It is quite true that the seat of government should be in this division of the Empire, which is little less in area than all the other divisions put together. The Hungarians are a more progressive, enterprising, more *modern* race than the Austrian in certain respects; on the other hand, they still have much savagery in their blood; they have been so shut out from personal competition with the higher civilizations of Europe that they have too rich a soil for the seeds of degeneration. Their very lack of morality has always been robust, and to-day the Hungarians believe the city of Budapest to be as superior to Vienna in morals as it is in industrial activity. While Austria is retrogressing, disintegrating, Hungary

is progressing, has all her old virility, ambition, unconquerable patriotism. Moreover, when Ferdinand was elected King of Hungary, he promised to live here, and the Hungarians have never forgotten that promise, never ceased to resent the neglect of their capital. His Majesty's brief compulsory annual sojourn that he may keep the letter of the Constitution which commands that the King shall spend a portion of every year in Hungary, merely exasperates them—trade as well as society. Therefore your suggestion to remain here, promptly upon the extravagant hopes raised in their imaginations by the juggling of the German Emperor, and to use your great gifts constantly to remind them of their loyalty to the dynasty, has struck me as one of the shrewdest instances of statecraft which has ever come within my experience. Perhaps"—as the Archduchess blushed and gave a delighted little exclamation—"perhaps I should say that *was* the manner in which his Majesty's communication impressed me. It was such an idea as might have come to Maria Theresia, wise in statecraft from her youth—but—it is true—you have never condescended to politics—apparently had not given them a thought—"

"I have certain inherited instincts. And is not the capacity to rise to an emergency also a part of my inheritance? It is true that I have taken little interest in politics. My books, my music, my out-door life, my brilliant American friend sufficed me. Being uninvited, I could not meddle in affairs of state without bringing one more calamity upon this unfortunate house; and this dynasty, I do assure you solemnly, has all the loyalty and the fealty of my soul. With this sudden idea of mine politics have nothing whatever to do. I know the current history of Europe and I know William. God forbid that I should be expected to talk politics

with these Hungarians. It would be to turn the palace into bedlam, and I am accustomed to the repose of stellar voids. My only idea is to make them love me, to win to myself what they gave to Rudolf, to *increase*—I am more frank with you than with my father, and choose the word advisedly—the popularity of the dynasty. I shall entertain magnificently and constantly, give them such a winter as they have always claimed to be their right and never have had. I shall travel and make the peasantry merry. I shall give up my studies and throw myself into this programme heart and soul. But it is a purely feminine programme. If there is anything else I can accomplish, I know that your Excellency will instruct me.”

And here she proved the possession of really great talents. Pleading a necessary word with her Obersthofmeisterin, she left him alone for a few moments.

He drew a sharp but silent breath. He had never seen a woman look more like an angel, and he knew no woman in whom he was so convinced the devil made extended sojourns. He understood for the first time why she had disciplined her spirit to rise triumphant above that breadth of jaw, the grand sweeping lines of her body, above her diabolical hair; for he was too astute to question her integrity on this point. In a flash he understood why she would not marry. But ambition?—and a permanent and ever-widening outlet for that tumultuous spirit, that repressed and violent nature? Was she sincere for the moment? Had he been sure of even that he would not have hesitated to give his cordial endorsement to her plan. But he had persuaded the Emperor that unless they could be positive she meditated no act of usurpation upon the succession of her unpopular cousin, she must not be permitted a liberty with which she might even before that event plunge all Europe into war.

The Emperor, who asked no more of life but peace, had told him to go to Budapest, investigate the mind of his problematical daughter, and then act in accordance with what his Majesty believed to be an unfailing judgment. What a tool she might be, his Excellency had thought. She looked like anything but a tool. It suddenly rushed upon his brain that he had never seen a woman who looked so surely born to sit upon a throne. *Why not? Why not?* And if he were her good friend now, if he, whom she knew to be the arbiter of her destiny, if he were the one to place the sceptre within her reach—who so fitted to serve her hereafter? to rise higher and higher in power?—for this woman would take no puppet consort. Might not Europe welcome such a solution of an agitating problem? Not William, perhaps, nor Russia; but by that time William and Russia might be too occupied with each other to scramble for plums in the Austrian pie. And a young and beautiful empress, with an intelligence capable of assimilating all the statecraft her ministers chose to impart, always of imposing dignity, irreproachable, her heart and soul given to her state and people, her beauty the constant inspiration of the artist, would she not be worshipped by her subjects, and appeal to the interest and chivalry of Europe? If she had the tact to appear nobly indifferent to any such result during the lifetime of her father; if the Hungarians, immediately upon the death of their king, arose as one man and proclaimed her queen, she would tower above reproach or criticism, the most picturesque personality in the world, far more certain of holding the Dual Monarchy together than Maria Theresa with the aid of the Pragmatic Sanction; for to-day the majority of nations wanted peace and the preservation of the Austrian Empire. Franz Ferdinand might attempt a struggle for his rights, but it was more likely that the army of Aus-

tria would march to this woman than against her. It well might be that she alone could rouse England as well as Europe to defeat the designs of William. With Franz Ferdinand on the throne, war, internal and external, Königsegg believed to be as inevitable as the messenger of death in the palace of kings.

He had experienced a shock from crown to heel. The Archduchess re-entered the room and graciously asked him again to take the chair opposite hers. He commanded his eyes, but permitted his voice to tremble as he made his first cautious move.

"Your Imperial Highness—it is my bitter regret that I have never been permitted to know you before—would to God that you were a man—what a solution of all our difficulties!"

"But I am not a man," replied the Archduchess indifferently.

"It has flashed upon me—humilitating thought to my sex!—that the greatest of the Hapsburgs was a woman."

Ranata knew as well as he did that the greatest of the Hapsburgs was Rudolf the First, but this was not the moment to establish the claims of the dead, and she demanded, "Has it taken you all these years to make that discovery, or have you been too busy making history?" Her first words were delivered in the tones of one moved to cold analysis; her last were accompanied by an enchanting smile. She had drawn her eyelashes together, lest a flash escape; she was quite aware of what was passing in his agitated brain, and her own heart beat high.

The minister drew another long breath. He dared not express himself more plainly. He was absolutely in the dark as to whether she understood him or not. A false move and he might be the laughing-stock of the

Empire. Failure to comprehend this imperial sphinx and his future might be passed in heaven or upon his estates for all the world would know or care. Muttering an obsequious request, he rose abruptly and walked down the long suite of rooms. As his back turned Ranata's statuesque face twitched with an almost ribald mirth and her eyebrows peaked in a manner which made her look truly diabolical; but when the minister returned she looked pleading and girlish, a trifle nervous.

He stood in front of her. "Your Imperial Highness," he said, solemnly, "I came here in much doubt, for you have never permitted me the honor of knowing you. But this brief interview—the most enlightening of my life—has convinced me of the wisdom of your plan, and of your ability to carry it out in every detail. I believe that you alone can hold Hungary to the throne when the hour comes which we dread so deeply, for there is no question that you can reduce this gallant passionate race to a state of willing slavery. Your brain will become more and more fertile with expedients; but I should be deeply honored if you would maintain a regular correspondence with me, for this is an experiment with unimaginable consequences, and I shall give it my unflagging attention. There is much I may be able to suggest to you if you will deign to permit me."

Ranata had too much tact to rise impulsively, for she towered above the minister by not a few inches, but she held out her hand and shook his warmly, and her face was radiant. "I am so glad! I am so glad!" she cried softly. "And you do not hate me! I have been so desperately bored and hopeless that it has given me a certain pleasure to make enemies—if only for the sake of sensation; and as you were the most powerful man in the Empire, it amused me to defy you. In your mag-



nanimity you have forgiven me! If you knew how grateful I am, how I thank you!"

His Excellency trembled, but he kept his head; how, he never knew. "Your Imperial Highness," he said, "I, too, am a patriot. I am acting in this instance, as in all others, in the service of the Empire. If, in addition, I am to be permitted to act in the service of a woman—of such a woman—madam, will you permit me to retire?"

## VIII

"We parted with mutual distrust, a mutual increase of respect, even of tolerance, and a common determination to make use of each other," said the Archduchess to Alexandra, as she finished the account of her interview with the minister. They were alone in her salon. "I reserved my Americanism for a future occasion, and played the old European game of the cat and the mouse. He is not in the least sure which is the cat and which the mouse. Neither am I, for that matter; but I have the advantage of knowing him better than he knows me. However, here I am for the present."

Alexandra drew a long and almost voluptuous sigh of content. "No more awful evenings in the Hofburg!—whist with his Majesty, or, worse still, with M. L.; a little music; tittle-tattle about the same threadbare old royalties, the last novel—French and wicked—the play, the last baby—there are always several; yawns, decorum *ad nauseam*; mad desire to lie down on the floor and kick up your heels. Oh, just and beneficent Heaven that sent William to Hungary with a wasp at his heel!"

"Let us forget William—and Austria. Where are the cigarettes?"

The girls smoked in silence for a time, the Archduch-

ess staring hard before her, after her habit, as if she were poring over the cryptogram of the future. When the short Russian cigarette had burned to its mouth-piece she returned to the present.

"I suppose it will be wise to pay my new friend the compliment of asking his advice about my Hungarian household—about the Obersthofmeisterin, at all events. I will write him an autograph letter to-night. What tact I shall develop with a few weeks' practice! I wonder who the new duenna will be? But no one even he approved of could be worse than Maria Leopoldina, and, after twelve years in the arena with her, I flatter myself I am more than a match for the most masterful he could select."

The Archduchess Maria Leopoldina, a member of a younger branch of the House of Hapsburg, who had succeeded the scrupulous but too obsequious English governess, had been selected, after much anxious thought on the part of the Emperor, consultation with his ministers, and with his old friend the Princess Sarolta of Windischgrätz, as especially fit for her delicate post. The Empress's prolonged absences from court, as well as the inevitable suspicions engendered by her increasing repugnance for contact with common mortals, made it doubly imperative to give the headstrong young Archduchess a duenna who would, by precept and example, educate her conspicuous charge in the great responsibilities of her position and curb any bent to eccentricity. Maria Leopoldina, a conscientious woman of masterful temperament but considerable tact, had done her work well, and took to herself the credit of much that had been evolved by the thoughtful mind of Ranata herself. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that her early lectures, delivered to an impatient but imaginative young princess, had sown seeds which might have floated longer with a

more pliable guardian. For several years she insisted upon the observation of the very letter of her great authority; no friend could Ranata make without her approval, no acquaintance talk with for five minutes alone. The Archduchess had never appeared in the streets of Vienna without her, but in the country, particularly on Ranata's personal estate on the wildest part of the Danube in Upper Austria, where they were as secluded as soldiers in a border fortress, she wisely allowed her charge a good deal of liberty; and as the years went on she relaxed by imperceptible degrees the rigor of her sovereignty; she left the girl more and more to herself, merely asserting her authority at discreet intervals, that the rebellious nature confided to her should not experience the temptations of freedom.

She knew that if she had failed to win her august kinswoman's heart she had her respect and gratitude; for not only had she early suggested to Ranata the benefit she could confer upon her house by playing the rôle of the lofty and immaculate princess, devoid of common weakness, inaccessible to common temptations, but she had inculcated the great art of self-command, and in the depths of this profoundly accepted lesson Ranata had discovered the strength to endure her life, accept her colorless future, and dominate her nature by her intellect.

Between Maria Leopoldina and Alexandra there was no love lost, but there was a golden and bejewelled truce. Alexandra, even at sixteen—at which age both girls attended court functions, although tutors and governesses were in attendance for two years longer, under the general supervision of the Obersthofmeisterin—was too wise in the ways of royalty openly to defy this valuable woman, who rejoiced in the absolute approval of the Emperor and his ministers; and the Obersthofmeisterin, who often longed to shake her and pack her off to

## RULERS OF KINGS

America, dared not, in this one particular, brave the wrath of her princess. During the first two years of her reign, however, they were more than once perilously close to open war, and a fatal rupture might have been precipitated by the more impulsive Alexandra had not Mrs. Abbott arrived in Vienna for her step-daughter's eighteenth birthday, and during a moment of extreme tension. Grasping the situation and its dangers, Mrs. Abbott admonished Alexandra severely, and made her present the duenna with a magnificent set of diamond stars—given out of the fulness of her heart on this the most sentimental of birthdays. The present was peculiarly welcome to Maria Leopoldina, who, herself the youngest of her family, having married in her uncalculating youth a junior member of an impoverished house, was sadly deficient in that jewelled panoply which diverts the eye from the shabby gowns of so many of Austria's noble dames. Moreover, this concrete illustration of the vast wealth of the American girl inspired respect, if not awe, and these sentiments were nourished at decent intervals by other offerings of increasing magnificence. As time went on, Alexandra, too, imbibed the great lesson of self-restraint, and developed a high impersonal way of looking out upon life; she ceased to irritate the Hapsburg, and admitted her own debt as well as that of her friend. Nevertheless, she had no love for Maria Leopoldina, and was alive to all her foibles. To Ranata's remark she replied, assuming a severe and elderly demeanor, elevating her head until the roundness left her throat, from which her voice issued with a scraping sound:

“Will your Imperial Highness kindly remember tonight that the Princess Cockolorum is only entitled to one minute of your august notice, as it is necessary to remind her that her manner in public with Lieutenant

von Poodle is unbecoming in a member of the Austrian court, which has dignity if not morals? And will your Imperial Highness exert yourself to remember that the wife of the American ambassador, although no doubt charming, is still an American? It is not necessary to inquire after her entire family. And—my dear child, your hair looks like a rat's nest! I shall dismiss that coiffeur to-morrow!"

Ranata laughed. "She should be glad of a holiday, poor soul. I had rather be a poor prisoner of a princess than a slave of a duenna like an Obersthofmeisterin—I have an idea! Why not Sarolta? She is Hungarian. She is in every way suitable. She would be *persona grata* here, is loved and trusted by my father, and while standing to the world as an impregnable outpost, would really give me a free hand, and with all her cynical soul enjoy the experiment. I shall write to her at once to manage it—as only she can. That would be the last thing necessary to make me feel as if I had been born again. Now, Alexis, let us give our attention to these rooms. I think I shall have cloth of gold in these panels, and curtains of these Turkish embroideries. My writing-room must be blue. Shall I have my bedroom in cloth of silver and white?—and my dressing-room in these old-rose brocades? And all the furniture must be new—nothing ancestral here! There is an intoxicating freedom in the air of Hungary—ah! I really do feel as if I had been born again."

## IX

The Princess Sarolta was obscuring the moon with the smoke-clouds of her big black cigar. It was nine o'clock—dinner in the Királyi Palota was now served at half-past seven—and the court could smoke behind the

## RULERS OF KINGS

pillars and the vines of the long stone terrace beneath the west windows of the private apartments of the King without consideration of possible field-glasses on the heights above. The Princess, who normally resembled a mummy, looked more like a witch in her encircling fumes, and her eyes glittered and blinked behind the red disk of her cigar. They were black eyes, and their fires in youth, and indeed long after Nature had given her more than one admonishing nip and claw, had recklessly leaped to so many other combustible hearts that even now the court gossips disentangled the pulsing tales of her past from others more commonplace. But with wrinkles and man's manifest preference for her conversation had come not only reform but the evolution of a severe and uncompromising code of morals. She astonished Vienna for a number of years by the vehemence of her criticisms and her treatment of certain noble dames whose fires were still unquenched, or who found in intrigue that taste of liberty which knocks alluringly upon even the doors of Austria. With the mellowness of approaching age the enthusiasm of the Princess had tempered somewhat, and it was observed that she grinned behind her big cigar when an after-dinner scandal exhaled a faint perfume of novelty; but by this time her fame as a she-dragon was securely established. Her tactics, combined with a fortune inherited coincidentally with her reform, from a relative who had married a wealthy and, as it proved, childless Jewess of Budapest, gave her a unique and impregnable position which made her the most natural guardian in Austria for a young princess who had left her father's roof to hold court in his most conspicuous possession. The Emperor, who was a little afraid of Sarolta, but who asked her advice on all momentous domestic questions, bundled her off to Budapest with a deep sigh of relief. Her reputation



## RULERS OF KINGS

as a dragoness relieved him of much of the anxiety with which he had entered upon this radical experiment, and he had not chanced to take note of her mellowing. But Ranata had, and, believing herself exempt from the weakness to which the Princess still showed her teeth, knew that she would have the real authority, while the Obersthofmeisterin sat scowling in the foreground, her wrinkles impassive above the chuckling within. As for Count von Königsegg, Sarolta had begun his education while unwrinkled, and not only had done him many good turns since, but had taught him to believe that there was one greater diplomatist in Austria than the Princess Sarolta Windischgrätz, and that was himself. Therefore when, after a hasty and pleading note from Ranata, and a long and humorous petition from Alexandra, she gave the minister to understand that it was his wish she assume charge of his interests in Hungary, it was but a matter of hours before her women were packing her boxes. She had come to Buda in full possession of his confidence.

The situation amused her intensely, but while she was too wise ever to betray a confidence or to share her amusement of a man with his enemy, yet she did not scruple to use any secret she might possess when engaged in the manipulation of human destinies. She cared as little for Königsegg as for the Emperor, sentimental memories being no longer insistent. But Nature had denied her children, and she had a considerable hoard of affection in her erratic but wholly human depths. Now that Rudolf was dead, she cared more for Ranata and Alexandra than for any one in the world, and was determined, to use the phrase of her American protégée, that they should have the "time of their lives."

To-night she grinned amiably at them from the depths

of a rocking-chair, long since presented to her by Alexandra, which accompanied her wherever she went. The party was a small one: the Obersthofmeisterin and her charges, two young Hungarian ladies-in-waiting of her selection, the Countess Vilma Festetics and the Countess Piroska Zápolya, and two invited guests, Prince Béla Illehazy, a magnate, who, in simple evening dress, looked a middle-aged and somewhat humorous man of the world, and Count Zrinyi, whose national fire and still youthful ardors—he was thirty-five in years—had given him over to love of an American on the night of a great and memorable dinner. It had been decided that the Grand Chamberlain and other court officials were only to serve at great functions, and that those who were in waiting upon the Emperor during his annual sojourn were to give their services to the Archduchess when she demanded them.

Zrinyi was leaning against one of the pillars, his black eyes flaming down upon Alexandra, who smiled upon him indulgently; she thought him a nice boy who might be useful in the cotillion and in general advice of a lighter nature. They were all discussing the momentous question of the first entertainment to be given by the new court.

The dictum of the Princess Sarolta, that it must be a great ball, to which men and women should come in the ancient dress of Hungary, had been received with approval by all but Prince Illehazy, who scowled at his girth.

“I thought I should burst the other night,” he admitted. “And I must say that my native costume always makes me feel more or less a fool. I suppose I have lived too much elsewhere.”

“You are no patriot,” said his old friend, whose eye, as it followed his, twinkled with some malice. “I in-

sist that you give up Vienna and Paris this winter and remain here as my private cabinet."

"You may need help," he murmured, and he looked at Ranata.

"And we? Are we to wear Hungarian costumes, too?" asked Alexandra.

"By all means," answered Ranata for the Princess. "I have already designed mine; the skirts and apron will be of white lace, and the bodice of black velvet."

"That will be your second stroke of diplomacy," murmured Alexandra. "But it seems to me that I should be a screaming absurdity in an ancient Hungarian costume."

"Not if—not if—" muttered Zrinyi.

"Why not make it a fancy-dress ball, everybody to be a personage of the court of Matthias Corvinus, during whose reign Hungary reached the height of its splendor and power and prosperity?" asked the Countess Piroska Zápolya. She looked full at the Archduchess with innocent blue eyes which were too widely opened for frankness. She was excessively pretty, and her mouth pouted like a spoiled child's. She was a descendant of that Stephen Zápolya, vayvode of Transylvania, who, in 1526, after the terrible battle of Mohács, when Hungary was threatened with annihilation by the Turks, and her king lost his life, was elected to rule over the distracted country by the faction which believed in a native dynasty and peaceful relations with the enemy. Another powerful faction elected Ferdinand of Austria, and in spite of the occupations of the Turks, which gave the Hapsburg as little authority as his rival, his dynasty kept its grasp upon the shadow until it became substance; while the son of the trooper who had been raised to a position of such power and magnificence by Matthias that his ambition knew no bounds, was unable to ex-

## RULERS OF KINGS

tend his rule beyond Transylvania, and his dynasty ended in his son. His descendants, powerful magnates as they were, had two enduring grievances: their inferior descent as compared with that of the magnates whose line ran back unbroken to Árpád and haunted the mists beyond, and the ancient victory of the Hapsburgs. The first grievance was little discussed, but no Zápolya permitted himself or others to forget that his right to the throne was as great as the Austrian's. Impoverished, and knowing little of the world beyond Budapest, the present generation was even fiercer in pride than the majority of their order, and bitterer in their hatred of the Hapsburgs. They were wise enough, however, to know that Hungary had not the strength for a native dynasty, even could one be established without devastating civil wars, and the father and brother of the clever little maid of honor had been the first to fling open the gates and drive out the wild waters of unrest towards William of Germany. Count von Königsegg had advised the selection of Piroska, for he believed she would be hostile and a willing spy, and Sarolta had acquiesced because she believed that herself and Ranata would be more than a match for any disaffected young woman. Outwardly the Countess was irreproachable. Her manners were high-bred and charming; five centuries of intermarriage with the best blood of Roumania and Hungary had obliterated all characteristics of John Zápolya except his ambition. She was lively and cultivated, and there was nothing in her manner to betray her hostility. She was the only enemy in camp. The other maid of honor, Countess Vilma Festetics, although proud and reserved, had loved the dead Elizabeth and had transferred her large measure of passionate loyalty, since unclaimed, to the princess who, in her great beauty and greater isolation, seemed to her the most romantic

figure on earth. Without humor or more logic than the larger division of her sex, she was capable of martyrdom for her ideals, however narrow. But she was bright and shrewd, and never having trusted Piroska Zápolya, suspected that she might be too high in the favor of Ranata's enemies. In appearance the young Countess was of a type more often seen in Hungary than described; she had neither the sparkling blond nor the voluptuous brunette beauty which, with their womanly figures and happy animation, have made the women of that romantic country so famous. She was small and slender, and her coloring was drab; under the hauteur of her delicately cut pale face were the tense lines of tragedy. Her breeding helped her to control a high and intolerant temper. Of the most ancient blood in Hungary, poor, high-spirited, and proud, she had seen nothing of the world, but her high accomplishments and qualities, and the affection which she had inspired in the Queen while a child, had induced Sarolta to select her for what the cynical elder believed to be a temporary post. She was also glad to give the girl a few months of light-hearted luxury, and would have included many like her had it been possible.

"She is the sort that in a less enlightened day would have used the poisoned bowl and then killed herself at the foot of the altar," she had said to Ranata; "but she will be loyal to you, and when she has nothing on her mind she can be very lively and young."

"We have many costumes of the time in our chests, Highness," the Zápolya was saying. "I am sure that Miss Abbott would look charming in one of rose-colored velvet—to which she would be more than welcome; and if you conclude to ask the Deputies, some tailor here could use the others as models. We have also two or three of the purple velvet costumes with the long gold

chains, and the head braidwork of gold and pearls, worn by two of the three hundred youths sent by Matthias in the embassy to Charles VIII., King of France. If you were escorted into the throne-room by a great number of pages in this costume, Highness, the effect would be one of perfect loveliness."

The Archduchess understood her perfectly, but she felt her own strength, and was amused at the flash in the American's eyes.

Moreover, her mind grasped the peculiar advantages which a fancy-dress ball would afford herself. She said sweetly:

"The national costume during the reign of Matthias differed little from that of any other reign, I suppose?"

"It merely reached its height of extravagance. The national characteristics have always remained the same."

"Then, if you will allow me, I will look at your costumes, and, no doubt, find one that I shall be delighted to copy."

In spite of her hostility the little Countess was flattered. She assured her princess, with something like spontaneous enthusiasm, that she should order the costumes brought to the palace on the morrow.

"I have a painting of Matthias in his robes of state," said Prince Illehazy. "I wonder will any one have the courage to impersonate him? He was a mighty figure, that son of John Hunyadi, and I have not the slightest doubt that the blood of kings was in his veins. There is no man in Hungary, alas! fit to wear his mantle, not even at a fancy-dress ball."

"He was a plebeian," said the Countess Piroska, lifting her little nose. "And even could it be proved that John Hunyadi was the son of King Sigismund, all his fame, even the medicinal water named after him, could not obliterate the bar sinister."



"The little cat!" said Prince Illehazy under his breath. He replied, "When a man makes a success of his life the bar sinister lends him the added distinction of picturesque, and not only did the Knight of the Black Raven have the blood of real kings in his veins, but Sigismund united on his head the crowns of Imperial Germany, Hungary, and Bohemia. Sigismund had his faults, but he was the head of the Holy Roman Empire, and neither he, nor his great son, and greater grandson, need descendants to keep the family name alive."

"I suppose the ball must open with the Chardash," said Ranata hastily, and forbearing to glance at the crushed Zápolya. "And I do not know how to dance it!"

Zrinyi found his opportunity. "May I be permitted a suggestion, Highness?" he asked. "The Chardash has been ruined by society—is a miserable degenerate thing. They sway and glide and languish. Have you ever seen the peasants dance it? They have preserved it in all its original simplicity, energy, and variety. If you could see them—and then dance it here in the palace as it should be danced—it is never vulgar, never boisterous, merely virile, full of the abandon of a happy and healthy people—"

"But how can I see it? I learn any dance quickly, but I must see it."

"To-morrow is a *festa*," said Zrinyi eagerly. "The peasants will be dancing all day. If you would go far enough you would see them in their native costumes—impossible near Budapest; but if you would deign to go five hours on the train—to a village on one of my estates—"

"Deign!" whispered Alexandra.

The Archduchess turned to her Obersthofmeisterin

with a very pretty show of deference. "I should like it," she said. "And I believe it is the right thing to do. I could go very simply dressed; they have not yet seen me; I should be under no restraint—what do you think, *ma princesse?*"

"I shall have to go too," grumbled Sarolta. "And there must be no publicity about it. We must not get the reputation here in Budapest for eccentricities; neither must we ever explain ourselves—how early can we leave here in the morning?"

"At five?" said Zrinyi.

"And we can return late—the palace can be lighted up at seven as usual. I like the idea of seeing the Chardash properly danced once more—so be it, then. Mind you are at the station before us, Géra, and that you exert all your talents in carrying out the programme. We shall dine with you, of course."

"Hurrah!" said Alexandra.

"*Élyen!*" murmured Zrinyi.

Ranata for a moment said nothing. Then with a sudden impulse for which she could give no reason then or later, she turned to Alexandra and said, "Where is your brother? Have you heard from him?"

"Not a word since I asked him to come here. He had probably started on his wanderings before my letter reached Berlin. He may be on the Russian steppes or over in Pest. The one is as likely as the other."

## X

Fessenden drew his leg over his horse's neck and looked idly about him. The sun was directly overhead; he had forgotten his compass, and, apparently, he was lost in the very middle of the great plain of Hungary. But

he had been lost many times before, and in far worse places than this green and smiling expanse; so flat and lying in an atmosphere of such clarity he could well believe the gentle Magyar boast that with the naked eye a man could be distinguished from a beast at a distance of fifteen miles. There appeared to be nothing whatever on the horizon; but an occasional small farm dotted the prairie, and here and there he saw a goose girl with her little flock, a shepherd in his native costume: a long white coat of spun wool, with panels of black embroidered at the edges; a garment as immaculate as if just from the loom, and swung carelessly about the shoulders, the sleeves evidently designed for ornament alone. The little goose girls might have stood for a study in lonely childhood; as Fessenden turned his head one was the solitary figure in the vast expanse behind him; but when he passed her she had nodded brightly and seemed quite content with her lot. It was not his first visit to Hungary; he had voyaged on the Danube and the Theiss in his canoe, and had climbed Retyezat to the lake of Zenoga, making his way thence into Roumania. He knew something of the language and much of the hospitality of the amiable peasant people, and could recall no other country in whose wilderness he would rather be lost. Moreover, the great plains of Hungary reminded him of the wild reaches of his own country. They were green and smiling, indescribably friendly and gentle of aspect, in spite of the barbarous hordes, the fierce battles that had ravaged them, the blood that had soaked their soil; and the American deserts, without history of consequence, scowled eternally at the sun that devoured them, and gave no hospitality to man. But both represented Nature in one of her abrupt desires to emulate the plains of Space; both gave man a sense of personal freedom, of disseverance from the complica-

tions of life. And the great Alföld had long since suggested to the practical mind of Fessenden what could be done with the Western deserts; in the last five years he had reclaimed the largest of them by means of a complicated system of irrigation, and encouragement of immigration from the Eastern States. One of his dreams was to make the United States fertile and productive from end to end, if only to relieve the congestion in the great centres and give the plain people of his country the happiness they constantly, with reason or without, demanded as their birthright. But he had sighed humorously more than once as he reflected that to compass all his plans would require at least two more lifetimes than Nature had placed at the disposal of any man.

But he had accomplished a great deal, and he was only thirty-one. Thirty years more, and did his energies survive devastating tropical fevers, the rarely relaxing strain of organizing and guarding industries, investments, transit systems, the ever-trembling aggregations of capital called Trusts, sound a money basis as his own were built upon, all the manifold ramifications of a fortune, which, through the increased resources of the country during the past ten years, through his own and his father's genius, and by the mere force of momentum, was now close upon a billion dollars; still far in the lead of all the other colossal fortunes which in the past decade had raised the United States to a position no less menacing to herself than to the rest of the world; did not only his health, his life, survive the strain, but his ambition, his hope, his faith in the worth while, then might he expect something like immortal fame.

Most men would have said that he had fame and power enough to satisfy any man of his years. His

accomplishment in South America alone had made his name a byword on two hemispheres. In company with his college friend, Jeremiah Keene, who promptly renounced the Northwest, he had gone to South America, intent upon fencing it off from European invasion and saving his country from what he believed must otherwise be an inevitable and humiliating war. Privately, he thought the Monroe Doctrine an obsolete absurdity, and heartily wished it never had been conceived. Like all of his countrymen who thought, he would infinitely have preferred the civilizing forces of Europe in South America to the tumultuous opera-bouffe republics of vicious hybrids, where no American could invest his money with a reasonable certainty of seeing the tail of it a year hence; but the Monroe Doctrine was as sacred to the American people as the Lord's Prayer, therefore the only thing to do was to make it theirs in fact as well as in fancy, and such an accomplishment must be the work of one man, of a citizen of the United States, who possessed that hitherto unheard-of combination of boundless wealth and burning patriotism. The government would never give a serious thought to the matter until the fleets of Europe were in the Caribbean Sea.

The three years in South America Fessenden looked back upon as the most picturesque and satisfying of his life. He had twice nearly died of fever, and he had been stabbed and shot, but life had been adventurous, exciting, never worth a moment's purchase; above all, one long test of his gifts and resources, with victory in the end. Where immediate bribery had availed not with the suspicious villain in temporary power, he had tracked the biding rival to his lair, furnished him with the necessary outfit and promises, while Keene and other agents persuaded the ever-disaffected people that an-

other revolution was due. With the impromptu gun-boats and inexhaustible ammunition sent down by Mr. Abbott, the revolution was an invariable success, and the enthroned dictator, with all the vices of his kind, was still shrewd enough to comprehend that did he wish his reign to be permanent he must be true to his benefactor and give him a free hand.

As a state passed into Fessenden's control he built a railroad close to the coast, and as he employed native labor as much as possible, and there was a rapid influx of American merchants, he was revered as the White God who had brought security and prosperity to a tormented country.

With the more advanced states it was a mere question of capital, particularly as the enterprise was a private one, and sure to bring an increase of civilization and wealth. The last tie had been laid seven years ago, and South America girdled by a complete system of railways, with at least one train on each section running daily. To-day the trains had increased ten per cent., many thousands of discontented North Americans had emigrated, there were American school-houses, churches, villages, and towns in every state, and a new and enormously profitable investment had been found for American capital. Four hundred thousand negroes had emigrated, and, reverting easily to a state of amiable and naked barbarism—sinking to the bottom as naturally as the black mud of the Mississippi—worked in the fields for the white man and forgot the Constitution of the United States. Fessenden's praises had been sung until he might have become conceited and obnoxious had it not been for the hostile press, which called him a robber baron, an unscrupulous blood-letter, and a future Czar; and so preserved the balance.

Then had come the long years at home, varied only by



the yearly tramp in Europe and an occasional visit to South America, where Keene was his general representative, and his boyhood chum, Jeff Hunter, his scout and secret agent. Two-thirds of the control of affairs had gradually passed into his hands, but he had found time to carry out his father's more personal programme as well as his own: the great army of working-men in his employ believed in him blindly, and withstood the pressure of trades-unions. He had, indeed, raised the standard of wages throughout the United States, and had made so many bitter enemies that much of his best talent was consumed in circumventing the attempts of other great capitalists to ruin him. With the decent laboring man he was more popular than any President of the United States could hope to be; and this class was not only grateful for his actual benefits, and appreciated his sincerity, but believed that he had been as especially created to pilot the United States through her difficulties as the great men of the early days of the republic. His methods and his genius were different, but so were the times. With the professional politician of the laboring class, with that breed who made their bread and beer by agitating, he was deservedly unpopular, but he now had most of them in his pocket, and they gave him little trouble. He hoped to bring about a condition of living in the United States which would avert a death struggle between capital and labor; if this task were beyond him, then would he at least be in a position in some measure to control it.

When the war broke out with Spain it was a matter of deep mortification and disappointment to him that the great electrical and mechanical ideal he had conceived in his youth was so far from completion. It had, indeed, given him more trouble than all his other enterprises together. Three accomplished electricians had met

with violent deaths in the building on the prairie, and he had their discontented families on his hands. Two reporters had been maimed for life while attempting to solve a mystery which annoyed the public, accustomed to the easy elucidations of the press, and others had "lost their jobs" for failure as signal, if less painful. All these men were among Fessenden's bitterest and most enterprising foes.

Again and again, when his keenest attention was demanded in New York, he had received an excited telegram bidding him hasten to the spot and witness the final combination which was to affect the great result; and as invariably he had added to the sum of his disappointments. Five years ago the buildings, in the course of a wind-storm, had burned to the ground, and not only the difficult and expensive machinery had gone with them, but the personal effects of several hundred men. More than once Fessenden's faith had been shaken, and even with the vast resources at his disposal he had hesitated before the increasing costliness of his coy ideal; but he dreaded the possibly demoralizing effect of his first failure; the position in which he could place the United States lured him on; and his father believed in the idea and encouraged him to persist. When the war threatened, Fessenden went out to his Western settlement and worked in the laboratory and machine-shops himself. At the last possible moment he hastened home and raised one of the most satisfactory regiments that went to Cuba. By this time he was a rigid disciplinarian, and his original genius for detail was fully developed. He also found his opportunity to distinguish himself, and returned to New York better pleased with life than since he had left South America.

And the old Fessenden? There was much of him left,

for strong individualities with the eternal boy in them change less than psychologists would have us believe, however much they may develop. He was less enthusiastic about some of his old ideals; his patience was at the same time greater and less; he was even more practical than Nature had made him, matter of fact and intolerant of shams, and somewhat hardened and cynical by his constant manipulation of fabulous wealth and the buying of men. Although money would never be his god, his life and times had taught him to respect, almost to reverence it as the mightiest force in the world of his day. He had in his brief span watched the crumbling of ancient aristocracies, the progressive ascendancy of the middle classes all over Europe, their reconstruction of power in their various states, their contributions to solidity and permanence, their slow absorption of the helpless classes above, and their increasing contempt for royal figure-heads; in his own country he had witnessed an outburst of wealth that in volume and results had never occurred before in the history of the world. He saw the financial centre of gravity swinging steadily from London to New York, the enormous aggregations of capital, combined with the unlimited production of the United States, controlling the markets of the world. Money had raised the United States from a negligible quantity, often mentioned with disrespect, into a menace which was winning for her the precarious tributes of hatred and abuse, more especially since she had let it be seen that she estimated affectionate overtures at their just value.

Therefore was her most characteristic product filled with a quiet and gentle arrogance, sadly, if contemptuously, confident of the illimitable powers of wealth, and owing to a sincere respect for but one man in Europe. With that man, in spite of a deep and mutual friendship,

he played many a game of chess, and once in a while he was beaten.

He no longer regarded the severe and oftentimes thunderous visage of William of Germany with envy; for time and work, fever and bitter anxieties had robbed his own face of all its freshness and most of its youth. His long body had lost its lankness, and was closely knit, properly covered, and very erect and imposing; but his face was thin, sallow, lined, and his finely cut features had acquired the sharpness peculiar to the American of intellect who gives his life to practical affairs—the sort that has the mere million-making kink is always as fat of face as of wit. But his smile was still quick and delightful, and his eyes, if sharper, were as bright and dark, sometimes as happy and eager as ever. He had acquired the trick of throwing back his head, lowering his upper lid, and darting a look over a cheekbone, which was merely impish, or peculiarly disconcerting, according to his mood. As regards the rest of his personal appearance on this October morning in Hungary, he wore a sweater, the oldest pair of trousers in his wardrobe, and a straw hat with the brim turned down—by which it will be seen there was a good deal of the old Fessenden left.

Indeed there was a great deal; and as he rode straight towards the gala village on Count Zrinyi's estate, he was in a very susceptible not to say sentimental frame of mind—which was usually the case when he was alone in Europe. The fountain of romance in the depths of him still bubbled. He had worked it deeply in the way of adventure and the realizing of patriotic ideals, superficially when he met an attractive woman. But life had pressed him too hard for love; moreover, he was easily disillusioned, and this particular ideal increased in stature and seemed ever more impossible of attain-

## RULERS OF KINGS

ment. He stood on a lonely height himself, and he wanted a woman who stood on one as lonely.

### XI

Fessenden stood for a few moments at the window before entering, although he had danced the Chardash many times and was arrayed as one of the elect. The deserted street of the village, and the muffled strains of a gypsy band, had informed him as he approached that it was a day of dancing and feasting, and he had despatched a casual boy to summon the tallest young man of the village. From the genial peasant he had borrowed a native costume, and without the aid of gold—for he carried a love potion in his indifferent command of the Magyar tongue. Another New-Yorker might have been daunted by the white divided skirt, which looked like anything but trousers, and the white blouse hanging free above it, but not Fessenden. He would indeed have preferred the Sunday best which the man had offered him to his own undoing, but had generously refused it. The men all looked very fine in their gay cloth or leathern jackets, embroidered, inlaid, their bright sashes, loose shirts and flapping trousers, embroidered with worsted or silk; but the women, after decorating their lords and brothers, would appear to have had no time left to enhance their own charms, for they wore common cotton frocks and had made no attempt at adornment beyond a ribbon or a string of glass beads.

The room in which they danced evidently belonged to the rich man of the village. It was of fair size for a peasant's house, and its prints of saints and Mary were draped with embroidered towels. The older folk sat against the wall, and some sixty young people danced in

## RULERS OF KINGS

what at first sight looked to be a solid mass. The Chardash was near its finish, and the couples were executing the vigorous and intricate figures, even separating for a second and flying together again, without the collision of an elbow or the twitch of a facial muscle.

Suddenly Fessenden swore in three languages and clutched the arm of his host.

“Who is that girl?” he demanded

“I do not know her name. The Count came two hours ago with two—Austrian peasants,” he said, “but we doubt—who wished to learn the Chardash. We know nothing further, except that they speak Hungarian well and are virgins, for they wear their braids hanging; but we are curious, for that one you admire is very pretty and lively, and the other is as beautiful and queenlike as a Roumanian peasant—observe her, my friend.”

The music had ceased and the crowd was melting towards the open. The girl worthy to be compared to a Roumanian stood almost in the middle of the room talking with pleasing humility to a young man who, even in his peasant’s costume, was plainly the lord of the village. She wore a common blue cotton gown a size too small for her, and a kerchief pinned so tightly about her head that only half an inch of hair brushed flatly backward was visible. But the figure was magnificent; the hands were small, pointed, white; the skin of face and throat had never been exposed to a peasant sun, and the visible hair was red. The girl suddenly raised her eyes, and Fessenden screwed up his own and left the window.

So he had seen the Archduchess!—was about to meet her at last! The fountain burst its bonds and flew to his head. His deep, almost passionate love of adventure shook him slightly from head to foot. The color



came into his face, and his nostrils quivered. If he could only corner his sister and warn her before she betrayed him by a feminine scream. She was standing just within the door arranging the ribbon at the end of her long plait of hair, which, like many another, had been disordered by the energy of the dance; and the hanging tresses brought forward for reconstruction by herself and several other maidens may possibly have fetched a sigh from lips too soon surrendered. Fessenden entered and placed his back between her face and Ranata.

"Now don't even raise your eyes," he said rapidly. "I want to be unknown here. I want you to introduce me to her and not tell her who I am."

Fessenden had underestimated his sister's accomplishments. "I won't do anything of the sort," she replied, smoothing her kerchief with steady fingers. "It is just one thing I should never dare to do. The responsibility shall be entirely your own."

"Very well. I can manage it if you do not betray me. What on earth does this mean, anyhow? Are you and she here alone? I don't see the ghost of a chaperon."

"Our first idea was merely to look on, but we had no sooner arrived at Count Zrinyi's castle this morning than Sarolta was attacked by the gout—or pretended she was; she is an angel—and ordered us to our rooms. We made Zrinyi borrow clothes from two of his servants—and here we are. I've never had so much fun in my life—neither has Ranata." She looked him over. "You are not a bad imitation," she admitted. "So many of them are fair, and luckily they all wear their hats. Pull your brim a little lower; your eyes are hopelessly American. Of course you'll fall in love with her—I've seen it coming for years; but don't propose on the spot and spoil all our fun."

“What do you take me for?” and Fessenden left her to an admiring peasant and sought his host.

“That girl is very pretty,” he said discontentedly, “but I can’t dance with a girl so much shorter than myself; I am always swinging her off her feet. Will you introduce me to the other Austrian—or Roumanian, did you say?”

“What is your name, my friend?”

“Árpád Hunyadi will do as well as any other.”

The peasant embraced him on both cheeks. “A great name,” he said solemnly. “All I have is yours.”

A moment later Fessenden was standing before the Archduchess, while Zrinyi’s willing eyes were diverted by Alexandra.

“You will dance this with me?” he asked in Magyar, his eyes bashfully lowered.

“You are not a Hungarian!” she exclaimed.

“Alas, that your first word should be so cruel! It is true that I speak the German tongue better—I have been much away—but my children shall speak only Hungarian.”

“It is to be hoped so.”

“You will dance with me?”

“I do not know. I am tired.”

“One is never too tired for the Chardash. It would raise a Hungarian from the grave.” This was uttered with simple fervor. He felt her powerful gaze and dared not raise his eyes. But the majestic beauty of her figure was in the direct line of his vision, and involuntarily he lifted his hands to tuck in his shirt, but be-thought himself in time.

“I don’t know,” repeated the Archduchess coldly. “I am tired, and I do not happen to be a Hungarian.”

“A Roumanian? We have all said it; you are so beautiful.”

"No."

The leader of the gypsy band struck his cymbal. His brothers drew the first long wail from their fiddles. The crowd thronged in.

Fessenden raised his hands and placed them firmly about the slender waist of the Archduchess. "Put your hands on my shoulders," he said. "I shall not let you go."

She drew herself up rigidly for a moment, then obeyed him.

"I know who you are," she said.

"So much the better," replied Fessenden.

"This is a great moment in the history of Hungary!" said Zrinyi solemnly.

"It is!" said Alexandra.

"A daughter of the Emperor of Austria and a Hungarian peasant! What a symbol! It is full of portent!"

"If you only knew how much!"

"Ah, you dream of a universal democracy, I suppose. I fear I dream only of the independence of Hungary—with William as enlightened overlord—and the humiliation of Austria."

"I can't talk politics and dance the Chardash."

