Nightcap and Plume

by George R. Preedy, 1886-1952

Published: 1945

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Author's Note

This novel is to be read as fiction; it has no pretence to be dramatized history or biography. Should anyone wish to treat this subject again there are ample materials available. Nightcap and Plume, being fiction, is the author's copyright.

Dedicated to
Allied Prisoners of War
and
The Swedish Red Cross

Foreword

I wish to express my gratitude to Major Hilary Long for the help given in writing this novel. His unfailing co-operation in every aspect of this attempt to present the most unusual character and extraordinary career of a merciful, peace-loving and splendid monarch, was given during five years of active service, and under conditions of great difficulty, because Major Long believes, with the author, that the subject of Nightcap and Plume has, at the present moment, more than a romantic interest.

George R. Preedy.

PART I

Total Hazard.

Chapter 1

THE young man who was waiting for the money had much on his mind and heart, but nothing distracted him from his anxious expectancy, neither the letters under his hand on the green leather desk, the half finished embroidered belt over the blue damask chair, the pair of English pistols in the open case, the roses shaken in a northern breeze at the tall window, nor the recollection, never absent from his sensitive memory, of the blood stained coats amid the flags and drums of the church where a dark space was waiting for him beside his father's silver coffin.

Everything resolved into the arrival of the money; without it he was lost, a fool, an adventurer, a puppet; already many had given him just those names, smiled at him behind their hands or through their fingers; he knew, even while they fawned on him, that they considered him a fribble, a dilettante, a tinsel beau, and used worse words than these, he did not doubt. He looked at the clock; the golden dial on the white onyx globe was bright and still as the noonday sun, the hands appeared motionless; even allowing for the rough and rutted German roads, the money was overdue, soon, it might arrive too late.

The sharp winged gulls, rising from the cool foam where the salt water met the fresh water and flying high over the masts and furled sails by the quays, flashed across the chill blue of the sky beyond the flickering red and white of the roses, touching delicately the crystal bright panes. The young man turned over a gold brocade portfolio and drew out a music score, carefully written in his own script; with his inner ear, acute, as all his senses, he could listen to the majestic chords of bass and 'cello, repeated with almost unbearable emphasis, the persistent appeals of the violins, the summons of Fate, the refusal to accept defeat. *Iphigénie en Tauride*, the overture, played in the candlelit orchestra pit before the fringed curtains were drawn apart when the whispering sighed away behind butterfly fans and swansdown muffs.

He was mindful of the meaning behind this music so enchanting to the spirit and the senses, and that of the other prelude, that he had also copied with special pleasure in the precise annotation, *Alceste*, that described the struggle of humanity to keep death at bay. He endeavoured to occupy himself with this symbolism so much to his taste; the portfolio contained other sheets of music besides the Bavarian's powerful and sombre melodies, beneath the pages marked Kristof Willibald Gluck, was another signed J. S. Bach—a little nothing for the harpsichord—*Toccata in G* a lesson, an exercise on a recurrent, on a slight theme, one touched with the finger tips, returned to slightly and left. As the young man's

fantastic and acute whim played with the reflections roused by the portfolio of music sheets, he heard a tap on the door, that vibrated across the large, loftly apartment into the imagined clamorous chords of the *Iphigénie* and the echo of the plucked strings in the Toccata.

He did not move or speak, showing by nothing that he controlled an expectation that afflicted him with nausea; he tied the portfolio strings of moire blue ribbon as the door opened; it was, of course, Elis Schorderheim, his humble, faithful friend, and factotum.

"Sir, there is nothing from France," said this person, anxiously, advancing with an air that was affection without flattery, and reverence without servility. "And I do recall that you were not to be disturbed for any other matter."

He paused in the centre of the room, a modest man in middle life, earnest with the cares of others and asking nothing for himself; his neat figure was reflected in the waxed floor as a smudge of dark suddenly cut by the lustrous pile of a Persian rug, azure and mulberry coloured sheen.

The young man noticed this effect and that of the looped back curtains of plum-hued velvet on the far wall that made a rich background to the unpretentious figure of M. Schorderheim; he could not forbear such observation even at the most vital moments; he had furnished the room himself, he approved even now, while ferocious disappointment shook him, the alabaster vase, filled with trailing fern, tresses of dark and pale lilac, white tulips and single white roses that stood alone in the far corner of the stately apartment, and appeared to be created from the warm shadows and filtered light from the far window. He had made the chamber a study in air and space, after the design of an Italian church; it was a success, a noble perspective met his glance when he turned in his purple velvet seat.

"Something else of importance, then?" he asked smiling.

"Sir, this—a young adventurer desires a private interview."

"Yes? You have an important reason for informing me of this?"

"The reason is, sir, that Baron Jakob Magnus Sprengtporten asks you to grant this favour."

"You are sure of that?"

"Sir, I have seen the brief credentials this gentleman brings. I have very soberly cross examined him. He is poor, of good birth, was an officer, but left the army for the law, he exerted himself to obtain a judgeship—on a technical error he was deprived of this, he then received a civil service appointment and lost it—he is still chasing fortune at twenty-nine years of age."

"And Jakob Sprengtporten sends him to me—now?"

"I am not surprised. I take him to be a man of genius and dangerous, sir, to his enemies."

"Bring him here, the secret stairs—say, I write a drama, true enough. If—there is news from France—knock twice on the door. What is this man's name?"

"Sir, it is Johan Toll."

The young man suddenly smiled, and the sparkle never absent from his large, dark blue eyes, lit up his sensitive face as he said:—

"Even this genius will be useless without the money, eh?"

Johan Toll entered from behind the carefully draped curtain that concealed the door of the spiral staircase, he came confidently round the delicate alabaster vase

that had an amber tint in the half light; he was a magnificent man, with regular, calm features, secure in the unusual strength of his body and the uncommon powers of his mind; his attire was plain and slightly worn, the searching glance of the other observed this as he came into the sunless gleam from the eastern window that illuminated the desk with the pistols, the portfolio, the letters and the blue chair with the embroidered belt.

"Baron Sprengtporten sent you, M. Toll, why?"

Unmoved by this direct question, the stranger answered:—"Because I have guessed that your Majesty intends a revolution."

"Ah—in the drama—in the opera—in the national costume—or perhaps, the stitching of a baldric?"

"Sire, in the constitution of Sweden."

"Baron Jakob Sprengtporten told you that?"

"No—I told his brother, Baron Goran—a friend of mine—what I guessed, sir, and he spoke to Colonel Baron Jakob."

"Because he has formed a royalist club of young officers—you supposed him a conspirator?"

"I knew he was. Several clues led me to him, then Baron Goran was too careful. Only a man with something to conceal would have been so prudent."

The King lightly sighed.

"Why did you come here? The Sprengtporten brothers should have told me this themselves."

"They said that if they related this tale to your Majesty you would not believe it, but that if I came myself you would."

"You think you impressed them, M. Toll?"

"I told them that the plot would fail without me. I gave them plans—to improve their own."

"I see. What makes you suppose that I, the King, intend a revolt against the constitution?"

"Your qualities. Your speech to your first Riksdag, all that men know about you. Your ancestors, Sire."

The King saw before his inner eye the darkness of the Riddarsholm Church, the clustered captured flags, the massed, mute drums, the two torn, bloody coats, the armour on the wooden horsemen, the silver and copper coffins, his inner ear listened to the strong chords, the ruthless demands of the gods, the music of Gluck.

"You are bold," he said smiling. "You dare to be, because of my wretched position, you know that I am in the power of ministers who are—scarcely secretly even—the servants of Russia, that Sweden is abandoned to that monstrous empire, that Prussia and Denmark hope to join in my own spoilation, that my one ally, France, wavers—perhaps withdraws. You know, doubtless, the money the Tzarina spends to keep the Riksdag in her interest you know the shameful corruption and disloyalty among the factions who rule, the moral anarchy, the futile complexities of the decayed and rotten constitution, yes, you know all this, the common talk of the common tavern."

"I did not come here to tell you that, Sire."

“No, rather, perhaps, to tell me what is said of me. I am helpless, incapable of assisting my people, a puppet on the throne of Gustaf Vasa, of Gustaf Adolf, of Karl XII, a *petit maître* from Versailles, worthy only to direct a theatre, to design an opera scene, to saunter through a masquerade.”

“I do not think that, sire, and you know it. Your balls and *fêtes*, your concerts and card parties do not deceive me. Your elegant idleness is a disguise for your severe intentions. Your Majesty indeed appears helpless—you have only a few friends, as the Sprengtporten and their followers, but you have yourself, sire.”

“You are indeed extremely bold,” replied the King smiling with a tranquil grace. “I admit to nothing. You have put your self in peril. Sprengtporten and his brother are daring men of iron intentions. To discover their plots—if they do plot—is to do a dangerous thing.”

“I might have expected to be shot,” said Toll.

Gustaf III glanced at the pair of pistols in the open case.

“To be assassinated? We all risk that. A fate that I have always particularly dreaded. But Sprengtporten does not intend that for you, or he would not have sent you to me.”

“He accepted me as an accomplice, Sire.”

“What did you offer?”

“A vigorous scheme. Your Majesty’s revolt is to begin in Finland—where Sprengtporten is a landowner and where his regiment, the Nyland Dragoons, is at present, his intention is to take, by surprise, the fortress of Sveaborg—Finland then under his heel, he would sail to Sweden and meet your Majesty at Erstawir, and overcome Stockholm by a night storming, the Senate would be arrested, and a new constitution given to Sweden. Count Karl Scheffer is in this enterprise, it is not known to many beyond him and your Majesty’s brothers.” Toll turned his steady placid eyes, slightly narrowed with irony directly on the King. “Your Majesty still has sufficient power to deny this, to have me arrested—and disposed of.”

“Yes, I have that. You are a resolute man. What suggestions do you claim to have made to Baron Jakob Sprengtporten?”

“I made these, sire—a sham revolt seemingly against your Majesty will take place in Kristianstad which will declare against the Government. Prince Karl will march against the rebels with all the forces of the South, reaching Kristianstad he will join the rebels, and return to Stockholm to meet Baron Jakob Sprengtporten—his start will be eleven days as winds off the Finnish coast may be contrary.”

“Captain Hellichus, commander of the garrison at Kristianstad is not in my confidence,” remarked the King; he was slightly flushed, though the eastern chamber, from which the sunlight was receding was chill; he rose and fingered the baldric that was embroidered with the crowns, lions of Sweden, Gotland and the horseman of Finland. “Who then, is to rouse Scania?” he added.

“I shall do that,” replied Toll, who stood respectfully by his chair.

“You are a formidable man. I perceive that it is useless to dissimulate with you. I must either silence you or accept you as a confederate. I know the first simple rules of politics, though perhaps you do not think so. I should have you put away. But I despise murder,” said the King.

Toll was silent, still standing at attention, his powerful figure and drab attire appearing alien in the gracious, charming elegance of the superb chamber: the

King's background was the roses quivering in the gentle sea wind on the panes of the tall window, the red petals, the dark green leaves, the blue sky were all losing colour with the fading light; his supreme elegance and distinction, both natural and perfectly trained were entirely unselfconscious, the man and his manners were one; he shone and glittered from intangible brilliance as well as from the rosettes of diamonds at his throat and the sapphires buttoning his sea-green satin coat.

"Baron Sprengtporten desires no confederates—if he plots, M. Toll."

"Sire, he has accepted me."

"What reward do you expect—if the supposed design succeeds?"

"The same as that which your Majesty expects—to see Sweden liberated."

"You flatter me," said the King. "And I am used to that—not so cockered as you suppose, perhaps." His long hand went out to the pistols, touched the dark gray steel, damascened with gold. "I admit that what you say is true," he added swiftly. "I do intend to overturn the state, to make myself master in Sweden, to save her from Russia. Exactly as you have discovered. You are shrewd and able. I trust you are honourable. Sprengtporten will watch you."

"But your Majesty will not, any more than your Majesty would lie to me. I can do as I have promised."

"And I can do nothing until I receive the French subsidy," said Gustaf III. "I wait for it now, M. de Vergennes has been delayed by the bad roads, yes, I was waiting when you came. What I received last January was soon spent."

Toll asked. "Will the revolution be after the Coronation, sire? I hear your Majesty has at last given way in the matter of the oath."

"Certainly, I have signed their absurd and humiliating manifesto—what does that matter, since I intend to do away with the Senate? The Coronation is to be on the 29th of this month—we cannot be ready before then," he spoke with easy confidence as if to a friend of long standing.

Toll looked at him very keenly, he was appraising every detail of his bearing, manner and appearance and the King knew it. "Do you admire the music of M. Gluck?" he asked. "You are interested in my Opera House, dedicated to the muses of the North? It is almost finished. Now, you had better go. I am watched. Again, what do you expect as a reward—when we succeed?"

Toll smiled brilliantly. "If *I* succeed, I am sure your Majesty will not forget me. If I fail I shall not require anything."

"A prison grave for each of us if we fail," said the King. He recalled the two bloody coats—Gustaf Adolf—Karl XI both shot, but in battle, he looked at the pistols. "Better in the field," he slightly shuddered. "A palace revolution! No glory in that—but there is no other way. It has been successful in Copenhagen," he faced the other man's knowledge of what this meant to him whose unwanted wife was sister to the imbecile King of Denmark.

Toll accepted the challenge.

"The family of your Majesty's gracious mother," he said with a tact that appeared spontaneous candour, "have cleared an adventurer from the footstool of a throne. It was clever to choose a masquerade for the arrests."

"We play in a masquerade all the time, M. Toll. The only ease from pretence is when we are in mask and domino."

“I know little of such diversions, sire. One warning I dare to make. Prince Karl is very much the cavalier of Mademoiselle Aurora Lowenhjelm, and she is Count Fersen’s favourite niece.”

“Ah.” Gustaf III gave the swift steady look that was the nearest he showed of surprise, save to his intimates. “Report to Baron Sprengtporten. Tell him I approve your plan, if I failed in Stockholm it would be well to have the south and a great fortress to retire to—as you know so much, know this, I do not intend to be defeated, save by our common enemy, death, it is total hazard—red—black, all on one throw.”

Toll paused before the curtain:—“Your Majesty’s enemy most to be dreaded is Baron Pechlin—your chief flatterer.”

Chapter 2

The King sat alone, the admirable M. Beylon, the royal Reader, had come with books, volumes of Catullus printed in Venice, from the royal library, and gone; the King was supposed to be writing verses, little odes, graceful and impertinent as butter flies, for the charming ladies who surrounded the Queen—the Queen, he had never come closer to her than the circle of her outstretched fan; she had been forced on him, on his parents, by the odious tyranny of the Diet. He loathed Denmark—the Northern Alliance it was to have been, to balance England against the Bourbons of France and Spain, Gustaf distrusted England, in everything he turned to France. The Queen was so quiet, the Queen, Sophia Magdalena, pretty, very dull and timid, he would have been sorry for her, even though his mother had skilfully trained him to hate her, had it not been for her brother. Kristian VII was insane, his English spouse had made a show of him before all Europe, putting a man of the people, the vulgar Stuensee, in his bed, on his throne. And now they had fallen, at the masquerade, the account of it lay in the letters under the King’s hand. Struensee, after the *bal paré*, in rose pink silk and sables, fainting, cursing, thrust away to an icy cell, chained, she, in her bed chamber, seized by soldiers, as, in her night attire she tried to hurl herself from the window, dragged off, half naked, with her nursing child, Struensee’s child, to prison.

Gustaf remembered her with disgust when, against his will he had visited Copenhagen; she had received him wearing male attire, Struensee had played the host, the wittol imbecile King had wept and raved in the background, the household was slothful, sluttish, bankrupt, the adulterers had leered and grinned, alone in her dignity was the Queen Dowager, stepmother to Kristian, and she had, as Toll had reminded him, purged the foul court. Gustaf shuddered; Struensee had been beheaded, a few days ago, the Queen cast off in utter disgrace; even her brother, the King of Great Britain, could not save her and from this tainted house of Oldenburg, that of the enemy Denmark, had come Sophia Magdalena, blonde as silver, too, as her wretched sister-in-law.

Gustaf tried to turn his thoughts, he had great concerns of his own to deal with, this stranger, that now, a man coming to tell him he knew this most perilous

secret, the lives of all his friends hung by a hair. Yet he must think of that English queen—she had been fifteen years of age when she had reached Denmark, wearing a bloom coloured gown with white flowers, pale as moonshine, that had been near the time of his own wretched marriage, wretchedly celebrated, with saddle clothes on the walls of the makeshift ball room at Helsingfors and the old coaches that had been sent for firewood, brought back, without furnishing, to serve again—six years ago and still he could not look at her without thinking of those shabby expedients of the penurious government, of the forced marriage into a lunatic family. What poor policy that had been! The miserable union had done nothing to unite the rival branches of the House of Holstein. Denmark was resolutely his enemy still, all her designs directed against him; he should have married as his mother had wished, a Princess of her own determined, bold and brilliant race, that also of the Queen who had dared to overthrow Struensee. But Gustaf recalled how he had tried to placate his mother in favour of the sad little Dane— "She is rather pretty, not beautiful as you are, I can never love her as I love you—one can be kind, I entreat you to send me an affectionate word to encourage her."

It had never come. Ulrica Lovisa, so fascinating, admired, dominant and jealous had had no compassion for her son's despised wife, she had caught at the report of his first words to his bride—"Take care!" as he had assisted her from her coach step at Helsingfors, and Ulrica Lovisa had played sharp variations on this theme, in letters and by speech. "Take care, Madame! Do not coquette, do not stare, do not be awkward, do not be envious, do not be impudent!" The warnings were no more than sneers; spied upon and isolated, timid and de pressed, the young Queen moved among those who had no sympathy with her lack of wit and spirit. Only her husband was sometimes disturbed by her sorry position, as now. This stranger, Toll, who, formidable and downright as a messenger of the gods, had been an inspiration by his very dangerous bluntness and his self assured confidence, had spoken of Prince Karl's infatuation for Fersen's niece, Aurora. So much this Johan Toll knew then, too much; he meant that Karl might blab the secret of the re volt to a girl of eighteen years who would betray it to her uncle, Fersen, the enemy. Gustaf's delicate and fantastic mind viewed this prospect obliquely—a fair confidante, above the menace of Fate, the menacing chords, the soothing appeal, the sweet melody of the woman's love and prayer. If he, the King, was to go to her, the Queen, and say— "I hazard all to save Sweden, to save myself, the country from being a vassal of Russia, myself from playing the weakling before the world, will you stand by me?"

As all subtle people, he liked direct and unexpected action, both for its own sake, and because in him, it was always suspect; since no one ever believed he could be simple, simplicity served him very well as a card to play, sometimes it had been the only one in his hand. Therefore this thought appealed to him, but he rejected it, she was too overshadowed by the spectre of the maniac brother, by the dissolute Queen of Denmark, now awaiting her doom, by the plebeian blood of Struensee, freshly shed on the scaffold.

He listened for the knocks; not to-day, then, not to-day, the masquerade would be prolonged, more games and balls and dramas, more frolics and laughter, while underneath the dangerous intrigues went on; he recalled the royalist plot of sixteen years before, engineered by his mother and some royalists—men the stamp

of the Sprengtporten and this Toll, to assert the Royal authority; it had failed, leaving the King weak, helpless, contemptible, the rebels had been tortured and beheaded.

Gustaf shrank, most from the thought of the torture, if this plot failed, he would not live to know his followers were being mangled on the rack or wheel.

His body chilled in the elegant chamber he had furnished with so accomplished a taste, blue, green, shades of Northern skies and oceans, mountain pines and seaweeds, adorned with the flowers that bloomed soon after the snows dissolved, those blossoms that might have been gathered in Hyperboreous, the fabled land beyond the Frozen Pole, beyond the scourge of the East wind.

The stranger had warned him of Baron Pechlin—his most dangerous enemy—"And I have so many of them." He knew this, he was fooled in nothing; he had never even tried to win Karl Pechlin so well he understood the man. A soldier and a politician of various talents, of no conscience, of no party, so powerful that he was termed "King of the Riksdag," cunning, bold, cool, indifferent to money or power, caring only for intrigue and so never to be bought wholly by anyone though taking money from all; the Tzarina must have lavished fortunes on him and he would betray her whenever it amused him to do so. Gustaf himself intended to spend most of the expected French money on corruption in the Diet, but he did not intend to offer a dollar to Fersen or Pechlin, the Count was too honest an opponent, the Baron too base. The King closed his brilliant blue eyes, and without that uncommon light, an azure that astonished beneath the mobile brows, his face had a still look, as if he suffered a secret wound in silence.

Soon he must ring for candles, go lightly to the supper table, distribute his papers of verses; the ladies would not recognize his paraphrases of Catullus, but there were a few moments yet.

The roses were no more than a trellis across the window, the sun was sinking behind the granite rocks, the dark pine forests, the broad blue lakes of Stockholm, behind the Riddarsholm Church with the tombs of Kings and heroes, of the women who had shared their thrones, their destinies, perhaps their secrets, the corded, tasselled drums, the fringed standards, and faded banners, the wooden horsemen, blue-armoured in the dusk, the shot riddled coats, buff military jerkins, not satin garments, strewn with silk flowers. The women intruded on the King's reflections, his mother, Ulrica Lovisa, sister of the great King of Prussia, who had educated him with such passionate pains, whose jealous love was always about him like an acrid incense, yet whom he would not trust with his secret, the shrinking wife, whose light hazel eyes sometimes turned on him a glance of resigned despair, Aurora Lowenhjelm, hoping to marry Prince Karl but in the enemy's ranks, Caroline Matilda, travelling now to Zelle where another woman who should have been a Queen lay buried after a long captivity, Caroline Matilda's great grand mother, Sophia Dorothea, better not to think of her, and her mad Swedish lover, murdered, too. If the orchestra played the *Iphigénie* overture to-night Gustaf would picture their phantoms, the madmen, the wanton women, the sacrifice of youth and beauty—for what?

The two dowager Queens of Denmark—he saw them, too, they were known to be admirable, they upheld what he prized above life, majesty, honour, decorum, dignity, the regal power, but they were ambitious, contriving, without compassion.

These crowding shadows of women must be dispersed when he was so deeply engaged in the affairs of men; he sighed and his lids fluttered as he unlocked and pulled open a drawer in the desk; her letters must be re-read until the next came; on top of the packet lay a case of white velvet; had he unclasped it he could not have discerned the features of the miniature, only the sparkle of the cold emeralds with which he had edged the oval, he did not need to stare at her painted likeness, nor to read her memorials sent with such secrecy, under feigned names, to safe addresses—The Hague, Amsterdam, Berlin, and so brought by a banker's courier, or a merchant's traveller to an agent in Stockholm.

Gustaf caressed the smooth paper; a friend had penned them to her dedication, only, here and there on the margin of the gilt edged sheets she had added some hurried sentences to emphasize the text. These epistles that so powerfully moved the man who laid delicate fingers on the covers, the seals, the superscriptions that he might once again touch what she had touched, did not deal with love, but he loved the writer and she loved him in a fashion neither his mother nor his wife could have understood; it was a passion that might have aroused ridicule among the stupid, amazement among the wise. What he held was a closely reasoned political treatise, expressing the noblest, most enthusiastic, romantic and generous sentiments possible to the human heart and mind. She knew his secret, she applauded his enterprise, she admired him, as she admired abstract courage, honour, chivalry. He would save Sweden, he would be a monarch who would satisfy the new faith, the new hope of mankind, without her ardent encouragement, perhaps he could not have undertaken this mighty enterprise.

He had been in her loge at the opera house, when the messenger, riding post from Stockholm to Paris, had come to tell him that his father was dead and he was King; she had turned to him, the rich pearls of the House of Egmont about her frailty, like tears on a lily and had whispered—"now."

He had understood her; the moment had come for him to put into practice the burning compassion for enslaved mankind they had professed together, the doctrines of Voltaire, Rousseau, the brave, bold schemes that were in the air for the betterment of humanity, the casting off of chains, the opening of dungeon doors, the unmasking of clerical hypocrisy, of political corruption—"now."

It had meant leaving her, perhaps he would never see her again; when he had left Paris a year and a half before this eve of his crowning she had retired from her dazzling existence of great lady, great beauty, and since lived in retreat with Madame des Mesmes, indifferent to the apathy, the sneers of Versailles, as she had been indifferent to luxury, to flattery, to pomp. She had dared to be chaste, to treat her narrow, scintillating world as a comedy to be smiled aside, to think, to feel for those beyond the palace gates, she had pleased the fastidious taste of Gustaf even more than had the other fashionable women who sent him reports from France. She had never been a coquette and now all frivolities displeased her; in these formal letters ad dressed "Your Majesty" she wrote of what the ideal ruler might be, and shrewdly, with expert insight as became the daughter of the Marèchal duc de Richelieu, the heiress of the Guises, and the wife of the first noble of the Spanish Netherlands.

The King locked up his treasures; it was possible he would disappoint her eager pride in him, if the shot or the steel was for him, she would not flinch from fate,

nor would he as he fell, yet neither believed in any other life, religion to them was superstition, stoicism and humanism sufficed their idealism. “The last farewell” he thought, rising in the dusk that filled the room with an even blue grey gloom as if the waters without the palace had risen and overwhelmed it; there was one secret that Toll did not know, the secret of Jeanne d’Egmont… the money, the money, if that did not arrive within a few days, it might indeed be too late for her to see her noble designs fulfilled; she was languishing, close to death.

He walked across the darkened floor to the vase of flowers, lilac, flowers and leaf, white tulip, white rose, and round the bouquet a tinsel ribbon, those of the new Vasa order, her colours, he always wore them, a knot of green, lilac, silver, was in his buttonhole.

Two knocks on the door; the King waited; the good Elis entered; the French plenipotentiary had arrived, bruised with rough travelling, he had made excuses for to-day. “And I can take none,” said Gustaf. “Leave the formalities, yes—we under stand one another very well. To-night, after supper, I shall inspect the opera house—ask M. de Vergennes to accompany me.”

When he was alone again he turned restlessly about the dim chamber, putting his hand in his deep pocket where lay a small white glove… “If Vergennes has not brought the money.”

Chapter 3

The third of the great geniuses of Sweden of the Tessin family had designed the Stockholm Opera House for Gustaf when he was Crown Prince, after the completion of the royal palace that rose majestic from the swift waters of the Norrstrom in the florid and imposing style of Italy. The Opera House was not yet complete, no music had ever resounded under the lofty ceiling, no applause had ever echoed from the loges that lined the horseshoe auditorium; neither curtains nor candelabrum were in place, the walls were bare of painting and statuary and the floor unencumbered by gilt chairs. One of the private rooms, the third from the right looking from the stage was however furnished for here the King consulted with his architects, his painters and sculptors, with the musicians and poets, the dramatists and singers who were to glorify Sweden in this superb building dedicated to the Arts of Scandinavia. Hung with pale yellow velvet and four circular mirrors, garlanded with gilt roses, this cabinet was elegantly supplied with a sofa of gold brocade, needlework, upholstered chairs, a console on which stood a goblet of rock crystal filled with fine wild lilies, a cabinet of acacia wood packed with papers and drawings, that showed through the open doors. On a tulip wood table, topped by a plaque in Sevres porcelain, there sparkled in the waxlight glow the pale bottle of yellow German wine that neither the King nor his guest touched; this light came from a single candle in a silver stick, and the brilliant little side scene was full of uncertain shadow as if the gloom in the unfinished, empty theatre had invaded this retreat on the edge of a deserted darkness.

M. de Vergennes, one of the ablest of French diplomats, was a prudent man, much disturbed. He had been constantly in the company of Gustaf when, Crown Prince and incognito as Count of Gotland, he had visited Paris the previous year, to be adored alike by the ladies, the philosophers, and the courtiers; his sparkling fascination had stirred even the sick lethargy of Louis XV, and M. de Vergennes had been told to encourage him politically, the Swedish alliance might be worth while in a reign barren of any diplomatic success. M. de Vergennes, who detested England and was fomenting trouble in the American colonies, had been pleased with this task, pleased even to undertake the long and uncomfortable journey to the North, a word that to him, savoured of barbarism, but he was not pleased with what the young King told him now—the plot against the Constitution, in which there was no one more important than a few impetuous young officers, and that France was expected to finance—against the Diet, against men as astute as Fersen, as wily as Pechlin, against the resources of Russia, England, Denmark.

A handsome gentleman, who took pains not to show his fifty-five years, M. de Vergennes, still in his black braided brown travelling coat, watched, listened and disapproved. “You know my situation,” said Gustaf, “it is little better than that of my father in ‘69, when the Diet wished to fix their seat at Norrkoping, in order to be near the Russian fleet—Osterman, then the envoy and paymaster of Russia, still plays the same part.”

“Sire,” answered M. de Vergennes carefully. “On that occasion the French ambassador, M. de Modene, backed the Swedish monarchy with some millions of livres. These were totally lost.”

“Yes. You lead to the question I have not dared to ask you till now—what sum, my dear Comte, have you brought from France? His Christian Majesty, in his last dispatch, promised supplies.” He had waited, with a gay patience, until this moment of complete privacy, but his enchanting voice, that of the most seductive orator in Sweden, stammered and his blue eyes, black in this shifting shadow were brilliant with anxiety.

The Frenchman was too able a politician to employ guile where frankness would serve.

“I have brought nothing, sire. The resources of France are extremely low. I did not expect to find your Majesty preparing a *coup d’état*.”

Gustaf paled from the force of the disappointment.

“No? Rather you expected me to accept the part of a *roi fainéant*—a palace chamberlain—a lackey to the Tzarina—you have a very poor opinion of me, so I suppose, has your King, your nation.”

“Your Majesty has surely not forgotten that you were the idol of Paris?”

“Of the drawing rooms,” said Gustaf quietly. “A fashion. Yet the Swedish alliance was not useless to you. The subsidy for next year holds good?” he added, then. “Ah, I stand, forgetting you are fatigued,” he took one of the chairs, indicating the sofa to the Frenchman who replied: “Yes, sire, the second instalment will be paid on the first day of the New Year. Until then, there is nothing I can do.”

Much agitated, Gustaf rose and walked to and fro; his tall and graceful figure was eclipsed now and then in the shadows as the candle flame flickered in the draught; he spoke, in uncommon disorder, of his humiliation, of the sorry show he

made before Europe, of his noble ancestors, of the past splendours of Sweden, of his resolve to die rather than to be dishonoured.

M. de Vergennes again on his feet, adept at judging men, could not be sure of the qualities of this one, who on the surface seemed a favourite of the gods, but who had never yet been tried in any great occasion—a darling of the salons, yes, a man of letters, a wit, of incomparable personal fascinations, for his brilliance was neither hard nor cloying, it was as natural to him as beams to a star, a man with every social grace, liberally educated, without pedantry, or superstition, chivalrous, enthusiastic for noble deeds. What else? Frivolous, perhaps, too fond of music, the theatre, cold to women, trapped in a nominal marriage, (his brother would be his heir), extravagant—the palace with costly bestaries and superb stove houses, this opera Palace, all in this distant North, as rich as luxurious as in France—cold to women? He had Madame d'Egmont's colours at his lapel now; M. de Vergennes did not know what to make of that pure and knightly affection, a pose, perhaps?

The young man liked to act, to walk the stage in disguise, to embroider scarves, to write verses, to play the violincello, his opening speech at his first Riksdag had transported everyone into a frenzy of admiration, but how soon that had faded! Now he stood alone save for a few hotheads, the Tzarina had bought his country under his eyes.

"It would be impossible to dislike him, one would suppose," mused the Frenchman, leaning on the back of his chair. "Yet how many enemies he has—perhaps even these malcontents despise him in their hearts."

With civil attention M. de Vergennes listened to the young man's agitated appeals, delivered with all the graces of consummate oratory, and all the charms of his seductive personality and pondered over what France might hope for from her investments in the King of Sweden.

He saw in that uncertain light of the one candle that gave a wildness to the scene, at variance with the dainty appointments, a gentleman aged twenty-six years wearing a purple velvet coat cut by a Parisian tailor, a cravat of Malines lace fastened by a brooch of sapphires, with a long scarf of shot silk, blue and crimson across his left shoulder, flowing over his baldric; his sword was as slight as that of a fencing master, his abundant hair, a brown fairer than gold, was fastened back with a diamond buckle and hung in tassel curls to his waist. His features were difficult to describe, his expression was so changing, so vivacious, the attention was so held by the vivid blue eyes, the soft caressing voice, but M. de Vergennes had seen him in repose, at the opera when fascinated by the music and he knew that the countenance was exact, handsome with full firm lips, a clear carnation, a sensitive flush that came and went easily.

"Adonis," thought M. de Vergennes. "A pretty youth—a Queen's favourite—perhaps the leader of some delightful ballet, perhaps an elegant harlequin—a king, a soldier? A leader? Hardly. He does not hunt because he fears the sight of blood."

Gustaf paused before the Frenchman.

"Again I have made you stand," swiftly, but not abruptly, he had concluded his persuasive arguments. "I shall not importune you any longer. Only, my dear Comte, realize that nothing can deter me from my project."

“And nothing, sire, involve France in it,” replied M. de Vergennes with great deference. “As for the money—since your Majesty can do nothing without it—”

“I shall obtain it. Will you see, at least, my followers?”

“If your Majesty can contrive that secretly—or—prudently. Who are they, sire, beyond the young officers of whom you have spoken? And your Majesty’s brothers?”

Gustaf smiled, snuffing the candle.

“The two good souls who wait for me outside, Beylon, my Swiss Reader, Schorderheim, my Herald and factotum.”

“Of no weight whatever, Sire.”

“But faithful and useful. Had I brought soldiers or—men of weight—with me here to-night, we should have been watched, followed—with those two ban-dogs I am left alone. You see, my dear Comte, so many people take me for a fribble. My confederates? Baron Jakob Sprengtporten has some able lieutenants—I shall term the Bishop of Visby my good friend.”

“The army, the navy, the arsenals, the forts, the populace?”

Gustaf glanced up from behind the clean flame. “M. de Vergennes, the harvest has failed for two seasons, the government is in utter anarchy—it is not only the honour of my crown, but the existence of my people—ay, and the welfare of Europe for which I contend.”

These were words that on any other lips the Frenchman would have heard with cynicism, but there was no irony in his mind as he considered—“Has this man really noble and lofty intentions?”

“Meet my conspirators at your embassy, as M. de Modene did in ‘69,” suggested Gustaf, lightly again. “Their lives are held precariously—as is mine—”

“Friendship and policy alike make me and my master true to your Majesty,” protested M. de Vergennes warmly. “Had I the resources of Russia and England to dispose of I should be a happier man.”

The King opened the delicate door and looked into the dark incomplete theatre; a small lamp stood on the empty stage where Beylon and Schorderheim sat on a workman’s trestle, playing cards; their modest figures in sombre cloaks seemed part of a remote drama performed before an invisible audience; the shadows in the wings and flies made the building limitless, as if it merged into the night sky; the black drop cloth seemed an abyss. The King picked up the candle, and shading it with a slender, steady hand, walked across the bare floor. M. de Vergennes, hidden in shade watched the graceful, eager figure in that small fluttering radiance, bright and shining, too. “He has many advantages if he had the courage, he might do it—there is, however, little hope of a success, I must keep France out and spend as little as possible.” The King had reached the stage, standing by the trestle he blew out his candle; Beylon took up the lantern while Schorderheim asked without hope, with the touching familiarity, humble and loving, of an old servant— “What luck, Sire?”

“Very little. He has brought nothing with him, but I shall get something out of him, by writing to France and he will be loyal. Come, it is a little cold.” The King picked up a thin dark mantle that he had tossed over a pile of drawings and plans on a deal table, he threw it over his shoulders, eclipsing himself into the shadow.

"I long to hear music here," he said, he felt he listened to the overture to *Iphigénie en Tauride*, played by phantoms who warned and menaced.

Chapter 4

M. de Vergennes, having made clear his position—all possible help to the revolt without compromising France, listened frankly to the men sent to him by the King; he admitted that they were likely to be very useful for this kind of work, that they were able, discontented, fearless, intelligent, discreet. Baron Jakob Sprengtporten was, the Frenchman acknowledged, more than this, his was a stern and masterful personality, intolerant of everyone but himself, impatient of the faults in others, his brother, Baron Goran was of the same type, but more cautious, there was indeed a look of iron about both of them, lean and hard featured, they wore their Dragoon uniforms with an air at once careless and martial. The elder had been in the army since his twelfth year. The Frenchman soon discovered their motives in the reckless move they were prepared to make, a cold passion for daring adventure, a bitterness against the politicians who had tried, by underhand ways, to ruin their estates in Finland, an intense interest in the gamble for its own sake and an eager lust for the reward. They never smiled, seemed ill tempered and were brusque of manner, besides them Count Karl Scheffer, the Lord Chamberlain showed as the affable, shrewd courtier, but it was to Johan Toll, in his plain civilian attire, his meagre appointments, that the Frenchman gave his secret attention, here was a man who did not disdain courtesy, who had the gifts of strength, of comeliness, of tact, who had no bitterness or malice, who had not bargained for a reward. M. de Vergennes admired the manner in which he, a penurious adventurer who had failed in both the army and the law, had discovered, then forced himself into this most hazardous intrigue; to look at this magnificent man, so serene and amiable, gave M. de Vergennes a sense of confidence that he knew was not justified—nothing could be more imprudent than this proposed *coup d'état*.

"It is astonishing," he remarked, "that neither England nor Russia have discovered your designs, gentleman."

Baron Jakob Sprengtporten named the British ambassador. "Sir John Goodrich has had an inkling from his secret agents, he has warned M. Osterman and some of the leaders of the Riksdag. They refused to believe him," haughtily the Finn added. "You can guess why—they think us extremely unimportant, they hope to break us by fraud among our tenants. They are not afraid of us."

"And the King?" asked the Frenchman.

"The King they do not regard at all," replied Baron Jakob gloomily. "He is popular, yes, he is admired, yes, but it is the popularity, the admiration accorded to—say—an amiable idler."

Count Scheffer made as if to protest, the other, supported by Baron Goran bore him down sternly. "Are we not here to speak the truth, our lives are on this—the very existence of our families."

“We shall come to the problem of His Majesty later,” said the Frenchman with the assurance of his years, his experience and the knowledge that these men depended on him for money; they did not know how little he could command, and however pinched his resources, theirs were even more mean.

They had gathered in the particular cabinet reached from the reception room of the French Embassy; a small casement showed a square of clear sky, the five men sat almost uncomfortably close together in the small space, they whispered and the door was bolted on the inside.

“Enlighten me as to the position in Sweden,” asked M. de Vergennes. “I have studied what I could during a troublesome journey but you, gentlemen, will find me ignorant of much I should know.”

Count Scheffer as the eldest of the conspirators, bowed and referred to Johan Toll. “As a lawyer he can put the matter clearly.”

Toll began to speak, without demur, he knew, as did his colleagues, that the Frenchman was perfectly well aware of the state of affairs not only in Sweden but in all Europe, that he was playing for time, making them talk while he observed them with pitiless and insistent shrewdness; Count Scheffer was inscrutable, the Sprengtporten brothers as impatient as they dared to be, while Toll spoke.

“Karl XII cost us dear, only the exertions of Baron Gortz enabled Sweden to afford his victories, and then it was turnips and leather money. You know how he died, shot at Frederikshall, you can see his blood stained coat in the Riddarsholm Church—perhaps the bullet came from a Swede, so weary were we of war.”

“You speak without reverence!” cried Baron Jakob hotly.

“Yes—as is needful.” Toll’s calm face was unchanged, he addressed himself to the polite attention behind which the Frenchman concealed his scrutiny of these improbable conspirators.

“When Karl XII’s sister seized the throne and had the folly to behead Gortz, the country was in chaos, ruined by twenty campaigns—we had fame, that of Swedish arms and that of having produced an almost fabulous hero—little else—our elected Queen retired after three years, leaving her husband, Frederik of Hesse, to govern a kingdom that had been for a generation at war—a King Log! but we had an honest and a talented man in Count Arvid Horn, he gave us a peace, year by year for the war—twenty years, but he grew old, his party termed the Nightcaps in contempt, was ousted by the military caste, the Hats—they threw out Horn, declared war on our old enemy Russia and lost, disastrously. We had our truce by adopting the Tzarina’s nominee, the Prince Bishop of Holstein—grandfather of the present Majesty.”

“If I recall aright the connection with the Vasa line is remote?” asked M. de Vergennes, referring blandly to the black moire notebook he held.

Toll replied without expression.

“The Prince Bishop—Frederik I’s grandfather’s grandmother was a sister of the great Gustaf Vasa.”

“But,” added Count Scheffer quickly. “You must not touch on that to the King, he will be pure Swede, and pure Vasa.”

“So,” smiled the Frenchman, “the grandson of Russia’s puppet, and the son of the sister of the Prussian enemy plays the Swedish patriot, it is ironical.”

“He had an excellent education,” urged Count Scheffer. “The most brilliant men in the country taught him liberal ideals, he has a natural turn for the heroic.”

“—for the theatre,” put in the Frenchman smoothly.

“—for the virtues of the Vasa line,” insisted Count Scheffer. “M. Toll, pray continue.”

“How can I clarify the present anarchy in our crazy constitution? The two parties, Hats—for war—Caps for peace—speaking roughly, are forever striving together and intriguers of which the foremost is Baron Pechlin run from one to another as their profit suits—in brief, Russia, Denmark and England rule the Riksdag by corruption and the country becomes ruined and bankrupt while these men fill their coffers.”

“The late King endured this very well,” commented M. de Vergennes, “even with a spirited Queen.”

“He saw the friends who had risen in his behalf, tortured and beheaded in ‘69,” said Toll. “He was a weak man, who suffered many humiliations.”

“You gamble on his present Majesty,” replied the Frenchman.

“We gamble,” said Baron Jakob decidedly.

“No need to ask you what you confront?” asked M. de Vergennes.

The Finnish brothers showed a well curbed annoyance at this delay. “We know—the Tzarina is a worthy successor to Peter the Great, she spent forty-thousand rix dollars to win the last elections—she keeps a well equipped fleet in the Baltic,” said Baron Goran keenly. “Denmark is on the frontiers, imbecile though her King may be, his brother-in-law Prince Karl of Hesse is an able general and keeps an eye on us, England is astute and wealthy.”

“And France a wavering ally,” smiled M. de Vergennes. “I must know more of your internal affairs—Who really rules? Who can be trusted?”

“The lawyer takes the word,” said Count Scheffer and Toll spoke again:

“An oligarchy of nobles rule—the poorest, the proudest, perhaps the most corrupt in the world. And no one is to be trusted save the few who are in this plot.”’

Toll bowed towards the two aristocrats, he was himself of the ofralse class.

“Who does the King favour, Cap or Hat?” asked M. de Vergennes.

“He has tried to mediate between them, uselessly, of course, so now this plot.”

The Frenchman fluttered the pages of his notebook, to him the only tolerable form of government was an absolute monarchy, and this rule by parliament seemed to him ridiculous; despite his cleverness and shrewdness he was so prejudiced that he did not perceive that his own country was in as perilous a condition as was Sweden, and that the rule of the Bourbons was unstable as it was splendid.

“Our ideal is,” said Toll coolly, “that power shall rest with the people—four estates, nobles, clergy, burghers, peasants.”

“With the nobility exempt from taxes and alone having the right to high offices of state,” remarked M. de Vergennes approvingly.

“Yet many of them are so poor they cannot afford to come to Stockholm to take their seats in the Riddarhuset and so sell their votes to proxies,” smiled Toll. “The peasants are excluded from the Senate, Diet or Secret Committee, that really governs, buy that and you have bought Sweden.”

“Some idealist without experience has framed this Constitution,” sighed M. de Vergennes. “I perceive the confusion that has inevitably arisen from such a dispersal of power, undoubtedly, gentlemen, you are truly patriotic to endeavour to overthrow this sad state of affairs.”

He did not speak encouragingly and the four men looked at him with a hint of suspicion—had he not been sent especially to assist the King? France had been paying subsidies to Sweden since ‘38 when the Hats had reversed the policy of the Caps and challenged Russia, Ulrica Lovisa had thrown in her fortunes with France even though she was the wife of the Tzarina’s nominee, and the present King’s visit to Paris had been to strengthen this alliance—was the Bourbon bankrupt or false—now at the keen moment of peril?

“I know what you think, gentlemen,” said M. de Vergennes. “That I hesitate. Yes, I do. I did not come to Stockholm expecting to find a revolution preparing, but I am much in sympathy with your design,” he turned sharply to Toll, who had much impressed him; he was an expert in humanity and liked to deal with new material. “You ask why I do hesitate?”

“No,” said Toll. “It is because of the character of the King.”

The Frenchman smiled, pleased by this precision, the Chamberlain made some shift to put up a courtier’s defence of his master, but the Sprengtporten brothers nodded gloomily and the elder remarked:

“We do not hesitate, but we feel that our weakness is the character of the King.”

Chapter 5

Toll listened while the four men discussed Gustaf, they agreed that he was an asset to any cause because of his brilliant personal gifts, in particular, his superb oratory and seductive manners. But what was known of him? None had his confidence. There was no favourite, man or woman. Affable to all, he disclosed himself to none.

“There is not anyone?” insisted M. de Vergennes, puzzled.

Count Scheffer, who had known Gustaf all his life, declared that there was no one, his mother had some influence over him—not much, she was left outside this plot, he took trouble to surround himself with brilliant young men, he told them nothing he would not have told his coachman, a near friend was the Bishop of Visby, but he was ignorant of the mind of the King who despised the Church.

“He is an able intriguer,” said Baron Jakob. “He can conduct this conspiracy, while seemingly absorbed in frivolity, his powers of dissimulation are remarkable, he has tact—are these the gifts of the playhouse only? He has not been put to the test,” the stern soldier was plainly uneasy. “Perhaps we risk our lives, our estates, on a man who plays a masquerade, an actor, a poet, perhaps he fools, with his schemes on paper! Listen, M. de Vergennes, I sent M. Toll to him, and he admitted this stranger to his full confidence at once.”

“It was clever of him, he saw I knew too much,” said Toll calmly. “And remember I had already persuaded you that I might be useful.”

“You had found out too much for us to be indifferent to you, certainly,” replied Baron Jakob. “I sent you to the King—partly to test him—partly to test you.”

“I know. You almost hoped he would have me disposed of when I made my bold throw, you almost hoped you would be rid of me that way.” Toll spoke with good humour, with deference towards the French Ambassador. “You were in two minds about me of course—yet, if he had done just that, you would have known him fearful, suspicious and cruel and would perhaps not have continued to intrigue for him—as it is—” Toll was abruptly silent.

“He acted, perhaps, like a fool, confessed everything, accepted you on my word.”

“On his own perception,” corrected Toll; he spoke directly to M. de Vergennes. “Do you, Sir, consider His Majesty a fribble? It is important that we should know how far you think we may trust him.”

“I saw him for a few weeks only at Versailles, against a glittering background, he exactly suited our taste, our fashion. I cannot judge his capacity to endure a great role—his courage—”

“Courage,” repeated Baron Jakob sombrely. “His is no martial temperament—has he heard a musket fired? He is afraid of assassination and keeps a pair of pistols on his desk. Wears mail, perhaps, beneath his waistcoat—we deal with a Prince who writes verses, and embroiders ladies’ sashes, also designs costumes, wears a silk scarf—vermilion heels.”

“A useful disguise for one in his position,” remarked Toll.

“Is it a disguise? Is it not the man himself?” demanded Baron Goran keenly. “He is too accomplished in all gentle arts.”

“But you have backed him, gentlemen, as has France,” smiled M. de Vergennes. “An enigmatical character. Courage? He will need that, of many kinds, to put through this—fantastic adventure.”

“So fantastic it is not credited,” said Toll. “That is amusing is it not—Sir John Goodrich suspects, but none will believe him. Well, I’ll answer for Scania, I await only the signal.”

Baron Jakob asked bluntly:

“How much money can you raise for us, M. de Vergennes?”

“The King had the first instalment of his subsidy, a million and a half livres last January,” replied the Frenchman taking refuge in a seeming stupidity, repeating what was known to all of them.