Fessenden summoned to his eyes a far and impassive stare. Ranata pointed her lashes to her cheeks. They were the tallest couple in the room, and those who sat had much to say in comment. There was little to criticise, for their natural grace and beauty of form diverted the eye from their few mistakes; and in truth those whose blood is quick must learn the Chardash easily. For a time the music is a wail of almost hopeless longing, and the feet and body move hesitatingly, monotonously, the man and woman at arm's-length; gradually it grows sweeter, more inspiring, and the feet move faster—life

seems to awaken. The music swells and the man takes the girl's left hand and raises it high; then, as it becomes triumphant and peremptory, he swings her faster and faster, executes wild and rapid figures, stamps his feet, snaps his fingers in the air, increases his speed to that of the whirlwind, flings his partner from him and catches her again, to whirl and whirl and whirl in a circle scarcely larger than his feet; and all without a moment of forgetfulness, a rude embrace, a change of expression. "It is the story of elementary passion before man was created to express it," Ranata had said to Alexandra before they had ventured to take part; and certainly the Hungarian peasant, intelligent and gay, but polite and dignified to his marrow, is worthy of a place beside the impersonal artists of any civilization.

Nevertheless, the Chardash is so intoxicating that no one can dance it perfunctorily, no matter how self-conscious at starting; and there was nothing here to distract the attention of the most fastidious: the air was pure, for the windows were open, and the Hungarian peasant is clean. No matter what the pressure of the speed, not a foot was trodden, not a temper shaken. Fessenden had danced half the native dances of the world, sometimes in hours of greater abandon than this, and Ranata had a natural love of the dance and indulged it whenever possible. As she had recognized and intuitively obeyed her friend's brother, she realized in a flash that for sixteen years he had occupied a silent but permanent place in a shadowy realm that was hers alone. He had been Alexandra's favorite theme from childhood, and Ranata's interest had never flagged. His sister was as truthful as most women, but in her extreme youth she had possessed a violent imagination, and her unknown brother, dwelling in the wilderness, had inspired it to deeds which had caused the little Archduchess to sit

open-mouthed for hours as she drank in his blood-curdling and heroic adventures with Indian tribes, robber bands, pirates, and wild beasts of every variety whose pictures were to be found in Alexandra's natural history. He had seemed to her the most splendid and picturesque of living creatures, and although the reduction of Alexandra's allowance for a year to the wages of a footman by her perturbed father had cured her of the habit of exaggeration, she still could tell a pretty tale, and there had been much to recount during Fessenden's sojourn in South America and after his return. To a princess living the most conventional and restricted of earthly lives he represented all that the world, beyond palace walls, held of romance, of freedom, of the grand free play of personality. As she grew older she forbade her fancy to lead him into the backwaters of sentiment, that being a part of the necessary discipline of self; but there had been times when the effort had exhausted her. Two thoughts had flashed through her mind as she realized that she stood face to face with him at last: the one came from depths she did not pause to analyze—"If I had suddenly heard that he was dead, instead of meeting him like this, I should have been appalled by a sense of personal loss." The other thought flew straight from superstition and made her for the moment the sister of the peasant-women about her—"This colored frock! I might have known it would bring me bad luck!"

In a moment she had angrily dismissed both suggestions, but she endeavored to nurse a general resentment. She had been taken abominable advantage of. He had known who she was and dared to treat her like any ordinary girl masquerading. That royalty, or aristocracy for that matter, moves on unselfconscious heights is one of the fictions of fiction. The aristocracies of Europe

## RULERS OF KINGS

may not, in the manner of the American, carry their ancestors like a bunch of chips on their shoulder, but, like royalty, they are "simple and unaffected" only so long as they are not expected to be humble and are not approached by the wrong sort of people. The intense dramatic moments of William of Germany might alone convince the unthinking of royalty's sense of its own value.

Ranata was not dramatic, or at all events had wanted opportunity; but had she inherited the simplicity of her mother, which assuredly she had not, she would have found it a difficult task to forget that she was the daughter of an emperor. But she had experienced no such inclination. She might sigh for liberty, and in erratic moments wish she had been born an American, but to her composition had gone the haughtiest particles of Europe. She was not only the last born of an ancient line of kings who had exercised despotic rule over vast possessions, but who had built about themselves a triple golden wall of ceremony. No court had ever been so uncomplaisant, no royal favor so difficult to gain; today no house in Europe was so tenacious of its ancient formalities. Every act of Ranata's life to which the least importance could be attached had been the combined result of her active consciousness that she was the daughter of the Emperor of Austria, and of instinctive ancestral tribute.

Therefore did the Archduchess Ranata Theresia feel that her sacred self had been trifled with, and was filled with wrath against her friend and her friend's brother. But it is both difficult and anomalous to nurse the severer passions while moving one's body and feet to the cry of the Chardash for the fulfilment of human happiness. A mist rose to and diffused itself through the historic tiers of Ranata's brain, and created an illusion.



## RULERS OF KINGS

The music of the Chardash, older than the House of Hapsburg, as old, perhaps, as that mysterious gypsy people who brought it to Hungary, was the song of the wind among peaks about a wild and lovely valley high in the Eastern Alps. She was primeval woman dancing with primeval man. A silver hammer rang on the distant rocks, the wind drew its bow on the young branches of the trees; all the new world moved in measure about her, groping towards its birthright. The vague melancholy promise of Nature grew ever more distinct in its utterance, swelled in fuller volume from the heights and passes. The man felt it and swung her with swifter assurance, clasped her surrendered waist more firmly; then in the wild and breathless whirl, where the male, inspired by the reckless adhortation of the music, expresses the insolent triumph of his manhood, and the woman alone hears the persistent note of sadness, the warning of the unfulfilment of mortal desire, the heroine of this tale was the creature of another will. In that dizzying circle she followed his every motion, the peremptory guiding of his hand, with neither thought nor desire of resistance; and when he flung her scornfully from him she leaped back to his embrace as automatically as the meanest peasant in the room. At the end she was conscious of nothing but that the mountain-tops were flying about her in a furious attempt to meet and crash together; the shouting of the men, the abrupt loud stamping of their feet, as the musicians played like madmen, came to her confused senses as the forces of the earth bursting their bonds; and when the illusion abruptly finished and she found herself on the veranda she leaned heavily against the wall and sought for nothing but her breath.

Fessenden mopped his streaming face. "By Jove!" he remarked, "that was warm work! But it's a great

dance—and you—you—were simply magnificent! When I get my breath I'll tell you how grateful I am."

Ranata lifted her head and assumed an expression of frigid severity, which shone oddly from a face that was wet and red from hair to throat.

"Would you like to walk up and down the road for a change?" asked Fessenden.

"No!" exclaimed Ranata, still short of breath. "I should not."

"You are not ready for another?"

"No, I am not ready for another!" She spoke with an asperity quite unnatural in a princess who never forgot to be gracious, lest she wound the *amour propre* of those at her mercy. The tumult within her had soured and fermented into a sudden hatred of the colossal wealth, the constant exercise of a power greater than her father's, and the habit of republican independence, which enabled this man to stand before her as unconcernedly as if she were a girl of his own class. Her wrath might be unreasonable, but she was in no mood to admit it, and she was divided between a desire to relieve her tension with tears and for power to humiliate the man.

Fessenden, who was too hot and thirsty to be sentimental, much less conscious of outraged royalty that he had been swinging in the Chardash, glanced about longingly. "I think there must be wine in that shed," he said. "Where there is a crowd after the Chardash there usually is wine; and doubtless the Count has set up a barrel of his own. If you will wait here I'll fetch you some."

As he walked away, his white blouse and skirts flapping in the breeze, Ranata sank upon a bench. For the first time in her life she was nonplussed, at a loss what to do. Her long experience with Alexandra did not

help her in the least. Not only had she always regarded the American girl as *sui generis*, but it had been her royal pleasure that she should be so. She suddenly became aware that her friend was standing before her.

"Of course you are angry," said Miss Abbott contritely. "And I must confess at once that I knew he was here, and might have warned you. But Fessenden is Fessenden, and I knew that he would do what he wanted in spite of me or any one else. Would you rather go at once?"

The Archduchess rose with alacrity. "Yes," she said, "let us go as quickly as possible."

## XII

Fessenden sat over his coffee on the terrace of his hotel in Pest, and stared up at Buda with little appreciation of its evening beauty. The sunset glow still lingered, pushing forward the dark masses of the Schwabenberg, where brilliant points of light were appearing among the dim outlines of the villas. On the long ridge above the Danube, and the abrupt irregular heights beyond, lights were darting forth rapidly, and one wing of the palace was illuminated. The irregular groups and single dots of fire gave the fissures and cliffs, the ruins of the citadel on its isolated height far to the left, and the beautiful outline of the palace a dark and savage grandeur. On the rough side of the cliff, far below the citadel, was a mass of lights like a meteor fallen upon a void, so dark were the woods and rocks about the little kiosk where men and women drank their iced coffee to the music of the gypsies. Along the ridge on the right of the palace were the melting outlines of public buildings, of ancient churches, the arches of the chapel above

the dust of Shêkl Gül Baba, which alone commemorates the century and a half of Turkish occupation, and the modern structures which cover the baths the Romans built two thousand years ago. Down on the river bank, in the shadow of the precipitous gardens of the palace, the cafés were brilliantly alight, and the music of cymbal and fiddle floated over to Pest and mingled with the strains of the gypsy band in the hotel behind Fessenden.

On the long line of terrace before the hotels of Pest, hundreds sat at little tables smoking and drinking their coffee. On the wide promenade in front many more sauntered, the women gayly and fashionably dressed, many of them beautiful, animated—bewitching, no doubt, to the fine-looking men who accompanied them. Fessenden had a fervent admiration for the women of Hungary, and he had sat at this same table during former visits and observed them with pleasure. But to-night his eyes rarely wandered from the balcony at the southeast extremity of the palace, where several figures were discernible, and the regular rising, lingering, disappearing of what might have been the travail of a miniature volcano. The volcano, doubtless, was the Princess Sarolta of Windischgrätz, for the figures had moved from time to time, and there appeared to be no man among them. Once the tallest of the group had entered the room at the corner and stood for a moment against the light. Fessenden, his heart beating faster, had fancied he recognized the Archduchess, and had half risen in angry determination to cross the river and storm the hill, but had thrown himself back in his chair and ordered another glass of iced coffee.

Nevertheless, his anger did not cool nor his determination weaken. It was now three days since he and Rana had surrendered themselves to the wild exhilara-

## RULERS OF KINGS

tion of the Chardash, and he had not even received permission to call on his sister in the palace. Alexandra had written him that the Archduchess was doubtless very angry, as she had ignored the day in the village as completely as if her memory had failed her, and every one was in doubt as to the manner in which they were to dance the Chardash at the ball. "But the ball will take place," Miss Abbott had added, "and if you will possess your soul in patience and remain here, I shall make a very especial point of your coming. She can hardly refuse. Indeed, she would know that if she did it would be the end of our friendship. I refuse to look ahead in this matter. I have always known that something would happen when you met. It is all on the knees of the gods. The twentieth century is not the eighteenth nor yet the nineteenth. For my part, I want to see history make itself, and the past, I hold, is merely designed by the inexorable law of progress as a background for the present. There will be an American queen in Europe yet. I am glad I am young—and I love you both."

She had asked Zrinyi and Prince Illehazy to call upon him, and he had pressed a tailor into hasty service and dined with them at the Park Club on successive evenings. He knew that he must meet the Archduchess before long, for both these nobles had designed entertainments in her honor, nor was it likely that she would refuse his sister's request. But he was not possessing his soul in patience. He was used to personal activity in the levelling of obstacles; moreover, the resentment of the Archduchess seemed to him the most erratic manifestation of feminine perversity to which man had ever been subjected. If she choose to dress herself as a peasant and dance with peasants, what right had she to vent her anger upon him for dancing with her as respectfully as

the most courteous among them? He had chosen to ignore her state, and no course could have been more consistent. He would not apologize, for he had done nothing culpable; he was as entitled to incognito as herself. To vent her wrath on him for a situation of her own making was a caprice so far unworthy of her character, as he understood it, that he was inclined to believe there was a misapprehension of which he knew nothing. By which it will be seen that there were many things Fessenden knew better than woman.

Whether he was in love with the Archduchess of Austria or not he was at no pains to discover. But his instinct for adventure was now on edge—the youth in him was rampant; New York was non-existent; his weeks of rest in Europe, passed almost entirely in solitude and sunshine, had made his pulses full and quick; he was ready for anything, and his will had never set itself more squarely. Here were all the high elements of romance at last; moreover, when he awakened in the night and heard the distant wail or rush of the Char-dash, he trembled and experienced a sensation of being stabbed by something that was both sharp and sweet.

The attitude of the Archduchess, the insurmountable barrier she had raised, but whetted his determination to know her. With all his contempt for monarchy, he was still too wise in its ways to make the mistake of republican approach. He was unconventional, but he was also a man of the world; while he would not hesitate to insist upon talking with any sovereign as man to man, with no more formality than he would yield to the President of the United States, he knew that to walk up to a palace door and demand admittance, even to his sister's apartments, would be merely to make an ass of himself. Moreover, he had long since learned that one



of the secrets of man's victory over life is never to court certain failure.

The afternoon before, he had crossed over to Buda and walked all round the palace. The great gates on the Danube looked impervious to battering-rams. On the farther side of the court-yard the central portion of the palace, which was of a symmetrical height in front, was built straight down to the street behind in no less than eighteen tiers of rooms. There were guards everywhere, and it looked as impregnable as a fortress. The gardens surrounded the front and south of the palace. At the north end were more guards, and just without the great court-yard, easy of access at its northern extremity, its southern gates closed upon the private gardens, was the guard-house. Connecting the vast front of the palace with the mass at the rear of the court-yard were galleries and many rooms. The private apartments of the royal family did not look upon the court, but were in the extension beyond it, above that sacred portion of the grounds to which the public was never admitted. No princess had ever been more securely intrenched. The wild idea of disguising himself as a working-man, and obtaining entrance to the portion of the palace as yet unfinished within, had invaded Fessenden's brain and been dismissed. In that huge labyrinth a man would be lost and found many times before he was escorted to the guard-house.

Fessenden, who liked a good story, had read the romances of the day which dealt with the imaginary modern princess of the imaginary modern kingdom, thrilling scenes of rescue, hair-breadth escapes, revolutions. They had been in his mind as he whimsically examined the palace, but they were no guide for him, even had he been of a less practical turn of mind. Were there a revolution in Budapest, none would be safer than the

Archduchess. There would be no hair-breadth rescue from that palace, unless, indeed, of himself. There was no moat, no drawbridge. The walls were ever visible to more than guards. He would meet her at balls, at dinners; a word alone with her in the garden or a corner of a balcony would seem to be all that he might anticipate. Nevertheless, the situation was romantic enough to keep him in Budapest; nor, he suspected, was Ranata a woman who needed romantic accessories; she would doubtless have interested him similarly in his father's house in New York. She was evidently a creature of many sides, an infinite number of ingredients mixed into a not altogether harmonious whole. As Fessenden caught himself sentimentally wondering if she were the isolated being of whom he had dreamed, and who like himself lacked completeness, he remembered that he had promised Zrinyi a game of Csendes—the Hungarian poker—at ten o'clock; but as he strolled up to the Nemzesi Casino he vowed anew that he would know the daughter of the Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary if he had to run the gamut of all the conventions.

## XIII

It was on the following morning that the Archduchess remarked to Miss Abbott—they were walking on the third terrace and paused under the shade of a heavy tree—"I have decided that the bodice of my costume shall be of blue velvet instead of black—and the train."

Alexandra being too dumfounded to reply, Ranata continued, "I have concluded that superstitions are unworthy of any one who claims to live by the light of his reason. Therefore I have made up my mind delib-

erately to violate all that may still linger like weeds in my mind."

"Blue is very becoming to you."

"I think more so than any other color except perhaps green. I have also ordered several green gowns. I shall not interfere with your pinks and yellows."

"That is kind, my dear, for you certainly would extinguish me. I see your new rôle is to lack nothing in thoroughness. Have you made up your mind how the Chardash is to be danced?"

"As it should be danced. Why not? All the manifestations are on the part of the men; the women do little but keep time."

The moment was favorable, the ice of Ranata's three days' reserve being broken, but Alexandra hesitated to introduce the subject of Fessenden. When Ranata chose to be unfathomable there was an aloofness about her which suggested that her soul was surrounded by the watchful ghosts of all her ancestors. She had never looked more aloof than to-day, despite the apparent frivolity of her conversation. She was standing very straight, apparently absorbed in contemplation of the roofs of Pest, glittering in fragments through the leaves of Buda. In the deep shade of the tree her face looked like marble, her hair like metal. There had been no coolness between the girls since the day of the *fiesta*. They had been much together and talked on any other subject; but it had been evident to Alexandra that a part of the Archduchess's mind had been bent introspectively, and she had retired to her bedroom earlier and left it later than was her habit. How Fessenden had impressed her, what tortuous train of thought she had been following, Alexandra felt it would be folly to guess, for she knew there were depths and ways in that mind no friend would ever enter. But it was her policy

never to manifest surprise, except at some lighter erraticism, and she did not lift an eyebrow when Ranata turned to her and said sweetly:

"Do you think your brother would dine with us tonight? We were to have been forty, but Sarolta tells me that Count Ábris Teleky is ill."

"I am sure Fessenden would be delighted."

"Will you write, or shall Sarolta send him a formal invitation?"

"I will write. Perhaps I had better go at once."

"I will wait for you here."

"How did she know he is in Pest?" wondered Miss Abbott, as she ran up the steps in the terrace wall. "And *what* is she up to?"

When she returned, Ranata was sitting on the rustic bench staring at the ground. Alexandra sat down beside her.

"What do you think of Count Zrinyi's invitation to visit his castle in the Transylvanian Alps?" she asked.

"I should like to go. Retyezat was the scene of Rudolf's first visit to Transylvania—he was the guest of Count Samuel Teleky who took him to Boldogfalva, the castle of Baron Kendeffy—it is not far from Zrinyi's castle—and they went into camp on Lake Zenoga. That was one of the most delightful experiences of Rudolf's life! He hunted the bear all over those frozen peaks, high above any vegetation except the Alpine roses. He used to thrill me with his descriptions of those terrible rugged mountains, the breathless wait for the bear, sometimes terrified, as often stolidly unsuspecting, and then the wild dance of the Wallach and Roumanian beaters round the camp-fire at night to the music of their flutes. Rudolf and all the others of the party sat huddled under a rock, muffled in furs, smoking

## RULERS OF KINGS

the long Hungarian pipe; but the wild men of the mountains were warm enough, for they danced like fiends, and the effect of the wild gyrations almost in the very midst of the leaping flames, the great teeth of the rocks cutting the sky on every side, the gathering storm shrieking into the sweet wild music of the flutes, the infernal cries of the excited creatures—I remember Rudolf swept all the things off my most precious table in his animation the first time he told me the story! Those were his happiest days—his hunting expeditions to Transylvania for bear and other game, and he loved to talk to me about them, for no one else cared to listen—at home, at least. Even when I was a child he often came and spent an hour with me, partly out of pity for my loneliness, partly because I was so much like himself in many ways, and in despair that I could not join in all his sports. He promised me the last time he returned from Transylvania that the next year I should go with him to Görgény—the crown property where he always went after that first visit. The occasion upon which he won his oak as a Transylvanian bear-hunter was almost as exciting in another way. When he had killed his first bear the beaters tied its legs together, and raising it on crossed poles carried it through the forest to the stretchers, followed by all the Roumanians in their strange costumes shouting *Setreasca! Setreasca!* The guests surrounding Rudolf responded with *Elyens* almost as wild, and Count Teleky dipped an oak twig in the bear's blood and presented it to Rudolf, who stuck it in his cap. When he returned to the castle in the evening, all the delighted and shouting people knew by that sign that their prince had taken his position among the great bear-hunters of Transylvania."

Ranata had been speaking rapidly and excitedly. As she finished she sprang to her feet. The blood was in

## RULERS OF KINGS

her cheeks, and her eyes were flashing with a curious angry animation.

“Do you think any man could ever come between me and the memory of my brother?” she demanded passionately—“between my duty to his memory, to his unfinished work? Do you think that I could ever admire, love, respect any man one-half so well? What of his weaknesses? He had the greatest of natures. He knew that he had the fate of Europe in his hands, and he would have made the soberest of rulers. Do you think that any woman was ever so fortified as I against the common weakness of woman? Rudolf!—Austria!—” She turned abruptly and walked down the dim path under the wall.

Alexandra caught her breath. She felt curiously uncomfortable, as a sensitive American girl, unskilled in feeling, always does at the sudden revelation of passion in another woman. Calmly to analyze the passions of the world, and stare ironically at the complications of life through a lorgnette, was all in the mental progress of a girl brought up with the peculiar advantages of Alexandra and possessing her uncommon acuteness; but direct contact vaguely offended the cool purity of her lighter nature.

She also experienced a sensation of terror which vibrated oddly among her calm and calculating particles. Should she write and tell Fessenden to go at once? Or—might it not be merely Ranata's imagination that had taken fire? Impossible that she could love a man with whom she had not exchanged ten words; who to his sister's critical eye had looked like anything but a god with his shirt hanging over his skirts, and sweating like any crimson peasant in the room—she had sent Zrinyi out immediately to wash his face. No, she decided, after a few moments of hard maidenly thinking, it was merely the romantic streak in that abundant



dreaming nature that had claimed dominion for the moment—aggravated no doubt by much retrospection and idealizing since; the occasion and Fessenden, to Alexandra's mind, stood in need of at least three days' perspective and created glamour. But should she send away Fessenden and leave Ranata at peace with her dead and her duties? She hardly had realized what she expected to result upon the meeting of these two. A vague and picturesque drama, mixed with much history, with a final prophetic vision of the two in New York, had whirled through her head. Passion, suffering, tragedy—she had given them no thought, well as she knew Ranata's capacity for all. Her friend had been the heroine of many romances woven by her energetic brain; but the romances had been creations of an exalted and poetic nature, like unto what she assumed the gods and goddesses had compassed.

And Fessenden? How would he fall in love? He usually teased her and joked with her; but his serious side and his achievement had no more fervent admirer. He had never told her an anecdote in which a woman figured sentimentally; to what degree women had the power to move him she found herself unable to imagine. He certainly was adventurous—born to make and to change history; therefore had she coupled him with Ranata in some great drama of the future; but in looks and deportment he was as little romantic as any other American. She calculated rapidly that he had upset most of her theories about him at least once a year since she had known him, and recalled that she had frequently wondered how well she ever should know him. She half rose. Should she send him away? She sank back with a laugh. That was beyond the power of anything short of law or violence. She recalled the angry and determined letter she had received the day before.

## RULERS OF KINGS

"He will come!" she thought. "They will meet and talk. Well—it is all on the knees of the gods."

Ranata returned and sat beside her. "We were talking about visiting your count," she said. "I am sure you want to go, and it will give me the opportunity to make the progress I intended through some of the villages. But it will have to be a little later. I must start the ball here first—make as deep an impression as possible before leaving Budapest even for a week. Why do you not ask your brother to take tea with you today? I shall be engaged this afternoon, but you will enjoy having him to yourself. Forgive me that I did not think of it before, but my mind has been so full of other things—the best plan of campaign with the members of the Left, for one. And tell him of all our plans and schemes. I should be glad of the advice of one so accustomed to the management of men."

### XIV

The Princess Sarolta, apparently absorbed in the achievements of the chef of Királyi Palota and the lively conversation about her, observed her imperial charge and pondered. It was the first time that Ranata had played the part of independent hostess beyond the limits of her small court and the few privileged friends, and the Princess was not surprised at her sudden blossoming into a graceful, almost informal, hostess, with a word of personal meaning for each of her guests as she greeted them, and an animation at table which a keen sense of liberty and her desire for popularity had finally set free. But what puzzled and faintly alarmed the valiant but suspicious soul of the Obersthofmeisterin was her exceeding graciousness to the brother of her American

friend. The Archduchess had lifted her chin coquettishly as he bowed formally before her, and then offered him her hand with a spontaneous warmth as she made known her wholly feminine and unroyal pleasure in meeting the brother of her dearest friend. To the handshake and the remarks the Princess had no particular objection—there was fitness in both; but why the blush and the coquetry? Why the curiously puzzled expression of Mr. Abbott, followed by a flash of relief and pleasure? Why the constant change of expression as she turned from Prince Illehazy who sat on her right to the American who sat on her left? The Princess was abnormally acute in the ways of her sex, and with age she added to the sum of a knowledge born of much experience, while forgetting nothing. It was towards the middle of the dinner that her alarm faded, and she remarked to herself: "She is up to some game or other. She is playing a part. But what an actress! Who would have suspected—but no, has she not always been playing the parts demanded of her rank? This is merely one of her own choosing. But what does it mean? I must find out before I sleep to-night."

Ranata, to those who knew her well, had never looked so beautiful. She wore white, for her colored wardrobe had not yet come, but the low bodice of her gown had been trimmed with blue velvet flowers, and there were sapphires on her neck instead of the usual pearls. Her brilliant coppery hair was arranged with so many little sparkling combs that it looked as if enmeshed in a diamond net; and almost in front was a sapphire lily. She had adjusted her new manner to perfection; while losing nothing of the dignity of the princess, she was a girl delighting in the levity of the hour, a human being conscious to the quick of unrestricted intercourse with lively and intelligent minds. She joined in the general con-

## RULERS OF KINGS

versation as far as was possible; pleasing and astonishing her guests with her intimate knowledge of Hungarian affairs and the crisis of the moment—there is always a crisis in Hungary—her subtly expressed sympathy, and her constant intimate references to the mother and brother who had been so beloved by this ardent and appreciative people. Her evident devotion to the memory of her brother would have insured her popularity had she reminded them less of him, been less attractive in herself. Those within her range had no sense whatever of being entertained by royalty; forgot the awful dinners they had sat through with their king; were at exactly the same informal ease as when dining with each other. And yet, so deathless is the reverence of the monarchical born for majesty and all begotten of majesty; so insidious the flattery of those whose souls are steeped in purple; that even these most independent of all monarchists unconsciously swelled with a fuller enthusiasm for the beautiful and gracious hostess, inasmuch as she commanded homage by divine right.

During the early part of the dinner Ranata was conscious only of the buoyant atmosphere, the gay content of her guests, their versatility of mind, their very evident admiration of herself, the smiling approval of the beautiful women in the pink flood of the palm-and-flower-filled gallery where the table was spread. It was her first taste of power, and it was not only sweet but inspiring. Her own enthusiasm waxed high. She felt expansive, democratic. Her ardent nature struggled with its bonds. She felt a momentary impulse to tell them that she was happy for the first time in her life, and felt as keenly as they the common bond of human nature.

She hardly knew when she began to feel the subtle difference between the American's homage and that of

the great Hungarian magnates. For some time her words with him were desultory, so much of her attention was demanded elsewhere; but as the conversation at the long table coupled, and the beautiful Roumanian, wife of Count Ábris Teleky, who sat on the other side of Prince Illehazy, absorbed more and more of his attention, she found her own consecutively claimed by Fessenden Abbott. She had been content with the apparent impression her coquetry and graciousness had made on the American, reflecting with arrogance that there is nothing so dense as the vanity of man. It was not long before she was made aware that Fessenden, if admiring, was not prostrate; that sensible as he might be to her flattery, his head was still cool. But it was not until they talked without interruption that she experienced for the first time in her life the sensation of being a mere woman talking to a mere man, and realized in a flash that she had spent the early part of the evening in a fool's paradise. Given to self-analysis, she wondered at its fascination, for Fessenden's attitude after the Chardash had been intensely irritating. But every nerve in her had been on edge during that extraordinary dance; however he had comported himself at its finish would doubtless have served as a pretext for opening a safety-valve among the sensations that were oppressing her. To-night she was filled with good-will to all the world; she had already sighed for democracy, and while she sighed again at the death of an illusion, it was doubtless consistent to accept pleasurable a momentary sensation of true equality. That this famous American, who was beginning to appall the world with his resource, was dazzled by her beauty and captivated by her charm, was apparent to whomsoever chose to observe, but it was the surrender of man to his goddess; his eyes were level, not upcast in the homage of courtier to princess. His



masculine vanity was flattered, no doubt, but by the woman, not by the daughter of the Emperor of Austria.

For a time the conversation was impersonal enough. "I hope you will come to my ball," the Archduchess had said, and then added with a laugh—"That ball! How often its plans have been changed! The Princess Sarolta thought that it should be given to the aristocracy alone, but I have finally decided that all the members of Parliament shall be invited, and all who have distinguished themselves in art and letters. I am not very patient. I do not like doing things by degrees. You saw Alexandra this afternoon? I told her to take you into our confidence."

"It is a very great scheme, and I am entirely at your disposal. But what do you intend, in this instance, to do about the wives of your untitled members? And the wives of your other distinguished guests who do not come to court as a matter of course?"

"Oh, the women cannot come. They do not expect it."

"They would be valuable allies."

"It is quite impossible. The women of the aristocracy would rebel—would stay away from court, no doubt."

"I wonder. Court life in Hungary is very rare. Surely you are powerful enough to set your own fashions."

But Ranata looked determined and unmoved. "I should lose much and gain nothing. And, besides, I do not wish it. An empire is an empire, not a republic. If I opened the gates, where would be the end? I should be shaking hands with eight thousand people of an evening, like your poor President."

"You would find that rather interesting. Your wild and picturesque peasants—Hungarians, Roumanians, Wallachians, Servians, Croats, Orthodox Jews, and what not—would come pouring in from their fastnesses."



## RULERS OF KINGS

"I shall go to them in their villages. To hold a little court for them, as it were, will be delightful. But here—it would be only to cheapen myself."

"It would be a great victory gained if you could bring the members of the Extreme Left to court. The Emperor cannot; but if you invited their wives, no doubt you would conquer their prejudices—the wives would see to that."

"Do you think I have given no thought to the Kosuths? I have my plan of campaign. 'Just you wait,' as Alex would say." She lifted her eyes and looked directly at him; there was not even defiance in their rays. "It has also been decided that although all the magnates and their families will come in the national costume, only a hundred of the younger will dance the Chardash. The older—the men at least—seem to have lost nothing of their fire, but I fear apoplexy."

"It certainly requires the wind of youth. I suppose I shall not be permitted to dance it," he added discontentedly. "Whom shall you dance it with?"

She hesitated a perceptible half moment; then she answered, "I shall not dance it at all."

He turned to her with a flash in his eyes, and her own dropped. "Allow me to contribute an idea. Why not have it danced by peasants? Many of the women have beautiful costumes, although they do not always wear them; enough could be found, at all events. Bring them here—house them in the servants' quarters for two or three nights. Do not offer to pay anything but their expenses. Ask them to come as a favor. Give them a feast and dance of their own afterwards. All the peasantry of Hungary will be delighted. Let your other guests dance the Chardash in their own way afterwards. You would then please everybody. I suppose no one has dared to tell you, but the women are by no

means enthusiastic at the prospect of having the breath whirled out of them; and many are disappointed at not being able to wear their latest costumes from Paris and Vienna."

"Ah! That *is* the truth, I suppose." She laughed. "The evolution of a ball! One would think this was the first that ever had been heard of. But I like your idea. Yes—it shall be. And only those who wish shall dance the Chardash."

"Then," said Fessenden quickly, "you can dance with me afterwards. I have to wear some sort of a costume, anyhow."

She caught her breath, and again her anger rose.

"It is customary," she began haughtily, then paused, at a loss how to word her rebuke. This was not only an American, but a sovereign in his way, and her friend's brother. She stole a glance at him. He had thrown back his head, and was staring down at her with a glitter in his eyes that made them seem peculiarly contracted. He looked more angry than she felt. She lifted her head and said defiantly, "I shall not dance at all."

"That is a great pity," said Fessenden coldly, "for I never knew any one to enjoy dancing more." Then, as her face flushed and her own eyes glittered, he added deliberately: "I have no intention of ignoring an experience which I have lain awake more than one night to remember. There is no reason why the subject should be taboo, and it makes an absurd and annoying complication. Do you expect me to be eternally on my guard lest I make a reference to it?"

For a moment the Archduchess did not answer. Her next words must decide the status of their future acquaintance, possibly would determine whether they ever met again or not. There was no mistaking the gauntlet he had thrown down: she was to take him on his own terms

## RULERS OF KINGS

or not at all. Should she? Should she? Her anger had ebbed in an unaccountable manner. There was something very alluring in the prospect not only of a new variety of homage, but of adventuring farther on the path of liberty. Many changes had lifted their heads within her since her break for comparative independence and her rapid victory. She was beginning to perceive how fatally easy it is for women and nations to cross the border between liberty and license. Four days ago she had made an appalling addition to the limited sum of her experiences: she had known for a few moments the intoxication of abandonment. The retrospect had filled her with an alternate fury and delight. Woman-like she had vented her wrath on the man; and he had commanded her waking thoughts to the exclusion of the Austrian dynasty. Then, with the elaborate subtlety of the feminine mind, she had persuaded herself that her duty to her country demanded that she win the American from the man who menaced the future integrity of the Austrian Empire; and, buoyed up by the virtue of her cause, she had drawn him into the circle of her influence, having first analyzed him into the abstract condition of a curiosity. During the last half-hour she had quite forgotten that virtue alone had summoned Fessenden Abbott to court; but as she hesitated, fascinated, but doubting the policy of letting him eat the fruits of victory, the devil, which sits on his tail in a corner of every woman's brain, plucked this virtue from its hook and flung it into the light.

She raised her brilliant powerful eyes to his and said sweetly: "You have placed me in a position from which there are only two outlets. I acknowledge myself defeated. What is it you would like to say about our Chardash? I am quite ready to discuss it threadbare."

He laughed, but without annoyance, for she had ut-

tered the words "our Chardash" in a tone that gave him a sharp sensation of delight. "The laurels are to you," he said with commendable sobriety. "It is my turn to acknowledge defeat. I shall never mention the subject again except at your command."

She had accomplished her purpose, and should have been satisfied. But she was filled with a sudden desire to hear all that he had left unsaid. What had he wanted to tell her? How had he felt for her that day? What did the memory mean to him? She cast about in her mind for the words that would express a delicate and elusive query, to lead him on, while not committing herself. But an interview with a Königsegg was a simple matter beside playing with fire when the fire was actually between one's fingers; the hereditary game of coquetry was no guide. Nonplussed, but unwilling to leave the subject, she bit her lip and drew a long breath.

"What are you sighing about?" asked Fessenden.

"I am a woman and inconsistent."

"I know less about women than you do, so I can't help you out—at all events unless you tell me what is the matter with you."

"Alexandra is direct, but she has a great deal of subtlety!"

"I haven't a particle of subtlety. I'll give a direct answer to a direct question from anybody but a South American president or a Chinaman. What is it?"

"I don't think I'll tell you," said Ranata hurriedly. "How I long to hear all your adventures at first hand! Even listening to Alexandra, I have held my breath. But we are going to have our coffee on the terrace."

A few moments later, as the company was standing about the pillared gallery behind the vines, the Princess Sarolta took Alexandra's arm and strolled with her beyond the others.

"Why are you angry?" asked the watchful Obersthofmeisterin.

"Ranata is trying to make a fool of my brother."

"You are making a fool of Zrinyi. Your brother has doubtless been made a fool of before. I was afraid that Ranata was taking man—in the person of your brother—as seriously as she has taken all life heretofore."

Alexandra was on the alert at once. "You are quite mistaken," she said indifferently. "Ranata has a very particular reason for turning my brother's head. I promised, in a moment of enthusiasm, to help her. I do not know that that would hold, but I am in a quandary. I want Ranata to succeed in all that she has undertaken, but I do not want my brother sacrificed."

"At your age tender consideration for a man is a characteristic! It is one of the amusing reminiscences of age. When you have learned, my child, how much they can stand—*enfin!* I am relieved that it is this way, for although I hope to have Ranata under my supervision when she goes through the inevitable, yet I shrink from it—and there is little I do shrink from! She would suffer quite horribly, because she must be utterly without hope; even intrigue would be forbidden her—she has too much at stake. But no! as well now as any time. As well your brother as any man. He looks as if he would never *affiché* a woman, he is not hot of head, he knows the world—and lives on the other side of it!"

"You are all wrong, Sarolta. Ranata is playing a game."

"The game is fire," replied the Princess dryly.

## XV

After that Fessenden took his tea—he detested tea—every day in the Hungarian house. Sometimes the

## RULERS OF KINGS

entire court was present, all conforming to the English custom approved by their princess, except the Obersthofmeisterin, who consumed glass after glass of iced coffee, to the secret envy of the rest. Sometimes only the younger ladies-in-waiting were present besides the Archduchess and Alexandra; but even at dinner, to which he was frequently invited, Fessenden rarely had a word alone with Ranata. Twice he had ridden with the court to the summit of the Schwabenberg in the early morning, but he had been obliged to content himself with observing the fine effect of flaming hair among the sweeping branches of the acacia.

If Fessenden had not long since come to the conclusion that it was a waste of man's valuable time to puzzle over the idiosyncrasies of any woman, he would have wondered at the sudden change in the Archduchess's tactics. She had dropped coquetry as abruptly as she had assumed it, and now treated him with a sisterly frankness which, in some respects, was a curious imitation of Alexandra's. The truth was that Ranata had taken warning from an angry glint in her friend's eye, although the subject of Fessenden had been mutually avoided. Moreover, Ranata had informed herself that the American's friendship would doubtless be as valuable to the House of Hapsburg as his love, and far easier for her inexperienced self to manage. He had thrilled her unaccountably in the Chardash, and startled and fascinated her later by his momentary conquest of her will; but she had finally taken alarm, and when he arose in her thought she wrote a letter to Count von Königsegg, or demanded the company of her lively ladies-in-waiting. When she was alone in bed she sternly reviewed the Hungarian programme, and forced herself to plan for the subjugation of the Party of Independence. On this question she had much correspondence with the



## RULERS OF KINGS

minister; for she had received more than one veiled command to let politics ostensibly alone while exercising the purely feminine forces of attraction to bind all parties in a common loyalty to the throne. This was not a difficult task for a beautiful and intelligent princess within the circle of her influence; but if a powerful band of enthusiastic Radicals chose to keep themselves far beyond the outer edge of that circle, how was she, hedged by every restriction, to cast her nets about them? She did not regard Fessenden's suggestion as feasible—not for the present at least. If all else failed, however, she finally decided, with a secret preference for following his advice, that she would summon the most influential women of the aristocracy in secret conclave, and, appealing to their patriotism, ask them to come forth temporarily from their haughty exclusiveness and meet the women of the dangerous element within the neutral shades of the palace. She had discussed this plan with her mentor, and it had been agreed upon as a last resort.

The enthusiasm and curiosity she excited among the masses were sufficient to satisfy the most patriotic and feminine heart. Every day from four to five she drove abroad, taking invariably the same route; crossing the suspension-bridge and driving out the wide *Andrássy ut* into the *Stefenia ut* of the park. All Pest seemed to tumble into the streets and the footways of the bridge as she passed, and frequently there was cheering. Beloved as her father was in Vienna, his people showed him no further attention in public than a perfunctory salute; and although in Hungary the masses cheered him during his brief visits, it was much in the same manner as the American is enthusiastic over any spectacle that varies the monotony of business. But that the people of Budapest were not only genuinely delighted with this flower of the Hapsburgs, but pleased and

## RULERS OF KINGS

flattered that she chose to live among them, was evident both by their spontaneous enthusiasm and its reflection in the press. In all but the Radical newspapers there was a daily chronicle of her doings, and gallant comment; the opposition had nothing to say in her disfavor, and was evidently unsuspecting of her motive in deserting Vienna for Budapest.

One morning, persuaded by Alexandra, she entered a shop for the first time in her life. It was a shop in the Váci utcza, and she spent a delighted half-hour to the greater delight of the sordid soul that kept it. When she left it she was mobbed into her carriage by a throng that impeded the traffic. She passed through the ordeal with such a lack of condescension in her good-nature that even the women cheered her, and there were murmurs of "Rudolf!" among their "*Élyens!*" When driving past the waiting crowds in the street, instead of favoring her admirers with the usual fixed smile and stately bow of bored royalty, she inclined her head slowly, including many in one salutation, and sometimes smiling in a manner that seemed both spontaneous and personal.

And then, one other morning, accompanied only by the Princess Sarolta, Fessenden, and Alexandra, she visited the Hall of the Deputies, the Lower House of the Diet. The new Parliament building, that epitome of Venice on the brink of the Danube, was unfinished, and both houses of the Diet still met in the old buildings in the "Magnates' Quarter." Ranata insisted upon sitting quietly in the diplomats' gallery for a time, and found much food for reflection. The magnates meet irregularly; the Deputies daily while Parliament is in session, and transact the business of the nation when not engaged in moving their kings and pawns a square further towards independence. One finds no type in Budapest, and

these were men of many types. Few possessed the famed Hungarian beauty, and the majority looked like energetic business-men whose native fires were nicely balanced by determination. They were curiously un-monarchical in appearance and atmosphere; and the un-enlightened stranger would have assumed without question that they were the working body of an aggressive republic. The ministry, striking-looking men, all of the Liberal party, sat in a semicircle below the desk of the President of the House, and followed the proceedings with evident cynicism.

The President, one of the few nobles in the Lower House, was lecturing the Party of Independence upon the inconvenient extreme to which it was carrying its policy of obstruction. He sat aloft, and the beautiful Magyar language rolled down, an impassioned yet monotonous torrent. The constant interruptions from the Extreme Left in nowise disturbed it. The "Young Kossuth party" acted much in the fashion of bad boys too big for the ferrule.

"They need Tom Reed," muttered Fessenden.

"They interest me very much," whispered Ranata. "I have never seen anything like them. Do they represent Hungary?"

"That is what they are here for."

"Your House of Representatives—does it look more democratic?"

"Only when it has its coat off and its feet on the desk."

"These men—why do they want William? Why do they want any king?"

"The great body are not extremists. They know that Hungary is not ready for independence—neither internally nor by her geographical position. No country is surrounded by so many enemies—who hate her for that obstinate individuality which has survived every

## RULERS OF KINGS

reverse and threatens to engulf themselves. The Hungarians would make their own terms with William—and give him their help in smashing Russia.”

“Is this matter the talk of Europe?” asked the Archduchess sharply.

“Not of Europe, but of those who do the hard thinking.”

“How could William smash Russia?”

“He only needs the money.”

“Ah! He promised his grandfather on the old Kaiser’s death-bed that he would maintain friendly relations with Russia. It is a matter of sentiment with him.”

“Sentiment evaporates, and promises are nullified, when it comes to a question of self-protection.”

“Or ambition! Will he ever be able to get this money? The Reichstag will not vote it, and the Socialists become stronger daily. How can he get it?”

“Well—he might raise the embargo on certain American industries, and as a return favor they might advance him fifty million dollars or so.”

“You know that is one of the few things he would not dare do. He cannot afford to antagonize another party—he is as much of a politician as your Roosevelt.”

“Well, you see, success in a great war would bind all parties in a common approval.”

Ranata was a thorough European in the sinuousness of her methods; but she recalled the picturesque advice of Alexandra to push a fellow-diplomat into a corner and tell him “to speak out or get out.” She fixed her disconcerting eyes on Fessenden and asked deliberately, “Do you intend to give him this money?”

Fessenden was not to be nonplussed by methods direct or indirect. His sharp eyes met the strength of her gaze unmoved. “Can you keep a secret? Yes?”

## RULERS OF KINGS

If the time ever comes when our interests seem one, I shall let him have all the money he wants."

"That is the vagueness of diplomacy."

"I have no immediate intention of putting my hand in my pocket, if that is what you mean. Nor is the time ripe for him to strike."

Ranata drew a long breath. To bridge an interval she asked, "Is it true—I mean in your personal knowledge—that the Balkan states would rally to him in case of a war with Russia—that they share the infatuated notion that he is destined to be the savior of eastern Europe—instead of ourselves!"

"I am as sure of it as one can be of anything in Eastern politics."

"And this story I heard yesterday—that he is having his second son taught Hungarian—is that true?"

"I heard it in Berlin, but not from the Emperor."

For a moment Ranata hated him. Then she registered a vow anew, and this time her chin seemed to absorb its firm pink flesh. She turned to Fessenden pettishly. "I hate politics!" she said. "I shall play my part here quietly, but there is no necessity to talk or even to think about it, except when I am obliged to discuss some point with Count von Königsegg. Of course, if you have advice to give me I shall be grateful, but at other times please forget and let me forget that I am an unhappy princess imagining I have the fate of an empire on my shoulders."

"I am not in Hungary to talk politics."

Ranata lifted her eyes to his; they were both soft and dazzling. "Why are you here?" she whispered audaciously.

The fires in Fessenden flew to his head and flashed from his eyes, but his voice if unsteady came to her ear

distinctly. "If we are ever alone for a moment I will tell you why."

Ranata received her first electric shock of passion. He had won again and with her own weapons. Tumultuous delight, amazement, anger, rushed through her brain. She clinched her hand in an attempt at self-control, and it slipped from her knee and touched his. She recovered herself at once.

"One would think you were a Hungarian!" she said scornfully, oblivious of the significance of her failure to comment upon the ancient ocean that rolled between them. "They need only a spark, and are accustomed to women who are always expectant of the language of love. From Alexandra I have gathered that the American man has been too well educated by his women to let himself go until he is sure he will not be laughed at, and that he is greatly assisted by the national frigidity of temperament."

"What you learn of the national temperament will be from me, not from my sister."

Ranata was now fully alive to her rôle. That her being was still in tumult, her brain alert with womanly curiosity, mattered nothing; she would follow her programme to the end. If that end were unimaginable for the woman, it was defined enough for the princess.

"I should like to know one man in my life," she murmured. "And you are an American—the only one I ever could know, I suppose. I find the prospect rather delightful. But you must not insist upon flirting with me. It would be an unfair advantage—I am terribly unskilled."

"I have not the slightest intention of flirting with you. I have had no time to learn the *a b c* of flirtation. Nor do I waste my time."

"How long shall you stay in Hungary?"



"I know less about that than you do."

"But you do not take long vacations. Surely, your enormous interests in America—they must demand your attention before long."

"My enormous interests can—take care of themselves."

The blood ran up to Ranata's hair. For a second she forgot her rôle. She tasted the sweets of woman's power for the first time, and wondered at the barrenness of the regal. "Would you stay here if your great fortune were in danger—if—"

"I should stay here if the world went to smash."

Ranata became aware that Alexandra's lips were at her other ear. "Sarolta is going to sleep," whispered the warning voice. "She will be horribly cross. Hadn't we better go?"

The Archduchess rose. "Yes," she said indifferently. "It is quite time. And we have promised to go on the floor for a moment. The President has left his seat. Doubtless he is coming to meet us."

A few moments later she was receiving the compliments of the ministers, most of whom she had met while her father was in Budapest. She was Archduchess of Austria and Princess of Hungary once more, touched with the happy informality of her brother. The members of the press had been requested to leave the room. The Deputies were standing at their desks regarding her with deep attention, and she played to them quite as much as to the ministers. She stood just beneath the elevated seat of the President, and its sombre dignity made the proper background for her noble height and brilliant hair. She wore a large black hat and a gown of black velvet whose jacket opened over the white softness of chiffons. The color was still in her cheeks, her eyes sparkled, her short upper lip curved in a smile

which was less gracious than youthful, and revealed teeth whose like from time immemorial have inspired man with longing and forgiveness.

Her eyes wandered several times to the benches of the Extreme Left. These men also stood at their posts. There was one who overtopped his fellows by a head. This head was shaped like a cannon-ball and surrounded by harsh black hair. His nose was short and thick, but the face was strongly built and the small black eyes flashed beneath a permanent frown.

She turned to the President. "Who is that man?" she asked.

"Molnár Lajos." He gave the names in the Hungarian sequence. "He is one of the most influential and violent of the Obstructionists, and gives us far more trouble than the son of Kossuth."

"Present him to me."

The great Liberal magnate hesitated. He thought of his king and turned pale. His eye sought that of the Obersthofmeisterin. She raised her brows expressively and lifted one shoulder. The President, wondering, for he had known Sarolta through many imperious years, turned and walked over to the young Radical. For a moment it was apparent that the disciple of Kossuth hesitated, but he had the courtesy of his race, and he hardly could decline to meet even an archduchess whose smiling eyes were not twenty feet from his. Moreover, she was young and beautiful. He felt that an apologetic glance at his colleagues was unnecessary, and a moment later he was bowing stiffly before the daughter of the king he hated.

Ranata began in the royal manner. "I found your remarks very interesting. Do you speak often?"

"My painful duty compels me to, your Royal Highness."

"Painful?" She looked at him with melting eyes. "Are you ill? Pardon me—you look very strong."

"You misunderstand me." ("I will not tag on your Royal Highness to every sentence," he registered.) "It is Hungary that is ill."

"Ah! Of course I know that you must refer to politics, Úr Molnár." The name of a man or woman, unexpectedly introduced, can be made the vehicle of the subtlest flattery, of a half-timid hint of deepening interest, may even foreshadow a caress. Ranata's rich voice uttered the commonplace name, with its long vowel, in a manner to mount to the head of any man. Wholly unused to the effort to please, she would have enjoyed this new exercise of power with all that was feminine in her nature, had the dynasty been rooted in the fires of the earth.

Molnár was young, he was barely thirty. He was ardent and susceptible, and for the moment he was not in love. And although he hated the House of Hapsburg as passionately as ever his great master had done, still was he monarchical born; the soul that could hate kings and love liberty was haunted by the ghosts of ancestors who had lived and died in reverence of the Lord's anointed. The poison was entering his nostrils. If Ranata had looked like most princesses doubtless he would have held sternly to his ideals. But she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and her ineffable air of breeding, her sweet condescension, and the changing expression of her powerful eyes were pumping the blood to his head. He made a final grasp for his politics and his pride.

"It is your happiness, madame, that you can afford to know nothing about politics."

"Ah! I wonder if I can? I have been much enlightened to-day. Enough so to understand your mean-

ing. Should I not know more? Can any member of my family afford to misunderstand this most important part of our Empire? It is true that I am only a woman—but at least I have some influence with my father. Will you not advise me?"

"Your Royal Highness," stammered Molnár. "Your Royal— Yes, of course you should understand our politics—would to Heaven that you did!"

"Whom shall I ask? I am in a position to hear only one side. Ah!" Her face was radiant. "You will come to the palace and give us a little lecture. My ball is to-morrow night. We can arrange then for an hour when you are not too busy to talk to us."

"I cannot go to your ball, your Royal Highness—none of the Left will go."

"Not come to my ball? Why not?"

"We never enter the palace."

"But my ball has nothing to do with politics. I am not your sovereign. I have my father's permission to live here this winter because my American friend and I are so tired of Vienna, and I am so fascinated by your city. I wish to enjoy Budapest, Úr Molnár. Is my winter to be poisoned by party feeling?—of which I know too little. How illogical, and how ungallant! You will come and bring your colleagues to-morrow night? It is to be the great night of my life, and I am sure you will not spoil it."

"I? Ah!" Once more he braced himself. "I am afraid there will not be enough women to go round, your Royal Highness," he said meaningly.

"That was clever. But"—she spoke very softly—"wait. I cannot do everything at once. I have an Obersthofmeisterin. Remember that you are far more your own master than I am mistress of my acts."

As she finally dismissed the bewildered Obstructionist,

she caught Fessenden's eye. It was twinkling with appreciation of a fellow-man's enslavement. Ranata saw in the twinkle approval of her manœuvres in a great cause, and responded to the new chord of sympathy with all a woman's facile manufacture of subtle understandings with unconscious man.

"I feel somewhat of a Jesuit," she said to him as they left the building. "But it is success or failure, and I shall not fail."

"Your tactics are those of the man who wins. And I suppose you reason that men will fall in love with you anyhow—that one more or less doesn't matter."

"That is an idea!" said Ranata.

## XVI

After luncheon the two girls, by Alexandra's manœuvring, were alone in Ranata's sitting-room. It was a very beautiful room now, with its golden walls, its rich Oriental hangings and chairs. The windows were open, and the Hungarian sunshine flooded it. Ranata sat in one of the deep straight-back chairs so beloved of royalty, Alexandra in a rocking-chair which had been upholstered to match the rest of the furniture, yet was impertinent and incongruous. "There is only one thing that will reconcile me to parting with you when you marry," the Archduchess had remarked when it arrived; "I can have a bonfire made of all those ridiculous chairs." And Alexandra had replied, "I will convert you even to those before I die."

To-day neither was sensible of pleasantries. Alexandra's face was flushed, and the Archduchess, although her eyes were fixed absently on Pest, and her profile might have been cut in stone, was bracing herself for the

coming conflict. Her subtle brain cleared and balanced its parts. She was determined to lose neither her friend nor her friend's brother, and an ill-considered word might lose her both. She needed all her resources, for no one understood her so well as Alexandra.

"You know I never beat about the bush," the disconcerting American began. "You would think me a fool if I pretended any longer to be blind to the fact that you are entangling my brother in order the better to turn the tables on the German Emperor. If he were any one else's brother I should follow your course with pleasure—I was as delighted as amused at your easy subjugation of poor Molnár this morning; for I am, up to a certain point, heart and soul with you in this great matter—but Fessenden is my brother."

"I wish he were not. Can you look at this matter dispassionately and impersonally, Alexandra? Do you believe that I can succeed as well without your brother?"

"Possibly not. But I see no reason why any American, much less the most useful young man in the United States, should be sacrificed to the Austrian dynasty. If it were a matter concerning your happiness, I might hesitate, for I love you as well as I do Fessenden; but when patriotism goes into the balance with family affection, pride also casts in a heavy weight."

"But why do you speak so surely of sacrifice? Men are always falling in love with women, and always getting over it."

"I have thought a good deal in the last few days. If Fessenden fell in love with you, he would have a hideous time getting over it—if he ever did."

"If he fell in love with me? You do not think he has, then?"

"He is in the first stage now. I suppose a man can



## RULERS OF KINGS

get over that. But quite aside from his feelings, I don't wish to see him made a fool of."

"I have no desire to make a fool of him."

"I should like to know what you call it. Do not let us quibble. If you cannot love my brother send him away."

"How would it help the matter if I did love your brother? I hope you do not wish me any such unhappy fate as that."

"I wish only for your happiness. You know that from my point of view the impossible is always possible. And it is not altogether the American point of view. Heaven knows the Hapsburgs have adopted it more than once. I hear that another of your illustrious cousins is about to renounce his rights of possible succession, and his titles, in order to marry an actress—or is it a girl in a chocolate shop?"

"They are insignificant—they lose nothing but their titles and their position at court, for which presumably they care nothing. And you know my sorrow and disgust at all such poverty of self-respect and sense of duty. We need not go over that old ground again. You know that with me it would always be my house first. I should never consider myself for a moment."

"Then send my brother away. He was an after-thought. You had made all your plans to succeed without him."

"I am convinced that when William has made his Germany as strong and prosperous—when he has fulfilled that first ideal of his reign—and when my father is dead—he means to make war on Russia, and that your brother means to furnish the enormous sum necessary. And if William conquered Russia—" she waved her hands expressively.

"It is by no means certain that William will conquer

## RULERS OF KINGS

Russia. It is a large order. The rest of Europe, to say nothing of England, would have something to say about it."

"With the best part of Austria and all of Hungary at his back he could snap his fingers at the rest of Europe. Without the interference of Russia in 1849, Hungary would be a free state to-day, and she only waits for her chance of revenge. Who knows what agencies are at work to give reality to the Pan-Germanic movement the moment my father dies? Bohemia might sympathize with Russia, but what could she do, hemmed in as she is? Besides, the Slavs outside of Russia have little desire to put themselves under the heel of the heaviest tyranny in Europe. Most of them would prefer annexation with Germany, if only because the German Emperor has learned the secret of prosperity. If he tempted them with that inducement, you may be sure that only a Pole would hesitate and stand out for complete independence. All this enthusiasm here for William in Hungary is genuine enough, no doubt, but Budapest is as active and ambitious as Berlin, and a ruler who could and would make Hungary as rich and as successful, industrially and commercially, as she should be with her resources and her enterprise, would be quite as acceptable if he were less fascinating. And I will confess that I am superstitious about William. I never raise my eyes to the heavens at night that I do not fancy I see his star laughing at me. Indomitable ambition has united Europe before. There is no sufficient reason why it should not happen again. Before every great change of the world's map wiseacres have shrugged their shoulders at the impossible, and the barriers have been solemnly pronounced impregnable. How easy it all seems when one looks back upon it. And with your brother—perhaps the United States—as his ally—great Heaven! If

I were William I should sleep serenely enough, in spite of all the antagonistic forces in Germany itself. And he grows in tact. He has the brain to learn his lessons."

"And it is your purpose to reduce Fessenden to such a state of idiocy that he would give you his pledge to let William take care of himself? Suppose he had already given his word to the Emperor of Germany? Have you not seen enough of him to know that he is a man who under no possible circumstances would break his word?"

"I have seen enough to know that he is a man who would give the one woman the world if she asked for it. It is not necessary to break promises. There can be misunderstandings, quarrels, which leave men mutually free of one another."

Alexandra drew her breath in and her brows together. She had hardly expected such frankness, well as she knew the methods of diplomacy. But she answered readily: "A man does not sacrifice his honor and his friendship, and place the world at the feet of the adored object with no hope of reward. Do you mean to say that you purpose to dazzle my brother with the hope of ultimate success?"

"No; it will not be long before we understand each other too completely for that!"

"What *do* you mean?"

A deep blush suffused Ranata's face, and she stood up suddenly. "I believe I shall love your brother," she said distinctly. "I believe it is my destiny as surely as it is that I was born to be useful to my house. I have never seen another man who has touched—has interested me at all. There has never been any hope in my heart that I should not love sooner or later—perhaps no wish. Would you take this from me—from him? Cannot you understand what a great love may mean to natures like mine and your brother's—that the earthly

## RULERS OF KINGS

consummation of love has nothing to do with its immortal part? Your brother did not receive your letter asking him to come here. We met by the merest accident—apparently!—and he interested me quite independently of my ambitions, my purpose. If ambition and purpose had never been born I should implore you as I do now to let him remain near me as long as possible. I shall not relax in my determination to win him from the Emperor of Germany, but there is so much in my soul to give! I shall give it to him—and I believe he will be satisfied.”

Alexandra, who had been repelled by the half revelation of purely human passion, thrilled at the vision of poetic and spiritual love high on the snowy peaks of Imagination. Ranata looked too exalted to kiss, but the American girl was delighted to find the infrequent tears in her own eyes. In a moment, however, her practical brain replied:

“I don’t believe Fessenden is very sentimental. You will have to educate him.”

“He needs less education than you think.”

“Of course you have already begun to idealize him. He is accustomed to get what he wants. He loves obstacles—and he always surmounts them.”

“I shall give him what he wants.”

Alexandra considered. She had little regard for the ultimate wants of men, had, indeed, given them slight consideration. But she knew that man was extremely prosaic on the subject of matrimony, and she was allured by the prospect of beholding her brother, purified of earthly gross, standing alone on a lofty peak, wrapped in the chastity of spiritual love. She shivered slightly, and Fessenden, somehow, seemed to slip out of the picture; but it pleased her nevertheless, and it was not unlike her own cool and romantic visions of

Ranata's future. Besides, it was not necessarily final. There was always the possibility that Fessenden, if induced to climb his peak, would stay on it only long enough to create a scheme for the further and final subjugation of Ranata. She answered after a moment's thinking—

“You have put such an entirely different complexion on it! I should be a fiend to betray you. William and Fessenden both know how to take care of themselves. I'm frightfully interested, old girl, and I'll never turn a hair again.”

When Ranata was alone she sat straight in her chair and stared hard at the floor. “How much of that did I mean?” she said finally and aloud. “How much! I wish to God I knew!”

## XVII

Immediately after tea the Archduchess rose to leave the Hungarian house, saying that she had letters to write, neglected in the morning. She had included all in the slight explanation, but as she passed Fessenden she raised her eyes irresistibly. He was looking as haughty and distant as she was attempting to feel. Again their positions were subtly reversed.

“Would you like to see my new rooms?” she asked hurriedly. “I think them very charming. Perhaps you will come up with Alexandra—in an hour?”

When she had gone Fessenden turned to his sister. “Wouldn't you like to walk about the garden?” he asked. “You do not take half as much exercise as you should.”

They did not walk far. As soon as they reached a rustic seat out of sight of the others, and Fessenden had made sure there were no lurking places for eavesdrop-

pers, they sat down, and he began at once, as if pursuing aloud the current of his thoughts—

“The great uncle, Frederick William IV., of the Emperor of Germany was mad, and there has been no suggestion of insanity in the family since. That disproves not only the alternate generation theory, but that insanity is necessarily persistent.”

“What on earth are you driving at?”

“A good many things have kept me awake at night lately, and one of them is the uncomfortable number of lunatics in the royal and ducal families of Bavaria.” He added deliberately: “I mean that the late Empress, and her cousins, Ludvig II. and the present Otto, seem to hover ever behind the Archduchess Ranata, three black and stalking ghosts.”

“I thought you knew your Europe.”

“I have no time to waste in analyzing court gossip. But do you mean to say that these three were not mad?”

“Elizabeth was no more mad than I am, and the other two lost their minds through specific causes. If I don’t know anything else, I know the facts about every royalty in Europe; I have been brought up on them.”

“Well, explain,” said Fessenden impatiently. “And don’t let your loyalty and your imagination run away with you.”

“You must have learned that the commonplace world always revenges itself on an unusual character by believing it mad. Doubtless you have been called mad yourself. It is only recently that people have resigned themselves to the sanity of the German Emperor. Elizabeth hated the footlights as much as he loves them, and publicity has readjusted him to the common estimate. The ever-increasing seclusion of her life deepened the mystery and the gossip, and both confirmed those who were not in a position to learn the truth, in



## RULERS OF KINGS

the belief that an empress who spurned a throne must necessarily have lost her wits. At the other extreme are psychic enthusiasts—over here in Europe—who already have begun The Legend of Elizabeth. A legend of some sort was inevitable, for she was royal, beautiful, unhappy, mysterious, and died a violent death. These enthusiasts knew as little of her personally as the world in general, but their imaginations are of finer fibre, and there was much in this lovely and romantic figure to appeal to them. No doubt, a hundred years from now Elizabeth will be one of the most irresistible figures of the past to the poet and the romancer, for the legend that the members of this cult have set on foot will grow and strengthen daily. Their belief is that she was one of those rare beings who are too exalted for human contact, and that the development of her natural superiority was one of the most remarkable in the psychic history of mortals. Profoundly imbued, according to them, with the doctrine that a man should develop his personality at the expense of every duty, every affection, of kin or subject, she withdrew herself more and more, not only from the world, but from her husband and children, that she might devote her thoughts only to what was beautiful, live the inner life alone, and develop her personality in a manner possible to most people only after they have cast off the flesh; that her sensitiveness in time became so great that contact with common mortals was unbearable. That is the legend, and, mark my words, before a century has passed she will be painted with a halo about her head. It will be only the glamour of royalty, but the world will never suspect that.

“This is the truth of the matter—like all truth, to be found midway between two extremes of belief: Elizabeth was a simple creature, bright, sweet, lovely, but, although highly accomplished, moderately gifted in the

## RULERS OF KINGS

matter of intellect and strength of character. Nature never intended her to mount a throne. She should have married for love a man who would have been faithful to her, and lived a life without the ostentation and public duties she hated, a life that would have been filled with all the refined pleasures. Instead of that the poor child was suddenly shot from her simple country home, where hardly a whisper of the world and its ways had reached her, up to the most formal and exacting throne in Europe. Here she was not only tormented by her mother-in-law, but by the rapidly waning love of her husband, to whom at that time she was much attached. She was too young and too undisciplined to accept her fate with philosophy; nor did she ever develop the strength of intellect and character which enables a disappointed woman to conquer life. Life conquered her, poor thing; as a queen and a woman she was a failure. First, while she was very young, she ran away and sulked for several years. She returned, but only to absent herself more and more from a life which she detested increasingly. It is quite true that she loved the beautiful things of this world—art, music, literature—above all, nature. In many ways she was an exquisite creature, and in these congenial resources she found much compensation for the constant unhappiness and the terrible tragedies of her life. Every person of refined tastes cares less and less for the world as he grows older. When the most excruciating disappointments crown this natural tendency, and there is not ambition to dominate experience, then most men and women of Elizabeth's age live much the same sort of life that she did; and the world knows too little about them to call them either mad or psychic phenomena. So much for Elizabeth—and let no one grudge her success in legend as a compensation for the failure of her life.

“As to Ludvig—”

“A moment,” interrupted Fessenden, “what of Rudolf?”

“Rudolf had suffered frightfully from headaches for several months before he died, brought on by the dissipations into which he plunged to drown the miseries of his life. He was one of the most rarely gifted of the Hapsburgs, from the first Rudolf down; he had no responsibilities to occupy his brilliant and restless mind; he had a great weakness for women, and they pursued him; his domestic life was wretched; he sought oblivion in every possible way, and the autopsy proved that he had unhinged his brain. He undoubtedly killed himself in a wild moment of intolerable *ennui* and disgust. That Marie Vetsera was present adds little to the significance of his death. It might as well have been any other woman, and Rudolf was incapable of the pathos of a romantic suicide. As to his insanity, it was not congenital; and there was no sign of it before he gave himself up to his last dissipations.

“Ludvig was born with no other screw loose than an inordinate admiration of himself and the actor’s disposition to startle the world from the centre of the stage. All little kings—and some big ones—have a disproportionate idea of their own importance; and to realize the extreme point to which Ludvig, after his brain became clouded, carried this not unnatural delusion, you have only to visit his castle of Neu-Schwanstein and look at the throne room. It was not even built before Bavaria became a mere state of the German Empire, and yet it has the proportions and the splendor suitable for one of the three or four great monarchs of the earth. And this, not in his capital, but in one of his many castles! But Ludvig’s passion for beauty, his patronage of Wagner, and the splendid monuments he has raised in Bavaria

to his own artistic genius, make him quite worthy of the inevitable legend. If you will look at his photographs, even those taken after he became gross and had suffered from many attacks of insanity, you will see that his eyes were always the eyes of the idealist. It was to this very idealism that he owed his insanity. Above all others was the monastic ideal of chastity, but he did not have the self-denial to live on monastic fare; and he was a king, and there was everything in his life to give his brain and imagination a preternatural activity. The consequence was periodical attacks of insanity, and the accentuation of his original peculiarities; towards the end, no doubt, he was vicious enough. The same thing might happen to any American, although, of course, centuries of interbreeding render the brain more susceptible to abnormal conditions. So much for Ludvig von Bayern, who in his youth was beautiful enough to demand from the very canvas absolution for all his vanities. As for poor Otto—recall all you know of the Duc de Reichstadt—I mean the young man of history, not of fiction.”

Fessenden rose and thrust his hands into his pockets, staring at the ground. In a moment he raised his head and made the motion of flinging a load from his shoulders.

“Is that all that has worried you?” asked Alexandra curiously.

“Yes,” he said, “that is all.”

## XVIII

A few moments later a lackey informed them that her Royal Highness had finished her letters, and they went up to the private apartments of the Archduchess. She received them in the writing-room, the first of the suite,

whose windows looked down upon Pest only. It had been panelled and hung with blue brocade, almost as bright as the cornflower, and the furniture and wood-work were white and silver. It was handsome and stately and stiff.

Fessenden wandered about for a time looking at the miniatures; the Archduchess, apparently in her most gracious mood, and somewhat amused withal, moving beside him and giving him little biographical notes. There was one of Maria Theresia before the flesh rolled out, and the face and poise of head were full of young pride and indomitable will; but this artist, like his fellows, had failed to demonstrate the beauty with which the historian accredits her. Several of the men and women had the terrible Hapsburg mouth, but their eyes were genial, and they looked like kindly simple folk. Most of the Bavarians had some degree of beauty, although the young women all wore that meekness of expression which would seem to be the pertainment of the inconspicuous females of reigning houses. The lovely face of Elizabeth, with its strange and disconcerting shadow of perpetual girlhood, looked from several of the bits of porcelain and ivory. There were two of Ranata herself, one in haughty profile, the other with eyes cast down, but, by cunning art, suggesting a swift uplifting of lash and a blaze beneath. The bosom also looked about to heave, the throat to swell. The artist evidently had caught her in some mood of self-repression and penetrated the mask she wore so well. Fessenden studied it for a moment in silence, then turned and looked at her sharply. Again the subtle delight of being understood stirred in Ranata, who had yet to learn that the truly masculine man never understands a woman, and has only a fleeting desire to do so when anxious or uncomfortable. She colored slightly and

turned her head away. Its movement happened to be in the direction of the door leading into the sitting-room. Fessenden's eyes followed hers, and he gave an exclamation of rapture.

"Do I see a rocking-chair?" he exclaimed—"a rocking-chair?"

Ranata experienced the first pang of her new condition; but deep among the complexities of her womanhood was that indulgence for man which carries so many of her sex through the shoals of amazement, disappointment, and weariness, into the calm waters of philosophy. To this instinct, as much as to pride, might be attributed her ready words and hospitable smile.

"I suppose it is many weeks now since you have seen one—unless you have happened to notice Sarolta's? This is Alexandra's most cherished possession, but I am sure she will lend it to you for a few moments."

"Yes, indeed," quoth Alexandra. "I will write a note here, if I may."

Fessenden started for the rocking-chair, but branched abruptly to the window. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "it is finer from here than from the garden—there are too many trees there. The Margarenthen-Insel looks as frivolous and unhistoried as any pleasure island in America, and that downward sweep of the mountain is very like the Adirondacks."

"Are Americans disappointed when they find the incomparable in Europe?" demanded the Archduchess dryly. "I asked a lady of one of your Embassies once how she liked Vienna, and she said she liked it very much, but she did so miss her back-yard."

Fessenden laughed heartily. "Doubtless her husband's post was a Christmas present from an appreciative President. You know something of our politics, so I need not explain."



It might be said of Ranata that she paraphrased a famous saying of Mark Twain's and had adopted the version as her safeguard: "When in doubt talk politics." She stood beside Fessenden and regarded him with contemplative admiration. "You have done so much," she said, as if considering. "Why do not you give your country a new code of political morals?"

"The pigeon-holes of my country are stuffed with codes of regeneration. The United States must dree its weird, and suffer the penalty of springing full grown from the brain of the old civilization. Several things may happen, however, before she is many years older: a revolution, which will let out the bad blood and bring what best elements are left to the surface; a collapse of our worst institutions through sheer rottenness; or a sudden awakening of the public conscience. That may happen at any moment, for all our history has proved that you can try an American so far and no farther. The sensationalism of the press has accustomed them to almost anything, from daily lynchings to the unblushing politics of their Presidents; but there is always the last straw, and I await the falling of that straw with considerable hope. I no longer remonstrate; on the contrary, I give a helpful shove whenever I can do so unobserved—and I have my men in Congress and State legislatures. They may not be first-class men, but they are intelligent, and they obey my orders."

"You are a bit of a Jesuit."

"It is a valuable lesson I have learned in your Europe. Besides, I want the crisis to come in my best years. Even my father could not grapple with it now; and as this crisis was what I was born for and raised for, you will admit that it is my duty to use every faculty and whatever methods the peculiarities of my country demand."

"We are not the only ones who think ourselves heaven-born," murmured Ranata.

"True, but your inspiration and mine spring from sources as asunder as the poles. A fool ascends a throne, with no more than enough wit to sign his name, with not an impulse for progression, not an idea with which to keep his state abreast of the other great nations of the earth, with perhaps every folly that will scuttle her unless a revolution or Heaven intervenes; and yet there he is, half his length above other men, braver, infinitely more intelligent men, who accept him without protest and never forget to flatter. His masses endure him without question, unless he push them to extremity, and often then. Can you wonder that he believes the Almighty placed him on that throne for some inscrutable purpose, or that his people believe it, knowing that they would have selected almost any one else? With us a man blunders along through square holes and round holes until he finds the one that fits him, and then he settles down and attends to business. I had the superior advantage of being trained for a specific purpose by one of the most remarkable men living, and I have inherited enough of him to make the consummation possible. I 'found myself' earlier than most men do, and I have been finishing my education ever since. I know where I stand and what I can do. My final accomplishment, of course, depends entirely upon circumstances. My best effort now is to make myself ready to meet any contingency whatever, and to leap swiftly to its mastery."

Ranata turned her head and regarded him intently. "If I did not know you so well through my intimacy with Alexandra," she said, "I should find it difficult to believe that patriotism with you was a consuming passion. You have so much carelessness, boyishness, in your manner—and—you are so practical!"

“If I tore about like a raging bull I might accomplish notoriety, but I certainly should accomplish nothing else. And the secret of the failure of the ‘reformers’ of the United States is that they have the ideals and the political bosses have the sense.”

She asked irresistibly, “If it ever came to a choice between your country and a woman, what would be the result?”

“No such question will ever arise.”

“No?”

“Certainly not. Do you think so meanly of my resources as that?”

“But circumstances are sometimes stronger than men.”

“Some men.”

Ranata had let her arm drop to her side; her hand was not an inch from Fessenden’s. Both were acutely aware of the magnetic temptation of that nearness; for a second all their being seemed to have surged into their finger-tips. Fessenden’s curved rigidly inward. His brain was still in control, and he was accustomed to play a careful and far-seeing game. Her hand fluttered towards his; then she swung about abruptly.

“Why don’t you sit in your rocking-chair?” she asked with a nervous laugh. “I must turn you out directly; it is nearly time to dress.”

Fessenden marched to the chair, and rocked himself for twenty minutes with every appearance of content. Alexandra came in from the next room, and they talked of the ball of the following night and of other impersonal things. The peasants had come and were housed, and a remarkable band of gypsies had been found in Transylvania. Fessenden, who was dining in Pest, rose regretfully at seven.

He smiled down upon Ranata and shook her hand

slightly. "Can I come up here again?" he asked. "I like it much better than any other part of the palace."

"Perhaps," said Ranata, smiling, but angry at the quick response within her to the warm and personal attitude of the lordly male. "You have had your own way too much. I think you need disciplining."

Alexandra was retiring through the outer room. Fessenden raised the hand he held and pressed his lips to it twice quickly. "I am humblest of your slaves," he said unsteadily.

"No you are not!" replied Ranata almost as unsteadily. "And I wish you would go. I have never been late for dinner in my life."

When she was alone she turned her eyes to the rocking-chair; then, after a manifest effort in another direction, she moved slowly towards it, regarded it impatiently, tenderly, then sank slowly into its embrace and dropped her head against the cushion.

## XIX

The palace at Buda to-day (restored by Maria Theresia) is chiefly remarkable for the imposing beauty of its exterior; within, the severe elegance of its walls and furniture conveys not a hint of the ornate luxury, the gorgeous magnificence of the palace of the fifteenth century, during the reign of Matthias Corvinus, son of John Hunyadi, the period in which Hungary commanded the admiration and homage of Europe.

Not content with the reputation of a soldier second only to that of his great father, Matthias, ascending the throne at the age of fifteen, and giving immediate evidence of intellectual and governing qualities of a rare precocity and order, quickly ripened into a scholar and

the most liberal patron of the arts in the world of his day. This great and singular man, who on the battlefield endured the hardships of the meanest of his soldiers; who, disguised, entered the camp of his enemies again and again, or calmly took his observations amid a rain of bullets and spears, whose justice passed into a proverb, and who was a rigorous administrator of finance, had a love of luxury, matched by no contemporary, that would have sapped the energies of another man, and a delight in purely intellectual pursuits and discussions that rounded one of the most versatile and grandly equipped characters known to history. He established and personally disciplined a body of foot soldiers—the Black Troop—modelled upon and equal to the famous Janissaries of Turkey, conquered the Czechs, and captured Vienna, driving out Frederick, the German Emperor, forcing him to take refuge in a wagon drawn by oxen, and to beg from convent to monastery like any common mendicant. The court of this ardent soldier became the rallying-ground of scholars and artists, who not only lived on his bounty, but were raised to the highest positions in the royal household. He spent his hours of leisure in day-long arguments with the scientists and savants who had deserted all other courts for this most enlightened and fascinating of monarchs, or lying at ease on a couch covered with a golden tapestry embroidered with pearls, in one of the most splendid libraries that any mortal has ever possessed. This library, sacked with the rest of the palace by the Turks after the battle of Mohács, was contained in two immense rooms, whose walls were covered with carved shelves of precious woods and tapestries of velvet embroidered with gold. The books, collected by Matthias, and in many cases written for him, numbered ten thousand. They were inscribed on white vellum, illuminated

by the most accomplished masters of the art, and bound in colored skins set with precious and semi-precious stones. On the cover of each volume was a miniature of Matthias and his coat-of-arms. The furnishings of the Palace of Buda, its objects of art, many made from gold or silver and of a great size, the tapestries, the pleasure-rooms, the hanging gardens of his several palaces, were marvels of beauty and costliness; and the embassies which he constantly sent to the various courts of Europe so surpassed the efforts of other monarchs in extravagance that his resources of wealth alone struck despair to the hearts of those who may have meditated an assault upon his kingdom. When about to take a second wife, Beatrice, daughter of the King of Naples, the splendors and luxuries of Buda were augmented twofold; and on the day of the wedding the great hall of the palace, in addition to its silken hangings interwoven with gold and precious stones, its tapestry of sheer gold, its thousand vessels of silver, its golden service chased with the history of the world, silver casks of wine were suspended from the ceiling, and a huge silver fountain spouted the choicest and costliest of all wines, the Tokay of Hungary.

The manuscripts in their jewelled cases, the thousand objects of barbaric magnificence, were gone forever. There was no modern art that could simulate them, even could craftsmen be found with patience for the attempt; but Ranata had persuaded the Emperor to send to Buda some twenty of the superfluous Gobelins which the Hapsburgs have retained throughout their vicissitudes. Her argument had enlivened the mood of her father, and raised still higher his hope in his youngest born.

“The Hungarians,” Ranata had written, “no doubt resent the very obvious fact that there are so few treas-



ures in the Palace of Buda, and, knowing that our tapestries are packed away in large numbers, and are as priceless as they are beautiful, must infer that we fear to trust them in this most precarious of our possessions. So it has seemed to me that it would be another stroke of diplomacy to send several of the best, with the understanding that they are to remain here. It is a small yet impressive sum to stake as an expression of our confidence in ourselves and our Hungarian subjects."

The tapestries had been promptly despatched, and now hung in the four circle rooms opening into the Great Hall of Ceremonies, and in the blue drawing-room and adjacent dining-room. These rooms, as well as the long suite down the front of the palace, were recalled for the night of the ball from their arctic splendors by a lavish adornment of palms and flowers, and in several of the smaller rooms the lights were pink. Modern as it was, the Great Hall itself, with its panels, like lakes of liquid gold, its heavy incrustations of yellow bronze on the brilliant white of the wood, and its immense chandeliers, with their thousand points of light, was too perfect in its way to gain aught from the past, nor did Ranata add so much as a flower.

It had been decided that Prince Árpád Nadasdy, an aged magnate and close friend of the Emperor, should wear the royal robes of Matthias, as neither political nor sentimental significance could be attached to his impersonation. The old Prince was far closer upon senility than his king would ever be, and addicted to long nights of Csendes, at the Nemzeti Casino, the club of the magnates, where he had left all of a once large income not absorbed by the turf; but he had ordered his costume of a long-suffering tailor, and vowed, over the hand of his beloved princess, that he would give the final touch of reality to the scene. As Matthias had died in his

prime, and was possessed of a classic beauty, Prince Nadasdy, who did not number vanity among his vices, had announced his intention to wear a flowing fair wig and a beard, although the fine outline of Matthias had been shaved on the battle-field. The piercing glance of that monarch no art could coax into the bleared orbs of the old magnate, but he still had a figure of majestic height and carriage, and in spite of dissipations he had preserved its slimness. He was to wait at the upper end of the Throne Room until Ranata, who was to impersonate Beatrice of Naples, dressed for the first time in the national costume of her lord, should have made, in her own character, the perfunctory round of greeting among her assembled guests. He would then stand at her side at the lower end of the hall while the peasants danced the Chardash, and afterwards walk with her through a *quadrille d'honneur*.

At nine o'clock on the night of the ball the great company was assembled in the Hall of Ceremonies awaiting the entrance of the court, but the aged Matthias had not made his appearance. In that splendid scene, however, he was not missed, and every eye turned constantly towards the door beyond the second circle room which led to the private apartments of the Archduchess. Many had not yet seen her, or but in glimpses, and by this time curiosity had risen to fever pitch. The women as well as the men were in the eccentric splendor of their national dress, and although it varied little in cut, fancy and extravagance prevailed in the materials of the low bodice, the apron, and the voluminous skirts; and bodice, neck, and arms were almost obliterated by the big dull uncut jewels and heavy chains which, with the ancient costumes of velvet and satin, embroidered and brocaded with a lost art, neither time nor poverty has been able to drive from the chest of the Hungarian.

## RULERS OF KINGS

The magnates wore, although lightly, their velvet cloaks, fur-lined, embroidered with jewels, and carried their plumed kalpags in one hand.

The men distinguished in art and letters, without jewels or hereditary costume, still made a fine showing in the silk-and-velvet dress of the retainers of the court of Matthias, but the greater number of the deputies, in their fierce Hungarian pride, had chosen to wear the military uniform of that period, which included a short braided jacket and a velvet cloak of some brilliant color.

The young girls, although in attire less imposing than that of their mothers and married sisters, were quite as picturesque, and their white gowns rested the eye in that blaze of color. Each house had contributed a young son who wore the purple velvet, the golden chain, and the golden network on their heads of the ambassadorial youths of King Matthias. These pages stood in a double file along the two circle rooms leading to the apartments of the Archduchess. In the high gallery that traverses the hall a military band played softly. Beneath, in the arcade, a double gypsy band awaited their turn and eagerly observed the historic scene. Behind them, erect against the wall, as dignified and impressive as the greatest of the nobles, were the peasants who were to dance the Chardash. Their presence was a surprise to all, and they had inspired almost as much conversation as the royal hostess herself.

That conversation was very animated, at times quite shrill, for the Hungarians, as lively by temperament as the American, were more excited to-night than they had been during the visit of William of Germany. The excitement during his entertainment had been, with slight exception, confined to the men, but there was not a woman in the palace to-night who did not feel a flutter at her heart and a shortening of her breath. Not only

was Ranata in appearance and manner their ideal of what a princess should be, and the daughter of a queen and the sister of a prince they had worshipped, but they stood in expectation of the initial moment of a court life which promised to be more brilliant than anything in Europe, might indeed revive the gay splendors of the days when their fathers had been the greatest aristocracy in the world—when the Hapsburgs were robber barons and the Hohenzollerns unknown. That this should be given to them who had been starved of court life, that those who were too impoverished to leave their entailed homes and go to Vienna should now cherish the prospect of constant functions, and many private entertainments in the palace, filled every feminine heart with a sense of enchantment, and gratitude to this fairy princess who had dared to have an idea. They were prepared to love as much as they admired her, and jealousy had entered few souls, in spite of the extravagant admiration of the men. Many of the women, indeed, were beautiful enough to spare themselves envy, and those who were neither handsome, nor yet pretty, had sufficient cleverness and animation to keep their little courts together.

Alexandra had decided not to enter in Ranata's wake. Having none of that unwisdom which permits a wound to self-love that a grievance may be nursed afterwards, nor yet affinity for the rôle of the humble follower, she was always careful not to be placed in any position by her exalted friend that might rankle too late in her brain. She had, therefore, entered the room early, under the chaperonage of Princess Nadasdy, and Zrinyi, as ever, hovered close. He was a beautiful object in his thick gold embroideries, his plum-colored velvet cloak, his buttons and his chains; and Alexandra, in the dull-rose costume with its old-lace veil and apron, lent her by the

ambitious Zápolya, excited his approval to such a degree that once more he poured his impassioned avowal into her ears, and begged her to accept the chests of his grandmother as well as himself.

"Are they at your castle in the Alps?" asked Alexandra. "How can I decide such a question when I do not yet know whether that castle is sufficiently romantic to meet my most exacting taste? Like all Americans, Count, I am a connoisseur in castles; and how can I be sure that your grandmother's clothes will fit? Besides, I am a monomaniac on the subject of microbes."

Zrinyi, if he did not yet understand her, was by this time sufficiently seasoned to accept her sallies with neither sulks nor despair. Perceiving that she was in a frivolous mood he changed the subject.

"Are you not glad to be here to-night?" he demanded. "To play a part? Who knows what may be the result of the extraordinary impression the Princess has made? I feel that to-night she will either make a—a—portentous impression or disillusionize us altogether."

"Great moment in the history of Hungary?" asked Alexandra mischievously.

The Count flushed, but laughed. "Yes," he said defiantly. "I seldom have presentiments, but when I do—I shall not give you another chance to laugh at me. I do not see Mr. Abbott. Was he not to come with Prince Nadasdy? I hope nothing has happened to our king of to-night. He was not very sober last evening at the club. I have not seen him to-day, and hoped he was in bed building himself up for the ordeal."

"I have not seen my brother since yesterday—he sent word this morning he could not come to tea; but I know of no one so well able to take care of himself. Still I am surprised, for he should be here before the Princess

enters. Even he would hardly dare to arrive afterwards. Have you seen him?"

"Only this morning in the park, where I happened to be rather early. Perhaps he went off for a day in the country; I fancy he is tired of being stared at. He excites as much attention as the Princess, and he told me last night that he is persecuted by all sorts of men with business schemes, to say nothing of those who expect him to instruct them in the art of getting rich. I find something picturesque myself about his unimaginable wealth, combined with the fact that he is a gentleman and young; but I admire more his achievements, and I am very proud to be one of the many to do him honor in Hungary."

Then Alexandra gave him a dazzling smile, and moved a step closer. "You are so much more sensible than you were!" she whispered. "I feel as if you owed as much to me as to your mother. Who knows what may happen if you continue to improve?"

"I know that American girls say things that in any other women would indicate a small amount of heart and soul. It is safe to assume that you mean nothing you say."

"Think of the reserve force, lacking in your emotional woman! I may not give much at a time when I marry, but I shall have enough left to spread over a lifetime."

He laughed. "At least I don't delude myself that you are a poet in disguise. Well, I only ask that you marry me and let me begin your education. You may also continue mine."

"You really are improving—" began Alexandra, when with the rest of the company she fell silent. The staff of the Grand Chamberlain smote the floor three times.

The doors of the private apartments opened, and the officers of the court appeared, walking backward. As



there was no throne, they took up their position on either side of the entrance to the Hall of Ceremonies. And then Ranata entered.

She entered alone, although her ladies followed a moment later. As she walked slowly down the two circle rooms, empty but for the pages, the great company, in curious excitement, which they attributed afterwards to the complete illusion she produced, thronged towards the entrance of the hall, breathing shortly and crowding each other without ceremony.

Her appearance and her solitary progress between the ranks of bowing pages in their rich mediæval costumes, was as startling in its historic naturalness as in its stately and picturesque beauty. The full skirts of her gown were of a material so fine as to be almost invisible, covered with embroidery in pearls and silver thread, and flounces of point-lace. The bodice, sloping outward from waist-line to shoulders, was of pale blue velvet, half covered with lace, and roped together across the black tulle of the under-bodice with strands of large pearls. The court train of blue velvet was lined with lace instead of ermine—thus increasing the ethereal effect of the whole costume—and embroidered with black ravens holding a golden ring in the beak—the emblem of John Hunyadi. Her hair fell to her knees in thick ropes wound about with strands of pearls, two traversing the front of her figure, the rest half hidden by the veil which hung from a tiara almost as high as the Pope's. On her neck and arms were many pearls. The brilliant fairness of her skin, the flaming copper of her hair, the intense blackness of her brows and lashes, the regularity of her features, and the majestic beauty of her figure, combined with her royal state, the enchantment of her condescension as a daughter of the coldest house in Europe, and her bewildering presentment of the daughter

of the Anjous, induced one moment of silence so profound that it was almost hysterical. Then Zrinyi lifted his kalpag and cried "*Élyen!*" and in another moment the vast company, from Prince Illehazy, most dignified of magnates, to the most truculent deputy in the room were stamping their feet and shouting "*Élyen!*" until the chandeliers trembled, and their lights were reflected in the jewels on the waving kalpags. Even the peasants and gypsies forgot their humble rôle and broke in with abrupt discordant cries, the Roumanians shouting "*Setreasca!*" And then all united in one great "*Vivat!*" It was a tribute as portentous as it was spontaneous, for it had been accomplished by the art without words.