The Finns despised this fencing—were they dealing with avarice or bankruptcy?

“It has been his sole resource,” remarked Baron Jakob. “One does not buy Sweden for a million and a half livres. It was expected that your Excellency would bring more supplies.”

M. de Vergennes, careful not to admit that he could not compete with Prussia, England or Denmark financially, made wary half promises, and turned the talk onto the Struensee scandal that had, he believed, further disgusted Gustaf with his unlucky wife, and with the King’s visit, on his return from Paris, to his uncle Frederik of Prussia at Potsdam. “They disliked one another, I hear? These family alliances on which one counts so much, how little they prove! The Danish marriage has been complete disaster—and the Queen Mother, so loyal to her son, cannot influence her brother in his favour.” The Frenchman rose and his guests got to their feet, Toll a head and shoulders above them all. “I wish you success,

gentlemen," a keen question followed the conventional words. "What do you suppose your King will make of his success—if he obtains it?"

"He means to be a citizen king of a free people," said Baron Jakob. "A disciple of Voltaire—Rousseau. As for me—say that the game, not the stakes are my concern."

"Do you trust him?" asked the Frenchman. "He has shown he can deceive. He has signed the oath to a Constitution he intends to subvert, maybe you hatch a tyrant."

"If he has the makings of a Caesar," smiled Baron Goran, "one among us will have the makings of a Brutus. I do not fear his tyranny—but his lack of courage. He must act alone in Stockholm, Toll and Prince Karl will be in Scania, I and my brother in Finland—"

"You have to risk the question of his courage," said M. de Vergennes. "I hardly understand him—why does he concern himself with dangerous plots? For one of his temperament the life he has—every luxury—a gilded idleness—should be sufficient."

The Frenchman considered his own court where Louis XV lived so unperturbed by any pricks of conscience, of idealism, of heroics; secretly the ambassador considered Gustaf likely to make an absurd failure—Russia would pounce across Finland, England send her fleet to the Baltic—Denmark push across the frontiers, France would face yet another political failure, and the four fine men now begging money from the Bourbon would die barbarously. Probing Count Scheffer who had known Gustaf so intimately, the Frenchman tried again to discover if there was not anyone who had the King's confidence; M. de Vergennes was so accustomed to working through favourites that this situation found him at a loss.

"None," repeated the Chamberlain. "You might say that he is open with all, accessible to all, uninfluenced by any—until this plot, he was candid and concealed nothing."

"He must be very lonely," remarked the Frenchman dryly.

"He wears openly the colours of Madame d'Egmont, he was much with her when in Paris, but she is entirely virtuous and he gave his friendship to other noble ladies of pure reputations, Madame de la Marck, Madame de Boufflers—nothing there, a coquetting with philosophy and the graces of the salons."

He looked with a trace of compassion at the two soldiers, the courtier, the adventurer, who were prepared to stake their all on such a King as Gustaf III was likely to prove, but compassion was not in his instructions, he had to maintain the dignity and credit of a great nation who possessed little of either. He asked if there was any means of getting rid of Baron Pechlin, the ablest of the King's enemies and if Baron Jakob was sure of his officers?

Pechlin, was the reply, was far too cunning to be meddled with, had it been possible to make away with him, that would have been done before now, but he was sly and cautious to the extreme, the only hope of outwitting him was by a surprise. As to his confederates, Baron Jakob could count he said, on several members of his loyalist club, "The Swedish Band," men of integrity and importance, who did not, however, yet know the details of the plot, he mentioned a naval man, Henrick Af Trolle, and a Baron Saltza of the Guards…

“Pechlin flatters the King,” said Toll, “but when I told him there was his chief enemy he replied that he knew—I warned him also of Prince Karl and Aurora Lowenhjelm.”

“You were bold,” remarked M. de Vergennes.

“I have to be. His Majesty received my impertinence well. We cannot trust Prince Karl who means to marry Fersen’s niece, we cannot trust this silly frivolous girl. But we can trust the King to avert this danger.”

“Ah,” the Frenchman shook his head. “Is he also not frivolous? He has told this mighty secret to M. Beylon and M. Schorderheim, two humble civilian members of his household.”

“Who would die for him,” added Toll, “and who fetch and carry for him without attracting attention, so that he need not employ any servant or messenger on his secret business.”

M. de Vergennes watched the two Swedes, the two Finns, as they picked up their gloves and cloaks. He rebuked himself for stupidity, really, he had become unbalanced in his judgment through having so far met only one type of human being; these men were honest, were patriots, they were not considering their own advantage, indeed they were all, except Toll, in good positions, they had everything to lose, even Toll could have sold himself at a high price to Pechlin or Russia, but they were really moved by these bad harvests, that corrupt Diet, the national vassalage, the poverty and suffering of their country, the debased coinage, the humiliation of a people essentially noble and brave. The Frenchman had often yawned through dramas where Bayard or some such chivalrous figment of academic fancy had declaimed self sacrificing and lofty sentiments, until now, he had not taken such aspects of mankind seriously; he had pulled himself up only just in time—he had nearly been so foolish as not to believe in the possibility of virtue.

The Swedish Band—the key to the puzzle was there; these quiet men were the prototypes the posturing actors aped; perhaps even the King? It was bizarre, but possible, that he had neither mistress, favourite nor vice, that he too was a patriot—a patriot? Sweden was his by adoption only, more likely he was a brilliant harlequin, but M. de Vergennes resolved to keep an open mind; he felt slightly uneasy, he would have preferred to have dealt With Osterman, Goodrich or even Pechlin.

Chapter 6

Two days before his Coronation the King sent Toll to Scania; he gave him a hundred rix dollars and instructions he had to memorise—“Baron Jakob is insistent that we put nothing in writing,” he said. “Any documents found on you would endanger others and not serve you.”

“They are the usual terms on which a secret agent works sire.” Toll sat by the window of the closet to which Beylon had privately admitted him; from the closed casement he could see the stone houses and towers with brass cupolas of the

ancient “City within the Bridges,” beyond, the granite rocks and the blue green woods; the King was opposite, rapidly drawing, then scribbling across, designs on a sheet of paper; the folio of many pages that contained the programme for his coronation ceremonial, was close to his quickly moving hand, he wore a loose chamber robe and his long bright hair was without powder, for this was the early light of day when he was supposed asleep in the bed with the silver brocade curtains.

“I shall sign an order for what you do,” he said without looking up, “that might save you—from the rack, the wheel, if you were taken.”

“Your Majesty would implicate yourself.”

Gustaf turned aside his drawing and wrote on a clean sheet of paper, reading aloud what he wrote: “You will carry out the plan you yourself proposed, you will provoke a sham revolt at Kristianstad—in the other fortresses of the South, Landscrona, Malmo, in the Arsenal of Karlscrona. Captain Hellichus at Kristianstad is loyal, but knows nothing of my designs—you can rely on Major Kaulbars at Malmo—the rest you must win as you go. As soon as I have news of the revolt I shall send Prince Karl.”

He signed “Gustaf” and gave the paper to Toll who returned it at once.

“Do you not even require credentials?” The King smiled, tore up the paper. “Well, I trust your wits. You guessed shrewdly about my brother’s weakness—he must hint to his lady, that he will soon be a great man and worthy of her acceptance.”

“Did he confess to your Majesty?”

“No, Mademoiselle Aurora confessed. I asked her in a whisper after supper, over the tric-trac board—if Karl had insinuated to her a secret. I saw by her frightened eyes that he had done precisely that—I added—the country’s future rests on your discretion, Karl’s life and that of many others, but I am not uneasy. She will not speak.”

“A light-minded girl of eighteen years,” remarked Toll. “Your Majesty is very subtle in your candour.”

“You think it a trick?” asked Gustaf, resting his head on his hand. “But I really do trust people. Hornesca, the Dutch Bankers, advanced me half the next French subsidy, on my bare word—what security have I?—because I told them Dutchmen must support a people striving to be free. You think this artful, Toll?”

Here, thought Toll, is one who is very lonely and anxious to be respected—perhaps to be loved. How can he exist without affection? His life is a sham, frivolity masking intrigue, well, we shall soon know his quality. Looking up suddenly, Gustaf smiled.

“You do not think that I can do this—and yet you risk your life for me?”

“For Sweden, sire.”

The King’s easy flush stained his cheeks.

“It is the same, as you shall know,” he added. “You discussed me with M. de Vergennes? All of you wondered—if I could play my part?”

Even Toll’s tact was hardly proof against this revelation of the King’s insight, that was delivered delicately, in a tone of light raillery, but Toll found, and at once, the right feint to this thrust.

“I also, am to be put to the proof, sire, had I thought of failure, I had not put my hand to this enterprise.”

The King looked at the closed case of pistols lying on his desk.

“If I fall—I mean that—fall, I shall remain on my feet until I have my death wound—I do not wish my death avenged. No bloodshed for Sweden on my account. M. Beylon, who is so faithful, brought me there, a fine set of dainty English fire arms, but it is not my intention to carry them, no, nor yet the dagger provided by my mother. Nothing but my sword—and that more of a courtier’s than a soldier’s weapon. Neither shall I wear hidden mail.”

“Why should your Majesty be so reckless?” asked M. Toll emphatically.

“Because precautions are not worth while,” replied the King with sudden warmth—“all or nothing—total hazard.”

Toll understood that attitude—if it were genuine; again he was startled by the King’s sensitiveness, for Gustaf exclaimed: “You do not believe me? Take the weapons yourself, do what you will with them. There has been no large arsenal in the palace since I was King, a small armoury only.” He opened a drawer in the handsome desk and brought out a dagger in a case of white shagreen, the golden hilt was set with small emeralds; it looked like a lady’s toy and could easily be hidden in a waistcoat pocket.

“Carry them, you will need them,” smiled the King, he held out his hand, the interview was over. Toll kissed the long fingers and took his leave, too wise to dispute the royal commands that had in no wise altered his doubt as to the King’s character.

Chapter 7

Gustaf preferred his other palaces to the magnificent residence on the Skeppsbro—the beauties of Ulriksdal, of Drottningholm, the charm of the little summer house at Haga, even the majestic splendour of Gripsholm, all of which he was improving and furnishing entirely to his own taste, pleased him more than the costly pile erected by Tessin, so superbly situated on the stately quays, with steps down to the water where the royal yacht Amphion was anchored, yet embellished with stove houses where grew those rare fruits, peach, apricot and nectarine, those blooms of the South, tuberose, freezia, camellia and African carnation; the menagerie where the lynx with tasselled ears prowled behind gilded bars; the statues from Italy, the temples from Greece. When Gustaf was in residence in his capital, he usually occupied a suite of small rooms, not the state apartments, that were so vast and lofty, and, even in the summer, cold. But lately he had been conducting his affairs in these impressive chambers, dining and receiving in the great salons, in order to give dignity to his position and, at the same time, to deceive the nobility with his appearance of extravagance and frivolity.

Only he retained his small sleeping apartment that he had used as Crown Prince, from a dislike of the ornate state bedroom with the alcoved bed canopied in blue velvet with the three crowns worked in gold bullion as a recurrent design in

the centre and the gorgeous ornament of gilt foliage and amorini encircling the wheatsheaf arms of Vasa.

He had played his part for the day, supped in public, taken his place at the silver card table, laughed with the tight-laced ladies in the furbelowed hoops, jested with the shaven poodles and parrots chained to swinging hoops, been witty, light, amusing—"no one surely, could suspect my design," he thought, and his full lip curled as he recalled that he had sensed the surprise, perhaps the contempt, with which his signature to the new Coronation Oath, that deprived him of the last rag of political power, had been received even among those who had not held him in much esteem.

It was to his mother's apartments that he went and as he entered her presence he was vexed by a recent loss; the cherished little white glove had disappeared, he had misplaced it among all the trifles with which he made play, in order to divert his ministers and his servants from his real intentions; he succeeded however, in fixing his thoughts on Toll, travelling to Scania, to rouse a province without credentials and supplied only with a hundred dollars. Gustaf much wished he could have provided a larger sum, but the advance from Messrs. Hornesca had largely gone in the expenses of the Coronation, despite the ruined harvests and the sufferings of the people, the prestige of the crown must be upheld by that lavish display of the rare and the costly that marked the King from his subjects.

The Queen Mother was extravagant and always in debt, her taste was noble and she insisted on surrounding herself with brilliant wits, scholars and courtiers, whom she fee'd and pensioned lavishly; usually in the summer she resided in the island palace of Drottningholm, set amid French and English gardens and avenues of pungently scented pines, or in Ulriksdal; she was in Stockholm merely for the Coronation; her mood was haughty, used to rule, to domineer, to be flattered, she accepted second place in her son's establishment with a secret fury sharpened by her scornful hatred of her daughter-in-law.

Ulrika Lovisa wore a purple velvet undress on white lace, ruffle on ruffle, and caressed a string of pearls twisting it, as a pet serpent round her bare arm, clipped with sapphires. Gustaf wished the value of it were in Toll's pocket; she nodded to his reflection in the mirror beside her needlework chair. Ulrika Lovisa had the grace and bearing that survives the loss of bloom, time had not misused her beauty nor quenched her spirit; a weak amiable husband, three sons, a daughter, a circle of flatterers, picked for their parts, for she did not tolerate the mediocre or the humble, had not satisfied the eager pride and bounding zest for life of this proud daughter of the House of Brandenburg.

She received her son with a calculated smile; she had taken passionate care of his education and personally seen that his gifts were developed and adorned with all that the brains of notable men could spend on him. She admired her own gifts repeated in him, but she had always preferred his brothers, especially Frederik and she had never forgiven Gustaf his marriage nor his refusal to share with her, his brilliant mother, all his affairs.

She did not, however, believe that he concealed anything important from her, for she thought him slight and incapable of dissimulation.

The King saluted her, then went to the window place and looked across the bridge that crossed Norrstrom, beyond on the mainland, he could see the Arsenal,

the Opera House in front of which was the statue of Gustaf Adolf II; there were carriages going to and fro, sledges on which were bound logs of wood and barrels, sedan chairs and a jostle of people on foot; the capital was crowded for the Coronation.

"You always go to the window, my son, as if you wished to escape," remarked the Queen Dowager.

"That is so," he assented. "My fancy is too lively. I feel trapped, even in this large room—you recall, Madame, the engravings by M. Piranesi the elder—the Prisons, in each of them there is the figure of a man trying to get out from a chaos of machinery."

Ulrika Lovisa was surprised at the turn to the conversation, she remarked that the Italian had been insane when he had executed those eccentric designs, and asked her son if he had come to discuss art with her?

He was instantly aware of her sneer; once they had been eagerly at one in the matter of all the elegancies of life, choosing together the buildings, the gardens, the books, music, statues, pictures and other luxuries in which they both delighted, but since his marriage Gustaf had consulted his own taste only.

"You will be crowned to-morrow, Sire, it will be a pretty show, no doubt, but the man, not the crown, makes the King. I do not commend the signing of the Coronation Oath after so long a refusal."

"The man involved in those stairs, dungeons, wheels and ladders, had to find a way out, Madame."

"Your simile is tiresome. Since you have been to Paris you have affected too much the airs of a *petit maître*." The Queen-Dowager slid the pearls onto her velvet lap and looked at her son with narrowed, tired eyes; he wore, as it was often his whim to wear, the national dress of Sweden, black and red satin, with a falling collar and cuffs of delicate lace, and the long scarf of the period of Gustaf Adolf II he always affected, now of black taffetta, his hair was free of powder and shone in the light of the clear May day.

His mother believed him resigned to the part that her husband had played so meekly, that of a marionette, whose strings were jerked by the oligarchy of the nobles, and, much as she despised such feebleness she had no temper for politics and cared little for anything but her immediate ease and supremacy over her own circle.

"I have considered, Madame," said Gustaf softly, "that Sophia and myself should be united, this nominal marriage is against nature and honour. I come to ask you to speak to her for me, to put before her, as you alone can, the need for our reconciliation."

Ulrika Lovisa saw through the tact of this direct approach and disdained it—"Reconciliation?" she countered. "Did you ever quarrel?"

"No—it is more than a quarrel. I meant, reconcile our natures, so different—a task for you alone and worthy of you," he emphasised, turning towards her with a graceful appeal; he knew that if he approached his wife directly all his mother's crafty jealousy would be aroused to blight them both; but she was not placated by his tribute to her skill and tenderness.

"Sophia is a silly shame face," she threw out contemptuously, "unable to put two sentences together, without wit or feeling, without dignity or spirit. Is it

possible that you, after all these years, tolerate this Danish marriage into which you were weak enough to be forced?"

"Had you been more tolerant, Madame, it had been more successful—now, she is my wife and I intend—"

The Queen-Dowager cut short his sentence as if he had been a child.

"Do not ask my help or sympathy. Had you, as I wished married a Brandenburg Princess, you would not have found me unkind to your wife—but this! And now, when the court of Denmark is disgraced—"

"Sophia has long left Denmark," put in the King. "Shy, reserved and pious she shows no sign of the disorders that have ruined her family."

"She is sister to Kristian, an imbecile, a lunatic," remarked Ulrika Lovisa distinctly. "You must have heard what some of her ladies say of her—recall that Kristian's child is puny, witless." As Gustaf, holding his left side, did not speak, she continued with easy malice. "Do you, who dream of heroes, wish to beget a half wit?"

"Do you not wish to see an heir to the crown?" he asked with that calm she so detested.

"Your brothers will marry," she replied fondling the lustrous pearls against her powdered cheek. "Your sister's child could inherit—the blood would be the same." She rose. "Leave Sophia to the retirement that alone suits her stupidity, she is half imbecile and so would any child of hers be—"

"No one save yourself would dare say that to me," he smiled. "I do not believe Sophia has this taint."

"You do," Ulrika Lovisa insisted. "She provokes disgust in you, revulsion, someone else has your heart, you are very cold or very sly in your amours. You are resolved that no one shall influence you, eh?" She spoke mockingly as if she did not consider him important enough to be so secretive. "You wear Madame d'Egmont's colours. What trick is that? Do you ever hear from this paragon?"

"How should I hear from anyone at Versailles save our Ambassador?" he parried. "Sophia does not disgust me, I treat her with respect and compassion."

"Compassion! She can console herself with her religion, blind with superstition, she has always a Bible or a prayer book in her hand."

"One cannot grudge her that support. She is virtuous."

"You think so? Were you as weak as Kristian, her brother, maybe she would dare to find a Struensee—Caroline is her cousin—all that blood is tainted."

"How you hate her," sighed the King. "On the eve of my Coronation I had hoped to find you in a tender mood."

"You should have known better than to expect any softness from me towards Sophia."

"Yes. Your rebuke is just, Madame," he turned, as if to bow himself from the room, but with a quick gesture, well known to him from nursery days she stayed him; he stopped instantly and with respect; he never forgot how much she had meant to him once. His liberal, brilliant education, his free mind, his splendid entourage were due to her, not to the weak father he had loved.

"The country is in an alarming state. Do you not intend to make an effort against these disasters?"

“I shall try to hold the balance between the parties—to set Russia, England and Denmark against one another.”

“Russia has bought Sweden,” said the Queen Mother. “And France has bought you.” She laughed softly. “I should have been the man in this family.”

He allowed her challenge to pass; he did not even feel tempted to tell her of Toll riding fast to Scania, of the plot daily spreading cautiously wider and wider, he considered her, despite her imperious temper, unfitted to dominate in any but backstairs intrigues and he knew that her once proud passion for him had turned to dislike since he had superseded her on the throne. He had hoped to stir that old affection to-day and that she would rise to the lofty part he had assigned her, of peacemaker between himself and his wife, but he quickly acknowledged how vain this hope had been, he was used to expecting too much from others and being disappointed. Brilliant, wayward, dangerous, jealous, a disciple like her brother, of the negative side of Voltaire’s philosophy, artful and selfish, the beautiful Prussian Princess, for all her gifts and charms, had not brought comfort, ease or pleasure into anyone’s life while her own had been embittered by the feebleness of the husband who had brought her nothing but a crown; she had found it difficult to tolerate even the memory of this amiable, affectionate man who had been beloved by all her children for his amusing ways, his indulgent temper and his elegant tastes. Now she was stung by the breach she had herself provoked and began her usual taunts; she struck skilfully at the King’s high minded patriotism that had always irritated her and that she affected to regard as a theatrical pose; though she had herself educated her children in the fashionable atheism and lofty idealism of the French philosophers, she mocked, when it suited her, at the results of her own training—the cult of abstract honour and heroism.

“I hope,” she remarked, “that when you speak to the people it will be in a sober style—your oratory is splendid no doubt, but it is ridiculous to hear you refer so constantly to the glories of the Vasa line—that are vanished forever, and that you are attached, too, by so slight a connection.”

“Why do you warn me?” he asked gently, “does it affect you, Madame? You are always finding some trait in me to rouse your irony.”

She knew him invulnerable to her taunts and her anger hardened.

“Keep to that kind of cross answer,” she replied, “that I myself taught you, practise a clever evasion of the difficulties and disagreeables of life, write your verses, act your plays, build your pleasure houses, be Madame d’Egmont’s knight—all these affectations and refined occupations suit you very well, but do not strike any heroic attitude—you are not suited for the part of saviour of a country that is, after all, only by chance yours.”

“Kingship,” said Gustaf, “is a special profession—the attachment of a Prince to a country he rules is beyond the patriotism of the common citizen. The Vasa Kings whose names I bear influence me, however remote my descent from them, this country where I was born and bred is mine—why do I argue with you?” he checked himself smiling, with compassion and regret.

He forebore to add that he felt no allegiance to the House of Brandenburg, that antagonism only had arisen between himself and his uncle when he had visited the King of Prussia at Potsdam. His mother resented his tolerance, if he had quarrelled with her she might, she thought, have conquered him, as it was he lay

without her reach; through a weak despised husband she had ruled the court, even if the country had always been alien and untouched, now, with sons she had herself trained with passionate care, she was in the background; she did not wish them to be as feeble as their father, but she wanted them to be in her power; she had not succeeded in avoiding the Danish marriage for the King, but she had discounted it, there, at least, she had been successful in reducing Sophia to a cipher. Yet still this clever woman's son had escaped her and she knew it; using candour to surround his secret he had baffled her as completely on the subject of Madame d'Egmont as on the matter of his politics; his days were spent in frivolous, if elegant, diversions and yet he talked of "the heroes of the Vasa line" and "lofty patriotism;" she tried to sneer, she should have been used to these noble, vapid, senseless sentiments of the salons where, in idle luxury, the over educated and the over sensitive made toys of virtue and honour.

Gustaf watched his mother as keenly as she watched him, but not with contempt or fret, rather with understanding and compassion for a brilliant, beautiful creature, frustrated in most of her desires. He knew she was dangerous and that, as she could not dominate him, she might intrigue against him, with adroit, bitter little backstairs schemes whispered among her women, her pages, even among her servants, with hostile actions and hurtful words.

"Karl," she said suddenly, "is nearer to me than you are—he, at least, opens his heart to me."

These words, spoken in good faith, emphasized to Gustaf the isolation in which all of them stood, Karl had not revealed the plot to his mother, yet he had betrayed it to a girl who would have been ignored as a fool by Ulrika Lovisa. Yet Gustaf was not sure of Karl nor of Frederik, though he had to trust them as Sprengtporten and Toll had to trust him; all their lives hung by gossamer threads. They trod near such a horror as had eclipsed the court of Denmark, the conspirators moving masked in the splendid, waxlit ball room, the midnight arrests, Struensee in rose silk and sables, swooning, cursing, chained, Caroline Matilda, in dishevelled cambric and swansdown, trying to cast herself from her bedroom window while the soldiers dragged at her soft limbs, the running up and down dark stairs of armed antagonists, the pistol shots, the blue sheen of bared steel, the long shadowed corridors and twisting flights of marble steps, the vast and lofty rooms and behind all the sombre vistas of the dungeon, the red sawdust on the scaffold. He, Gustaf, saw all this, in such a bitter streak of vision, that for a second he felt faint and snatched into an hallucination where he was Piranesi's haunted figure, caught in a web of wheels and vaults, ladders and pulleys, a phantasmagoria of crazy architecture gigantic, impalpable, then his nimble mind was serene again, he smiled at his mother and spoke to her gently of her debts; she must endeavour to live within her allowance and he recommended that she should retire in an honoured seclusion to Gripsholm, away from the fatigues of the court where she must endure so much that was displeasing to her taste. She knew this meant banishment from the capital, from public life; she had, warned by Frederik, expected as much. Her narrow face hardened, she countered in a manner that was, for her, childish—what expenses had he not piled up in Paris? Those crates of porcelain, of pictures, of furniture that came so frequently from France? His buildings, the academies he proposed to found, the Italians paid to send him

antiquities from Rome and Florence—his expensive musicians, his richly staged dramas, his superb Opera House?

These last words sent the chords of the *Iphigénie* overture through his mind, a supplication and a warning, evoked by this malicious silliness peculiar to a clever woman.

"I am the King," he replied quietly. "What I do is for Sweden."

Her sneers sighed into silence on her lips; he stood in the doorway, as a full length portrait in a frame, and his likeness to the Vasa Kings with whom he was so remotely connected in blood abashed her, as if she, atheist as she was, had suddenly seen something that might have had some spiritual meaning. Her son had the elegant, narrow athletic body of Karl XII, the blond hair, brighter than gold, the long features, the pale, clear carnation, the noble features, the inscrutable smile of those dead Vasa monarchs, to her so bleak and remote, who had never been influenced by man or woman. She moved abruptly, impatient of her bewilderment at her own son; she could not believe that the spirit of Karl XII, the grim and ruthless hero, was concealed in the body of this graceful, accomplished and charming dilettante—it was his eyes that deceived, those blue eyes that changed from a flash as a sword, or moonlight on ice to the blue of a summer flower; his secret lay there, a mere physical peculiarity, those blue eyes, so uncommon in size and brilliance as to both fascinate and alarm, even in this country of blue eyed people.

"I wonder," he said softly, "you cannot like me, I wonder you cannot try to heal my wretched marriage. I wonder you harbour my enemies."

"It is not true!" she caught at his last words. "I labour entirely for your advantage."

"As does your friend, Baron Pechlin?"

"Yes, the ablest man in Sweden—you vaunt an open mind, you should admire how aloof he held himself from petty party politics."

"He betrays all in turn," replied Gustaf slightly, "as it suits him. A very dangerous, worthless man."

Ulrika Lovisa twisted the string of pearls in her pretty hands, she felt baffled and duped.

"I wish," she complained, "you would not wear that old-fashioned scarf—merely because it is the Gustavan manner."

Tears came into her eyes, mother of three sons and one of them a King, she had no power open to her beyond the usual kitchen maid intrigues, available to every slut in the world; she glanced at the lilac, green and silver favour her son wore at his lapel, there was something in his life from which he shut her out; how different with Karl, who wished to marry Fersen's niece, there, at least, she could meddle and spoil.

"Go," she whispered bitterly. "You are no use to me—nor to anyone. Weak, yes, I could have managed that, as I managed your father, but weak and obstinate, close and secretive."

He bowed and left her; never had she been able to make him angry; her rage with him always returned on herself, making her sick, weary and meditating mischief.

Chapter 8

As the King, unattended as usual, left his mother's apartments, he crossed a chamber where the windows were open to the sun that shines so steadily and with such rich warmth, during the short Swedish summer. There the pages who were to attend the Coronation were resting after having for the hundredth time rehearsed their parts; all of noble Swedish blood, they lay on brocade and velvet cushions in the window place, the gentle salt breeze blowing across acacia blossoms and roses over their pale tight rolled curls; mothers and governesses attended them, feeding them with crisp sugar plums, smooth dragées and tiny porcelain cups of chocolate. The King paused, motioning, with a smile, all to remain at ease; he turned to a little group about the green velvet settee where Madame Pechlin was playing at chess against herself; close to her were seated Countess Ribbing, Countess Horn and Countess Liljehorn, Baroness Bjleke, each had her boy seated, sleepy and satisfied, on the flounces of her rich skirts. The King forbade them to rise; he considered the children with tender pleasure, his pages, then his officers, his nobles and his guards, they represented the Sweden he intended to rescue from Russia, from every foreign power, healthy and handsome in their ceremonial habits, with rumpled locks and sleepy eyes, the well trained children insisted on rising respectfully—Ture Bjleke, the oldest, already a youth, Pontus Liljehorn grasping the skirts of his governess, Ludvig Ribbing, Klaus Horn, the King smiled at all in turn, then spoke to Madame Pechlin, who had got to her feet and was curtseying; she had been taught by her husband to fawn; Gustaf glanced at her chessboard. "Right hand against left, Madame?" he asked.

"My husband, Sire, played black, then he was called away—on your Majesty's business with M. von Engerstrom—from this idle scene. Now I try to defeat him—in vain."

Gustaf supposed she spoke in parables, perhaps in warning—if Pechlin knew of the plot—if Pechlin had any inkling of the plot—the King put out his hand, his lace cuff touched the pieces; he moved the white King.

"It is easy, Madame, check mate to the black Empress."

She thanked him with another curtsey, disconcerted by his unexpected skill; the ease with which he could achieve any elegant accomplishment often baffled and even alarmed those who rated him as a charming marionette. The King asked the name of one of the youngest pages, with dark hair and features, sombre for his age, who, the most distant of the group, remained sprawling and played with a small toy pistol.

"Sire, it is little Jakob Anckarstrom," replied Madame Pechlin; the child, hearing his name, looked round and stared at the King from clouded eyes; Gustaf thought of the pair of pistols he had given to Toll who might be fingering them now in his ride to Kristianstad, and of the missing glove that Madame d'Egmont had worn when she had sat beside him in the Paris Opera House while Iphigénie was played.

Chapter 9

That evening Gustaf asked Beylon to search again for the glove, but the faithful Reader, in despair, had already overturned everything in the King's apartments, telling the lackeys, and all the gentlemen save Colonel Munch, the Equerry most close in the royal favour that he looked for a diamond brooch; but the glove, so small a trifle, had not been found.

"It has been kept too carefully, Sire, you have surely locked it away in some secret place."

Beylon, who could hardly control his agitation as the daring plot increased its ramifications, added that Toll had given him the King's pistols and dagger.

"Why?" asked Gustaf. "They were not marked, they would not have incriminated him."

"He said, sire, that they were too rich and valuable for him and that he had his own army weapons—perhaps your Majesty will take them again?" pleaded the Reader nervously, "and wear a steel cuirass, there is one, light as a lady's corselet, in the little armoury.

"Elk's hide or oxhide will turn bullets better than steel," smiled the King, "but there are two leathern jackets in Riddarsholm Church that have been pierced. I'll have no weapons about my person, or in my apartments, Beylon."

"What shall I do with these pistols and the dagger, Sire? I have no wish to be armed if you are not." Beylon spoke with simple loyalty.

"Give them to Schorderheim, he can enter the armoury without exciting attention."

"You would not employ Colonel Munck or Count Scheffer for this, Sire?"

"The first is my friend, but knows nothing of the plot—the second is not a stable man, he does not believe in me." Gustaf spoke thoughtfully. "He works with me for his own interest, he might even betray me, yes, Beylon, if we have an informer amongst us it is Karl Scheffer."

This was Beylon's opinion, smooth and flattering as the Chamberlain was he could only be relied on as long as he served success.

"I shall keep the weapons locked in my desk, Sire, and choose a quiet moment to return them to the armoury. I do not intend to broadcast the fact that you are unarmed. I have tried to let your lacqueys think you are privately defended. I shall let them believe you carry the pistols and the dagger—remember your mother gave one to you, Sire," the Reader spoke anxiously.

"Poor Beylon!" the King sighed. "I know that, humanly speaking, I am in constant peril of my life from some malcontent, but I do not really believe I shall be assassinated, no Swede would do that."

Beylon thought how pitiful it was that a man who had never harmed anyone, should accept with tranquillity the overshadowing horror of secret and sudden murder.

"I wish I could have given Toll more money," said Gustaf again voicing this regret, "but one must dress one's part, Beylon, kingship has its trappings. I shall go out to-night, Beylon."

He rested his head on his hand, and though a mirror was before him, he did not look into it, his thoughts were not of himself, but of all those others who would die horribly, leaving ruined families behind him, if his throw of total hazard failed.

Chapter 10

Where the King went so often privately was a solved puzzle though he went disguised in a cloak of midnight blue colour that blended with the shadows, and a plain tricorne, without a cockade, pulled over his brows; while he was Crown Prince his mother's spies had followed him and reported these furtive movements in which he was accompanied by his younger brothers, before her jealous suspicions had been awakened, the able and vigilant Chief of Police, Baron Liljensparre had put some of his strictly trained men onto shadowing the Prince. The Queen Dowager had long since ceased to concern herself as to these secret visits of her sons to a modest house in a back street, and Baron Liljensparre had them followed merely as a matter of routine, in case they became involved in some incident not conformable to the dignity of royalty, though he had not much fear of that, Stockholm was an orderly city, there was little crime or vice among an easy going people with a tolerant religion and not much money to spend, besides, Baron Liljensparre was most efficient in his duty, that he followed strictly, without heed to politics.

At first Ulrika Lovisa had feared a secret woman; Kings sometimes found their favourites in the gutter as the detestable example of Madame Du Barry had shown, at first the police had thought so, too; now both knew that the brothers went to visit an ancient seeress, Madame Arfmedsson, who affected to be the widow of a country parson, but who was nothing of the kind, but an adept in every kind of occultism, of obscure origin.

Baron Liljensparre had a complete dossier under her name, knew most of her tricks and colleagues and the medley of what he termed rubbish that she dealt in, compounded from the new doctrines of those fashionable madmen, Swedenborg and Mesmer, darlings of the salons and the ancient witchcraft of remote sorcerers hidden in the morasses of Finland and Lapland the eternal sources of all wizardry.

Ulrika Lovisa had felt contemptuous on discovering the superstition of the sons whom she had carefully trained in the doctrines of Voltaire, but had controlled herself from upbraiding them, for she supposed that this secret might some day be useful; a careful espionage had discovered nothing but nonsense in these meetings where the crone read fortunes in coffee grounds. Karl acted as an intermediary between this world and the invisible world and Gustaf and Frederik tried to raise spirits, still, a weak spot had been discovered in the characters of the young men, one of which they, who posed as sceptics, were ashamed, and their mother hoarded her knowledge sharing it only among a few intimates. The Chief of Police was silent because of respect and discretion, the royal amusements seemed to him harmless even decorous, even amiable weaknesses compared to the insane

licence taken by the King of Denmark and his blackguard hangers-on, who rioted nightly in the streets of Copenhagen.

Both the Queen Dowager and Baron Liljensparre were privately amused by the cordial terms under which the three brothers met at the wise woman's house, for in general they took very little notice of one another and the two younger were believed to be jealous of the King; no doubt Madame Arfmedsson, to secure high fees had persuaded the Princes that there was a blood tie between them that would help them in their attempts to storm the mysteries of the unseen and unheard powers.

Baron Liljensparre expected the King would consult the sorceress the evening before his Coronation as to the auguries for his reign, and though the Chief of Police, whose work was not political, knew nothing of any plot in particular, he took it for granted that as the state of the country was so wretched, the government so crazy, busy intriguers like Pechlin and Fersen so powerful, the Queen Dowager so artful a schemer, the court so frivolous and irreligious, there were likely to be dangerous people and perhaps dangerous plans abroad. Moreover the careful official considered the new monarch a most uncertain quantity, though popular because of his obviously brilliant qualities, he had certainly raised many enemies in the Riksdag and perhaps only saved his throne through consenting after a long struggle to sign the humiliating Coronation Oath; probably, Baron Liljensparre thought, Gustaf Adolf III would make exactly what the Riksdag wanted an admirable King "do nothing", in which case no one would interfere with him or his pleasure, but, the prudent Chief of Police considered, it was always possible that someone might fear the new sovereign sufficiently to try an attempt on his life at this critical moment of his history, so on this evening of the 28th of May 1772, it was Baron Liljensparre himself who kept watch at the corner of the narrow street named after the Black Monks, standing, in his dark habit, blotted in a doorway. The pale Northern night was glittering with stars radiant as Amsterdam cut diamonds and their coloured rays struck a faint gleam from the copper domes of Stockholm; passers-by, intent on the splendid business of to-morrow that would concern all the estates of the realm, could see their ways without flambeax or lanterns and the number of these people, all absorbed in the prospect of the rare spectacle that they must either assist in or stare at, helped Liljensparre to move from doorway to doorway and to pass and repass the quiet, shuttered house of Madame Arfmedsson. He did not observe any one else loitering near, all went along briskly, with open speech or laugh; only the shrewd expectant eye of Baron Liljensparre could have picked out from this hurrying press the three young men who emerged from a side lane, one well behind the other, and who sauntered past the doorway where Liljensparre was concealed, one twirling a cane, one humming an aria, one silent, all in cloaks of midnight blue and ordinary pattern; the skilful watcher knew them, though they were most similar in their persons, tall, slender, elegant, with an upright carriage and an agile step, with blond locks showing like flax in the starlight on their shoulders. It was Karl who touched the door thrice with his cane, it was Frederik who followed him in silence when it was opened, it was the King who hummed an operatic air by M. Gluck.

The door closed. Watchful, the Chief of Police kept guard; two of his men strolled the other side of the street, the embers of their pipes showed red in the

silver twilight. Liljensparre believed that his charges were safe when in the house of Madame Arfmedsson; he had warned her sternly and often, she was closely watched and certainly never meddled in politics; the Chief of Police considered her ignorant, half witted, but cunning as to her own advantage, she would keep within a law that could at any moment, throw her into a torture chamber, Liljensparre was satisfied that nothing of importance passed between her and her visitors, he had tested her and her fellow mystagogues. The Princes visited her in order to try to raise the spirits of the Vasa Kings and to learn of the future. That was all their own private business.

The Chief of Police, on his patrol that he made appear so casual, smiled with a scornful pity, to this degradation, he thought, does a man come who is educated without religion, better an orthodox Lutheran, sheltering comfortably in church, than a free thinker reduced to cantrips at once childish and blasphemous—"wiser to believe in Martin Luther's God, than in the Devil of a half imbecile, half fraudulent old woman descended from mythical Finnish witches."

Baron Liljensparre resigned himself to a long watch; doubtless, on the Coronation eve, there would be a lengthy consultation of the powers of darkness; he was too well trained to yawn, but he sighed with tedium, as he watched keenly for any suspicious lurking figure—he felt gratified when he saw no one; the royal secret had been well respected, save, perhaps by the Queen Dowager and her favourites, whom it no longer interested, and he, the Chief of Police had done his work so skilfully, that the brothers had never suspected they were spied on; the King had blandly given Liljensparre duties that would have occupied him elsewhere had he not relegated them to a subordinate.

Chapter 11

Inside the quiet little house the three young men took off their mantles.

"Liljensparre was there himself to-night," said the King, "he is a good, diligent fellow and some day I may find him useful. There are police the other side of the street also."

"We are always well protected," smiled Karl; he much resembled the King in grace and comeliness, had the same type of pale vivid colouring, a similar sweep of brow and large blue eyes, a similar air of fastidious elegance, his expression was alert and humorous, he had not either the extreme distinction nor the extreme amiability of the King, the slightest and shortest of the three brothers, Karl might have been the model for one of the exquisite courtiers modelled in Dresden porcelain who adorned the rose-silk padded cabinets of his mother's drawing room, but he gave no impression of effeminacy. Frederik was more heavily built, his blue eyes darker, his hair a brighter gold, his features, though fine, modelled with less delicacy, his air was smiling and affable, all of them concealed their thoughts and emotions behind the most polished courtesy. Gustaf who had put his life and his kingdom into the slim hands of his brothers, did not trust them beyond this plot that would benefit them as much as it would himself; he relied on

their courage and pride, their diplomacy and cunning, though none of these qualities had been tested in them, but he did not rely on their loyalty as he did on that of others not his kin.

The bent man who had opened the door to the brothers trimmed the lamp, asked respectfully if they wanted anything and when told no, left, shuffling in slippers; he had a carefully cultivated air of a learned recluse, with long dingy robe and untrimmed beard, he was well known to the police as a harmless eccentric, terming himself an alchemist, who resided, partly as servant, partly as partner, in the modest house of Madame Arfmedsson, where his wife cooked and laboured in small domestic duties, and he had a small laboratory; his name was Nordenskfold, a Finn.

The room was lined with plain tables and chests of drawers on which stood boxes, these contained, as the seeress had informed the police, the apparatus of her art, and she had opened them to show grimoires, charms, puppets in precious and base metals, bottles and jars with handwritten labels. Now the King took some keys from his pocket, and unlocked most of these receptacles; without words, for they understood one another well, the three young men brought out maps, packets of memoranda, notebooks, pencils and rulers that they placed on the centre table that was divided into seven sections with white paint, these met at a centre point where stood the plain silver lamp.

Drawing up their chairs, they sorted out the papers, Karl placed in front of him a map of Scania, on which the fortresses of Kristianstad, Karlskrona and Malmo were vivid with red crosses, the distances between them being marked off in pencilled leagues, the routes and the state of them being clearly described, every waterfall, mountain and canal clearly indicated; yet again Karl studied the progress of his advance to quell the sham rebellion Toll would provoke. Frederik had his hand on a chart of the Finlandian Gulf, before the King was a map of his entire domains; he did not need to look at it, every detail of his country was always clearly before his mind; he leaned forward and told his brothers of the men whom he had lately sworn into the band, the noble Adelebeth, the secret whispered when he, the King, had read his verses, Sergel, the famous sculptor, Maurice Arm-felt, the splendid courtier, the dashing Axel von Fersen, Evert Taube the unrivalled secret agent, all these, burning with enthusiasm for high ideals, had ardently put their swords at the King's service.

"But," said Gustaf, "though I wholly trust these gentlemen, only the men of action know the full details of the plot—you, my brothers, Colonel Baron Jakob Sprengtporten of the Borga Dragoons, his brother, then this strange Johan Toll, and their lieutenants—ah, and Scheffer who must draw up our Constitution, we need a lawyer there, and Beylon and Schorderheim, who fetch and carry with absolute composure." He looked at Karl as he spoke and a clear flush rose to that youth's cheek as he recalled his indiscretion towards Aurora, but after all, it had been no more than a hint that he might acquit himself well soon in some great task; he studied the plan of Karlskrona with the elaborate fortifications that looked like a design for embroidery; Gustaf never humiliated anyone, and he had, as he believed, secured the loyalty of the Fersen demoiselle, so he contented himself by remarking:

“We have been fortunate in keeping our secret from all the ladies, even from the Queen Dowager.”

Frederik, tracing a silver pencil over a map of Smaland, a danger spot, since Baron Pechlin’s estates and influence lay there, spoke firmly, yet with an almost jesting decorum.

“Your Majesty knows that our mother would have most eagerly supported your Majesty.”

Gustaf thought, without rancour, “perhaps, after all, she does know, and Frederik is her spy, he was always her favourite and is much under her influence,” aloud he said: “We cannot doubt that, but we have no right to put her in peril—she must be able to swear she knows nothing—if it goes awry.”

“Besides,” added Karl coolly, “Her Majesty is not the woman for a mighty intrigue, she would enjoy it so much she would betray her excitement.”

Gustaf was thinking of Jeanne d’Egmont, if Karl had let slip a rash hint to Aurora Lowenhjelm, he, Gustaf, had written minute descriptions of his plans that were now in the possession of Madame d’Egmont, Madame Feydeau de Mesmes and her friends, but he had not betrayed any of his designs to her, for, step by step she had encouraged and exhorted him in the noblest terms, in impassioned language, to this great enterprise; he put his hand to his pocket where her knot of colours lay.

The three blond heads, lightly powdered and elegantly curled, bent over the pile of memoranda in cipher, it was dangerous to put these secrets into written words, everything had to be memorised, even these few papers were concealed behind the apparatus of the jugglery used by the mystagogues, in case the police should suddenly be zealous.

Behind the mechanics of his task the King’s agile mind flowed onwards towards his visionary goal; the map of Sweden glowed and flowered under his eyes into a rich picture of the country he meant not only to be free, but the outpost of freedom in Europe.

Hyberboreas, Ultima Thule—the mystical land beyond the snows of the farthest North where storm and stress was unknown; that fable served to symbolise the state that he intended to create with resources so meagre and uncertain, merely his own ardour and that of some other enthusiastic men, young as himself, as himself inspired by the noble idealism of modern French philosophy. A most comely and stately country with the thin layer of soil, no more than a foot deep, over the precious minerals underground, the silver, gold, copper and jewels in their matrix, the ploughs so light that a single ox and a lone maid with easy hand could draw and guide them, the forests that grew from the shallow earth to return to it as fertilising ashes; the poverty that was strict and pure, sheep with wool so coarse that only peasants’ garments could be spun from it, the straw roofs unthatched in winter to feed the elk or reindeer, waterfalls crossed by rainbows with spray veiling the landscape until it was as the remembrance of a dream. At midsummer one continual day and the land overspread with raspberries, currants, strawberries, honeysuckle, hops and dog roses, corncockle and tansy, the Swedish colours, blue and yellow, flowing by the wayside, the lamb feeding on the grass grown roof and the wild, fragrant briar rose at the door. Always the sense of the snow, the ice, the North not far away, always the desire to journey

there, to be away from the waving grain, the lilies of the valley in the damp woods, the lilac bushes in the ale house plot, the sharp blades of sweet vernal grass in the meadows, the ancient silver willows by the quiet stream, the mountain ash hung with clusters of orange-scarlet berries, away from the water breaks like liquid amber casting aureoles round the summits of the blue black pines, the quickset hawthorn hedges at Goteborg brilliant in spring, the sloe hedges in Scania, brilliant in autumn, the barley mown by the ruddy good humoured peasantry while their children in aprons of Turkish yellow plucked the wild gooseberries and blae-berries. Yes, the desire to be away, in a sledge drawn by the stout dun native horses hung with copper bells, away on one of those moonlit winter nights when the traveller needed no lantern, for the snow reflected the luminous heaven, and the white hares sped over the trackless ice, to be driving fast, to where the singing swans fly, where by the stirring river of Lethe the heroes rest, the back of the North wind.

This was the King's heritage, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Swedish Pomerania, on the map he saw the stately cities, the majestic forts, the clean villages, the lonely farms, the desolate marshes where the wizards dwelt and the lotus floated on solitary lakes, the handsome brick and stone mansions of the Scotch merchants at Goteborg, with the painted birch furniture and hangings of Lyons silk, the sulphur mines at Fahlun, surrounded by yellow streams tumbling over sharp rocks and greenish spume, the rivulets of the dales that ran over beds of purple porphery, moss coloured and red feldspar, the Lorelei who lured travellers to the heights of granite mountains only to cast them into the azure and purple whirlpool beneath. Vedern, the bottomless lake, haunted by the Fata Morgana, near the Vedern Castle, gloomy with unhappy legends, the ruined church at Husaby, where the glossy ravens flew in and out of the glassless windows and the massive coffin shaped granite gravestones were, Kinekalla, the hanging gardens of Sweden, the palace of Locko worn by time, the birthplace of St. Brigitte, the saintly patroness of the North in the days of idolatary, Gripsholm, haunted castle and modern palace alike, Drottningholm, Ulriksdal rising in rich islets from the blue green swift waters or the blue still ice, traversed by the nocken, the water sprites, those ondines with green tresses, who rode the violet sheened water horses with seaweed for their curling, rippling tresses, Haga, the elegant little summer house built for the King's private repose, and the cottages the soldiers had in lieu of pay, each with a regimental shield by the wooden door. Jeanne d'Egmont had seen this splendid panorama through his eyes, though they had so little time together, he had made her behold his kingdom as he beheld it, blue and green, clear air, all rising on riches of silver and jewels, mines and galleries of precious stones where the elves gambolled, the wild swans flying North stretched like arrows for their goal.