For an instant Ranata felt a sensation of tumultuous faintness, but she walked on slowly, not relaxing the mask of her face, except for a graceful smile of acknowledgment. Then she was possessed by an exhilaration which sent the blood through her veins like spirits, and in her brain was a confusion of feminine and patriotic delight, insolent triumph over the man who had worked harder than she to make these walls ring, and an emotional melting towards one whose face she did not see in that worshipping throng. It had been arranged that the distinguished American should attend King Matthias as captain of the "Black Troop," and although his place for the moment was at the head of the throne room beside the King his height should make him noticeable even in the confused breaking of ranks. But Ranata's eyes did not encounter his, and as she advanced closer to that tossed sea of flashing eyes and shouting voices, this daughter of the Cæsars, who had convinced an emperor and his Metternich that she could maintain the integrity of an empire, for a moment forgot her great rôle and permitted her soul to murmur, "Is he

here? Is he here? If he is, does he think me the most beautiful woman in the world? Is he thrilled with my triumph? Does he love me the more for it? Does he love me at all?"

She had almost reached the entrance of the throne room, and the company was moving backward to the walls, when, through the falling wave of sound, a low note reached her ear from a new direction. It came from the blue drawing-room, which here opens from the second circle room; and although the word was merely the one still echoing, and uttered hardly above a whisper, it thrilled Ranata as even the fulness of her triumph had not done. Only the self-control which the years and her state had given her kept her eyes fixed upon those who would note the flicker of a lash.

She entered the throne room, and made her tour of the guests in what was now an atmosphere vibrating with suppressed excitement. They held their breath to hear her speak; and although to exchange a word with each would have consumed the night, she paused where she thought it judicious and said a few personal words, while her eyes included those close by. When she reached the end of the room she discovered that the royal bridegroom was not at his post, and was profoundly annoyed. She herself might be the Hamlet of the piece, but without the chief accessory the illusion would tremble. There was no sign of him, however, and she could only hope that, fearing the full fatigue, he was in the blue room with his captain.

She forgot him for the moment as her eye suddenly encountered the fixed and fiery glance of Lajos Molnár. He wore a fierce red uniform, and stood against the wall with his arms folded. He looked as if he had been dragged to the palace by a halter and was prepared for the worst that could befall him.

Ranata smiled brilliantly, and motioned to him to come forth. He obeyed with such precipitation that there was a momentary panic in the ranks. Ranata gave him her lifted hand, and he kissed it like any courtier.

"Thank you for obeying my orders," she said. "Have you brought your friends?"

"Four," he stammered. "The others were obdurate, but I shall win another time. These are all men of importance; and like myself they would die for you, your Royal Highness!"

"Ah! Would you?" she asked softly. "I shall not ask that—only that you will all come here to luncheon to-morrow, and tell me what you think I should know. Will you?"

"Yes—yes—will I?"

Ranata smiled again and passed on, but in truth she was repelled at the unmasked passion in his face. It was evident that she had succeeded too well; and, while to fascinate him was a necessary part of her programme, his love both disgusted and faintly alarmed her. Like all women whose depths have been profoundly stirred by one man, she regarded the proffered love of other men as an insult, and was merciless.

When she had finished her progress amid a tribute as expressive as its vocal prelude, she took her stand at the end of the room; the Grand Chamberlain raised his hand, and the leader of the gypsy bands struck his cymbal. The peasants made their way to the middle of the hall, and began the curious stamping march which sometimes opens the Chardash. The company were diverted at once. Not only was here a novelty worthy of the night, but the peasants had been selected for their good looks and the superior beauty and freshness of their costumes. The men from the Hungarian vil-

lages had much embroidery on their white trousers and flowing shirts, and on the wide sleeves which escaped from jackets as elaborate in device as they were gay in color; their slender waists were bound with the silken sash of the gala-day, and many wore chains about their necks. Those that had been found in Hungary's Roumanian villages beyond the Theiss wore the ancient Persian sandal laced half-way to the knee, closer trousers, and a graceful shoulder-cloak. Their women wore panels of embroidery over white petticoats, and blouses almost as elaborate; while the Hungarian women, if not so richly attired, were quite as picturesque in their tight bodices of bright cloth with full sleeves and upper front of spotless lawn, their fancy aprons and dainty kerchiefs. All were handsome, and some of the Roumanians with their Roman faces and antique heads and forms had as much beauty as falls to the lot of any mortal. As they passed Ranata they looked their loyalty, for they too pulsed with the popular excitement, but they played their part with a calm self-possession which the great hills and the lonely plains had bred in them, and courts could do no more.

Ranata fixed her gaze resolutely upon them, but her ear was strained towards the drawing-room. Why did not the bridegroom come forth and bring the captain in his wake? But it was not until the march was over, and the partners were swinging about to the first slow wail of the dance, and holding every eye, that she became aware of the trailing of regal garments on the hard floor behind her. Her quick ear advised her that, for the moment at least, he was unaccompanied. She set her face in severity, for she had no mind to let the old Prince take his own way unreprieved, and as he finally halted beside her she did not speak nor lift her eyes to his, although she darted a glance of feminine curiosity

over his costume. It was regal enough; and in spite of his age he looked a superb and supple figure in his closely fitting armor of gold brocade sewn with jewels, covered to the waist with chains; and his legs in their long silken stockings were as shapely as youth. From his shoulders flowed a mantle of white velvet lined with ermine, and embroidered with the black raven holding the golden circlet in its beak. In spite of her intent to reprove, Ranata's eye travelled upward to observe how well he wore the crown, the while her ear was alert for another footfall. But her ear forgot its cunning, and her eye the crown it was rising to criticise, the while it should ignore the bleared apologetic orbs of her father's old friend. Her gaze was arrested and held by the piercing glance which tradition and the artist have given to Matthias Corvinus. And the rest of the presentment was complete, Ranata noted as her knees shook; even under the fair wig and beard the outlines were firm and fine, and the head was well poised and shaped. He looked far more the king than her father or any other sovereign in Europe, except perhaps the man whose memory she had expunged to-night. Had the dead risen? As the room swam round her she wondered if she were expected to drop on one knee. Then the eyes puckered themselves and smiled, and Ranata was the angriest woman in Hungary.

"How dared you!" she exclaimed beneath her breath. "How dared you!"

"Dared?"

"Yes! Yes! Yes!"

"It required no courage whatever, merely ingenuity—a considerable amount of that, however. Would you care to hear the story?"

"I have no curiosity on the subject whatever. Where is Prince Nadasdy?"



"At this moment? I have no idea. Yes, he is probably at the casino—if there is any one left to play with him. Otherwise he is doubtless lost to every variety of disappointment."

"And you—how did you inveigle that costume from him?"

"Inveigle, madame? I paid a king's ransom for this costume."

"Your loathsome American millions! I thought there were a few things they could not accomplish."

"There is nothing, madame. When they fail it is due to bungling only."

"You have no cause to be angry—to assume that tone with me!"

"You have abused me like a pickpocket."

"I beg your pardon—it seemed to me incredible that a magnate of Hungary, a prince who has been a member of my father's household, should do such a thing."

"When magnates and courtiers are consumed with a passion for gambling, to say nothing of the strong wines of Hungary, they are apt to degenerate into very ordinary human creatures. The story is a brief one, and I know you wish to hear it. I have had the honor of playing a number of games of Hungarian poker with your prince, who conceived a flattering preference for my game, although I usually won. Three nights ago I told him plainly that I wanted to come to this ball as King Matthias, and wear his costume. At first he merely stared at me helplessly; then he reflected that, being an American, I was doubtless mad, and proceeded to deal with me in his gentle and charming manner. When he was convinced both of my strength of purpose and sanity, I proposed a game in which he should stake this costume and his silence against a sum which I will not name. Furthermore, if I won I was to pay the price of

the costume three times over and return it to him the day after the ball. He confessed that he was haunted by the fear his tailor would not hand over the outfit without the price, and that he might have to mortgage his family jewels to pay it. He closed with my offer in less time than I am telling you this tale. His last scruple was of you, for he knew that I could pass unnoticed in the crowd, particularly if I kept my eyes half shut and wagged my head occasionally; and I vowed to him that I would secure your forgiveness—”

“I shall never forgive either of you, and I am ashamed of him.”

“So am I. But one man’s loss is usually another’s gain, and I am here without a scruple or regret.”

“Your horrible money may have bought poor old Nadasdy, but it will carry you no further.”

Fessenden’s hand closed deliberately on hers, and he drew it through his arm. Ranata was aghast, but it was impossible to struggle, and she stood rigid, but closer to him by two inches.

“I and the money you hate have no further dealings with each other to-night,” he whispered. “But for every barrier it has levelled between you and me, for all that it has permitted me to accomplish that makes me more worthy of you, it has my eternal gratitude. And now, please forget it.”

“I can forget nothing,” she murmured. “And you are running a terrible risk. If my father hears of this you may be requested to leave the Empire.”

“May I tell you that you are looking more beautiful than any one on earth can look?”

“Am I?”

She grasped at her receding anger, but it vanished. Into its place flashed an enchanting sense of danger; the wildness in her Hapsburg blood leaped its dike and

seemed to roar in her ears the while it sang in her soul. She forgot the years in which she had mourned the subjugation of Rudolf's fine brain by his passions, and the interminable disasters his weakness had entailed. Why should she not be thankful that her own drama had begun at last? She should live and feel. What mattered the end?

It was by no means the first time the temptation had beset her since she had met Fessenden Abbott, but her brain had controlled her hitherto; she had fancied that her clear vision would keep the end always in view, however she might feel the weakness of woman within her and indulge it in friendship, while working for the cause of her house. But the excitement and exhilaration of this evening had lifted her to reckless heights, her pulses were throbbing, her being was trembling with exaltation, her head almost whirling. And before her was the great company who knew nothing, suspected nothing. To live in their very presence, as if they were ants on a hill—her newly born dramatic sense flew to the fanning of her emotions. She leaned heavily on his arm and raised her eyes.

"Am I?" she whispered again. "I wondered—I heard your *Élyen*."

"I knew that you heard it."

"I did not turn my head."

"Nevertheless, I knew."

"Can you read my soul?" she exclaimed in a momentary panic. "Do not read too much."

"That is all I live for."

"You—who have so much else! Would you give up one of your ambitions for me?"

"I would give up the whole game, every ambition, every penny."

"Your country?"

## RULERS OF KINGS

“Yes, my country.”

“You were very cool about it yesterday.”

“Yesterday is not to-night.”

“I had the greatest faith in your devotion to your country.”

“When you feel as I do now you will have faith in nothing else.”

“Do not be too mad. Let us be happy for this one evening.”

“Is this your idea of happiness?”

“I am as happy as I dare to be.”

“When I have taught you what happiness is you will remember this prelude as a very poor affair.”

“Have you also bought poor old Nadasdy’s jewels?”

“No, he is not so bad as that; but he is not above renting them.”

“Not another magnate would speak to him again if they knew what he had done.”

“They are not to know it.”

“Why did you wish to be king?”

“For two reasons: I am tired of duennas and interruptions—I have not much patience. Matthias was the husband of Beatrice, and you are Beatrice. In the eyes of this fanciful company to-night you are my wife—I am your bridegroom.”

He felt her tremble and draw in her breath sharply. But in a moment she raised her eyes again—and there was no veil upon them—and said: “Yes—I will be Beatrice for these few hours, and believe that you are Matthias. Is—do you mean to tell me that there is no happiness in such imagining? If I have been happy in my fancy before, surely this—this—”

Fessenden was as nearly intoxicated as a man may be in the presence of a thousand people. “Listen to the Chardash for a moment,” he said unsteadily.

The Chardash was near its finish. The gypsies were playing madly. The peasants were shouting and stamping, their women dancing with the graceful energy of panthers; the spectators were looking on in delight, the bodies of many swaying slightly. The music stopped with a crash that had a note of disappointment and anger in its triumph; the peasants marched forward and bowed profoundly to their sovereigns—who looked as high and impersonal, yet gracious, as sovereigns should look—then filed out of the room, to revel in the servants' quarters till morning.

The guests were impatient to dance. The musicians in the gallery received their signal, and the opening quadrilles were quickly formed, eight in the four circle rooms.

Fessenden walked through the stately old-fashioned quadrille very creditably. His hands were concealed in gauntlets, and his height would have saved his face from too close an inspection had any one felt sufficient interest in the old Prince to examine him in detail. Once only he caught the eye of the Countess Piroska Zápolya, and wondered if she had recognized him. He was the least vain of men, but she had exhibited a preference for the distinguished young millionaire as openly as a high-born maiden may; and the glance he encountered to-night was less guileless, perhaps less amiable than usual. But she left Fessenden's mind as abruptly as she had entered it. He was absorbed in planning an interview alone with Ranata. He had come to the palace in doubt as to what he should say or leave unsaid until a future stage, but her sudden unmistakable yielding to her emotions, if not to him, had sent the blood to his head and spurred his will to action. He divined that she intended to play with those emotions under the protecting eye of the public; but while he had no mind to

court too great temptation himself, he was determined to seclude her long enough for a conversation which should put an end to moods and coquetry, and compel her to face herself and him. The quadrille finished with a waltz, and he saw his opportunity. He put his arm about her before she had time to retire to her former position.

"Take your train over your arm," he said, "or you will have a circle about you as many yards deep; and I want to be lost in the crowd."

She obeyed him, and they waltzed unobserved. The greater part of the company was dancing; the older women, including Sarolta, had gone to the reception-rooms to play cards or eat ices, and no one would be surprised if the royal hostess, her part played, had chosen to retire. It was evident that the guests were expected to enjoy themselves; and if anything further was necessary to add to the gay content of the evening, it came with the rumor that immediately after supper Count Zrinyi and Miss Abbott would lead a cotillion, and that the favors were many and unique.

"This evening is ours," said Fessenden peremptorily. "Take me where we can talk alone for an hour."

But she took alarm. "Not quite alone. On the balcony in front of the tea-room perhaps—"

"A balcony, if you like, for it is too warm to think in the palace. But not that one. You must trust me. You will have to do so for the rest of your life, so you may as well begin now."

Ranata, having no practical knowledge of men, and still throbbing with a reckless desire for adventure, hesitated no longer. She had learned that this American's power of self-control was very great; and if he would permit her to play with fire until the wildest in her was exhausted, and she could feel for him again as



she had felt in sadder hours of self-communing, why should she fling aside an opportunity which might never come again? He held her in a light embrace, but it filled her with happiness and submission. She was all woman, and the sensation intoxicated her. Let the morrow and its cold duties take care of themselves.

When a woman with an uncommon power of passion delivers herself to liberty after years of self-repression she is more than likely to forget all she has ever considered, and pass with blind eyes the half-way house where most women sit down and think. Perhaps it is more correct to say that the fire in her brain induces a sort of insanity of which the average mortal is incapable, and in spite of the ideals of her calmer moments and her thoughtful programme of conduct, she is at the mercy of the man. In this instance the man was playing a very big game; and although Ranata was in no mood for analysis, instinct told her that he was the one man who had ever loved her with whom she could trust herself.

They were in the circle room from which her apartments opened. It was not wise to enter directly. She pushed aside a tapestry on the left, and when it fell they were in a corridor. It was deserted and she led him through unlighted rooms and into her suite by the door which the King had used when the Queen came to Buda. Here the lights burned dimly, but she did not pause until they were on the balcony. The moon was too young to reveal them to any one below; but a woman who has been severely chaperoned will sit out all night with a man and shrink from the indelicacy of screening walls.

Ranata sank hurriedly into a chair and motioned Fessenden to one opposite; but he shook his head and stood looking down upon her for a moment without speaking. He had left his beard and wig and crown in

the sitting-room, and in that superb costume under the light of moon and stars he looked not unlike Matthias, and handsomer than himself had ever looked before. His beauty was the last thing that concerned him, but he saw the sudden rise of Ranata's bosom under the tight bodice, and the flash in her eyes as she dropped them. He did not comprehend the cause, but he tingled in response and almost yielded to an impulse to kneel beside her and take her in his arms. But there was too much to say, and he drew back. If he kissed her now he should have to talk to her another time, and opportunities were too rare.

"Let us thresh it out," he said. "I want to marry you. You have a hundred reasons against it, of course. They never will mean anything to me; but if you want to relieve your mind I am ready to hear and answer them."

She had put out her hands in deprecation. "Don't be so practical to-night! We could write all that if it must be said. To-night we were to play a game—I am Beatrice—you are Matthias."

"Not here. That sort of thing is for a ballroom flirtation, or for lengths which you probably don't understand. I am up to no such pretty comedy here alone with you; besides, I am in no mood for the unreal, no matter how pleasant it might be. This is a matter of eternity with me. I have never loved any woman before, and I have never wanted anything I have fought for with my life in my hand as I want you. These are the first moments I have actually felt the reality of life. It has been a game before. I know now I could have relinquished that game at any moment for something else, with no very deep pang. But I could no more give you up than I could live without my head. And I have no intention of trying. I shall marry you, but whether it is to be the most difficult job of my life or not depends entirely upon you. You love me, and I

## RULERS OF KINGS

am romantic enough to believe that every man has his mate in this world, and that you are mine; but your head is full of absurd notions that you will have forgotten after a year in the United States."

She stood up then, the princess again for a moment. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "Remember that Europe is still a reality; that, so long as the United States permits it to exist on the map, its prejudices and customs are entitled to respect."

"I am ready to respect your prejudices, but as I am not a European I am not obliged to accept them as final."

"Is it possible," she asked, staring at him, "that you do not know we never could marry?"

"Only if every clergyman on the planet refused to perform the ceremony. Have you not, with that fine brain of yours, thought deeply enough to know that nothing is impossible? I could have told myself that a hundred things were impossible, and be a nonentity to-day. Marriage between a man and woman who are free is the least of the impossibilities."

"But, great Heaven!—cannot you understand?—I am the daughter of the Emperor of Austria!"

"You are not any other man's wife. That is all that concerns me."

"Do you realize what it would mean to Europe, to the principle of monarchy, if I, an archduchess of Austria, married an American?"

"Do you imagine that I am interested in perpetuating the monarchical idea?"

"But I am—at all events, I, as a part of it, know where my duty lies; and—will you consider my mission here?"

"Your mission here is the impossible one of preserving the integrity of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Western Austria will melt towards the German Empire by a natural law; and as for Hungary, cannot you see

that the destiny of this people is independence? They would accept you as a welcome substitute for Franz Ferdinand, but only until they were ready to face Europe as an independent state. Do you suppose that the sole destiny of the United States is to live and prosper? Every day envy of her grows in the European, ridden by police, his individuality cramped by social laws, his manhood dwarfed by a ridiculous institution that should have disappeared with the first year of free schools. Monarchy was necessary enough in its time, but its time is past. All educated mankind is determined upon freedom. William of Germany will not admit it, but his mission is to sweep the kinglets of Europe off the board and unite their states into a peaceful whole which shall convert itself at the right moment into another great republic founded on the few sound principles of socialism. Man's destiny has steadily progressed towards independence since the beginning of general education, and the time is almost ripe for the fulfilment of it. That is the reason, quite aside from friendship, that I shall give my assistance to William the moment he is ready for it. He pretends not to believe that the result must be a republic, but in the depths of his great intelligence he must."

Now was the moment for acting, to promise anything if he would desert William. But the thought passed through her mind and out. That might have been possible yesterday, but not to-night; might indeed have been possible an hour earlier, but not now. She too was facing the bald realities; and the chiefest was that her love for this man, at whom she seemed to stare through a mountain, was eternal; and that she could take no advantage of his love for her, even were there anything else that mattered.

As she stood and looked at him, her eyes stony, her face set in despair, Fessenden for the first time felt his

## RULERS OF KINGS

courage recede. Her next words left him for a few moments without speech, and with the sensation that the world had come suddenly to an end.

“Then,” she said, “I must work out my destiny with my house. If it is tottering, then the severer my duty to stand by it till it falls. What happiness could I have?—what a picture!—I secure in America, and all my kind groaning under the ruins of Europe? I believe that what you predict has reason enough. I am no infatuated monarchist. I have known Alexandra too long for that. And I have never doubted the fate of Austria since Rudolf’s death. There is no reason why the rest of Europe should not follow. But it will not come in a moment, and it is the bare duty of every man and woman of royal birth to give to the old idea their last drop of heart’s blood and life blood, whether there is any individual achievement for them or not. As for me, if I were convinced—which I am not—that I could do no good by making Hungary mine, still would I remain at my post. It will break my heart; it will make life a mere tread-mill, now that I have known you; but if you kidnapped me I should return.”

They faced each other then for two or three minutes without speaking; but although Fessenden could descend into depths of discouragement, nothing this side of death could keep him there. The army of resources in his soul stirred in their nap—it was seldom they slept—and quickened his blood in the old lust of the fight. He revolted with angry impatience against his momentary despair; and at the same time realized that this, the supreme desire of his life, he would not have won with no exercise of the talents which had been given him that he might wear down and ride down the obstacles of life.

“Very well,” he said, “your way of looking at things is natural enough; but I don’t want you to forget for

## RULERS OF KINGS

one moment that, deeply as I respect even your prejudices, they mean nothing to me intellectually, and never can influence my conduct in the least. But on this subject I will say no more now except that your argument that you should stand by your house until it falls is too illogical to be worthy of you. It is not a woman's part in life to prop up rotten structures, but to assist man in founding new ones to replace the old; nor is it the highest destiny of human beings to retrograde or stand still, but to progress. And if I regard the past with its superstitions and institutions as mere history, as a mere prelude to a far greater present, and if I myself belong to that present and to the future, you by no means are an indissoluble part of the past. You are too virile, too healthy, too modern, too great in every part of your equipment; you represent the utmost that Europe and her centuries have been able to make of your sex; and if she had any design in making you, it was as a present to the future, not as a sacrifice to the past. But enough. I have a plan to propose. For two months we will not speak of this. Nurse your traditions if you like, believe that we must part, but make up your mind to be happy during this time. We will have constant companionship and some moments alone."

The light broke through her face again, and she held out her hands. "Yes! Yes!" she exclaimed. "A fool's paradise! That is what I would have asked. It is all I can ever know, and it will give me courage for the rest of my life. But I was afraid—I was afraid— It is a very unpractical plan for you to suggest."

"I have my unpractical moments," said Fessenden, "and this is one of them." And then he caught her in his arms and kissed her, while the music of the Chardash from the palace and the Danube beat upon them; and something of the dearest dream of both was realized.



## RULERS OF KINGS

But he left her presently. As he closed behind him the door by which he had entered the private apartments, he had a flashing glimpse of a face he knew; but the blood was in his head, and the small white visage, disappearing like a ghost's, made no impression on him—he did not even recall it in cooler moments. He had readjusted his disguise, and he made his way down the great staircase, exciting no more comment than would have fallen to the portion of Prince Nadasdy, who certainly would be expected to go home early. When he reached the palace of the old Prince he changed his gorgeous trappings for the inconspicuous tweeds he had left there, and then went out and walked until dawn. When he returned to his hotel he wrote two letters, one to his father, and one to his friend in Berlin. The latter concluded as follows: “. . . But not for two months, or thereabouts. I want her to have a deep draught of this Hungarian wine she finds so heady, that she may have the less to torment her imagination with in the future. Moreover, I want that much time to teach her that she really loves me. If we acted too promptly, she might, during the inevitable weeks, perhaps months, of separation, persuade herself that it had been but a passing madness. And I want her to be in no doubt during that time of what her rewards will be.”

“I can safely count on help there,” thought Fessenden, as he enclosed the letter in a second envelope addressed to a less conspicuous name, “for before these two months have passed he will be as anxious to see her in America as I am.”

## XX

At luncheon that afternoon Fessenden found himself beside the Countess Piroška. The Archduchess had an

## RULERS OF KINGS

Independent on either hand, and Alexandra assisted her with one of them. The Countess Vilma had another in charge. There were no other guests, and Sarolta, who had found the prospect of Radical politicians anything but amusing, was lunching elsewhere. The table had been laid in the small dining-room adjoining the blue room, but the curtains were half drawn across the large windows, for all the women were paler than usual. Three had danced until the cocks of Buda announced the morning, and the other had slept less than they. She and Fessenden had met without a word, but with a handshake of complete understanding. The "Young Kossuths" were in good order; they had left the ball as soon as the general dancing began. As they entered to-day they had looked somewhat truculent, as if fearful of patronage, but were now at their ease, and Molnár alone appeared indifferent to the delicate viands of the palace chefs.

"He is in love with our princess," whispered Piroska scornfully. "Not but that it is quite natural everybody should fall in love with her, but I should think it would be a sensation to be avoided by any one under an archduke; and as for Molnár, he is not to be pitied, he is too ludicrous."

"I don't fancy you waste much pity on any one," said Fessenden.

"I pity you," said Piroska softly.

"Indeed?" he asked innocently. "What have I done that I should be pitied?"

"Done? Ah — but I understand American better since I have had the pleasure to know Miss Abbott. I mean—I think you are too fine to waste your love on a woman who is no more achievable than the polar star."

"Oh— Do you think I am in love with the Archduchess? Well, I will confide to you that I am, but

don't—don't betray me, or the Emperor will be ordering me out of the Dual Monarchy; and I have a theory that it is a good thing for a young man to be in love with the polar star. It keeps him out of much mischief."

Piroska was nonplussed, and turned her wide gaze upon him. He was eating with every appearance of appetite, and Piroska, although a sordid soul, had her idea of what a lover should be.

"You never have eyes for any one else," she murmured, at a loss.

"Remember the limited time at my disposal. One month—two, perhaps, and I must walk a tread-mill in a land without polar stars." He was thinking, "Shall I throw her off the track, or would she be more useful as an enemy? I should use her without scruple, for I am convinced that she is here to spy, and she has a ledger where her heart ought to be. It will not do to be too precipitate; she might act before we are ready. All I want is her added weight at the right moment." He determined to be guided by events, and turned to her with his frank smile, which seemed at once to establish a personal relation. "I should like to show you America—that is a large order!—New York, rather," he said. "You must come over some time with my sister." And then, to the mystified but delighted little *intrigante*, he made himself as agreeable for the next half-hour as he knew how; and his spirits were so plainly unaffected that the Zápolya thought less of Ranata's power to charm.

The rising voice of Molnár gave him the excuse he wanted to assist the Archduchess in her difficult task.

"You are all so tired," he murmured to Piroska. "I had better talk to that man."

"The King is quite mistaken," Molnár was announcing, "if he believes that our ultimate idea in wishing

## RULERS OF KINGS

the universal use of the Magyar language in our own country is to divide the army against itself, or to encourage hatred towards Austria. Not only does the Constitution accepted by the King provide that Hungarian soldiers shall be commanded by Hungarian officers, but we wish the language for two reasons—to fulfil more nearly a passionate national ideal, and because it is the fitting reward of a thousand years of indomitable individuality.”

“But do you not think,” asked Fessenden, “that passionate ideals, when carried to extreme, may degenerate into mere vanity? I suppose you are not averse from a fair-minded discussion, so you will not mind my saying that I think vanity is the only rock on which the Hungarian nation may split and go to pieces. It is a dominant trait in your aristocracy, as is evidenced by their theatrical and childish delight in an ancient and ornate costume—this in a day when the more highly civilized a man is the more simply he dresses. The bulk of the nation betray this itching vanity in its persistent struggle for things insignificant in themselves, but whose attainment would inflate its pride and permit it to exult over its step-children. If you can prove to me that I am wrong, and that you are possessed by a nobler motive in this agitation for the compulsory use of your language throughout an army in which there are so many Austrians, Germans, Roumanians, Saxons, Slavonians, Bulgarians, and, above all, the Croats, who most hate you, I shall be glad to acknowledge myself mistaken.”

Molnár's eyes had flashed. He was vaguely jealous of the American, bitterly as he realized that his disappearance would leave no field for him. But he had come to the palace determined to assist the cause of his party, and not only did the quiet air of the room and

company depress his energy of temper, but his deep respect for the Archduchess, and desire to stand well with her, would have restrained him from a violent outburst. He replied with a calm which he was made subtly aware his princess commended.

“It is difficult to prove what is so largely a matter of standard. The Americans have so vast a country, so many liberties unknown in Europe, but worthy of emulation, that what seems the noble motive of pride to us may appear quite petty to them. But after all, did not your country, when under the heel of another power, make mountains out of many mole-hills that you would laugh at now? You tax yourselves more heavily than England ever taxed you, and it is seldom that a voice is raised in protest. The stamp-tax after your late war is a case in point. You burned your British governors in effigy, and now your contented and prosperous people merely shrug their shoulders at the iniquities of your bosses, confident that the country can take care of itself. The great patriotic virtues that were extolled a hundred years ago in the United States of America are passed by now as a matter of course, or their absence is unnoticed; and I remember reading that a large portion of your country in its youth went quite hysterical at the monarchical proposition that Mr. Washington’s head should appear on coins. But I only wish to illustrate that a young country lacking complete independence, or fearful of losing that so recently acquired, is never so indifferent to certain points as a great one.”

“I admit all the faults of my country past and present, but it seems to me that if the law of progress means anything, it means that a people dissatisfied with monarchical government and bent upon republican should take warning and example from the older republics—not act as if every page of history had been destroyed. When

vanity stiffens into a monumental conceit, as in the case of England and ourselves, it is still bad enough, and has its dangers, but at least it is not childish, and is the result of a developed strength that it would be next to impossible to wreck. But being still weak as you are, by your constitutional inferiority to Austria, and the hatred with which you are regarded by almost every other division and tribe in your share of the Dual Monarchy, it doubly behooves you to eliminate your weaknesses. And, I repeat, vanity is the one which will prove most fatal. William played upon it in a masterly manner; he uttered but a few words of flattery, he took the trouble to learn but three words of your language, and the nation wept tears of joy. I amuse myself counting the number of mustaches—particularly in the army!—that stand on end. If it had been the tyrant of all the Russias, the momentary enthusiasm would have been the same, although second thoughts would have disillusioned you. That an enlightened and progressive monarch chose to declare himself your friend, no matter for what purpose of his own, you may count as a piece of good fortune which you had done nothing very especial to encourage. But do you flatter yourself for a moment that if William took you over he would permit the universal substitution of any language for his own?"

"I was not of those whose heads were turned by the Emperor of Germany," snorted the Hungarian, whose own mustache Nature had planted in a most aggressive fashion. "The constant abuse of Hungary by the German press, and the attempts of propagandists to corrupt German-speaking Hungarians and unite them for the propitious moment of rebellion against the country their ancestors adopted—that Germany may have a weakened state to oppose her when she is ready to put



into execution her designs on the Balkans—those are scores, sir, that an emperor cannot sweep from some memories by flattery. I am—since the death of the Crown Prince—” He hesitated and looked at the Archduchess.

“You are to speak with perfect freedom to-day,” she said smiling, and endeavoring to feel as political as she should. “That was the understanding when you consented to come. Please believe that I am listening impersonally. Not that I wish your secrets, merely your well-defined point of view.”

“Then I will say what is well enough known, your Royal Highness—that I wish for no king whatever. Our king is as just and indulgent as his fixed notions permit him to be, and yet under him autonomy is a failure. I wish for complete independence, with, if not all the features of the United States of America, at least with those which have permitted her to exist in the face of all prophecies; and with many others which we are quite capable of evolving ourselves. Independence, you will not hesitate to admit, sir, is the only logical condition for any civilized people at this stage of the world’s history, and, above all, it is the only condition which will content the most independent race in Europe. When the hour of this Dual Monarchy strikes, I am perfectly willing that western Austria shall go to Germany, provided that the price of our acquiescence is the complete independence of this country. If the aristocracy don’t like it they can move to Prussia; that country is badly in need of a real aristocracy, and the fine clothes of our magnates would be a pleasant relief among so many uniforms. But for Hungary, Independence!—Independence!—Independence!”

His voice ended in a mild roar; and Fessenden replied in his most matter-of-fact tones, “Then if you want independence, why, I repeat, don’t you begin now to

strengthen instead of weakening yourselves? Surely you must know that if the King granted this demand of yours, completely to Magyarize the army, you would incur the still bitterer hatred of all these races who are obliged to serve in it. Their native tongue means as much to them as yours does to you. And when one considers that three-fourths of Hungary is ethnologically non-Hungarian! If your king were thirty years younger, and you could reasonably feel that you had that amount of time in which to subdue or reconcile your rebellious step-children, then one might feel that you had more wisdom, more reason on your side; but to strain at a gnat when you must inevitably swallow a whole herd of camels the moment your king sets these centrifugal forces free, is a folly I cannot comprehend in a race so like my own in many respects."

Molnár had listened sullenly, but with attention. It had been agreed, although all four of the Hungarians were men of ability, that the brunt of the talk should be borne by their leader; for they were sure to interrupt even each other if they sent the blood to their heads with too many words. But they were neglecting their plates to follow the argument; and they frowned when Fessenden spoke, and smiled approval upon the logic of Molnár. When the American asserted the analogy between his race and theirs, they looked pleased and surprised; for it is a remarkable fact that, in spite of the execration which Europeans, as a result of our protective policy and successful invasion of her aristocracies and industries, bestow upon the United States, they are invariably surprised into pleasure if informed that they possess an American trait—which is doubtless owing to the fact that every human creature craves success; and rightly or wrongly, the United States and that most vulgarized of words are synonymous.

Even Molnár looked slightly mollified, but he had come to make good his cause before a princess who he believed must influence the King her father, since he was convinced she could twist Hungary round her finger if she chose. "It is to be hoped that another century will see us even in advance of where the United States stands to-day," he replied; "for, as you justly observed, it is our part as an intelligent nation to profit by the mistakes of other nations. But it is impossible to admit that we are unwise to insist upon the adoption of our language as the sole language of our army, even in the old age of the King; for we are convinced that our disruption from Austria is but a question of a few years, and it is wise to accustom the inferior races to the dominance of our language and rule as long before our independence as possible. It is our misfortune that we have not been in a position to push this claim sooner. It was a tremendous innovation when Kossuth and Szechenyi carried their point that Magyar should be the political language of Hungary. It was not the part of wisdom to ask for more then, but that is half a century ago—half a century. And you call us impatient and unreasonable! You—who are so recently come from the battle-field, do you recall the passionate enthusiasm with which you sang and listened to your national hymns by your camp-fires at night—as you marched to the battle-field? What would have been your emotions if you had been compelled to sing the national songs of another country? Good God! Cannot you understand what it would mean to us to sing our own beautiful battle hymns in our own beautiful language, instead of the words of a hated power in the most hideous sounds that ever were invented to torture the ear? It is true that you have set your national anthem to the tune of England's, but you have long since forgotten that; and I am

## RULERS OF KINGS

told that when Americans go to England they are flattered when the band plays 'God Save the King.' But that is your happiness—that you have been permitted to forget—while we—we—”

“I have no doubt that if you asked for the privilege of singing your national hymns, and nothing more, the King would readily indulge you; and the Hungarian military colleges you are sure to have will no doubt entail much that you wish—if you have the patience to wait. I admit, of course, that vanity has no part in your desire to sing your own anthems in your own language—what more inspiring?—but the imposing of your difficult tongue on the Austrians who are obliged to command in your army during the years when you must still have an insufficiency of Hungarian officers, as well as upon the races that hate you now, and only await the opportunity to serve you the same trick they served you in 1847—I repeat, it seems to me the height of vanity and folly. And I regret it deeply, for in a struggle in which you were incontestably right, you would have the sympathy of the United States. Kossuth is by no means forgotten; and the American loves romance, having so little of it. For romance you stand in history preeminently. But if you make yourselves ridiculous—”

“Ridiculous?” All four were muttering. Ranata leaned forward, and drew Molnár's eyes to hers.

“How would it have been if Rudolf had lived?” she asked softly.

“Ah, Rudolf!” The four men might have received an electric shock. “If our crown prince had lived,” cried Molnár, “he would be our sympathetic, our indulgent ruler to-day. The King would surely have abdicated in his favor before this—if he had been reluctant we should have found a way to persuade him! The King

is preferable to his present heir; and not only do we hesitate to incur the antagonism of the world by embittering the last days of our old monarch, but it is a trait of human nature to postpone the evil day. But Rudolf! He would have granted our demands; and with his tact and resource have found a way to reconcile all the other states in the monarchy to our reforms. Perhaps he would have given us our liberty, and accepted the presidency of the republic! That indeed would have been Utopia!"

"No one can admire and regret Rudolf more than I do," said Fessenden, in the even dispassionate tones which irritated the Hungarians more than his words; "but it is impossible not to notice that the inevitable legend is growing up round his name. In a few years it will obscure an individuality and a mental endowment that were better left unexaggerated. I came on the scene too late to know him, but I have heard him much discussed by more than one of his close personal friends; and while he was far more genial and sympathetic than is common among princes, and far more liberal and broad-minded, I do not in the least believe that he had a republican instinct, or would have parted voluntarily with an inch of his inheritance. Rather he would have conceived it his mission to maintain its integrity with the last corps of his army. No doubt his tact and his alert modern brain would have found a way through these difficulties which would have satisfied himself and Hungary. Problems that seem insoluble to an aged king might have been disentangled readily enough by him. But the hard fact remains that you have not Rudolf to deal with, but your king—and, for a period after him, no doubt, the present Crown Prince; so would you not be wiser to conciliate your enemies until you are strong enough to crush them? Suppose Germany and

Austria in a war against Russia—over the Balkans, let us say—do you realize what your position would be as an independent state with all the antagonistic races within your borders in revolt—these races number 7,500,000, nearly half your population, do they not? In some respects the Hungarian mind is the brightest and most alert in Europe, and you are probably the only monarchical people wholly without servility. If you wreck yourselves, and this rich and enterprising country, because you love your weaknesses more than your virtues, then you deserve to be crushed like an egg between the enemies who will take a particular delight in the process. But your party does not represent Hungary. The enlightened majority are not extremists. You can obstruct and keep the country in a turmoil, but when it comes to the general vote you must be beaten. But meanwhile you are demoralizing Hungary at home, and making it ridiculous abroad—that is the point to be considered now.”

Molnár pushed back his chair and stood up, tossing back his head. For the moment he looked like the statue of the poet of the Revolution, Alexander Petöfi, which, in its square across the river, seems to have the nerves of the dead man in it.

“You pay us your cold tribute,” he cried, “but what do you know of the ardor, the passionate enthusiasm of a race as different from yours as the Latin from the Teutonic. Logic! We have as much as any men when our hearts are not on fire with our wrongs; but we would rather die, die, die—be crushed like an egg, if you will—than exist like slaves a generation longer.” He turned suddenly to Ranata, his face illuminated under its perpetual frown. “You—your Royal Highness”—he cried, “if you were our queen—you, who look born to sit on a throne as wisely as Maria Theresia,



yet without her bigotry and obstinacy—you, who are so like Rudolf— Ah! Why not? Why not?"

"We will have our coffee in the next room," said the Archduchess with cold severity, as she rose and led the way. "Úr Molnár, have you seen the river and Pest from the balcony?"

## XXI

Fessenden and Ranata were alone in the Hungarian house. Upon the departure of the Independents—diverted and mollified—the Archduchess had dismissed her weary ladies-in-waiting; and Alexandra, after wandering down to the garden with her brother and friend, had stolen away to sleep until the hour to drive.

"You heard!" said Ranata. "Do you doubt now that I could be queen in Hungary?"

"I never doubted it; nor that your reign would be as exciting as brief. Hungary is now enjoying her days of halcyon peace. When your father dies she may not only have your cousin of Austria, and William, to reckon with, but King Karl of Roumania. It is the secret and persistent ambition of his life to win back to Roumania the lands it claims it owned before the conquest of Árpád, and one of these is not only Transylvania, but Hungary as far as the Theiss. He would join Austria in any attempt to crush Hungary, and he would be abetted by all the internal enemies of this country. Moreover, he hates William as only one strong personality can hate another, and at the first call of Hungary for the German Emperor, or for his second son, he would not wait for Austria. He is a big man in a small country, and has never yet had his opportunity; but when it comes he will grasp it, be sure of that. But have you not had enough of all this for one day?"

“Yes—what a contrast you were! I never so fully realized the destiny of the American race. Your brain remains as cold as your eyes until the right moment comes to let the fires leap up. And then! Tell me—I have thought constantly of all that you said last night—it seems to me that you felt yourself safe enough in declaring that you would sacrifice everything for me—ambitions, fortune, country—because you knew the obligation never would confront you. It is I who would have to renounce all and follow you. Austria would expel us both, and could do you no harm.”

“It is you who are most distressingly practical to-day. Why analyze the vows of a lover? I spoke the language of the heart last night, and my brain took the rest it needs. You were convinced of my sincerity then—and I am quite prepared to say it all over again.” And so he did; but although he could make love with an intensity which Ranata would be likely to recall in long hours of separation, he was still able to practise the better part of valor; and with the natural egotism of man, he was soon talking into a sympathetic ear of his hopes and plans for the future. Never was the egotism of man so wise in its exercise. It was the last magnet he needed to draw the soul of the woman to him. As he unrolled his vast schemes, so practical and so ideal, Ranata forgot her own conventional ambitions. She seemed to herself to step out of a volume of history and mingle in the great throng of individuals, who made their own laws and thought for themselves.

“Before many years have passed,” said Fessenden, “I hope to have united South America in one great republic. It is not only necessary to protect my railways—the element of personal selfishness must enter into everything that hopes to succeed—but I want to see the

## RULERS OF KINGS

republican ideal flourish over the greater part of the civilized globe before I die.”

“And then? Shall you rule over these vast republics?”

“Not I! I shall have all the work I want while creating them. There may come the crisis in the United States which I have been trained to meet, and the result might compel an interval of strong centralization. But the reconstruction finished, those could rule who were equal to the task. And such an interval would be brief, for the American would not stand the infringement of his liberties a moment longer than circumstances demanded. Although I believe in permanent centralization, to the extent of a ruler elected for life or good behavior—and I believe this principle is growing in the minds of all thinking republicans who are not only sick of corruption but of seeing a fine man in the presidential chair the slave of politicians, and shelved coincidentally with the full development of his usefulness—still that ruler must be the free and deliberate selection of the majority of the people, and a monarch by their will alone, with no privileges whatever for his heirs. With democracy I have no more patience than with the autocracy of Russia, but I should be the last to blight an instinct which it is my desire to sow broadcast over the earth. It is for that I wish to be remembered; they can forget the dramas as soon as they like—”

“Ah, but tell me those!” exclaimed Ranata. “I have waited for years to hear them.”

He entertained her with several of his adventures and exploits in South America, but dropped the subject to tell her something of his problem in mechanics and electricity.

“If anything was needed when I awoke at noon to-

## RULERS OF KINGS

day to make me feel as if I owned the entire universe," he said, "it was a letter from my chief electrician which convinced me for the first time that he was on the verge of perfecting this old dream of mine. My father was to go out as soon as telegraphed for and witness the practical demonstration. Then, indeed, I practically will hold the fate of the world in the hollow of my hand."

Ranata stared hard at him, her pulse quickening. She had always envied him, and now he seemed to her to embody all the hopeful ambitions of all the world, a Titan whom only a new country with its utter disregard of failure could have produced. What order of men would his republics bring forth?

"But shall you never have a reverse, never fail?" she murmured. "There is a relentless law of compensation in Nature; surely you must have your blows, your bitterness, like other mortals."

"I have already had enough trouble and anxiety, to say nothing of hideous privations, fatigue, and illness to satisfy Nature for the present. The only blow that could have reached my heart before this would have been the death of my father."

"Ah!" she exclaimed sharply, "you do love me—I know how much! When this is over, will its memory mean as much to you as it will to me? Will the loss embitter, discourage you? It has seemed to me since last night that it will mean too much to me—that I shall need more courage than I possess to live on. With men—with you? How would it be, with your thousand occupations where I might not have one? Oh, at least help me to win this country! I fear no enemies—nothing else on earth."

"All that," said Fessenden, "is a subject which I positively refuse to discuss until these two months are up. All I wish you to be firmly convinced of from this

## RULERS OF KINGS

moment—and you might repeat it nightly with your prayers lest you forget it—is that, under no possible circumstances short of death, shall I give you up, or relax for a moment in my determination to overcome every obstacle which either you or your father may raise. The sooner you recognize me as your destiny the better.”

### XXII

When a woman is groping about among the mysteries of her great passion she has little to give the world, and, all the forces of her being consuming her inwardly, her magnetism is diminished. With the average woman this matters little—she merely bores her friends; but in the case of a princess, with but a season perhaps at her disposal within whose limits to preserve the map of Europe, or alter it to her liking, the untimely advent of love might blight her in the very plethora of her opportunities. Ranata realized this danger after a few days of complete indifference to anything but her own thoughts and the presence of Fessenden Abbott, discovered that she had fallen back into the niche of the unapproachable princess, from which only he could draw her. The moment she appreciated her condition she roused, when in public, the energies of her mind, wrenching it from her inner life. A career she was determined to have; and although she could not recall the enthusiasm of those first weeks in Hungary, her purpose was revitalized by the long shadows of bitterness and despair which the future cast back to her. True to her compact, she endeavored to eject that future from her imagination, and in greater part succeeded, for she had more wisdom than most women, and appreciated the priceless value of the immediate happiness. She was

content, and in brief intervals intensely happy; her imagination was liberated and her power to feel superlative. The knowledge that both imagination and capacity for living must prove her scourge hereafter but made her cultivate both the more ardently while briefly mistress of her fate. And the concentrated ardor of which Fessenden was capable in the rare moments they found alone, contrasted with his average mood when he seemed to belong so wholly to himself, fascinated her far more than any constant evidence of her consuming influence over him would have done. Her own powerful individuality recognized the separateness of his, and was content to touch it in fugitive moments only. The archaic poem of eternal oneness made no appeal to her. Passionate love and loyal friendship she had to offer in the fullest equipment granted to mortals, but the development of her own individuality in its incorruptible silences must go on forever, submerged only by the primal tides; and so her instincts and her endowment saved her from the pursuit of that will-o'-the-wisp which most women follow until it hides in the grave. She saw that Fessenden recognized in her this disunion of temperament and personality, for although his were the masculine limitations which deprived him of the comprehensions women think they want, the needs of his own soul were too great for blindness to another that had come so close.

Therefore, Ranata, although she loved her hours of solitude the more, and even grudged her brain its sleep, reopened her windows to the world before it was too late. She entertained frequently, and many of the magnates gave superb entertainments in her honor. Fessenden, Zrinyi, and several other young enthusiasts, arranged an illuminated fête on the Danube, and for a few moments she believed herself to be a fairy princess on a



fairy planet. Every house, great and small, on the hills of Buda, burned its colored lights, and the bridges, the islands, the boats, looked as if on fire with the souls of stars and flowers. The fireworks among the ruins of the castle on the height completed a scene of illusion possible in only three or four cities of the world.

Her own entertainments were given in no perfunctory fashion. She had one state dinner a week, and small dinners and luncheons for the better study of the Hungarian character. There was no theatre in the palace, but she had a stage erected in the Hall of Ceremonies, and Possart came from Munich to give the soliloquy of Manfred among the snow-fields of the Alps, in what is perhaps the most perfect German spoken in a great empire where perfect German is seldom heard. Fremstadt came with him to sing from "Carmen"; and Frau Schratt and other artists of Vienna were engaged for the later winter. The local poets were permitted to declaim, and their emotional fires and abandon won the English and American guests, long divorced from patience with drawing-room inflictions.

But the Hungarians shone most brilliantly in music, and there were frequent concerts in the palace, given entirely by members of the aristocracy, which inspired no comparison with professionals. When the Archduchess found time she went to the theatre or opera, and sat in the gala box, wearing her best conceived gowns, and having taken care that her intention should be announced in the morning newspapers.

And so Budapest had its gay winter at last—a winter that exceeded even longings and dreams, and made the heart of the tradesman sing, and filled the hotels with curious and ambitious visitors. But perhaps the true rapture dwelt in the pen of the correspondent, so long driven in the mere service of politics for the casual

## RULERS OF KINGS

glance of a world at no pains to understand that it might yet be the destiny of Hungary to precipitate the great convulsion of Europe. These grateful gentlemen quickly made Ranata the most famous woman on the public stage. Her pictures were sold in every capital, the illustrated weekly newspapers presented her to a delighted public in all her available aspects, and girl reporters came to Budapest and wrote imaginary interviews with her maids.

No one knew better than Ranata that this glitter and tinsel was but the prelude to true fame, and that without the opportunity to prove her wisdom as a ruler she would take no place in history outside the covers of some "Book of Beauty"; nevertheless she found the notoriety and incense sweet after her long monotonies, and her pride was deeply gratified with the unequivocal success of her first programme. She would have been more satisfied if she could have had proof of the jealous uneasiness of William of Germany; and more secure if the state of mind of the Crown Prince of Austria and Hungary could have been revealed to her. But if Fessenden corresponded with his friend he made no confidences; and neither her father nor Count von Königsegg mentioned her cousin in their letters, although they appeared to commend her course.

But to Ranata's surprise and occasional alarm, she frequently discovered that her imagination dwelt less on her future in history than on the great schemes of Fessenden Abbott, and that her thoughts were far more occupied with their unique and interesting details than with the future complexities of Europe, which long since had acquired the habit of repeating themselves. Gone were the hours when she had striven to untangle the web of her empire's future, to fit herself for every imaginable contingency. When her womanhood took its temporary

rest, her brain was far more apt to dwell upon some point that was puzzling Fessenden. She reminded herself that this may have been the result of their daily conversations, his abrupt confidential asides; and believed she might assure herself that when the spell was removed her interest in subjects so foreign to all in her previous twenty-eight years would vanish with the sweetness of life.

But they were not foreign to everything, she suddenly reminded herself. There was Alexandra! Would this sense of intimacy with the brother have descended upon her so quickly, even with the assistance of love, had it not been preceded by that other long intimacy? How deep had the influence of this American sunk? What changes had it perhaps wrought in her character during those eighteen years of almost constant mental friction, beginning when her mind was plastic, and always making her chief interests in life? Nothing is more difficult than to concentrate the mind in self-analysis, self-examination; the children of the experience resent the scientific probing of the mind and hide in the shadowy deeps. Ranata was forced to recur to the subject abruptly, to glimpse her mental layers by flashlight. It was difficult even then to make sure what tracings had been done by an alien hand, much less to imagine just what she would have been had that hand been withheld; but finally she learned enough to cause her moments of deep uneasiness, grave doubts if she were so inviolate a Hapsburg as she had believed; and when she realized there had been intervals when her emancipated and now rebellious imagination had transported her to the American continent, where she moved with the assurance and the vivid sense of freedom of the American girl, she shrank in terror, as if already she had taken a traitorous and irrevocable step. She

had always been convinced that she should find all things in the American section of America quite detestable, from their very unlikeness to all things sanctified by the traditions of Europe; but now she emerged from visions of herself penetrated with happiness in a romantic wilderness of mountain and forest, or in cities which epitomized that wonderful modern life which seemed to relegate the old to boards and calf-skin. There were times when she actually felt the rush and fever of the life in her veins. It was then that she turned her mind to Hungary. She had been deeply gratified to learn that on the greater portion of the Left, William had made no impression, except to deepen their hatred and distrust of Germany. That this enthusiastic and oft-times desperate party was being secretly drawn to her standard, Ranata was not long discovering. For a time, at least, they would accept a queen where they would reject a king, and their susceptible natures inclined them naturally towards a young and beautiful ruler whom they could love, and, no doubt, manage; while she added to their picturesque strength in the eyes of the world. Ranata was aware that the new thought was travelling silently; and while trembling lest it reach Vienna, she dared not notice it sufficiently to demand prudence. The part must be thrust upon her, not only to save her in the eyes of Europe, but the lightest hint of ambition from her would have alarmed the Independents and turned their admiration to contempt.

There were times during this strange interlude in her life when she was possessed by a sensation of supreme joy, or by deep and tranquil happiness—moments when she paced the terrace alone on brilliant mornings in a tumult of wonder, when Budapest, beautiful enough, was glorified, and the links binding her to the mundane were dissolved. In such moments she neither analyzed

nor speculated, she but intensely lived; but when they had passed, she wondered if such ideally pagan moments were prophetic of greater happiness, or if they were peculiar to that antechamber of the unknown which is the prelude in love. The possibility depressed her, and at other times she suffered sharply. If Fessenden carelessly laid his arm about Alexandra's shoulders or took her hand, satisfied in the masculine fashion with what happened to be convenient at the moment, Ranata would turn cold with jealousy and disgust with life. As she was too proud to protest—or explain—she punished the bewildered offender with a freezing demeanor, and both were miserable for several days. The reconciliation, however, enshrined the misery in a halo of gratitude. Her jealousy was purely impersonal, and induced no alteration in her attitude towards Alexandra. It was not the object but the apparent wandering of his affections that concerned her, and the physical manifestation. She took for granted that he loved his sister—would have thought him deficient in human nature if he had not. But that sort of relation was passive; the active he had entered upon embraced her alone. Like other women in love, she was constantly making discoveries about herself; and when, one day, alone with her thoughts, she found herself overwhelmed and dissolved in a transport of maternal tenderness for the man to whom ultimately she could be nothing, she realized for the first time how far love had carried her. This was towards the end of the interlude; and soon after, even the uneasiness of this discovery was forgotten in the haunting dismay which preceded the end.

Meanwhile Zrinyi was manifestly impatient that the visit should be made to his castle in the Transylvanian Alps before the full rigors of winter should compel an indefinite postponement. So far, the winter was mild,

and the snow on the lower Alps not so heavy that oxen could not draw the sledges up the steep mountain roads. Ranata, welcoming a few days' release from the world, and greater freedom, set the date; and it was arranged that the party should consist only of her ladies, Alexandra, Fessenden Abbott, and Prince Illehazy. They were to linger long enough in Klausenbourg, Kronstadt, and the intervening villages, to give the inhabitants a glimpse of their princess, and an opportunity to offer the ovation which once had been their joy to give to Rudolf.

## XXIII

When one is standing in a window looking down into a gorge a thousand feet below, the cynical reflections of a mummy in bed smoking a cigar vex the impulse of romance, quick in the brain. Ranata was in the window. The window was Zrinyi's; so was the perpendicular mountain of which the old border fortress might have been an abrupt continuation, so indeed were the harsh wild peaks, bare but for the glittering snow, which rose high above this lofty height. The mummy was Sarolta, who was in bed with a cold. The invasion of her sacred person by impertinent microbes always put her in a bad humor, and to-day it urged her to improve one of her rare solitudes with her royal charge. Moreover, she was profoundly puzzled. If Ranata was not in love with this American, why then did she show him a preference never before won, for a moment, by another admirer? But if she were in love, why then this serenity? She had expected that Ranata's inevitable love episode would be fraught with tragedy from the very first, and that pallid cheeks and heavy eyes would be the visible signs, haughtily as the Princess might com-



port herself. Had the heroine been any one but Ranata she might have drawn a characteristic deduction from this serenity; but although she was not the European to swear to the virtue of any woman, she knew that Ranata, if not bigotedly virtuous, was bigotedly loyal to her house, and had long since made her vow that by no act of hers should another of its stones be loosened; rather was she exalted by the hope that it might be her destiny to save it from destruction. And Sarolta, who had settled back comfortably into her early doctrine that life was made to live, could have gone to the stake herself for the aristocratical or the monarchical ideal. Therefore, she believed that Ranata would immolate her passion on this altar the moment it burned too fiercely; and so, after all, was prepared to take her oath upon the virtue of one woman. Nevertheless, she was curious. Of the compact, of course, she knew nothing; and had she, still would she have puzzled, knowing the power and the will of woman to torment herself; but she had come to the conclusion that it was possible Ranata, never having seen Fessenden alone—this the good lady also believed—did not wholly realize her condition, would not until he left her; so determined to do what she could in the way of preliminary disenchantment.

“There is no greater fallacy,” she was saying, “than the belief that women regret their youth—I mean women who have lived the life of the heart. Nature invariably compensates, and in exchanging wisdom for youth she is at her best. No woman ever crowded more into her youth—nor held to it longer—than I did, yet I can recall now the sensation of relief when I finally realized that henceforth I should live for myself alone; above all, that I had had my final disappointment. For love, my dear, is one exquisite disappointment from first to finish—for the woman, I mean. Men are rarely psy-

chological enough for the disappointments that grind the heart of woman until it is callous. When they are, they are not able to hurt us, so may be left out of the question. The thoroughly masculine man, the only sort that is capable of inspiring the *grande passion*, because he has the primal attributes designed by Nature that he may fully mate with woman, is in the very completeness of his equipment blind to all that is most subtle and feminine in woman, giving her, therefore, twenty strokes of torment to one of happiness, or even pleasure. What is the result? We live, the most irresistible of us, three-fourths—five-eighths—of our lives alone, striving to find in imagination what man will never give us. Life, with women who are not small pieces of pulp in the domestic mill, is one long chase after happiness—what is there for most of us but happiness, politics, and charities? I have sometimes envied the women who have to work their brains blunt to fill their conservative little stomachs!”

Her voice thickening, she paused to inhale the fumes of the last specific for colds. Ranata continued to stare out of the window, and her duenna continued in a moment:

“But I have also wondered, *ma chère*, if, did man give us what that craving thing we call our soul demands, would we enjoy ourselves even as much as we do. It is always a gamble which will tire first, the man or the woman; and on the whole I am inclined to believe that the woman of charm and brain, and the position in life which enables her to find much distraction, is the surer prey to disenchantment. If she be of a deeper nature, or if she has deluded herself for a little that the man actually loved her and not himself, she may not tire, but be so bitterly disgusted and disillusioned that, for a moment, at least, she is capable of tragedy. But the

## RULERS OF KINGS

average man, so particular with charm at first, merely lets us down in *ennui*. If he gave woman more of himself than he does now, perhaps she would tire sooner. He needs all the mystery he has. However, the fact remains that man is eternally unsatisfactory and woman eternally unsatisfied. I doubt if a woman of imagination ever lived who, having won what rent her soul and body while withheld, would not, after the first short chapter, exchange the reality for the previous lost world of her imagination. Good God! the disillusionment, the readjustment, the struggle through terror and despair to philosophy! If I were ordered to live my life over, I should demand, in compensation, the ever-fresh memory of a great and unsatisfied passion—after having known one man in the daily life of matrimony. A woman is briefly happy twice in her life—when a man—the man—is pursuing her, and palpitating doubt alternates with delicious certainty; and again, during the man's first ardor, when he is so anxious to please, and so certain that he loves the woman, not himself, that his concentrated charm blinds, yet irradiates the universe. Shortly after, he becomes as matter-of-fact as he is. And then men are, no matter what their brains, utterly, irretrievably stupid where women are concerned. A man is never so happy as when he has lost the love of the woman, and she, taking refuge in duty, makes him thoroughly comfortable. On the other hand, men are abruptly left by women, again and again, and the cleverest of them never guess the reason why. They go on ruining their own lives—which they never suspect—and those of the women best worth having, without learning a lesson from the past. There is no happiness, my dear, until you are as old as I am, look like a mummy, and smoke *vuelta abajo*."

"Of course I recognize that all that was meant for me."

Her charge left the window and stared down at her. She puffed out a cloud, for Ranata's eyes always made her blink. "But I am surprised that a woman of your wisdom should fancy that the person ever lived who would adjust his life by the experience of another."

"You have a brain. Most women have not. You will always be more or less guided by it. Therefore, you are worth the trouble to warn."

"You are the last person I should have expected to advocate the happiness of the unknown; but I have thought that out for myself, and more than once. I believe that the only way a woman can avoid the curse of her sex is to avoid the fulfilment of love. Then the fates are placated, and, after the first wrench, permit the imagination a certain happiness, the soul a certain elevation, no doubt impossible in what must eventually become prosaic and disappointing."

"I am not surprised that you have arrived at that truth by yourself; and be sure that all the troubles in the world amount to little if you can bear them alone, and that no troubles, barring poverty and pain, count an infinitesimal speck in the balance with those made by love, or the desperate attempt to find happiness. Indeed, I will modify what I said just now, and stake my life that a woman is happy only when she is not in love. There is no such thing as sympathy between the soul of man and woman. The man who thinks he sympathizes with a woman's subtle wants is a milksop. The other, the only sort we love, doesn't try, never thinks about it; and either way we are miserable, having the primal curse of Eve upon us. So, the old maids, or the quickly widowed, have the best of it in this life. Doubtless things are better arranged in another."

"Perhaps in that we will be born without imagination.

## RULERS OF KINGS

I don't know but that would be the deepest definition of heaven after all."

"I think it more likely that in alternate existences the man of one is the woman of another," said Sarolta dryly. "That would be Nature and her compensations as we know them. On the whole she is just."

### XXIV

Fessenden was walking restlessly about the hall of the castle, awaiting the finish of Ranata's visit of duty at the bedside of her duenna. There was a prospect, for the first time in several days, of an hour with her alone. Zrinyi, Prince Illehazy, Vilma, and Alexandra had gone for a walk, and Piroska had not been seen that day.

They had arrived two days before, after three, in a special train with many pauses and no solitudes, and until now had been a gay and united party. Alexandra had announced herself satisfied with the castle; but as her tone had been frivolous, Zrinyi had forbore to press his suit. The roughness of the old days of border warfare was curiously blended with the modern comforts of a nobleman's hunting-lodge. The staircase, towards which Fessenden directed eyes of impatient longing, looked as if no woman had ever descended it, although many women had huddled there when the Turkish guns were battering. The logs in the old fireplace, and the big ornamental stones which have superseded andirons in the greater part of Europe, tempered the ancient cold; the rough walls and floors were covered with the skins of wild beasts and other trophies of the chase; and the chairs at least were comfortable. The hall was a museum of old battle-flags, captured from the Turks, Austrians, rival clans

## RULERS OF KINGS

in the days of the Oligarchs, and of weapons as old and varied. The castle was very large, and had been surrounded on three sides by a double moat; but to former implements of war it had been impregnable, and the unsquandered wealth of the family had kept every part of it from decay except the entrance wall. Fessenden thought it an admirable setting for a honeymoon; failing that, for a few days' final courtship.

But his patience, never a gift of Nature, but a creation of his will, was close upon its finish, and the day he left Budapest he had set his train in motion. Only his habit of playing a close and far-seeing game had saved him from some precipitate act which might have wrecked his hopes; for the blood was often in his head. Whether or not Mr. Abbott had had such a crisis as this in mind when he trained his son in the qualities that conquer, in no other way had they served Fessenden so well. He was pitting his wit and his wealth against the mightiest prejudice which existed in the world of his day; and his victory over Ranata must spring solely from the former, for without it her love would avail him nothing. Had he been able to conquer her prejudices by any of the arts of love or passion he would have urged a flight from this castle—which was far from communication with the telegraph, and where the sympathetic Zrinyi would have kept guardians and spies imprisoned—to Trieste, where his yacht awaited him. But he knew that Ranata, although capable of a revolution which would raze the first wall between them, must accomplish that revolution in solitude and despair, under the pressure of circumstances which he had already shaped. The demolition of the second wall might cost him something almost as dear as the woman, but Fessenden was prepared to sacrifice more than that.

Fortunate for the great affairs of the house of Abbott,



that the senior was particularly well at this time! The heir, for all his self-control, was in a state of mind which, had he been compelled to return—and nothing short of his father's death or a financial panic would have drawn him across the seas—would have lost him the faith of Wall Street.

Since his violent attack of calf-love and the strange illuminations which had succeeded it, he had looked upon woman with a critical eye, and treasured his inmost feelings with a jealous care. Never again, he had determined long since, would he go through that futile agony at the instance of anything less than death; when he found the one woman whom he could love more than his life or his ambitions—or as well—then would he pour all he had husbanded at her feet; but he would have her unless the Almighty himself intervened. Busy as was his life, he had been sharply aware of its incompleteness; there had been many hours of longing for the deep companionship of love, for the perfection of his own soul and manhood. The vague ideal of his dreams he had not recognized in Ranata's physical part when they met in the cottage, his sense of adventure being keener than any vital longing, and the fury of the dance excluding mental knowledge of his partner. But he had discovered her not long after; and the great measure that he had to offer of homage and love and passion had since burned steadily; with a less strong brain the flame would have been less steady, and the rare moments of solitude with her, and their temptations, might have overwhelmed him: he had never imagined a woman who could so crowd into a moment the concentrated essence of all the melting tenderness and the passionate energy that made up the surrender of woman. It is true that more than once the temptation had assailed him to use her weakness as the shortest way out of the difficulties

that beset him; but not only had he so far never taken advantage of any one but a scoundrel, and did he still hold women in an old-fashioned reverence, but he forecast the weeks — perhaps months — asunder, when in desperation she might marry any prince her father selected. And in his cooler moments he tingled at the thought of a victory which would be as great for his young country as for himself, of being the chosen instrument to initiate a new order of things as inevitable as the progress of the world. Romantic as he was, the campaign he had planned—where the only weapons should be his own wit and the millions which the world, with its curious love of self-delusion, affects to despise, typifying as they do modern life itself—appealed to him more powerfully than a flight across a picturesque country of many costumes to his yacht, or a rescue from the palace of Buda. But at present he was not rehearsing his plan of campaign; the coming moment commanded his imagination, and the blood was beginning to pound in his ears when he heard the light rustle of her garments. He sprang up the stairs and met her on the first landing.

“Not here!” she said nervously. “Sarolta is in bed, and Piroska has a toothache; but who knows?”

“Has it ever occurred to you that the Countess Piroska is a spy?” he asked as they crossed the hall to the room Zrinyi called his study, although it had not a book in it.

“Possibly,” said Ranata indifferently. “We are accustomed to spies. That is usually one of the duties of the Obersthofmeisterin. But as Sarolta is too wealthy to be bought, and is of a proved fondness for me, I suppose Count von Königsegg thought it wise to have one in my household he could count on. I doubt if she has made any report of consequence so far, for she has bided

her time, hoping that the worst would happen; but she will, for she wants to marry you. But it will matter little now! Our time is almost up!"

She spoke in a tone of profound dejection. The serenity she had maintained in Sarolta's presence had dropped from her like a mask. In a moment she withdrew from his embrace and leaned against the window-frame and stared down into the ravine where so many Turks had mouldered to dust.

"It is time for the comedy to end," she said sharply. "Sarolta knows, and before long will interfere. Königsegg is sure to interrogate Piroska before long, if he has not done so already, and there must be many comments in Budapest and Vienna on your long stay here and your constant presence in the palace. Moreover, it is impossible you should remain away from America much longer. The two months you set yourself have nearly passed. Let us talk plainly. My capacity for self-deception is at an end—indeed, for days past it has slipped from me again and again—and I am worried about many other things—"

"What things?" asked Fessenden gently. He gathered his faculties and stood looking at her, from the other side of the narrow window, with his piercing and concentrated glance; but he took her hand and held it tenderly. "At least, if we are soon to part, let there be as little to regret as possible. You owe me your confidence—nor is there any one else to whom you would give it."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "That is true enough! To no other have I ever been as—been frank at all. No one else has ever known me, nor ever can. It has given me the most intellectual and voluptuous delight fully to reveal myself for once in my life—I suppose I do not yet realize how much. After all, why should I complain?"

## RULERS OF KINGS

I have had what most women never find. And I have that sense of the indestructible bond. I shall have it as long as I live. How many that flutter over this earth, do you suppose, have that sense of an everlasting indissoluble embrace? You feel it now. Will you? Will it content you—that sense of spiritual completeness—can you be faithful to that?”

“I should be very grateful for it if I could not find anything better, and I am as capable of complete fidelity as you are. But tell me what other things have worried you.”

“It is this—” Her rising excitement flashed the blood into her face, and she pushed her unsteady hand into her hair, lifting it, as if its weight oppressed her. “In these weeks that have slipped along so easily, so naturally, in which we have found so much happiness, I have—I had grown as accustomed to it all as any engaged girl. My imagination seemed to sleep, or only to give me to you in the future. Nothing in me protested, warned, except a mechanical effort of intellect. It all seemed the most natural thing in the world. I thought when I entered into that compact that I should lead a dual mental life; or rather that I should be wholly yours when with you, and wholly myself when alone, fully alive to the end. But I have been wholly yours when alone, and as wholly oblivious of the future. And that is not all. It needed only you and what you brought me to fill me with a joyous abandon of liberty such as a man might feel who saw and could walk alone for the first time. I had felt something of this before you came, for the sudden change from prison to a comparative freedom almost turned my head; but since you—who breathe liberty, who typify it, who seem to exhale the very essence of your wonderful young country—you who fear no one! who fear no one!—Am I still myself? Am I, Fessenden?”

That is the thought that has tortured me these last few days—am I unfaithful in some subtle way to my house, to myself, to the future, to Europe, to all that slaves born in the purple should be most steadfast to? Rudolf may have been weak, but he killed himself in a moment when he was mad with his loathing of life and the methods by which he had sought to forget it; but he was incapable of deserting his post deliberately, and if his mind could have been occupied by the duties of a ruler he would have had no time for despair. But I—I feel as if this secret revolution in me had made me capable of greater than weakness—that is common enough in my class! It has bred in me an indifference—there, I have said it!—to all that I have held most sacred. I feel as if I had slipped into another world. My rigid love of duty, even my old superstitions, they have—they had gone. But I have dragged them back. Last night as I lay awake it seemed to me that I clawed them out of their graves and shook and warmed them into life. I have escaped a deadly peril. I know that when you have gone I shall gradually become myself again—if not quite the same, if without enthusiasm, at least I shall fit into the old routine—”

“And you believe that?” asked Fessenden. “You will no more fall back into your old state of mediæval ignorance and superstition than I shall be wholly myself until I possess you. You have been remade. You have come to life, and only in me. You will return neither to separateness nor to ignorance. The imagination is quiescent while companioned—but wait!”

“Do you know, there have been moments when, if you had asked me, I believe I should have fled with you to your yacht? I don’t know myself! I almost long to have you gone that I may suffer to the utmost capacity of my nature, and then adapt myself to the future.”

## RULERS OF KINGS

He had taken out his watch. "By carriage and a good many changes of train we could reach Fiume some time to-morrow; a telegram on the way will bring my yacht there. Will you go?"

"Oh! No, I will not go! It is bad enough that I am tempted. Oh, I want to go, I want to go, more than I have ever wanted anything on this earth! Another man would make it inevitable, but you will not; and in a few days I shall be battling with regrets, and hating myself the more."

"Yes," he said, and with little enthusiasm. "I could compel you, and you would love me the more for it; but I should not love myself. It would not be playing a fair game. I have a Puritanic conscience as an inheritance; also I have the instinct of the American to protect women—girls, perhaps, I should say; to look upon them as his chief responsibility. That is pounded into us early. And I have lived so much within myself that it would demoralize me to fall too far below my own standard—God knows, I fall below it often enough. Moreover, if I gave way to my passions you might—were our escape interrupted—suffer so terribly that it chills my blood whenever I think of it. I believe that is the one thing—the knowledge that you were in your father's power, unable to escape—that would send me off my head. And it is necessary that I keep my head until I am able in all ways to protect you."

## XXV

"Have you noticed," asked Alexandra of Zrinyi, as the Archduchess descended the staircase, "that our princess has, until to-night, for the past week worn only black or white?"



“Why should I notice a trifling detail like that?” asked Zrinyi sulkily. “If she look beautiful, what matters her dress?”

“You don’t deserve to be asked intelligent questions.”

Ranata was trailing down the rough old staircase, between smoking lamps almost as old, in a green velvet gown of many hues, any one of which would have enhanced the brilliancy of her skin and hair. The neck of the gown was cut squarely, and a high stiff collar of white lace rose behind her head. Her skin was bare of jewels, her hair piled high and without ornament. In her cheeks was a deep flush, her eyes sparkled restlessly, her face had escaped from its habitual repose. Her whole figure expressed vigor, energy, impatience ill-confined.

“If it were not the Princess, one would almost say she looked reckless,” murmured Piroska to Fessenden, who was staring at the vision—the only one of the company, perhaps, who found nothing foreign in Ranata’s appearance. Piroska compelled him to transfer his gaze. “That is the way I have always imagined a girl might look who had made up her mind to elope,” she continued.

Fessenden started slightly, and quick as he was with his words, the Countess noticed it. “The Princess has the cruelty of your sex,” he replied. “She doubtless occupies a very considerable part of her time thinking out new gowns with which to distract us.”

“Why don’t you look more hopeless?” whispered Piroska.

“Must you have men who wear their hearts upon their sleeves?”

“No; but no man can wear a mask forever, unless he is secretly happier than he would have us believe.”

“I am always happy; it is a mere matter of temperament.” He paused deliberately and looked at her.

## RULERS OF KINGS

“Moreover,” he added, “I have no intention of failing.” And then he joined the group about the Archduchess. They had parted but two hours before, and although he had never been so convinced of her love for him, there had been nothing then of the almost reckless promise which her eyes seemed to flash to his as the movement was made towards the lower end of the room. What did it mean? Had an hour of solitary thought in the dark, before her maids came to dress her, beaten her passion so high that it had overwhelmed her traditions at last, and urged her to take advantage of this opportunity for flight? He turned giddy at the thought; and suddenly realized that deeply enamoured as he was with the idea of manipulating princes, his want of the woman extinguished this ambition among others, and that he found incomplete happiness something more than torment.

The hall was of immense proportions, and the dining-room being far off, beyond many chill corridors, the table was spread at the end farthest from the doors that opened directly upon a platform in front of the castle. The cannon were still in the embrasures. In the light of the many, yet insufficient, lamps the room with its battle-flags and weapons, its skins and dim hangings embroidered with the old arts of Hungary, so recently revived, was feudal enough to please the most exacting American.

“Count,” murmured Alexandra, “if you could only provide an earthquake shock among other phenomena I believe I should no longer resist.”

“You need an earthquake,” he replied. “But, of course, I am gratified, and hopeful, at the conquest of the castle.”

“I shouldn’t care to live here all the year round, however.”

“Heaven forbid! even with the most adored of women. Give me the capitals of the world in winter.”

“It is a great comfort to feel that our tastes are so much alike!” And she thought, “The Hungarians may be two-thirds fire and impulse, but no American could take his cues more quickly.”

Zrinyi, who was not in a sentimental mood, continued: “I have a surprise for this night, if not an earthquake. I find that the peasantry all through these mountains have been much excited since they heard the Princess was coming here—that is to say, the sister of Rudolf. Most of the young men were beaters at one time or another for him, and those who were not, and the old and the women, invariably managed to see him when he came to Görgény. His delightful manners, combined with the halo of monarchy, made them worship him in a manner which few modern princes have known—Ludvig II. perhaps furnishes the only parallel. Nor will they believe him dead. They know that our princess resembles him in many respects, and doubtless they have some sort of hope that she can give them definite news of him, that perhaps she has come to announce his return from the dim unknown. So I have sent men about inviting them to come here to-night. She has another opportunity to draw to herself the love that has been wasted since Rudolf’s death. I am grateful that she is looking her best to-night, for although she is always beautiful, she has appeared less brilliant of late.”

“She wears color to-night,” said Alexandra dryly; “that is the whole secret.”

“I am not a fool, *inademoiselle*; I understand quite well, and sincerely wish she could be happy. But unhappiness is the fate of princes. They are born in sacrifice, and they die in it, having known little else.

But our princess has so much to give—it is a great pity. I don't waste my sympathies on them as a rule. And your brother—it is his first disappointment? It will go hard with him, but any man worth the name can get over anything."

"That is comforting! If Ranata and Fessenden suddenly made up their minds to run off, should you help them?"

"Run off? Great Heaven! How could you conceive such a thing even in jest? The Hapsburgs have done a good deal for love—but that!"

"An American? That is the point? It would be a good beginning."

"I have always wondered," murmured Zrinyi, "why you did not put three heads on your eagle while you were about it."

"The two-headed one was sufficiently absurd to deter us. You have not answered my question. Should you help them?"

"I suppose I should. My sympathies would be with them as lovers, being in such a deplorable condition myself. But I should not approve, for I believe in the principle of monarchy, and that would deal it a heavy blow. But a liaison—there is no objection to that if it were circumspectly managed. That shocks your American prudery; but in the case of princes it is a desirable outlet for the feelings they have in common with the rest of human-kind, especially when a still more vital principle is at stake. Our princess can preserve this monarchy if any one can, and I for one would welcome her as the solution; for William, with all his great qualities, is perhaps a trifle too high and mighty for Hungary, and his second son is still an unknown quantity. It would be criminal in her to desert us, but a liaison would do no one any harm."

"I don't take monarchies as seriously as you do, and I have brought up Ranata too well — she will have no liaisons. Besides, my brother plays for high stakes. It is the best or nothing with him."

"Men have been known to take what they could get; and there are elements in our princess which are beyond even your training. To-night she looks like a beautiful ripe fruit hanging heavily from the tree. The Hapsburgs have bad blood in them; not a drachm of the Puritanism of the Hohenzollerns. The Princess has it in her to be a great sovereign, but—*bien*; the world is her oyster; why should she not open it?"

"If I marry you it will be to reform your morals. Not that they are worse than those of any other European."

"American morals are *bourgeoise*."

"So is its hypocrisy! But we like things that way. I may even make an American of you yet."

"I have no objection to being an American if I can live in Europe. And all the Americans I have met seem to make no difficulty about that. I suppose your excellent father would not wish me to go into business with him?"

"I am sure he would not!"

"Sarolta," murmured Prince Illehazy, "I have been uneasy for some time. Has not the moment come to speak?"

"I have spoken — this afternoon — and her philosophical calm staggered me."

"I see no evidence of philosophical calm."

"It is a transformation I do not understand—although I understand it as a manifestation better than the philosophy. I shall ask Mr. Abbott to go as soon as we reach Budapest, and doubtless he would be obliged to return to America very soon in any case; although I had a letter yesterday from his step-mother,

and she seemed to take his long absence without protest. I do not care to do anything further without something more specific as an excuse than the young man's devotion, and an expression of reckless defiance worn for one evening. Besides, we have Piroska to do the spying. The King will not remain too long unwarned. But Ranata's love-affair hardly worries me as much as this perhaps too sudden popularity. I fear it may be overdone, and will alarm Franz, possibly the King. Ranata has not a thought of usurpation. I am convinced of that. But—"

"Exactly. I saw Königsegg when I was in Vienna last week, and he tried in his delicate way to pump me. He learned nothing, but I did. The wind is blowing the wrong way. If the Princess, in a moment of haughty forgetfulness, drops her policy of conciliation towards Königsegg, or he becomes suddenly fearful of American influence—for Mr. Abbott may go, but he will return, or I know nothing of men—or the minister fears to anger the heir—then our beautiful princess will go back to her cage in the Hofburg."

"In that case I should not care to be the Emperor," remarked the Princess Sarolta.

Ranata suddenly lifted her hand. "I hear such a peculiar noise," she said. "Is a storm rising?"

The rest became aware of a deep low murmur, not unlike the rolling in of tides. Zrinyi left the table hastily and looked from one of the narrow windows at the upper end of the hall.

"I will send for your cloaks," he said, "and then I shall ask you to step out on the platform for a moment."

A few minutes later he threw open the great doors of the hall, and the party stared silently at the scene before them. The full moon swung close to the ice-fields, the white harsh peaks high above. In the court-yard, on



the small plain beyond, on every snowy hill and rock, were crowded hundreds of men clad in the skins of the sheep, the wolf, the goat, and the bear. On their heads were high fur hats, which exposed but a fringe of long hair on their shoulders and concealed their brows, giving them an aspect of singular wildness. But they were very quiet, almost breathless, until Zrinyi stepped forward and shouted something in Roumanian. Then each man lifted a flute to his lips, and a sweet and savage melody stole forth gently, to rise and swell until all the vast and desolate scene seemed to bend and listen. The notes might have been born of the peaks that looked as if torn asunder by harsh unlovely hands, then softened to beauty and gentleness by the silver glitter of the snow. And the strains, piercing yet remote, had in them too the eternal loneliness of the mountains, the only thing in Nature akin to the eternal loneliness of the great. The hills took up the echo and rolled it on, and among far and hidden peaks a laugh seemed flying from itself.

When they had finished, Zrinyi turned to Ranata. "They have come here to see your Royal Highness," he said; "and not so much because you are our princess as the sister of our lost crown prince. Have I your permission to ask them to enter?"

Ranata, who was pale, turned paler. "Yes," she said. "Ask them in."

The guests returned to the lower end of the hall, whence the table had been removed, and threw off their cloaks. The women made a brilliant group in their elaborate dinner dress, their flowers and jewels and superfluous fans.

The Wallachians and Roumanians—there are few of Hungarian blood so far south in Transylvania—came silently but eagerly in. Each man as he entered re-

moved the tower of fur on his head, revealing a dark mane of matted hair. The countenances thus exposed were mild and often handsome, but the dark eyes burned and flashed with an excitement of which they gave no other evidence.

Ranata remained with the group until the incoming throng had almost filled the hall. The doors were still open, and behind the mass of heads on the platform she could see the snowy slopes of the range, whose silences seemed to have fallen upon the castle; no one spoke, and the sandals of the mountaineers pressed the floor silently. Zrinyi murmured a suggestion, and Ranata ascended a few steps of the staircase which finished the hall. All the voluptuous beauty had left her face; it was so white that her eyes burned black. Her aspect would have been angry had it been less stern. She could not speak Roumanian, but Zrinyi had hastily taught her a few words.

"I am the sister of your crown prince," she said. "And I am honored and happy that you have come to see me."

They gazed at her for a few moments in a heavier silence. To them she had lost nothing of a beauty they had never seen, and in the wavering lights, possibly because at the moment her mind was face to face with her brother, her likeness to Rudolf was so strong as to send the blood to their heads. It rose slowly, for they were cold with long waiting and taken by surprise with a beauty they had not expected, but when they realized that the sister of their prince and the chiefest object of his affections stood before them, they suddenly sent forth a mighty cry, hard, wild, abrupt. It was almost a note of agony, such as the mountains might have given when the fires of the earth boiled them apart. The cry shot out again, but this time it swelled into volume,

ended in a roar, and then split into intelligible sound. "Élyen!" "Setreasca!" "Setreasca!" shook the old flags like the wind of battle; then, on a higher note, "Rudolf!" "Rudolf!" "Rudolf!" They came forward like a great wave, excited, voluble, demanding to be told what they had done to anger their prince that he came no more, what his wicked enemies had done with him, why his father, the great King and Emperor, was hiding him. It was idle to attempt to answer, and Ranata stood looking down upon them, at times forgetting the strange scene, her thoughts in the crypt of the Capuchin Church with her brother. Suddenly she heard herself addressed in Hungarian, and glanced aside to see a gypsy standing on the step below her. He was regarding her with admiring eyes, but there was a sardonic twinkle in them, and his mien although friendly would not have inspired confidence in an idiot. However, Ranata came forth from her thoughts and smiled on him.

"Did you know him?" she asked.

He addressed her in the most extravagant forms of homage, but when he answered her question it was with directness enough.

"I was with his party on every visit," he asserted triumphantly, as if exhibiting a valued stock-in-trade; "I and my band. He was always eager to hear the Char-dash. And out on Lake Zenoga, sometimes at Görgény, we sat at his board, or in the circle by the fire. Oh, those were the days, your Highness—first a prince, then a gypsy, then a prince, then a gypsy, all mixed up, all drunk, everybody happy. I know that Rudolf is dead, for I have travelled far, but I wish he were not."

The man's speech broke through the severity of her mood and she laughed. "I have no doubt they were gay times," she said, "and I regret that I am not a man

to come and take his place among you. But I will do the best I can; and believe that I shall love you as much as he did."

The man shook his head. "We would never dare to love like that again." He paused, then added meaningly, "The love of the chosen Hapsburgs is fatal—to themselves and to those who win it."

Ranata looked over the man's head as if he had disappeared into the still shouting multitude; but he had the assurance of his race, which acknowledges neither country nor king, and he repeated:

"It is always fatal, your Royal Highness."

Then Ranata looked down at him once more. After all, the creature was not worth crushing, and he was diverting. Moreover, he had known and doubtless been spoiled by her brother. Rudolf had told her many anecdotes of the gypsies who always attached themselves to his Transylvanian household.

"You will not return to us!" continued the gypsy. "When Rudolf left us the last time I said he would not return. Nor did I predict it because he said to us not '*Aufwiedersehen*,' but '*Good-bye*.'"

"Is that true?"

"It is true, but that was not the reason. When he came that last time I said he would not return."

"And how do you know I shall not return?"

"Because love is fatal to the chosen Hapsburgs, your Royal Highness."

"Then they can avoid love," said the Archduchess impersonally.

"Not when they are made for it. Nature has protected many by a mask as ugly as the plague. When she gives them beauty be sure it is to scourge the proudest house on earth, and to chastise it for centuries of cruelty and oppression."

## RULERS OF KINGS

“Maria Theresia was beautiful.”

“She was fat. She also had more children than a man ever can remember. Besides, she was not really beautiful.”

“And you are not very logical. Other houses of Europe have records for injustice as great as ours may possibly have.”

“Nature has taken other methods to punish them. Be sure that none shall escape.”

“I suppose you wish to tell my fortune. I have not superstition enough for that, but in the name of my brother I will send you a purse to the servants’ quarters to-night.”

She withdrew into the polite silence with which royalty lays down the burden of audience, but the gypsy held his ground. He thanked her extravagantly, and added: “I am more honest than most gypsies, your Royal Highness—I do not pretend to see too far into the future. But when a man’s heart is black with remorse and bitterness and hatred of life and the reckless indulgence of passions, I can see the end; and when a woman—”

“Go!” said Ranata; and this time the man mingled his featureless sheepskin with the others. She beckoned to Zrinyi and spoke with him a moment. Then he stood beside her and lifted his hand. Every man seemed to shut his voice between his teeth.

“Her Royal Highness wishes me to tell you,” said the Count, on a note which carried to those beyond the door, “that Rudolf is dead. That he has gone where you may meet him again if you are faithful and loyal subjects to the throne. She will tell you herself.”

And Ranata said in Roumanian, and with the cold accent of finality, “He is dead.”

Zrinyi let the words sink into the silence, then he raised his voice again and shouted that barrels of wine were

## RULERS OF KINGS

opening in the kitchen, and the great wave turned upon itself and rolled out, but still in silence and with many a backward glance.

Ranata ascended the stairs. When she returned she wore a short skirt and a long fur cloak with a hood.

"I am going for a walk," she said to the astonished company. "Mr. Abbott, will you come with me?" Then to the Princess Sarolta, who had risen, she added, "No power can prevent me. But do not be alarmed; I shall return."

"Do you give me your royal word for that?" asked the alarmed Obersthofmeisterin, "otherwise, old and lame as I am, I shall follow you."

"I give you my word. You may sleep in peace."

## XXVI

Fessenden and Ranata walked rapidly and in silence over the paths the mountain peasants had trodden that night. There had been neither wind nor snow for many days, and what had fallen was compact and not too smooth for impatient feet. For a time the path was straight, and, looking back, the irregular mass of the castle on its isolated rock was the one dark object in the white radiance of the Alpine world. Soon, however, a sharp turn about the foot of one of the peaks that rose straight from the brief level seemed to fling them abruptly into an eternity of ice-fields and endless chains of glittering crests so high above that their fierce teeth must surely bite new pictures into the moon that hung so close. Ranata's arm was within his, but Fessenden's mind reverted to his boyhood in the Adirondacks, when he had stolen forth to his balcony on winter moonlight nights to gaze upon the snowy lake and peaks, and



dream of their kin in the far-off Alps. How tame that picture seemed to-night, dear as it was! That was a mild and pleasant wilderness compared with this upper firmament of ice and desolation, with its black forests below and on high its masses of rock and crag that looked as if arrested in brutal warfare with each other.