He had described Stockholm, where the grandiose modern palace rose from a quay a mile long and the anchorage at the royal steps where the royal yacht Amphion fired a salute at sunset. Incongruous amid the huddled alleys of the old city, isolated at night by the lifted drawbridges that connected with the mainland, the palace stood as a fit dwelling for kings; and to-night all the shipping would be dressed with flags and pennons for the Coronation of a marionette. He had not described to Jeanne d'Egmont the Riddarsholm church with the silver coffins of

the Vasa heroes, the drums forever silent, the standards forever dropping still and heavy on the poles, the two bloody buff tunics torn by bullets, the wooden horsemen in their blue steel armour. She had spoken to him most earnestly—"Sire, a dream can be realized, and you can achieve this one. Do not suppose because much in France is frivolous and corrupt, because philosophy has become delightful as a game, because we exercise our wit on virtue, that humanity has lost hope. Reform, progress, enlightenment, the end of ignorance and superstition—dull, heavy words, you think, but beside what they mean everything else in the world is without enchantment." She, born heiress of Richelieu and the Guises of Lorraine, had lived as a Queen from her childish years, surrounded by all that was splendid, elegant, sparkling and seductive, she had put aside all this magnificence, flawless as a fairy tale's recital of fairyland with as light a gesture of her pale hand as if she had smilingly refused a brittle glass of thin wine. She lived in retreat, much away from the husband to whom she was constant and respectful, but whom she did not love, away from the waxlit palaces and the lamplit parks, the costly staged dramas on the toy stage, the luxurious festivals, the sumptuous masquerades, away from the enchantment of music, away from the delicate homage and the tactful flattery, all the arts and letters of Paris and Versailles that she had so warmly encouraged, away from the miracles of Cagliostro and Mesmer, the wonders performed by M. St. Germain, the Rosicrucians and the Swedenborgians. Her sole interest was the young King of Sweden and what he might do to ease the galling burdens of the times, she wrote to him of the rotting harvest, the starving manual toilers, the lean beasts, the foul and crowded lazar houses, the dungeons where those never brought to trial wasted for years, the scaffolds and the axe, the crippled children, the rigid censorship as an iron grip on speech and print, the Church wielding authority as a steel whip to scourge freedom in the name of bloodstained superstitions in which only the uneducated now believed… freedom of thought, of action, mercy, justice, tolerance—"if you love me" wrote Jeanne d'Egmont "you will serve these, even when I am dead—yes, when I am no more than a little dust nourishing a blade of grass, if you love me, you will be true to these ideals in which we both believe."

He did love her; a solitary spirit, he would have put through his life's task without her impassioned encouragement, he required no prop or stay, but her love, so remote from his daily life, so apart from his destiny most richly gilded his resolution taken so long ago; and the exquisite courtesy of his love allowed her to believe that she had wholly created his intentions as truly she inspired his actions inasmuch as she was always everywhere about his thoughts, as the rainbow spray was about the waterfalls, it was a dangerous emotion, this love etherealised until it was as a guiding star to the sick woman and to the man an enchantment that kept him spellbound from the natural affection of a woman seen, caressed and kept close.

He completed his precise writing and looked up at his brothers, intent on their ciphers, the long fingers moving in the ring of lamplight; Gustaf often felt a detached, almost compassionate curiosity as to how far they were with him; they had bargained for dukedoms, increased revenues, Karl wanted Fersen's niece as wife, but the Queen Mother would prevent that match, both of them helped their mother to keep the Queen an outcast, both of them surely, hoped in time to rule,

or to be father of a king. And Gustaf was helping them because of the cold, black dread of the Danish blood and an imbecile heir, and because he loved the unattainable Jeanne d'Egmont. He allowed his fancy wing as he might have let a bird from a cage, as he rested his long face in his long hand, he and she, ruling a new world between them, or, dearer dream still, speeding together across the ice, across the snow, under the lakes, through the rainbows, to the land beyond the North wind.

"There is really nothing more to do," said Karl looking up and breaking the King's day dream, with his manner of a veteran he added: "If Toll does his part and the troops don't mutiny I should subdue Scania in a matter of days from my leaving Stockholm. Should I fail," he remarked slipping his note book inside his vest pocket, "I shall try to fall back on Hambourg in good order and I hope that your Majesty will send me supplies." Gustaf admitted this to be a reasonable request, but he thought of Toll, who had asked for nothing, who had refused the rich weapons, who had gone to raise a province without credentials, with only a hundred dollars.

"I shall share all I have," said the King; the brothers exchanged their charming smiles, their blue glances. "It will not be much if we do fail," murmured Frederik, "that your Majesty will have left to share."

"Truly," said Karl rising as the King rose. "I believe I have now every inch of Scania engraved on my mind."

They went into the next room that looked on the street; there Madame Arfmedsson sat before a modest coffee urn and cups; she was a creature of meek appearance, with sunken chest and depressed nose; her vague eyes stared wistfully at the three brilliant young men to whom she gave a loyalty she never voiced and they never questioned; the industrious and faithful Beylon had found her long ago, both her house and her reputation formed useful blinds for the secret activities of Gustaf; he put on the table before her the thick gold piece that was her usual fee and she made the coffee with cheerful, busy care while they talked together of trifles. Unable to read or write the seeress took no interest in anything save the affairs of her small household and the invisible world; she did not know why the brothers met secretly in her back parlour, she did not care—"matters of state" Beylon had said, and she agreed that there must be secret matters conducted quietly by the great. None of the brothers had shown the slightest concern with her occult arts, but cunning in her simplicity, she was well able to baffle the adroit and diligent Liljensparre by pretending that they frequented this modest trysting place for just that—to consult the spirits.

She remained standing, her hands humbly folded while they drank the black coffee, smiling over the brims of the cups. "There are dregs in my cup," said the King; unable to resist a dramatic effect he added. "Shall we not give the good Liljensparre something for his vigil?" And went to the window, opening the shutters by a chink; the watchful Chief of Police did thus see, for a second, the King's fine profile bent over a coarse, empty cup, before the shutter was hastily closed. "What folly!" Liljensparre sighed as Gustaf laughed at his brothers.

"Your Majesty is too fond of playing the harlequin," smiled Karl, his eyes and tone were cold. "For my part I should have divulged the plot to Baron Liljensparre and asked his very able help."

“One does not disclose an approaching rebellion to as efficient a Chief of Police as it is our good fortune to possess,” said the King with unblemished good humour, and he asked how the obscure and loyal alchemist Nordenskfold was succeeding in his experiments? Had he yet discovered the philosopher’s stone?

“Your Majesty is pleased always to mock at these mysteries,” replied the seeress with the steadiness of simple faith, “but Nordenskfold is a most loyal subject of your Majesty’s and works in your service.”

“I wish he could make enough gold to pay our debts,” said Frederik while Karl remarked, “I wish he could send a few familiar spirits to Kristianstad to revolt the garrison.”

“He can do nothing because you do not believe,” replied the old woman respectfully. “Some day your Highness may think differently.”

“Peep into the future for me,” smiled Karl, drawing on his gloves, “tell me if I shall be lucky in love.” Frederik twitched his sleeve—“It is so late, I shall be yawning soon, I could not stay awake much longer for all the witches in Finland.”

They were out in the narrow street, with well acted airs of precaution, hurrying away, separately up the lane where the shadows of the houses lay dark beneath the silvered roofs.

“It is regrettable,” sighed the Chief of Police again, “that they are such fools, for it is impossible to dislike them.”

Chapter 12

M. Osterman, who considered he had received good value for his Russian roubles, since he had bought the entire Senate of Sweden, enjoyed the pageantry of the Coronation of the King of the Swedes the Goths and the Vandals; he admitted to the British Minister, Sir John Goodrich, who had worked with him so well to deprive Gustaf of all power, that the puppet show was very well set out, as became a dabbler in the drama and the opera.

On the surface everything glittered, there was a new order of knighthood, the Vasa, a play on the word that meant Wheat-sheaf the rebus of the Vasa name, for this honour was for those who encouraged agriculture. But there had been two seasons of famine, not only because of wretched crops, but because the hundreds of thousands of tons of rye were used annually for spirit-distilling, and on the reform of this scandal though advocated by the King, the officials who ruled the Riksdag and the provinces would not agree. Secret Committees, the Estates, local officials, quarrelled and bickered, the man with money in his purse had his brandy and the man without money ate bark and bran, while disputes as to freightage left the grain rotting in the relief ships (sent too late) at Goteborg.

A splendid regalia was borne before the young King riding in a cloth of silver habit beneath a canopy upheld by magnificent nobles, the famous orders of knighthood, wore their ceremonial attire, the Seraphim in black and white, the Sword in White and Blue and the North Star in crimson, the Senators trod with dignity in ample robes of scarlet edged with ermine But the national debt

amounted to fifty tons of gold and the national resources were bankrupt; panic economy had cut down the national defences to the danger point, and the enemies of Sweden knew this. All bowed before the elegant and handsome young monarch, whose mere presence roused a touching enthusiasm, but he had signed a revised Coronation oath that deprived him of his last prerogatives and M. Osterman really ruled Sweden as viceroy of Catherine II, who freed, by a series of rapid victories, from the menace of the Porte, was closing in on Sweden as she had on Poland. Silver shoes, lightly nailed, fell from the hooves of Gustaf's charger and were scrambled for by the mob, as they were replaced by others of equal value, but the plan for the reform of the currency had failed, jobbery, pilfering, nepotism, corrupted alike the Riksdag, the Church and the bureaucracy.

Fanfares of martial pride greeted the placing of the crown on the King's smooth brow, but the slothful peace party, the Caps, had the majority in the Riksdag and they would sooner sell their country than defend it, rather be comfortable hirelings than lean patriots. A sweet faced Queen, gentle and charming, fair as the first lily of May, stood beside the King, adorned with the crown jewels of Sweden, daughter and sister of Kings, good, pious and obedient, truly a delicious picture of earthly pomp and felicity; but the marriage was in name only; condemned to barrenness the maiden wife shrank from the mocking triumph of the Brandenberg Queen Dowager who loathed her, from the strained kindness of the husband, who saw in her the offspring of a tainted house, the sister of a dishonoured lunatic, the husband who dreaded her vacant look, her idle hands, her halting voice.

The religious rites were impressive, but few of the clergy had any thought of any God, or cared for anything save their own aggrandisement and their own private feuds; only Olaf Valquist, the brilliant churchman, grieved in his heart at the bitter distress of his country that was so universal, so little to be understood, the result of so many secret betrayals and so many petty clashes of vulgar interests already lost in the anarchy of yesterday's party politics.

The King felt the crown on his brow; not far from the church, was that other church with the silent corded drums and tasselled, motionless flags, and the silver and copper coffins that hid all that was mortal of the Vasa Kings, the armour on the wooden horsemen, the elk tunics stiff and tattered.

His smile gaily singled out the Russian minister, the suave ringmaster of this splendid circus, the King put his hand to his face as if he had felt the faint flick of the lash there; the Dalesmen had once saved Gustaf Vasa and Sweden, now hundreds of them lay dying beside the blighted corn patches, the rich ores, the jewels and sulphur, the precious stones and metals lay useless in the ground for men were too feeble to mine and dig for Sweden's wealth. He looked at his brothers; elegant, slight, frivolous, could he trust their brittle enthusiasm for noble ideals? Could he trust himself? From to-day he would be quite alone, always playing a part, the gracious King, crowned, apart. Jeanne d'Egmont's last letter lay over his heart, with her portrait; his inner ear could hear the written phrases in her delicate voice, the exquisite French tongue—"Sire, it will soon be in your power to rescue a noble nation, to put into practice reforms that even the most lofty of mankind, Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau can do nothing save preach from secret presses—for they are not Kings." He thought of Toll, two days journey now, in Scania; he thought—'that woman loves me—that man serves me', he singled out

the British minister from the gorgeous corps of diplomats and smiled on him with such carefree candour that even the wary Sir John Goodrich almost doubted—the suspicions roused in him by his secret agents' reports—suspicions that the King meditated a *coup d'état*. "It is not, after all in his character—a scheme altogether too rash and wild—if he does try anything he will destroy himself."

And the British Minister smiled in his turn at M. de Vergennes whom he respected for his ability, but despised for his empty pockets; France could do little against the Russian gold and the English Fleet.

Chapter 13

M. Beylon chose the day of the Coronation to take the case of English pistols, and the dagger in the shagreen case to the armoury, for he thought that, on that occasion everyone would be too occupied to notice him; he was not without hopes that the King would be induced to be what he, Beylon, considered reasonable, and go armed, so he intended to put the weapons ready of access in the inlaid cabinet by the door; he had not reached the armoury, a small apartment near the chapel, however, before he heard someone coming along the corridor; the king's Reader was over worked and over excited, he had to make a considerable effort to maintain his cheerful calm, especially when under the keen eyes of the Queen Dowager whom he greatly feared, so he turned into the first apartment he came to, put the case and the dagger in the drawer of a green marble console and hurried away, ashamed of himself as he saw that he had been diverted from his purpose only by a lackey walking carefully with a slow step, in order not to spill the water from the great agate vase filled with tresses of purple lilac that he carried. "I must watch my chance to take the weapons to the armoury," M. Beylon resolved anxiously, then the matter went out of his mind, for he had to wait privately on M. de Vergennes to press him for a guarantee for he 5,000 rix dollars Gustaf was trying to raise from the Dutch banking firm of Messrs. Grill and Sons.

Chapter 14

On the morning of August 16th, 1772 General Rudbeck, Government Commissioner in Scania arrived in Stockholm in a coach drawn by six foaming horses and flung out a furious tale; the South was in revolt and a line of bayonets had turned him back from Kristianstad. It had been impossible to get a message in to the Commandant of the fort, Captain Hellichus, for the hostile troops confronting him had been Pomeranians unable to speak a word of the Swedish language. The General had acted incompetently for he had been sent by the government to inquire into rumours of trouble in Scania, rumours that had arisen from an ambiguous letter written by Gustaf III to Louis XV and intercepted by an English agent; Sir John Goodrich had put it before Baron Pechlin who had used it

to rouse the baffled Riksdag against the King. A month had passed and nothing effectual had been done, then Rudbeck himself had gone dozing in a coach, without an escort and now had returned to the capital with this incoherent tale; there was no news from Baron Sprengtporten, who had been sent to Finland with his Borga dragoons, partly to overawe the Grand Duchy, partly to banish a possibly dangerous man from the capital, but the same day as General Rudbeck's indignant return to Stockholm, Lieutenant Boltenstjerna arrived from Prince Karl, commanding the forces in Scania, sent to that province by the King under a pretence of keeping order, the young messenger had come post from Landskrona with an official despatch for the government; His Royal Highness, at the head of the Scanian forces was marching on the rebellious city of Kristianstad and hoped soon to restore order. Sewn into his saddle the daring soldier had a letter for the King, that he delivered when he had a private audience with His Majesty, who listened keenly to his account of the false rising. Karl had been as good as his promise, so had Toll who was responsible for the revolt in Kristianstad but whose name even was not known to the Government; Gustaf read the message from his brother who was undertaking so difficult and perilous an enterprise; he recalled the silver ducat they had broken and divided when they had parted and the quick clasp of Karl's long hand. He wrote laconically, repeating, as in a sly jest, some of the words he had used the last time they had conferred in secret at Madame Arfmedsson's little house.

"I shall soon advance on Kristianstad, to-day I act for the Riksdag, to-morrow I shall be accounted a rebel. Relying on your Majesty's friendship I risk my position and life and hope this affair ends as well as it has begun. Your Majesty recalls my request—that if matters go wrong and I retire in good order to Hamburg, I may have a draft, for I have to rely on the garrison chests for the payment of the troops."

The King thanked Lieutenant Boltenstjerna, advised him not to remain in Stockholm—"The British Minister's suspicions increase, you might be arrested and I should not be able to protect you." These words confessed his utter isolation; he had no one but himself on whom to rely; the first moves of the revolt had been successful, but his hand had been forced by Goodrich's skilful spies; the letter to Louis XV insinuating his intentions into a courteous flourish of grateful compliments had not been incriminating, Gustaf had been too prudent, but it had roused a storm of conjecture and surmise that could not much longer be evaded.

The King took out his tablets, that never left his person and ran over the dates pencilled there—May 29th the Coronation and the letter to Madame d'Egmont sent under cover to M. Hermensen, *rue neuve des bons-enfants*, Paris, the speech from the market place after his crowning, nothing but routine hypocrisy was expected, but he had spoken sincerely, with passion, the effect of his oratory, his personality had been tremendous, he could have roused the people by a few more such orations but the Riksdag had foiled him by declaring he must not speak again outside the Riddarhuset, then the secret message brought by a faithful agent from Toll that he had secured Captain Hellichus, and the retreat of himself and Karl to Loka, where Karl Scheffer had drawn up the plan of the new constitution, then Goran Sprengtporten returning to his regiment in Finland and Karl leaving for Scania. Captain Henrik of Trolle was to have roused Finland, he had safely

reached the Grand Duchy in his fine well armed man o' war, but the Finns were apathetic and suspicious, Baron Jakob Sprengtporten and his dragoons were needed to overawe them, then the Riksdag, alarmed by Goodrich's grim warning, had sent Sprengtporten and his Borga regiment carefully trained by himself just where he wanted to go, Finland. He had secured Helsingfors and Sveaborg at once, Gustaf smiled as he came to that date, the ninth of the present month of August; finely tricked, the Riksdag had sent the arch conspirator exactly where he wished to be. So far, a smooth course, the King added the present date—August 16th—"Rudbeck and Boltenstjerna arrive in Stockholm" and gazed at it keenly.

One factor that no one could forsee or depend on had gone wrong—the weather; Sprengtporten was detained off the coast of Finland, his troopships lying at anchor without a puff of wind to stir the smooth sea. But nothing would detain the regiments of Uplanders, loyal to the government, officered by men hostile to the King, who had been summoned by Rudbeck, acting on private advice from Goodrich, Osterman and Pechlin, to the capital.

Not only was Gustaf isolated, he was likely to be surrounded—if the revolt failed in the capital, Karl would not be able to hold Scania, a victorious Riksdag would arrest him and all those who had openly declared for him—supposing he could not accomplish that retreat on Hamburg? Sprengtporten was useless until a Swedish wind rose, Count Scheffer had fled to his seaboard castle, this showing his opinion that the royal plot had failed, Field Marshal Fersen, able and honourable opponent on whom the King had relied in his capacity of Colonel of the Guards to keep order in Stockholm, had secretly deserted his post and was hiding on his Ostrogotland estates cautiously watching the weather vanes; Saltza, an officer in Sprengtporten's confidence, with much influence in the Guards had closed himself in his chamber, declaring he was too crippled by gout to get into his clothes.

The King had only a few junior naval and military officers who were in the plot, (but of whose fidelity he could not be sure) on whom to rely, and a few trustworthy but helpless civilians, Beylon, Schorderheim, the seeress and the alchemist. There was no one to whom he could turn, even for comfort, his neglected queen would be shy, alarmed, incredulous if he were to tell her his interests and ask her for a word of support, his mother would betray him to Pechlin because she would believe the Government to be the winning side, Gustaf Armfelt, young Axel Fersen, Sergel, Munck, Essen, men of talent, grace and charm, to whom Gustaf had played the lavish patron he disdained to involve in a bold enterprise that might mean the rack, the pulley, the hangman, the block for all. Besides he was not one who wished to lean on others, he needed now tools, loyal followers, not confidants.

Yet he was touched to a poignant distress by a sign from an ally he had forgotten; he had stood alone for a moment, after Karl's messenger had left him, in the audience chamber and stared out of the low window at the set calm of the azure day when Aurora Lowenhjelm, who had been long waiting for this chance, had glided up to him and shown him some close woven wreaths of white and crimson roses hanging on her smooth, dimpled arm.

"Look, sire, these are for the alabaster statues in the gardens—I hope before they fade a wind will rise from Finland." She curtseyed into her muslin hoops; though they were alone in the vast rooms her discretion was complete as she added in a whisper: "Your Majesty had heard from Prince Karl?" A month's secret

anxiety showed in her pleading eyes; the King smiled to think that in those dimpled hands, on those soft lips lay all his fortunes—how many of his suspicious enemies would gladly hear what she could tell.

He was too accomplished a flatterer to thank her for her loyalty, or to allow her to suspect that he had forgotten her; serenely he voiced the confidence he did not feel and watched her move away, graceful, mournful as a deserted white bird, across the shining floor of waxed wood.

Chapter 15

Beylon had discovered that Sir John Goodrich had argued and threatened the alarmed Government into a Cabinet meeting, at which both he and the Russian minister had been present; the truth was strongly suspected, Prince Karl was to be recalled from Scania, his messenger, Lieutenant Boltenstjerna was to be found and tortured in order to extract a confession of the royalist intrigues from him; there had even been talk of arresting the King, but Rudbeck had declared that Gustaf was nothing but an effeminate fop, incapable of organising a coup d'état of this magnitude, and had told how on relating his adventure with the revolting garrison of Kristianstad, His Majesty had expressed the most gracious sympathy but continued to embroider a lady's scarf.

"We cannot wait," said Gustaf to Beylon, who trembled but stood firm. "Let the preparations for the opera on the evening of the 18th go forward, that will keep a number of people occupied. Meanwhile I sign all the papers they put before me, I shall agree to everything, even to the re-call of Karl, and you shall go to those officers I can trust with messages from me and I must do what I can with them. Captain Koenig, though so young is daring and skilful, he at least can be relied on. M. de Vergennes has promised the ten thousand ducats, Beylon."

The faithful Reader was silent, for weeks he had been trying to raise this sum or the half of it, but the bullion had not arrived from France and Messrs. Grill still hung back from advancing a loan on the security of this delayed treasure.

"I must have it by the evening of the 18th," emphasized the King quietly. "I do not fool. Beylon, my good and faithful friend, there is, for many of us, more than life on this. Senator Kalling, very resolute against us, has been appointed commandant of Stockholm," he added, "and they have the militia out—yet there is no evidence against anyone. I have, say, a day before the Uplanders can be here, rested and—used."

"It is certainly easier," sighed Beylon, "to act than to wait in suspense."

"Wearing a mask," smiled the King, "that is what fatigues, that and the loneliness. Comfort yourself with a grotesque reflection, Beylon—none of my adherents really trusts me, I who have never been tested, was always the weak link in the chain, now, as it falls out, I have to act alone, and everything—the total hazard—rests on the luck of my throw. That pleases me."

"I should not have used the words 'luck', or 'hazard', sire—but rather heroism," replied the modest Reader with humble enthusiasm.

“The situation,” replied Gustaf lightly, “requires, perhaps, both—I trust that neither I nor the gods of chance will fail.”

Chapter 16

General Rudbeck had indeed asserted that he was convinced the King was no more than a spiritless, if agreeable fribble, entirely absorbed, for the moment, in the opera he was himself producing in the palace theatre and for which he had written the libretto, but the Government were not wholly satisfied with this opinion. Caps and Hats alike were baffled by this fine spun, wide flung plot, that must be known to so many, yet which no one betrayed; Prince Karl’s messenger had disappeared, no news could be expected from Finland until a fair wind rose, nor from Scania until Prince Karl sent an answer to the command for his recall. No one knew where Sprengtporten’s loyalty lay. The bewildered and angry Riksdag requested the King to remain in Stockholm, and while sending out couriers to hasten on the troops who were to overawe the capital, they sent, on his own desire, Baron Pechlin, universally considered the ablest man in the realm, to ask an audience of His Majesty.

This was at once granted and Gustaf received his chief native opponent in the private apartment overlooking the quay where he spent his most familiar hours.

Baron Pechlin, who had never known failure, remorse or scruple, who was not burdened by any sensitiveness of any kind, was always certain of himself and he did not doubt now that he could screw his secrets out of this slight young man who had never experienced anything beyond the games and adulations of luxurious salons, who passed his time in what Baron Pechlin considered idle and foolish pursuits, yet he was acute enough not to despise what he did not understand, he allowed to himself that it was just possible that Gustaf might have qualities other than the brilliantly ornamental attractions he so flashingly displayed.

The Holsteiner, a man of late middle age, of formidable appearance, his brows habitually drawn, his speech habitually circumspect, his thin rigid lips set in a smile that was soon touched into a sneer, yet courtly and insinuating of address, directed himself at once to his task.

As he offered his conventional compliments he studied Gustaf as he had never studied him before; the King was standing in the window place, a tracery of glossy rose leaves, with here and there a last bloom loosening last petals, was behind him, he wore a fantastically rich costume of azure satin, glittering with sequins on the cuffs and pocket flaps, his carriage was erect, yet eager, as if he awaited a signal, he held his head high and laughed and seemed, Pechlin thought, pleased and amused; his height was increased by his hat, round, of the new Henri III fashion with upright ostrich plumes in the national colours of corncockle blue and sulphur yellow.

“Who,” the determined observer asked himself, “is this charmer with the smile of a woman, the step of a Ballet master, a regal air, an enchanting grace?” and a

doubt of any pat answers to these questions chilled him, he felt uneasy as if he looked at a dangerous stranger.

"Sire, the Riksdag is much concerned at the revolt in Scania, the more so as General Rudbeck overheard an officer declare that your Majesty's hand was in it."

"I myself heard General Rudbeck make that remark," replied the King easily, "was it not absurd? It was not however, an officer who spoke thus foolishly, but a sentry."

Unable to doubt openly the King's word, Pechlin bowed and Gustaf motioned him to the winged blue damask chair, while he himself took the settee of green velvet, where he lay at ease, indolently graceful.

"Had it been an officer," added Gustaf, "he would have lost his commission."

"Your Majesty treats very casually this serious state of the country."

"The state of the country is more hopeful than it has been for some while, my dear Baron—is it not served by patriots who are resolved to reform all abuses, to punish corruption, to defy our enemies?"

"Your Majesty is pleased to employ lofty terms of speech, the idiom of antique virtue goes very well on the stage, but in real life we must employ a sterner language."

"Virtue is stern," smiled Gustaf, "vice is soft and easy to serve, virtue is difficult—save, as you remark, for those who strut on the boards. What was the purpose of this audience?"

The King took a pencil and tablet from his glittering pocket and drew a caricature of Karl Scheffer, now waiting nervously at his coastal castle of Tyreso, staring at his becalmed yacht on which he hoped to escape to a German port.

"To arouse your Majesty to a sense of your—danger."

"I consider myself very well protected—the burgher cavalry already posted in the streets—the Uplanders on the march, the rebellion quelled in Scania."

But behind his perfect self assurance, his most accomplished ease, he faced the gloomy labyrinths of Piranesi's prisons, the heads of Struensee and Brandt held aloft, the bloody scaffold, the screaming hunted conspirators, the masquerade interrupted by the rush of armed soldiery—the man in the stone spider's web of stairs, and wheels and ladders—"I want to get out". The word "danger" was borne on the boom of the sunset gun fired then from the Amphion, the light chilled in the gracious apartment; the dangerous vision, powerful as an hallucination, hung like tattered smoke in the darkening corners of the chamber where the King's blue glance turned expectantly. Yet as if completely at leisure he waited; he knew exactly what the other man thought of him, the purpose of this interview, how he was spied on, despised and yet feared; within a few hours they meant to have him quite helpless, perhaps a prisoner in Gripsholm. Kings had spent years in dungeons, kings had been murdered, privately, secretly.

He tossed down his tablets and flung off his hat then crossed to the gilt harpsichord. *Toccata in G*—what variations on that theme? *G minor—G major*—he signed his initial on the dainty keys of ebony and ivory while Baron Pechlin, contemptuously on his feet, pressed home his point, the offer of his false loyalty to beguile a man who must be afraid.

"There might be some clash in which your Majesty would need friends," he insinuated, touching his breast.

“I trust I should find one, as always, in yourself, my dear Baron.”

Even Pechlin was for a second nonplussed at having his words anticipated and so mocked; he remarked sombrely.

“I might be more useful than some of those who are encouraged by your Majesty.”

This from a man who had betrayed everyone with whom he had ever worked, and made with the most cynical intentions of luring a damning admission from his victim, caused the King to shudder; to him it was as if a monstrous figure, treachery and fraud, had leaped from behind the trim courtier’s conventional figure, to stand menacing and leering beside the harpsichord, to beckon up those other shapes from the shadows of his mind.

“Your Majesty is faint?” asked Pechlin, creeping closer.

“Yes, sometimes I have a giddy fit—our native Lorelei haunts me—but I do not stand upon a height,” he added, “so I cannot say why sometimes I sicken and vapour seems thick about me—here, where the air is so clear.”

“The spasms of a cockered weakling,” thought Pechlin gratified, for the King, who had ceased to play, did appear wan, his cheek near as colourless as his whitened curls, only his blue eyes, so changeful, so remarkable, remained charged with energy.

“When this disturbance is over, your Majesty should again try the baths at Loka.”

“Now you speak lightly, Baron. Disturbance? That is a word for a student’s brawl—not for the anarchy of—” he stopped deliberately, said to himself “the worse governed country in Europe,” then aloud—“some reckless hotheads.”

“Your Majesty must be agitated by the absence of news from Finland—perhaps Madame Arfmedsson who is so clever with coffee dregs, could have sold a fellow Finn a capful of wind before he sailed—Baron Sprengtporten should have thought of that—”

Gustaf wondered how many people the Queen Dowager had told of his visits to the seeress, these had served the very purpose he had intended, but it was not agreeable to know that his mother had joined in the sneers he had hoped to raise, but he was sure that it was she, neither the Chief of Police or his men would have gossiped about the weaknesses of the King. He moved languidly on his stool.

“Ah, my dear Pechlin, coffee dregs sound ridiculous, I know—but they are a mere device for concentrating the attention as is the crystal ball, the lines caused by breathing on sand in a tray, or the waving of boughs of leaves before the eyes. How absurd are the pretensions of superstitions! And why need I concern myself about the delay in Baron Sprengtporten’s fleet? The Uplanders will protect my person and my crown without the help of the Borga dragoons.”

“Your Majesty has decided to disclose nothing?” asked Baron Pechlin abruptly.

Gustaf turned this direct challenge, bold even for Russia’s spy and agent, as swiftly as if he turned a rapier aimed at his heart, by a more skilful parry.

“Of the entertainment to-night,” he asked. “The opera *Peleus and Thetis?* I did not know you were so interested. I am the more delighted, as the work is largely my own—I offer Sweden, music, singing, the drama, here in my own palace, until the opera house is built.”

His words and his aspect showed a graceful pride, a charming vanity—"that is, after all, his main interest," thought Pechlin with disgust, amazement and some relief.

"I thought of employing a national legend," added Gustaf, "but they are rude, and we cannot better the classic symbolism, eh? Thetis and her sisters, Amphitrite and Galatea, are nereids, daughters of the most kindly of deities, Nereus, who reigns so placidly over the sea nymphs and those who guard coasts, lakes, mariners and islands—the titular goddesses of Sweden—Thetis is wedded to a mortal, Peleus—and all the immortals brought immortal gifts—as they have brought them to this country—Thetis and Nereus haunt this country changing into waterfalls, streams—dolphins and even the Fata Morgana, the aerial images seen over our inland lakes."

Gustaf spoke with moving eloquence and grace, also with an artificial manner such as he used when addressing a literary meeting, playing a part on the stage, or declaiming before the Riksdag; he so easily assumed the well trained actions and gestures of the accomplished orator that he led Pechlin completely off the track of the truth; that experienced politician was as misled as the less astute Rudbeck had been—he thought—"we deal with a pedantic *impresario* at best" and expressed his contempt by remarking coolly.

"I am satisfied it will be a pretty spectacle, though the allegory seems strained—Sweden is something more than a haunt of ondines," he added on an impulse to be insolent. "Was it not at the marriage of Peleus and Thetis that Discord threw the apple so disastrously disputed?" Gustaf rose, picking up the hat with the blue and yellow plumes to show that the audience was at an end, as he countered—"Such fruit is tossed at most feasts," he thought poignantly. "Do they mean to assassinate me at the ball to-night?"

Chapter 17

The entertainment was more than sumptuous, a rare taste had blended the designs of nature and art; the open windows of the palace let in the warm air of the blue dusk that was the Northern night and the faint breeze only sufficient to flutter a lady's handkerchief, salt and tinged with the perfumes of crushed flowers and let out the glow of thousands of wax candles to illuminate the green tresses of the acacia trees drooping by the gilt cages of the lynx and the leopard, the milk white statues of Eros and Hebe crowned by the fading roses woven by Aurora Lowenhjelm, the steps to the dark water, the flagged lantern lit shipping, the upsweeping prows on which women, eagles, angels and sea gods turned their staring wooden faces, to the full moon that hung like a God's silver embossed shield in the pale sky above the brass and copper domes of Stockholm. The open water glittered where it rippled to the sea, beneath the quays it was dark and still in a shadow broken by the shifting reflections from the lanterns at the mast heads; the melodies of the first Swedish opera floated over the artificial groves, set round the classic temples of the elaborate royal garden; Italian violins and violas,

flutes of ivory and boxwood, accompanied the pure young voices that used the Swedish tongue with so touching a sweetness. The spectacle, as the music, seemed more the realization of a dream than a cunning human contrivance, the troupe of singers more like a band of the native spirits of Sweden than men and women playing parts; Thetis, spangled and garlanded with pearls seemed to move her milk white limbs in a waterfall's spume, her attendants to float rather than to walk, so easily did the daughters of gentle Oceanus glide the narrow stage veiled with blue green tinsels arranged to resemble a grotto beneath the sea. Curtains of shot silk, interchanging colours behind silver gauze parted on the green, shell strewn corridors of the sea king's palace as the nymphs tripped forth with hair flowing freely as the streams, rivulets and forests where they dwelt, blessing, protecting and succouring humanity, foremost were the Naiads, goddesses of the inland waters whose delightful murmur echoes so softly over the Swedish campaign, or of those dark and sombre lakes where the lotus rests solitary, and the reeds whisper ancient secrets to the lonely swans. Honoured and lovely, divine, yet wistfully mortal, the guardians of the springs that refresh the ground, bring health and the gift of second sight, hovered on rosy, sandalled feet, carrying sheaves of corn, poppies, roses, lilies and rowan, offering their tiny hands to their green clad sisters, the Dryads who had come from their hiding places in the dark forests and the wayside trees, the Oreads who tread the rocks and guide the wanderer away from the abyss where the false Lorelei lurks, the Oceanids, with conch in hand, branches of coral in their azure gray tresses, amber necklets round their soft throats and seaweeds and grasses entwining their head dresses fashioned as naval crowns.

Peleus the mortal, was gently guided by these friendly spirits, who were often invoked to bless a marriage rite, and who sometimes themselves wed mortals, to Thetis whom he had seized as she leaped beneath flashing water on the back of a shining dolphin. Fans sewn with sequins fluttered in the audience, like hesitant butterflies sparkling in the dimmed theatre, the jewelled handles winked sparkles of light, so that it was brilliant as a southern May night when the fireflies twinkle in the dim warmth. A circle of these changeful fires shone from the diamonds on the proud brow and bosom of Ulrika Lovisa seated erect in her gilt chair, her brocade paniers stretching a yard either side of her delicately clasped hands, the royal gems of Sweden glittered on the prim white curls of Sophia Magdalena, shy, unhappy and apart, she affected no pleasure in the entertainment that evoked a sighing enthusiasm in her companions; the King looked at her secretly, keenly, without hope; she was as inanimate as one of the plump expressionless penitents dully listening to the courteous rebukes of a stout angel that showed in the prints in her German Bible; she even yawned, more from idleness than vacancy; the King trembled, thinking of Jeanne d'Egmont who would have quivered to every note of this music, to all the implications of this allegory, who, exhausted by emotion would have sent her spirit to him mingled with the harmony of sound and colour that expressed his fantasy.

Something at least of his fantasy as he sat enthroned, watching the enchanting scene that was his own creation, his mind was far from this dainty artifice that suited his taste so exquisitely.

Two of the skilful and high-minded ladies who acted as his secret agents at Versailles had lately contrived to write to him, the erudite and fascinating Madame de Boufflers had written words that seemed too *a propos*, he could hear them behind the spell of the music, as one can fell pain, dulled but persistent, behind the opiate—"Sire, despite my attachment to your Majesty's cause and the lively hope I have of your triumph, I cannot suppress a reflection, that your Majesty must pardon if it be too bold. It is that your Majesty may be misled by the very eminence of your own noble virtues, that are, possibly, in the rude storms of party passions, likely to prove inconvenient. Your Majesty's gifts are so remarkable, they have always shone against so brilliant a décor, that perhaps your Majesty, admirable favourite of the gods, first of men, is not fitted for the part of an absolute monarch, a part that requires a ruthless energy, a cold knowledge of the baseness of humanity, a severe carriage, even perhaps, cruelty. Ah, I think woman's understanding so confused and feeble on these matters that I dare write no more, I should not have written so much had not your Majesty demanded my opinion on your Majesty's chances of success."

She means, thought Gustaf, she does not think me capable of overturning a government, maybe, not even capable of contriving a palace revolution, did she know my present situation she would consider it one of despair. Madame Feydeau Mesmes had written, Jeanne d'Egmont was too languid to hold a pen for more than a few moments, though she had pencilled notes to the eager political tract her "chancellor" as she termed her friend, had written to her dictation; folded inside the letter was a three cornered note—"You write again for my portrait, declaring that you have nothing but the picture my husband's mother gave you, but I remain startled and alarmed by these odious stories that you asked Madame du Barry for her portrait and that it hangs in your cabinet. Your minister, M. de Stedingk, denies this, and so have you, yet lightly, you must offer me your word of honour that you will not compromise me with this ridiculous rivalry before you receive my likeness. I learn with deep emotion that the colours of your new order, of Vasa, are to be mine, and that you will wear this habit of lilac, green and silver on ceremonial occasions, and the ribbons always, I have a secret joy in knowing that Gustaf is my knight, that is a touching glory of which I am unworthy—reassure me about the portrait. Three years of illness have not much wasted my countenance—M. Hall will paint me in a French dress of the time of the Chevalier Bayard—but how unfortunate that he has also painted the likeness of Madame du Barry, it is somewhat hard to be forced even to think of this woman, and to be obliged to contemplate, even from a resigned retirement the magnificent rewards given to the most shocking of vices—even the reward of adorning the cabinet of Gustaf."

The King had replied by return courier—"Madame du Barry offered me nothing but the impertinence of her adulation, and I offered her nothing but a collar of diamonds for her poodle."

A third great lady, the Princess Rohan Lorraine, Comtesse de Brionne had written to Gustaf privately, encouraging him with her sage admiration, reflecting an honest credulity—"is it so easy to overturn a kingdom? What philosophers have preached can princes put into practice?"

At least none of them doubted his sincerity or his courage, their fine, nobly bred feminine and Gallic minds had judged him more truly than any Swede—he knew that even the Sprengtporten brothers, even Toll were not now sure of him.

He had spared no art o make himself agreeable, to coin himself into charm, laughter, gallantry, wit, to spin impromptu verse, to scribble impromptu grotesques, to toss the rose to this, the silken ball to that, to move from group to group gay, cool, seductive, wearing silver brocade and the scarf of lilac and green knotted above his sword, and the scarlet heeled shoes that were the butts of the pamphleteers and the caricaturists.

He was unarmed save for his courtier's rapier and under the constant apprehension of assassination or the signal for his arrest, Baron Pechlin had given him more than one furtive glance, sidelong, prying, sharp, and Colonel Ribbing, in his presence, had had the insolence to mock at the sham revolt in Kristianstad, Gustaf had paused at that name, that face, one of his mother's party, father of the beautiful page he had seen in her ante-chamber—"Ha," he had smiled, "let us keep our fiction, our make believe reports, and sportive tales for the stage—the drama needs your power of invention, Colonel Ribbing."

Chapter 18

By ten o'clock the entertainment was over, the elder queen, gracious and softened by this tasteful luxury so congenial to her, the young Queen, remote and dim, her pouting lips apart, her pale eyes vacant, had retired.

The King disrobed, dismissed his lackeys, then holding a small wick that floated on the oil in a Venetian glass goblet, left the state apartments for that he more commonly used, having re-attired himself in a costume Beylon had bought him especially for this purpose.

Fatigued by the excitement of the joyous spectacle, or absorbed in private pleasures, those resident in the royal palace were all behind closed doors, even the spies who usually watched the King were taking their ease, nothing could be expected from a day almost spent, from the dark of the day to follow, from the King jaded with adulation, weary with frivolity.

Schorderheim awaited the King, he had drawn the curtains across the window and lit a small lamp that he had set on the desk, he started anxiously as he heard the door open and saw the King, wearing a thin dark cloak to his feet, standing quietly by the stifling glow of the floating wick he appeared as if a portrait framed in the doorway.

"Well, they did not murder me to-night," he smiled, "and they might have done it—any minute of five hours, easily. Has Beylon come with the money?"

"Not yet, Sire."

"Well, we must not expect too much good fortune at once, my friend, eh?"

"Has your Majesty been blessed with any good fortune?" asked the Herald dubiously.

“Yes, first, a secret post from Paris.” Gustaf seated himself at the desk. “And Captain Koenig has obtained the powder and shot from the arsenal—sufficient to arm all his men. And quite simply, he merely asked Governor Kalling, Stockholm’s new commandant, for the means to repress a possible rising in my favour.”

“That is indeed lucky, Sire,” declared Schorderheim. “But the militia, the burgher guard? I saw them to-night at every street corner and the Riksdag trust them absolutely.”

“So absolutely that I was allowed, for two nights, to beat the rounds with them on a tour of inspection. I disclosed my designs to them and won them to my cause—which is that of Sweden.”

Schorderheim, used as he was to the King’s boldness, was taken aback by this, as it seemed to him, appalling rashness.

“Will not at least some of them betray you?” he groaned.

“Not one. They are Swedes, they know the condition of the country,” replied the King firmly. “They trust in the name of Vasa. They have,” he added keenly, “very little to lose. One has but to speak to them with sincerity. I could have done it in public speeches, but the Riksdag silenced me, this was better, man to man.” Raising his blue eyes, dark with passion, he smiled. “I can work with other material than tinsel, Schorderheim.”

“I hope there are that number of honest men in Sweden, Sire.”

“Ay, there are, I need never fear them, it is the nobles who will hate me, Schorderheim, the privileged—the fralse who will never forgive me for turning to the unprivileged, the ofralseit will not be those I shall liberate, raise up, who will oppose me or betray me, but those whom I must displace. Is it not strange Schorderheim, that these haughty nobles will sell themselves to Russia, humble themselves before the Tzarina’s footstool, and yet not obey their own King, or cease to disdain their own people?”

Gustaf spoke wearily, resting his face in his hand, his elbow on the table, and gazing at the floating wick. “Did you visit M. de Vergennes, Schorderheim?”

“Yes, His Excellency did not seem satisfied by my reassurances, he was gloomy and troubled, wished he had never been drawn into such a foolhardy enterprise and expects the French Embassy to be sacked if your Majesty fails.”

“I thought of that, also,” replied the King, “therefore I have sent all my papers under seal to the Spanish Embassy. Beylon is late—how obdurate those Dutch bankers are! Always I wait for money.”

“M. de Vergennes was bitter also on that point, Sire, he says he is starved of supplies, while the du Barry has gold for her meanest utensil.”

“And a diamond collar for her dog from me,” said Gustaf. “I dared not offend her—this pothouse Circe has truly changed the King of France into a swine, and I must take his money—and wait for it. Russia is so large, so rich, Schorderheim, the English are so sly, so clever, the Danes so near and so venomous—we have only France, and she corrupts beautifully, like a cankered rose. Her Bayards are all dead, her heroes all dreams.” He peered through the shadows to the clock where the golden figures showed on the globe of white onyx—past midnight, August the 19th, 1772 had dawned.

A scratch at the door and Beylon entered stepping softly, the King asked no question, but smiled with compassion for the Reader’s fatigue that showed in look

and gait; under his mantle, however, he had the reward of his persistent endeavours, a locked leathern bag that he placed before the King with a humble reverence. “M. Grill, Sire, only gave way, out of sheer tedium,” said Beylon. “He was confounded by the constant sight of me.”

“I could not love you more than I did,” replied Gustaf; he put his hand on his side and the pallor of his cheek increased, he thought of King David and the water from the well of Bethlehem; he had been ungrateful when he had thought that no one in Sweden trusted him, these two modest men did; he could not have moved without them, their services had been vital for the secret errands vital to his success; he now divided the five thousand ducats into separate amounts that he laid ready in the desk drawer together with a sealed letter he had written to Karl, once more commanding him not to revenge his death if it should overtake him—“for no Swedish hand will destroy me,” a copy of the new Constitution, drawn up by Karl Scheffer and engrossed on parchment in Schorderheim’s heraldic script; on the marble hearth lay the ashes of some of the King’s correspondence.

“Take some wine,” said the King to his friends, “and some repose—I have yet to write the order for the arrest of the Senate—I shall do that in my own hand so that none may be involved save myself.”

Schorderheim fetched the golden wine in the long crystal flasks from the tortoiseshell cabinets and the lily shaped glasses from the green porphyry console where also stood sugar plums and biscuits in filigree porcelain dishes.

Beylon, commanded to a chair, watched the King writing slowly and carefully, his white quill and slender hand sending a shadow over the square of vellum; the Reader had glimpsed Gustaf at the entertainment, and now it seemed to him that he looked on another man; the flashing gaiety, the enthusiastic joyousness had vanished, the King was tranquil, almost sad, without smiles or brilliant glances, the face seemed older, there were slight hollows in the cheeks, the full lips were almost hard in their firm set, for the first time Beylon noticed the depression in the left temple, the slight drag at the left nostril, faint scars of natal injuries, that in some lights, as now, gave Gustaf’s profile a foreboding expression. In a plain blue coat, tight buttoned from throat to waist, his body showed hard and narrow, like that of Karl XII, a cambric was folded round his neck, cambric ruffles showed beneath his cuff; he wore neither sash nor baldric, a narrow leather belt fastened his sword to his side, the skirts of the coat were buttoned back to show the white lining and the black breeches and hose, oval silver buckles on his shoes that were without the usual red heels, were his sole ornament; this costume, at once peculiar and antique, resembled that worn by the hardy Swedes who, being but 8,000 had beaten 50,000 Russians at Narva, seventy-two years ago; this costume was so dissimilar to any that Gustaf had ever worn before that it amounted, Beylon thought to a disguise, one that was completed by the King’s long and abundant hair, from which the powder had been brushed, hanging loose and undressed in a horn clasp, instead of the usual rolls and curls.

Beylon wished the King had worn mail under that old-fashioned coat, the uniform of Karl XII, wished that he carried the English pistols and the shagreen dagger. The Reader had been obliged to report to Gustaf that he had lost these weapons, he had been so pressed that he had forgotten into what piece of furniture he had slipped them when disturbed by the lackey; the King had made

nothing of the matter and refused to have attention called to it by a search; but now Beylon felt uneasy, almost guilty; he much wished, also, that he had been able to find Madame d'Egmont's glove, though Gustaf had said nothing more of this loss.

Well, he had the three fine, almost imperceptible ribbons in his buttonhole, and Beylon supposed her letters over his heart—or, no? Lest they be found on his corpse?

The King lit a taper in a flame shaped silver holder from the wick in the Venetian glass, melted the wax and impressed his seal on the order for the arrest of the Senators who were all of them, at this moment, unable to sleep in anxious eagerness for the arrival of the Upland regiments.

He looked up, and even Beylon, who knew him so well was startled by the lustre of his eyes that had that noble brilliancy so seldom seen save in children and animals, so intense was this dark blue that changed to green flashes when Gustaf was excited that the effect on many people was unnatural, sinister and even alarming.

Chapter 19

Beylon had fallen asleep in his chair when the King returned from his night patrol with the burgher guard, the lamp was low, the King extinguished it; only the wick on the oil in the glass of water gave a feeble star of light in the blue shadow of the brief Northern night; the Reader looked an old man, puzzled and sad in his sleep, his breast rose with little shudders, his cheeks were flaccid, his mouth half open; Gustaf glanced at him with compassion and affection. Schorderheim was still away on an errand to Rear Admiral Tersmeden who was in the plot, and who had promised to do his utmost to bring the vessels of the fleet anchored off Skepparsholm to declare for the King, the Herald had taken with him two of the bags of money, the others were on the desk; the King's sole resource, pitted against the wealth of Britain and Russia. Gustaf lay on the sofa, his long fingers beat out the chords from the Iphigénie overture, he thought of Jeanne d'Egmont, dressed in the period of the Chevalier Bayard—that drama of de Bellay had been deservedly laughed at by the wits, as Gustaf, himself an expert dramatist, knew, the declamation of heroics on the stage was always amusing to a cynic idle audience, the French King, diseased and haunted, had slept, yawns and titters had broken the histrionics of the peerless Knight, but Jeanne d'Egmont would never find heroism a subject for mockery, she had a clear forward seeing vision, she could hear what others could not hear, the menacing cries of the Furies, see what others could not see, the writing on the wall. "How easy it is to sneer at what is good and noble," mused Gustaf. "Why are we afraid of this allegiance to virtue? Even if M. de Bellay had composed an excellent piece those French courtiers would have been wearied and impatient, but give them a wittol held to ridicule, a lover hidden in a married woman's wardrobe, a grey beard with the palsy, a fool tricked by a knave, and they will be vastly diverted. Yet, maybe,

the time may come when some of them would have to rely on honour and courage—as I do to-night," he raised himself on his elbow, smiling into the dimness of the chamber, as if he saw her there in her costume of two centuries and a half ago, a touching, womanly caprice, the endless longing for disguise, masquerade. "I am glad you will wear my colours the day of your Coronation." Eh, well, he had lived once, been as real as Gustaf and this moment now was real, Pierre du Terrail Bayard, propped up against a tree, gripping his sword for a cross, dying with his face to the enemy, as he whispered the *misere*; he was brave and honourable, and he had left the loyal servitor to write his eulogy—"as Beylon would write of me, if I so proved myself—but how rude, how terrible an existence, war, assault, wounds, death." Gustaf shuddered, he put his hand to his brow where the fine locks were dark with sweat, he had never seen blood, not even the blood of the beast slain in the hunt. He could not have written a drama about Bayard, and his perpetual clash of arms, the battles trampling to and fro, over the Alps, across Piedmont, in Champagne, the loud praise for the senseless combats for aggression, greed, pride—Jeanne d'Egmont had not seen this, only the unmoved nobility of the Chevalier Bayard and how he had stood away from the dark ruin of his age, one who fought for abstract honour, never for gain, one who was never cruel or mean or arrogant.

The sun was up, a stir of salt breeze from the open window lifted the ends of Beylon's graying locks; the King blew out the oil wick; the shadows receded before the clear pallor of the dawn.

"Beylon—it is six o'clock. I am going to the Chapel to receive the sacrament. I made this appointment with Dr. Vrangel last night. I also asked him if he regarded my proposed action as a sin, and he answered—as a court chaplain would—not if it is for the good of the State."

The Reader, who was an honest Lutheran, woke to hear these words and smiled with a warm gush of pleasure, he had always found the sole flaw in his young master to be his—as Beylon termed it—"godlessness" not that he had blamed him for this sad defect, since his mother had carefully trained him in a fashionable atheism.

"The disciple of Rousseau and Voltaire does not go into a Christian chapel to mock," observed the King kindly, "nor am I converted to superstition."

"Your Majesty dissimulates!"

"Perhaps I think this action of mine will become known and please Sweden—especially please the humble people, Beylon, but I feel I can dedicate myself to the God Dr. Vrangel believes in—without hypocrisy—it is no more than to pause and say—may the best of myself succeed in serving the best in other men."

Chapter 20

Gustaf rode out of the main entrance of Nicodemus Tessin's palace as the onyx clock in his room chimed ten o'clock, the strokes vibrating the empty lily glasses, stirring the ashes on the alabaster hearth; four grooms followed him, this meagre

escort, his own plain Karl XII attire, his light locks flowing under the three cornered hat, causing the passers-by to stare after him, puzzled, not sure of his identity—no scarf, no red heels—neither smiles nor bows, the drawbridge was down facing the Northern entrance to the palace, that to the state apartments, the waters of the Norrstrom were blue beneath the bridge, blue round Helglands Holmen, the small islet that lay between the city within the bridges and the city on the mainland the drawbridge continued into a fine road across this island, the Norrgro. As he passed over this, the King was joined by several groups of officers on their way o the parade in the yard of the Arsenal, when he reached the second drawbridge that led to the mainland, he had more than two hundred plumed and spruce soldiers behind him; the King glanced at the crowded shipping along the quays, he glanced back once, at the men behind him as he passed the statue of Gustaf Adolf II opposite the unfinished Opera House; they were fellow conspirators waiting for his signal. Others came out of the Artillery Depot facing the Opera House, the King led them round the elegant classic building and into the yard of the Arsenal, divided from the Opera House only by a narrow street; now he had roused from his reverie and gracefully acknowledged the salutations of the citizens setting about their daily affairs, unexcited by the cavalcade, for an inspection of the garrison in the parade ground of the Arsenal was a routine affair. Tile messages sent to these officers were to the effect that if the King returned on horseback to the palace, the plan of a revolt was abandoned; therefore they all watched him closely until Le had made his rounds of the companies and spoken to officers and them.

To most of them the affair seemed fantastic, a whim, a caprice, no more real than the scenic marvels at which they had gazed last night, a great doubt of the slender young man in the old-fashioned blue coat disturbed them; even the most ardent almost wished the King would turn his horse's head and ride out of an impossible situation.

Gustaf was thinking of Toll, of the Sprengtporten brothers, of Beylon, of Karl and Frederik, of Jeanne d'Egmont, of all who had trusted him; he glanced up at the flag above the barracks, no air to stir the furled folds, no wind to fill the canvas of the fleet off Finland and the Uplanders only an hour or so from Stockholm, M. de Vergennes turning his papers, Aurora Lowenhjelm murmuring a prayer—*nunc aut nanquam*, the ancient tag, always fresh.

He dismounted, throwing his reins to his orderly and announced in a loud voice:

"Gentlemen, we shall return to the palace on foot." The officers dismounted also and followed him; among them now were some who had no knowledge of the plot, others to whom merely a hint had been given, and some who were in the King's closest secrets. Gustaf walked up to two of them, Lars Hjerta and Frederik Horn and gave them a scroll he took from his pocket.

"You know what to do with it," he said and the two officers bowed in silence. Ensign Hjerta took the order to arrest the Senate.

The King's bright humour was overcast, he walked slowly as if the night's fatigues still enchained him; his ungloved hands were clasped behind him and he looked at the pound; those near him remarked uneasily the pale, despondent cast of his countenance and whispered among themselves, many of those in that

lagging procession thought of Struensee, and Brandt, and the grisly fortunes that awaited those who fail in a palace revolution; some wished they had fled like Scheffer and Ferson, others that they had been taken ill like Saltza; but there were those who were coldly determined to see the revolt through or shoot themselves; if the King faltered, winced, blundered, they would dispose of themselves before they could be dragged to the torture chamber; among these bold and reckless men were Koenig, Horn and Hjerta.

When the King entered the palace court be asked the porter if the Senate had arrived and learned that, punctual to their hour, they were gathered in the Council Chamber, with sentries posted at the doors; the King glanced anxiously up at the windows of this apartment that gave onto the court then made a signal for the officers to come with him into the guard room; Hjerta and Horn, however, entered the palace by the main doors, the latter remarking swiftly—"We are doing all that man can do, and all is done in vain—did you note this Vasa king? His brilliancy is snuffed out as the tinsel of yesterday's spectacle, now that he has to deal with men."

Hjerta then commanded the fifty grenadiers whom he had ordered to wait for him in the splendid vestibule to follow him up the noble stairway that led to the Council Chamber on the second floor.

Chapter 21

The King hesitated a second before the magnificant facade of the palace, enriched by caryatids and busts in relief of the Princes of the House of Vasa; he glanced again at the stately windows of the Council Chamber, those of the Great Gallery and the ante-chamber of the Yeomen of the Guard, he could see blurred faces looking down behind the glass, those of Senators, curious and ignorant as to the movements of the soldiers below, those of lackeys, expressionless at their duties as they shifted the brocade curtains that obscured the light, then, crossing the first windows the upright plumes in the round hats of Hjerta and Horn.

Gustaf turned into the guard room in the side pavilion and the officers came after him; when the last had entered the plain barracks room, Gustaf himself locked the door and put the key in his pocket, then advancing to a table where Beylon and Schorderheim sat, at their clerkly offices, with their clerkly implements; they alone looked at the King with complete sympathy and no one noticed them; the officers remained grouped together, alert and wary, intent on the man before them, more intent on him than on the large events they were engaged in, to them, of a cool, reasonable and hardy race, the cause was already lost if the leader was incompetent; the blond faces, the light blue eyes were stern with the secrecy of doubt.

Gustaf faced them; they expected his seductive oratory and already discounted it; to men of action the arts of the actor were suspect, they were dubious even of his antique simplicity, the change from the glitter of last night was startling, truly, they thought, but in a theatrical way.

Gustaf, facing them, wavered, drew back against the table even his lips were pale and that with the shadows under his eyes gave him an appearance of mortal weakness; he spoke, incoherently, in a strained voice, putting his hand to his heart with a gesture of almost womanish weakness; none of the officers had ever seen him anything but superbly self assured, and their scrutiny became fiery, some of them shifted their swords in the belts, some breathed in a sighing fashion. Gustaf spoke again, no one could understand what he said, he was abruptly silent, and glanced desperately round for support that he did not receive; the haughty faces hardened, some with a sneer, and Baron Cederstrom, a Government man who knew nothing of the plot, muttered: "Is this your impelling eloquence, Sire?" and stepped forward. The sight of an enemy challenging him, where he had expected the championship of friends, released the young man's passion, he spoke spontaneously, clearly, into that grim and hostile silence that sank over all darkly after Cederstrom's sarcasm.

"Do you expect an Academic oration?" he asked with a fury like the drive of a sword on a foe. "You know well enough the country is bankrupt, blighted, bought and sold, appanage to Russia, pawn to England, victim to Denmark, you knew the price and the hiring of those—your rulers and mine—who confer together, even now, even here, to put the shackles on you! on me!"

One of the ensigns, so much in earnest that he forgot his junior rank, exclaimed impulsively. "It is true we are in extremity—we—Sweden."

The King turned swiftly towards him.

"Yes. And we—you and I—and all of us here, can save Sweden. Give me your oaths of allegiance."

"Will you be a dictator, Sire?" asked Cederstrom darkly.

"No—the first citizen of a free people. I have a new Constitution ready, but you must trust me for a few days. You have seen the danger of prating, Cederstrom! You mocked at my oratory and well you might, what use has it been? Let us now try action."

This roused and pleased the soldiers, none of them had ever heard the King speak like this before, nor supposed that he might prove this manner of man.

"Follow me," added the King, "as your forefathers followed Gustaf Vasa and Gustaf Adolf and neither of us will be dissatisfied."

"What are you plans, Sire?" demanded several of the officers at once.

"Take the oath and you shall know them."

Fired by the generous enthusiasm of youth, Ensign Lieven cried: "Yes, we will follow your Majesty blindly!"

The pause was no more than a second before the strong voices assented: "Yes, we will obey your Majesty."

"Beylon, have you the oath engrossed!" Gustaf swung round to the desk, before the Reader could reply Cederstrom had come closer to the King.

"I will not move against the Estates, Sire, or swear any allegiance save to them."

"Consider what you do in thus declaring yourself my enemy!" cried Gustaf fiercely.

Cederstrom drew his sword; in everyone's mind was the knowledge that he could easily have given the King a mortal thrust, but he offered the hilt to Gustaf,

saying: “I have sworn an oath your Majesty desires me to break, of what use to your Majesty would be the word of a perjured man?”

The others murmured at this slight, Gustaf returned the weapon at once, remarking: “I know you too well to suppose you will make a dishonourable use of it.”

But Cederstrom, unmoved, laid the sword across the desk, by Beylon’s parchment, that the other officers were coming up to sign, Gustaf crying: “Quick, it is a matter of hours.”

When all had signed save Cederstrom, the King flashed at him—“Do you give your word to remain here until I send for you?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“Then, put on your sword.”

Cederstrom did so, reluctantly, and the King rapidly unlocked the door and stepped into the courtyard that was still in shadow. “The Senate,” he said loud enough for all to hear, “is being arrested, we will now go and secure Stockholm.”

The new Commandant of the city, Kalling, was called from the window, by Vallvijk, to record his vote on the affairs of Scania, but, paying no attention, he replied loudly, “The King is in the courtyard with a great hum of military—their officers are giving them ducats and ammunition—it is Beylon who holds the money bags.”

The Senators sprang up in gusty rage, shouting: “We will soon set the young fool down!”

“Yes, your excellencies, I shall soon put a stop to this impertinence, the soldiers are huzza’ing and horses are being brought out.” Count Kalling left the window and hurried across the Council Chamber, breaking violently into the ante room of the guard; there he recoiled, for Ensign Hjerta with his grenadiers were facing him.

“I must see the King!” shouted Kalling purpling.

“Return to your place,” said Hjerta, who had the order for the arrest of the Senators in his hand. “The door of this room is locked, and that one soon will be.” Kalling hastened back into the Council Chamber, where the Senators were in a tumult, fumbling with papers, crowding about the windows, exclaiming at what they saw below; Captain Arminoff with thirty men followed Kalling, coolly bade their Excellencies save their breaths, and locked the door behind him. “The entire palace is occupied by troops who are loyal to His Majesty,” he declared dryly with that indifferent air of authority so provoking and alarming to civilians. Two of the military senators, implacable enemies to the King, Colonel Ribbing and Colonel Falkengren, responded instantly by proposing to hack their way out of the building but were dragged back by the others who implored them not to begin the shedding of Swedish blood, so naturally to them came the platitudes of their profession, even at a crisis of their fortunes. Arminoff smiled contemptuously enjoying the humiliation of those who until a moment ago had been his masters with power to torture him to death, confiscate his estates and blast his honour.

Intent on carrying out the royal orders, the officers had not observed a simple faced valet in the Vasa liveries, who had stood aside, with a dumb foundered stare as they clattered upstairs. This fellow, a Holsteiner, was the extremely adroit spy of Baron Pechlin who paid well and was well served; having satisfied himself that the Senate was helpless, the spy ran into the sunny gardens where his pay-

master, disdaining the dull debates of the Senate, and believing himself in complete possession of power, was sitting easily in an arbour of plaited willow, savouring an exquisite collation he had ordered from the palace kitchens, the brilliant warmth of the blue air and indulging in comfortable thoughts of the near arrival of the Uplanders. Never a man to spend himself on side issues and sure that he had the situation well in hand, he did not concern himself with the routine sounds, as they seemed to him, from the parade ground the Northern side of the palace, but placidly digested his repast and entertained himself by inhaling the pungent perfume of the herb plots, watching the gulls cleaving the azure void, while he sarcastically recalled the vain and absurd display the spendthrift King had luxuriated in last night, and the fury of Sprengtporten without a puff of air to stir his shrouds—"Yet both the silly spectacle and the shores of Finland will be regretted no doubt," mused Pechlin, "when they meet in Gripsholm." The hurried pace and quick, secret gesture of his spy coming on him sent the Baron instantly to his feet, on the panted news he heard, he sped by posterns towards the quays that faced the isle of Riddar; Pechlin went on foot, cool and furious—"I'll make a push for it, I'll have civil war, if nothing else."

Vigorous and inflamed the Baron hastened, not aware that he was hatless and that his napkin hung on his arm; he passed unobserved in the streets where rumour had already skipped and each man and woman, uncertain, was thinking of their own, some to clutch, some to fly, some agape on the Riddarholmen bridge over the lake. Pechlin paused, to pant and stare up at the spire of the Riddarsholm Church where were the hundreds of flags, drums, trophies, the green Swedish marble tombs of Gustaf Adolf, the blood stained jerkins—"A jay to endeavour the flight of an eagle!" he muttered and shook his heavy fist towards the direction of the other church where Gustaf had so lately been crowned on his silver throne near the silver altar; his resolute enemy hoped he might soon lie in his silver coffin, in the ancient vaults that waited for the Vasa Kings.

Swift as the Baron had been, he was too late when he reached the ornate, baroque facade of the Riddarhuset, doors and gates were wide, a running servant had brought the news of the arrest of the Senate to a beloved master; the deputies had fled on the lackeys' cries of the King swooping down on them with a regiment of armed soldiers; the Estates had mingled in the medley, priests struggled with peasants, burghers with nobles, nothing was valued but haste. When Pechlin reached the Great Hall, the bright colours and swirling lines of the coats of arms of all the nobility of Sweden that enriched the walls surrounded empty benches and the forlorn solitary figures of the Marshal of the Diet and his clerk; without a word Pechlin turned away, alarm had cleared the streets, but he had to draw aside as Governor Rudbeck rode past, his nervous horse in a foam; seeing Pechlin, he pulled up, "A revolt!" he yelled. "And when I try to rouse the people they only grin! I have ordered the militia to fire on the troops!"

"Not one in ten has any ammunition," remarked Pechlin curtly, "better get to the British Embassy—that won't be sacked, though I'd not be so sure of the Russian."

"I went to the palace stables—I ordered the ostler not to allow the King a horse," cried Rudbeck.

"Go home," advised Pechlin with a leer, "or you'll get shot in the scramble—someone will begin firing soon."

Governor Ridbeck drooped, his face bright with sweat glaring with the savage impotence of a man unable o deal with a crisis; the horse clattered on the cobbles, restive and frightened, Pechlin jostled into the crowd, now beginning to surge steadily in one direction, that of the palace; royalist agents were putting it about that there was a design to murder the King—this the Stockholmers took for a heavy and ghastly report and snatching up sticks and knives sped to deal with the traitors, railing against the foreigners and the perjured Senate.

Pechlin, declining their fury by side streets and lanes made for the Skeppsholm quays where the fleet was anchored, with guns trained on the city, he wasted no energy on abuse or curses, but his blood raced with rage against the popinjay King who had flouted him; a light carriage with the British arms on the panels passed, halted at a quick word, and Sir John Goodrich peered out above the drooped leathers with a sly amusement; he had warned them all and so often—"I perceive you have the good intention of stirring up the navy," he remarked, "it is the last hope—I suppose your admirals will stand to it? Or at least destroy some of the city with a brisk cannonade?" as he helped Pechlin into the carriage he continued: "I have brought what money I had to scatter to the sailors, it is no large sum, but my expenses have been heavy of late."

It was his sole hint at his continuous attempts to rouse the Senate and the swollen bribes he had lavished there; Pechlin nodded in acknowledgement of the thrust, saying: "The King fooled me completely—I have met a whole generation of liars, but none of his quality, 'tis the very fine art of dissimulation."

"Maybe," replied Sir John who showed no trace of his bitter vexation, "he will put up no impressive performance, he is a comedian, perhaps nothing more."

"What does he do now?" asked Pechlin.

"He went, I heard, to the artillery yard, and there is a noisy press about him, with the Burgomaster pushed in and some distracted citizens, and he makes them one of his florid speeches."

"I would he would lay about him and arouse some resistance—when he begins to shed blood, he'll begin to slip."

"Perhaps he never will be vindictive," suggested Sir John leaning out of the window and peering at the masts of the men o'war now showing at the end of the crooked street of stone houses.

"You mean that he will not destroy his enemies?" asked Pechlin amazed. "Impossible!"

"I do not think so," said the Englishman, "prodigies will occur—fantastic notions are the mode, your King may be true to his much cried about notions of chivalry—and this windy nonsense belched abroad by that scoundrel Voltaire, and that whining rogue, Rousseau."

"Impossible!" cried Pechlin again confounded by this bizarre suggestion. "I heard this of him, just now—one of his officers would not follow him."

"Ah, that would be Cederstrom—a bustling fool, he should have slid in, then out, with news."

"I did not catch the name, messengers are in a hurried sweat but the King has forced this fellow to keep his sword and given him the guard of his person, giving his enemy this honour instead of prison, or a bullet."

Pechlin laughed.

“I still cannot credit such folly—but if he intends to behave like that, we certainly shall not long be vexed by him.”

Chapter 22

That afternoon Gustaf had established his Headquarters in the Artillery Barracks Yard; his march there had been triumphal, as the eager crowd had gathered outside the North Gates of the palace, these had been flung back and he had ridden out, at the head of his guards, and so across, again, the Norrbro, past the Opera House, to the Arsenal; the gathering citizens behind him. He had at once sent a dispatch rider to Karl, bidding him secure Scania, another to Frederik in Smaland, with similar instructions; later a second messenger went commanding Frederik to arrest Pechlin, who had found the navy secured by the bribes and promises of Admiral Tersmeden, and then, unable to do anything further in the capital had taken a horse from Goodrich’s stable and ridden off to his estates and his regiment, Hjerta had overtaken this bold and tireless man, but as he had no warrant for his arrest, Pechlin pounced on this oversight, rebuked the junior officer severely for his insolence and pushed on post for Smaland.

Gustaf, using the easiest badge procurable, had tied his cambric handkerchief round his arm and ordered the soldiers to do the same, this token of loyalty had been fastened on the bewildered Burgomaster by the King himself, who declared—“it was right for a patriot such as M. Ekman to wear this loyal insignia.”

On beholding this, other supporters of the government, believing the Burgomaster had turned his coat, whipped out their handkerchiefs and tied them round above their elbows; though so far not a shot had been fired, cannon were parked in the squares, the city gates were closed, and the story went about that Rudbeck had been arrested, that Pechlin was fled, that when the King had visited the fleet he had been received with joyful enthusiasm; the timid, the indifferent and the sly therefore roundly showed themselves as active on the winning side.

Thus there was no opposition to Gustaf, and, as he rode about the city, the common people, the women and the children, who knew nothing of him that was not pleasing, kindly and comely, gathered about him, with praise, with this hope, with that sorrow; he rebuffed none of them, but constantly reined up to promise relief for their griefs and cares and a deliverance from the miseries of famine. He had never been more truly himself, those who rode with him noticed that he was neither nervous nor exultant, his earnestness flowed into the earnestness of these, his lesser subjects, so clearly did he see their burdens and so absolutely was he resolved to ease them, that he forgot their station and his own and they, who had suffered not understanding why, and unable to express themselves, did behold in this tired young man, with the long tossed hair and simple habit, some wonder, one of the powerful masters of the world (for such to them he was) detained by them and their humble calamities and obscure apprehensions. To them, living so long with private miseries, unwarmed by hope, he was worthy of worship for his pity; the fair haired women went on their knees on the cobbles, holding up their

fair haired infants, and the children sensing kindness, clustered to the stirrups, the withered and the sick, the old and crooked dared to come forward without a fear of being pushed back for knaves or a pest; flowers snatched from gardens and pots, the humble beauty of common blooms in nosegay tied with penny ribbons scattered the King's way as he returned to the palace.

"This is the only important day of my life," he thought, "the other pleasures were as trifling dreams."

He had not forgotten Jeanne d'Egmont, but she and this were one, these hours were as her gift to him, yet even without her he would have done this, though not with so good a grace.

Chapter 23

When Gustaf returned to the palace, the sky was yellow in the mist and the hot light blotted out with radiance the details of the courtyard, and edged with purple shadow the medallions of the Vasa kings and the caryatids on the grandiose facade. Messages were awaiting the King from the women; the Queens wished to know his pleasure; he could well imagine his mother's uncertainty, ready to triumph with success, to rail with failure, his wife's timid desire not to offend, were he to bid her to retreat into exile she would go silently and he would never be troubled with her tears; for the moment they must wait, he sent each of them consoling words and a promise that he would soon wait on them; he knew it would be dangerous to put his mother aside for long, unkind to for long ignore his wife. But there were other duties that were immediate; he could not swallow the food that Beylon brought and wine he never used, having sufficient fire in his blood; he drank coffee, standing in the Great Gallery as he directed that the families of the imprisoned Senators should be apprised of their safety and gave orders that their comforts should be attended to; he commanded guards to be set round the Russian and English ministries; and, not finding his tablets, wrote on the back of a ten dollar note an invitation for the foreign diplomats to attend the palace. Only M. de Vergennes responded by coming at once, in high spirits, thereupon Gustaf sent a second time to request the presence of M. Osterman and Sir John Goodrich.

"Both of them," declared M. de Vergennes, "endeavoured to revolt the fleet, they would willingly have laid Stockholm in ruins, sooner than see your Majesty triumph—this is a keen defeat for them."

"And they are redoubtable enemies," smiled Gustaf. "Perhaps now they will respect me more, but that will only make them more dangerous."

The Frenchman was too elated to be surprised at the King's seriousness; M. de Vergennes had helped to bring about the one success of the long, feeble and dreary reign of his master, and the fact that he had been far from confident of this splendid result of his half hearted support of the King's daring move, added relief to his pleasure..

“You are assured,” he declared warmly, “of the utmost that the friendship of France can do.”

A hollow, if glittering promise; the French Ambassador was not aware how carefully those most expert of secret agents, the highborn ladies who privately corresponded with him, kept Gustaf informed of the massive decay and magnificent corruption of his only ally; he leaned back in the corner of the green damask settee, the dust of the crowded day on his shoes and in his hair, he was unconscious of fatigue, but the tremors of exhaustion shook him as he stared into the pattern of light and shadow, both golden, that lay over the handsome appointments of the noble gallery.

“I hope,” remarked M. de Vergennes with respect, “that your Majesty will not be too lenient.”

“With whom?” asked Gustaf. “With myself, no.”

“I mean, with your enemies—the Senators.”

“They have been sent to apartments in the palace. They passed through here, and each kissed my hand, they were much afraid, yes, even Kalling, who is a soldier, was afraid.”

“Your Majesty must give them cause for this fear, they should all be removed. So should Baron Pechlin, Count Fersen and General Rudbeck.”

“From office, perhaps.”

“I do not mean from office, sire.”

“What do you mean?” asked Gustaf intently.

“These men, or most of them, have forfeited their lives. My master will expect them to be punished. Their subordinates should be tortured to extort confessions to incriminate them.”

The King was silent; the pantomime of his never sleeping dreams closed on him, the insane designs of Piranesi, the bloody heads of Brandt and Struensee, the harsh denials whereby the goddess refused Iphigénie’s pleas for mercy for her victims.

“Your Majesty can have no other intention?” asked M. de Vergennes with a deference that did not disguise a certain insinuation of the expectations of the paymaster; without French gold Gustaf could not have succeeded.

“When you pass the great square,” asked the King, “do you never think of what happened there? We term it the Swedish blood bath.”

“A massacre by the Danes—and two hundred and fifty years ago. One finds such incidents in every history. The only means of government is to extirpate one’s enemies, the dead do not conspire.”

“No? What of dreams? Remorse? Hauntings?”

“Mon Dieu! Your majesty does not speak like the man you proved yourself to-day.”

“Yet I am that very man. So you expect I should send my opponents to the torture chamber, the block.”

“Certainly. Your Majesty played total hazard—the loser loses all.”

“I intend to send Baron Pechlin to Gripsholm,” replied the King pleasantly.

“No more than that?” asked the Frenchman. “If Your Majesty does not destroy your enemies they will destroy you.”

The lackeys opened the folding doors and M. Osterman and Sir John Goodrich entered, the Russian disdained to conceal his sharp edged amazement, and put through his formal salutations with an air of malice, the Englishman was unperturbed and complimented the King on the splendour of the entertainment of last night.

"I shall do better," smiled Gustaf, "when the new Opera House is complete, the theatre in the palace is small," without a change of tone he added: "Gentlemen, the events of to-day do not alter my relations with foreign powers. You have perceived the tumults in my capital, should you be disordered by them, I offer you asylum here, in my own house."

Osterman bowed, disdaining to reply, Sir John said, easily: "Why, sir, I don't suppose the British Embassy in any danger and, with your leave, I shall remain at my post."

"Then," the King rose, "there is nothing more for me to say, and I shall not keep you from your concerns."

"May I send a courier to London, sir?" asked the Englishman.

"Your Excellency will have remarked that the city gates are closed. You will understand that I cannot re-open them until the city is settled."

The ministers bowed and withdrew; "They are bewildered," considered the King. "Even M. de Vergennes does not understand."

He sighed, under no delusion as to the value of his triumph or the intricate difficulties ahead, he did not applaud himself for what he had done and he knew that he had but taken one step on a road not only of extreme peril, but one so over-cast that he could see but little ahead along that twisting perspective; knowing what he must do, and following a course long set in advance, he denied himself to the numbers who desired to throng about him and went to his mother's apartments where she had remained all day, too proud to send a gentleman usher to enquire what the commotion might be; but Gustaf had ordered Beylon to instruct her, and Schorderheim to reassure his wife that she need be in no alarm.

Chapter 24

Ulrika Lovisa was passionately offended because her sons had not confided in her, nor could she understand why she was kept out of a design that she would warmly have approved and which had been disclosed to so many, even of mean condition, such as the Herald and the Reader; she received Gustaf with rancour, and that elegant mockery that she had tinkled in his ears ever since he could remember her; the magnificent gift that he offered her, the governorship of Swedish Pomerania, did not appease her surging vanity.

"This is policy," she sneered, "to keep my brother harmless, if not allied."

"So I considered it," he answered. "The King of Prussia will not suspect me of intentions of crossing his frontiers if you rule this border province. Moreover, it was as a grace to you, a tribute to your gifts and fame."

“To remove me from your household?” she asked. “I have been much undermined in your affections—your brothers also—vain glory consumes you all.”

“Have it as you please, Madam,” he said. “I have long known that you take no comfort from me.”

The arrogant woman closed her eyes; she was faint from much watching, from anxiety, from a furious inner conflict, she delighted in the revolution that had made the royal family powerful, and yet her inordinate ambition stung her because she had had no part in this achievement, nay, more, had been deliberately excluded from it; she began to contend with Gustaf, jeering at everything he had done, scorning his clothes, his conduct of the revolution, slighting him for the escape of Pechlin, predicting a dismal end to this desperate flourish as she termed the revolution, this she did after her manner, well composed, graceful, her passions guarded.

Gustaf listened respectfully; it was years since she had been able to move him, here was a settled grief, a loss accepted; he had known that she would be contrary to all his intentions, and though he again wondered a little at the peculiar follies of clever women, even those of noble blood and training, he had no answer to her reproaches that he interrupted to say.

“I can never count you my enemy, I must always believe you do not mean to harm me.”

This caught her up, she demanded: “Do you consider me mischievous?”

“To those you hate, therefore, you must not hate me.” He laid this on her like a command, with urgency; she recoiled into her natural secrecy.

“I perceive that I am little esteemed,” she said and gave him the smile that had something of his own fascination; he could not comprehend this lust of domination in a woman, here was one whose life was supreme luxury, who had the wit and taste without which luxury is but the gilding of a sluggard’s idleness and yet she must fret because she was not as supreme as the Tzarina.

Clever enough to change the style of her railing, she asked. “Perhaps now you can pay my debts?”

“They shall be my first consideration when I have the resources.”

“What! Are you not now master of Sweden?”

“Madame, no politics between us. I give you Pomerania—and Sweden a new Constitution.”

“What of our—your enemies?” she began to name them, putting in adroit excuses for her own friends; she made it plain that she expected what M. de Vergennes had expected, trials, torture, the block, the rope, perhaps a massacre. And yet she had educated him in advanced liberal teachings and herself despised superstition, tradition and convention; he hardly listened to her, but stood at a forced attention that was partly fatigue and partly respect. Ulrika Lovisa seeing him unmoved, became agitated, she began to feel unsafe, to recall past imprudences, even acts of malice, she demanded news about her other sons, and, on being old, realized that this coup d’etat contrived by young men she had thought so frivolous as to go secretly to consult a cheap fortune teller might be serious, so, stifling her resentments, she clamoured on Gustaf to be firm with his enemies, now he had the chance—“You are dictator, from what you tell me, establish yourself as an absolute monarch, put aside your useless fool of a wife,”

she spoke vehemently, her handsome face was unpleasant, it had an expression of a vixen, as her brother, Frederik of Prussia had that of a dog fox, she pulled at the ruffles on her fine bosom, her clear eyes, watchful, sly, tried to penetrate her son's reserve. Gustaf kissed her hand and slipped away without replying—"They all expect a massacre," he thought. In the ante-chamber were the Queen Dowager's idle pages playing shuttlecock across one end of the shining room; Gustaf noticed Colonel Ribbing's son, and remembered there was an enemy there, unless that arrogant soldier's acquiescence in the revolution had been more than mere expediency. Gustaf could not hope so, yet he would have to trust his opponents—or murder them; he heard the hand bell peal from his mother's apartment and her restless voice complaining; he hesitated as to whether he should visit Sophia; he paused with his hand on the baluster of the grand staircase, then turned o his own chamber, he dreaded his wife's lisping accents, her blank pale eyes, her lack of interest in anything he did; he excused himself by deciding to ride round the city with the burgher guard during the brief night, time and strength must be conserved until his work was finished. Neither of the women presented any likelihood of more than little teasing difficulties, Ulrika Lovisa would make the best of Pomerania when she realized she could have nothing else, and play her part there with radiant, stately luxury, Sophia would continue her indolent routine, some day he might overcome his disgust of, his repugnance to, all she represented, all she, he feared, was, but not now, at this moment he could not face this unsubstantial menace.

Chapter 25

Stockholm was tranquil, the revolution complete, twenty-four hours had flung the country into the King's power, as a ball is flung into a net; alone in his chamber, after his return from patrolling he city, he looked squarely at his task; he had made no pause in his preconceived plan; he had dispatched flattering letters to Fersen and to Scheffer, one the man who had always opposed him, one the man who, after edging him on to rebellion for five years, had forsaken him at the crisis, but useful, adroit politicians, gifted, powerful, Gustaf did not doubt that they would loyally repay his clemency. He had his rewards ready, dukedoms for Karl and Frederik—they had bargained for as much—and earned as much by their military audacity, generalships for the colonels, a grade up for everyone—and Toll, who had worked secretly through others and whose name was scarcely known, even among the King's friends?—"he may have what he likes," thought Gustaf, "and I expect he will ask for very little."

His lamp was scarcely needed in the Northern summer night, the golden glow on his desk wavered into the silver sheen that fell through the tall open window. Before the King's inner eye the whole of his country lay outspread, the ragged cliffs, the sombre forests, the purple lakes, the rugged castles and lonely cottages, the water breaks with the rainbows in their spray, the wild swans with

outstretched necks flying across solitary marshes, beyond all the north, and beyond that the golden landscape of the Hyperboreans.

Gustaf took up his quill and wrote to Jeanne d'Egmont.

"Madame, I have the happiness to acquaint you with the news that the *coup d'état* of which I have so often written to you, has been accomplished, without a drop of blood shed or a single pang—this is to assure you that I, now in absolute power, shall always be guided by those principles I have always respected and you have always approved…"

Chapter 26

"I wonder," said Beylon affectionately, "that your Majesty is not giddy from applause and exhausted by success—the last fortnight has been one triumph after another—indeed, who is discontented? Where is one blot on the perfection of this revolution that secures the happiness of an entire nation?"

He spoke pedantically, but without flattery; he felt what he expressed, a deep relief and delight in Gustaf's amazing achievement; with the exception of Baron Pechlin who had been lodged a prisoner in Gripsholm castle, no punishment had been inflicted on anyone, all past offences had been over-looked, and everyone had rallied to the King, and accepted with expressions of passionate gratitude and loyalty the new Constitution, that of a limited monarchy, he had given the Riksdag after three days of dictatorship and after an ironic, cool and magnanimous speech to the Estates. By the second week in September, the Riksdag, after humbly accepting the King's terms and voting ample supplies, the reform of the currency, a medal to celebrate the release of the country from civil commotion and the corruption of foreign meddling, was dismissed by the blast of trumpets, blaast ut that proclaimed the end of the sessions; Sprengtporten and the Borga dragoons had at last returned to the capital, the wind that had filled the sails of the fleet, bringing water swollen clouds tumbling over Sweden, so that it was in a drench of gray rain that the King had ridden out to greet the Finns, Sprengtporten, kneeling in the downpour to be created a knight of the Order of the Sword. Gustaf had not found any of his tasks difficult, he had long since rehearsed them in his mind and they suited his character and fulfilled his fantasy, swift and exact, he had given himself no time for meditation or cloying side fancies, his actions went by rote, like a military manoeuvre, learned before with wooden soldiers; he consulted with none, though his affability was so extreme as to make it appear that all were his favourites.

Beylon's adulation he accepted as a mere expression of faithful service; it would be, he knew, impossible to reward either the humble Reader, or Schorderheim, the Herald; they were closer in his intimacy than anyone, and this accentuated his loneliness, his ever present knowledge of his barren hearth, his blighted marriage, his phantom love; he had winced when he had chanced to see Karl with Aurora Lowenhjelm—she with warm praise for a returned hero in her eyes—Frederik had his mother who had received him with passionate affection—there was not one of

them who did not have some one dear and close to applaud; Gustaf smiled at his own weakness. “Tell me,” he asked. “How the Queen takes this?”

Beylon, who had waited on Sophia every day, with respectful and comforting assurances from the King, replied in conventional phrases; there was indeed, little to be said, for Sophia had always received him with a stupid air of total indifference.

“I must see her myself,” said Gustaf with a sudden sickness of the spirits; he no longer had any excuse for evading this duty he had resolved to undertake in spite of the insolent attitude of the Danish court towards his *coup d’état*, the mischief making of the Danish minister in Stockholm, and his mother’s repeated suggestions that he should repudiate the sister of the disgraced and imbecile King of Denmark, and choose a wife found by the House of Brandenburg—that was—herself.

“I have succeeded in every other design, I must succeed in this. She is pretty, obedient, civil and demure, without faults—save those caused by her unnatural life.”

Thus forcing himself to think of Sophia as a creature to be pitied, he suppressed those images of dread and horror that the mere sound of her name provoked, even now, at the summit of his triumph when he had become one of the most admired men in Europe, the inner hauntings that no outward glory could totally efface stirred and darkened his inner solitude.

He sent his equerry, Count Munck, who had shown, of all his train, the most sensitive sympathy with the Queen, to ask for an interview, then went, through the amber coloured autumn light to her drawing-room; he was vexed with himself because he noticed at once the crude taste that had overfilled the apartment with ostentatious and ill matched furniture and ornament.

Sophia stood stiffly at attention; usually she spent hours at her unbecoming toilets, copying heavily the last Prussian extravagances, but to-day she wore a trivial gown of a hard green colour and thin texture, her hair, so flaxen, as hardly to show powder, was without pomade, her courtesy was awkward, the gaze of her prominent blue eyes listless.

“I have now something to offer you,” began Gustaf gently, as if he encouraged a timid animal. “I want, also, your help. Divided as we are, we are both handicapped.” He expected her to melt at once, as she always had done before, if only into tears, at the least touch of his kindness, and he was resolute to give her his entire confidence; a nostalgia for the home he had never had urged him to lean towards her, but Sophia stood rigid.

“Are you sending me away?” she muttered. “To Copenhagen? To Gripsholm? Are you intending to divorce me?”

“No—do not speak such words—who told you—” he could not continue; he recognised too well his mother’s hand; Sophia’s milk white face flushed, she backed against the wall, fingered the gold eyelet of the string that laced her bodice.

“I know quite well what happened—the masquerade—and Caroline dragged out of bed,” she lisped.

“Do not mention such horrors!”

“A revolution,” muttered Sophia. “Is not this a revolution also? Caroline was watched by the Queen Dowager—as your mother watches me. Who is to be tortured—who beheaded?”

Her tone was apathetic, her look gloomy, wild and vague.

“Nothing of this,” said Gustaf sternly, his generous hopes baffled. “I have abolished torture. I have pardoned my enemies. Dismiss these irksome delusions.”

His eloquence and grace that were integral to him were overlaid by disappointment, he stammered, shocked, she had conjured up those very images he had fought so fiercely to dismiss—the masquerade, the palace revolution—the scaffold, the dungeon.

“None of that here, nothing!” he cried. “I shall release even Pechlin and restore him to his rank!”

“You say that because you think I am imbecile like my brother,” she whimpered. “You intend to put me away quietly.”

Her bemused melancholy overflowed into tears; he could not touch her; to steady himself he evoked the phantom of Jeanne d’Egmont and a desire not to be repressed from his mind pricked him—‘I must get away, to France—see Jeanne again’—aloud he asked passionately if Sophia had no interest in his achievement, no realization of what he had done for Sweden?

“What to me are your Vasa kings?” she sobbed pettishly. “No one ever troubles with me. What do I care for Sweden?”

Her childishness further repulsed Gustaf who nerved himself with difficulty to persist—“Do you not understand what I propose? Will you not help me? Neither of us wished this marriage.”

“No, no, I did not wish it! From the first I have been insulted and put by.”

“I shall try to make amends for what was amiss—but you have always been given due respect—” he did not realize the irony of his position where he, whose charm had never yet failed to enchant, could do nothing with the one person in the world it should have been easiest for him to win.

“You always wear Madame d’Egmont’s colours,” she complained.

The sudden mention of this name, sent him farther from her. “That is a friendship that will never disturb our marriage. The colours are those of The Order of Vasa.”

“Our marriage!” lisped Sophia, she moved into the stream of light from the high window and her insignificant person, in which every trait revealed indecision seemed to waver, to disappear in the golden beams; Gustaf had never seen her save decked out with a panoply of formal attire, he had scarcely realized she was so commonplace—he forced himself to use the word, even in his thought, his meaning was different, she resembled her brother—both were tainted—imbecile, and Gustaf drew away again. Sophia went to the window; and leaned there in her gaudy, untidy frock, pointing at two butterflies that fluttered through the golden air; then she glanced over her shoulder with suspicious eyes, wet and dull.

Gustaf raised his hand as if in appeal, then allowed it to fall; as he left her he could hear her dull and lengthy laughter.

Chapter 27

Johan Toll unfolded his mind to the King; they now knew one another well; Gustaf had justified himself in the eyes of the bold and skilful adventurer, and Toll had succeeded superbly in his service to the King who recognized that in him, even more than in Jakob Sprengtporten was the prime mover of the revolution that had been successful even beyond Gustaf's highest hopes.

Toll had been ennobled and his former post in the civil service returned to him; he had not wished for any other rewards, he was a man who liked to keep in the background of affairs and to avoid display; but he asked for one immediate favour, an interview with the King at which he might speak without restraint; Gustaf thought the request singular and at once appointed the time and place. Toll was still a peculiar if admirable personality, and Gustaf had noted how he had stood aside from the swift events and almost unbounded exultation of the last few weeks, he was pleased to have private speech with his valuable servant, and to probe his nature.

"When last we spoke together alone you doubted me," he began eagerly, "now I hope that you know me better."

His voice had the glad candour of a man who has not only been successful in a high and perilous enterprise but who has proved himself to be worthy of success. "Now," he added smiling, "I can play the King even before such a man as yourself."

"Sir," replied Toll, "from the first that I heard of your proposed action, I backed you with my life."

Tall, robust, wearing severe civilian attire of brown fading into gray, handsome and impressive in his heavy proportions and splendid carriage, without the slightest affectation and sure of his own supremacy in every company, yet innately modest, Toll seemed out of place in the chamber designed for idle luxury, the brocade chairs seemed too fragile for his massive weight, the rose garlands and shepherdesses of the tapestry behind him too trivial for his background, while the King seemed exactly suited to the apartment that set off his grace, his brilliant clothes, his blue ribband of the order of the Seraphim and the chain of diamonds round his cravat. His manner was warmly impetuous and it seemed to Toll difficult to believe that he had been capable of so long, patient and skilful a dissimulation, that had involved not only the most polished acting, but many nicely calculated falsehoods and grave oaths never intended to be honoured.

"It was an adroit intrigue," said Toll genially. "You are, sir, completely satisfied?"

"Affairs could hardly be better—though I do not doubt that I shall have the Danes on the frontier, I do not doubt I can turn them back. Sweden has had a new Constitution within three days, state affairs that have been dragging for years have been settled in a few hours—you are satisfied?" demanded the King.

"No," replied Toll smiling, speaking forcibly.

Gustaf's easy flush stained his delicate face, this was the first hint of opposition or criticism he had heard since his triumph, for he did not consider the complaints and scoldings of his wife and mother as more than domestic vexations,

not to be noticed; acute in his judgment and quick to read others, he replied at once.

"You are not personally disappointed, for you know you could have any reward you wished—it is with me, then, you would find fault?"

"Sir, I am already too late, your Majesty took the revolution into your own hands—and so swiftly that your advisers could not serve you."

"This is the first I have heard of discontent on that score—what cause has anyone to complain? The entire country applauds the *coup d'état* and no one is a jot the worse for it."

"Cannot you perceive, sir, that precisely there is the blunder?"

At this last word the King stared with brilliant, yet temperate eyes, very closely at Toll.

"Continue, my friend. Tell me what is wrong."

"At first—everything appears to shine with an extreme felicity—never has there been so brave a stroke for the happiness of a nation, never has a conqueror been so magnanimous—never has the prospect seemed more shining for all those glories dear to your heart, sire—commerce, agriculture protected, the arts flourishing—eh, is it not so? Opera houses built, academies founded, men of letters pensioned."

"Are you one of those who think such designs effeminate?" asked the King. "Sweden has so firm a title to warlike honours that she need not fear such a charge." As Toll did not answer, Gustaf added quietly. "It is a royal part to encourage culture—in order to admire the arts one need not be a mountebank or even a comedian."

"Baron Sprengtporten is an angry man," said Toll.

"Why do you tell me that?"

"In order that you may mollify him before it is too late. He cannot forgive your Majesty for bringing off this stroke without him."

"He must blame the wind, had I waited for him, all would have been lost."

"Then you did not even listen when he advised you to keep the power in your own hands, for at least a decade, until the country is settled."

"Are you of his opinion?"

"Yes."

"I had supposed you both to have been more liberal minded. I am not fitted to play the tyrant."

"It was a bitter mistake to let everyone know that," said Toll. "Your Majesty's universal affability that treats friend and enemy alike, this excessive kindness to your enemies—it is of that I came to speak, Sire."

"Speak," replied Gustaf, motionless, but with his blue eyes moving restlessly. "You have earned the right."

"Yes," agreed Toll calmly, "we, who enabled your Majesty to overturn the estates, have the right to try to save you."

"To save me?" the King repeated, taken off his guard by these bold unexpected words.

"Yes, Sire, it is true that the common people regard you as a deliverer, that you hear nothing but applause and joybells, flattery and praise—even from Fersen and Pechlin—"

"You believe they are still my enemies?"

"Yes, and mock at you for your generosity. This is not the golden age, Sire, and Sweden cannot be ruled by the maxims of fantastic philosophers incapable of action, ignorant of affairs, nor by the exhortations of high-minded foreign ladies who exist in a fairy tale."

Toll had come much more shrewdly to the truth than he knew, for he was not aware of Gustaf's intense sentiment for Jeanne d'Egmont, it was to the whole coterie of the Versailles enthusiasts that he referred, and Gustaf did not betray his secret even by a flicker of a finger.

"What should I have done?" he asked evenly. "Give me your opinion on that."

"Banished Fersen and Scheffer, imprisoned Pechlin—shot some of them, perhaps Kalling and Ribbing, retired the Queen Mother from the court, left no power with the Riksdag, put aside the buildings, the academies until the country is out of debt. If your Majesty is to make a stand against your enemies abroad you must secure your enemies at home. M. Osterman is foiled for the moment, but do you suppose, Sire, that he ceases to slip his bribes into the hands of your secret opponents? In order to face Russia, Denmark, Prussia and perhaps England your Majesty must exercise the sternest economy and purge both Caps and Hats of malcontents."

"Nightcap and plume!" exclaimed the King. "I weary utterly of these terms, I'll hear no more of them. I disagree with all you say. A load, a blight has been lifted from the country—I do not believe that any Swede will conspire against me now I have made it clear that I consider nothing but the honour and safety of Sweden."

"Baron Pechlin is a Holsteiner," remarked Toll. "Sprengtporten is a Finn—the Queen Dowager is a Prussian, and the Queen a Dane—"

"You hit too near the mark." Gustaf pressed his handkerchief to his lips. "You do not shake me. I shall keep to the principles I am resolved on—with an inflexible severity of purpose. I have the approval of France, of her finest spirits."