In the course of an hour the path came abruptly to an end on the shore of a small lake, from three sides of which the mountains rose like the straight and jealous sides of a mighty jewel casket guarding the diamond treasure of some old god of the hills. The lake, looking smaller perhaps from the great height of the perpendicular mountains surrounding it, was oval in shape, and its frozen surface glittered and sparkled under the moon poised directly above. No light of man had ever drawn such radiance from the diamond. The air was so still that the cold was hardly noticeable. The silence was intense, oppressive, now that their feet no longer met the snow crisply. Ranata put her hand nervously to her head.

“What are you thinking of?” she asked.

“Of my boyhood in the Adirondacks. To-night a thousand years seem to have disappeared since then. And many and wild as were my dreams of the future in those callow days when I had leisure for dreams, no flight penetrated to the future which held these last weeks, to the indescribable solitude of this night with you. In those days I fancied myself a poor boy who had begun life in the orthodox log-cabin and must end in the White House. But that I should love a daughter of the Cæsars and hold her in my arms among the eternal snows of the loneliest of the Alps never muttered in my most exalted moments. Life is a rum thing.”

Ranata laughed in spite of the chaotic emotions that

had driven her forth. "Which do you really love best, I wonder, the sublime or the ridiculous? Do you know what I had almost made up my mind to do when I came down to dinner?"

"To go to-morrow with me to Fiume?"

"To-night; as soon as the others were out of the way, and Zrinyi could have the horses harnessed. After I left you there was an hour in which I think I really was mad. Every fact of existence except the possibility of being alone with you on your yacht seemed to have been burned out of my mind. I would have sold Austria to William, I would have flung Hungary to Roumania—there was no crime I would not have committed to have been alone on this earth with you. And now we are alone, and the fever is gone. I look back upon the hours before those poor creatures came and shouted Rudolf's name as upon some half-remembered interval of insanity. But it was appallingly real then, and if it came once it may come again. After our return to Budapest—and I shall start to-morrow—I shall never see you again."

"I still think you are unwise not to take advantage of this opportunity. You will regret it; take my word for that."

"Doubtless, when it is happily too late. I am ice now. I can only describe my sensation while those wild men were begging me for Rudolf by asking you to imagine yourself standing under that frozen cascade over there. It seemed to me that for the first time I realized the enormity of his crime. He could have been a great monarch, he could have preserved his country, he could have saved Europe from unimaginable horrors; and every gift, every duty, every ambition disappeared into the flaming abyss of his passions. Oh, if my father could only have died twenty years ago! That alone

could have saved Rudolf, for it was excess that killed him; the occasional indulgence would not have mattered. And these men, and thousands like them, would have obeyed his lightest call to save Austria from Europe, to save it from Hungary if need be. They would come at my call. They would laugh even at my father. And, Fessenden, above those wild heads, and bodies like mountain beasts, I saw for a moment the pale face of Rudolf, terrible with agony and remorse, with impotent resentment against the law of the grave, dumbly beseeching me to continue the work that the great invisible forces up there had sent him into the world to accomplish. It was then that my blood turned to ice. An hour before—and in other moments, perhaps—I had been capable of greater guilt than Rudolf's; for after all I have had no such temptations, no such provocations as his. Where you have upheld me, women, from the time he was old enough, the very girls of the court, flung themselves beneath his feet, honored to be dishonored by the heir to the throne, even had he been less fascinating as a man. My father had made no secret of his own amours; there has been no more corrupt court in Europe; Rudolf saw no necessity for restraint, and he used none. If he had married happily all might have been well, for he was not vicious, and his nature was very affectionate. But when does royalty marry happily? Fortunate the prince who marries the cow. Then at least there is one incentive the less. Rudolf had no such fortune, and disappointment and *ennui*, multiplying themselves, drove him to the arms of charming women who wished for nothing so much as to make him forget, and from them to the boon companions who adored him, but dared not remonstrate had they wished, when he drank till morning. But what excuse had I? Only that of a

## RULERS OF KINGS

passion so great and so real that it should give me the strength of these mountains. Without it, after gaining my wishes in Hungary, I might have become bored, indifferent, cynical; I might even, as I felt youth passing, have indulged in amours that no one would dare to take me to account for. I might have gone to my coffin there in the Kaisergruft without an ideal in my soul, disillusioned, all my original nature in ruins, reviling life, glad to die. Now it seems to me that after the inevitable agony is over, I have it in me to become really great in character, sustained by an inner life and fed by a memory that will keep me young till my death. I thought of this long ago, when I met you first, but it passed from my mind. It was more like a dream then. I know it to be a reality now. I doubt if there can be any such actual happiness as what I shall find in the memories of you."

Fessenden looked at her long and intently. If she was of many and variable moods, the moods were of an intensity and truth which submerged the other women in her while they lasted. And he always responded to her deeper moments so fully and so involuntarily that only his ever-alert brain saved him from compromising his future conduct. As in the profoundest solitude he had ever known, he looked through her eyes into her naked soul, he had a long moment of doubt. In that cold ideal of fulfilled duty, with her love apotheosized and spiritualized, might she not in truth be happier than he could make her? Her state, and the more commonplace cause of the deep chill of an Alpine midnight, had cooled his own blood, and muffled the passionate voices in his imagination. For a moment he too felt the white intoxication of the ideal of a lifetime of self-immolation on the passionless shores of duty, forecasted the serenity with which Nature rewards perpetual

striving after spiritual heights, and compensates for the voluntary resignation of the joy of love. He darted a glance upward and was visited by a brief illusion: he and Ranata stood alone on the highest peak that pierced the stars. Then like Life he compromised.

"I wish for nothing less than your full and unconditional surrender," he said. "If, when you have had time to know yourself better than you do now, you tell me that your decision is unalterable, I will persist no further. I believe that you will send for me before long, but I may be mistaken. Perhaps I have been blinded by my love, and the hopes with which it has inspired my imagination. There may be, there are, of course, depths in your mind of which I have no conception. These may contain forces that will finally shut me out of your life. If you convince me that I should add to your unhappiness by persisting, or that I should do you a great wrong by making you mine in spite of yourself, then I promise you here solemnly to withdraw finally from your life; and to be as eternally faithful to you as I believe you will be to me."

Vilma from her high window saw them return. She had watched for them, not from the motive which had made her neighbor walk restlessly between her window and her writing-table, but in tempestuous sympathy with a romance against which she pressed so close. Her own heart she believed to be a graveyard with one tomb, and she found a vicarious happiness in this atmosphere of passionate and uncommon love that she was graciously permitted to enter. She had seen how it was from the first, and had done what she could to divert the attentions and the suspicion of Piroska. Pumping had had no effect on the wary Zápolya, and Vilma, with all her subtlety, was still in doubt as to what the possible

## RULERS OF KINGS

enemy may have seen or suspected. She had followed Fessenden and Ranata on the night of the ball, and waited without the door leading to the private apartments until she heard him returning; that she might be able to assure Piroska she had been their companion and chaperon. But Piroska had given no sign that she had been occupied during that brilliant night except with her many partners, and Vilma dared not tell Ranata what she had done. Gracious and captivating as the Princess was in her new rôle, it would have been a braver than Vilma who would have taken a liberty with her. Fessenden possessed no great charm for this young Hungarian, who preferred a more romantic type, but if he had inspired love in her beautiful princess she wished with all her heart that he too were of the blood of kings. Had these two been content with intrigue she would willingly have helped and shielded them, but she shrewdly suspected the truth. Astounding as the fact might be, the American wished to marry the daughter of an emperor and king. It took the ancient pattern of her brain a long while to adjust itself to the bare idea, but when time had accustomed her to its audacity she could, starved soul that she was, but sympathize. She too had had an intuition of Ranata's state of mind when she bloomed upon them at dinner that night, breathing passion and defiance, and she heartily wished the Princess had slipped out of the castle with her lover instead of giving her word to the Obersthofmeisterin to return.

She had also overheard the words of Piroska to the American, and she had noted that the moment the Princess left the castle the sister lady-in-waiting had pleaded the morning toothache and gone to her room. It adjoined Vilma's, and for two hours the friend had listened to the steady scratching of the enemy's pen, interrupted only by hasty visits to the window. Vilma



had lived close enough to Piroska during these months of court life to be sure she did not keep a diary. She was now fully convinced that she was the tool of Königsegg for two reasons: it was worth her while, and she had intended to marry the American when he became convinced of the hopelessness of his suit. Piroska's wiles had been patent enough if her hostility had not, and to-night, as the American had turned to her with an air of conclusion and six words which might have extinguished hope in a more sanguine heart, the hard little face of Piroska had settled into lines of malice and determination. She had been as gay as usual during the dinner, but the color had come back neither to cheek nor lips, and Vilma suspected that if the unfortunate lovers had flown that night Piroska would have managed to follow them as far as the first telegraph station. Now, no doubt, she was writing her long-deferred report.

As Vilma watched Ranata and Fessenden return, she slipped from the window-seat and climbed onto the bed, still huddled in her furs. The fire was out and the room almost cold, but she could not prepare for sleep knowing of the plot thickening in the next room. The hour had come to act, but what should she do? To attempt to intercept Piroska's letter on the morrow would be futile; Piroska would see to that. Vilma did her justice; there would be no loose ends, as in novels, for the good fairy to unravel. Should she walk boldly in and hurl suspicion in her face? Vilma was too European to approve of the crude method. The wild idea occurred to her of smothering Piroska with a pillow as she slept, but she had a certain measure of common-sense; a tragedy in the royal household would put an end to court life in Buda for the present, perhaps thwart ambitions she half suspected, possibly send herself to keep company with

Piroska. She dismissed with some reluctance the idea she was quite capable of executing, and suddenly determined to go into Piroska's room and be guided by events. She left the bed and knocked on the connecting door; then, assuming that she had been answered, opened it and entered.

"I cannot sleep," she said, "and I heard you moving about, so I thought you might be as glad of company as I. You are writing? How can you in this cold? Do you know I sat up to watch them come home? Not that I doubted they would, but I felt as if I were living in a chapter of romantic memoirs. I may write mine some day—but you should do that—you are so much cleverer than I."

Piroska had risen politely and pushed a chair slightly away from her table. She had a small pile of manuscript before her, which she had the presence of mind not to attempt to conceal. "*I am* cold," she said, stifling a yawn, "and tired. But I could not go to bed. The excitement of the evening made me hopelessly wide awake, so I thought I would write my long-neglected letters."

"It has been exciting—those wild simple creatures! But that looks like a book. Tell me—" her eyes were bright with girlish curiosity, "*are* you writing a novel? You could! Ah! I know you are!"

"Well," said Piroska, with a delicate hesitation, "I—for Heaven's sake don't breathe it, Vilma! One is such a fool until one succeeds!"

Vilma gave an ecstatic cry, and with a movement as swift and unexpected as that of a panther flung herself upon the mass of papers. "Let me see! Let me see!" she cried. But they were torn from her hands, and the eyes that met hers blazed with the ferocity of a less civilized century.

"You dare!" gasped Piroaska—"you dare!"

Vilma had seen enough. "Oh, very well," she said haughtily. "I had no idea a book was like a tiger's cub. It made me quite wild with curiosity, and I am sorry we tore the manuscript. Good-night. I would not sit up and copy it if I were you. Your tooth will be quite frightful to-morrow."

She swept out, and locked the door as she closed it. Piroaska, too, might be capable of using a pillow. She took down a candlestick and let herself noiselessly into the hall. It was very dark, except for the patches of ghostly moonlight; but commonplace fears were unknown to this girl of fighting ancestors, of women who had suffered worse than death. She knew that the men's rooms were in the opposite wing, and she traversed the long corridors between without adventure or qualm. When she reached the wing she saw light under two doors; Zrinyi had undoubtedly sat up to await the return of the Princess. Which was the American's door she had no means of knowing, but she did not hesitate. If her knock summoned Zrinyi she would tell him that she had a message for his guest which must be delivered then. It brought Fessenden, however, and she stepped quickly into his room and closed the door.

He did not look as astonished as she had expected, but she told her story breathlessly and begged him to act at once.

"It will do no good to intercept the report," she added. "Even if you could, she would merely write another. But let me go to the Princess and beg her to fly with you to-morrow early. We could shut Piroaska up for twenty-four hours. If you do not take this opportunity you will never have another. Her Royal Highness must have many enemies at court. This will be the final straw. If

## RULERS OF KINGS

she is forced to return to Vienna you will never see her again."

"I wish that report to go to Vienna to-morrow," said Fessenden, "and if you are not too tired to sit down for a few moments, I will tell you how you can help us when she is once more in the Hofburg."

### XXVII

Two nights after her return Ranata went to the opera-house of Budapest for the last time. Much to her chagrin she was ten minutes late. Royalty has its privileges and virtues. It may exercise the courtesy of promptness without loss of prestige, and no men and women the world over sit in an opera-box with the same ease and dignity and grace. From childhood they are trained to stand and sit without moving or betraying fatigue, and if the frequent necessity adds to the sum of their mortal expiations, it makes them as decorative, when properly dressed, as their ancient palaces and historical pageants.

But for one princess the tenor of the day had been disturbed. A sleepless night had resulted in an involuntary nap at three o'clock in the afternoon. Her drive had been late, and she had returned home so short a time before the early dinner that her maids had detained her through half of it. She regretted having announced her intention to attend the opera, but it was a *première*, and she would have been expected in any case.

The large house was crowded with the gay aristocracy of Budapest, and with many who, if not so highly placed, could dress as well, and contribute to the general effect of brilliant beauty: an effect which owed more than the women would have admitted to the varied and

magnificent uniforms of the officers. Orders glittered on black coats as on colored, and every woman wore her abundant store of jewels. But fans and heads were moving restlessly. Where was their princess? It was the *première* in Hungary of Massenet's "Le Jongleur de Notre Dame," and this music-loving people were eager for the curtain to rise.

At ten minutes past seven that mysterious electric current that announces the coming of royalty to the sensitive faculties of Europeans flew over the house; bringing it to its feet, and lifting its eyes to the gala box facing the stage, as if manipulated by a spring.

Ranata, accompanied by Sarolta and Alexandra, her Grand Chamberlain, Prince Illehazy, and Count Zrinyi, entered and advanced to the front of the box, acknowledging the waving of handkerchiefs and clapping of hands, the well-bred "*Élyens*" and "*Vivats*" and "*Hochs*." She wore white velvet, a small crown of pearls, and many pearls on her neck. For the first time she showed the wear of too much thought and loss of sleep; she was pale rather than white, and her eyes were listless. During the few moments that she stood there, however, while the band played the national anthem, her guests on either side of her, the admiring house saw only the perfect carriage of her form and head, the undimmed brilliancy of her hair, and that most rare combination of beauty and majesty.

The anthem finished, the royal party took their seats, the opera began. Ranata kept her eyes resolutely bent upon the stage, but although she felt and had been severely drilled in music, hers was the imagination which escapes control under the influence of the only art that penetrates to the key-notes of being. The spell of the limpid semi-religious music swirled round her like a soft tide. She saw far beyond the poor juggler apologizing

to the Virgin for desecrating her name that he might gratify a heartless rabble and keep his wretched body from starving; and if she forbade her eyes to wander over the house, every nerve told her that Fessenden Abbott was not there.

She had asked him to leave Hungary immediately upon his return to Budapest, and she knew that if he had not done so—he must await important telegrams—he would not come to the palace, nor to any gathering where she was sure to be. And to attend the opera except in her train would have excited the comment both wished to avoid.

Whether he had gone or not she did not know, for she would not ask Alexandra; if indeed her friend knew, for the brother and sister had said good-bye at the station in Budapest. Ranata, who had been gifted with no greater measure of consistency than the rest of her sex, had hoped to see him while driving, while entering the opera-house, to receive from him some swift involuntary token that he was thinking of her as persistently as she was of him.

For she thought of little else, and she was aghast at the power of love to defy the will. The emotional struggle had induced a physical lassitude she had never known before. That morning she had risen with the thought, "Am I going to send for him to-day? Am I? *Am I?*" And the question had risen again and again, acquainting her for the first time with the insolent defiance of the fixed idea to the higher qualities of the brain. She had had experience of the dual entity in the mental household before, but never so complete a sense of division, nor of possession by faculties which seemed to have forced an entrance into her mind rather than have risen from its depths.

She had not sent for him, however, and she hardly



knew whether she had refrained through the exercise of a will which appeared to sit in a corner smiling with amusement, from pride, a sense of futility, or merely because the argument in her mind had not finished in time. In any case she felt so far from her imperious self that she was almost as alarmed as she was unhappy. She was filled with a dull abhorrence of the idea of living the rest of her life on the surface of her nature, as she was attempting to live it to-night. For what else was left her? Did she become queen, and none knew better than she that it was but a possibility among a thousand opposing forces, she could occupy her brain with routine as her father did; but in a constitutional monarchy, particularly in one as jealous of its rights as Hungary, she would exercise so little power that, with her merciless clarity of vision, she must soon know herself for what she was, an ornamental figure-head. It would be the pride of the Hungarians to have the most beautiful queen in Europe, delight the abundant enthusiasm and the loyal instinct of their natures to love their elected sovereign; and they would value her the more for a charm which must unite all factions and preserve them from internal conflict. They would vote her immense sums to live as a queen should, to restore to the old palace of Buda its ancient glories and excite the envy of Europe. All these things she might have, and she knew them to be toys.

Did she sympathize with the tide of liberty rising in the world, and nowhere so vigorously as in Hungary? She had put the question from her again and again, and it had returned as often. Surely he had not revolutionized her brain to that extent; she must be less than herself were she unfaithful to the monarchical idea. And yet, when her mind left Fesenden Abbott it seemed to her that some mysterious force drew it to the great

sullen heart of mankind, brooding eternally on its birth-right of freedom; every instinct of independence, when not crushed by the tyranny of the Turk or the Russian, still blunted and pruned in a thousand petty and humiliating ways. Would the socialists conquer William? And then—when with greater liberty had come their own adaptation to the unalterable facts of life and human nature—would the world be better, a more habitable place for mankind in the general? And was that the destiny of the human race—the happiness of the many, not the exaltation of the few? That it was a great thought, a grand theory, she did not pretend to deny. But did she sympathize with it?

While she assured herself contemptuously that she did not, that the order of the centuries must be best merely because it was, a part of her brain seemed to her to accept the doctrine, and give itself no concern to argue. She turned her back upon it. Why argue, indeed? A month, a few months hence, possibly a year, the influence that now possessed her would be so far removed that her mind would have recovered its balance, alien thoughts must have sunk so deep that she would only unearth them now and again as curiosities. She made up her mind that if Alexandra did not marry Zrinyi she would put an end to the intimacy with herself; and it seemed to her, in her present unhappy condition, that she would be insensible to further sorrow. She should indeed welcome complete loneliness, barren of outward suggestion. There could be no doubt of the triumph, in time, of her strong will, of her absolute fidelity, in thought as in deed, to the lofty station to which she had been born.

She sighed for her lost superstitions, rather for the superstitions of her fathers which might have been hers had no alien influence entered her life. How they must

## RULERS OF KINGS

sustain the soul of majesty through its trials, through its loneliness, through the long martyrdom of its earthly course. There had been times when she had heard the deep mutter of those ancient ghosts, when for a brief hour they had risen and possessed her brain. Indeed, there had been hours—usually when Alexandra's uncompromising practicality summered in its native land—when it had seemed to her that in the depths of her soul was a charnel-house of hideous memories, ambiguous of outline, of old corruptions, unknown in her life but transmitted with her blood, of impulses for tyranny and cruelty, and unbridled passions, of lust of blood, and callous indifference to human suffering. Philip the Second and Joan the Mad were but two of her illustrious ancestors who might have sent filtering down the worst traits and impulses which the human heart is capable of supporting. There had been times when she had believed that had she been born a century earlier it would have needed but the circumstances to make her the vilest of women. She could have reigned with her feet in blood and loved as royal harlots have loved since Messalina burned her pitch in history. And, she recalled, as she listened to the soft passionless music of the opera, there had also been moments when she had regretted that no such life could be hers—wondered if indeed it had not been.

But it was years now since the last of these obsessions had risen, five or six, at least. She had acquired great control over herself; moreover, they had rested impotent under healthy influences; and assuredly in the company of Fessenden Abbott she could not have evoked their memory, the ghosts of those old ghosts. Would it not perhaps be better if she could? Would not even the occasional demoralization of her spiritual nature be a lesser sin than this treachery to the divinity in her royal

blood? Were she steeped in superstition she might have known her lover better than she had; but the temptation to marry him, the persistent disposition to look at life from his point of view, would never have assailed her for a moment.

Her eyes during this long reverie, interrupted only by an *entr'acte*, were fixed upon the stage. The surface of her brain had taken its impression of the interior of the monastery where the starving mountebank, cursed by the prior for his blasphemy, had been enticed that he might find absolution in the life of a monk and fill his stomach daily. The priests and friars in their rich white cassocks, the brown interior of the monastic room, made a harmonious and insidious picture, and the despair of the miserable youth while the other cenobites boasted of the arts—painting, sculpture, poetry, music—with which they glorified the Virgin, drew tears from many sympathetic eyes.

The juggler and a kindly friar were alone, and the elect was pouring into the astonished ear of the poor ignoramus the story of the birth of Christ in a manger, and explaining that the Lady of Sorrows understood not only Latin, but all languages, and even dialects, and had as merciful an ear for the outcast as for the king. The mountebank, with his primitive credulity, his almost maniacal terror under the curse of the abbot, is a vivid study of superstition in the Middle Ages. As Ranata's attention was captured for the moment by the intensity of the final moments of the act, she found herself envying the simplicity of a creature as capable, in his primal limitations, of the extremest satisfaction and happiness as of terror and despair. The second *entr'acte* is very short. A few moments after the curtain rises the impressive double row of friars in their sumptuous cassocks march out of the chapel to their own solemn mu-

sic, and the mountebank enters alone, throws off his monastic robe, and in his costume of a harlequin offers his juggler's art to the glorification of the painted Virgin above the altar. It is a scene almost incredible in its childish superstition, but so pathetic that in that rapt audience neither Jew nor Protestant paid his brain the tribute of a smile. Ranata, of all persons, saw no humor in it, for her mind traversed the history of her race, and halted suddenly at the memory of Maria Theresia, who had sent her daughters down alone into the imperial crypt on the eve of their marriage to pray among the coffins of their ancestors. She recalled how she herself had sometimes felt an impulse to go down there in the night and do likewise, that she might satisfy that something in the depths of her soul so akin to those who had dwelt in the benighted past.

Her attitude suddenly lost its graceful ease. She stiffened and sat erect as if about to spring; but the eye of the house was focussed on the stage and she was forgotten. Was not the time come for that nocturnal pilgrimage? Might not she there, among those four centuries of her dead, steep herself in that subtle aura of personality which still must diffuse itself through lead and bronze? Alone there, at midnight, with but the light of a taper to illumine those motley hillocks, with the dank odor of death clogging her senses, kneeling close to the dust and the corruption which had lived so intensely with the blood that ran in her own veins, must she not recapture her inherited superstitions, break with the present, absorb once more the poison of the past? She realized that it was not to satisfy her sense of kinship with the dead that she should now go to them alone at midnight, but to revive the lost sense of indissoluble relationship, of similarities, of the closest likeness of which inherited blood and brain-cells are capable. She

should kneel finally at the foot of Rudolf's coffin, and pray there until she was a Hapsburg once more.

Heavy and abnormal as her brain was from fatigue, sleeplessness, passionate misery of thought, and reaction from the exalted mood of her last interview with Fessenden, still it seemed to her that it drew away in modern disgust from the idea that had risen precipitately in its middle and taken possession. But Ranata clung to that idea as to her one hope of salvation; and as the Virgin and the angels, which had appeared in place of the picture above the altar, to reveal the eternal beauty of simple faith to the indignant priests, were growing more luminous, and at the same time, so perfect the art, less and less material, and the poor juggler's spirit was struggling from its flesh, she matured the details of her plan; and half an hour later, when she descended from the carriage in the palace court-yard, she asked Sarolta to be ready to accompany her to Vienna on the following day.

## XXVIII

Fessenden had found his telegrams awaiting him, and started at once for Berlin. While the ghosts in Ranata were chuckling their recognition to the painted superstitions of the stage, he was in the royal palace, in the comfortable English-looking study overlooking the Schlossplatz. On the north corner of the huge brown pile floated the purple banner which informs the people of Berlin that their "Travelling Kaiser" is visiting at home.

The Emperor was pleurably at home this evening, for, although he was too much of a soldier to lounge, he wore a smoking-jacket and sat deep in one of his English



chairs; the color of animation was in his pale face, and his eyes, always expressive and brilliant, sparkled with a more personal emotion.

It was night. His courtiers, his ministers, his generals, his supplicants, were on the other side of the door, and he could be wholly himself for an hour with the one man who neither feared nor flattered him, to whom he had given a large portion of his own warm affections, and who, in return, gave him the sincerest friendship he would ever know.

Fessenden's chair was drawn close to the fire, and he was sipping a Scotch-and-soda. It was a night for a comfortable talk in a warm bright room, surrounded by books and a man's more intimate belongings; for the wind howled about the corner of the palace and dashed the rain against the glass. Fessenden's eyes were sparkling also, but with excitement, and he was more nervous than he usually permitted his manner to betray.

"Within a week," the Emperor was saying, "the Archduchess will be summoned to Vienna on one pretence or another. The plan is to make her a prisoner in her own rooms until she promises to marry the Archduke Aloys Franz. I suggested him on account of his commanding qualities as a disciplinarian; you will recall that they married the Princess Marie Stefanie to him when her liaison with her tenor was discovered. He imprisoned her on one of his estates, never permitted her to leave it for a day, and when she lost a front tooth mortified her vanity by refusing her the services of a dentist—she was a beauty, poor little thing! As a husband for refractory princesses he is without a peer; and my indirect suggestion met with instant favor from the Emperor, who is distracted between the jealousies of the court and the new motive for disturbance in the caldron of Hungary.

## RULERS OF KINGS

The full information—furnished by the maid-of-honor and other spies—of her love for you was the last straw; and much as the Emperor loves peace and quiet, when the moment comes to act he acts. The Archduchess, of course, will not marry Aloys Franz. We know her; elaboration of that statement is superfluous. But several weeks of solitary meditation will probably convince her that, as her ambitions are thwarted, she may as well marry you and be happy. Confinement will reduce her to an abnormal state, where love will seem the only object for living.”

He left his chair and moved restlessly about the room. “I don’t like it!” he announced in his harsh emphatic voice. “It is unheard of. It is a dangerous precedent. We shall have other dissatisfied and romantic princesses following her example. Take one stone out of the monarchical edifice and it is impossible to foresee the end. God knows, we are shaky enough now. I tell you frankly, Fessenden, that I should assist in no such revolution solely out of friendship for even you; but to get her out of Europe is the less of two evils. I have been called the trigger of Europe. She is the firebrand charged with dynamite. She was dangerous enough before. Now that she has fallen in love, the only thing to do is to marry her to the object as quickly as possible. Balked, and thrown in upon herself, she would set Europe in flames merely to distract her mind and gratify some other passion.” He swung round abruptly and laughed. “I must say, Fessenden, that while I am delighted to be able to help you get the woman you want, I don’t envy you. I shouldn’t say she was the sort of woman a man could settle down and have a comfortable time with.”

“I want nothing more nor less,” said Fessenden; and the Emperor laughed again, although his generous nat-

ure was gratified at the opportunity to be of service to his friend.

"It will be rather more than less," he said. "I have known her since childhood, and while I admire her more in certain respects than any woman living, I am not precisely blind to her faults. I will confess that I shook her once, a good many years ago, when I was visiting Rudolf, and that she bit and scratched me in return. However, the one man can always manage the woman of strong passions, so I wish you joy."

"Thanks; and don't let my domestic prospects worry you. Are you perfectly sure of your man, by the way?"

"Oh, perfectly. He has the ear of the Emperor and the Crown Prince, and, while by no means false to them, is so good a friend of mine that he would do more than that if I asked it of him. Moreover, he has the confidence of Königsegg."

"Suppose they should suspect that you put him up to it? That would ruin everything. They are quite as afraid of you as they are of her."

"No diplomat in Europe is more discreet—or finer in his methods. He has dropped the poison by degrees. His first references to the astonishing popularity of the Archduchess in Hungary were almost inadvertent, and at the same time accompanied with enthusiastic comments upon her talents. Her conquest of the Independents was the last straw. The Emperor has been convinced that they would proclaim her queen the moment he died. Was it your suggestion that they met her in a body at the train when she arrived from Transylvania?"

"I put Molnár and one or two others up to it, although they are quite convinced it was their own idea."

"I am thankful you are my friend, for I shouldn't want

## RULERS OF KINGS

your finger in my political pie! Well, Ranata will never see Budapest after this week—if you are quick enough. If she should devil the poor old Emperor into his grave while he was trying to bring her to terms, I should not venture to answer for the consequences. What is your next move? I see no further. How shall you get her out of the Hofburg? Bribe the guards? It will be difficult. The Emperor will guard her well. She could hardly disguise herself and slip out. How shall you manage to communicate with her?"

"Do not exercise your imagination over possibilities of escape, for I have no idea of attempting any. I intend to marry her with the Emperor's consent. Not very graciously given, perhaps, but still—"

"Oh, Fessenden!" The Emperor spoke impatiently. He had paused on the hearth-rug, and stood there with his left hand resting lightly on his hip, the familiar sword-hilt being absent, the right gesticulating slightly, with a constant movement of the wrist and an occasional pointing of the index finger. "That, my dear boy," he added kindly, "is just the one thing that even you cannot accomplish. That you will get the Archduchess sooner or later I have no doubt. When a woman like that loves a man—" He shot his hand up expressively. "It may be that I shall have an inspiration of some sort and help you further, but I cannot act openly or I would invite her here. But I have every faith in your resource."

"You will have more when I tell you my plan."

The Emperor's keen eyes met his, and they measured each other as they had a habit of doing.

"Well?" asked the Emperor of Germany.

Fessenden stood up and thrust his hands into his pockets. His nervousness had gone, and his eyes were hard and brilliant. "What do you suppose the Emperor

## RULERS OF KINGS

would give to restore the ancient strength and prestige of Austria?" he asked, in the cool and even tones he employed in his Wall Street offices. "To obliterate the memory of 1866? To finish his long and unhappy reign gloriously?"

"What on earth are you driving at? I never heard you talk at random before."

"You have never heard me talk at random. What would he give in return for such a certainty?"

"More than Ranata. But I hate riddles!" His eyes flashed. The blood burned his cheek. He knew Fessenden, and was sure that he was not listening to bombast. His curiosity and impatience nearly choked him. "Come! Come!" he said. "What idea have you in your head? After South America I am prepared for anything. If you were not such a good fellow I should hate you—but go on."

"Perhaps what all the world most wants next to the fulfilment of its personal desires," continued Fessenden imperturbably, "is the obliteration of its most actively malignant forces. The most malignant force in the world to-day is Russia; in a lesser degree, Turkey. These countries, by their unredeemable barbarism, compass the utter misery of more millions of helpless human beings than all the other causes in the rest of the world that conduce, in the natural order of things, to unhappiness. Moreover, Russia is the one menace which prevents Europe and England from enjoying a moment's security. She creeps and creeps, and never retraces a step. In far-sightedness Russia is the greatest genius among nations, and she is absolutely unscrupulous; the tyro in diplomacy does not trust her, and yet she outwits again and again. There is a hideous possibility of her eventual triumph, and the day she weakens the power of England, puts her nose in the Persian Gulf,

flows over Turkey, that day sounds the passing bell of modern civilization. Therefore, the power or powers that hamstring this anomaly in the twentieth century, forcing her to crouch with her feet in the sand like a malignant but helpless sphinx until invading progress has taught her wisdom—these powers would achieve an immortality in history which they could compass by means of no other modern conditions. Am I not right?"

The Emperor nodded. He was very pale. Not only had Fessenden pricked from its drugged sleep one of the passionate hopes of his early manhood, but he knew that the American was no idle dreamer, that he had already accomplished the impossible. He had a sensation of standing spellbound on the threshold of a miraculous future towards which the great forces within him had moved precisely since the birth of the worlds. But the impression was hardly realized; his faculties were concentrated upon the utterance of the man who no longer looked young, in whose aspect was no trace of the lover of the Archduchess of Austria, who, indeed, looked little more than an intellect, using a casual body as a convenient medium. Abbott asked his next question so abruptly that the Emperor stiffened into an attitude not unlike that of a midnight sentry alarmed by a sudden footfall.

"You know what I have been trying to do in my factory out West?"

"Well?"

"The experiments are perfected. The kites—and they are as beautiful as they are deadly—can be sent by electricity to an incalculable distance, and each one will rain down dynamite enough to kill a thousand men at a time if they are close enough together. The generators to charge storage batteries have, by other experiments, been so reduced in size and weight that they hardly



## RULERS OF KINGS

count among the effects of a travelling army. The enemy could be routed in ten minutes. Even balloons are not necessary, except for reconnoitring. You also know of the other invention, no less important. That is perfected. The steel forts are not only impregnable, but the secret has been discovered of moving electrically operated machines over any sort of ground. So far, moving forts, bicycles, automobiles have been useless except on good roads. These forts will travel without so much as a lowering of speed over the worst that nature has to offer; there is even an apparatus, on the principles of the flying-machine, which will carry them over swamps and rivers. Do you see my drift?"

The Emperor's face would have looked like wax but for the severity of its lines. "Good God!" he muttered finally. "If this is true it will make you the master of the world."

"It will make you the master of Europe."

"What riddle now?" He spoke thickly, but involuntarily twitched his shoulders. He was quick to resent any attempt to manage him.

"The Spanish War has come and gone. I have no use for these new weapons of war. They must be used at once, for ideas are microbes. A few years hence—a year hence—and the discoveries may be universal. If I had never met Ranata I should have presented them to you and told you to go ahead, and in the name of humanity wipe Russia and Turkey, in the form they now exist, off the map. I want to see you at the helm while you are still young, and discouragements and disappointments have not crushed all the enthusiasm out of you. The world has waited and waited for you to do the great thing, not realizing your difficulties, and that it was your purpose to make Germany strong and prosperous before launching it into a great war; your crusade will

be looked upon as quite in keeping with your character. And you are the only man on this side of the water capable of handling a great empire. So, I repeat, I should have offered you this new power in any case. Now I ask you to use it as a bait for the Emperor of Austria. Owing to your alliance it would be a natural act; unless you could afford to wait for his death, which you cannot. Tell him that if he refuses you will swallow him too. But he can hardly hesitate to snatch at the one compensation for the failures of his reign and life. Such of the conquered territory as you may have to yield to him will flow to you naturally at his death, for his heir could not hold it, and you may be sure that, as the initiator of so magnificent and beneficent a conquest, and as the younger and more picturesque of the majesties, you will be the idol of Austria-Hungary, as well as the hero of the world. France can be as easily disposed of as Russia, and indeed every intelligent power will let you alone after your first battle. Of course you can have all the money you want should you meet with opposition in the Reichstag. That offer has always stood. As for the excuse for war, it will be simple enough to whip up a disturbance in the Balkans. A few discreet agents, a revolutionary committee, surreptitious presents of arms, and Bulgaria or Macedonia is in flames. A secret understanding with Ferdinand and he will do anything to get Russia off his back. Then when the pot is boiling, and the so-called Christians are sprinkling their gore on their own unspeakable filth, announce to Christendom that Christian rulers can stand no more, impose impossible conditions on Russia, and sail in. There will be enough of these weapons of destruction ready before the end of three months to conquer the whole of Europe, and no more time is necessary to manipulate the Balkans."

He paused abruptly, and again the two men stared hard and long at each other. The pallor and the burning eyes of both testified to the passionate emotion they controlled. Fessenden had permitted eagerness to creep neither into his tones nor manner, but he felt as if he were standing in the dock awaiting a sentence of life or death. The Emperor felt as if he had been whirled back to the first years of his reign, when all things seemed possible to a young and indomitable ruler. And that reign had been one long and desperate struggle between his autocratic instincts and the deep and persistent desire for the extreme rights of man among a large division of his subjects. He had given them much, but they wanted more; and being advised by flatterers, and so far removed from contact with the masses, he looked upon the greater part of their demands with angry impatience. But no ruler had ever brought a more lofty enthusiasm to reform, and he had been thwarted by ignorance, and conservative stupidity, and personal hatred, until he sometimes felt that the day might not be far distant when he should shrug his shoulders and simmer down into the routine of other sovereigns. It was true he had accomplished many things and he had made a great city of Berlin and a wealthy state of Prussia; but when he thought of his old ambitions he felt sick with the futility of life. Fessenden's abrupt proposition had given him a moment of unutterable happiness, then almost paralyzed his faculties. He wondered if he should awake and find himself alone, still compelled to profess friendship for the enemy of civilization.

Fessenden continued. "Ranata, of course, will formally renounce all rights to the throne. But the Emperor's consent I will have, if only as a concession of Europe to the United States—a formal recognition

## RULERS OF KINGS

of her absolute equality among nations. I forgot to tell you that the details of these inventions have been so worked out that no one but my head electrician and myself knows them all, and the exact combinations. And he is not only a man of honor, but no crowned head in Europe could offer him a bribe comparable to what he will receive from me on the day of your first battle with Russia."

The Emperor came out of his reverie. "Have you samples here?"

"They are in the custom-house. They have not been examined, and await your order to pass them through unopened. The electrician is also here. My father arrives to-morrow. We can have an object-lesson on Saturday."

"Let us have it by all means," said the Emperor of Germany.

## XXIX

Vienna, the stately brown city, so haughty without, so simple within. Vienna, the city of beautiful men and women, of fastidious breeding and dispersing forces. Vienna, the gay, the wanton, the merciless. Vienna, the city of the dead soul; the great actress whose still perfect shell moves mechanically upon the stage, not knowing under what sudden stroke she may tremble and disappear. In no city on earth is life so full of charm and yet of unreality, no city where one feels so alive and yet so encompassed by dreams, where to the American New York is not, but a superlative civilization with the taint of the Middle Ages in its brain.

Ranata felt something of this luscious yet corrupt flavor of her native city as she drove from the station to the Hofburg; but vaguely, for her contrasts were few.

Moreover, her father had met her, and was talking constantly and somewhat at random. If Ranata had not been preoccupied she would have noticed the evident embarrassment in his manner and his elaborate attempt at dissimulation. He was more affectionate than was his wont; a shade less of his perfect breeding and he would have appeared apologetic. But his daughter's brain was heavy and absorbed by one idea. Sarolta was driving to her own palace, and Ranata was anxious to take advantage of these few moments with her father. Suddenly he gave her the opportunity she wished. He remarked in the tone of one whose masculine recesses have received a welcome illumination:

"I suppose, my dear, that you have come to Vienna to have a personal conference with your dressmakers."

"No," said Ranata, and it was notable that she did not smile; "I have come to ask a great favor of your Majesty, and I beg that you will predispose yourself to grant it."

The Emperor stiffened, the natural act of a monarch whose life is passed with those that crave the royal favor. But the act to-day was more than mechanical; there were several portentous favors this extraordinary daughter of his might have nerved herself to ask—might indeed have deluded herself she was in a position to ask—and the very thought of them turned him to steel.

"Well?" he demanded.

"It is a singular request, sir, for it is for permission to revive an ancient custom of our house. I wish to go down into the crypt alone on this midnight and pray by the coffin of Rudolf."

The Emperor drew a long breath of relief. There was nothing remarkable to him in the request, for he believed his daughter to be as devout a Catholic as himself. "How

could a Hapsburg be otherwise?" he would have asked, if questioned; and dismissed the subject. Nevertheless, he divined that her mind must be in heavy shadow to prompt an immediate act of devotion at some inconvenience, when any other time would have done as well. Scrutinizing her face, he saw the change in it, even through the disguise of a veil with heavy dots. Trained in detail, he remembered that he had never seen her wear such a veil before. His experienced brain travelled to the natural solution. There was truth in the story that she loved the American; and she wished to do penance among the tombs of her ancestors. That meant, of course, that the affair was closed, that when she had realized the enormity of her folly she had hastened to mortify her flesh and spirit in a worthy manner. He had not been surprised to hear that she loved at last, but he wondered at the security into which he had fallen during the preceding ten years, deluded, like others, by her superb indifference; and the evident marks of suffering he saw in her face to-day in no wise set his heart at odds with his purpose to marry her at once. Even were he not now convinced that she might at any moment become a menace to the Dual Monarchy, or had he been less harassed by those that feared and hated her, he still would have used his authority to marry her without delay. He knew the weaknesses of his blood, and was determined that her very obvious genius to make the world ring with a scandal should be clogged immediately. He resolved, however, to defer the subject until the morrow, snatching at the prospect that the midnight vigil would subdue and chasten her spirit. He answered as if he had given her request due consideration:

"There is no objection, if you are sure you have the strength to go through the ordeal—that you will not have an attack of hysteria. Of course"—in response to



an indignant ejaculation—"I know you are not that sort of woman, but it will be a trying hour. Sarolta must accompany you to the church; she can wait for you in one of the chapels or in the carriage. And a friar will go down with you to hold the taper. I insist upon that."

"Very well," said Ranata listlessly. The friar would be an integral part of the scene, like enough to those who had gone down with her ancestors, dead and alive.

She sat through the early dinner with her father, but five o'clock was now her hour for tea, and she made a bare pretence to eat. She wondered if she would be hungry in the crypt, then scowled so severely at her levity that Count von Königsegg, who was watching her, feared that her suspicions had been roused by something in the dull flow of conversation. Several of the archdukes were present, besides the many members of the Emperor's household, and they were mildly discussing a crisis in the Reichsrath. The minister had greeted her coldly. He was profoundly annoyed at the sensation she had made, and the consequent failure of their carefully laid plans. That she would play her cards in Hungary with the historic tact of the Hapsburgs he had made no doubt, and that she could fascinate and beguile he had had personal evidence; but that she had in her the elements of a public popularity, so desirable in a sovereign, and so reprehensible in anything less than the acknowledged heir to the throne, he had not for a moment suspected. These last weeks had left him aghast, for he was by no means desirous of the slightest disturbance in the present order of things, nor to be the victim of suspicion from those who might one day be in a position to elevate or ruin him. He had been prepared to declare for the Archduchess if she played her part properly, and her star shot up at precisely the right moment; but for the present he was puzzled how to act. His in-

## RULERS OF KINGS

stinct was to desert the sinking ship, but he found it difficult to connect Ranata with the idea of failure; she looked, pallid and extinguished as she was, cast for a great part—not endowed by Nature with the finest gifts of the Hapsburgs to languish in obscurity. He did not approve of marrying her. The Emperor's course must be nearly run, and she would be a valuable card to hold when the anticipated calamities fell upon them. However, the man selected was of Hapsburg blood; no vow of renunciation would be required of her, and at the right moment she could be summoned forth. Perhaps it was as well; for what to do with her meanwhile, he confessed, was beyond any inspiration likely to visit his fertile brain. Perhaps she would be ill for a time; she looked so unlike her usual self as to invite the hope, and that at least would keep her quiet for some months.

Ranata, suspecting naught of these unsympathetic reflections, was longing for the night. When she was finally alone in her rooms—those rooms that looked like nothing outside the Hofburg except other musty old palaces where the sun never entered—she sat down in the dark and attempted to prepare her mind for the ghostly pilgrimage. Her sense of drama was stirred at the thought of performing this ancient rite, but she felt less religious than she had hoped, less ancestral, less akin to those quaking girls who had been swept down into the cold vault of the Capuchin by the stern arm of Maria Theresia. One had died of the small-pox, caught from the emanations of a recent victim—doubtless the poor little body had half-disintegrated with fright, and let the poison in. She wondered if she would be frightened, and dismissed the thought with an impatient shrug. Her strong soul had little acquaintance with fear. Still she would have welcomed a premonition of it at this moment, if it had brought on its long shadows the first

mutters of ancestral superstition—the first stirring of her stupefied Hapsburg sense. But her thought flew to Fessenden Abbott. She wrenched it from him, and it fluttered about among the pleasures and distractions of her months in Hungary. She found herself longing for the bright rooms in the palace of Buda, the bustling business-like streets of Pest. She recalled her first and only visit to a shop, and wished she might repeat the experience on the morrow; she had had many vivid accounts of the shops of Vienna from Alexandra, who, untrammelled by state, or even by the haughty usages of the aristocracy, visited the shops as often as she pleased.