"Touch!—and the French monarchy falls—the Bourbons are bankrupt beneath the tinsel of Versailles. M. Voltaire applauds you, Sire! It is very well, but it will make no impression on men like Baron Pechlin or M. Osterman. The Tzarina will not keep her hands off Sweden because her *protégé* has written verses in honour of your Majesty."

"That I know. I also know that my country will gather round me to confront Russia, as it gathered round Karl XII at Narva."

Toll, who had not for a second changed countenance, raised or lowered his level voice, who had hardly moved from his position in the patch of autumn sunshine while he had spoken, now rose, and turned his head aside.

"We must consider the present, Sire. Or, if we think of the past, we must not dwell only on the victories. But I can say no more. I intend, whatever your Majesty's policy, to serve you and Sweden.

"Speak further," urged the King leaning forward. "I know the accents of honesty. Tell me all that is in your heart and mind."

"I have already done so—and perhaps too boldly. I can only implore your Majesty not to trust the members of the Estates you dismissed, to beware of the jealousies of the army and the nobility, the disappointment of Sprengtporten."

"I could not have honoured him more!"

“But, Sire, you did not take his advice, and of what use will our honours and rewards be to any of us if this stroke prove a failure?”

“It has already brilliantly succeeded.” Gustaf suddenly displayed agitation. “Toll! You shall not persuade me that humanity and justice will not prevail—that the gratitude, the obedience offered me are not sincere. I went unarmed save for my sword, and not a hand was lifted against me—no, I will not believe that clemency and kindness bring no response—Cederstrom would not take the oath to me—I made him guardian of my person, did he abuse that power?”

“No, but it would have been better to have put him under arrest, such gestures smack of the playhouse, of which your Majesty is over fond for a plain fellow’s liking—and we are most of us plain fellows, Sire.”

Even at this the King did not take offence.

“So I perceive,” he remarked lightly. “Plain enough to prefer the halter and the block, the rack and the wheel, to the garland of roses, the gilt arm-chair, the down bed and the elegant supper? There is nothing foppish or foolish, Toll, in the arts, a taste for the theatre, the opera, is harmless, nay more, it enriches life—comedies help us to a cheerful mind—tragedies to value nobility.”

“A monarch should patronize the arts, not practise them,” said Toll. “You, Sire, have indeed proved you are no weakling—yet only to the understanding of able men, these will fear you, since you have once deceived them by acting the idle dilettante, they will never trust you again—the others, not so acute, will still consider you unstable and believe that you succeeded by a mere trick of luck.”

“Toll, you show me a dark path ahead, and truly I expected nothing else. I am sorry I have not your approval of my policy.” Gustaf’s tone was earnest. “I know no one to whom I owe more. I think you speak as you do out of friendship. I value that—but nothing will change my intentions.”

“Except, perhaps, Sire, experience. You are determined to trust everyone—after showing everyone that you could not be trusted.”

“I had to deceive my opponents—there is no playing at politics on any other terms.” Gustaf seemed suddenly weary, as if the vital fire had flickered down in him; his loneliness oppressed him; he had no entire friend, even this man was not with him; there was no one, how often this knowledge rang in his head, on whom he could open himself, sure of complete approval—none, save a far away woman who could offer him nothing save smuggled letters.

“I watched Prince Karl when I was in Scania,” said Toll and the King looked round at this unexpected name. “He is like your Majesty in nothing save in being fearless, he is ambitious and never forgets how close he stands to the throne.”

“You would have me distrust my own family?”

“I say, Sire, the position is dangerous. You have no heir of your body, your brother stands next to the throne and the Queen Dowager favours him.”

“If this were so, what would you have me do?”

“Send away the Queen Dowager, not to Pomerania, keep your brothers in Finland, reconcile yourself with your Queen or put her away and take another wife. This to your face, Sire, as all who support you have said behind your back.”

“This to my face,” murmured Gustaf. “You, also, Toll take advantage of the clemency you deplore.”

“No, for if your Majesty had been able to order me to the torture chamber I should have given the same advice—when I worked underground for your Majesty I—we—all of us faced that possibility, the torture chamber—”

“Do you then not applaud me that I have abolished it?”

“No, Sire. I should have said—do not use it—but do not let everyone know that you cannot do so.”

“It is too late to heed these warnings, even had I wished to do so—yet, I thank you for them.”

“I speak for many others who are silent out of fear for their places, their ribbons or their pensions, I am outside it all, the adventurer, the stranger who came to you without credentials and who had—and has, little to lose.”

“You are the man who raised a province—alone—with a hundred crowns, Hellichus has the glorious show of it, but I know what you did.” The King’s smile, fascinating as a fondling caress when he wished to please, shone, from eyes and lips on Toll. “Soon Sweden will call on your services.”

“Sire, I shall be ready,” emotion showed in Toll’s strong face, the natural ease and gaiety of his manner was overcast. “I can forgive you for being magnanimous to me—there are others who cannot.”

Toll paused and the King waited, not giving the signal for dismissal, but holding him, as by an impalpable chain.

“Mistrust all those who stoop and grovel,” added Toll. “Mistrust Baron Sprengtporten.”

“A second time you warn me of him.”

“On the grounds I gave you, Sire—and these. When Sprengtporten went to Finland, he had your Majesty’s commission in his pocket, he considered the signature blurred, the seal vague, he believed this done purposely so that your Majesty could repudiate the commission if he were caught.”

“He thought that of me!” exclaimed Gustaf reddening.

“It is in his nature so to think. But he cared nothing for what he thought a cunning trick, for he already had a clever forgery of your Majesty’s authority, to show in case of need.”

“You find out men’s secrets very shrewdly,” replied the King. “I trusted Sprengtporten—I must trust him, even if he does not trust me. As I trust you, Toll.”

“The blunder is enormous, hardly to be credited,” said Toll sombrely. “It is a rare nature persisting in generous error, a nature not fitted to rule the present race of men.”

“You speak of me?”

“Ay, indeed, Sire, the Vasa Kings, Gustaf Vasa, Gustaf Adolf—Karl XII are your models in much—imitate their severity.”

“Those were ruder times—and did their severity save them?”

The King thought of the buff jackets torn by bullets that came perhaps, from Swedish muskets.

“You shall not provoke me,” he said. “Nor shall I forget what you have said,” he held out his hand, Toll kissed it, found it cold and left abruptly.

The King stared at the door that had closed on him and felt loneliness like a deep cold creep through his blood; even with this man he was on no terms of

confidence. Toll would serve him because Toll had no one else to serve in honour, but Toll did not trust him or his designs, Toll had warned with a stern regret that he feared his warnings were too late.

This knowledge was a monstrous blow to Gustaf, who had believed that all his supporters would agree in his policies, that no honest man could reject or approve his liberal designs that had, in a matter of weeks, brought order, peace and dignity to Sweden. He was not shaken in his own faith, but his sensitive intelligence knew that Toll had spoken sincerely and that there might be truth in his estimate of his fellows, in his conception of Kingship as a tyranny, just, even merciful, but severe and absolute, suspicious and prompt to punish rebellion.

Toll scorned culture, the arts, save as hardly noticed glosses to a life of action; he would have ignored the wits, the philosophers, the poets, the painters, even men like Rousseau, even men like Voltaire who were of high importance to Gustaf in the creation of the destiny of a nation.

Because the King had magnificent tastes and adorned his station with all that made short human life lovely, cheerful and easy, Toll considered him a vain man of show, intent on the costly self indulgence of establishing a sham golden age, a mock Arcadia.

"Brutality alone impresses them," he thought sombrely and there floated in the receding light visions of the masquerade, the dungeons at Copenhagen, the weapons of war, the dark flags drooping over the silver and copper coffins wrought from native ore, the linked swords forming the collar of the order he had placed round Sprengtporten's neck, the Swedish and the Finnish Guards, tall soldiers, with tall upright white plumes…he put up his hand to shut out these unwelcome phantoms, that, faint palimpests, showed one through the other, slipping and shifting, but he could not silence the ghostly chords from *Iphigénie* that rang in his fantasy.

Not for a second did he falter, not for a second was he offended, not even at Toll's reference to the blue tight buttoned Karl XII coat being disagreeable to "plain fellows"—to Gustaf this uniform had been a just symbol of his part—part, a masquerade? In one sense, yes, Toll was right, but only right because he did not understand a nature with as many facets as the Amsterdam expert cutter could obtain from a mighty diamond.

Gustaf suddenly smiled at himself, at his own dismay on hearing Toll's mind. "I am not so frivolous as they think—I should have reminded him of the reform of the currency, the brandy monopoly—my patiently thought out constitution—legal, just, progressive, worthy of a free people," he checked his thoughts, considering self justification on this matter a weakness; he was so sure of his ideal, not so sure of his capacity to realize it, but sure again of his resolve never to falter in that service.

The air had become chill in the vast undefined space of the chamber, shadow filled, as the blue Northern night came over the lakes and bridges, the alleys and churches, the copper and brass domes, the hills and trees, the quays and waterfronts of Stockholm, the splendour of the outward state of the palace surrounded by purple water, the flagged masts of ships, the boats at the landing steps, the gardens full of gold leaves and plots of unseen blooms, plashing

fountains, and white statues set against sombre thickets of poet's laurel, box and yew.

The King went to the window, held the heavy, stiff curtain back and stared out into the azure evening, he evoked, with the lively ease of an over trained imagination, the figure of Jeanne d'Egmont leaning on her arm resting on the ledge of her box in the opera house, looking at him, "It can be done, Sire, and you can do it."

It was done, despite all Toll, or anyone could say; reflecting on her, on the letter to her now on the way to Paris, he could not feel daunted or even shaken; but his weariness was insistent and had to be eased by fantasy before he could undertake the complications of the intricate task now to his hand. The sop he threw his loneliness was that of his own yet unfinished Opera House, radiant with music and all that shines and pleases, and Jeanne d'Egmont there, among the crowds who had come to see this offering to the Northern muses, his gift to Sweden.

Here, at least, was no caprice of the imagination—a few moments walk away, across the Norrbro, stood the Opera House, a solid block of masonry, opposite the statue of Gustaf Adolf II, the mansion of Baron Cederstrom, the Artillery yard.

"And I shall make some other of my designs as visible, as admired."

PART II

Total Hazard.

Chapter 28

THE young man in the white cloak looked out on the white landscape, though his ears were muffled by the flaps of his fur cap he could hear the sleigh bells ringing in time with the clop clop of his horses' padded hooves, in front a screen had been drawn to keep out the whirling snow that the north-easterly blast was driving across the prospect, but from windows in the hood he could see the high piled drift on the road side, the spray from his snow nets, the closed houses, with the untrodden snow on the paths leading to the closed doors, the garden beds raised in smooth white hillocks, the snow particles flying before the wind; the driver, under his bear skin rug, handled the reins cleverly, the stout, dun coloured horses went steadily ahead along the highroad unprinted by any track.

The tempest was increasing, but was not yet such as to impede travel, and desolate as was the scene on which Gustaf gazed, he peopled it with rich, golden, and royal images, no mere exercises of fancy but symbols of achievements that had impressed Europe with the fact that in Sweden a personality had appeared who must count in any future combination of the great Powers and that Scandinavia would never be overwhelmed as Poland had been.

The North was his domain and he had been born to the long winters and the brief summers where the climate, save for that short respite was rude, wild and sullen, forcing people to remain in their houses, making the greater the need for a national life, stable, protected, and glorified by every art and science, by all the advantages of liberal government. As he drove, unattended, as was his usual pleasure, towards the splendid palace of Ulriksdal, Gustaf considered with a grave, exultant satisfaction, the results of two years of government according to his Constitution of 1772 and, along the banks and fields, the villas and cottages that glided past, like pictures on a streamer unrolled, his active imagination saw the noble shapes of the ancestors whose patriotism and courage had inspired him, riding on the wind and attended by the beautiful and unconquerable spirits of the North. For this man, who had proved himself so practical a statesman, so daring an opportunist, lived continually in a world composed of past and present, where visions crossed and intermingled, where unearthly music sounded, where distant perspectives dipped and slanted into the glittering radiance of triumph yet to be, in which all the traditions, fables, splendours and exploits of the North and the house of Vasa were blended in a midday brightness shining beyond the storm, the marvellous, the romantic and the heroic were always, combined like the rainbows

over the waterbreaks of Sweden, in the background of his peculiar mind, that few understood, and fewer valued.

His companion, Johan Kristopher Toll, now Adjutant General to Karl Sparre's War Ministry, noticed that the King was abstracted from his surroundings, that he did not observe the dreary grey sky, the steady pelt of the snow flakes, the chilling air that crept in even under the sable coverlets, the cloak lined with ermine and martin. To Toll, a man completely of his own time and of the material world, there was an extravagance of fine, rare qualities, in the King, a charm not to be denied, yet not natural because unaccountable—at least to Toll—that combined into what he, a man of robust talent, high honour, and cool, well balanced intelligence, could only term, magic. But Toll, who preserved, as a necessary decorum, the rules of the Lutheran church, did not believe that magic existed and considered all the uncharted seas and unmapped territories of the invisible world as existing merely in the over turned imaginations of the ignorant or those of unsettled wits. Yet the King was neither one nor the other, he had remained steadfast to the Voltairean doctrines in which he had been educated, while conforming to the national faith, and had shown no taint of superstition.

What then was his secret? Toll had often wondered; himself a soldier, a lawyer, with an intricate knowledge of mankind and a penetrating intelligence he was baffled by this character that he had constantly under observation for two years. Now, while they were shut up alone together in the sumptuous sleigh, his perpetual curiosity as to the character of the King, a curiosity strongly roused when he had first seen Gustaf and the King had trusted him, an unknown stranger, with a secret of secrets, and never since, though overlaid by pressing events, satisfied, made Toll turn his head and glance at the man who sat beside him in averted profile—a man? It seemed to Toll that in Gustaf he perceived an inflexible image of both a country and a King, an allegory of ruler and ruled, of a monarch and his subjects. Toll, the cool and resolute soldier-statesman smiled at his own whimsical thought, for caprioles of fancy were uncommon to him, yet he could not wholly understand and judge Gustaf as he understood and judged other men; at first he had believed "we deal with a young visionary, nourished by illusions" but Gustaf had proved apt at intrigue, shrewd in affairs, accomplished in diplomacy—again, Toll had pondered—"Is he one suited only to the cabinet, a hero on paper? Was his *coup d'état* only successful because it was accomplished without the firing of a shot? Was the courage that sent him unarmed, unprotected through those August days, in constant peril of assassination the mere foolhardiness of inexperience?"

But in the October of that year, 1772, Gustaf had turned on the nearest of the foes his success had roused and had ridden fleetly to Orebo to threaten Denmark, showing such haughty challenge that the Danes had given way without offering to fight, and it had been obvious to the searching scrutiny of Toll that Gustaf had regretted this, that he had wished to give battle to his sly and dangerous enemies, to prove himself, who loathed even the bloodshed of the chase, ready in the field. Perhaps, in everything, he was a brilliant actor, assuming each part that he undertook with exquisite skill and polish, yet this explanation would not do, either, for the King had handled the Riksdag, the nation, foreign affairs, his own family with an intelligence, an audacity, a sensitiveness, not learnt on any stage—

no, that swift, subtle, ardent spirit was not that of a clever player apt to assume a character.

As Gustaf was so uncommon, so was his fortune, the warnings that Toll himself had uttered to the King had proved needless, for Gustaf had ruled according to his own standards—and successfully. So far his magnanimity, his generosity had not been betrayed; all the Estates had accepted, even with eagerness the benevolent, energetic and enterprising rule of Gustaf III; true it was that Toll still thought the King made mistakes and that his position was as precarious as that of a man walking across a mountain torrent on a tightrope, but it was equally true that no evil had resulted from what Toll considered errors of government, and that the taut cord showed no sign of breaking. Toll did not refrain, however, from adding mentally, the word "yet". He continued to glance at the fine profile, the aquiline nose, the deeply curved lips, the rolled curls, framed in the cap of white fur, until Gustaf turned and laughed at him pleasantly. "You are always wondering at me, Toll—your gaze is as sharp as that of the eagle owl or the falcon—yet there is no mystery, I have disclosed myself fully to you and to all my friends."

Gustaf put up his gloved hand with the gauntlet to the elbow as if to brush away the tracery of frost that had gathered on the the window of the sleigh, then checked his futile gesture, and turned from the blurred prospect.

"My very thoughts are crystal clear to you, Sire," admitted Toll. "But I am not dismayed, for there is nothing in them to offend your Majesty."

"Where is the puzzle?" asked Gustaf; his exquisite use of his native tongue, the use of an orator and actor, made the natural rise and fall of the language in harmony with the muffled hoof tramps and the light ringing of the bells on the hoops about the horses' halters. "Sometimes I am puzzled myself," he added, "for I am not obstinate—am I obstinate, Toll?"

"No, Sire, assuredly your Majesty is not obstinate."

"Eh, well, I believe I am right in what I do, in what I try to do—and the puzzle is why others should be in any way astonished or confounded by my policies or actions."

"They are, many of them, Sire, against precedent, and mankind distrusts novelty."

"So you have said before, Toll, I recall all your rebukes, upbraidings and advice," smiled Gustaf.

"Your Majesty recalls everything."

"At least, too much."

The shadow in the carriage was grey and dreary; those rich and mighty phantoms with whom Gustaf had peopled the white empty countryside since he had left the gates of Haga, were not untroubled by wraiths he had never summoned and could not dismiss; he put his hand under his mantle to his breast, where, in an inner pocket, lay a letter from France, unopened, conveyed by secret messenger and addressed in the handwriting of Jeanne d'Egmont's steadfast confidante, Madame Feydeau des Mesmes; it had been delivered to Gustaf as he had been leaving the pavilion at Haga, built as a substitute for the palace he intended to raise among those superb woods.

"You accuse me of levity," he continued. "And so do many others, I know that and I do wonder at it, Toll."

“The extravagance,” smiled Toll, “of your Majesty’s designs seem to the Northerners a reflection of the extravagance of France, that is known to be decaying, cynical, corrupt—through the disrepute of the late reign at Versailles, the Swedes see your Majesty’s academies, palaces, mock tournaments, operas, dramas, balls and fairy like entertainment, the pomp of your household, the lustre of your court—all this appears, to plain men, light and unsuited to our needs.”

“But you know, Toll, that France is still able to pension me, that Louis XVI is liberal minded, that without M. de Vergennes I had never saved Sweden, that as Foreign Minister he is very useful to me—and that in France is, under all the show of idle luxury, the foremost philosophy of the world. Ah,” he added quickly, as Toll was about to reply, “it is true that I long for Paris, that I was happy there as I have never been elsewhere, but it is also true I live to serve Sweden—and it is false to sneer—as some do, but not you—that I copy Versailles, as any German princelet does. I encourage native arts, native talents, native genius, and I surround myself with splendour, with formality, with every grace and adornment, I find out and encourage every gifted Swede, in order to set up the nation, to give it a becoming dignity in the opinion of Europe.”

“Sweden has been nourished on austerity, it is a land with its riches underground, never can it compete with fertile France—”

“I have made it do so,” interrupted Gustaf.

“Ay, there is the point, it is you—you, not the country that shines, that is the secret that most of us feel, without knowing it—your Majesty does not develop the genius of Sweden, but your own, were you removed from the scene, the curtain would fall.”

“That is fantastic, Toll, there are hundreds of abler men in my employ than myself—thousands, perhaps.”

“It is a nation of able men,” agreed Toll, “nevertheless it is your Majesty’s own personality that shapes and colours everything, Sire, you have the capacity for making toys seem important and tinsel flash as pure gold.”

“You still touch me off as a mere dilettante in the arts—perhaps in life,” said Gustaf. “Yet behind my trappings, so needful to maintain my state, I have worked hard.”

“My full tribute there, Sire, but you dazzle too brightly, your labours are too hidden. Ah, well, I scold again, forgive me.”

“I am never offended by you, Toll, only admit that none of your prophecies of disaster has been fulfilled.”

“I was correct in warning you of the haughty wilfulness of Baron Sprengtporten.”

“I always knew it, but his merits are great and I still hope to win his complete allegiance, nay, his friendship.”

The carriage was passing by lake Edsviken and Toll, gazing through the frozen window could see the expanse of frozen water, the storm smitten trees tossing the flurries of snow from their writhing branches, the cascades of flakes that seemed like a visible wind tearing across the landscape. He heard the King say—“I hope you will always remain my friend, Toll, I can think of nothing that could estrange us.”

“Not even my incessant warnings, that your Majesty always receives so graciously?”

Toll never used an affected manner of speech, his tact was native and unstrained, but Gustaf noted that these words were an evasion; Toll had not promised eternal loyalty; he was still critical, still held himself in reserve and the King sighed without speaking; keenly reminded of his perpetual loneliness.

The sleigh turned into the gates of Ulriksdal park, and along the magnificent avenue of lime trees that were veiled in the incessant snow flakes; the brief day was nearly over, and as the cold light receded, the white landscape seemed to be swallowed up into the grey of the heavens, as if the smooth driftage piled on the withered grass, continually tossed into fresh hillocks, the storm beaten groves in the park, the sombre outlines of Ulriksdal were no more than the colourless dreams of a Northern god slumbering amid the polar ice.

The avenue and the approaches to the castle had been continuously swept, but particles of snow were again on the cleared steps as the King descended from his sleigh, and he had to clutch his cloak to prevent it from being snatched from his shoulders by the whirling wind. The plain flat façade of Ulriksdal with the even rows of windows, the cupola in the centre, the frozen lake, narrowing like a river, through the woodland, close to the building, seemed to vanish as an hallucination as he glanced at them, so swiftly did the dark and tempest overcome the scene. Gustaf entered the doors the lackeys held open, with Toll appearing gigantic in his ample furs and the snow pelted in behind them, the King recalled the treasured letter in his breast with such a gush of warm and yearning delight as he might have thought of violets in April.

Chapter 29

The cabinet meeting had been the deliberations of successful men, not one of his ministers had failed the King; in two years Sweden might claim to be a great power, and this without war, the peaceful victory of Gustaf III had established and enriched the land, as the martial victories of Gustaf II and Karl XII had shaken and ruined it; the new Constitution had been admirably administered; the reforms in the army undertaken by Count Karl Sparre and General Toll, were as excellent as those that had re-organized the navy, where Sparre again, as Minister of Marine had continued the designs and labours of the veteran Ehrensvard who had received the baton of a Field Marshal on his death-bed from Gustaf III. A first class coastal flotilla was armed and ready, the great docks at Karlskrona were busy with the building of modern men o’ war, the finances and the status of the National Bank were in good order, no one had any fault to find with or any grievance against the constitution of 1772 save the foreigners who were jealous of the new strength and prosperity of Sweden, and who were secretly agreed she should receive the same fate as had ruined Poland. The arts and crafts, from the sublime to the trivial, the sciences, every kind of enterprise was encouraged by the court; the Stockholm Opera house had been presented to the nation, the tradition of the

great Karl Gustaf Tessin had been followed in the embellishment of the royal palaces, torture had been abolished, the censorship raised from the press. Gustaf had received sheets of praise and encouragement from his friends at Versailles, where Baron Creutz maintained worthily the honour and dignity of Sweden, at Upsala, ancient shrine of Sweden, learning was nobly supported and the great Linneaus dwelt there, his house and garden honoured by the nation.

"If anyone disapproves of me," thought Gustaf, "and several do, no one can disapprove of what I have done." That Russia was still hostile, though too engaged with the Porte to be dangerous, that Denmark remained an implacable enemy, that Britain, now represented at Stockholm by Lord Stormont, was jealous and watchful, that the envoys of these powers still bribed lavishly in Sweden, the King and his cabinet knew, but, in sober judgment they felt they could confront the future with hopefulness, for every week the country strengthened with the disappearance of some abuse, the appearance of some reform; the administration of justice had been cleansed from many defects and corruptions and every state department worked smoothly under a liberal, an able, and a generous government. The Chancellor, Johan Vesterman, ennobled under the name of Liljenkrantz, had put forward the final report of the Finance Commission which he had been so, long and so ardently directing; the King had taken a close personal interest in the devices whereby the budget had been almost balanced, devices complicated and ingenious, in which the genius of the great financier had been aided not alone by Gustaf, but by Baron Ulrik Scheffer, and Georg Gustaf Vrangel; the one debatable point in the arrangements whereby the monetary standing of the government and the National Bank was as assured as the bill to make distilling a royal monopoly—"Bread before spirits." Gustaf, with poignant memories of the famine years of '71, '72, termed it, and he intended the measure to serve as a check on the heavy consumption of brandy; Liljenkrantz, however, hoped, by farming out the monopoly, to increase the national revenue in spite of the abolition of the spirit tax that would follow the withdrawal of the ancient privilege hitherto held by every Swede, that of distilling his own spirit.

This large scheme was as yet only outlined, but the King was determined that it should become law, as he was determined that another extremely able man whom he had singled out from the lawyers, Joachim Liliestraale, should proceed with his investigations into the judicial and civil administration of the country.

The ministers had shown their reports, received their instructions and departed and the King was alone. Baron Sprengtporten had asked for an audience but Gustaf had an hour for his own loneliness; a paper of caricatures that he had idly traced, a rapid sketch for a scene in a comedy had fallen from his long hand, as he lay back in the chair covered with azure velvet and stared into the logs in the bronze basket splitting into flames, he could sense the cold, the tempest, the desolate magnificent scenery hidden without the stout walls, beyond the firmly fastened shutters and the green damask curtains; he was relieved to be away from the large hall, designed for ancient feasts where the cabinet meeting had been held, an apartment that it was impossible to warm in this weather; he disliked, too, the sombre hangings of gold stamped leather, the dark old-fashioned furniture, his taste was for the modern design of light, air, pale colour, crystals, mirrors. The Castle of Ulriksdal was not as ancient as the haunted and gloomy

apartments in the medieval building of Gripsholm, but Gustaf would have directed considerable alterations in the already splendid palace had he not been committed to such high expenses elsewhere, for, justify it as he might, he knew he was out spending his revenues—was that what Magnus Sprengtporten, who had lately been stiff and sullen wished to speak of? He was allowed great familiarity and often expressed his views as frankly as did Toll, but not so gracefully; Gustaf did not wish to see the stern Finn to-night, nor to wait on the Queen Dowager; he had put this full hour between himself and these two duties, intending to use it for reading Jeanne d'Egmont's letter; but he could not do so; to break the seals on the carefully folded, treasured packet that had come secretly by such devious ways across land and water, seemed in his present mood like shattering a pearl; he untied the strings of a portfolio of engravings sent him by the younger Piranesi from Rome that leaned across his chair, then left it to fall open. In the spring when the flowering trees would be decked with festival lamps and flowers he would surely see Jeanne d'Egmont; his duty lay more in a visit to Russia with the object of bewitching the Tzarina into an alliance or, at least, into neutrality, but he had done his duty for a long time now, and done it with enthusiasm, all his long suppressed yearning turned to France, to Jeanne d'Egmont. He passionately wished to see as well as to read her approval, to persuade her that he had always taken her advice seriously, she, in her nervous love, could rebuke as well as praise, she had written (always by the hand of her friend) that he should not show himself so often on the stages of his private theatres, that the costumes of Cinna or Meleager were not suitable attire in which to discuss the affairs of the Bank of Sweden, that his proposal to invent a national dress for Scandinavia was untimely, he would do better to order the planting of potatoes in the Dales—"this vegetable can preserve an entire people from famine, in order to make it popular, many of us wear the white flower of the plant in our lapels, I assure you it is as pretty as myrtle or orange bloom."

So much in earnest was she, that she never suspected he teased her with these bagatelles when engaged on designs that to her enthusiastic idealism would seem slow, or dull, too laborious and heavy for a retired and languid woman to relish who lived on dreams.

In her last letter Madame des Mesmes had written that her Wend was stronger, and would soon be able to hold the pen herself, she too, looked ahead, to the spring. Perhaps there was a message in her own hand in the letter the King could not open, not until he had done with the fatigues of the day.

He knew that his mother wished to discuss Frederik's marriage, in please her the cabinet meeting had been held in Ulriksdal that she had chosen as her winter residence, she must continually be placated, flattered, indulged with dramatic interviews exhausting and useless; Gustaf was relieved when his frustrated Mother, so brilliant, so bitter, and his weak sister, Albertina, Were visiting Potsdam or Quedlinbourg, though since his triumph she had often flattered him, he sensed her as a secret enemy. He leaned forward to snuff the candles in the twisted branched stick on the console table behind his chair; he had been a prodigal and spent his hour in those deep dreams that at once comfort and sadden, dreams of love and of the absence of love; an unseen clock chimed in the far shadows of the room and Magnus Sprengtporten, who always used his

privileges to the full, entered at once on the heels of the lackey who announced him; with a curt salutation he approached the alabaster hearth rosy from the fire glow.

"I regret," said Gustaf pleasantly, "that you had to come here, my dear Baron. I was not able to wait for you in Stockholm, the cabinet meeting could not be delayed—I had to attend the Queen Dowager, who could not travel to the capital in this weather."

The sombre Finn was not mollified by the royal apology, he remarked dryly that when the winds were not against him he was always punctual, and shook from his uniform some of the snow that had penetrated the sables he had cast aside. Gustaf was accustomed to these references to Sprengtporten's services in '72 from his own lips and those of his brother, he offered a chair to the man he forced himself to consider his friend, but Sprengtporten did not seem to hear his master's commands to be seated, turning his angry dark eyes beneath his scowling brows on the King, he exclaimed: "It is incredible to me that your Majesty could have written me a letter of rebuke!" he pulled a crumpled paper out of his soft buff waistcoat, and thrust it almost like a weapon in the King's face.

"A mild protest," smiled Gustaf, "and that inevitable, even you, Sprengtporten, cannot offend the Guards—my letter came after their appeal to me, and my putting of the case to the Senate—come, let it be forgotten. I desire to send you to Finland—the Turks alone keep Russia off—let this be forgotten."

"Sire, there is too much to be forgotten!" was the violent reply. "You are forever listening to my enemies!"

"You have none."

"Ay, I have, and so has every honest man in Sweden, and well your Majesty knows these enemies since your Majesty has sought them out to honour them."

The King's ready colour came at this rude interruption, but even his strong sense of dignity and etiquette was subdued to his sense of obligation towards the man standing before him with so menacing an air.

"No Scandinavian should be an enemy to another—we must work in unison," protested Gustaf slowly, shading his face with his hand from the heat of the flaming logs. "We have had two years of success, I cannot be disturbed by this error of yours—yes—error, you gave your Dragoons precedency over the Guards at a court martial, we talk of that and nothing else—it is trivial, let it not be spoken of again."

Gustaf's effort to limit the theme of the conversation was without avail, his finesse was useless before the wrath of Sprengtporten, suffering from the jealousies, the grievances that had gnawed him since he had marched on Stockholm in the rain to find the revolution accomplished without him; still gripping the King's letter, the excuse and focus of his outburst in his bare first, he touched on all the causes of his fury—first, the King's clemency towards his former opponents, the oligarchy he had displayed in '72, chief among whom were Baron Pechlin and the Fersen family.

"They serve the state," put in Gustaf. "They are most able and powerful. I have no reason to mistrust them."

“No? Nor to mistrust Cedarstrom, or Ribbing, or Horn?” demanded Sprengtporten with stinging bitterness. “Or Bjleke, or Ederstrom—ah, I could name some others!”

“You are prejudiced,” replied the King gently. “I trusted Cedarstrom with my life when he refused to obey me.”

“And he has always hated you for it—and so do the others. Pechlin makes a party under your nose, Sire, the Russian bribes right and left, the Fersens clutch and grab at every advantage. Yet I doubt even if your Majesty,” and Sprengtporten used the word sarcastically, “has your Chief of Police to watch their activities, while it is certain that those cunning dames at Versailles, the Fersen women, and young Axel, are most favoured by your Majesty. Who, too, is that jackanapes, de Stael, strutting in Paris, intriguing for Necker’s daughter and his millions?”

“Sprengtporten!” demanded the King rising. “Do you challenge me on all my policies, on all my friends?”

“I think I do. I object to the ennoblement of an engineer.”

“Thunberg built the docks at Karlskrona—it has been the custom of the House of Vasa to ennoble genius.”

“Sparre has honour on honour. War. Marine—”

“He is a man of genius.”

“And who is Henrik of Trolle that he should be raised to the rank of Admiral? A nobody!”

“He has put the fleet on a war basis. I pay you the courtesy, Sprengtporten, of answering all your objections to the men I employ, but pray forego a recital of all our differences. I fear there might be no end to them,” the King spoke sweetly for he sincerely felt a warm obligation towards Sprengtporten, but the Finn was but the more inflamed by what he considered the effeminacy of Gustaf and he began to attack the talented and gorgeous young men who continually surrounded the King, who were to the stern and haughty soldier so many fribbles, it was true that one. Adelebeth was a noble, and that Gustaf von Armfelt was an officer in the Guards, but these merits could not balance the gross wrongs inflicted on what Sprengtporten represented, the military, aristocratic caste, who regarded such men as Gustaf gave his friendship to as little better than tradesmen, if not lackeys. Moreover, though the proud Finn had helped with all his might the revolution of 1772 that set down the nobility, and though he resented the pardoning of the overthrown aristocrats, yet his feeling against admitting the unprivileged to the ranks of the privileged was as strong as it was inconsistent.

Gustaf, without losing his self command, interrupted the angry soldier.

“I owe you so much, Sprengtporten, that I can never be angry with you, therefore it is not honourable in you to provoke me. I, and you, and all who serve with me have one object, to establish Sweden so strongly that she can never be dismembered as Poland has been—that outrage is always in my mind, when I first heard the whisper of it, before I came to the throne, Sprengtporten, I was struck to the heart, I have been alert against such a doom for us.”

“A doom! A doom!” cried the other impatiently. “Sweden can be destroyed from within as from without. Pechlin is as sharp an enemy as the Tzarina.”

“I do not believe it—Pechlin and his like, though they may have no virtues, know where their interests lie—they will not conspire against me while I treat them

according to their talents, if not their merits," the King spoke rapidly but Sprengtporten forced the pace of the interview even faster. He complained of everything in the administration of the country, of the King's tastes, companions, he rudely insinuated that the Queen Dowager's court was a centre for discontent, even for conspiracy, that Gustaf was sneered at behind his back by the very favourites—and Sprengtporten used the word contemptuously—who battened on him, he ridiculed the princely pleasures and magnificent entertainments the King held in Stockholm, at Gripsholm, at Haga, Ulriksdal and Drottningholm, he reminded Gustaf that his very costume, the scarlet heels, the shoulder scarf, the knot of ribbons of the colours of the Vasa Order, (that had another meaning, too) were the subject of pasquinades and squibs, as was his friendship with a group of female philosophers and vapouring intellectuals at Versailles, who had been crazed by the snivellings of that Swiss gutter rat Rousseau and that rascal tradesman Voltaire.

Gustaf stood at ease and allowed Sprengtporten to run on; he had paid him the supreme tribute, not now only, but often before, of justifying himself to his disappointed, furious follower, and there was nothing more that he could say—"I owe the man much, and he is valuable to me," he thought. "I must endure this," he knew the power of his own eloquence, he also knew that he could not persuade Sprengtporten against his own passions, the Finnish noble spoke the furious protest of the privileged orders against any recognition of the unprivileged orders, the furious protest of the downright man of action, bound as with iron chains to tradition and prejudice. How could the like of Magnus Sprengtporten understand that among those who shared the King's confidence, who formed his personal retinue, were not only those whose gifts in the arts would glorify and dignify Sweden, but others, like Evert Taube and Axel Fersen, who were highly skilled and adroit secret agents, what could make a man of Sprengtporten's type realize that the Fresen beauties, the French ladies, the Swedes like De Stael and Kurt de Stedingk, captain in the Le royal-Suédois who moved amid the radiant luxury of Versailles, were not more useful to the King than conventional diplomats?

How teach Sprengtporten that he, the King, had the measure of both Rousseau and Voltaire and all their medley of followers, and that caring little for the men, even despising many of their Ways, he yet held firmly to something of deep value in their teaching? Sprengtporten's rage slowly spent itself, but in outward show only, he glanced with hatred at the spare figure standing the other side of the hearth, at the long oval face turned towards the light of the wood fire, the full lips slightly smiling, the eyes downcast.

As the soldier paused, thrusting the letter again forward with a fierce gesture, Gustaf remarked: "I am indeed sorry, my dear Baron, that you should put yourself in such a fume for such a matter."

At this Sprengtporten made a strong effort to check his violence and altered his attitude, curtly demanding if the King would withdraw his letter of rebuke?

"If your Majesty will do that, let other matters go—this I cannot."

"Put up the paper," said Gustaf without moving. "I shall not take it back—in any sense of the word, my dear Baron."

Sprengtporten dropped the letter between them, and set the heel of his cowhide boot, damp with snow, on it. “This time he signature was clear,” he remarked with intense bitterness.

Gustaf recalled what Toll had said—that, when he had gone to raise Finland in ‘72, Sprengtporten had doubted the King’s intention to commit himself and had forged his seal and signature even before suspecting that those Gustaf had given him he took to be deliberately indistinct.

“You endeavour to insult me,” said Gustaf. “I have not taken what you have offered me from any man before—from dealing with women I have learned patience.”

This was his sole retort, it struck Sprengtporten hard; convicted of railing like a virago, he shuddered with fury and stammered:

“I offer you my resignation as Colonel of the Borga Dragoons, and from your Majesty’s army.”

“Reconsider that.”

“No—your Majesty needs only figureheads, both in your cabinet and your court, men of my metal cannot serve under you.”

“Remain as a member of the Senate.”

“Let your Majesty retract the rebuke.”

“No, for it was deserved.”

Gustaf now raised his head and smiled at Sprengtporten who, to his own utter rage, inwardly flinched from the glance of those curious eyes, a vivid blue even in the fireglow.

“I’ll not serve your Majesty, I’ll retire altogether from the army and from politics.”

“I will put you in charge of all the Forts of Scandinavia with the title of Quarter-master General,” said Gustaf. “If you will go to Finland go as Commander-in-Chief.”

“Your Majesty’s offer is not accepted,” sneered Sprengtporten eased by what he considered a weakness on the part of the King who could, he knew, have had him arrested for treason; Gustaf, who so often disconcerted others by seeming to read their minds, remarked: “You have the advantage of that tenderness you despise, Sprengtporten,” and he held out his hand. The other did not touch it, but flung himself from the room, almost overthrowing the Chinese lacquer screen that stood by the door with the violence of his movements; Gustaf listened to the heavy tramp of his feet in the corridor, turning towards the door as if to face a threat.

The King did not undervalue his loss; he could not well spare a man of Sprengtporten’s abilities and influence; for the moment there was truce in the designs of his enemies, but well he knew that it might not be for more than a moment; he had been forced to hold a cabinet of war in this very palace, a few weeks before when his agents one after another had sent in their reports as to the secret arming of Russia and Prussia, and the skilful and incessant intrigues of Osterman; neither Sweden nor her one ally, France was ready to confront the Tzarina, the King had had to carry out his two years of reform while in a most precarious position from which he had been relieved only by a Turkish victory that left Russia unable to strike Northwards.

But that she would strike Gustaf did not doubt, he was tormented continually by the dread of some secret pact between his enemies whereby his country was to be divided between tyrants as Poland had been divided. To meet this menace he needed all his energies, all the resources of the country, he must conserve and built up both as rapidly as solidly as possible; he might not have long before Russia recovered, would pounce—and he had lost Sprengtporten, that obstinate man would not change his mind, Gustaf knew.

He stooped to tie the strings of the portfolio of engravings he had noticed Sprengtporten glance at them with contempt, curious, that jealous intolerance. Toll disapproved of much that was the breath of life to Gustaf, but he Johan Toll, was liberal, cool, free from spite and envy—"I do not think I shall ever lose Toll", reflected Gustaf. "Yet he and Sprengtporten say the same—for intelligent and experienced men their ideas are extremely out of date."

He had not been angry while the furious soldier denounced him, his spirit had been withdrawn from the simple issue that he had decided as soon as he had heard of it; it was not fair that the Borga Dragoons should be set above the Guards even if Sprengtporten's services were lost to Sweden the King could not permit an injustice.

"How many will leave me," he wondered. "Before my task is accomplished?"

He withdrew into the phantasmagoria raised by the memories and association this sparring with one of the promoters of his *coup d'état* had roused, the world of the Piranesi perspective, the demoniacal dungeons, pulleys, ropes, wheels, stairs, the masquerade at Copenhagen, the soldiery dragging away Struensee in mask and sables, his paramour in her night shift; she was dead now, suddenly in her prison castle, her lunatic brother had lost all trace of reason; Gustaf recalled his attempt to gain the sympathy of his own wife and her recoil, the haunting echo of Gluck's music—all that private world, unguessed at by others, where he must spend so much time, he recalled his mother and the group of pages, children of hostile noblemen whom however he had not only pardoned but promoted; his senses swam, he put his hand to the letter hidden in his bosom, and went, not with his usual quick lightness of foot, to his mother's apartments.

Chapter 30

Ulrika Lovisa received her son with guarded smiles; she was pleased now at any petty exercise of power for she had never ceased to regret her throne with a consuming passion, what she could not longer command as a queen she tried to obtain as a woman or a mother; she had not only not forgiven, she cherished as a fierce flame of resentment, her son's refusal to allow the guards to stand sentinel at her doors; this royal honour Gustaf, jealous as to his prerogative, had refused the Queen Dowager, and it had confounded as well as enraged the proud woman that the man who was so amiable to all, so magnanimous to his enemies, so complaisant and easy, should be so immovable on a point of etiquette, so rigid about every detail. She sat sullen, brooding, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes,

wondering what she could say or do, to harry or to wound Gustaf; she felt the sorriest of pangs, natural love overborne and poisoned by jealousy, ambition and lust for power; the engaging child, wayward, enchanting, affectionate whom she had spent all her talents and pains on, seemed to her to be dead, and the young man facing her, with his secrets and passions alike withdrawn and hidden from her, a stranger, a changeling, perhaps who looked at her directly, with clear blue eyes, vivid even when they gazed into the light of the candles on their branched supports. It was true that he had forgotten her; he had withdrawn into the fantasy bred by fatigue and disappointment, he felt Jeanne d'Egmont's letter in his pocket press like a caressing hand on his heart—what had she written to him? Another tract for the times, or a reminder that "*printemps de velour*" was no longer fashionable, but that satin of a rose colour glittering with orange and opal coloured sequins was preferred in Paris?

His mother watched him cunningly; she could see his reflection in the dim disc of the mirror behind him, his rolled curls arranged differently on either temple, because of the slight distortion of his face that was often noticeable, then suddenly vivid as a brand, the sliding loops of hair beneath the sapphire buckle, the velvet coat showing in the lapel the colours of the Order of Vasa that were those of Jeanne d'Egmont; with a trick of action usual to him, he turned, rose and stood thoughtful before the brass and ruddy gold and black of the Boule cabinet. He saw in his meditation, the roadsteads of Stockholm, dark, yet glinting with the harbour lights, the ships at anchor, the groves of silver bole and close grain beech trees beneath the rolling mist, above the serpentine rivers, the sombre rocks, the jutting crags, the cottage with the spindle straw, the spindle, the humming wheel, the bales of coarse wool, then the bosquets of Versailles, and the ladies, all dressed in white, moving, gentle as doves in the rosy glow of the fairy lamps, Jeanne d'Egmont, with the Flemish pearls. "I am going to France as soon as the weather breaks," he said.

The watching woman swooped to the attack.

"Why? Who is to be Regent? Is not your extravagance already shameless? What is this journey to cost? Everything in Sweden is so unsettled."

"I shall travel incognito," he replied. "Yes, I spend money, I turn it into civilization—I shall leave something behind me that will be remembered."

"The Gustavan period!" she smiled. "Really, you overdo this fostering of luxuries in a poor country, too many palaces, spectacles, men of genius, concerts."

"You will have your quarrel, Madame," he meant this and left her with a courtier's touch of his lips on her hand.

"Give me the Guards as sentries again," she implored, but she knew that he would not break for her the rules with which he kept up the regal dignity, the Guards were and always had been, for the reigning sovereigns only.

Unabashed, unperplexed, he shook his head, she changed her course. "You blunder over the brandy monopoly—do you suppose that the peasants will appreciate more bread if they are no longer allowed to distill their own spirits?"

"You are not interested in such subjects, Madame, you repeat what one of my critics said—Baron Pechlin? Why do you encourage him?"

"Why do you not destroy him?" she retorted. "I despise a king who cannot conquer his enemies."

He left her as she began that stale argument that because he would not destroy his opponents she was free to intrigue with him; he went to his apartment; although he often employed for months together a regal ritual of stiff ceremonial, often again, as now, he lived without even a body servant, with only the Swiss Reader, Francois Beylon, in attendance.

He thought of the tempest of snow without the closed room, remote from the storm as a cabin on a ship in a gale tossed sea; his lamp was lit, and the watch light set in the fender place; he put the letter on his desk, and on top of it, the miniature with the emerald surround, in the white velvet case, the month was March, a few weeks and the new grasses and the breaking blooms would enrich the landscape and he would ride to France, but this was a month he disliked, as unlucky.

A draught of wind broke through the chinks in the shutters, the human lights swayed in that shivering chill. Gustaf put out his hand to pull the bell rope for Beylon, for supper, changed his intention, broke the seals of her letter and unfolded it, one sheet, some brown flat pressed petals, falling out; he bent near the lamp to read:

"Madame d'Egmont died yesterday, this October rose lay for a while beside her cheek."

Gustaf jerked the bell; the Reader came from the cabinet, recoiled at sight of the King's face, at the sound of his words: "Did not those wizards claim that they could raise the dead?"

Chapter 31

The snowstorm had abated and the moon swung high and very far away in the dark blue sky, casting clear shadows from the palace, from the lime trees with boughs outlined with snow, from the white hillocks and drifts in the desolate park, the frosted ice on the lake gleamed with a dead pale glow as Gustaf and Beylon rode down the bare avenue. The Reader could do nothing but this, accompany his master, who, without him would have returned alone to Stockholm; his destination was not the palace but the house of Madame Arfmedsson; Beylon, muffled in furs, shocked out of his usual consciousness of his position, spoke as to a beloved equal.

"I never guessed you believed in this—witchcraft."

"Nor did I, until to-night." The smooth, pallid face of Gustaf, twisted at nostrils and lips, resembled the grimace of some young demon lost in eternal snows beyond time. "Witchcraft? Halldin, the Swedenborgian, is an able man—Swedenborg has died too soon. I could have gone directly to him—he has many followers—Halldin stopped my carriage a few days ago to throw a pamphlet in—"

Beylon was utterly surprised; he had always believed the king to be, despite his courteous gestures towards the Lutheran church, an atheist, and that he had merely used the chance medley of mystagogues who gathered at the witch's house to cover his serious practices, yet the first great grief of his life and he turned to

crude superstitions. “Halldin! The man is crazy—so are the others, or charlatans, pause, Sire.”

“Perhaps they can raise the dead,” muttered Gustaf, peering from under his fur cap at the snowbound, moonlit landscapes. “Perhaps I shall see her to-night and shall not have to wait until the spring—” he pulled up his chestnut horse, whose roughened hooves scraped on the rimed ground, as if a phantom barred his path.

“This will be much remarked on,” said Beylon, thinking of the two queens, the clutter of enemies and spies, the dark shifting forces lurking to destroy.

Gustaf did not hear.

“Dead four months and I unaware—could no one get such news through to me?”

“Were the mystagogues in the right, you would have been aware,” sighed Beylon.

“How should I know when she was always a phantom to me?” cried Gustav sharply. “You cannot see my world nor realize how haunted I am.”

They rode fast, scattering the untrodden snow with their horses’ hooves, their sables flapping on their shoulders, their cloaks twisting round their gauntletted hands, the cold, half seen night landscape swirling by, white silver, ash-coloured in the shifting moonbeams now free in a remote heaven, now veiled by banks of dappled snow cloud.

Gathering his reins in one hand, Gustaf threw the other up before him as if defying his destiny; through the twisted perspective of stair and dungeon where stood blind bust and maimed torso, sounded the melodies of Gluck, the human appeals for compassion, the stern refusals of the gods, on the slight plunging wind that shook the snow wreaths from the spectral trees, came the still voices of the Eumenides, the clank of the shuttle, the clash of the shears, behind them Nemesis, claiming her eternal rule of balance.