“I feel hopelessly modern, frivolous,” she thought, as she rose and walked to the window. “But it is merely the perversity of the brain. Like a spoiled child, it must do precisely what is not expected of it. I thought I had disciplined it better.”

She held aside a corner of the lace curtain, and peered down into the court-yard, and at the battered walls opposite. There would have been no danger of detection had her room been light, for the rain was falling heavily. The court-yard was deserted; and the scene was intolerably dreary. A prison-yard could be no worse.

Suddenly she was seized with a wild unreasoning terror, an impulse to fly from the Hofburg to Budapest and her many friends. A premonition seemed to rise out of the dark and press close upon her. Her brain tossed up the reserve, the embarrassment of her father's manner, the watchful speculative regard of Königsegg's cold eyes, the sensation of insignificance that had vaguely assailed her as she arrived in Vienna—of stepping down from a pedestal to withdraw into a niche. Why had she left Hungary? There she would have been safe, for nothing short of violence could have removed her, and that they would not dare to use. She touched the electric

## RULERS OF KINGS

button as soon as she could find it; and when the room was softly brilliant, she wondered at her nerves. Determined to reduce them to subjection before their midnight ordeal, she sat down with a novel Alexandra had given her at parting. This was not the preparation for nocturnal prayer she might have wished, but it could be no more mischievous than her own unruly thoughts. It proved to be absorbing—a brisk well-written tale of mediæval love and adventure, war and romantic incident, without psychology, or a reminder of modern life and character. It was not the literature of her habit, but for that reason perhaps held her the more closely, the tenor of her mind being altered, and life as she knew it best forgotten. When, at a quarter to twelve, one of her maids entered with a long fur garment, and the announcement that the Obersthofmeisterin awaited the pleasure of her Imperial Highness, she arose with reluctance, and, as the woman adjusted the cloak and hood, glanced at the finish. “If I had not been sure of that final rapture,” she informed herself apologetically, “I believe I could not have rid my mind of it in the church.”

### XXX

Sarolta had sunk on a hot-water cushion in one of the chapels of the Capuchin Church, after an involuntary appeal to her archduchess to pray no longer than she could help. The friar, a dark blur in his brown robes, unlocked the door that opens on the winding stair sacred to the House of Hapsburg. As Ranata carried a lighted taper in her own hand, she motioned to him to walk behind her, and picked her way on the uneven stones worn by four centuries of men and women who had gone down with the dead, or to pray among the ruins of those

who had ruled and loved and oppressed, or battled in secret and impotence with the wretched comedy of their existence. Twice before—since her early girlhood, when her tutor in history had included an occasional visit to the Hapsburg dust in his course—had Ranata descended this stair: behind the coffin of Rudolf, and the coffin of her mother. The first time she had been blind and dumb with grief; the second, horror-stricken as she still was, she had meditated sadly upon the conquest of life over the charming and singular woman she had known so little. To-night, as she reached the foot of the stair, and held the taper aloft, she was conscious of little but the cold and the dank smell of death, which in spite of glass and lead and bronze, and robbed of its final offensiveness, pervades the crypt. It is an odor hardly definable; it might be the very breath of Death himself rising thickly through earth and mould.

Ranata shuddered and drew her cloak about her, but walked resolutely down between the long rows of sarcophagi, elaborate and ostentatiously simple, crowding close behind the bars. She was thankful that her father had insisted upon the escort of the friar; but when she came to the great gates behind which Maria Theresia still reigns in the pomp of death over those that have followed her, and her silent attendant had turned the key, she motioned to him to remain without.

She stood for a moment looking with a curious impersonality, of which she could not divest herself, at the magnificent leaden sarcophagus, on its pedestal, of one of the few great rulers of Austria. The carving and chasing, the bas-reliefs and fixtures, were so elaborate and beautiful that she caught herself wondering how many years the august remains had awaited their final state, or if the far-sighted Empress had set the craftsmen to work long before her death. She was a practi-

cal soul, and it was likely. At her feet, in the plainest of leaden coffins, lay the husband she had loved and snubbed. About her, in receptacles of varying art and costliness, were nine of her sixteen children.

Ranata turned her back upon the last vanity of the ancestor who had been a religion of her youth, and passing the equally lofty but far less imposing sarcophagus of Franz II., with the perfunctory receptacles of his four wives scattered near, she paused for a moment beside the long coffins of Napoleon's second wife, and of him who had been called King of Rome and Duke of Reichstadt—he whom the French remembered as the second Napoleon when his cousin seized the throne. She stared down at the lead above the dust of the little cousin for whom she had much sympathy and compassion, knowing him to have been the victim of court intrigues, his soul and body systematically ruined. She wondered how much rebellion had beaten beneath that apparent docility, how much cunning, perhaps; biding his time in his grandfather's old age, hating and fearing Metternich, yet neither wise enough nor strong enough to avoid the traps that never cut his feet, and closed about him as softly and warmly as sirens and drugs. She wondered if the French poet had divined the secretive nature correctly, or if a true Hapsburg brain had dissolved in the silences of the crypt; then, if the ruined soul had been graciously relit in consideration of its youth and ignorance; if, in some juster world, the fine brain he may have inherited might not now in its maturity be fulfilling the purpose for which it had sprung from a force that would still seem to haunt the earth.

These were not the thoughts, the sulking superstitions, she had come to evoke, and she passed on. The alcove containing what was left of her mother and brother, with the angel between them presented by the ladies of



Hungary, was before her, but she wished before kneeling and praying there to saturate herself with this subtle atmosphere of ancient death, of indestructible repose, of serene and final disassociation from the world above. This portion of the crypt is only two-thirds below ground. A high small window admits a patch of light by day; but the glass is heavy, and no sound penetrates. The Hapsburgs sleep as quietly as the Pharaohs.

Ranata wandered past the brilliant silver-like coffin of Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph, but she did not linger; she had little sympathy with the unknown uncle whose wavering brain had cost him throne and life. "If I had had Mexico," she thought arrogantly, "I should have kept it. Picturesque an object as he was with his American empire, and his brave death, he will never be a favorite in history or romance, for human nature despises the waverer. What the Americans call bluff is not only the wiser policy, but makes a stronger appeal to the imagination." She walked down between the long rows of the lesser dead, pausing a moment at the simple coffin of that cousin who had set her thin frock on fire with a lighted cigarette, hastily concealed as her father approached. She smiled with tender pity, grateful that her own parent, obdurate in many things, was advanced in a few simple particulars.

Finally she returned to the elevated remains of the old Emperor Franz, and holding her taper high, looked slowly about her. It was a sufficiently grewsome sight, those piles and rows of gray sarcophagi, most of them but stark shadows under the meagre light she carried, and the ray of a lamp that filtered through the little window. She gave an involuntary shudder of feminine horror, and once more experienced a throb of gratitude for the proximity of the friar, standing beyond the door. He had extinguished his taper and looked like a statue at pray-

## RULERS OF KINGS

er. Her eye rested again on the coffin of the Duc de Reichstadt. "Poor Franz!" she thought. "What barbarians they were only two-thirds of a century ago! I wonder how much better we are now—they! I feel, rather, as if my spirit had been purged down here, than packed with its old ghosts."

She let her taper trail on the stones. Her pilgrimage was a failure. The night and its horrid suggestions had accomplished no degeneration for her; she might as well have come by day, or spared at any time her limbs the cold, her nostrils this infliction. And there she faced and accepted the truth. What she had been was gone, what she was so must she remain. Her brain in its absolute modernity must help her to endure and to regulate her life; from her ancestors she would receive no further help, neither now nor ever. From all miasmatic obsessions rising out of the crypt in her soul she was free henceforth; the crypt itself had vanished into that eternity so far from the corruption about her. She lifted her head suddenly with a sensation of liberty, of independence, which even Hungary and her intimate spiritual absorption of her American lover had not given her. Then she went forward and knelt at the foot of Rudolf's coffin. She had rejected dogmas and theologies, but she still could pray; for she had perfect faith in an overruling power, who, if great enough to manage the universe, must be great enough to answer prayer without upsetting the balance of His machinery. And prostrate at the foot of the ugly bronze coffin under half its height of brittle wreaths, that held the clay of the warmest nature she had ever known, of the only being she had deeply loved until now, of the Hapsburg whose light might have raised him so high in history and had gone out in folly and dishonor, she had her moment of profound tribute to the dead, of utter abnegation of self.

When she rose from her knees she entered the recess, and pushing aside the old wreaths with their emblazoned streamers, the gifts of kings, and princes, of family, and illustrious subjects, she pressed her wet face for a moment to the head of the coffin, then walked rapidly from the inner crypt, down the lane between the older dead, and up the stair.

Sarolta was not in her chapel, and, dismissing the friar, Ranata left the church. The Obersthofmeisterin was in a corner of the carriage sound asleep. The coachman slept profoundly on the box. The footman had disappeared. Ranata stood alone in the streets of Vienna. The clock struck one. She, a daughter of the Hapsburgs, was as free as any waif in the city. The sensation of liberty which had taken possession of her down in the crypt surged wildly to her head. She walked swiftly to the corner and stood there, pushing back her hood and staring about her. The rain had ceased, but the night was black. What was there to prevent her from finding a cab, driving to the station, and taking the first train for Berlin? If Fessenden were not already there a telegram would summon him in haste. From Berlin it was but a few hours to Bremen. She took another step forward, then almost laughed aloud. Was this the first result of her rendezvous with the dead? But if that had been futile, her brain and her sense of duty were still in control. She had renounced love once for all. Moreover, her flight would mean the exile and disgrace in her old age of Sarolta. To-morrow she would return to Hungary and take up her work there. Now that she knew exactly on what forces she must rely, she could hope to walk her self-appointed path without faltering; and in gratitude for her strength, and for a memory which the inflexible laws of her station could never take from her.

## RULERS OF KINGS

Nevertheless, she lingered for a time, walking aimlessly to and fro, for it was the most complete liberty she had ever known, and she enjoyed it much as a child enjoys itself the first time it runs away. It also appealed to her sense of humor, and she would have been amused still more could she have come face to face with her father.

And so she rejected her second opportunity for flight and actual liberty, awakened the terrified coachman, and returned to the Hofburg.

### XXXI

She slept well, and late; then being already long past her early hour of rising, lay for a time, half in pleasure of that narrow world wherein she still could confuse dreams and life, half in dread of the realities into which she must step with her clothes. Should she go to Budapest that day? It occurred to her too late that it is more difficult to return to the associations identified with the intense or tragic moments of life even than to remain among them. Should she stay in Vienna for a few days? The Hofburg had never seemed so dreary; her own rooms were musty and chill. In Buda, at least, she would be companioned, and she should find novel work to do immediately upon her return. She remembered Fessenden's early suggestion to conciliate the Independents by inviting their wives to the palace. Many of these men were her slaves, but of them several would not come to Buda, and others held wholly aloof. She should persuade to her cause, as soon as she returned, the patriotism of the influential women of the aristocracy. And there were charities to organize, subtler methods of conquest to be conceived, now that society had

been won by gayeties and pleasure. As soon as the winter broke she would make her progress through the country; she had made the impression she desired on the crowds that had met her at the stations in Transylvania. It was all easy enough, this brilliant preliminary, but what of the future? Would she have her great public career, and would it console her for the renunciation of what she wanted at that moment more than the career of a Maria Theresia or even the triumph of cold duty? As she awoke fully the tenderness and passion, roused and stimulated, yet so little satisfied in these past weeks, which for two days and nights had been quiescent under the sullen despair of her brain, now, after long hours of refreshing sleep, rushed in tumult through all her channels of emotion; and all her soul and body shook with longing and regret. Why should she not see him once more? And would it always be once more, and once more? Would her life be bearable if his expulsion from it were final? She had not seen so far into the future while with him, but now it looked as empty and cold as space. *Could this be the end?* She almost cried the words aloud as she sprang from her bed in a frantic desire to take some step—at once—before it was too late. He could not have sailed, for he had told her he should spend some days in Berlin, and his yacht was at Trieste. She should see him again if the world stood still. In all the emotions that had rent her, even after the terrible deaths of her brother and mother, she had never so faced the awful vista of finality; and she discovered that it was the one for which she had no power in her to endure. Of course he must leave her at last, but not yet! It is all very well for the old and the wise to argue with the accents of fatigue that love is not the only thing in life; so it is not, for those that argue.

She rang. Her women came in and dressed her in a

travelling costume. She sent a note to the Princess Sarolta, asking her to be ready an hour hence, and another to her father expressing a wish to bid him *Aufwiederssehen*. The Emperor replied that he would call upon her as soon as she had finished her coffee, and that it was with regret he was obliged to inform her that her Obersthofmeisterin had caught a severe cold the night before and was unable to leave her bed. He had sent a messenger to Maria Leopoldina, who was at Baden, asking her to resume for the moment her old duties; and doubtless she would arrive in the course of the day.

It was a long message, and the Emperor had taken the trouble to write it, when a simple announcement by a chamberlain that he would call upon her immediately would have sufficed. Ranata left her breakfast-room abruptly, and stood alone in her dressing-room removing her hat with shaking fingers. For what was he preparing her? What pathway smoothing for himself? Had Piroska tattled? Was she to receive the paternal fiat that she must never see Fessenden Abbott again? Her father might require her submission before permitting her to return to Hungary. Had the world come to an end? She felt as if the floor were swaying and sinking.

She heard the Emperor's voice in the salon, and controlled herself and went in to meet him. Her eyes met his squarely in the manner he detested. He kissed her, however, and congratulated her upon her improved appearance. She had rarely looked better than in this frock of green cloth and steel and sable, so simple and closely fitting that on her slim yet heroic figure it gave her a somewhat warlike appearance. The Emperor himself was looking remarkably well, in his parade uniform with its sky-blue coat and black and scarlet trousers. He had been in the saddle for two hours inspecting his troops, and the fresh color was in his cheeks, his



well-exercised body was almost as free and elastic as his daughter's. He sat erect and alert like the good soldier he was; but with the wariness of the diplomat he had taken the precaution to seek this interview on the enemy's territory that he might retreat if a sudden lapse in the negotiations seemed wise; he knew that he would be physically unable to expel Ranata from his apartments until she chose to go.

He began with diplomacy, also, asking her of the pilgrimage of the night before; complimented her on her courage and piety—and no man could turn a compliment more neatly. But as Ranata answered him in monosyllables and preserved an upright attitude of expectancy, he felt himself driven towards the point.

"My dear," he began delicately, "it has come to my knowledge that you are more interested than is prudent in the brother of your friend." He paused, but as Ranata made no reply, nor even changed color, he continued. "Of course it is to be expected that a girl as beautiful as you are will captivate many men, aloof as you must hold yourself; but I am surprised that you have permitted a devotion so conspicuous as to create gossip. A princess can never be sure that gossip will stop short of scandal; for where a woman may not select her own husband, the idle and the envious are always on the lookout for an irregular connection to gloat over. I am very sorry to seem to reprove you—"

"I have expected it, of course. I knew that the little Zápolya was a spy; and she also wished to marry Mr. Abbott."

"I hope you will give me the credit of having lived long enough to sift evidence before I decide, of making due allowance for circumstances, and of accepting no evidence unsupported. You and Mr. Abbott have been much in public together; your mutual interest has been

commented upon far and wide. I have been warned from more sources than one. If I had known that Count Zrinyi had invited Mr. Abbott—and scarcely any one else!—to accompany you to Transylvania, I should have forbidden the visit. It had long been a part of your programme, and I inferred, as a matter of course, that you would be accompanied by a full court and a large number of guests. There is no doubt in my mind that Zrinyi made this opportunity for you, and he must take the consequences—”

“I doubt if he gave my private affairs a thought. He may have cared to entertain me as a princess, but his first object was to see as much of Alexandra alone as possible—in romantic surroundings.”

“That may be. Now I must ask you if you are prepared to deny that you took a walk at midnight up there alone with Mr. Abbott; that you managed upon numberless occasions to see him alone—at Buda, as well as at Zrinyi-vár? That he wore Prince Nadasdy’s costume on the night of the fancy-dress ball, and that you both retired simultaneously—”

“I deny nothing,” said Ranata. “I am in no humor to make a sentimental confession. Your Majesty may believe or not that I love him. I have, however, sent him away. That should satisfy you. You will accept my word, I suppose.”

“Your word is the last I should doubt. But I happen to know that human nature is stronger than promises. You will not send for him, but he will return. He is a young man with an exceptional record for attaining his ends. If he manages to see you alone again after a separation”—he spread out his little hands with the grace of his Spanish ancestors—“I should not answer for the consequences. If you were your mother I should have no apprehension, for she was devoid of passion;

but you are a Hapsburg, and God knows I have had knowledge enough of the weakness of my race to act promptly when I am graciously vouchsafed a timely warning."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Ranata—unconsciously, in her quick suspicion, using the American vernacular, although her language was German; her father had never found it necessary to learn English.

This time the Emperor met her eye fully, although his heart quaked. "I have determined that it is time for you to marry," he said in a louder tone than he was sensible of in time.

Ranata laughed. She was surprised at her rudeness. The disrespectful ebullition was due partly to nervousness; but the Emperor's brave announcement had also struck at the quick of her humor.

His Majesty's ruddy face deepened in hue, but he had too difficult a task to accomplish to permit himself the luxury of a personal sensation. He had steeled his heart against pity; to give himself up to anger was unworthy, and he brushed the emotion aside. He would have been glad to see his daughter happy, but the stoicism of lonely majesty had been immutably set in his case by the many and agonizing personal experiences which he had weathered into a healthy and tolerable old age. Princes were born to earthly martyrdom tempered by much casual consolation. If their women were forced to play their part without the compensations, that was the decree of God, who made kings, and they must suffer and make no complaint. As a rule they did, and it was the manifest duty of him who was divinely permitted to govern to see that they found no opportunity to do otherwise. "You are overwrought, I fear," he said tactfully. "Did you sleep well after your pilgrimage?"

## RULERS OF KINGS

“Perfectly. May I ask whom your Majesty has considered as a son-in-law?”

The Emperor made a slight motion that in a person of less graceful dignity might have been mistaken for a squirm. He had no doubt of the wisdom of his choice—his own choice he believed it to be—for his relative, if stern and unbending, a disciplinarian of the first rank, was neither brutal nor cruel, nor, if met with a discreet submission, unamiable. The idea of handing over his potential daughter to this Gibraltar among husbands, who had responded with enthusiasm to the invitation to marry a beautiful and wealthy princess, had taken full possession of the apprehensive mind of the old monarch; but he had not planned to break the name until after the right amount of preparation. He had anticipated that Ranata would dissolve into tears and perhaps more tempestuous emotions, under cover of which he could retreat, to communicate in writing the fulness of her fate. But there was no sign of a tear in the large angry eyes transfixing him, and her full fine mouth, with its short upper lip and unsatisfied corners, looked as if a sob had never shaken it.

“Well?” she asked.

There was nothing for it but to plump out the name. Even were he willing to gain time by asserting that the man had not yet been chosen, he knew that she would detect the lie and place him at an immediate disadvantage. He answered stolidly,

“Aloys Franz—”

“What?” she stood up and stared down upon him as if she were repeating his statement to herself and endeavoring to place it in connection with her brain. In a moment the blood rose hotly to her hair, even her eyes looked bloodshot. “Oh!” she exclaimed. “Oh!” and then she walked to the window.

## RULERS OF KINGS

It was an opportune moment for retreat, but there was more to be said; she was calm, and the sooner the whole task was finished the better.

"Perhaps you will understand why I think it best you should not return to Budapest," he said gently. "It is well for many reasons that this wedding take place at once, and it is my duty to expose you to no further temptation. It can be given out that your trousseau detains you here, or Sarolta's illness—"

Ranata wheeled about and faced him. For the first time in her life she was ugly.

"And have you really deluded yourself," she asked with an ominous calm, "that you will marry me to that man?—or to any one else?"

The Emperor rose then and faced her. War was declared, and he knew where he stood. There was no better mettle in Europe than his.

"You will marry Aloys Franz," he said.

Again Ranata laughed, and for the moment she looked hideous. "I shall not," she said. "And you should know by this time what stuff I am made of."

"I have not had a doubt of your resistance. I have as little of my firmness of purpose. You have not been sufficiently disciplined. A princess marries whom and when her father and sovereign dictates. You were my youngest, in many ways exceptional, and very much alone. I have been more indulgent, more lax, than I should. But that is over. From this moment you will recognize that I am your emperor as well as your father."

"We are no longer in the Middle Ages, nor yet in the middle of the last century. Your subjects are free to marry whom they please, or to remain unmarried if they choose."

"Constitutions have shorn monarchs of too much power over their subjects, but in his own family the

## RULERS OF KINGS

power of an emperor is as absolute as it ever was. To the law you would have no appeal did I choose to practise upon you the tortures of the Inquisition here in my palace, to starve you in a cell, to cause you to disappear forever from human sight. Please understand once for all that you are my property, given into my care by Almighty God; and for your own salvation and for the honor of my house I shall do what I think best with you."

"And if I still refuse?"

"You will remain a prisoner in these rooms until you consent. Your servants will attend to every want, you will have the society of Maria Leopoldina, and you may take your exercise in the corridor. You will see no one else. There will be a guard day and night at each end of the corridor. If you make any attempt to bribe these guards, or to communicate with any one in the court-yard, you will be moved elsewhere and deprived of exercise. But I do not wish to be forced into undue severity, and you may remain here so long as you transgress no rules."

"Good God!" she exclaimed. "And this is the twentieth century! Have I heard aright? Am I a prisoner under an armed guard? Am I more helpless in the eyes of the law than the meanest of your subjects? May any illiterate peasant woman seek redress in the courts of justice while a princess of the realm, whose supreme advantages have set her apart from mankind, is but a chattel among the possessions of her father? I suppose I have known this. But I have managed to surround myself with a different atmosphere. But you—you are a man of the world, and all your faculties are still alert—do you mean to tell me that you have not outgrown the barbarism of the past?"

"You may call it by what name you will. I shall go now, and you will meditate—"



But Ranata had flashed between him and the door, and he knew that he could not pass her. He was deeply annoyed that he had not retreated in time, but he stood immobile, looking coldly into her distorted face.

"No," she said hoarsely, but still retaining an appreciable measure of self-control; "you will not leave this room until you have heard the truth for once. If you are no longer my father but my tyrant, then from this moment I am your most rebellious subject and nothing more. And I would that I could open my veins and drain out every drop of royal blood. Has it ever occurred to you, sir, that the great enlightened masses not only in America but here in central Europe regard us not with the hatred of half a century ago, but with impatience and contempt; that they look upon us as anomalies, anachronisms, ornamental nuisances, and do not rise to let out our blood on the guillotine only because they are well aware of the peaceful disintegration, the irresistible rising of the tide of independence and liberty? If your people love you—here, not in Hungary!—it is for your personal qualities, not because you represent an idea which, in their estimate of life and civilization, they have relegated to the past, with crinolines and Bath chairs. Do you suppose that what loyalty you enjoy will be transferred to the Heir? You know it will not. That alone is proof enough that the people are carelessly—perhaps unconsciously—determined to have what they want—monarchy, only if it happen to suit them at the moment. There is only one monarchy on the face of the earth enlightened enough to grasp this fact before it is too late, and that is England. There alone is monarchy not ridiculous—and not threatened. What do you suppose is the meaning of the immense and undaunted increase of socialism in Germany? What is the meaning of the incalculable and persistent forces of dis-

integration in this empire? Look at Italy. At Spain. At Turkey. At Russia—that dares not sleep. Only the insignificant little monarchies are comparatively safe from themselves, being occupied with apprehension of the greater. Even in the United States the unsatisfied tide of liberty is rising. McKinley was not shot by a lunatic, a fanatic, nor by a member of any deadly organization; the assassin was merely one of the millions of dissatisfied poor in the richest country on earth, where he saw liberty and justice becoming as paralytic as in Europe. Did the portent of that assassination never occur to you? And with this spirit abroad in the world we dare over here to play at divine rights, at being hereditary rulers of millions more enlightened than ourselves—we—pygmies—marionettes—who may be born as foolish as the last Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, who thought that all eagles had two heads, and yet dare to mount a throne and cry ‘I am King!’ No one has ever more devoutly tried to do what he conceived to be his inherited duty than I have done. I have, for many years, been deliberately blind. During these last months in Hungary I have *held* the scales to my eyes lest they fall off. Last night down there in the crypt, where, if you must know, I went in the hope of finding my old idols, I lost most of those scales. To-day I have lost the last of them. If I had it in my power to do, I would give liberty and the broadest sort of constitutional government to every man that breathes. I am mortified that it took the deprivation of my own liberty to force my brain to acknowledge the truth. I would rather I had been less human and welcomed the truth as the result of much deep and intelligent meditation. But to expect the godlike of one of us of royal blood is beyond reason, and I am thankful that I am not too dense to receive illumination from any

source. But I loathe my blood. I hope to God I may live to see every monarch now alive a useful member of a republic and no man degraded by being forced to submit to what he had no hand in making. I am sorry to have detained and agitated you; and for any unintentional rudeness I hope your Majesty will forgive me. For you, until to-day, I have had a great respect. For what you stand for it is impossible that I should ever again have anything but the profoundest contempt. I will not detain you any longer except to repeat that you will save yourself a great deal of trouble if you give up at once this idea of marrying me to any man but the one I shall select for myself."

She no longer looked hideous. The relief of her emotions, the tide of passion which had surged over its dam laden with the profoundest truth of the century, had carried her to the heights of her nature, and she had never been more beautiful—nor more formidable. Not so the Emperor. He was purple, and his heavy underlip trembled. But he preserved his dignity, his soldierly bearing. As she moved aside to let him pass, he bowed courteously to her without speaking and left the room.

## XXXII

The Princess Sarolta, Prince Illehazy, Countess Vilma Festetics, Alexandra Abbott, and Count Zrinyi sat in agitated conclave in the palace of Buda. The Countess Piroska Zápolya was officially in bed with an attack of influenza.

The five friends sat close together in the blue drawing-room. Sarolta had related the story of the appalling interview between the Emperor and Ranata as reported to herself by a faithful maid of the Archduchess; who

had almost fainted in a window-curtain. The woman had escaped to invoke the aid of the powerful Obersthofmeisterin before orders had been issued for the isolation of the Archduchess's servants.

"There you are!" exclaimed Sarolta, who frequently expressed herself in English for the sake of its facile idiom. "God help us, what a lashing she must have given him! It was not the first, poor dear man, but I doubt if he ever had it quite so straight; for Ranata's brain would always preserve her from the usual feminine tangents. But—but—our poor princess! she is a prisoner! Do you realize it? He will keep his word, the more rigorously as he now no doubt thinks she is mad. And *Aloys Franz*! If I didn't love Ranata, nothing would amuse me more than to look on at his attempts to reduce her to submission. But the situation is not humorous; it is tragic! What in Heaven's name are we to do to help her? We shall not be able even to get a word of consolation to her; not one of us will be allowed to visit her; she will receive no letters; she will be shut up for months, perhaps, with *Maria Leopoldina*, for whom I feel an even more acute sympathy than for herself. And she, with that active brain, that nervous temperament—no exercise, no society, no change—Good God! she may lose her reason."

"That need not concern us," said Alexandra. "Nor Aloys Franz. They'll never marry her, with or without antediluvian methods. But the rest is bad enough. Surely the Emperor will let her exercise in the riding-school. She would still be in the Hofburg and sufficiently guarded."

"I am sure the Emperor will not hear of it. The official announcement has been made that she is suffering from a light attack of influenza—light, you will understand, that neither suspicion nor too much sym

pathy may be awakened. If she went as far as the riding-school there would be too many people in the secret. She is confined to five rooms and a corridor, and there I am afraid she will stay. Refractory princesses have been shut up since the beginning of kings, and will be until all the kings have gone to the guillotine. Poor dear!"

"I shall telegraph to my brother at once. We have a code. He will get her out. Be sure of that. If he doesn't he may look upon his life as a failure. He will, however."

"Would it not be better," suggested Prince Illehazy, "if Mr. Abbott did not take any step in the matter? It might create a scandal and do the Princess a lasting injury. She has a severe ordeal before her, but I think there is no doubt she will win. Her will is stronger than the King's. I think it would be better to leave the matter to Time."

"Time!—a woman like Ranata for six months, a year, in confinement and uncertainty! She must be got out at once, and there is only one person who can make the deliverance final. Now I am going to say something that will make you all jump. My brother intends to marry Ranata."

They did jump, with the exception of Vilma.

"*Ach so!*" Sarolta's tones were guttural with irony, but her fingers shook slightly as she lit a cigar.

"But, mademoiselle," murmured Prince Illehazy politely, "you know, of course, that it is impossible. No one can sympathize more than I with the romance of youth, and I have been deeply interested; but marriage—between an Archduchess of Austria and Princess of Hungary and, pardon me, an American—you who know your Europe must surely have discouraged Mr. Abbott."

"I never set myself impossible tasks. Fessenden will

## RULERS OF KINGS

marry Ranata; of that I have not the slightest doubt. I know now that I have always anticipated it—and so has my father!—although as far as I am concerned I thought of it until lately as a dream, rather. I know now that it was a belief, and founded on my intimate knowledge of both and of their fitness for each other; as well as on that very knowledge of Europe which assures me that if I live I shall see greater social revolutions than the marriage of an American with a princess of the blood. You are dumfounded because you know Europe only. Go over and live in the United States for a while and you will come back with the future in your brain as well as the past.”

“I have never been in the United States, but I think this strange love-affair is the most beautiful thing in the world, and I would help them if I could!”

It was Vilma who spoke, and she was leaning forward with her hands gripping the arms of her chair. The grayish pallor of her skin had never been more noticeable, and the lines about her mouth were tense. Not only had every nerve been on edge since Ranata's departure two days ago, but she was possessed by the exaltation of the martyr; she was not going to the stake for the ideals of the proud aristocracy of her ancient country, but in sacrificing those ideals in the hope to compass the happiness of two exceptional beings she felt that she had made good her claim to the martyr's crown. But the time had come when her morbidity might prove more useful than the healthy impatience of Alexandra, who had little talent for intrigue; and who looked upon Vilma as one of the unfortunate products of a too conservative aristocracy.

“Princess,” she continued, appealing to her chief, “you do not approve, of course. But you would not betray us if we attempted to help her?”



Sarolta bit the end of her cigar. "I would do all I could to help her out of this difficulty; but connive at her marriage with an American—never! I have outgrown romantic nonsense; and I am also a loyal subject of my king, although I do think he is an—"

"But what you did not know, dear Princess, you would not feel obliged to discover, now that you are no longer Obersthofmeisterin," said Vilma wheedlingly. "Why not leave it to her? You do not believe, do you, that she would make such a marriage?"

"I do not. There at least my faith is unshaken."

"Then take me to Vienna with you, and close your eyes if I try to communicate with her. Only I can, for I am quite unknown in Vienna, insignificant in appearance, and if the King has ever seen me he would not recognize me. I cannot go unless you take me, but go I must."

Sarolta, whose heart, as the astute Vilma well knew, was aching, appeared to consider deeply. Finally she shrugged her shoulders. "I cannot see what you could accomplish; but you might let her see you occasionally in the Franzensplatz and give her a little comfort. The rest of us cannot go near it. Alex, of course you will return with me as soon as I have closed the palace. Zrinyi, I think you and Vienna had better be strangers for the present."

"I go to Vienna the day you do," announced Zrinyi. "The King, on second thoughts, will do nothing more to irritate Hungary. If he ordered me out of Vienna I should return here and tell the whole story. Molnár would go off his head and demand the liberty and return of the Princess as the price of peace in the country. In any case he could set the tongues of all Europe wagging, and the King would find himself outwitted. He is shrewd enough to know this—or his ministers are. They will pursue a very moderate and conserva-

## RULERS OF KINGS

tive course outside the Hofburg. After all, this is the twentieth century."

"Who would have thought it!" said Alexandra. "Will you come with me, Count, while I write my telegram, and then send it yourself?"

"I would take it to Berlin if I could get there as quickly," said Zrinyi gallantly.

"Count," murmured his tormentor as they left the room, "you are a brick. I am a grateful soul. I feel uncommonly like rewarding you."

### XXXIII

For twenty-four hours Ranata's brain whirled to no machinery but her wrath. To that succeeded an energetic desire to escape. All her prejudices and separate ambitions had gone down in that final moment of disillusion, and she was determined to marry Fessenden Abbott as soon as she was beyond the reach of her father. But her brain, fertile as it was, and abnormally active, could conceive no method of leaving unobserved that great palace of many corridors never for a moment deserted. She was forced to relinquish her intention to bribe the guards, for there were constantly three together, and it would seem that they were changed every half hour. To assume the disguise of a servant was equally impracticable, for not one of those in attendance upon her reached her shoulder, and they were as closely watched as herself. Her rooms were not high above the ground, but a guard paced beneath her window day and night, and the guard-room was opposite. She was in the very heart of a great European capital preeminent in science and art, the civilized virtues and vices, not a hundred yards from cabs and crowded

streets, and no mountain fortress could enclose her more securely.

When Maria Leopoldina arrived, after a delay welcome to both, Ranata greeted her with some warmth, but frankly asked her to remain in her own rooms as much as possible. This the duenna was more than willing to do. Not only had she returned to her exacting post from her pleasant retirement with a reluctance she dared not express to her sovereign, but she had a very considerable understanding of her former charge, and was by no means unsympathetic. She recognized the necessity of drastic measures in so lamentable a state of a princess's affections and temper, and she should do her duty cost her what it might; but she would obey the letter of her instructions only, and leave the prisoner such freedom as she still could find within her own walls.

And then the days dragged themselves out. Ranata saw no one but her cousin and servants, received no message from the world; even Maria Leopoldina was not permitted the solace of a newspaper. Ranata seldom sat down, but moved about until all her body ached with weariness, pausing every few moments to look down upon the Franzensplatz, through the sheltering lace of the curtain, in the hope that Fessenden Abbott would saunter through with intent to give her courage. If she tried to forget her plight in a book she would fling it down presently and fly to the window lest she miss him.

In these first hours she was too hard for lovers' regrets, so wroth was she at the insult put upon her individuality, and so great her astonishment that with all the intellect and character of which she had vaunted herself she was as helpless to move in behalf of her own destiny, as poor in resource, in these primitive circumstances to which

her father and sovereign had reduced her, as any little fool of the Middle Ages. Although she had been warned by her opportunities of close observation against the devouring and repulsive selfishness of those who pushed the *culte du moi* to its modern limits, yet few women had so proudly developed their individuality, few had so jealously insisted upon the right of the brain to its own thoughts, of the character to develop in its own way and as far as human limitations would permit. If she had until her visit to Hungary been submissive to the laws of her position it had been because she had deliberately chosen submission, and aloofness, as her part, as her highest duties to her house; not because she stood in the slightest awe of her father, or recognized his right to direct her thoughts and conduct. It is doubtful if she could have loved Fessenden Abbott had she not recognized in him a spirit as free as her own, and an enlightenment and a sympathetic understanding which would never seek to change nor control her. She had found a mate, not a master, and both being the extreme products of their century, their prospects of a lifelong desire for partnership exceeded those in the great restless sea of awakened intelligence between the highest type and the commonplace. Ranata, in more passionate hours of longing and anguish, had felt the possibilities she relinquished, rather than grasped them with her reason, but now she knew their full significance, and the knowledge helped her to deeper indignation of the mediæval conditions into which she had abruptly been thrust.

The days passed and the lover gave no sign that he was as distraught as the prisoner. There are times in life when one lives very fast. The first forty-eight hours of her imprisonment consumed the mental energies of months. As the first excitement decreased, and with it

something of the novelty of her situation, her mind was free again for thoughts and dreams she had been half glad to forget, so many were the pangs they had held. And in the train of love came all the doubts and tragic conceptions with which a woman cursed with imagination never fails to torment herself. The women for whom men would most willingly die—if there be yet that spirit abroad in the world—women who in the end are most sure to discard the still ardent lover, often suffer in their imaginary tragedies as intensely as their more constant and less valued sisters in their hopeless realities. Ranata was not the woman to love and tire, but her imagination was the least controlled of her faculties. She descended into the very depths of depression and convinced herself that Fessenden Abbott had taken her at her word and returned to America before any one had suspected her imprisonment and sent him warning. (The faithful maid had not dared to confess her eavesdropping.) She might be confined here until she lost her reason, and he would drown his thoughts of her in the hideous details of business, or in those great schemes of his, remembering her only as a purified spirit; likely enough, wearying of the cold picture. She forgot her ideals, even her instinctive knowledge of him, and treated his vows with cynicism. What man in this practical modern world—and the world was practical and modern outside of the Hofburg—would be faithful to the woman hidden forever from his sight? He would marry, of course, and forget her; why, indeed, should he not? And what if he did? There were times when she hated him, when in the prolonged contemplation of his commonplace infidelity she despised him as unworthy of her, and hardened her heart until she doubted if it ever would melt again, even if he suddenly appeared and took her in his arms.

These crises in a woman's brain are very unfortunate, and when men are wiser they will study to prevent them. After all, it is the psychical experience that tells, not the visible cause, and the scars may be deep and callous. In this case poor Fessenden was helpless, and Ranata had still felt and known so little that she had elasticity enough to survive several such crises without the worst effects; but if life had added bitterness to her store of experience she might have come out of her ordeal with her best prospect for happiness blasted.

Time cured this mood; but the passing of doubt and the restoration of the lover to favor helped her little to serenity. She recalled every look, the tones of his voice, every moment they had snatched together, all that he had taught her. She remembered every trick of speech and expression, the lighter but still personal habit they had fallen into of sitting apart for a few minutes after the tea-hour, while the others were drinking their coffee in one of the reception-rooms, at the opera and theatre, or riding to the Schwabenberg in the early morning. These had become established habits, and she regretted them almost as intensely as the more concentrated moments; she had known to the full the tantalizing sweetness of the intimate understanding in a crowd.

And she recalled all she knew of him through the stories he had told her of himself in the years before they had met. They revealed him in many phases, and she had often lingered on them when alone. But there was one that now seemed to be always in her brain, to rise vividly in the brief moments when she was not struggling with a passion of grief, of regret, above all striving to tear her mind from the uncertainty, the maddening inability to act.

It was a brief graphic story of an adventure in a mountain-pass in Venezuela, when with three or four men he had been set upon by half a score of the threat-



ened dictator's followers. The case had been desperate, there had been a few moments when he had never expected to see a wider sky again, and in those moments it was not so much he that had fought as Life itself. His pistol emptied, stabbed, shot, his clothing almost off his back, he was dragged to and fro on the rough mountain-road, hacking, struggling, hating, not a harking in him to his old love of the fight in that gasping tortured wrestle with Death himself; possessed only by the furious determination of Life to persist, to win against the enemy that never for an instant sleeps on its trail—so that the wonder is man lives a month from birth. At the end it had seemed to him that he saw the two ancient enemies at each other's throats.

Fessenden's face had been composed enough as he told the story, but her imagination had visioned it set and desperate, pictured the swollen chords of his neck, the muscles on his half-naked and bleeding body bulging with rage and resistance. His eye had glazed as Keene arrived and put the assassins to flight, and he had sunk into unconsciousness in bitterness and resentment, believing that he was dying. None of his stories of brilliant and reckless adventure had stirred her like this glimpse into his primeval depths, depths which in the lower types make for ruin, and when rarely in the ken of the great forces of soul and brain are chief among the main-springs of a man's conquest over Life. The oftener this picture recurred to her, the face convulsed, or indomitable and grim, of the man she understood so well, the more was she persuaded that something had happened to still his energies, or he would have made her a sign before this. It had not needed that story to convince her that his courage would never fail him, but it now served the purpose of suggesting a similar strait where a wild revolt against death availed him nothing.

## RULERS OF KINGS

It needed only a shock to send the blood to her head and deliver her nerves from the control of her will, which had struggled hard to keep in office. The shock came, and Maria Leopoldina was the apologetic medium. She entered Ranata's sitting-room on the sixth morning of the imprisonment with a newspaper, and pointed to a marked paragraph. The news item stated that the famous American, Herr Abbott, had sailed on his yacht from Trieste for New York on the previous day.

Then it was that the blood flew to Ranata's head and stayed there. It disorganized her will, almost her powers of consecutive thought. A moment of forgetfulness and the tide of feeling, of terrified emotion, poured upward again, shaking her body and racking her nerves. She slept but a few hours at night, waking with a load of despair and terror in her brain. Her desperate efforts at self-control, her prayers for strength, were of no avail; for it must be remembered that mental suffering is a physical thing after all, psychical as may be the heights it is flung upon, and, until it has spent itself, as little to be controlled as a fever of the body. There was a constant effort in her throat to gasp, and moments of such utter and tumultuous despair that it seemed to her she saw straight into the soul of her brother during his last tormented moments. For it is in such depths of mental suffering, when the passions are in absolute control of the brain, and the victim if not mad might as well be, that life is taken. The strength in Ranata's soul fought dumbly and persistently for mastery, and won in the end, but a weaker woman, with imagination and passions as strong, would have killed herself.

Finally she demanded of Maria Leopoldina—blissfully ignorant of the tragedies enacting within the hard exterior of her charge—a sleeping-potion; and the stewardess, when she returned with it, brought also the informa-

tion that as a hasty marriage would undoubtedly cause a scandal exactly similar to that which had entertained Europe upon the informal exit into matrimony of the late wife of the Archduke Aloys Franz, it had been determined that the ceremony should not take place until two months hence. The official announcement of the engagement would be made presently, however, and until the day of the wedding she must remain in her rooms.

"Why, now that Mr. Abbott has gone?" asked Ranata. "Why deprive me of my liberty when I could make no use of it?"

"I cannot say, my dear," answered Maria Leopoldina. "It would not take him long to come back, you know; and then you have not given your formal consent to marriage with Aloys."

"That is a point I had quite forgotten," said Ranata dryly. "I hope my father and my prospective husband are not unduly impatient."

On the following day, after the surcease of the sleeping-powder, and the inevitable reaction from many days of torment, she felt almost light-hearted and frivolous, and wondered if it were possible to suffer like that more than once in a lifetime. Passing a window her eye was idly attracted by the shabby figure of a tourist. It was a bright winter's day, and visitors to the great capital came to look at the fine bronze of old Emperor Franz and the gilded wall where the drawbridge had been. Ranata envied them deeply, nameless as no doubt they were—she had a vague idea that all sight-seers were a composite with a number—for they had their precious liberty, no doubt belonged to such free and happy countries as England and America.

This insignificant little woman carried a Baedeker, which she read industriously, walking round and round

the statue, with but an occasional upward glance at the work of art. Alexandra had told Ranata of tourists who read their Baedekers on the Rhine, forgetting to look at the historic monuments described, and she watched this illustration with some amusement. Suddenly her brows met, and she drew closer to the window. There was something oddly familiar in the little deliberate steps, in the fashion of opening and closing the book. And this tourist had been here on other days, when her brain was too surcharged to piece impression to thought! In a moment the girl paused with her back to the window, and, raising her hand, nervously twisted a curl on the right of her neck. It was Vilma Festetics.

She turned, her curious tourist eye roving over the ugly wall of the palace, concealing unimagined splendors! She even sighed, and let her mouth fall with discontent. Ranata shook the edge of the curtain. Vilma came forward laggingly, her eyes on her book. The guard was inspecting the peculiar antics of another tourist, who had a bulge beneath his coat. When Vilma was directly beneath the window Ranata threw it open and leaned out.

"He has not gone," said Vilma distinctly, "and he wants your answer before he proceeds further."

And Ranata answered as distinctly: "Yes. Yes. Yes."

It was all over in an instant. Vilma had shot through the archway and mingled with the throng in the Michaelerplatz and Ranata had closed her window before the astounded guards realized they had been outwitted.