“Tell them,” cried Gustaf, gazing upwards, “my dear friend, that I loved a dead woman and was married to an imbecile—”

“No! No!” Beylon spoke sternly.

“What else? She is my wife now and through compassion I can tolerate the bond, I know her House—she has borne me one dead child—”

“We are at the gates,” Beylon implored: he shivered with horror that such things at once sacred and terrible, should be spoken of, they were better wrapped in a leaden secrecy.

Gustaf caught his thought.

“Everyone knows. What was concealed at the Copenhagen masquerade? Where was their privacy? Kings live and die in public to make sport for their people.”

“I never heard you speak so before.”

The sentries, recognising the King, raised and dropped their bayonets, the lodgekeeper hurried out to open the gates to the two prancing horses; the silver platings on their harness shot off white fire in the moonlight.

“A black ribbon!” demanded the king, pulling back the reins, “have you a black ribbon?”

Astonished and alarmed, the gatekeeper returned to his lodge and returned soon with a narrow tie from his wife’s bonnet, Gustaf leaned sideways to receive it, then, with his trained and natural dexterity, twisted it into the favour in his lapel.

The horsemen rode on, bending to the gallop on the Stockholm road.

"*Was* that the King?" whispered the gatekeeper—wild riders and a cold March night, maybe some unearthly power had galloped from the black bogs of Finland. The man glanced up suspiciously at the moon now obscured by curdling vapours edged with radiance, and hurried to his snug fireside; the sentries stared ahead at the avenue marked by the hoove tracks of the two fresh horses, the wind increased, shrill and direct, it appeared to blow from the heart of the North, chill from a trumpet of snow.

Chapter 32

Gustaf beat on the door of Madame Arfmedsson's house, while Beylon held the horses, who pranced, full of fire and suspicion, on the snow covered cobbles, the moon was free of the clouds, the copper domes gleamed in a chill and luminous violet blue sky, the Reader looked at his master's face, the eyes were hidden by the shadows of the fur cap, the mouth showed, fixed and grinning. Beylon noted that his emotion expressed itself with equal clarity to his thought, he had revealed himself with an unconscious precision that had not been touched by any sense of drama, nor coloured by his racing imagination, both consciously and unconsciously the actor, he had not acted to-night, the candour of his passion had been wholly pure. Beylon, pulling at the mouth of the riderless horse until the animal jumped, wondered what the king had lost to-night precious enough to fling him to the juggling he despised? Madame d'Egmont was not, could not ever have been more than a dream and dreams do not end with death; the narrow door opened, Gustaf turned sharply—"Take the horses to the palace," and was gone.

The door closed. Beylon remembered the mock precautions that had surrounded the King's former visits to this house, now he had not even lowered his voice; wrong and false this all seemed to the faithful servant, who had no life of his own, who existed only in the lives of those he served, a twisted marriage and a twisted love, a wife taken out of duty and kindness with a shudder of inner repulsion, a mistress who had never been more than a vision and who was now a phantom indeed, a swerve from heroic stoicism to the pitiful tricks of charlatans—Beylon liked none of this, so close he was to all the members of this family, trusted by them all with an absolute trust. The Reader saw too much for his own comfort, this headlong ride to-night, that could neither be concealed or explained was to him but the bringing into the open of a long festering grief, dangerously concealed beneath the splendour of many artful devices. He took the horses to the palace that stood large and sumptuous against the winter sky.

Chapter 33

Madame Arfmedsson held that nothing was unaccountable or surprising, and accepted the King's appearance and his emotion as if she had expected both; only the strange, the curious and the eccentric existed for her, she had ignored the commonplace so long that it meant nothing to her, she had sufficient shrewdness to defend her faith with ignorance, and for everything out of the way that occurred she could find a portent, a warning. In the past, hers was an easy profession and she had able partners in her enterprise, therefore she and those with her accepted the King's arrival as if he came exact to an appointment, and he, in his self absorption, felt no surprise at their lack of astonishment.

He followed the woman to the back parlour where he and his brothers had met so often to make their plans for the revolution of '72 and took his place, as if by a matter of course, at the lamplit table. The stove overheated the small apartment and the glow from it added to the ruddy light on the faces of the company who rose to receive the King, some thinking he had been brought there by spells, others who supposed he had long been engaged in occult pursuits.

Gustaf glanced round, sat down and asked abruptly: "Can any of you raise the dead?"

One who looked the superior of his fellows took the word and they allowed it to him, watching him with secret looks.

"That is a question full of dread and awe, Sire—but if the need be great, the motive pure—"

"The need is urgent," interrupted the King. "The motive? Yes, what is that?"

"It is always either curiosity or the need to assure ourselves that those who have gone before us have not vanished like a glass of water thrown into the air."

"Yes, that is the motive," said Gustaf, the room, the faces, the cabinets round the walls where he had once kept his maps and papers, the focus of light in the lamp, the Finnish drum that had been but a shifting, broken pattern to him, now cleared, he recognised the seeress, the old astrologer who lived with her, and Johan Gustaf Halldin, the Swedenborgian who had thrown the paper into his carriage. This personage had fiery eyes, a direct and impressive speech, an other worldly air that suited the present distraction of the King who did not know that Halldin, one of the most ardent of the followers of Emmanuel Swedenborg, had been sending him a medley of documents, exhorting, menacing and warning, ever since he had come to the throne, but which had all been destroyed by Beylon.

"What is this gathering?" asked the King sombrely; no one answered him; he had come upon a secret meeting of the Stockholm branch of the Illuminati, a society that included fanatics, rogues and spies among its members; two of those present, Plommerfelt, the Finn, and Bjornham, had studied with Count Cagliostro and Dr. Mesmer and claimed to know many of the secrets of the Comte St. Germain, they were dry, quiet men, who spoke when they wished a jargon composed of many languages, clogged with symbols, both stale and confusing, yet who knew when to be silent, and when to speak plainly. Madame Arfmedsson began to whine and shuffle, and to tap her lean fingers on the drum, tracing the figures painted thereon. Ulkenklow, the astrologer, Palmstrick, the theophist, Nordenskfold, the alchemist, who was searching for the philosopher's stone, shrunk together looking with the gaze of men who await miracles, at the King in his fur riding mantle; between them these men knew all the means whereby the

invisible world might be entered, and all the magic of all the ages, yet they lived furtively, were poor and had often been in exile and prison.

"We are here to assist your Majesty," said Halldin. "Give us your commands."

"She is dead," thought Gustaf, "and I have come among charlatans to evoke her spirit."

He put his hand before his eyes as they waited for him, some in awe, some in hope of profit, in the stillness with which they waited for spirits to appear or the metals to fuse in the crucible.

Gustaf had forgotten them; the incidents of the last few days flew before his closed eyes as the landscape had swirled past him as he rode to Haga, as he returned from Haga, Toll, and Sprengtporten, his mother, the snow and the cold, the letter lying unread over his heart, the reading of it, the flight with Beylon, the phantasmagoria of the Piranesi architecture, the dark plates, showing bridges, prisons, vaults, half buried, monstrous arches, falling from the portfolio, the chords from *Iphigénie*, the new Opera House in Stockholm, fading into the masked ball scene in Copenhagen, the dishonoured queen in her bloom coloured gown, changing into his own fair, pale wife with her sly, frightened glance, into his mother's bitter menace, into the phantom that was Jeanne d'Egmont, masques, disguises, stage costumes, decorations taken from down the ages, he fled from one to another finding nowhere peace, and they closed on him, hounding him to the Church with the tattered flags, the torn jerkins, the coffins of copper and silver. He opened his eyes with an effort and saw strangers staring at him, waiting on his will, his wish, his whim; the seeress had placed an apple shaped piece of polished white quartz in front of her and the lamplight reflected from a single ray. The aloofness of the King's gaze changed to an intense awareness of the actual moment; the rational disciple of Voltaire, who was also a man haunted by dreams, who lived in the spirit, scrutinized the mystagogues; although his candour had been complete, none of them had guessed his secret, though all of them thought that they knew it, and all were prepared to offer to gratify what they believed to be his uncontrollable desire.

"There are no dead," said Halldin, "angels and fiends, Heaven and Hell are about us every day."

To Gustaf who had been educated in the rejection of all myth and superstition, yet who was vividly imaginative and passionately emotional, these commonplace words seemed to contain the eternal compromise between reason and faith, whereby alone man can exist without despair.

"You think you have the art to reveal what is invisible to most of us?" he asked, leaning towards Halldin.

"Sire, it might be so, if you have the art to see," replied the Swedenborgian mildly, but Bjornham and Anders Plommerfelt took up the matter vehemently, and promised to raise the illustrious dead whenever the King wished.

"You know who I wish to see?" asked Gustaf.

Cunningly the Finn, Plommerfelt answered.

"Your Majesty's great ancestors, whom your Majesty so much resembles."

The shape and gleam of the silver and copper coffins of the Vasa Princes passed before the King's tormented fancy, the spirits of these mighty men who had been his examplars and paragons, were offered to him as smoothly as one of his

managers might offer him a puppet show; this would be a test, could the dead break through the shadows at a summons, then Jeanne d'Egmont would come to his secret anguished appeal; he turned to Halldin.

"Is this within your belief?"

"It maybe, it maybe," replied the sharp and furtive man, "nothing is so foolish or so dangerous as incredulity. I have written much."

"Too much, Halldin! I do not read the documents you send me."

"Yet when I was in prison for treason, you ordered my release and sent me a gift of fifteen ducats."

"I had forgotten. What was your treason?"

"I wrote of the possibility of your Majesty being the man on the white horse—the Beast 666."

"Ah that!" the King sighed. "Perhaps you sell the wind in a kerchief or a red string with three knots and know how to weave a cape that renders the wearer invisible!"

Ulkenklow, the strologer, instantly claimed these gifts, he could divine, he declared, by reading the lines on the hand, the stars, trays of sand and bowls of water, intimate spirits revealed to him where ancient treasuries, the hoards of ancient monarchs were concealed, Palmstrick added that he was a theosophist, a past master in both white and black magic, moreover, he was a proficient in the hermetic art, and on the way to discover the stone that would change base metals into gold. Nordenskfold took the word, scorning what Palmstrick had just boasted, gold and diamonds were gross, he knew of a process, disclosed to him by immortal beings, whereby one could be transmuted into *urim* the other into *thummin* mystical substances that had the power to absolve mankind from all the pain, torment and grief brought on him by his sensual and sinful nature.

"Pain, torment and grief," said the King rising; as the others got to their feet, Anders Plommerfelt caught at the King's fur mantle, and in a jargon composed of many languages assured Gustaf that he was an assistant to the Finn Bjornham, who was, in his turn, instructed by a magus, who never left the dark bogs of his sombre country, moreover that both of them were adepts in transcendental physics, and deep in with the Rosicrucians who had a lodge at Spa. Gustaf put this by, silencing the man, who persisted that he was well known to Duke Karl of Sudermania; the King paused at this; he knew his brother was an active Freemason, but not involved with the Illuminati, but the energetic and voluble Plommerfelt was telling him that Karl had gifts of mediumship and second sight, and, with the Duke of Ostrogotland, often attended séances in a church at midnight or his, Plommerfelt's, apartments—"as your Majesty knows" added the mystagogue confident that his royal patrons had sent Gustaf to this sudden and secret visit to the house of the seeress.

Gustaf remembered the means he had chosen to disguise his own conspiracy against the Estates; he supposed, and without much interest yet with an increase in his anguish, that his brothers were turning his own weapons against himself, spying on him, intriguing against him, edged on by their mother, if not actually plotting his downfall, ready to circumscribe his actions and clip his powers—so, he had ridden through the winter night, to snatch at a fluttering hope of meeting the spirit of Jeanne d'Egmont, and found he had turned back, like one tricked in a

labyrinth, into the vulgar schemes of the half witted, the hired charlatan, the professional mischief maker, the restless, selfish malcontent; the statesman and the Swede prevailed over his desperate sorrow, it was, to him, as if Jeanne d'Egmont touched him on the arm and bid him to his business—that of a King guarding his people.

He instantly dissimulated and so perfectly that there was no change in his look or his manner, none of them, for all their vaunted powers, knew that he now considered them with a seeing eye and an abrupt appraisal of their qualities, mean and wretched they appeared to him, their drab and dun clothes blotted in and out of the shadows, the lamp glow showing their furtive anxious faces, all of them were of commonplace appearance, Halldin alone had some dignity, though uncertain and sly.

"Like rats in a sewer, these might infect a city, a nation," thought Gustaf as he quietly made an appointment with Plommerfelt, to investigate the mysteries of the other world; even through the shock of his personal distress, his keen memory had placed the mystagogues in the order of their pretensions, he told Palmstrick that he should be glad to have the philosopher's stone to help the finances of a poor country over-spending on reforms and the arts, and Nordenskfold that he might work in the Drottningholm laboratory on his labours to discover the magic elixir that would bring felicity to mankind. At Halldin Gustaf looked kindly—"You shall preach in the royal chapel," he said, "and elucidate your readings of the Book of Revelations."

So, at a stroke, he had them all under his hand and himself well in the centre of their secrets, there was something disgusting in such an ending to such a quest, he had flung himself into the winter night, indifferent to all but the assurance of the immortality of the soul and the reunion with the beloved, humanity's dearest wishes, and he had found himself forced into policeman's work. Yet he had taken it up instantly, alert and adroit, it would have all been turned over to Baron Liljensparre but for two reasons, that had instantly occurred to him, he could not expose his brother's folly, or, possibly, treachery, to the astute Chief of Police, and he could not afford to make enemies of people behind whom might be all those powerful figures of whom Johan Kristofer Toll had warned him, Pechlin, Fersen, nobles like Cedarstrom and Ribbing, his own mother, her brother, Frederik of Prussia, Osterman the Prussian Envoy—behind all of them the Empress Katherine herself. The news of the death of Jeanne d'Egmont had coiled round him like a tentacle of a hidden force to drag him back to the whirlpool of his precarious fortunes.

As he closed the door of the narrow house and turned along the street dark beneath the snow clouds, he put his cold, numb, ungloved right hand on the knot of black ribbon given him by the gatekeeper and twisted it in the colours of the Order of Vasa, the sombre image that confronted him, imposed on the night scene of Stockholm, was that of his uncle and the Tzarina bending over the map of Poland, severed in half, unfurling the map of Sweden, the knife lying ready, ay, the knife and the pistol, his tired mind picked up those symbols of violence, the weapon his mother had given him and that Beylon had lost, the day Madame d'Egmont's glove was lost also, or near about, probably by now they had been found and placed in the armoury, he would never wear them, or need them. "You

cannot afford to make enemies," so Toll had warned him, so he had just now warned himself, no, Toll had said he could not afford to allow his enemies life and liberty. It was the same, if he broke all the rules of statecraft and never punished, he must be careful Whom he offended. Once he had thought that generosity would meet with an instant response, yet he had lost Sprengtporten, whom he had over rewarded, through a trivial matter. The King knew that he should have treated Baron Jakob Sprengtporten as Baron Jakob Sprengtporten had furiously demanded he should treat Pechlin, Fersen and their followers. Gustaf had left this powerful man, free and an enemy, probably despising the magnanimity that had left his insolent ingratitude unrebuked; the King did not regret what he had done, but as he returned on foot to the palace, an aching weariness suddenly over him like a leaden cloak, the sombre difficulties of his chosen way cut on his spirit as keenly as the sea wind cut on his face, with invisible, bitter strokes.

Chapter 34

Karl and Frederik acknowledged good humouredly their interest in Freemasonry, the Illuminati and all the fashionable forms of magic, science and chemistry were imported from France, they remarked, as openly and as regularly as the crates of Sèvres porcelain, the bales of Lyons silks and velvets, laces and ribbons, tapestries and pictures were imported from the same country.

"And costing less," remarked Karl, who never missed an opportunity to comment on the King's extravagance, and where his personal magnificence or the adornment of his palaces and the patronage of the native arts were concerned Gustaf did spend recklessly in the sense that he did not count the monetary cost of bringing his grandiose conceptions into being.

"This I knew," he replied, "but not that you met in secret at the fortune-teller house—that we used to trick Liljensparre."

"Ay, Gustaf, to trick," smiled Karl, and he made his meaning plain that if the King could dissimulate, so could his brothers.

"Then it was necessary, for a great enterprise," said Gustaf. "What is this? Mere folly?"

Karl evaded, spinning out words, on what was folly? The King had the impression that the elder of the brothers was deeply engaged in this medley of people that certainly included many poets, journalists, musicians, whom the King encouraged himself, some of them men of lively intelligence and talent, pensioned by the court, and it was true that Freemasonry and the Rosicrucians were fashionable—"I shall make them more so," said Gustaf. "Halldin will preach the doctrine of Swedenborg from the royal pulpit and I shall accompany you to one of Plommerfelt's meetings," he continued drawing a design for a garden in the Moorish style, though he was rebuilding all his palaces on an elaborate scale, his desk and tables were littered with plans for yet other residences, with sketches of outlandish costumes, fantastic drop cloths, embroideries for scarves and sashes, dialogues for drama—draughts on the future that would never be honoured.

Karl agreed with elegant courtesy, if he were vexed at the King's method of keeping a watch on his activities, he showed it not, since his marriage he had withdrawn himself much from his brother whom he blamed for the loss of Aurora, the King suspected him, but of nothing more dangerous than idle mischief making. Karl had proved himself a brave, active, skilful soldier, but in peace was no more than a lazy courtier with no interests beyond his petty personal affairs; as heir presumptive his position was delicate, his own marriage was childless and he appeared without ambition, but several of the King's intimate friends had skilfully hinted that Karl was only quiet because the royal reconciliation had produced a dead child. At any such warning, however kindly conveyed Gustaf sickened, Karl was so little younger than he was himself, was it possible he intended marking time all his life to mount a throne in his old age? And if there is an heir, what will he do?

The King always thrust these questions from his mind, but they recurred to him now, as he scribbled his arches and twisted columns, and discussed Dr. Mesmer and the Count Cagliostro with the seemingly indifferent Karl.

Frederik was distracted by his love for the Fersen beauty, a plight noted with bitter amusement by Karl who had also had the ill luck to become romantically enamoured of a girl too highly born to be his mistress, not highly born enough to be his wife. Gustaf, despite his unfaltering severity in keeping up his royal state and the most elaborate etiquette, would have permitted these marriages into the Swedish aristocracy, not only as a matter of policy, but because of his own sufferings at a forced union and a separation from one (in his case always unattainable) who would have gilded even the darkest places of his life. It was the fiery ambition of Ulrika Lovisa that had forced her younger sons into matches of her choosing, she had been thwarted in the King's marriage, and would not give way again—had she, when selecting Karl's wife, the cheerful and pliant Hedvig of Holstein Etten, also been selecting the future Queen of Sweden?

The question posed itself before Gustaf, followed by others. Why should they count on my death? Why does it seem to me as if they were waiting for me to die, so that all I have done should vanish with me, all my work be overturned? It cannot be so, he told himself and raised his blue eyes to stare at his brother, while his pencil slid out of his hand.

Karl smiled, as if coolly rejecting alike challenge, question, overture, he never affected the least interest in any of the King's policies or reforms, all that he shared with him were the pleasures and amusements that Gustaf so lavishly provided.

"What took you to the Arfmedsson's house?" he asked politely.

"Chance," replied Gustaf, he had been utterly unprepared for the question but answered it with a coolness that deceived Karl into thinking that his brother had been spying on him and his associates, it was exactly, Karl considered, in Gustaf's character, to go himself, suddenly and secretly, to the seeress's house and cast a public light on people and proceedings so much more easily watched and countered when employed and patronised than when turned over to the police.

Chapter 35

A melancholy fit was on the King, and this disturbed the brilliant liberals, the enthusiastic men of talent, the beautiful and splendid ladies and courtiers who were his chosen companions, the easy philosophers, the single minded reformers who fixed on him the most generous of hopes.

His lavishness was only disliked by those already his enemies, his tourneys in the market square of Stockholm, his daylong absorption with Elis Schorderheim over heraldry and all the discarded trappings of the age of Valdemar or Eric II were forgiven even by the serious minded most anxious to re-establish and re-arm the country and to strengthen the constitution of '72, first because no more was spent on these delicious pleasures than had formerly been lost through waste and corruption, and second because Gustaf's ardent energy, his swift imagination, his eager fervour, his abnormal quickness of wit and his many uncommon gifts combined to give him a double fascination, that which he exercised personally and that which he could give to everything about him. His looks, his gestures, his eloquence, his taste surrounded all his projects with enchantment; the pasteboard castles, the tinsel ballets, the varied and fantastic entertainments, foreign to the North, that he continually offered to his people, the concerts and operas in which he personally appeared in antique costume, his own dramas, tributes to Swedish history, in which he took part, his winning, under a feigned name, of an essay prize at the Literary Academy he had himself founded, all this might in another have seemed touched with burlesque, at least frivolity, but Gustaf could create an illusion, he had that, the showman's supreme genius. The lists with the pavilions flying elaborate pennants and armorial devices, tricked by the industrious Herald, really seemed the Middle Ages re-created, and Gustaf, riding a white horse with monstrous white feathers on the forehead, wearing fine steel armour set with jewels, his tilting helmet on, his esquire before him with his banner of the golden lion and his page following him with his arms, seemed neither slight nor ridiculous as he rode into the lists while the people beyond the barriers applauded the superb spectacle, but rather a re-incarnation of some golden age when chivalry had ruled the world. Nor did anyone consider the contrast between this brave panoply and the plain costume, copied from that worn by Karl XII, affected by Gustaf for his *coup d'état*, an affectation. If his sashes and scarlet heels, his round falling collars and full breeches that he often wore in the style of Gustaf Adolf II, were jeered at by the pamphleteers paid by Russia and Britain, this was because they had no other point for their mockery in the character and surroundings of a man who was so talented, so successful, who had showed himself so resolute and daring in state affairs and so generous in his triumph. It was the King who was always the first to laugh at himself, to order the lights to be lit, the curtain dropped, the masks and costumes set aside, the ropes and pulleys that had worked the scenic effects revealed, the cardboard palaces moved from amid the trees, and new projects brought forward, a fresh gathering of delights arranged. And as he had chosen men of marked worth for every department of the State, and as he guided these and foreign affairs with a sure hand, a searching eye and a

high burning love for Sweden, none but mischief makers could accuse him of squandering his time and his accomplishments on these fair and seemly exercises of pageantry that graced his capital and the embellished palaces he constantly visited.

It had, indeed, to be a sour and a bitter nature, that would have complained of this abundance of refined and delicate pleasure making, marred by neither coarseness nor cruelty, that Gustaf so freely offered to his family, his friends, his court, his people; not often had a monarch amused himself in a fashion so highly civilized, for even the artful magnificence of Versailles where the Bourbon Kings had so carefully built up a social fabric of incomparable dignity and grandeur, a magnificence that Gustaf had taken as a model, though not one to be dully mimicked, even that superb setting for royalty and royalty's expansive glory had had defects unknown to the Swedish courts. Talented, graced, educated and accomplished out of all count more richly than the French kings, Gustaf was also far nobler in character, though his court was in every way liberal, and, the severe declared, much licence was admitted, provided outward etiquette was observed, yet it was not blighted by the boredom that follows the constant practice of vice, the apathy that comes when a sense of honour withers, the cynicism that corrodes the completely worldly minded, the dreary lassitude that overcomes those who have no ideals, no sense of duty, no resources save the gross indulgences of the senses. Gustaf's household was not influenced by either priests or harlots, it was neither darkened by fanaticism or coarsened by ribaldry, it was neither cramped and hindered by the dogmatism of the Church, nor disillusioned by the scoffs and sneers of the philosophers. The Queen's earnest Lutheranism was not allowed to intrude on others, the King could keep a Bishop for a close friend and allow the Church no influence whatever, he could discuss every turn and twist of modern ideas without becoming either arid or pedantic. If the clergymen who preached in the royal chapels were easy and liberal, and disgusted the orthodox by their tolerant views, at least they were treated with respect, the King did nothing that could have offended the most simple peasant in his dominions. The atmosphere of his court was never lewd and dull, never vicious and brutal, decorous appearances were always maintained, Karl might have a servant girl for his ammorata of the moment, but she was not permitted in the royal palaces, though accommodated, for her transient appearance, in the Chinese pavilion at Drottningholm. In everything was a delicate compromise, due to the King's acute sense of order and balance, of justice and dignity, a sense that had caused his breaches with the Queen Mother and with Sprengtporten, both over matters of precedence. If he allowed jests on light loves and lighter infidelities, they had to be witty and impersonal, if the Countess Hopken dared to pose to Sergel as a nude Venus, it was because she had a beautiful body and knew how to reveal it with the utmost decorum. The King gave an air, not only of sparkling enjoyment, but of innocence, to the society he ruled, a society that had all the elements needful for base folly, cold evil and gross vices, all the elements that had been present in the court of Kristian VII and that had under the rule of an imbecile, an adventurer and a wanton, turned Copenhagen into the scandal of Europe.

Under the touch of Gustaf what might have, had another handled it, proved trivial or tiresome, became delightful, he never praised to flatter, but to reward

merit, and he seldom needed to say anything in the nature of a rebuke for he surrounded himself only with those he considered possessed, of one kind or another, merit. His entrancing smile, his keen look, so blue, so flashing, remarked by all who saw him, was never assumed for he truly wished well to everyone, and was interested in everything that was in his opinion, worthy of interest. His private griefs he never disclosed, it was known that he had them, and often he would break the glittering yet arduous routine of his work and pleasure and retire to one of his residences with no one save Beylon or Schorderheim, who were allowed the parts of chorus in a Greek drama, they stood apart, with no desires of their own, save to watch and serve.

It was not only Gustaf's personality, his charm, accomplishments, his obliging airs and winning appearance that charmed, he employed, though many of those whom he fascinated did not guess this, the manifold devices of the impresario, his artistic sense was so acute that he could display everything to the utmost advantage, he brought the best out of all with whom he came in contact, from his pages to his statesmen, and he knew as surely how to tie a curtain, loop a cord, set a branch of candles against a mirror, or any trick of that kind, as he knew how to outwit Osterman, and keep his uncle Frederik of Prussia ignorant of his intentions. So individual was the atmosphere with which he surrounded himself, that even in the first years of his constitutional monarchy, when he sincerely declared he was the first citizen of a free people, his peculiar elegance received the name of Gustavan and those who had been even for a short time under his influence were notable for the elegance, the high breeding, the gaiety, the intelligence associated with this term.

The members of the Literary Academy found that this Gustavan atmosphere was something not to be defined, they could speak of it only in terms of comparison with what had never existed, the fairy tales, recited not for children, but for witty, chivalrous, clever and contented adults, a transmutation of ordinary life into something only poets could describe in stories like those related by Ariosto, Tasso or Edmund Spenser.

The *divertissement*, the masquerade, the pageant, the perpetual disguise of humanity that is too soon marred, too soon sad, the theatre, every conceivable artifice of light and shadow, sound and colour, speed and space, was needed to imitate these enchanted dells and forests, these magic lakes and unearthly palaces, where Armida and Gloriana might have disported.

As these vivid illusions were the King's creations, so his was always the hand that destroyed them, the first to lift the drop scene, to show behind the dark machinery of the drama, so like the perilous engines poised above the unending stairs in Piranesi's dungeon plates, but only Gustaf saw the likeness.

Then, in this March, a month he considered unfortunate, a month when all was set for pleasure, the King took on this melancholy and a new religious fit, he lost interest in the spectacles he was preparing, delegated his tasks, attended chapel regularly and listened earnestly to the obscure preaching of Halldin who seemed to be using a threatening language and cancelled some theatrical performances he had ordered; only the welfare of the country had his attention, he was continuous in his work with the staffs of his various departments and wrote much of the correspondence to foreign courts with his own hand.

This change in the King lowered him in the opinion of his intimates and followers, the soldiers considered this melancholy unmanly, the intellectuals feared that he was inclining to ancient superstitions, the women missed the amusements, the gaiety, the attendants and servants missed the excitements of a constant change of occupation, troops of players, musicians and dancers wandered sullenly over empty stages, down deserted groves, their pay and their keep were not diminished, but, no longer allowed to exercise their art, they felt lifeless.

The Queen Mother and her party sneered behind their muffs raised to secretive faces, Ulrika Lovisa did not guess the cause of the change in the King, but she was sure that it was due to some fault of his own and was something that she had predicted. Only the Queen was pleased, she had always moved like a wooden puppet through the pageantries in which she took a leading part, and she alone was able to resist the King's arts and devices, to put her finger through his illusions, to say—"why, 'tis but gauze," or "why, 'tis worked by a wheel" when the god descended from heaven amid clouds to end the spectacle.

But this religious fit she understood, she too could listen to Halldin since she supposed he was a Christian and she never had understood the most lucid and eloquent of preachers; as she sat by the King in the royal chapel, she looked at him with a faint interest, he was, she felt, behaving more reasonably than he had done; already she was a little grateful to him, first for not sending her away in disgrace or even to prison as her brother's wife had been sent, then for making her his wife in truth, then she had been moved as far as she was capable of being moved, though she had understood nothing of what it cost him to receive her into his arms and even, into something of his heart, she knew only that he had supported her against his mother and set her up over his household.

That softness had soon vanished, she became morose, withdrawn, resentful of the King's activities, indifferent when her child was born dead, and the cannons did not fire the royal salute from the expectant men o' war.

Even the "reconciliation" with her husband, as it was termed, was remembered by her only as a service rendered to her by Baron Munck and his wife, who had with tact and flattery played the intermediaries in this most delicate affair. Sophia preferred Equerry Munck to her husband and had given him her portrait set in brilliants of the first water, but when he was not with her, which was seldom, she never thought of him or of anyone else, she ate sweets, larded her complexion, admired her dainty plump hands and read her prayer book that was so familiar to her yet whose contents, text and pictures she saw, every time she viewed them, with a cool start of surprise.

She did not question the King's melancholy, it seemed to her a natural sobriety, and she was conscious of a gratification because his mother, his family and his friends were vexed and disturbed at the change in him, and what they disliked, pleased her, for she vaguely considered them to be all her enemies.

There was no outward alteration in the inflexible etiquette of the court, which although strict was never irksome and pleased even those foreign envoys who were Gustaf's enemies. The King's hand was in every detail, though he appeared neither to direct, nor to interfere in his carefully regulated household. His levée was on the model of those held by Louis XIV, as was the reception of his officers and

strangers of importance at the richly canopied head of the state bed, weekly the royal family dined in public, a stately repast followed by ceremonious games of quadrille and trente-et-quarante. The evenings of the other days after the earlier hours had been spent in business, the King kept open and comparatively informal court for his intimates and household, as well as for a wider circle to which all members of the nobility were freely admitted; cards, reading, drawing, discussions, charades, filled the time until supper. Afterwards, on the nights on which there were neither concerts, the opera, or a drama, the last hours of the winter day passed with the courtiers gathered again round the card tables, or in conversation between the brilliant company, in which friendships, the details of modern learning and discovery, the arts, philosophy and elegant love affairs were gracefully discussed. Johan Toll had once spoken to the King on this show of frivolity, so out of harmony with his policies and designs, as a disguise of his quality before the revolution of '72, it had been skilful—but now?

Gustaf had replied with his swift candour. "It is still a disguise, apart from my desire to glorify Sweden, I wish to draw all the aristocracy to me, by golden chains. To destroy alike their dislike of me, and their power to make mischief, their independence by attaching them to the exacting ceremonial and the engaging pleasures I provide."

"Several monarchs have succeeded in overcoming an over bold, over restless nobility by these means," Toll had remarked, "but I doubt if our military aristocrats, poor, haughty, and enraged against your Majesty by their political defeat, can be so subdued."

He had once more offered a stern suggestion that the King should use, not the glittering arts of seduction but the method of force and, if need be, violence, to weaken the power of the nobles.

"I believe that I can succeed by my methods," the King had smiled. "Besides I have deliberately and openly chosen them, I can use no others, and I think, Toll, that more of these gentlemen are my friends than you believe—are we not all Swedes? or Northmen? I do not, I cannot fear treachery from these."

"After what you have given Sweden, no," Toll had agreed, "not treachery, but hostility, underground intrigues, a secret falling away to Russia, a perpetual private jealousy, a watching to find a moment of weakness, of confusion in your government."

"To try to overset me?" asked the King. "It is not possible, I must, I do believe them patriots—besides, were they to refuse to support me, I still have the country behind me."

When the King's abstracted sadness fell upon him, and he, though obliging and civil, showed little taste for his former amusements, or undertook them absently, Johan Toll recalled this and many similar exchanges of warnings and self confidence between himself and Gustaf; then this watchful friend believed that the King was distressed, even shaken by the cruel defection of Magnus Sprengtporten who had retired in a fury to his Finnish estates, by the ill humour of the Queen Mother and the moodiness of Baron Goran, who also threatened to leave the King's service, though surfeited with praise, rewards and dignities. No one thought of Jeanne d'Egmont in connection with the King's low moods save the Reader, who knew this secret grief as he knew everything relating to the Vasa family, when the

King retired to his closet after the Sunday services in the chapel, taking with him a copy of the Bible and some of the works of Emanuel Swedenborg Francois Beylon alone guessed where Gustaf's meditations might turn. The King's most intimate companions were disappointed and even disgusted when he spoke to them of spiritual wonders and asked their opinions on religious dogma, this change in his behaviour made those who had considered that they were his most intimate friends realize that no one had his entire confidence, neither among the lively, splendid young Guards officers like Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt, like Sergel, among the men of genius, nor among the philosophers, the statesmen whom he encouraged and employed, nor among the witty and beautiful women whom he daily flattered was there one who influenced him or who really knew his private inclinations and intentions.

The King had appointed Halldin, who was an accomplished scholar, one of the royal secretaries, and permitted, without much attempt to disguise the matter from the quips of the court, Nordenskfold to pursue his chemical experiments in the palace of Drottningholm, yet while Gustaf allowed these men and their followers considerable liberties he did not appear much affected by them, but rather to watch them and to study their antics with a civil and not very eager curiosity.

Nor did the King take any trouble to conceal his attendance at a *séance* in the house of Anders Plommerfelt who was the son of a wealthy merchant and lived in a rich comfort that contrasted painfully with the skimping poverty of the other mystagogues, but no one was told what Gustaf's opinion of this affair had been and few knew of the sombre and dreadful scene that soon followed the King's first attempt to summon the phantoms of the dead within the circle of mortal knowledge; nor could Gustaf himself have disclosed to anyone what was precisely his opinion of the performance, at once horrible and ridiculous, given by the adept with so gloomy a relish, for while his reason beheld only quackery, his emotions were deeply stirred.

Chapter 36

Karl had accompanied his brother willingly, using that amiable, slightly mocking courtesy that was his way of preventing Gustaf knowing his mind or his intentions, he, like the King, had no favourites, gave his confidence to none, and under an appearance of charming frankness, made his way, in large matters as in small by subtle means, delicate intrigue and dissimulation, there was no indication as yet that the motives behind his actions were as lofty, as unselfish, as patriotic as were those of the King.

"When we went to the Arfmedsson's house we were happier, Karl—you and I—do you recall how we broke the silver piece between us?"

"Happier?" parried the younger brother, "then we were about to undertake a very difficult and dangerous—and doubtful adventure—now we are completely successful, Sire, I confess I am happier now."

“If you feel completely successful you must be,” replied the King thoughtfully, “yes, you must indeed feel happier. I do not—then there was action, peril, the chance, the hazard, ay, I suffered and I winced, but it was done—now? There is still much to accomplish.”

“In what way, Gustaf, are you not yet satisfied with your triumphs, your reforms, the figure you have made in Europe?”

“No—I am a King, Karl, it is a most difficult profession.”

“One that you take too seriously.”

The two young men walked, with their trained, graceful tread, Gustaf’s slight limp swinging into step with his brother’s easy stride, through the light grey spring night wrapped in those mantles of midnight blue colour that effectually disguised their persons, their three cornered hats pulled over their brows.

“You were successful, Karl,” said Gustaf. “You undertook one definite campaign and won it brilliantly.”

“I did not get my reward.” Karl spoke from his collar turned up against the sea wind and in his refined voice Gustaf heard the harsh accents of Magnus Sprengtporten.

“All I could give you, Karl.”

“I asked for Aurora. I think she proved herself, eh? When I like a fool, young and boasting, told her the design, did she betray it?”

Gustaf thought—“this discretion was as much for me as for you,”—he remembered with a stressing of his melancholy how the little creature had come to him with the flower wreaths over her arms, asking for news of her lover. Ulrika Lovisa had ruined that tender and chivalrous romance.

“You should have stood your ground. You gave way, as Frederik will give way.”

“As you gave way, Gustaf.”

“I was aged eight years!”

“At the betrothal, yes, there were other chances—and you,” added Karl keenly, “had our lady mother on your side.”

Gustaf was highly vexed when he realized that he had been led into speaking, even obliquely, of his wife, the woman who he resolutely forced himself to respect, to uphold, even to regard with compassion and affection, he felt, too, and keenly felt, the unkindness behind Karl’s cool words.

“Tell me,” he asked suddenly, “do you think that I have any friends?”

“Princes have no friends, only favourites and lovers.”

“Karl, you evade me. Once I thought that we were friends.”

“The note you strike is solemn!” laughed the Duke. “I do not admire the effect this religious fit has on you.”

“Are you not interested in religion, in magic?” asked the King earnestly. “If not, why do you meddle with these occult societies? A fashionable amusement, you say, but you kept it secret from me, I should never have known of it had I not gone to the Arfmedsson’s by chance.”

“What that chance was, I shall never understand,” remarked Karl as they paused before the tall house in front of which hung a lantern shaped as a star that blurred the Northern dusk with gold. Gustaf remembered with horror that wild ride from Haga.

“You would never understand,” he agreed rapping three times and then three and then three, on the handsome door. As he spoke he knew that Karl suspected him of spying on him, and that even if he tried to remove that doubt by confessing that he had broken in on the group of adepts in the lunatic hope of raising the spirit of Jeanne d’Egmont, Karl would have smiled courteously and credited his brother with an elegant stroke of deception.

“Why is he suspicious?” thought Gustaf. “He would not be unless he had something to conceal. Yet for what can Karl intrigue?”

He glanced at the slender figure beside him in the sparsely lit hall, Karl’s blue eyes met his with a whimsical glance.

“The art of the actor runs in the family, Gustaf,” he remarked. “None of us is ever without some disguise—do not you yourself encourage the masquerade?”

“As you know.”

“Some day there must be a last masquerade,” said Karl. “Yes, but maybe we shall vanish with our masks on.” The brothers exchanged a smile. Karl added.

“You have a true friend in Elis Schorderheim and another in François Beylon.”

“They are friends to all of the family.”

They followed the plain liveried servant up the shallow stairs and spoke in voices easily lowered.

“You specially favoured Schorderheim, he is much exalted with his own mansion and the offices of Minister of Public Worship—a delightful sinecure, and clerk of the Council and Grand Herald!”

“I can promote him, I can hardly exalt him,” returned Gustaf. “Everyone likes the man, his loyalty, his modesty, his tact, his ability to understand my humour—make him necessary to me, as is François Beylon with his uncommon fidelity.”

“Why do you, so candid and determined in your character and policies, need such companions? Indeed they do seem to be the sole people to whom you give your complete trust—certainly they were useful in ‘72—but now?”

“Now I do not need them for the purposes of intrigue,” smiled Gustaf, understanding that Karl was accusing him of setting the Herald and the Reader to spy on his brothers, and feeling despondent at this mistrust. “But I know that I could rely on them, before any, to undertake any risk, any service, for all of us.”

“Neither of these gentlemen, though I have been familiar with them since an infant, have done anything for me, or for Frederik, or for our sister,” replied Karl lightly. He had paused on the second landing and the servant opened the folding doors in front of them. “Enter, Sire, I pray you, it is in this apartment that the experiment will be conducted.”

Gustaf, on entering the room, at once began to look about him with the eye of a trained observer and an expert stage manager; he had himself created many effects, both on the boards of the enclosed theatre and amid the trees and groves of parks and garden, that might have been taken for the creation of a wizard’s spells, had he chosen so to present them to the ignorant or the credulous. He could himself have played with brilliant address, the part of a St. Germain, or a Cagliostro, but he would soon have tired of it; his glance now was that of a cool critic, yet he had Jeanne d’Egmont’s last letter in his waistcoat pocket, folded with the white velvet bag containing the miniature ringed with emeralds.

So far the affair was well arranged; there had been no attempt *at* display, at inducing an atmosphere, the servant, certainly himself an initiate in Plommerfelt's mysteries, had ignored the rank of his visitors, yet without disrespect, and the room was plain, furnished formally with dark pieces and sage green curtains at the windows.

The Duke offered his brother a seat between the empty chairs and himself mounted a small dais in the centre of the room, on which was a stool with a black serge cushion, over this the young man folded his blue cloak, with the collar and lappets of sable, then sat on it, folded his arms on his breast and waited, smiling across, and slightly downwards at his brother.

An octagonal lamp of rough silver hung directly above his head, so that he was in a clear, steady shadow, while the rays struck, widening, in soft beams of light across the walls covered with flock paper of a greenish tint. Karl wore a tightly buttoned suit of deep gray corded silk, that accentuated his long, elegant narrow body that was given an air of a grave and courtly comedian or pierrot by the very full ruffles of cobweb fine lace at his throat and wrists and the flame coloured sequins on his pockets and wide cuffs.

Gustaf recalled that Karl had spoken of masquerades and disguises, and Karl himself seemed no more than a smart puppet, with human eyes looking through the full lids of a paper vizard, then, again in the even shadow, Karl might have been, to his brother's gaze, the man in the Piranesi plate, who could never escape the colossal machinery of his perpetual chaotic imprisonment, at once the haunter and the haunted, changing in his turn to the black notes of Gluck's score, as Gustaf had pondered it, that set down the musician's symbols for the challenge of humanity against the cruelty of the gods and the power of death. Karl smiled in silence; he was as if enthroned and the King sat lower than he did on the dais.

Anders Plommerfelt entered by a door at the end of the room, he was accompanied by his patron the Finn Bjornham, by Nordenskfold, Palmstrick and Ulkenklow, behind the mystagogues walked Halldin grasping a large wooden crucifix that was too heavy for his weakened hands and swayed as he raised it; while not pretending to the insight of the adepts, he affected to be able to reconcile Christianity and Rationalism by the doctrines of Swedenborg that covered a ground sufficiently large and undefined to accommodate all superstitions and reasoning, he declared, also, that he held the key to the prophecies of the Book of Revelations, and spared no one in the denunciations he founded on the sublime ravings of the political minded seer who with such poetry and malice foretold the destruction of the once overwhelming power of pagan Rome.

These men had all been fasting for twenty-four hours according to Halldin's unsteady but boastful greeting, Gustaf noticed at once that the two principals in the affair, Bjornham and Plommerfelt appeared as neither exhausted nor as excited as the others, but conducted themselves with alert shrewdness. All were attired in the traditional dark gowns, pointed caps and flat shoes of the solitary scientific investigator, all, save Halldin and Plommerfelt wore rough beards and large steel rimmed spectacles; Gustaf automatically reflected that if he had been dressing a group of alchemists for the stage he would have attired them in a less conventional manner; speaking to Plommerfelt, he asked that the experiments might begin immediately.

Karl laughed, though the large tiled stove in the dark corner of the room was spreading a heavy heat, his face was so thickly powdered it did not flush, which gave him an expression, with his tightly pleated frills and high piled white curls, of the aristocratic indifference of a splendid court clown posing for Antoine Watteau or François Lancret.

"You will certainly be disappointed, Gustaf," he remarked. "On some of these occasions nothing at all happens."

Halldin paused before the King; he was of a mean appearance, his sickly youth passing into a decaying prime, even his enthusiasm could give no glow to his eyes that had never shone and now were like muddy water, long settled, he had a look of the ashes from another's fires, never rekindled by himself; he set the crucifix down and rested on it as if it were a walking cane, while he recited the names and attainments of his companions.

"Why, they are known to me," interrupted the King. "Let them get to their spells."

Chapter 37

The magicians stood aside while Plommerfelt drew circles of chalk and charcoal round the dais and set cauldrons filled with hot stones at the four corners; between the two brothers, he placed the crucifix flat on the floor, the head towards Karl.

Gustaf felt disgusted and weary, one of the qualms of nausea that sometimes afflicted him to the point of swooning, nearly overcame him, he rested his head against the wall and closed his eyes in order not to see the lean and tormented image on the cross at his feet.

He heard the adepts swoop and chatter under the directions of Plommerfelt, who was a stout man now over heated. "This," he thought, "is, surely, neither a conspiracy nor transcendental science storming mysteries, but gull catching, crudely done."

He did not even think of Jeanne d'Egmont, so far was she from any juggling such as this: he kept his eyes closed, allowing other scenes to press upon his inner visions, allowing water, enchanted, holy, benign to wash away all such dull scrabbling for gain as this. The water of Sweden that he had celebrated in the opera Peleus he had presented the night of his snatch at power, the sea, the rivers, the lakes, the pools, the water breaks, the springs and wells, beating on the Northern coasts, coiling through sunless valleys, sliding down the face of gigantic rocks of granite, arching in a rainbow from the jutting precipice to the swirling pool, gushing thin and pure through the spongy moss, dipping and swirling round the hidden pebbles of agate and crystal on serpentine beds of porphyry, underbanks of willow and alder grown over yellow tansy, pungent mint and sweet thyme; most potent of all the genius locii were the water spirits who presided over the hollowed stone pillar filled with raindrops as well as over the bottomless lakes where Morgana and the ondines lurked and tempted.

Gustaf did not consider Peleus and his immortal wife, but the native god whom he had rejected for his symbolic fable, the genial Nikr, who was so highly regarded that ferrymen warned their passengers not to mention him save with respect, whose daughter, the Nixie, wreathed with river pearls, would sometimes, when sporting with the soft water gulls, woo the youths fishing for the brown trout or the silver pink salmon and draw them under the waves, but who was himself gentle and serviceable to mankind.

Often it was his delight to take the form of the Stromkarl that lay beneath the brown sedges and the sharp rushes; when the children tossed their gilded balls in the water meadows or rowed their little boats on the sheltered inlets, then would the Stromkarl, as the daylight faded, rise to the rippling surface, and singing a song older than the world, toss the white lily buds and the wet river pearls from his weed green hair among the last of the revellers as they strayed homewards through the pale evenings.

The perfume of incense clogged the King's nostrils and dispelled his swoon or his dreams, he opened his eyes to find the room dim before him, shrouded in a darker shadow, the lamp was extinguished, four unsnuffed candles in iron sticks, had been lit by the bowls of stones, their smoky flames lit the crouching swaying shapes of the magicians as they uttered incantations, composed of doggerel in bad Swedish and worse Latin; Halldin was prostrate over the crucifix, muttering and groaning.

Only Karl sat erect, his arms still folded, smiling, his glance like azure crystal, his lips curved upwards, his powdered face tranquil, his high dressed curls and fine white ruffles as if painted thickly on the uncertain brown shadow and yellow light that encompassed him; he stared directly at Gustaf and yet stared at nothing then began to recite, in a thin intoning voice.

Aloof and impersonal he repeated, in staccato sentences, some of the loose and aimless maxims that were the trading stock alike of saints and quacks, the magicians bent and bowed around him as if in earnest anguished encouragement, Gustaf, alert and done with dreams, watched and listened.

Karl's monotone was interrupted by sharp, even spaced raps that seemed to come from the walls, so darkened by shade that they appeared to recede into unmeasured space, green globular lights appeared at uncertain intervals, this phenomena was greeted by tremulous groans from the group pressing round the dais. Nothing, the King thought, would have been easier to arrange—a knocker in the next room, apertures in the wall into which lamps with coloured shades were inserted and withdrawn, yet the very crudeness of these devices had their peculiar horror to Gustaf; no one present he believed, save possibly Halldin who was probably demented, could hope that the King would be deluded by this paltry *hocus pocus*, what then was the purpose behind it? A purpose to which Karl had lent himself?

Gustaf tried to speak, but a heaviness was on him, the clumsily contrived stage show that he would have despised to produce himself depressed him, he could not put from his mind the motive that had sent him galloping through the snow to Madame Arfmedsson's house and it seemed now like a blasphemy, yet such was the power of his poignant hope that he still ached towards the possibility that Jeanne d'Egmont might appear above the dark showing of charlatans, as a shaft of

morning sun might break through a high set window into a room filled by the fatigue and misery of night watchers round the dead. Lights and rappings ceased, Karl, or the spirit Zorah, who spoke through his lips, spoke sharply.

"Let the ruler look to his measures. Now he swells with his power and overturns the state, in time he shall be over-turned and all be as it was before. No son shall inherit for his wife is barren or bears imbeciles, therefore his reign will be transient, leaving no impression on history. Zorah says he knows how this will come about, he knows the two imperious women and the men of action who will return to the old ways that are for the good of the people. He warns the ruler to be cautious, so he may escape the worst of fates. He, Zorah, will instruct these people who labour righteously to remove the tyrant."

Karl paused, as if exhausted, his head drooped on his breast, then, with convulsive movements and his hands falling limp to his sides, he returned to his obscure rigmarole.

Gustaf stood up, and one among the magicians must have had his eye on earthly matters, for a sharp voice uttered commands, a side door opened and the servant brought in a lamp. Plommerfelt blew out the candles and put an extinguisher over the bowl of incense, the stifling smoke curled away through the open door that admitted the cold air from some wide set window into the heavy heat of the apartment. The common light of the lamp that Plommerfelt took in a steady hand revealed the faces of his companions greasy with sweat, pallid with an unwholesome fatigue, even on the smooth countenance of Karl, the thick powder was moist; the smears of chalk and charcoal on the floor appeared ridiculous.

"Your Zorah talks politics," said Gustaf.

Karl dismounted from the dais and gazed straightly at his brother.

"Does he? I, of course, know nothing of what he says, what did the spirit say, Plommerfelt?"

"Sir, he made an illusion that may have been to the King of Denmark."

"Then he is a tiresome fellow," smiled Karl flippantly. "What have we to do with the lunatic Kristian?" He yawned, pressing his handkerchief to his lips, in all he was so casual that it would have been impossible for Gustaf to use any resentment at this allusion to his wretched brother-in-law.

"Bjornham," added Karl. "I protest I begin to tire of this impertinent Zorah. Can you not invoke another entity?"

"Your Royal Highness has more power than I," replied the Finn, humbly.

"Where are the spectres you promised me?" asked Gustaf. "Your Majesty broke the spell as I was about to produce them," Bjornham bowed low. "But your Majesty will attend the great ceremony we intend to hold in the Church of Lojo?"

"A church?"

"The parson permits it, your Majesty will not forbid?"

"O, no!" smiled Karl, "for I and Frederik intend to be present, and if you forbid it, Gustaf, at Lojo, we shall make the invocation at some spot equally holy and more secret."

"As I can well understand," Gustaf smiled also. "I shall be present at Lojo church—what is your intention?"

“To raise the dead, Sire,” said Bjornham with his sunken glance on the King who thought, “the scoundrel recalls my appearance at the Arfmedsson’s house—who does he suppose I desire to see with such passion that I lend myself to this?”

He then asked what phantoms the magicians proposed to summon and the Finn replied—“Those whom your Majesty most desires to behold,” and the King gave his rare, low laugh.

Chapter 38

As the brothers walked home from the Plommerfelt house, Gustaf leaned on Karl’s arm, his usually quick light step dragged and his lameness was noticeable. “Why do you take this on you, Karl? It was most tedious. I could arrange such an affair better at half an hour’s notice.”

“I meet these adepts through the Freemasons,” replied Karl with an air of candour. “You may suppose them to be quacks and rogues, but I assure you they possess some most curious learning, have travelled far in the East and the new world and are engaged in the most remarkable experiments.”

“I have noticed nothing of that, Karl.”

“Why did you go to the Arfmedsson’s house? Why come tonight? Why go to Lojo? Why give Plommerfelt a laboratory and Halldin a pulpit? Ah, I know the answer.” Karl spoke with the sparkling vivacity that was his nearest approach to enthusiasm or ardour. “You wish to keep them under observation.”

“Yes.”

“Then you consider them dangerous?”

“They might be—these underground movements, secret societies—a wide network of possible spies, agents, informers—your Zorah began on ambiguous politics to-night.”

“Did he? How indiscreet!”

“I wish you would not—perform—with these fellows, Karl, enjoy their capers as a member of the audience.”

“I resemble your Majesty,” smiled Karl, “in never being able to resist the stage and the dramatic disguise—is it not as amusing to appear as the mouthpiece of my poor Zorah, as to dress up as the enchanter Archelaus?”

This allusion to the gorgeous spectacle, *Armadis de Gaul*, to be given in the grounds of one of the palaces, for which Gustaf was continually making designs and plans, but that was far from the prospect of a production, fell ill on the ear of Gustaf, the music to *Armadis de Gaul* was by Gluck, and a sinister dream pageantry arose at the reference, given in this hour of disgust and fatigue.

“My wizard shall be more amusing than yours, Karl. I shall give you the part of the noble Paladin Esplandian—how cold the wind is—strange that this trumpery has saddened me,” he spoke briskly, moving his hand as if to dispel the phantoms of his own creation.

Chapter 39

The King and his brother went to Drottningholm, on Lojen island without causing comment in Stockholm, for he was always swift in his actions and sudden in his decisions, and never long in one place; he left his mother and wife in the great palace, not having given his confidence to either, and sailed in the royal yacht Amphion through the thick set eyots of Lake Maleren, where the winter storms were abating into long curling green waves, dashing spume over the budding trees and the low flying gulls.

This palace of Drottningholm had been much enriched by Gustaf and contained the priceless set of Gobelin tapestries given him by Louis XV and a superb state bedroom that vied with the splendour of Versailles. Here were commemorated in terrible and dark outlines the cold and ferocious battles of Karl XII, where the narrow figure of the hero in his plain blue coat, could be seen riding amid death and fury, amid writhings of horses and men, smiling with a lunatic fortitude at the rolling snow clouds against which the cannon balls broke in scarlet stars. In a gallery set aside were portraits of his generals. The “Karoliners” sombre, inflexible, the warriors of Narva and Poltava, the makers of the fame and the cause of the ruin of Sweden, commanders of the hardy and fearless Swedes who died without complaint in the Russian marshes or without complaint returned to rotting crops, leathern money and the North wind flying over the unroofed cottage and the weed grown hearth.

Gustaf did not often visit these galleries; he preferred the modern gardens he had laid out in the noble park, the pagoda palace, taken from the design on a Chinese porcelain plate that he had admired, or the grass amphitheatre that served for his spectacles, or the Maze, artfully contrived with high clipped hedges for secret political or amorous discussions.

The palace was in charge of a small staff only and the brothers lived privately, though Gustaf shut himself up with Elis Schorderheim and business papers every morning. The Herald was inclined to regard the magicians seriously; he did not doubt mankind to be approaching astonishing discoveries both in science and mystics, he could not credit that what humanity had always believed in, though in a stupid, blind fashion, was not basically true, though overladen by superstition and ignorance. Until, he argued, the mysteries of the universe were fully explained, we were entitled to investigate any phenomena that puzzled us. Who could explain the processes whereby Dr. Mesmer induced people to do his will without touching them? And what of M. Volta and his gropings with the electricity?

“Probably all these secrets were known to the ancients—their wisdom has been lost. I agree, Schorderheim, that the world would be duller without these wise men. But they claim they can raise the dead—tell me, Schorderheim, do you think this possible?”

The Herald partly guessed, what one person only, Beylon knew, the identity of the spirit that Gustaf yearned to raise and he dared not answer.

The King, walking about, puckering his cravat in restless fingers, spoke rapidly, emphasising, as he did when moved, the lilt of his native tongue, his art was unconscious and Elis Schorderheim knew his complete sincerity, yet no one listening to him could have been unaware that here was the most seductive orator in Sweden and an actor gifted with every accomplishment.

"The alchemist is harmless, Schorderheim, he knows how to make false diamonds from the cuttings of inferior stones, he declares he learned this from M. St. Germain whom I remember at Versailles, wearing an apple green peruke, here, truly, is a source of wealth to Sweden, with her vast store of minerals—could the capital be raised the mines of the Dales might provide wealth enough to equip the fleet—only by money can we hold our own, Schorderheim, this man makes cosmetics, dyes and perfumes by new processes, could we market these on a large scale, we might claim to have found the philosopher's stone. He whispers, also, of devices whereby we might fly through the air, talk across the world and sail through the sea."

"These are old dreams," said the Herald dubiously, "but I hear he has inventions for watch making in large and cheap quantities, and by such means M. Voltaire made his fortune."

"Yes," agreed Gustaf, eagerly. "If I could establish watch and clock factories as there are in Geneva—industry, invention, these are the *urim* and *thummin* of the world, more precious than gold or diamonds, the dyes of Tyre, the velvet of Venice and Genoa, the embossed leather of the Moors, the engraved steel of Toledo—these are the riches that bring content and greatness to a nation—could Sweden be at peace one generation only, Schorderheim, and such ingenious labours be encouraged, we had no need to fear the tearing across of our map."

"There is prejudice against commerce, the merchants are despised, the peasants disdained by the nobles who care for nothing but the army and make their livelihood from war," remarked Schorderheim.

"And how poor they are!" exclaimed the King. "How barren is the profession they follow! What exclaim and distrust because I show them something of what civilization might be—how adverse they are, not only to these poor magi, but to my Academies, my free press, the men of learning and letters whom I encourage—how many of them prefer to stay starving on their estates than put in practice my plans for the improvement of agriculture—"

Gustaf checked himself, as if afraid of having said too much, even to Elis Schorderheim; never before had he so nearly admitted that the nobles were mostly his intractable enemies. "I shall persuade them yet," he added, "that can be, *must* be done. Schorderheim, arrange with the bellringer of Lojo church to hide you in the belfry, to-morrow night at the time of the conspiracy, it maybe that I shall not see everything they do—you will and can report to me."

"Why, Sire, do you concern yourself with these poor tricks?" asked the Herald earnestly; the King looked exhausted, and Schorderheim wished that he were at Spa or in the agreeable solitude of Haga with his witty and entertaining companions, instead of in solitude here on this dismal business.

Staring at him, Gustaf asked: "Do you think that Russia means to attack me?"

"If she can settle with the Turks, yes."

“Britain would assist her, and my uncle Frederik? For us the fate of Poland? Denmark, too—she was only checked, not crushed, when I rode to the frontier.”

“Your Majesty has always seen this clearly.”

“Yes—but it is possible, that were I strong enough these enemies would not venture on a toss. How strong am I, Schorderheim? As strong as the confidence of the country in me—I believe that to be absolute, save for this small military clique of the nobles—they must be won.”

“If Russia has not won them already.”

“I must overbid. Or win them by other means than money. I must watch them, also, that is why I am here to keep the appointment in Lojo church.”

The Herald was startled; he had not suspected anything but the tricks of charlatans in the schemes of Halldin, Bjornham and their crew.

“There is an organisation here that could easily cover up a conspiracy,” continued the King. “Consider—a man, in a supposed trance, a spirit speaking through his mouth as they claim—could give, openly, information and instructions, encouragement and directions to his followers. I used this mask of occultism in ‘72, my methods could be improved on.”

Schorderheim was silent, something confounded, he watched the King carefully, fearful of saying an ill becoming word.

“Do you believe,” asked Gustaf pausing by the window where Schorderheim stood, “that were I to die to-morrow, Karl would reverse all my policies? Come, you and Beylon know us all so intimately and have known us so long—would Karl, though he helped me in ‘72, revert to the puppet state of my father and allow my mother and the nobles to rule?”

“He would,” replied Schorderheim gravely. “His Royal Highness would be a *roi fainéant*.”

“Then Sweden’s enemies would dismember her.”

“Surely they would seize on the chance a weak government gave them to do so.”

“But Karl is only slightly younger than I am, and I have sufficient hopes of an heir.”

“Therefore your Majesty need not consider this distressing subject.” The Herald’s conventional words hid uneasiness.

“Karl would not conspire against me? Answer fairly—you and Beylon know us both.”

“In a bedchamber fashion, yes, perhaps, no more.”

“No more?” The King caught up the words. “He plays at magic, Schorderheim, and at being possessed. I was present when, into a farrago of gibberish, he inserted some impertinences clearly levelled at me—though given under the gloss of King Kristian.”

“No more than impertinences, Sire!”

“Watch him, for me, I can set no other spy on him, save you and Beylon, watch Frederik and my mother, tell her, if need what I have said. There your loyalty lies, my friend, to the revolution of ‘72, and to me.”

“I think so, too, Sire, I shall do as you direct, not as spying, though.”

“My mother, once suspicious, might have you removed from her service.”

“No, I am indispensable to her, Sire,” replied Schorderheim simply. “And so is François Beylon.”

“Then, I have no more to add, you know my heart, my mind as you know your own. Watch this experiment to-night.”

“Yes, but I do not like that work. I have heard,” the Herald added gravely, “that sometimes, amid these mock incantations, the veil of the invisible world is ripped aside, and the spectres peer through.”

“If I had the least hope that might happen—” the King paused, “I should be a happy man,” he had been about to say, but changed this easily to—“I should be satisfied of the mortality of the soul.”

He returned to his desk and took up his quill pen, signing the papers the Herald and a secretary had left for him; Schorderheim, whose delicate tact had gone far to gain him his position in the royal household, remarked, completely ignoring the serious matter the King had just dismissed:—

“M. Beylon bade me inform your Majesty that he has found the weapons M. Toll gave him before going to Sweden, in the drawer of a console table—”

“How needlessly Beylon concerns himself over trifles! I shall bid him keep the weapons. I am in no more mind now than I was then, to carry them.”

“It might be prudent—Gustaf II was threatened by a dagger—these arms are very elegant, Sire, M. Beylon showed them to me, he had no occasion to see your Majesty before you left Stockholm.”

“The weapons of a coward or an assassin—they would not save me, if any designed my life. And who would in Sweden? Gustaf II was attacked by a Jesuit—not a Swede.”

Gustaf recalled his mother’s gift, and the slight, smiling touch of contempt with which she had bidden him carry this, as if she trusted neither his courage nor his subjects’ loyalty, and the hours of suspense, waiting for the French subsidy, with the lilac tresses in the white vase by the curtain where Toll had entered with his audacious proposal, the pile of letters, the onyx clock, a heartless tyrant, ticking Time away, the unfinished belt over the chair, the roses at the window pane, the gulls beyond—

“Schorderheim—was the white glove ever found?”

“No, Sire.”

Chapter 40

The three brothers in their dark blue cloaks with sable collars entered Lojo church, having walked along the western avenue under a radiance of clear stars, the air was cold, already sweetened by the perfumes of the grasses and flowers that would soon suddenly break over the fields and meadows, the isles and gardens from which the snows had drenched away.

The deer from the park leaped from the shadow of the churchyard wall, as the princes approached, they passed by the grave of the poet, Dalin. Gustaf glanced at it, his brothers passed on, their long steps swinging together, the ends of their cloaks turned over their shoulders, showing the purple satin linings, their three

cornered hats perked up with cockades, their tasselled white curls hanging stiffly down their shoulders.

Gustaf gazed after them as he hesitated by the grave: he recalled when they had all played together at Drottningholm, on hobby horses, on roundabouts, or at ball in the riflemen's gallery; those children seemed now as if dead, and these two young men strangers.

The King entered the church that was filled by a vague illumination, little stronger than the starlight without, that came from small lamps placed in the open beam of the roof, and obscured by the cross sections of the supports. Beneath these beams, Bjornham and his companions stood in a group so close that their shapes mingled in one irregular blot of darkness.

They took no heed of their princely visitors save for Bjornham's request, spoken in a distracted voice, for the brothers to stand directly opposite, drawing their swords and grasping them with both hands, in order to ward off any devils who might appear in response to the powerful invocations needful to raise the dead. Gustaf protested against the awkward manner of holding a light rapier, that no swordsman would employ, but Karl whispered—"Do as he asks—"

Gustaf understood that the purpose of this command was to prevent them from using their hands quickly; the gleam on the rapiers would show if they moved from their places and if they dropped them, the clatter would warn the celebrants of these mysteries to create a medley in which their deceptions might be concealed, the King credited them with being clever conjurers.

The staging was impressive, the cold flags beneath, the dim light above, revealing beams intersecting in the shadows, (too like the infernal architecture of his haunted memories for Gustaf's comfort) before the darkness of the unlit church, in which a distant window showed a fainter gloom and a tracery of stars, the group gathered together looked sombre and foreboding to the man who watched them, and the ancient incantations they murmured had the detestable meaning that death sundered lovers for ever, and left the desperate, groping bereaved heart no solace but this paltry trickery.

A row of flames sprang up in front of the adepts, the fogged light and the acrid smoke confusing the senses; between this and the mystagogues who were now totally hidden in obscurity, rose faltering shapes; above the filmy indications of tattered shrouds, showed faces with staring eyeballs and gross, yellow cheeks, each with the circlet of kingship on his brows, these phantoms wavered in the glow of the burning gunpowder.

Gustaf recognized Gustaf II and his own father; a drum beat in the darkness of the church; it might have been one of those that had hung so long, silent, dusty, corded and tasselled in the Riddarsholm Church, echoing above the black marble tomb of Karl XII, the green marble tomb of Gustaf Adolf Magnus, round the wooden horsemen in the heavy armour, the buff jackets with the bullet holes, the flag carried at Lutzen, the vault waiting for the man who watched this dismal marionette show.

Some substance cast skilfully into the flames caused these to leap, green, orange, blue and ragged before the blown shrouds.

"Speak to them!" exclaimed Karl, but the King did no more than sigh; Frederik, however, questioned the magicians.

"What spirits are there and why have you summoned them?" he demanded.

Bjornham's deep and self assured voice answered from the darkness behind the flames "We show the King those whom the King most desires to seethe demons become impatient, we cannot much longer control their power, leave the church!"

The royal faces wavered and sank from sight. Frederik and Karl sheathed their swords and took the King by either arm and led him into the graveyard.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Karl slightly.

"Yes," replied the King, still holding his bare rapier.

His brothers watched him, uncertain of his mood, as he moved to the poet's grave; Elis Schorderheim accompanied by another dark figure, Hedin, one of the court physicians, issued quietly from a side door in the Church, the Herald had a dark lantern, he opened one shutter and revealed the princes, then the King; a lurid green glow showed in the windows of the Church.

"Lycopodiam powder," remarked the King, glancing at this display.

"And wires and masks, Sire," said the Herald. "From where I was hidden I could see someone, Plommerfelt, I think very cleverly, pulling the strings—"

"An infernal puppet show." Gustaf spoke without anger at the crude deception practised upon him. "One not without a meaning and a horror."

"Truly," admitted Dr. Hedin, "though I saw all the preparations, the effect was appalling."

"When one dies, one lies *here*," Gustaf pointed his sword down which the starlight slipped, at the grave, "in the earth, beauty, genius, noble heart, love—extinguished quite."

"Your ancestors live in you, Sire," Elis Schorderheim replied sincerely.

"My ancestors?" Gustaf had been pondering over Jeanne d'Egmont, the extent of his own infatuation had been revealed to him by the quenching of his lunatic hopes. The scene had beguiled his imagination, so well had it fitted into the pattern of his inner life, the machinery of Piranesi's insane dreams, the masks, the drum roll, evoking pictures of two murdered princes of his House waiting for him in the Riddarsholm church, the darkening coil of his passions and his desires, his secret loss, presented to him by means of childish mimicry—the charlatans had, in their belief that he was obsessed by the glories of the House of Vasa, touched him more shrewdly than they knew.

"Schorderheim," he said, "these gentlemen shall be paid for their entertainment. M. Halldin shall continue to preach in the chapel royal—he is more amusing than the Bishops and their chaplains. I shall appoint you Vicar General, Schorderheim, and you shall fill the livings with good, easy, talented fellows who do not permit superstition." He stared at the Lojo church from the windows of which the ghostly glare showed dimly The Herald bowed and laughed, close as he knew himself to be to the King, and many as had been his preferments, he had not expected such an offer as this—yet it was one that had much attraction for a liberal Voltairean. "Cleanse from within," continued the King, sheathing the rapier. "Yes, laugh, Schorderheim—laugh away the spectre and the bats, the charnal house stench, the dusty foul shadows, all the mumming—"

"I supposed you relished mystic ceremonial," said Karl. "Always you applauded the ritual of the Church of Rome."

“That is orderly and beautiful, Rome, yes—but this! See what rebellion from Rome leads to, Karl, Protestantism is the outpost of anarchy, only in a Lutheran church would this be allowed—only a Protestant church would tolerate Swedenborg.”

“You are wise to appoint Schorderheim as Vicar General—he will much diminish the power of the clergy,” mocked Karl, taking his brother’s arm. “Come, why do we stand so long by a grave?”

As the five men moved towards the churchyard gate, Frederik asked.

“Shall you dismiss these quacks?”

“No—their affected bold assumption of my credulity makes me desire to keep them observed—I think their pretensions a disguise for some political design,” the King spoke rapidly. “They wish to put me off my guard by these crude tricks, so that I shall continue to treat them as impudent rogues.”

“No,” interrupted Karl. “They are more than that—some tricks there must be—a long, a patient investigation is needed before you can judge them. Besides they have extensive training in chemistry, use them, Gustaf—recall how poor the country is, and how much you spend.”

The words came whispering under the shadow of the west avenue, the way lit by the Herald’s lantern, darkness was withdrawing from the sky and the stars were receding in the dawn light; Gustaf touched the favour with the mourning ribbon in his buttonhole.

“I shall spend even more extravagantly,” he said, taking his brother’s arm affectionately, with an entire change of tone and mood. “I intend to visit St. Petersburg—and contrive a reasonable treaty with the Empress—she has feminine whims—would she not be pleased to see the Count of Haga in his blue coat à la Charles XII with the white handkerchief round his arm?”

PART III

Two Queens.

Chapter 41

THE King regarded the toys that were the sole prizes he had gained from long and difficult labours; though he had coined himself into golden flattery and seductive arguments of the most subtle and delicate kind, he had not won the friendship of the German adventuress who wore the crowns of all the Russias; the brilliancy of his visit to St. Petersburg, some eighteen months before he chanced to open this cedar wood case had only been equalled by its failure.

There lay the Order of Alexander Nevsky, vying with the coloured flash of the pearl set diamond forming the knob of a walking cane, the long travelling cloak of sables, richly silvered as if frost lay on the magnificent fur, the mantle of blue fox, bloomed like a grape, a time piece of black amber. The Empress had been magnificent in her hospitality, most gracious in her compliments, but she had laughingly refused to touch on policies by one word, and while she would not allow their amusements to be disturbed by any discussion as to the Finnish frontiers, she was, as Gustaf well knew, intriguing among his opponents in Sweden to stir up an appeal to Russia and Denmark to restore the Swedish constitution of 1720 that these nations had guaranteed.

Johan Toll had reported to Gustaf the progress of this movement that could not yet be termed a plot, that twisted underground, that might be dangerous and yet that might drain away, like water into sand, if Gustaf could strengthen his hold on the country and pile up his arms. M. Simolin, the Russian ambassador, was the paymaster of the agitators, Toll believed that Baron Pechlin worked with him, that several of the Senators were pensioners of the Tzarina, that Fersen had been sounded, but that he remained an honourable opponent—such the report on the King's return from St. Petersburg.

The King closed the chest, that he had opened with an idle hand. Elis Schorderheim was with him, and they were searching in the wardrobe for costumes and materials that could be used in the *Amadis de Gaul* spectacle that had, at intervals, been worked on for years, and served the King for intermittent distraction.

"We could use the furs," smiled Gustaf taking up the sables. "M. Simoun would recognize them, but no matter. I shall sell the diamonds in Paris—"

"Better," advised Schorderheim, who now held so many offices, that he declared himself that his name should be factotum, "have them reset and placed with the Regalia."

“From which you wish to remind me I took Queen Kristina’s ruby, the largest in the world, to present to the Empress?” smiled Gustaf. “I had to offer something unique, for Sweden’s credit. Schorderheim, I have watched M. Simolin carefully, I believe he does not find my people as discontented as he had hoped. Even Toll had to admit that my trust had been justified, year after year goes by, no vast conspiracy, no popular uprising overwhelms me, there is no attempt on my life, my brothers are obedient, my mother resigned, Denmark does not cross the Straits and Russia does not attack Finland. And I grow daily more powerful, and in the winter I shall have an heir.”

Elis Schorderheim knew that there was a challenge in these last words and that the King could not dismiss the fear that Sophia’s second child might be still-born, but the Queen was well and in cheerful spirits and the physicians had high hopes of the appearance of a healthy prince who would assure the continuance of his father’s policies and consolidate Sweden’s already considerable place in Europe.

“Toll, however, remains sceptical,” added the King, opening a press in the wall, filled by theatrical costumes. “As to some of my actions, he can put affairs in a sober light, he insists that I have lost the peasants because I have taken their brandy from them, the nobles because I have not enough money to compensate them for their loss of power—and the Church—” he added, turning with an amiable smile and some sashes of golden tissue over his arm, “because you are Vicar-General.”

Schorderheim returned the smile; he believed the matter of no importance; he lacked sympathy with Toll, who stood apart from the King’s friends, who had never received favours or even rapid promotion, who was always reserved and when he spoke did so gravely and usually on a note of warning.

“I know what you think,” added Gustaf. “But Toll is a great man, when I go to war, I shall raise him to the rank of Adjutant General.”

“I do not care to hear you speak of war, Sire.”

“You realize I intend to attack, as soon as I prudently can? Sweden cannot long prosper under this constant menace.” He shook out the gleaming scarves. “Those would fit with my designs for the Princess’s attendants—I desire this divertissement to be my masterpiece—yes, Schorderheim, I wait and wait, but the signs are favourable, Britain is embroiled with her Colonies, the Emperor will be occupied in the Palatinate, Katherine, for once desires peace, out of jealousy towards the Emperor, and in order to guard her Polish plunder—King Louis has little education or character and should never have sided with the American rebels, but M. de Vergennes has promised me he will renew the subsidy treaty in the autumn.”

“Sire, how is it possible,” asked Schorderheim, “that your Majesty can have these mighty complexities in your mind and yet employ yours with these elaborate amusements?”

“One sets off the other,” replied the King. “I cannot endure idleness, the skill I learn in handling puppets helps me in handling my politics—‘tis one art. I might, while M. Guldencrone is meddling in Stockholm, meddle with better effect in Copenhagen, I have been there incognito, Schorderheim, and so has Toll.”

The faithful friend to whom he spoke knew that there was more than the furthering of public affairs in the King’s intense desire to defeat Denmark in camp

and cabinet, he longed to sweep away all traces of the tainted branch of the House of Holstein from which his wife came, to cleanse the Copenhagen where Struensee had made the Royal House a mock and a shame, before the heir to Sweden who was maternally descended from that family was born.

"I shall summon the Riksdag," he said. "Better to face them, and be sure who is my friend. I believe I have by now surrounded myself by men sufficiently loyal and sufficiently talented to withstand any opposition—the army, the fleet are those of a great power, abuses have been reformed in every department of the State—Schorderheim, do you, as Vicar General, sell benefices?"

The good humoured courtier smiled at this charge of simony so suddenly and so lightly given.

"Only to honest and able men, Sire," he replied. "And your Majesty has condoned it. When the actor, Stenborg, delighted your Majesty by his performance of *Gustaf II* in your Majesty's drama—did you not give him Alsida Rectory for his friend Ekelund?"

"I did not know he paid for it."

"Ah, Sire, *this*—" he touched the golden scarves, "costs something. I am constantly applied to for money—as I never take anything for myself my honour is not involved—it is no more than the buying of a commission in the army."

"Toll objects," said Gustaf. "He declares this practice sets the Church against me. Yet if the clergy be able and enlightened men, there is no harm, and we must have money, be prudent though, Bishop Nordin has also spoken of it to me, he is my very good and liberal friend and thinks the sin venial—I was lucky," he added at a tangent, pulling down brocades and velvets from the press and casting them over the chairs, "when I promoted that young preacher from St. Klara's church—Olaf Vallquist—there is one who believes in Sweden—in me. Schorderheim, I will have *all* the men of enthusiasm and ability behind me, a bodyguard to defeat the old, the corrupt, the gloomy." Again he changed his subject, turning his blue eyes swiftly onto Schorderheim, who was examining some of the heraldic designs *appliqué* onto the tunics and tabards the King had tossed out of the cupboard. "Beylon—of all men—seems melancholy, even to avoid me, while he is often closeted with Karl and my mother."

"François Beylon is not turned conspirator, he is ill, and conceals it from your Majesty—he has some wasting complaint and should go to Spa, but will not leave the court until your Majesty's heir is born."

"He shall go," declared Gustaf. "He has always worked himself to the bone for us."

But when the King warmly pressed the Reader to safeguard his heath by a visit to the baths, Beylon refused and begged so warmly not to be sent away that Gustaf assented to his wish, that he attributed wholly to the desire to be present when the birth of Sophia's child should secure the succession and the policy of Gustaf III, and amid his manifold interests and occupations, so varied and so complicated, so delicately balanced and so skilfully interwoven, as to leave even the men of talent and genius by whom he was surrounded, at a loss, the King forgot the melancholy of François Beylon.

Chapter 42

The Reader had indeed overworked himself in the royal service; body and soul he had exhausted in the cause of the family to whom he had given his entire love and ability, and the poor constitution that had caused him to choose this clerical life, was overstrained; he would have had less fatigue and less anxiety in the army that had been considered too hard a career for his slight frame, undermined by severe illnesses in his youth. It was this physical disability that had partly prevented Beylon from accepting any of the honours and posts Gustaf had offered him, partly, too, his refusal had been due to his attachment to the royal family, modest, affectionate, without ambition, he preferred rather to use his talents, his gifts as the loyal and trusted go-between, the faithful, almost secret friend, often, as in '72, performing a servant's work, than to accept public office. So while Schorderheim, with whom he had once been on a level, now enjoyed the rank of Minister, Beylon remained the Reader to the Queen Dowager; so attractive were his manners, so signal his loyalty and obliging good humour, so exquisite his tact, that he had often, against his wish, been drawn into private intrigues of great importance, and against his will, been confided in by all the members of the royal family; yet his first loyalty was to the King, and his chief merit that he always acted as peacemaker.

Never had his qualities been so put to the test as during the few weeks before the expected birth of Sweden's heir, while Gustaf, his brilliant ministers and troops of talented friends were absorbed in politics, domestic and foreign, and a thousand amusements, Beylon was faced by a situation likely to overset all the royal fortunes.

When Ulrika Lovisa had been told by Gustaf of the expected child she had received the news civilly and even with some show of pleasure; soon after she had retired to Pomerania, taking Karl and his wife, and Frederik, for whom she was endeavouring to obtain a bride and a handsome settlement, with her; on her return, in late autumn, when the King was occupied in preparations for the opening of the Riksdag, the Queen Mother sent for Beylon to Ulriksdal, where she had taken up residence; she had left the Reader in Stockholm where he had been engaged in listing books, tapestries and pictures Ulrika Lovisa had lately purchased in Paris.

She pleasantly received Beylon in the elegant little porcelain filled cabinet that looked out onto one of the splendid lime tree avenues, now yellow as honey with thick flowers and leaves. The extravagant woman, whose finances were always in confusion, but who endeavoured to compete with Katherine of Russia in splendour, was wrapped in three pile velvet of a raspberry shade, and wore a tricorne hat that shaded the upper part of her face; she played with embroidered gloves and gold handled whip while she spoke rapidly, with emphasis, with hot words, with bright glances; beautiful and fascinating, she was suffering some torment that, as usual, effaced much of her delightful charm. She complained of the King's policies, of the summoning of the Riksdag, of the power of Johan Toll, even of the dismissal of Halldin and his companions, though she had mocked at

them as quacks—"better," she now declared, "Swedenborgians than narrow minded Lutheran pastors—than ambitious clerics like Vallquist."

The tired Beylon had allowed her to glance at all her grievances without offering any consolation; she returned again and again to the summoning of the Riksdag. "Why that? Is not my son independent? What does he need from these people?"

At last the Reader said: "The King must ask for his revenues, he must show his accounts—he might need to consult with the Estates—"

"What a chain he put about himself in '72 when he could have made himself an absolute monarch—but he must needs leave the purse and the sword to the people—what are the use of his grandiose schemes if the Riksdag's permission must be asked before he can go to war?"

This, guess as Beylon knew it to be, came so near to the King's intentions, that the Reader warded it off, and in doing so gave the Queen Mother the opening she wanted.

"The King labours to keep the peace, Madame, the Riksdag must be summoned in order that he may present his heir to Sweden."

"Beylon, you must not mention that to me—the Queen is incapable of bearing a living child. The heir is the Duke of Sudermania." From that moment she took her stand on those implacable words and it took all the arts of the astonished and frightened Beylon to induce her to hold her hand; she only did so on a brutal compromise; let the farce end, let the Queen have, or pretend, a miscarriage and she, the outraged mother of the heir, would be silent, let a child, idiot or healthy be born and she would speak to defend her second son's rights. Nothing would persuade her that this was anything but a fraud—either the physicians knew that the child could not live and were fostering false hopes to beguile the nation, or there was some plot to bring in "a child in a warming pan as had been done in England."

Before Beylon could meet this with more than an incoherent outburst of astonishment, the agile woman had spread before him what she termed "proofs," the King's known antipathy to his wife, her feeble mindedness, the common knowledge that the royal reconciliation was a mere pretence for the sake of decorum, the uncertainty even whether the Queen had ever had even a dead child—for she, the Queen Mother, had been excluded from "everything". Here, Beylon, in horror, for he saw that this might disrupt the Kingdom, asked if Her Majesty wished to accuse her son of a gross fraud on his family and on Sweden? Ulrika Lovisa vehemently declared that Gustaf was deceived, and that the Queen who she had just once more spoken of as half witted, was capable of conducting by aid of a few confederates, a most perilous and intricate deception, clever enough to deceive one as brilliantly astute as the King.

The accusation was cancelled by its own folly, but Beylon could not consider the woman who made it harmless; he knew too well the atmosphere of a court not to be aware of the immense power possessed by even the most impertinent gossip. He pressed the Queen Mother as to the proof she claimed, she assumed an air of mystery, only disclosing that her intentions were grim and malicious, she named Baron Munck as one of the Queen's accomplices, she accused Dr. Hedin and some of Sophia's chamber women, she vowed that never would she see "that imbecile's son as heir to Sweden, in place of Karl."

By controlling his amazement and disgust sufficiently to promise her a secret investigation into this affair, Beylon whose prudent advice and devoted assistance had often saved the Queen Mother from pinches into which her headlong temper and spendthrift habits had placed her, contrived to silence the trembling woman and to extract a promise from her of silence, of discretion, at least for a while.

"You cannot throw doubt on the origins of a child accepted by the parents," he said; he was careful not to say a word in favour of Sophia, for Ulrika Lovisa's humour alarmed him; he had known her make, clever as she was, many of those surprising blunders possible only to jealousy, and now he dreaded that she might lose her head and deal the royal family and the nation a vital stroke.

"Gustaf's attention has been taken by the ballet dancer, Carlotta Busoni," she said sullenly. "Sophia has put this child upon him to win back him, to give herself some importance, to defraud Karl."

"There is a misinformation here, madame," replied Beylon sternly. "The King's behaviour, whatever his relaxations, is most dignified—he would never disturb his wife with his gallantries with a dancer."

"His court is lax enough," sneered Ulrika Lovisa. "You are very simple minded, M. Beylon. I assure you that Sophia is most jealous of the beautiful Italian—bah, she works an old trick! I know what I say," added the angry woman with fiery impatience. "No one tells me anything, I am shut out, fooled at everyone's pleasure, but I have my means of knowing what happens."

"Spies?" sighed Beylon. "Ay, your Majesty always kept them all spied upon, servants here, police agents there, and you never found out the truth and you were often deceived."

"I am well served now," answered the Queen Mother. "If you do not sound this scandalous affair for me, I shall act."

"If you do you will ruin yourself!" cried Beylon, agitated almost to panic.

"Very well, then," declared the haughty Prussian Princess, rising, "I shall be ruined—but so shall she and her fellow plotters."

As Beylon, shuddering with anger and alarm left the Queen Dowager's apartment, he noted a youth in her livery lounging in the antechamber, and staring into the mirror strapped with bronze bands and set with bronze rosettes, above the mantelpiece.

This reflected the inner door through which Beylon had just passed, and the Reader's sallow face, twitching and shadowed; it reflected also the countenance of the page that was secretive and moody, his expression, old and gloomy for his years that could not have been more than sixteen and heightened by his unpowdered locks that were notably dark and lank for this country, and hung in disorder, escaping from the horn buckle, as the youth pushed his fingers through them.

Beylon knew him for Jakob Johan Anckarstrom, a young nobleman who was shortly entering the army and whose lively political diatribes against the King's government had already been censored, even in that new liberal lifting of restrictions on the press.

"That is one of her spies," thought the Reader, as the page gave him the slightest of salutations, "a born malcontent such as she keeps about her person."

Chapter 43

Beylon's first impulse was to find the King, without knowing what he should say to him, beyond a general warning to order the Queen Mother to Pomerania at once, but when, a day later, he had returned to Stockholm and secured a private audience with the King, he found Gustaf oppressed by yet another vexation caused by the Sprengtporten brothers.

Baron Magnus had retired to his estates with a handsome pension and the privilege of a guard of honour and Gustaf had endured with equanimity the frequent letters of reproach and complaint he sent from his retreat; Goran had accepted most of his brother's posts but shown himself restless and dissatisfied, and recently, not obtaining the command of the forces in Finland, had sent in his resignation and demanded leave to travel.

"Now," said Gustaf to Beylon as he received him in his private closet in the Stockholm palace, "Baron Goran has changed his mind—as the Riksdag is to be called he wishes to remain—and make mischief."

"And you will permit this?"

"No—he goes. I have sent him a thousand riks dollars for his travels, he goes."

"As an enemy, Sire."

"So it must be. As Colonel of the Savolax Dragoons he did good service in the Grand Duchy—but, as his brother, he is violent, jealous and has a touchy vanity, a haughty temper, never to be satisfied."

Beylon thought of the Queen Dowager to whom these words very well applied, he sat mute and could not bring himself to approach the matter of his coming, the King remarked on his air of lassitude and recommended him to the bathing at Haga before the season was too late; at this display of concern for himself the Reader lost his fortitude, and staring at the King, murmured:

"Anckarstrom."

Gustaf's memory, trained and tested so long and in so many different directions, recalled at once the name of the young noble who was about to leave his mother's household to join the army, though he had never taken any notice of the dull and reserved youth, who indeed, was not one who would ever be singled out for preferment, Beylon could hardly have mentioned a name that meant less to the King, who, waited smiling, for the faithful Reader to explain himself.

But Beylon had allowed the moment to escape him, the King's blue eyes unnerved him, he stammered:

"I think he eavesdrops, I do not trust him."

"What is behind this, Beylon? All of them, in that household, linger by doorways and behind the arras. Anckarstrom? I have nothing against him, an insignificant fellow who will never do anything notable."

The King reflected on the name, while Beylon sat silent; he remembered observing the little page scowling, playing with a toy pistol, amid a group of pretty children, waiting for a rehearsal of the coronation ceremonies, the sons of Ribbing, Horn and other of his nobles, and this brought to his active mind the weapon his

mother had given him, the flickering knife in the ornate sheath, and how Beylon had lost that after Toll had refused to take it, the same time or near it, when he had lost Jeanne d'Egmont's glove. He closed his eyes in weariness for the day had been long and most tedious, he recalled his visit to the Queen, whose petulant silly moods had been set off by spells of inertia and bouts of weeping, in which she complained of his keen interest in Carlotta Busoni, to his great distress, he had seen in her, with her plump fairness, with the silver hair loosened over the pink satin bedgown, as her sister-in-law Caroline dragged from the masquerade to prison, and the infernal pageantry, the nightmare symphony had shifted and broken into the whirling pattern of horror that was the background of his life and that moved before his closed eyes. Now, as Beylon was miserably mute, the wheels, the pulleys, the stairways, a spiral up, a spiral down, the endless perspective avenues lined by monstrous busts, the masks above the rich dominoes, the conspirators running up the palace stairs, the Italian songs, the Italian dances, harlequin, wearing skin-tight diamonds of black and white before a drop cloth with painted fountains, the children, the pages, one with the pistol, Anckarstrom, the name fitted into the beats from the idle drums in the Riddarsholm church, the dusty drums hanging by the wooden horsemen, the silver coffins, the copper coffins, the sarcophagus of green marble, of black marble; he broke his dream, opened his eyes and spoke with an effort.

"What of this fellow, Beylon?"

"Nothing, Sire—but your mother—"

"You were with her recently?"

"Yes. Forgive me if I speak abruptly—I am not very well. You know my loyalty—"

"Indeed, indeed I do," put in Gustaf warmly. "Often do I remember that '72 would not have been possible without the money you forced from the Dutchmen."

"You know her temper, Sire," laboured the Reader. "It would be wise to send her to Pomerania before the royal birth—"

"I could not do that, she would not go, the mere suggestion would be a scandal. Beylon! What has she said to you?"

"She has shown a dangerous ill humour, she might let her passion overthrow truth and justice, she listens to gossip and spreads it for her own designs. She has visited the Queen only to—to watch—and to torment her with jealousy of the Neapolitan dancer, Carlotta Busoni."

The King knew this and was prepared to endure it, for he had expected no better of his mother, but never had the Reader spoken so plainly about Ulrika Lovisa, and the King guessed there was some heavy matter on his mind.

"She is jealous for Karl," he remarked. "How sure they all are that I shall die first—die young it seems. This jealousy! The Sprentportens, my mother, the poor Queen, so many of them—what do they want? Were Karl king would she be satisfied?"

"Sire," asked Beylon earnestly, "are you satisfied as to the loyalty of the Duke of Sudermania?"

The King answered at once.

"Yes, we are estranged, but I know him to be a patriot and loyal to the House of Vasa."

Yet he remembered Karl and the necromancers, Karl as the medium at the seance, Karl as an ardent Freemason, as a member of powerful secret societies, Karl with the machinery for a revolution behind him, and it was only by an effort that he could recall Karl the victor of Karlskrona, Karl breaking the silver dollar with him before their joint throw with Sweden as the stakes.

"Why did you ask that, Beylon? I do not like these pauses, these questions. Never have I seen you so overcast—is it the tattle about Carlotta Busoni? It is true I find her very beautiful, very charming, but I do not bring the members of any troupe I employ into my family circle."

"No, but your Majesty now spends all your leisure in the theatre or the concert hall," replied Beylon simply. "And you have shown this dancer much attention."

"No one could have known of that, save by spying."

"Did I not say—spying? Has your Majesty observed Anckarstrom attending the rehearsals?"

"Why, maybe, I hardly notice, so many come and go—I like an audience—yes, Anckarstrom, I think so—"

"He, or someone, loiters round the wings, the dressing-rooms, takes tales to your mother, she takes them to the Queen."

"The Busoni soon leaves Stockholm," said Gustaf. "She is nothing to me but a lovely figurine. Beylon! Must we have, added to all our cares and employments, these feminine, bedchamber intrigues?"

Still the Reader could not come to the root of the matter, and with heavy self disgust left the King tearing into strips the drawings for the costumes he had devised for Carlotta Busoni to wear in the spectacle Amadis de Gaul that he hoped to give next spring in Drottningholm palace grounds, while he pitied poor, weak and silly Sophia, easily stirred to futile tears and reproaches by his mother's careful words about the exquisite ballerina whilst she remained oblivious of the knot of colours with the mourning ribbon her husband always wore in his lapel.

Chapter 44

Ulrika Lovisa changed her ground as the Queen, restored to placidity by the departure of Carlotta Busoni from Stockholm and the King's constant attentions, bloomed amid the flattery and kindness that surrounded her; the pampered young woman felt, for the first time in her timid, ineffectual life, of some importance, and expressed her wishes and gave her commands with the false emphasis of a forced character. Not even her mother-in-law's malice could ignore the patent facts of her health and spirits, her public appearances, the doctors' confident reports, and so the Queen Dowager began another attack.

She hinted to Beylon that Sophia had been very reckless in her behaviour, that Gustaf was too absorbed in his affairs, both mighty and puerile, that the Queen had been much gossiped over and that she had given her portrait to Baron Munck; a man's name linked with the Queen by her husband's mother was sufficient to rouse scandal in this court where she had no well wishers save her

husband and those to whom she was the future mother of the heir of the House of Vasa. The Queen Dowager set her own household whispering, her spies casting hints in taverns and clubs, her pamphleteers writing discreetly malicious broadsheets to be issued by the secret presses that the lax censorship permitted to flourish.

None of this careful slander reached the King's ears; Beylon had succeeded in intimidating the Queen Dowager to some discretion; her malice was not lessened, but it worked underground; the Reader, though exhausted by ill health sought out the page Anckarstrom and accused him of treasonable practices in his violent articles, weekly rejected by the Stockholm papers; these were anonymous but the young man's identity had easily been discovered by the Chief of Police, who had asked Beylon to deal privately with the gloomy young hothead. Secure in the protection of the Queen Mother, Jakob Anckarstrom was sullen, he named the King a tyrant, declared that the Constitution of '72 was but a cover for an absolute monarchy, and quoted much from ancient history, as to liberty and freedom. Beylon considered him unimportant, addle minded, of a sour and saturnine temperament, bitten by the miserable ambition that sometimes cankers the souls of mediocre men. Beylon could not find that he had any just cause for dissatisfaction; the King had never spoken to him, did not even know of his disloyal journalism.

"You, as so many others, take advantage of the King's magnanimity," protested Beylon. "You shoot, from under cover, at an unarmed man. You do not know the King, what harm has he done to you?"

The youth laughed and would have hastened away, but the Reader caught him by the sleeve and sternly bade him "leave aside His Majesty's private affairs," which was as near as the faithful servant dare touch on the whisperings against the Queen.

Anckarstrom wrenched away rudely—and muttered "Caesar's wife" as if he had given the answer to a riddle. Beylon then knew what Ulrika Lovisa and her followers were doing—laying a mine beneath the throne, so that, at any time, maybe years hence, it would explode, and the heir of the House of Vasa be declared illegitimate on this trumped up tale.

Chapter 45

François Beylon turned in his distress to Karl, the man who stood to gain by his infamous conspiracy and implored him to silence his mother.

"I speak as a servant of many years standing and as one who has nearly done with service and with life."

"Nonsense, Beylon, you are very well, or would be if you did not concern yourself with ladies' tittle tattle," smiled the Prince. "Whoever heard of a court without scandal or a city without a secret press? Gustaf pays for his own easiness. Where there is never any punishment there will be licence."

"This matter may mean the ruin of your family," insisted Beylon.

“Eh? And why should Sophia’s child be a better King than I should be?”

“And why should your royal Highness expect to succeed a King so little older than yourself?”

“I take better care of my heath,” said Karl, his blue eyes half shut. “Gustaf burns himself out—a taper in a furnace.”

“I still intreat your Highness to silence these insinuations against the Queen.”

“It is not in my power to do so.”

“Then I shall denounce Anckarstrom to the King!”

Karl glanced over his shoulder.

“Jakob Anckarstrom?”

“Yes, a dull fool who makes deadly mischief—what causes his venom?”

Karl continued to look thoughtfully at Beylon as if debating how far he should go in candour.

“The youth is a Freemason, possibly a member of the Illuminati, a Swedenborgian, I suppose, his head is full of idle, dangerous notions.”