Ranata sat down to await the consequences of her act. Her heart sang, and she did not care in the least what they might be. Indeed, closer imprisonment, probably a change of quarters, was the worst she had to fear; her father was not benighted enough to put her in solitary confinement, nor even on bread and water. She wondered

at her doubts, at her facile acceptance of a news item that no doubt had been inserted by order of the Emperor. She knew now that Fessenden had made his plans and that he would not fail. She looked back in amazement at the power and instinct of woman to torment herself, and she also felt a throb of satisfaction that she should not grow old and ugly in the course of a month, as she had fully expected to do. Finally she shed tears of wondering gratitude, and for a few moments felt as humble as a man could wish.

It was not until two days later that Maria Leopoldina announced herself to the Archduchess at an early hour, and with an air of deep depression imparted the information that they were to leave Vienna on the following morning.

"I infer that we are bound for the country," said Ranata smiling. "It is unfortunate that you should hate it as much as I love it. Cannot some other trustworthy duenna be found?"

The Obersthofmeisterin shook her head with gloomy pride. "How many people has his Majesty had reason to trust? I may not be as brilliant at Sarolta, but I shall live and die in the confidence of my sovereign. And as I have borne so many crosses in this life, I may perhaps hope for compensation in the next."

"Where there will be no kings?"

"I see no fault in our august relative," said Maria Leopoldina hurriedly.

"I should not tell him if you did. Where are we going?"

"That, I deeply regret to say, I am not permitted to tell you until we are in the train. But we are going not only because you have had the misfortune to incur the royal displeasure, but because, as you are not to be

married immediately, his Majesty fears for your health if you are confined too long in-doors."

Ranata drew a long breath. "To live out-of-doors again! Even alone it will be the next best thing to the Atlantic Ocean on a yacht."

"What?" demanded the stewardess sharply.

"Oh, you will not have to go to sea with me; and you will be rid of me sooner than you think."

On the following morning, Ranata, accompanied only by Maria Leopoldina, three officers of the Emperor's household, and her servants, left Vienna, not in the Emperor's private car but in ordinary railway carriages reserved for her use. She wore the plainest of her travelling-frocks, nor was there anything in the appearance of her modest suite to attract attention; and in the heavy fog of daybreak even the mounted escort that guarded her to the station passed unnoticed.

When Vienna was an hour behind them Maria Leopoldina informed the prisoner that they were bound for the Adriatic, for the castle of Miramar, built by Maximilian several years before his departure for Mexico. The information gave Ranata pleasure, for she had never seen the beautiful home from which her uncle had sailed to his romantic and ignominious fate. Her father and mother had avoided it since long before her birth, but she knew that the castle was as comfortable as it was magnificent, and that there were grounds in whose labyrinths she could walk for hours without the monotony of repetition. Suddenly she had an inspiration.

"Did my father order Mr. Abbott's yacht to leave Trieste?" she asked.

"Ah!—well, it can do no harm—he did."

"Where is it?"

"That I do not know. I think his Majesty has not inquired—so long as it is not in Austrian waters."



“Does my father expect to keep my departure, my residence at so conspicuous a spot as Miramar, a secret?”

“That will not matter. There will be an official announcement made that you are gone to the sea to recuperate from an attack of the influenza, and a man-of-war has been ordered to Trieste; it will anchor off the castle. The guard in the castle and grounds has been quadrupled from the garrison at Trieste. Moreover—I will tell you all, as it can do no harm—Mr. Abbott has given his *parole d'honneur* that he will make no attempt to carry you off; he wished you to be removed to the country, it seems. He has had the audacity to ask your hand of his Majesty. I suppose he is of unsound mind, poor young man.”

And Maria Leopoldina had the profound satisfaction of writing to her sovereign and cousin that evening that his daughter had received this proof of American absurdity and presumption with a peal of laughter which had warmed her own heart, heavy with responsibility, and with sympathy for his most gracious majesty.

## XXXIV

The Emperor of Austria, the Emperor of Germany, Mr. Abbott, and Fessenden Abbott sat in secret and informal conclave in a small audience chamber in the Hofburg. The host sat behind a table between two high and heavy golden candlesticks. The Emperors, erect in their uniforms, were imposing figures. They had the free supple upright carriage of men whose lives have been more than half passed in the saddle, and their eyes sparkled with the evidence of exercise and fresh air, regular habits, and systematic care. Mr. Abbott, in a frock-coat, was huddled in a perpendicular chair of crimson

## RULERS OF KINGS

velvet and gilded oak, in a vain endeavor to make himself comfortable, and surreptitiously consuming tablets; suffering in the stomach he had failed to treat as a brother the tortures of the damned. He looked with envy at the older Emperor who had been born some twenty years before himself, had endured enough public cares and private castigations to kill half a dozen Americans, and looked more vigorous than many in their youth. It was even possible that he might outlive the young man who aspired to be his son-in-law; towards whom his eyes, in spite of his will, wandered in the fascination of a shock from which he found himself unable to recover.

It was now a fortnight since he had been made aware that nothing less was asked of him than that he should give his daughter in marriage to a scion of a country not only devoid of every tradition of royalty, but of an hereditary aristocracy; and while he was still stunned and dully alarmed for what he conceived to be his failing wits, this demand had been backed up by an offer which had awakened him, it is true, but, he having outlived the age of romance and enthusiasm, had by no means met with favor, nor even credulity. To avoid war in any form was the final ambition of his life, and he was proud of his position as keeper of the peace of central and eastern Europe. On the other hand, he admitted that were he forty years younger he would doubtless have grasped any reasonable opportunity to rid Europe of the governments of Russia and Turkey, civilize and give happiness to those two countries, estimable enough in themselves, and mount to a place in history high above the mistakes and disasters of his unfortunate reign. But he was old, and with the selfishness of the old had long since resolved that he would close his reign in peace could it be done without

## RULERS OF KINGS

dishonor. As for the inventions, they seemed to him as chimerical as the prospective telegraph did to his forefathers, as the telephone would seem to an Esquimaux. Moreover, that the restless and uncertain quantity who claimed him as his "fatherly friend" was the one from whom the astounding proposition came, was enough to fill his bosom to repletion with distrust; the more especially as the invention was the property of an American notoriously the German's friend. The Emperor took little interest in American history or affairs, but it happened that he knew a good deal about Fessenden Abbott; not only through the intimacy of Alexandra with his daughter, nor yet through an acquaintance of long standing with Mr. Abbott—for whom he had a very considerable respect—but because of the young man's menacing exploit in South America, his establishment of certain and apparently impregnable industries in Europe, and his reputation as a manipulator of men. No doubt he was the only man in his raw country who would have dared so far as to love a princess of royal blood, much less have had the incomprehensible audacity to bargain for her hand; but of all men in any objectionable republic whatsoever, the Emperor-King knew of no one to whom under severest stress he would longer hesitate to give any sort of recognition. He was aware of young Abbott's principles and theories; they had been hammered into his smarting ears by the only one of his children who had been dowered to the full with the haughty and intolerant spirit of her race; and he looked upon him as a menace to the best that was left in the world. The wealth of these two men appalled him, albeit he was the richest monarch in Europe; and as he listened once more to the description of the incredible inventions and their certainties, he found himself staring at the little old man in the chair and the

## RULERS OF KINGS

vigorous restless young man standing by the window, much as a half-dazed man watches the approach of a land cyclone, whirling houses, people, and trees in its funnel.

He had been astounded that one of his generals, whom he had sent to Berlin to witness the experiments, had returned convinced, and advocating war; and he had been still more astonished and upset when, in the formal consultation which at the insistence of the German Emperor he had held with his cabinets, he found that to a man they were for accepting the offer of the American. During the past week his ears had rung to no tune but the glorious finish of his reign, the inestimable service he had it in his power to bestow upon Christianity and Europe, the sure future of his Dual Monarchy—which the intoxicating knowledge of its greatness would solidify. The only thing they had stumbled over was the condition; for the Emperor was no more conservative than his aristocracy, and the idea of allying the most exclusive monarchy in the world with the most blatant and dangerous of republics, that moreover which had recently whipped one of the ancient states of Europe, was a huge pill for them to swallow. Had it not been that they all felt that Europe would be well rid of this particular princess—even Königsegg, with this alternative—it is doubtful if, no matter what their reason for approving this projected war, they would have opened their batteries upon the Emperor. But as it was, the old sovereign, who had permitted these many years his advisers to do so much of his thinking, had an irritated subconsciousness of being trapped, and hardly realized yet that he had actually gone so far as to grant this private audience and to permit the royal countenance to shine upon a manifest impossibility.

It was notable that the Emperor of Germany, in spite

of his warm friendship for Fessenden, had drawn his chair close to his host's, and for the moment was in fuller sympathy with him; an unconscious manifestation of that *esprit de corps* which exists among great rulers, no matter what their differences. Fessenden felt this but did not resent it; but he also felt that it left him practically alone, his father's faculties being necessarily bent to introspection; but the isolation merely put him on his mettle, and he had fought too many battles single-handed to feel any faintness of spirit. Even he did not compare favorably in freshness with the two Emperors, for he had known too many anxious hours in the past three weeks, too many sleepless nights; but his temper was now cast in iron.

"Your general, as well as the Prussian generals who have witnessed the experiments, are satisfied that failure is impossible," he said, having finished the description of the inventions, which, like all great inventions, were simple enough. "It will be the first time in the history of the world that a war will have commenced with no uncertainty whatever as to the issue."

The Austrian Emperor answered with a German proverb, the equivalent of "There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip."

"We include no bunglers in our calculations, sir," said Fessenden dryly. "Although every precaution will be taken against their admittance in the first place."

The Emperor turned to his brother of Germany, who answered promptly: "I will confess that I entertained the identical doubts of your Majesty, at first, but I have since been fully convinced. And I am also convinced that it is our great and only chance. Sooner or later, doubtless before half a dozen years have passed, Russia will be at war with Japan. That war may involve the

rest of Europe, including ourselves; and fighting for our lives perhaps instead of shaping history as we think best. Sooner still there is bound to be trouble again in Turkey, which may involve one or more of the Balkans, and if we delay we shall once more be in the periodically mortifying position of daring to do nothing for the peace of Europe, for humanity, in our fear of Russia. At present we are in the not imposing position of merely holding on to our inheritances by what my American friend would call main strength. I conceive that a sovereign has a higher duty. This great power is not given to him in the interest of his inheritance alone, although no doubt its welfare is his first duty, but as a stepping-stone to a greater power which shall benefit the human race. It is often the case, as your Majesty well knows, that a ruler may be so confined by circumstances that he can make no such attempt without causing disaster instead of benefit, but the great men of history have been alive to the great moment. I believe that ours has come, your Majesty."

The old Emperor darted a glance at his rival and friend, as though to note if his tongue were in his cheek. He answered with the same accent of respect, however.

"I cannot fail to respond to words so stirring, your Majesty, and I need not add that my conception of the lofty duties of a ruler is precisely the same as your own. But war in any case is a stupendous calamity, if only for the loss of life it incurs. And in any conditions the added responsibilities of conquered territory are among the weightiest considerations which must always affect a ruler no longer young. In this case, with the half of Russia and Turkey and the Balkans to add to my present heavy load, I confess the prospect does not allure me! Reflect, your Majesty, that I have already a perpetual nightmare in Hungary. If I were a genera-



tion younger I might contemplate with equanimity the additional problem of sixty or seventy million more subjects clamoring for constitutions, but not now!"

William did not reply that he would gladly relieve his august friend of all but his countenance; he answered quickly.

"It will be our part to civilize these people, to give them the benefit of the reforms they have long been promised and never granted. That will keep them quiet for a while. When they reach the stage where enough has begotten a desire for more, then we can deal with them by another method for which we will have the inspiration at the right moment. And in this war, your Majesty, there need be no loss of life on our side; there will of course on the other for a short time, but less by many thousands than both Turkey and Russia will cause before Europe is many years older, less than die of famine and filth every year."

He stood up, his eyes flashing, his cheeks glowing. Europeans, unlike Anglo-Saxons, are not afraid of expressing lofty sentiments, and William was the last man to consider whether people approved or not of any sentiments he chose to entertain. "I believe that it is our destiny, your Majesty," he cried. "And that it is the greatest destiny that ever has befallen any sovereign. For, I swear to you all, I have no desire to be a second Napoleon, crushing and ravaging, but to rule men for their good, to have a vast empire in which human life shall be as protected, as safe, as it is in my own empire to-day, where all may have a chance to prosper and be happy, to worship God in their own way, where such tyranny of the mind and body as still exists in these benighted parts of Europe—to our shame, your Majesty, to our shame!—will be abolished so completely that the children of those who suffer so bitterly to-day shall

listen to tales of the past with incredulous amazement. I have burned for this since the day I ascended the throne, but I had no right to plunge my country into a war in which the chances were all against me. Now I believe that the day has come!—the day has come! And I beg, I implore your Majesty not to throw away this opportunity to make our names and our empires the most invincible on earth, our opportunity for good such as no sovereign before has ever dared to dream of. If we let it pass we deserve the worst that can befall us. But it is impossible for me to believe that your Majesty will let it pass. I have seen it all before me! I have already lived in that future—ruled by the sword, by kings divinely appointed, sternly, inflexibly, but with wisdom, with kindness, with justice. I have been cramped, thwarted, balked at every turn; there have been times when my interest, even my courage, has almost failed me; but with a power so vast as this conquest would give me, I should be invincible, the enemies in my present empire would crumble. Far from fearing such increase of power, of responsibility, I court it, I am eager for it, for with no lesser weapons can I accomplish the destiny to which I was born.”

Even Mr. Abbott had forgotten his pangs, and a faint glow of excitement had entered his gray cheeks. Fessenden, thrilling, forgot his own desires for the moment: he knew that however the Emperor might feel to-morrow that was the way he felt to-day. Indeed there had been little exaggeration in his mood. William thoroughly believed in himself and in his gifts and mission as a ruler; and no matter what the causes of discontent which had bred the German socialist of to-day—causes insignificant enough when compared with those of even Italy and Spain, leaving out Russia and other barbarous states—no one questioned the clock-work system of rule in his

country, the security of life and freedom of conscience, and the solid industrial basis on which he had set it.

The Emperor of Austria knew him well enough to believe in him when he was excited, at least, and he too felt a spark fly up from the ashes in his breast. He answered temperately, however.

"I should be the last to forbid the fulfilment of such worthy ambitions, your Majesty, had this opportunity come to us in the regular and legitimate channels. But not only does it savor too much to my mind, grown old in practicality, of Aladdin's lamp, but it would place us under an obligation to a republic on another continent which, it seems to me, is full of portent."

"The obligation is a personal one, your Majesty; and when we are in possession of Europe I think we will be in a position to force our own tariff conditions on the United States. More I cannot say."

The older Emperor leaned across the table and fixed him with his eye.

"Your Majesty," he said solemnly, "are there any conceivable conditions in which you would marry your daughter to an American?"

William had expected this question, and had trusted to inspiration to answer it without betraying the fact that no such circumstances existed in the womb of Time. "Your Majesty," he replied quickly, "may I not answer your question with another? Is not the Archduchess Ranata Theresia a menace in her own remarkable self to the peace of your empire, and doubly so since she has given in Hungary the evidence of her talents, and achieved a popularity that no sovereign in Europe enjoys? I heartily wish she had been born a man, but as it is I must frankly insist that the future peace of Europe depends as much upon her removal as upon any other cause."

"What you say is true enough," replied the ruler of the Dual Monarchy gloomily, "but she can be removed otherwise. You are informed of the alliance I have in mind?"

"I am, your Majesty, and with all my humble deference for your judgment I am forced to say that I do not believe such a marriage would effect the result we desire. In the first place, it would be a contest of two strong wills, and your daughter is a woman of Hapsburg gifts, quite aside from her force of character; in the second place, she is a woman of uncommon fascination. No doubt she would bind the Archduke Aloys Franz hand and foot, and gratify her ambitions through him; it must be remembered that she could not be asked to take the oath of renunciation, your Majesty."

The Emperor of Austria stirred uneasily. His daughter's charm as a woman had never seriously occurred to him, but he saw the danger in a flash. Would it not indeed be better to get her out of Europe? But he looked at the American leaning against the casement, encountered the cold blue eyes before which millions seemed ever passing in review, and stiffened. The temptation fled. The idea was preposterous enough, without a son-in-law who would make him feel as if Europe were on a library-shelf in an antique binding.

"She can be shut up," he said briefly. "There is no necessity to marry her at all. Such things have been done, and they can be done again—with all kindness, of course, but as securely as if in an underground dungeon."

Fessenden strode forward and stood in front of the table.

"Is that your answer?" he asked.

"That is my answer."

"That you would shut up a woman like that as if she

were a lunatic or an idiot, without liberty, without friends, until she went mad or killed herself?"

"What would be done would be for the good of the state, and she herself would see it in time." The last words were not emphatic, but it was evident that the gorge of the Emperor was rising.

"Well, sir, you will do nothing of the sort," said Fessenden.

"What?" The Emperor was on his feet. Angry as he was, he stood erect and majestic against the red wall, an imposing figure; but the old man and the young man, the old world and the new, glared at each other between the tall candelabra.

The other men had also risen. The Emperor of Germany, who had had an instant of deep depression, felt his spirits rise, and at the same time resented the light treatment of majesty.

"You will do nothing of the sort," repeated Fessenden. "And before the month is out you will give me your daughter in marriage here in the Hofburg. I have had no desire to threaten you, to make you feel your impotence; I hoped that, like the Emperor of Germany, you would be sufficiently enlightened to take advantage of the offer I made—an offer in which you would have had no share, by the way, but for the daughter you propose to treat as if she were a wooden doll, or you some long-forgotten Hapsburg. Now I will tell you, your Majesty, why you will neither incarcerate her nor forbid her marriage to me. If you withhold your consent for twenty-four hours, I shall take the train to-morrow for St. Petersburg and make the same offer to the Russian government. You may imagine how long they would hesitate. With such assurance of success they would strike to-day instead of waiting a half-dozen years for greater preparedness. Then, sir, when Austria was a province of

## RULERS OF KINGS

Russia, your daughter would be the first prisoner set free."

The Emperor had fallen heavily into his chair. As Fessenden finished speaking, William, with a gasp, walked to the window. There was a moment of intense and painful silence, and then the German Emperor spoke.

"He will keep his word, your Majesty."

The Emperor rose. His face was almost purple. His heavy Hapsburg mouth was trembling.

"I shall give you your answer before to-night," he said to Fessenden, although he did not look at him. "And now I beg that you will excuse me. I am unable to stand any more."

He passed out. William turned to Fessenden. His eyes sparkled with excitement, but he frowned.

"The battle is won," he said. "But what a *coup d'état*! I am thankful I knew nothing of it."

"I should have been a poor sort of friend to have taken you as deeply as that into my confidence."

"Ah! Well, I wish the Emperor could have consented more gracefully. I hated seeing him driven to the wall like that."

"So did I. But it was success or failure. The odds were even. He is the ruler of a great empire, skilled in power and diplomacy. If I had hesitated to use the only available means of success, I should not be worth my salt. For that matter, he merely followed a law of Nature."

"Well, you have won, and I wish you joy. No doubt you will see her before many days have passed."

As they were leaving the room, Fessenden laid his hand on the other's arm. "Always remember," he said, "that I am no trafficker in human beings. I throw this great power into your hands because I



believe you will govern so wisely that your people will be fitted for the great European republic before you die."

"*Ach was!*" said the Emperor of Germany.

## XXXV

The *bora* which had raged for days, making it not only unsafe but impossible to venture out of doors, had flown round the isthmus to torment Fiume. The blue Adriatic sparkled in a great silence, and, so brilliant was the atmosphere, Ranata could fancy she saw Italy far away on the edge of the level waters. Even the little breakers at the foot of the castle growled like cubs instead of bellowing in fury at the high confident roar in the pine tops on the hill. The white castle, with its Norman tower and gateway and innumerable turrets, fresh, strong, symmetrical, solitary on the long curving line of white coast, whose little peninsula juts abruptly from the wooded mountain into the sea, was the fairest prison that had ever held a princess captive. The bluest sea in the world was at its feet, the yellow sun flamed in a sky almost as blue, and on the mountain behind were the everlasting greens of cypress and pine. There is no more dazzling combination of color in the world, and on moonlight nights it is but the exchange of gold for silver.

Ranata, standing on the stone terrace in front of the library and overhanging the sea, her back to the war-ship on the right of the castle, her eyes roaming from the incomparable expanse of the Adriatic to Trieste and the mountains beyond, felt that with knowledge, in addition to the faith that sustained her, she could serenely endure her exile throughout what she believed to be the in-

## RULERS OF KINGS

evitable months. She had now been two weeks at Miramar, and kings might have died and dynasties fallen, the very continents might be at war, for all the news that had come to her from the world. Not a letter, not a newspaper, passed the sentries at the gates; the grounds swarmed with guards; one paced the terrace where she stood; others were on duty at the head of the staircase at night. She met Maria Leopoldina at the second breakfast and at dinner, and was accompanied by that vigorous duenna on her long walks in fine weather, but subjects of common interest had long since been exhausted and they bore each other silent company, the older woman too thankful that her charge was amiable to repine at her own fate.

Complete faith had restored Ranata's peace of mind, delivered her even from variability of mood, and on the whole she had been glad of these many days alone. She no longer yearned with romantic melancholy for life companioned but by a spiritualized memory, but examined herself and her possibilities conscientiously, and dwelt much, if soberly, in the upper air. If she idealized Fessenden and the matrimonial state, that did her no harm. Still, the time seemed long, and she had not the least idea by what method the American lover purposed to induce a Hapsburg to give him his daughter in marriage. She knew that he would succeed, but she also knew that the petrifications in his way might yield very slowly even to his energy and habit of success.

She sighed and entered the castle. Her morning walk had been a long one, and she returned to the library for rest and the unfailing distraction it afforded her. It was a lofty room, not too large, the light woods of floor and ceiling almost reflecting the sunshine which poured through the windows. Each one of the six thousand books in many languages looked as if personally selected

by the poor gentleman and scholar who had graced so delightfully the one sphere for which Nature had designed him, and in whose alien rôle naught had become him but his death. The room had been bright even while the *bora* seemed to blow the very sun about the sky, and the books in their haphazard bindings looked so gay and fresh that it was difficult to believe their owner had left them forty years before. Only the photographs of friends, which covered the walls of the adjoining study, were faded, their garments old-fashioned. Eugénie, in her crinoline, looked like a by-gone fashion-plate; even her autograph was dim; for the pictures had been hastily thrust into ordinary little wooden or gilt frames, and unprotected by glass. The beauty of Elizabeth had retired to the inmost folds of her hideous Victorian costume, and of her two oldest babies, taken with her, little was noticeable but the bulging brow and solemn eyes of Rudolf. But the crimson of hangings and chairs was still fresh and vivid, the heavy wood-work of the low ceiling, its design repeated in the floor, was highly polished, the pen on the table might have been dropped yesterday; all the clocks had been ticking these forty years. Every room in the castle looked as if designed and furnished by the happy young couple, but these two rooms were still most personal, still were pervaded by the refinement, the love of comfort and of home, of Maximilian and Carlotta. Ranata, when forced to remain in-doors, spent most of her time in them. In the library she had discovered five volumes of *Reports on Explorations and Surveys*, fruits of the thirty-third Congress of the United States, and had read them diligently. She had succeeded in investing the dry and spotted pages with a sentimental interest, all things being possible to a woman in love; but although most of the books she read at this time were written in the

## RULERS OF KINGS

English language, it must be confessed that she did not find her profoundest distraction in the *Reports*. To-day, however, she was taking down the fourth volume, albeit with some humor, when Maria Leopoldina entered the library hurriedly, consternation and amazement distorting a countenance habitually masked with the mincing placidity of the courtier.

“The ship is weighing anchor!” she exclaimed. “And all but the usual guard have received orders—by telegraph from Vienna—to return to Trieste. And that is not all! I was asked a moment ago to look through the spy-glass—a steam-yacht is approaching from the Italian coast—they say it is Mr. Abbott’s. Can Franz have gone mad? Good God! can he be dead?”

Ranata dashed past her, and up the stair to the tower-room, where she had spent so many hours scanning the horizon through the glass. A moment later, in its burgee, she had read the personality of the rapidly approaching yacht. It was the *Alexandra*; and the war-ship was steaming in the opposite direction.

When she turned to the agitated Obersthofmeisterin, close upon her heels, she was trembling so violently she hardly could stand, her cheeks were blazing, and she thrust her hands into her heavy hair, and pulled it down as if its weight were intolerable.

“It means,” she stammered—“it means—cannot you see?—he has won—already—*I am to marry him!*” And then Maria Leopoldina felt as if her nerves had been assaulted by a swarm of hornets. Ranata collapsed upon a chair, and flew into hysterics. She had suffered in silence during that first awful week in the Hofburg, pride carrying her successfully through even that ordeal; and she had been calm enough during the past fortnight of solitude and uncertainty; but in the face of this sudden and violent prospect of victory and immediate

## RULERS OF KINGS

happiness, her suppressed energies leaped their walls, and she cried and laughed and talked incoherent phrases until the duenna could stand no more and took refuge in a dead faint.

Ranata promptly recovered her reason, and applied the necessary restoratives without summoning help. When she had led her vibrating relative to a sofa, and fetched a bottle of salts, she arranged her own hair and face, and returned to the tower to watch the approach of the yacht. It steamed swiftly over the calm sea, but to Ranata's excited nerves hours passed before she could read the ensign and burgee without the aid of the glass. She was now schooled to any surprise, but experienced a sharp thrill nevertheless when the proud craft, instead of passing the castle and making for Trieste, deliberately swung about and dropped anchor upon the exact spot where the war-ship had kept its vigilant watch. A moment later it ran up two flags, side by side—the Austrian and the American.

Ranata sank again upon a chair and held her breath, expecting to see a boat lowered and Fessenden descend. But the long moments passed—an hour passed; the incident appeared to be closed for the present. Officers sauntered up and down the deck, sailors bustled about, but no one appeared to manifest any interest in the castle. Finally she was forced to conclude that, whatever Fessenden had accomplished in Vienna, his yacht had come without him.

To remain inactive any longer was beyond her electrified nerves. She regarded Maria Leopoldina's authority as at an end, and it was evident that the shaken Obersthofmeisterin was of the same opinion, for she had dragged herself to her room, and was seen no more that day. Ranata sent an invitation to the captain and the officers of the yacht to lunch at the castle. They

lowered the flags and returned with the messenger; and although there was an animated party in the little dining-room up-stairs, all her subtle questioning was able to extract were the bare facts that on the previous evening they had received orders from their master in Vienna to proceed in the morning to Miramar, run up the two flags as they anchored off the castle, and not to lower them until they had received some answering signal from her. They were naïvely curious, and, face to face with the Archduchess beloved of their chief, frankly suspicious of the sequel. It was evident, however, that her information was more meagre than theirs, and they were so glad to get back to the tonic sweetness of the Adriatic after their fortnight at Venice, most malodorous of cities, and so enchanted with this beautiful princess and her castle, that they were content without knowledge, Yankees though they were.

After luncheon Ranata took them for a walk through the gardens and woods of the park, keeping them until they bored her, for she dreaded solitude and looked forward to the night with terror. But before the night came her nerves were to be lifted from the rack.

## XXXVI

It was sundown and she stood on the terrace before the windows of the state dining-room on the eastern side of the castle, watching the shadows darken the woods rising almost perpendicularly before her. She heard the train go by high on the mountain, and sighed impatiently. She was at liberty to take any train up there she wished, and here she must remain in maddening unquiet. She even felt some impatience with Fessenden, who surely might have sent her a telegram.



## RULERS OF KINGS

But dinner had calmed her nerves—she had eaten no luncheon, and once more took her evening meal at the hour of five, that Maria Leopoldina might not add dyspepsia to her other burdens—and she made an effort to detach her thoughts from the fixed idea and subdue them before bedtime. There was an infinity of suggestion in her surroundings, and she conjured back the scene of nearly half a century ago when Maximilian and Carlotta had stood up in the boat at the foot of the water-steps down on her left, smiling farewell to the throng of relatives and friends who hung over the parapet or had crowded out upon the narrow mole as far as the sphinx at its point. Where the American yacht rode at anchor, a ship, in the gala dress of flags and banners and pennants, had waited to carry the brother of the Emperor to the imperial destiny in which he and the many who loved him found cause for pride. Some there may have been with misgivings, but they trusted in France; and that an Indian would in his dreams presume to treat an archduke of Austria as a mere rebel was beyond the imagination of any in that aristocratic throng—certainly unconceived by the gallant and smiling gentleman who looked his last upon Miramar. Throngs also—the people of Trieste—had stood on the long flight of stone steps with its three tiers, which led from Ranata's feet to the broad terrace below, leading, in its turn, to the landing and the parapet; on the similar flight rising opposite; and on the steps beyond, ascending steeply to the quaint stiff old gardens. Ranata fancied the scoop bonnets, the ugly garments over the crinoline; and even the gay aftermath in the sky seemed to flaunt the colors that had bedecked the fatal vessel.

But visions and the past fled to their limbo. From the mountain came a wild peculiar cry, the supposed Indian war-whoop with which herself and Alexandra

had been accustomed to pierce the repose of Ischl and Schönbrunn, when younger. For a moment she believed it to be another delusion; but it was repeated, and careless of the astonished sentry she answered it. She skirted the upper parapet and first garden with a fair assumption of dignity, and entered the dim twilight of a long arbor covered with wisteria vine and ivy. Here she picked up the tail of her gown and sped onward, and then up flight after flight of steps, along wild paths and avenues and arbors, and up, up, again, until she suddenly came upon Alexandra followed by her maids and a score of the Hofburg servants. The girls kissed each other formally, although one was palpitating with more than exercise, and the other bulged with news repressed. When they finally reached the library Rana had never been paler.

"Tell me quickly!" she exclaimed. "This change—these changes—why have I received no official information? What does it all mean?"

"That the Emperor has practically washed his hands of you, my dear, and that your day for receiving official information is over—for which I hope you are duly thankful. It has been a long and weary tussle, but Fessenden has won on every score but the last: he was set on marrying you in the Hofburg, but there your father held out. They were at it alone for two hours, and even Fessenden was limp when he left the palace, while the poor Emperor went to bed and slept ten hours instead of seven. No argument nor reasoning could move him. In so far as he could punish and humiliate you he would; moreover, he wishes the public to know nothing of the affair until it is over. Fessenden was forced to give way, partly because he didn't want to be the death of him, partly because every delay involves too much risk. So, my dear, prepare for the shock—they are all coming

## RULERS OF KINGS

to-morrow—the Emperor, my father and Fessenden, the Archdukes and Constitutional Cabinet—to witness the oath of renunciation, the Archbishop to administer it—not a woman but myself and Maria Leopoldina—no wedding-gown—I begged him to let me bring one, but he said you should be married in a travelling-dress and hat and go from the chapel to the yacht. He is fearfully upset, and I confess my knees shook when I received his summons to the Hofburg yesterday. He gave me my official instructions, if you like to call them that, in less than ten minutes, and then wouldn't even shake hands with me, much less kiss me. Well—there you are! Of course, if you want to retreat it is not too late.”

The words had dinned into Ranata's ears like the inharmonious clashing of many bells, and her mental attitude was little less homogeneous. Her conquering sensation was one of profound humiliation, accompanied by a vivid appreciation of all she was renouncing. In less than forty-eight hours she would be no longer the daughter of a great empire, Archduchess of Austria and Princess of Hungary, but a *citoyenne*, a unit of a huge and heaving republic. And, barring the unavoidable ceremony of renunciation and the distinguished witnesses, she was to be married and despatched as were she one of her own maids. Was love so tremendous a thing that it was worth the barter of birthright and the loftiest state to which a mortal might be born? Ranata had driven forth most of her traditions, but she was the descendant of eight centuries of kings, and her Americanism was yet in the making. She looked hard into the future, and wondered. At this juncture Alexandra produced a letter.

“It is from Fessenden. I will leave you alone with it if you will tell me where I am to sleep. I dined on the train, but I'd like to get into something loose.”

Ranata took the letter. It warmed her hand and she

## RULERS OF KINGS

smiled. "You had better take my aunt's room," she said. "It has two beds, and to-morrow night I will sleep with you there. I have been using the state bedroom, as it has fewer associations, but I shall have to give that to my father. What on earth are we to do with all those people? Some will have to go to the villa up on the hill, or to the hotel in Trieste—this castle is not so large as it looks. I suppose Fessenden will sleep on the yacht? Thank Heaven there will be plenty to think about. What time do they arrive?"

"At half-past four, on a special train—so that the Emperor may dine as usual at five. The ceremonies are to be performed on the following morning, and your father's train will leave for Vienna at twelve. My father and I start in the evening for Genoa, whence we sail for New York. I suspect the Emperor hates the thought of coming here, but in his present frame of mind it is the less of two evils."

Ranata escorted Alexandra to the simple blue and gray bedroom with its two pathetic little beds, then went to the state bedchamber in which she had lodged for the past fortnight. It was a superb and stately room, in which, like the rest of the castle, one might yet be comfortable. The old French bedstead was of massive gilt, with high and twisted pillars, but open above; and on the walls and on the furniture was the crimson brocade wrought with the Mexican eagle and imperial crown; a tapestry which the prince who ordered it had never seen. Contemporary kings, a pope and a queen, with their coats-of-arms above the frames, covered much of the walls; and most of those who had sat to please their friend were dead. Beyond was the great audience-chamber, hung and furnished with the same imperial crimson, but with fewer paintings: the Emperor of Austria when young; Elizabeth in her exquisite and high-

spirited youth; and Maximilian in his ermine, looking still, majestic as was his figure, the gentleman and the scholar and no more—the heavy open mouth the index to his failure in the alien rôle. Continuing the great suite were similar rooms, where the eagle and the crown deepened to blood shade in the twilight.

Ranata looked about her lingeringly. It was all a mockery, to be sure. Had her father possessed a proper sense of humor he would have burned the tapestries and the portrait, done all that he could to obliterate the memory of a fiasco which would have been one of the passing absurdities of history had it not been for the untimely finish of an estimable man and the more cruel fate of his wife; nevertheless it was impressive in its high and perfect harmonies and in its serious intent, and it expressed sufficiently all that she was about to renounce. Moreover, she was leaving the loveliest and most various country in Europe—for what? She might have this beautiful castle for her own did she remain Archduchess of Austria, and in Europe there must always be a thousand compensations that could never be found in a new country among a crude and alien people, were love less than she had dreamed. A composite of woman seemed to come forth from the shades and warn her that love was not all, nor yet enough, for man demands all, yet so little, giving less in return. The music of the Chardash rose, as the ghost of the dead women drifted on; and then the words of Sarolta. But in a moment she lit a candle and read Fessenden's letter.

## XXXVII

They arrived on the following afternoon, the Emperor and his American guests, his relatives, his primate,

## RULERS OF KINGS

two or three members of his household, and his ministers. It was raining when they left the train at the little mountain-station, and there was no driveway, no alternative but to walk down the steep and winding paths and stairs, sheltered by the umbrellas the lackeys held over them. As the long file under the umbrellas emerged from the arbor into the garden, the Emperor picking his way daintily on his diminutive toes, and the Archbishop holding up his gown with both hands, while the gorgeous flunkies streamed with rain, the sight was not as imperial as it should have been, and two girls in an upper window giggled irreverently. Being uncertain of their status, they left Maria Leopoldina to receive in solitary state, and did not appear until dinner; but when this solemn hour arrived, Ranata, in an evening-gown of pale-green velvet and all her pearls, entered the audience-chamber where the party was assembled, greeted her father and the guests as she had done many times before, and led the Archbishop down to dinner. With Fessenden it was not possible to exchange more than a flash.

It was a dreary function. The Emperor did not utter a word, although he was graciously pleased to intimate that his guests might talk if they could. Mr. Abbott ate his restricted meal with an expression of grim humor, and felt himself exempt from verbal expression. The Emperor, perhaps with a corresponding sense of irony, had asked him to occupy the state bedroom, lodging himself in the little camp-bed with its tentlike curtains, beloved of the sailor in Maximilian. The archdukes and ministers mumbled at each other; Fessenden and Ranata were many feet apart. Even Alexandra was depressed, and stared at the ugly old masters on the walls, longing for the solace of Zrinyi. Maria Leopoldina was still in a state of bewilderment and horror, which made



her fearful of attempting speech lest she gibber. At times the ticking of the clock in the ceiling above the table could be distinctly heard.

After dinner the Emperor and three of his friends retired hastily to the study for a game of whist, the others scattered, and Ranata and Fessenden found a few moments alone in Carlotta's boudoir in the tower.

For a time there was no conversation; then Fessenden placed his hands on her shoulders and held her from him, his eyes narrowing to a fiery point.

"Do you realize that I have won?" he said—"that you and I are changing the face of the world?"

"Yes—Alexandra has told me everything. I think you more wonderful than ever—but—is it for the best? Changes should come in the slow course of events."

"No change occurs that the world is not ready for. The world has never been readier for the extermination of Russia, particularly now that she has become a menace to the United States. And the sooner Europe is a republic the better."

"I believe you care more for this part of your accomplishment than for me."

His eyes relaxed and the fires spread.

"No," he said; "I do not. And we are all mere tools, my dear."

"If I were still superstitious," she said a while later, "I should feel very uncomfortable. I am sure this is a subtle revenge of my father's—not only to marry me in this castle, but to force me to embark from the very spot on which Maximilian said good-bye to Europe forever. Your yacht is where the ship stood which took him to Mexico. Not that my father wishes me any such terrible fate, but he believes me to be superstitious, and that I shall be punished by my imagination, if not by my conscience. But it is too late for that!

## RULERS OF KINGS

And Maximilian failed because he was Maximilian. I believe you could not fail if you tried."

### XXXVIII

The next morning at ten o'clock the Emperor and his guests entered the great brown and gold and crimson throne room with its imposing frieze of Hapsburg rulers, its illustrated genealogy of the blended houses of Hapsburg and Lorraine, crowned so naïvely with Maximilian and Carlotta, its eleven graceful chandeliers, and its meagre and apologetic throne. This the Emperor, in the full-dress uniform of an Austrian general, ascended with no apparent sense of its incongruity, thankful, no doubt, that it stood ready for the occasion. Before it was a table spread with a formidable-looking document. On either side of the throne stood the archdukes and the ministers, also in full uniform. The Primate, in his robes of ceremony, faced the Emperor, and Fessenden stood close to the table, his father beside him. The rain had passed, the gay southern sunshine flooded the fine room, where, for the first time in its history, an emperor stood on its mockery of a throne. It had been built for balls and other functions of young and wealthy royalty, and in those days the crimson tapestries had not been woven.

A moment after the Emperor had taken his position on the throne, Ranata, accompanied by Alexandra, and for the last time by an Obersthofmeisterin, entered and walked proudly up the room. She wore, not the sombre frock her father had had in mind when he issued the imperial fiat that she should marry in travelling-dress, but an elaborate and beautiful costume of white cloth. The Emperor scowled, but felt himself helpless, for she

also wore a hat, albeit with plumes that were truly imperial, and framing and enhancing a beauty which might have been conventionalized and half obscured by orange-blossoms and lace. She wore the pearls which her skin always seemed to reflect, her eyes sparkled, there was a faint pink in her cheeks, a deeper hue in her lips, and she had never borne herself with a more subtle blending of triumphant beauty and the dower of eight centuries of kings. She looked so happy that even her relatives smiled in involuntary sympathy, although they had never disapproved of a Hapsburg more. As for Fessenden, who had been beating a light tattoo on the table, staring at the document, he stood suddenly erect, his eyes flashing their pride and delight; and when they stood together before the throne they seemed to fill the room with their victorious youth, and to obliterate every memory of failure and tragedy.

The Emperor stood speechless for almost two moments. Age might have atrophied his power to suffer, and religion and philosophy have long since taught him to accept the inevitable with little more than a sigh; nevertheless, in these moments he felt a hot tide of youthful rebellion rise from mould and mildew, and of all the crosses he had been called upon to lift to his shoulders this seemed to him the heaviest. The stillness was so intense that many made a quick movement of uneasiness. The Emperor recovered himself, and in cold grave tones called upon all present to witness that his daughter renounced her rights and titles, and, with her betrothed, all pretensions to the thrones of Austria and Hungary. The terms of the renunciation were then read aloud by the prime-minister of Austria, the Primate administered the oath, the affianced couple signed the document, and Ranata for the moment felt nameless and bewildered.

## RULERS OF KINGS

But the signatures having been witnessed with due solemnity, the party went at once to the little Jerusalem chapel, and Fessenden gave Ranata what her father had taken from her; and, so the Americans and the man in him believed, far more besides. There was no breakfast, for that would involve the drinking of healths with their flowered expressions of approval, their reiterated good wishes and will. The moment the brief ceremony was over the Emperor led the way out to the terrace, and down the long flight to that other terrace whose lower steps were in the sea. A boat—its rowers with tossed oars—awaited the newly wed, and beyond was the yacht in gala dress of flags and banners and pennants.

Fessenden and Ranata were the last to leave the castle. The others stood stiff and straight beside the two short flights of steps leading into the water, the Emperor on the right and slightly in front. The windows in this angle of the castle were suddenly alive with servants, not wholly unsympathetic, but no flunkies lined the long flight to the lower terrace as the bridal couple descended. Did Ranata think of the stately ceremonies in the Hofburg, the dim and perfumed magnificence of St. Stephen's, the joyous pealing of all the bells in Vienna, the procession to the church of prelates, and military, and royalty in the six-horsed coaches of gilt and glass, that the world had come to see, the congratulations of every sovereign in Europe—all that would have been hers had she married as an Archduchess of Austria is expected to marry? Perhaps; for she was human, and a woman; but doubtless she also reflected that she had spent a goodly part of her life avoiding, with dexterity or obstinacy, such a wedding-day as that; and, Fessenden Abbott remaining unknown to her, she never would have married at all.

## RULERS OF KINGS

But any such fugitive reflections were routed by the prospect of the impending farewell with her father; for the moment her very happiness seemed blighted. It was true she had known him little, that her more congenial older sisters had appropriated what love had not been shocked out of him, but until these last weeks she had had little to forgive, and indirectly she owed her happiness to him; for she had laid its foundations in the period of liberty he granted her. And he was her father, nor was it likely she would ever see him again. He stood like a soldier, staring at the yacht, nothing betraying the genial kindness of his nature. When Ranata, with her husband, reached the landing, the Emperor turned and appeared about to favor her with another of the cold and courteous bows which had been her portion of late; but she saw that he was maintaining the severity of his countenance with an effort, and she approached him and put up her lips timidly. He took her in his arms then and held her closely, and told her that he forgave her, and hoped she would be happy. After that her relatives came forward and embraced her, the other Austrians kissed her hand for the last time, and then Mr. Abbott and Alexandra went with her down the water-steps and into the boat.

“Good-bye, sir, and thank you,” said Fessenden, as he shook hands with his father-in-law. He was turning away when he faced about again. “I should like to tell you,” he added, “that I am not superstitious—and neither is Ranata.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the Emperor. “Well—I am glad—I am very glad.”







STAMPED BELOW

AN INITIAL FINE OF 25 CENTS  
WILL BE ASSESSED FOR FAILURE TO RETURN  
THIS BOOK ON THE DATE DUE. THE PENALTY  
WILL INCREASE TO 50 CENTS ON THE FOURTH  
DAY AND TO \$1.00 ON THE SEVENTH DAY  
OVERDUE.

MAR 9 1933

OCT 17 1935

DEC 26 1935

MAY 30 1936

16 JUL '53 RC

NOV 3 1953 LT

JAN 11 1980

REG. CIR. DEC 18 1979

May 20, 1929. Walden	ru
MAY 23 1929	
MAR 24 1930	<i>Bonny</i>
JUN 6 1931	<i>Jackson</i>
MAY 29 1930	
MAR 9 1933	<i>Chomper</i>
MAR 5 1933	
CT 17 1935	<i>Biagio</i>
OCT 4 1935	
DEC 26 1933	<i>Looney</i>
OCT 21 1935	
MAY 30 1936	<i>Torrey</i>
MAY 29 1936	
APR 4 1941	<i>Fisher</i>
JUL 31 1941	
MAY 5 1941	
SEP 12 1942	<i>Peter</i>
AUG 31	

266128

955  
A 808  
TU

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