“The King himself is all of these,” smiled Karl easily. “Did he not caress the crazed Halldin until that vain and vicious person declared His Majesty’s position was sixteen degrees in Hell? As for this sulky page, he is enamoured of Carlotta Busoni—it rankles, my dear Beylon, when one is entirely disagreeable in person, entirely ambitious and entirely overlooked—he, loitering round the stage—”

“—as a spy—”

“—loitering round the stage, saw the brilliant Carlotta smiling on Gustaf. I doubt if she knew of his existence. Now the King has dismissed her from the *troupe*. I understand the melancholy of Anckarstrom.”

“I never thought of that,” sighed Beylon wearily. “Still what does the cause of his spleen matter?”

“Exactly,” agreed Karl cheerfully. “I shall see to it he enters the army at once, where he can neither spy, nor write for the press, forget, I pray you, this most insignificant person.”

And the Duke of Sudemania was gone, with no more satisfaction than that for the anxious Reader.

Chapter 46

The King thought, too often for his own ease of mind, of his brother-in-law, Kristian of Denmark, now an acknowledged lunatic, thought of the tales of Kristian’s escape from his guardians, his desperate flight down the alleys of Copenhagen, chased by valets and porters, cursing and sweating.

How easily this was done, the change from dignity, a regal decorum, to the brutish horrors of anarchy—how soon the tall mirrors and Sèvres vases, the candelabra with the fine cut crystals and the china porcelain of his own palaces could be shattered by shots, broken by bayonets, how soon the smart white Henri III plumes of the Guards torn off and tossed down.

He tried to think only of the noble and talented men who served him, of the great Karl Tessin for whom the fountains of Versailles had played, an honour worth more than a title or a riband, of his father Nicodemus, architect to Queen Kristina, who had changed, by the enchantment of his genius the old, rude and haunted castles of Sweden into a new conception of the Gothic style, of the last Tessin, Gustaf's Governor and Ambassador to France, the Swedish Lucullus, but the phantoms grinned behind the evoked memories of these splendid figures, Struensee had been an ally of Russia, Poland had been divided—the same month of the same year as his own *coup d'état*—forget these monstrous images!

Soon he would have an heir. He forced himself to wait upon his mother; she was peevish and fell on him about Frederik's marriage being delayed because he, the King, had encouraged the Fersen girl. Gustaf was displeased by the importance she gave to this point, he thought she was losing her tact, her brilliancy, showing crude jealousy; the nominal post in Pomerania had satisfied neither her nor her brother, it was true that she ringed herself about with those hostile to Gustaf, yet despised him, because he did not exterminate his enemies, she was now of an age when feminine wilfulness is no longer charming, and she wearied Gustaf by returning to her old grievance about the Guards being removed from her doors. Gustaf's final break with Baron Magnus Sprengtporten had been on a trivial point touching the Guards, and he recalled this with irony as he faced his mother, awaiting her persuasions, her reproaches, as a rock might await the shallow waves of an inlet sea.

Ulrika Lovisa reminded him she had had her way with Karl, who had been forced to relinquish his once passionate hope of marrying Aurora Lowenhjelm, and was mated to his mother's choice, the amiable and cheerful Hedvig Elizabeth of the House of Holstein. The Dowager now intended to thwart the wishes of her youngest and best beloved son, Frederik Duke of Ostrogotland, who was still, she feared, entangled with the fascinating Sophia Fersen.

"Why come to me, Madame?" asked Gustaf. "You have more influence with Frederik than I have—and you know my sentiments as to state arranged marriages, Aurora and Sophia are both accomplished, virtuous, fair and of noble Swedish houses, their brothers are among my friends."

"That is my complaint," said Ulrika Lovisa quickly, "had you not encouraged the Lowenhjelm and the Fersen families they had not been so presumptuous as to treat Princes of the House of Vasa as if they were pensioned cadets—I trust none of them," she added.

"Whom do you trust?"

"Not you, Gustaf, not an idealist in a high place."

"Sometimes that is your complaint, sometimes you term me a dissimulating trickster," he lightly smiled aside her complaints; before his inner eye was the map of Sweden, the Tzarina and Frederik of Prussia, brother of the woman seated opposite to him, pondering over the dividing line as they had pondered over that of Poland; her gleaming glance recalled him to the need of putting through this courtesy of listening to her grievances.

"I must trust all or none," he said with an effort over weariness. "I have been through this dispute with several good friends. I will not play the tyrant. If I did,"

he added in a voice that was soft and caressing, “I might recall the liberty I allow you to visit Berlin so often—”

“If you cannot trust *me!*” she gave a stammering cry.

“I cannot trust your brother, my uncle of Prussia—one of Sweden’s enemies, and I do not count on, do not expect, your loyalty.”

“I have the tenderest regards, the keenest fears for you, whatever I do is for your fame and honour.”

“We give the words different meanings, Madame, I do not grudge you your bedchamber intrigues—but keep them to the bedchamber, I beseech you,” without giving her time to reply he continued, “As regards Frederik, he is all yours—he and Karl have been faithful to me, but I do not know their hearts, their secrets.”

“Do I know yours, Gustaf?” she asked, fixing her glance directly on him, speaking in an insinuating tone. “Perhaps I could help you, if you would trust me.”

She wondered what Beylon had told him, Karl had advised considerable caution; the prospects of the child could be blighted without any risks being taken.

“I need no help,” said Gustaf. “I look forward, with the meeting of the Riksdag, that I expect to be wholly obedient, and the birth of the child, to some of the happiest days of my life.”

“You arc deceived, my son.”

“In very little,” he replied. “I know how you, and Baron Pechlin, and others, even the brothers Sprengtporten dislike me, but I trust you all to be loyal to Sweden.”

The words were meaningless to the Prussian Princess; she disliked Sweden; she glanced with contempt at her son—he to boast that he was not deceived! He was indeed stupid not to have noticed how she had prepared the grounds for her repudiation of Sophia’s possible child ever since she had been aware that, through his own sense of duty and the good offices of his equerry, Count Munck and his wife, Gustaf had overcome his repugnance to the Danish Princess and lived with her on as good terms as his native kindness and tact could achieve.

He had given up much of his leisure to his domestic life, and to trying to gain the confidence and even the sympathy of Sophia; his mother had always been prying into the intricacies of what she sneeringly termed “the reconciliation” but not even from the faithful Beylon could she drag any admission there was renewed estrangement or any discord between Gustaf and his Queen. But his mother had steadily persisted in regarding the marriage as what she termed “farcical” as “mockery” and of always referring to Sophia as a sickly imbecile incapable of bearing children, Gustaf as possessed of an incurable distaste for her person, and Karl as heir to the throne. She would have preferred Frederik who was so much more under her influence, but Karl was more to her liking than Gustaf; she knew that she could not get behind his guard on this subject, but she could not always resist throwing her darts, even though, she was vexed to observe, Gustaf did not even notice them. Soon he might be forced to notice.

“How unhappy you make yourself,” sighed Gustaf. “Because you never can rejoice with me—nor I think, with any one.”

Ulrika Lovisa drew herself aside; it was true, she was most unhappy, and she meant to revenge herself for that; she thought of her page, who had left her service hurriedly; the sullen Anckarstrom, he had been imprudent, perhaps, but he had

been loyal to her, Beylon had alarmed Karl about him, Beylon was becoming intolerable.

She began to complain of this, guardedly, a page of hers had entered the army, she might have kept him longer, she had trained him well, he knew her wishes.

Gustaf who supposed this was merely one of her usual frivolous grievances replied.

"I shall give you another page, a charming child, Liljehorn's boy, the pretty Pontus."

"I do not like him."

She put her hand to her face and felt it trembling, life was dry as summer dust on her lips, once it had been as a draught of rich wine, during her weak husband's reign she had been the guiding star to many splendid servitors and flatterers—what had the crooked politics, the pitiful poverty, the brazen corruption, even the humiliation of the throne mattered to her? She had been always surrounded by everything that gold or credit could buy and taste design, neither her mind or her spirit went beyond the confines of the palaces where she reigned amid her glittering entourage, she might protest furiously against the insolence of the Riksdag, but she had not really much cared what happened beyond her immediate surroundings. She had no friends save the meek daughter she despised and Beylon, who, she knew, under all his deference, despised her; she was in debt, and she found no pleasure in the luxuries for which she had not paid, nor in these continual journeys from one castle to another, from Stockholm to Berlin, from Berlin to Stettin, which were pointless since no one confided large policies to her, and she saw her only interests, the domestic intrigues she started and inflamed, flare out like damp squibs because they were so futile.

Looking at her eldest son now she identified him with all her losses and misfortunes; if he had been as malleable as his father she would have continued to reign, the detested Danish Princess "forced on us when she was eight years old, by Karl Scheffer, to strengthen the Northern alliance, the fool—" she 'reflected fiercely—"would have been divorced, not set up over her, Ulrika Lovisa, as Queen."

Tears of self compassion softened her hard blue eyes, she cunningly turned these to account, she did not wish wholly to estrange the son who was also her master.

"I am concerned about your safety," she murmured. "You recall that weapon I gave you? You never wear any—"

"It is in good custody," replied Gustaf, who instantly recalled the pistols and the dagger with the emerald in the hilt, and how Beylon had mislaid them. "It shall be treasured. Do you think, Madame, that this—or any arms, could save my life if anyone designed to take it? No Swede would touch me." He spoke indifferently for he knew the falseness of her concern; he did not intend to vex Beylon by mentioning the lost gift that had a teasing association for him—Jeanne d'Egmont's missing glove.

Ulrika Lovisa wept, then dried her tears that were unforced and burning. The triumph of her son meant her defeat; with every day she lost power, all she could do was to make as much mischief as possible before she had to leave Stockholm Gustaf pitied her distress, as she sat drooping, withdrawn, he remembered his obligations to her, his lavish education, her pride and care, the genuine suffering

she had endured at his marriage—and did he not, secretly, share her dread, her fear, of a union with the Danish House? He spoke to her softly, endeavouring to gain her attention for a matter that troubled him, one that had nothing to do with their own poignant concerns.

She recalled young Peyron?

Ulrika Lovisa nodded disdainfully.

"Eh, well, he is a hot head, but I am fond of him, we grew up together, and he has a brilliant record in the royal suedois."

"But he was insolent to his Colonel, who is also a friend of yours, Gustaf, and refused to sail with the regiment for America."

"It was a private matter, he was no more than reckless, he has been to England, where he has married an English lady—her family object to him and he appeals to me."

"Could anything be more trivial?"

"I shall help them, of course. Creutz writes to him to state they are in Paris—he advises them to leave before Colonel de la Marck returns to France."

"Surely you will not allow this disgraced couple to come to Stockholm?"

"I thought I would see them when I visit Paris."

"You intend to visit Paris?"

"Yes, I must have the subsidy treaty renewed. Besides I—long to return to France. And why not, when the child is born."

"The child!" exclaimed Ulrika Lovisa; their glances met suddenly he realized at least something of her intention. "I think of Karl's rights," she added. "I feel that I must protect you from your own generosity, your misplaced trust."

She was pleased to observe that he became sickly pale, stammered and could not speak.

"There is too much whispering," she continued softly. "You ought to know."

"Now I do know," he forced a composure she had not expected, that was more dreadful than any violence. "You will remain at Ulriksdal until the celebrations are over—then you will retire to Pomerania, never to return."

Ulrika Lovisa rose, fury giving her strength and dignity.

"So be it. I would rather never see your face again, than recognize a—"

"Silence!" commanded the King.

But she added swiftly—"a half wit in Karl's place—"

"Karl's place! How you all count on that! I shall keep my place, until my son succeeds me!"

She was shuddering, almost overwhelmed by the anger she had tried so long to provoke, that she had now aroused to her ruin, but she answered, though in a broken voice. "No one will dispute that it is her child—and I would prefer exile in Pomerania to recognising an imbecile as the Vasa heir."

"How false you are! You care nothing for the House of Vasa, nor for anything save yourself! You are much in need of compassion, but I have none to give you."

He left her, no longer able to endure the moment, and in the antechamber came upon Jakob Anckarstrom, idling with some spaniels. Gustaf did not see him, nor anything, save the way before him, that seemed to incline abruptly into the fantastic hell that Halldin had ordained for his uncertain fortunes.

Chapter 47

Sophia's son was born the first week in November, he was named Gustaf Adolf, the four Estates were his sponsors and there was a month of costly festivities in honour of the Crown prince of Sweden, bars of gold were presented to the infant and to his mother, masquerades, illuminations, pageants filled the short winter days, the long, pale winter nights; after taking bier part as a Chinese empress in one of the spectacles the Queen Dowager and her small court left the capital quietly.

Before her departure she had signed a document in the presence of all the members of the royal family, the Chancellor, Karl Scheffer, and before a full Senate, that stated that in her opinion, the foul gossip that had accused the Queen of indiscretion was the brazen invention of idle spite.

The humiliation of this moment was not wholly hers, as Karl had emphasised by remarking that he hoped the young Prince would never hear of this detestable affair, when it was obvious that he must do so, since the parchment, formally sealed and witnessed was placed in the public archives, while Frederik smiled and whispered: "The evil fairy leaves the christening feast, but not without undoing the work of the good fairies, eh, Karl? Everything perfect but that one little doubt."

Gustaf, in his speech to the Riksdag, dedicated the child, descendant of Gustaf Vasa, Gustaf Adolf and Karl XII to Sweden—"I will not think, that any heir of mine, should ever forget that he has received from Providence the crown of a great kingdom on condition that he accepts the charge of a free and magnanimous people, whose happiness and prosperity must ever be the sacred charge of the Princes of the House of Vasa."

Chapter 48

In his room in the royal Palace, the Reader wrote at his desk. The Queen Dowager had dismissed him from the post he had so long held, but this had made little difference to him, since he was at once given a position at the court of Gustaf, it was indeed, a relief to him to be away from the furies, reproaches and lamentations of the overthrown woman, who was going to what she knew to be banishment, and suspected to be a sentence of death, for her defeat was more than she could endure, thrice embittered as it had been by the defection of Karl, who, in the final issue had stood behind his brother, only her daughter and her younger son gave her a dubious, half shamed support. Some garbled report of her conduct had got abroad, it was said among the common people that, in a fit of jealousy she had tried to poison the Crown Prince, and when she went abroad stones were thrown at her carriage; incapable of travelling to Pomerania, she had retired to the utter seclusion of Swartsjo, and François Beylon who had served her so long, did not regret that he would never see her again.

Worn out by his part in the affair of the two Queens and by his effort to conceal his illness and to take part in the sumptuous celebrations of the Crown Prince's birth, the Reader sank rapidly, refusing Dr. Hedin's advice to return to his native Lausanne, and keeping the news of his condition from his overworked master.

His modest affairs were soon settled, all he possessed he left to the King, to be disposed of as His Majesty wished; to the last of his strength he employed himself in the service of Gustaf, letters about the Peyron business, about pensions for the charlatans, now in beggary, directions to a hack writer to answer the Lutherans who had been shocked by the Romish splendour of the Royal Christening, Carlotta Busoni's fee, increased, because of her dismissal, sent to her impresario at Venice…no need for him to do all this work, there were secretaries and clerks enough, but Beylon could not leave his service while he lived.

A few hours before he died, he found the King's pistols and dagger in the drawer where they had been long overlooked and gave them to his lackey. Gustaf would not wish to see his mother's gift again, the weapons were of considerable value and bore the royal cipher. "Return them," commanded Beylon, "to the armoury—this should have been done before. I have been pressed."

The man, a Holsteiner not long in Beylon's employ, promised, then alarmed at his master's livid look, ran for a physician, after slipping pistols and dagger into his vast flap pocket.

When he returned with Dr. Hedin, the Reader was dead, across his desk, his papers under his head, his outstretched arms, and scattered, by his last movements on the floor.

Gustaf's grief at this unexpected bereavement, eclipsed, then shortened the festivities, the King blamed himself for neglect, for stupidity—how easy, but how shameful, to take such loyal, such silent service without notice!

The possessions of François Beylon, with a handsome sum added, were sent to such relations as he had in Switzerland; the royal weapons were not sent to the armoury, but taken by the dishonest lackey to a back street in Stockholm and sold for something less than the value of the emerald in the hilt of the dagger.

"You see," said the jeweller, "I can make use of the stone but even if I remove the cipher, I cannot sell these pistols or the dagger for a long time, they may be missed and searched for."

"Sell them in Cophenhagen? Paris? London?"

"Too risky—no, I have to keep quiet with such articles as these, to regard them as an investment—but, of course, if you would like to try abroad yourself—"

"They are mine, my master gave them to me."

"Of course. But you couldn't prove that."

"No," the man was a secret gambler and needed money, he was out of a place, and never kept his places long. He took the money and disappeared out of the shop.

PART IV

Double Defeat.

Chapter 49

A MEDLEY, again, for the King, of toys, memories and debts, of travels that had been undertaken with the desire to find the past, that fondest of delusions as guide. Another interview with the splendid Katherine at Frederikshamm and the confirmation beneath her lavish courtesy of her unbending purpose to destroy Sweden, escape to Naples, to view those classic scenes he had so often reproduced in mimic show, to Rome, to gaze on the majestic ruins that had inspired Piranesi's gloomy engravings that had for so long been the background of his haunted mind, to visit the Pope and to sense the comfort of the gorgeous trappings of a stable Faith, immovable, unforgiving, unchanging, Florence and Paris, meeting with the Emperor, with Charles Stewart, with the ineffectual King of France and his young Queen, clever with enchantments.

Marie Antoinette had the talents and the means to make fairy tales come true, and for Gustaf, travelling as the Count of Haga, she had spread her costly entertainments with all the elegant allure he recalled so well from his first visit to France. Nothing was lacking save the one person who had gilded all the festivities with magic. As Jeanne d'Egmont was not among the ladies, all habited in white, who moved among the lantern lit trees in the Park at Versailles, to the sounds of Mozart's music played by hidden orchestras, even that, the most delicate, the most to his taste of all the *divertissements* offered him, had more tormented than pleased.

Time was closing over her memory, this was another court, another epoch, another King and Queen, and though Gustaf was flattered, praised and treated as if he were the most remarkable man in Europe, yet the compliments had lost their savour, the spectacles their brilliancy, it was with disillusion that he considered himself and his place in his times.

How radiant his prospects had seemed when he had risked all on one throw and won, when he had given Sweden a new Constitution, setting an unmatched example of generosity and liberalism—and now though much had been achieved, he felt he did no more than hold a precarious position with difficulty. His enemies still threatened, they were only waiting an opportunity to attack, Sweden, for all his efforts, was poor, he had been glad to obtain a renewal of the subsidies from France. Johan Toll warned him constantly of enemies at home, indeed Gustaf was not sure whom he could trust, the brandy monopoly fretted the peasants, Elis Schorderheim had had to resign the Vicar-Generalship of the Church because of charges of simony, the Sprengtporten brothers sulked in retirement, the Queen

Dowager had died in bitter seclusion, François Beylon was dead, Sophia, with placid dullness, had resisted all his attempts at friendship, she was preoccupied with her own state and the sudden overthrow of the Queen Dowager, she took no interest in the Crown Prince, beyond occasionally boasting that she was the mother to the heir of the House of Vasa, words that to Gustaf had a double meaning that made him inwardly wince into a nightmare gloom.

The child was not feeble in his mind, but rather sharp and precocious, and passed as handsome, brilliant and charming.

His father, however, saw in him but too poignant an evidence of the tainted Danish blood for, while he was almost pitifully a Vasa, with his father's traits heightened with startling emphasis, he was frail, excitable, nervous, and given to fits of violent temper, the excessive care taken with him serving only to increase these defects, the extent of which his Governor, Rosenberg, hoped were hidden from the King, who did not speak of what he saw. So, these reflections clouding his memories, caused him to look with self disdain at this roomful of treasures he had brought from Europe.

"Will any of my palaces be finished, Schorderheim?" he asked. "Will all these pictures, statues, tapestries ever be finally in place?"

"You have undertaken much," said the Herald, he retained that first post, he yet kept that name, he had resigned from his larger offices willingly enough for he still retained his Stockholm salon and the close friendship of the King. "Your reign will always be remembered as a golden age."

His flattery had a simple air, Gustaf smiled tenderly. "Peace, Peace," he said, "could I have that for Sweden—for a century—for a thousand years. A golden age! Ah, no, but perhaps Sweden will not forget one who tried, Schorderheim—you know this is no academic speech—who tried not only to make her strong and prosperous, but to show her there are other things than war—have I not given employment, reward, pleasure, to Sweden by the arts of peace?" As the Herald was about to answer, the King checked him by adding—"I question myself, not you. I have tried to change not only many of the customs, but even something of the character of the people—was I wise? Could that be possible, even to one possessed of a genius far larger than mine? Have I, by searching out, encouraging, rewarding all that is worthy, noble and useful in this country, increased the richness of its heritage?"

"Sire, can you doubt this?"

"I doubt this—and much else," replied Gustaf. "I doubt now if I was wise to leave the power of the sword and the purse with the Estates. I should not summon them now, did I not require money—to settle the budget, to finance Toll's schemes for the army—no, had I the reserves, Schorderheim, I should issue an ultimatum to Russia and to Denmark, and free Sweden of this menace forever."

He stood at the window looking out on the lake; on the eve of the elections for the Riksdag that he had, on the advice of his ministers, so reluctantly called, he had retired to Gripsholm, the ancient royal castle he was rebuilding, altering the sombre outline, the heavy walls, the small sunken windows, the ill lit chambers, to modern splendour of light, space, air and rich decorations.

The crates that filled the room where he and the Herald conversed contained furnishings bought in Italy and Paris for Gripsholm; when the business and

anxieties of the Riksdag were over, the King intended to return to the ancient palace and surprise the architects, painters and craftsmen who would be working there.

Schorderheim, considering dubiously the large number of the crates and packing cases and what they must have cost in transport alone, remarked, with his allowed freedom, that the royal reputation for extravagance, already notable, would be increased by these travels and these purchases—would it not have been better to have spent very little at this juncture of the national affairs?

"No one realizes, not even you," replied the King, "that if I were to forego all these expenses, what I should save would not supply one regiment for a campaign, nor build one battleship—besides, I spend for the nation—I give Sweden treasures she can display for centuries—of what use to posterity would be my economies?"

Even the easy good humoured Schorderheim thought this argument fallacious and not likely to weigh against the discontents of a people who had endured three bad harvests, who were bitterly fretted by the government brandy monopoly, and who, essentially, staunch Lutherans, were shocked and vexed by a King and a court who appeared now as Freethinkers, now as Swedenborgians, now as dabblers with Romish ceremonies and who sold Church benefices. Yet the Herald agreed that the country had had very little to complain of during the King's reign and he was of Gustaf's opinion that the Riksdag would be loyal and obedient for the King, whatever his apparent frivolities, had a record of solid achievement to present to the nation.

Chapter 50

The King inspected the magnificent little theatre that was nearly completed, he declared that the first performance to be given there should be Gluck's Iphigénie en Tauride, the choice surprised some of his companions, who considered the work heavy for such a delicate setting, the King however was gay, as if he had no cares in the world, his incomparable grace and charm, his radiant enthusiasm threw a lustre over this inspection of the old castle and the new palace, and gave an air of wonder and excitement to what was, many of the company afterwards reflected, but yet another imitation Château of Versailles of which there were already too many in Europe.

When he had left the Council Room, the picture gallery, the state bedroom all of which he keenly considered and advised upon, Gustaf withdrew from his friends and attendants and retired to a little closet off an enfilade suite in the ancient part of the castle that was furnished with antique and neglected pieces some of them nearly as old as the castle Gustaf Vasa had raised on the site of the sombre fortress built by Bo Johnsson Grip and since destroyed by fire. Gustaf recalled again that the royal palace had been used as a prison, that one of Gustaf Vasa's sons Johan III, had confined his brother Erik XIV here, and had in his turn been imprisoned in the gloomy tower that Gustaf III intended to demolish.

The history of the brothers was obscure and their deaths mysterious, Gripsholm enshrined their legends and was reputed haunted by a lost spirit, hovering between time and eternity, who was, in some dark manner connected with the dreary fate of the great Vasa's sons. This was not a passage in the history of that famous house that Gustaf cared to ponder on, and those close to him believed that by his lavish alterations in Gripsholm he hoped to lay the spectres that haunted men's minds when they visited the old castle or considered the worn path that was shown in the stone floor of one chamber where the captive king had walked round and round his prison.

There were those among the friends of Gustaf who would have preferred to see Gripsholm left to fall into ruin or razed and another dwelling planned on the site, but the massive edifice, now a monument, in memories, in legends and in splendour, to the glories and miseries of the House of Vasa, suited some of the King's moods. He had held his state there, arranged carnivals in the park, and even before the theatre had been built, had held charades and spectacles in the Council Hall, the Chamber of the Court Marshal, and in the Assembly Hall, while suites of light, gracious and elegant rococco chambers had been built onto the two hundred and fifty year old apartments where the King walked about with Elis Schorderheim.

The Herald had an expert's pleasure in Gripsholm, his research there had given him much material for those meticulous reconstructions of the past in which his master delighted; a large part of the armour, costumes, the heraldry, the furniture of Gustaf's tournaments had been copied from details found in the appointments and archives of Gripsholm, and there Schorderheim had discovered the recipes for the dishes, with outlandish sauces and flavourings he had arranged for the banquet that had exactly reproduced one once offered by Queen Kristina to favoured guests.

But the Herald was not pleased to be in this dreary chamber, cold as winter, though the month was April, uncomfortable and ill omened, and his cheerful and affectionate disposition was chilled as he observed the King shudder as if tormented by a deep anxiety as he stood at the window reluctant to lose the last glow of daylight across the lake, the trees, the sky, and Schorderheim wondered why he remained in this cheerless place, instead of returning to the modern rooms, or 'walking in the park, as he so frequently did, selecting yet again a site for a repetition of the costly pageantry of Amadis de Gaul, the superb spectacle given the previous summer in the grounds of Drottningholm, after the years of preparation.

"I remember a room here, where there was a constant noise, day and night, it used to frighten us, as children, we supposed it was caused by the phantoms of Erik and Johan—one day Karl and I went upstairs, a winding stair, and discovered some old machinery that had been used for theatrical effects, old drop cloths there were, and masks, I wonder if they are there now, we did not return to Gripsolm often after that, you recall how I had the sceptre taken from the figure of Johan III in Upsala Cathedral and placed in that of the unhappy Erik at Vesteraas."

"Your taste was formed early, Sire," replied the genial Herald. "But you have long passed these antique devices—the chamber will be dust laden, foul."

Gustaf was persistent, one journey into the past had been nothing but a disappointment, he had been no nearer to Jeanne d'Egmont in Versailles than in Lojo church where the cheating quacks had tried to beguile him with puppets and gunpowder, yet he was impelled, by his own restlessness, to strive to turn yet farther back, to his childhood, to his first handling of the disguises in which he had long since become so skilful.

"There is hard work ahead," he said. "Come, let us amuse ourselves."

But it was not of amusement he was thinking as he, after once missing his way in the cold apartments, discovered those where he and his brothers had stood to listen to the rattle and the moaning to be heard even on a night that seemed windless. He struck the cold walls with open palm.

"Here one could beat and fret," he said. "It was a prison before it was a theatre," the King added, quoting from his epitaph on Erik XIV. "He died, betrayed by his brother and abandoned by his subjects at Orbphus."

The pale Northern light from the deep set window showed a rude platform at one end of the room, curtained by shadows.

"Gripsholm should be demolished, without further inspection," remarked Elis Schorderheim; but Gustaf would investigate the sources of his earliest dreams. "The man in Piranesi's prison plates trying to get out, I used to picture him, here, beating the walls, then escaping—but to what? The engraver was lunatic, and tried to murder. To the stairways that go round and round, the pulleys, the ropes. I saw Gripsholm all again in Piranesi's mad designs—do you hear that!" he added smiling, and the Herald listened to that creaking and groaning that comes unexplained from old rooms with wide chimney places and deep walls, closets, ramps and water pipes and presses, ramshackle in ancient chambers.

Gustaf led the way up a spiral staircase of solid wood, then in that half light his satin coat, the positive smooth brightness of his hair shone, as did his blue eyes when he looked down at his friend, smiling with an air of expectancy.

"The god in the machine, deus ex machina," he said. "When there is no solution possible to the tragedy, one lowers a god from the flies who destroys all the characters—then one begins another drama. Observe these contrivances."

Elis Schorderheim looked with distaste at the crude and time worn engines, pulleys, wheels, rollers, chains, rusty and broken, the fraying ropes, that filled this upper room, beneath them were holes and slits in the floor, largely blocked now with dirt, fallen plaster and fragments of rotting wood, the stage machinery had been kept in some order, grease showed on the metal parts, polish on the wooden wheels, but this care had been perfunctory, as if a needless task had been unwillingly undertaken.

An arched window in the centre of the outer wall cast a colourless and vague illumination onto this monstrous paraphernalia that did not appear to have any connection with either life or dreams; the spiral stairway from which the King and the Herald had reached the room, continued above them, into the attics, and down this another beam of light fell onto the sombre lumber.

"See, the shadows, how they interlace, the cross lights," said Gustaf. "There should be a pine knot flaring—if there was that red glow—an interior by Rembrandt, eh?"

“It is most clumsy,” sighed the Herald as Gustaf went to a massive press in the corner and opened it; out fell cardboard crowns, tinfoil bucklers, ragged robes and suits, the discards of some magnificent wardrobe, “and still,” observed the King, “making a rich display by candle or lamplight.”

He pulled out of the press jack boots, twisted lengths of cord, a bird cage, torn dominoes and masks. “Do you remember Peyron?” he asked.

“Surely, when I asked of him, Sire, you put me aside, I supposed he was still in disgrace, in England?”

“He is dead. Peyron is dead.” Gustaf turned over the masks with one of the toy swords. “Yes, it was hushed over. But I cannot forget. Peyron was our playmate in Gripsholm, too. I must tell you, Schorderheim, how Peyron died—”

“Here and now? The day darkens—”

“But it will never be dark as it is in France.”

Gustaf moved to the deep set window, his elegant poise was natural, yet in his sleek satins, with his powdered tassle curls and fine falling ruffles, he reminded the Herald, as so often he reminded him, of a figure in a canvas by Watteau, for the vigorous, enthusiastic and tireless man, appeared, in the half shadows, with the theatrical toys at his feet, as the embodiment of an eternal idler.

“I bade Peyron leave Paris,” the King continued, “and promised I would make his peace for him with his wife’s family and I intended to bring them back to Sweden with me and place him here, but, no, he could not forget that Colonel de la Marck had named him poltroon, he called at his house, demanding satisfaction, and was thrown out by a lackey. There was a masked ball at the Tuileries, always, you note, Schorderheim, a masked ball. I had forbidden Peyron to attend the court. De la Marck was in the right, and he, too, is my friend—but no, Peyron obtained entrance to the palace—wearing a cloak of cherry coloured silk and a cerise mask, he found De la Marck in an alcove where cards were set, and struck him. They met next day in the bois de Boulogne and Peyron was killed at once. De la Marck was wounded and still lives, his malady is supposed to be fever and Peyron was buried privately, at night, a plain hearse, the torches—I saw him in his mean apartments, the bandage over his face looked as if the mask had only been removed for one of white linen, and he was wrapped in the cerise coloured mantle, his young wife was trying to sew his shroud but her fingers failed. I thought—how could he have tossed his life away for a punctilio when he was loved like that? I thought—if I were struck down—how many would stay to weep by my corpse? Would not all hasten to overturn all my policies?”

“Why—” exclaimed the Herald, “should your Majesty suppose so dismal a future? You have set Sweden so firmly in her place in Europe, that your achievements can never be blotted out, yet you speak so often of your work being undone.”

“The Queen of France told me that when she awaited the news of the late King’s death, she heard a sound she thought was thunder—it was the feet of the courtiers rushing to do homage to the new King.”

“What of that? Louis XVI continues the policies of Louis XV.”

“At least,” smiled Gustaf with sudden lightness of tone, “he has continued my subsidies—I owe that to the brilliant charms of the dazzling Baron Creutz and some others—a million and a half livres above the present payments—and the

Island of Saint Bartholomew—then, in case we are attacked, twelve men o' war, twelve frigates, twelve thousand men." Gustaf went over the main terms of his secret treaty with gay pleasure, and in the same tone, added—"Now, I shall venture to destroy the Danish monarchy before they endeavour to destroy us."

"The Riksdag will never consent to a war."

"I shall insult the Danish ships by refusing the salute, then they will declare war on me. Russia? No—an ultimatum there, and the Estates will support me, after I have taken St. Petersburg."

He led the way from the darkening room, leaving all the piled trumpery scattered by the gaping doors of the open press, the window showed livid white in the blurred shadows out of which rose the monstrous shapes of the wheels, pulleys, chains and ropes, the twist of the spiral staircase.

As Gustaf descended the fan shaped steps, he asked, over his shoulder.

"I hear the Bishops of Lund and Karlstad are likely to oppose me. I esteem them both, they owe their advancement to me and I supposed them my friends."

"They are narrow formal men, offended by my appointment, Sire," replied Schorderheim easily. "Pedants, also—and your Majesty puffed up the Bishop of Lund by making him a member of the Academy."

Gustaf did not consider either of these talented men dangerous, it was more with amusement than chagrin that he had observed that Baron Pechlin had left his estate to come to Stockholm to rally a party and that among those who he was flattering were the two Gustavan Bishops, who had also received Count Fersen, leader of the Opposition, by reason of his abilities and his traditions.

"Who is this Johan von Engerstrom?" asked the King as they passed along an unlit corridor into a large room overlooking the lake that reflected the pallid sky and gave back silver reflections cast faintly into the chamber. "I heard of him as a philosopher, but he has kept himself obscure, now I learn he joins these malcontents."

"That nobleman is of no importance," replied the Herald. "He is a fanatic Voltairean—an advocate of the American rebels and the rights of man."

"And he joins the stiff Lutheran Bishops against me?" the King laughed. "Such are the convolutions of party politics! These gentlemen will be surprised at the temper of the country—I fear none of them, even such a sly intriguer as Pechlin will not be able to make mischief this time, though he tries to make a party with Cedarstrom, Ribbing, Horn—ah, these old men!" Gustaf broke into a swift melancholy violence. "Nightcap and plume! It is true that I abolished these hateful terms in '72, but they often ring in my ears! The ancients with their caps over their bald heads, who must slyly and furtively intrigue and plot—the young soldiers with their arrogant panache—and how to hold the balance?"

"Toll would tell your Majesty," replied the Herald good-humouredly, "that you should have got clear of both the hoary plotters like Pechlin, and all the ruffling officers like—why, many of them—in '72, but I assure your Majesty that there is no need to be disturbed—this Riksdag will be as loyal as the last, and the country will be behind it."

"I wished to look again at this roundabout," said Gustaf. "The light is barely sufficient, but see how charmingly the little horses show—that was mine, ginger bright, with shining blue harness."

The galloping wooden steeds had been kept in smart condition, prancing one behind the other, their piebald, spotted and mottled coats of glossy paint, their flaring scarlet nostrils, their staring black eyes, their gaudy leather and metal trappings showed dimmed by the twilight, above them the pointed roof of the roundabout, glittered faintly with gold leaf stars on a candy pink ground, in the centre were the stucco figures of four grinning clowns with scarlet hair and floured cheeks, each holding a handle that the lackeys turned when the royal children mounted the wooden horses. Gustaf thought of the other wooden horses in the Riddarsholm Church.

"Peyron used to delight in this amusement, he would beat the drum for us."

Schorderheim guessed the King was thinking of the Crown Prince's visit to Gripsholm last year, when he had rejected the roundabout with screams of terror, as indeed he rejected most of his father's amusements; nothing frightened him more than the theatre or any such travesty of life; the King had never made any comment on this disposition in the heir of the Vasas, but even the Herald, not in the least inclined to forebodings or melancholia, sensed that now, as Gustaf stood glancing at one of his own childhood's most sumptuous toys, he was reflecting sternly that even if he destroyed the Danish monarchy, he could not destroy the lunatic Kristian's share in the Prince Gustaf Adolf.

Chapter 51

"Have you," asked the King, "any other policy to offer? Any statesman to carry it out?"

He spoke plainly, without any of his usual graces, with the firmness he could on occasion show so definitely that it baffled, even confounded those who believed they knew his character to the bottom; it was some hours since he had received Count Fersen, who had solicited this interview, yet the King showed neither exasperation nor fatigue, though he had listened for so long to the leader of the Opposition's dry assurances that the royal policies were utterly distasteful to the Swedes and that all the proposed royal bills would be equally distasteful to the Riksdag.

Correct, cold, even impertinent in a formal fashion, Count Fersen tore to pieces all the King's measures with that merciless destructive criticism that can be directed against the wisest and noblest of ideals and the most splendid of actions; the King had explained, had parried, had argued with perfect tolerance and courtesy, never taking his brilliant blue glance from the handsome hard face of his opponent, who was so like, in stately and formal comeliness, in the regular features, expressionless and severe, the fine pert and cold good manners, his son Axel Fersen, whose Northern fairness shone with incomparable distinction even among the pliant and vivacious French courtiers at Versailles. Now the King put his question, his challenge, and Count Fersen had no answer.

"Constructive help," urged Gustaf. "That is what Sweden needs. You know the condition of the country when I took it over in '72. Pray consider what has been

since achieved. Even in this matter of the Church—if benefices were sold—it was always to worthy men, nearly two hundred churches have been rebuilt, parishes have been divided, a new hymn book, a new version of the Scriptures—both long since demanded—are being prepared, decency and reverence have been preserved everywhere—not all the money Schorderheim received was spent on court amusements, my dear Count."

"None of these acts, Sire, excuse simony," replied Fersen stiffly.

"Ah, no, not if you are resolved to find fault—well, Schorderheim is no longer Vicar-General, may his successor do as well as he did in that office. Do you think nothing of the humane legal reforms?"

Fersen pursed his lips obstinately, as if to infer that the abolition of capital punishment, of torture, the codification of the laws to reduce expense, the setting up of schools for the children of criminals were small matters; he even ventured a flutter of a cold glance at the onyx clock, as if to intimate that he was bored as well as hostile.

Gustaf maintained his tranquil air, he pulled out from under his arm that rested on a table, various papers and drafts like a pack of cards an impetuous player had cast down in an anguish of expectancy.

Count Fersen, who represented, in his implacable enmity all the forces opposed to Gustaf, had not been impressed by any of these cards, not by Saint Bartholomew, Sweden's foothold in the West Indies, nor the canal from Lake Malare to Central Sweden, nor the advantageous trade agreement with those one time rebels, now the United States of America, nor the new towns and villages planned and built in the Grand Duchy, nor the fourfold increase in the exploitation of the mineral wealth of Sweden, nor the imposing navy, the magnificent docks at Karlskrona, the newly built forts, arsenals, camps, the flourishing academies of Art and Sciences, the rebuilding of Stockholm on a scale not before even contemplated, the flourishing state of the Bank of Sweden, (for all Gustaf's reforms, and benefits to his country had been paid for by the French subsidies) not even all this could move the high-minded, rigid, cautious, judicial Frederik Axel von Fersen from the stand he had taken against the King. One time leader of the Hats, Fersen was still a jealous guardian of all the privileges of his order, and though he professed himself a patriot and a liberal, he was secretly of the same opinion as so many of the nobles, that Gustaf's constitution of '72 might have benefited the country, but that the nobles had been deceived into supporting it, because it had not tended to their aggrandisement, as they had expected, but rather to a levelling of class distinctions in which they had all to lose.

Ignoring the important points at issue, Count Fersen remarked that Elis Schorderheim was hardly the man to read to the Estates the royal statement of the royal achievement, and as the King remained silent with an unclouded look, Fersen, who was beginning to feel the weight of the evening's fatigue, added, with a tremble of anger in his over trained voice—"None of your Majesty's propositions will be acceptable by the Estates."

"Not even that, whereby a fund is to be created to feed the peasantry in time of famine? The Government economies have been such that we can afford this," said the King soberly.

Fersen found this question and comment a mere sleight of hand to evade a reply to serious matters, Gustaf's slides from candour to subterfuge caused men of Fersen's prejudiced, conventional type to mistrust him to the edge of hatred; such men understood nothing of the King's fantastic mind, his vast talent his genius for life itself that made all he touched animated and brilliant; uneasy under the blue, serene and commanding stare of the man he so disliked, Fersen said bluntly: "I advise your Majesty to withdraw the bill for the reform of the army, the establishment of Karl XII will continue to satisfy Sweden."

"Now you come to the heart of the matter, I must have that bill passed, Count Fersen."

"And why, unless you wish to declare war?"

"War might be declared on me."

"In that case, Sire, the present machinery will work very well—as Count Sparre will explain in the Riksdag."

"But surely you, my dear Count, can see that this scheme, whereby the maintenance of mobilised troops falls on the peasantry, is out of date, and that they would welcome a relief from this obligation in return for a small annual tax, that would provide a sum whereby the efficiency of the army could be increased to that of a first-rate power?"

"I can certainly see, Sire, that the passage of this bill, would give your Majesty the use of an army that could be instantly put in the field, without the embarrassment of obtaining its maintenance piecemeal from a reluctant peasantry—and we do not choose you to have this advantage."

"We, Count Fersen?"

"The Estate of the Nobles, Sire, and we shall be supported by the Peasants who will, of course, prefer the chance of having to pay for the upkeep of the forces, to the certainty of the tax."

The King rose so swiftly that Fersen seemed to be jerked to his feet; they stood facing one another across the slender desk; behind Gustaf, the well trimmed flames of the extremely tall candles shone like gems in the straight crystal sticks; he turned and precisely snuffed them before he spoke again, the while he smiled at Fersen's reflection in the mirror behind the console, "You old, safe, cautious man," he thought, "dull for all your abilities, without charm for all your comely majestic looks, too timid to accept high office, fearful of risking your large fortune—afraid of a venture, bitter towards the new, the successful, the dreamer, the artist." He put his fine hand with the Indian sapphire ring behind the small pointed flame, the delicate fingers, the fall of transparent lace, the ripple of light on the thick sea green satin, the diamond buttons at the wrist of the lawn shirt were reflected in the mirror, in front of Fersen's handsome figure that had something of the solid air of the Scots merchant from whom he was descended; he believed he was being kept standing while the King trifled in order to insult him, and he said abruptly:—

"A King never tried in the field should not risk a war."

"Ah, the prudent man of office!" said Gustaf courteously, still with his back to Fersen, and smiling at him in the mirror. "So they said of me before '72—who was Ito risk a revolution?"

“Your Majesty then had the support of the nobility—we staked on you and—how have we been rewarded?”

“Far too well, my advisers say,” the King looked over his shoulder. “Come, do not let us bicker like office men—I must have this bill, I must have the army bill, and the subsidies and the mineral bill for the Dales. I am sure of the Burgesses and the Clergy.”

“Of the first because they smell money, trade, commerce—”

“As indeed I hope for, work for and encourage, money, trade, commerce—”

“Your Majesty is sure of the second Estate because you have sacrificed Schorderheim and promised them reforms. King Charles of England did not save himself by throwing Stratford to his foes.”

“You flatter us in the comparison,” said Gustaf lightly. “I am no tyrant and Schorderheim is no statesman, his office of Vicar-General brought to him merely a toil that he gladly relinquishes.”

“The bill will not pass,” persisted Fersen.

Gustaf turned, so that the flame was behind him, showing his gauze sash, his pomaded curls in the mirror, and the older man, vexed by the fair, smooth, smiling face, intimidated secretly by the intensity of the blue gaze, added sharply: “These roles, Sire, of patriot, Maecenas, poet, actor—and warrior, cannot be put on and off like a harlequin’s cloak.”

“I thank you for your candour,” replied Gustaf. “I knew you despised all men who dream and wonder, all those who, feeling life so short, move quickly from place to place, from action to action, leaving something to sweeten their memory as they go—perhaps an Opera House—or a frontier established—a dungeon blown up, or gallows pulled down, or an Academy founded, or an artist pensioned—”

“If they be Kings and fortunate—”

“As I am a King and fortunate.”

Fersen hesitated, lowered his eyes and was silent, awaiting his dismissal, in his heart was obstinacy and a desire to humiliate, perhaps to destroy what he could not understand; he looked old, the skull bones showed in his narrow brow, in his pinched cheeks, for all his stiff carriage he quivered, erect he yet trembled, as if he was all of a piece, a statue shaken.

“You are weary,” added Gustaf. “It is past midnight.”

Fersen bowed and departed, behind the yellow leather screen, behind the looped purple Utrecht velvet curtains, into the vast shadow behind, into the ante-chamber, where Pontus Liljehorn, now an ensign in the Guards was on duty with his men, yawning, his arms folded on his breast, the white plumes nodding on his casque.

The King, alone, put up his papers, they slipped through his fingers.

“Why can he not work with me? Why cannot so many of them work with me? What offence to any of them in my measures? What are their jealousies? Their hostilities?” He ached with weariness, still concealed, even though now there was no one to deceive; he moved carefully and seized the thick gold cords at the nearest window and pulled apart the dark yellow curtains that slid easily on the polished poles, revealing the sweet, clear grey night and the moon above the copper roofs of Stockholm, above the fresh waters meeting the salt waters, every ripple outlined in thin silver, the broken beams of the moon, high, remote above

the city. “The Sprengtportens behaved like truculent fools—Fersen like a petty clerk. When I asked him what his policy was and who would unfold it, he had no answer—yet, always ready to hamper, to check, to frustrate—to insult—harlequin?”

Harlequin was alive, a flame, a gleam, smooth and bright as a jewel, leaping with magic grace, bearing an enchanted wand, masked, bewildering and dismaying all the heavy, earthbound, prosy folk, among whom he moved swift as winged Hermes, or as a glittering fish in a hastening stream. “Lucky to be Harlequin,” the King rested his sick head against the mullions and stared out at the blank, ash coloured scene, where everything was distinct, yet faintly seen, as a reflection in very still and shadowed water. At these times, when the fret and strut of the day’s pageantry was over, when he had no longer any need to caress, or flatter, to parry another’s thrust, to deliver one of his own, Gustaf felt his acute loneliness. He could hardly count his friends, there were those he liked, honoured, even loved, but there was no one who could have penetrated his deepest moods; his wife had become as remote as the melancholy moon was from the human homes it shone on, his brothers were guarded, civil, no more, and of the others, the crowd he employed, respected, worked with, fee’d, there was none to share such an hour as this, when the fatigue of the day brought a lassitude that sent the thoughts roving far. Phantoms came nearest to him then, Jeanne d’Egmont with her heavy pearls, in her costume of Bayard’s time, creeping close to see if he still wore her colours with the black ribbon, the royal Danish rabble, a nightmare’s brood, not to be banished, lunatic, blood stained, sables and bloom coloured gown, the mask, the domino, Peyron in his cherry coloured cloak and the white linen bandage over his wound, Ulrika Lovisa, visited on her death bed, dying furiously, while he held up the child she had denied, screaming with fright, while she had gasped, the beautiful, cruel, unhappy woman: “Yes, he is yours—I see now—and hers—a Vasa and an imbecile!”

Chapter 52

Neither the King’s graceful and manly eloquence, or the oratory of Karl Sparre, or the reign’s undisputed achievements, agreed on and checked, or Schorderheim’s tact, or Bishop Vallquist’s adroit speeches, or the support of the Burgesses and Clergy, not all the cunningly displayed pomp of the Senators in their vivid robes, with their thick golden chains, the Knights of the Sheraphima with collars of angels’ heads, those of the Sword with collars of swords, those of Vasa, with wheat-sheaves, all symbolic of aspects of Sweden’s prosperity, not the gorgeous escort of the Guards officers, with their snowy erect plumes, their precise uniforms, the royal pages in liveries of black and scarlet, the sons and younger sons of the nobles, and representing, under the leadership of the King, a school of manners, of gallantry, of talent and elegance not equalled in Europe save in France and not there surpassed—not any, or all of this, proof of what he had done for Sweden, saved the King’s measures in the Riksdag.

He had not tampered with the elections, save to raise one malcontent into the peerage, and now the result astonished him and his friends, the Riksdag showed a majority among the Opposition, even the Estates who supported the King did so half heartedly, the Bishops of Lund and Karlstad spoke against his measures and few of the Peasant representatives could forgive the brandy monopoly.

The Royal speech, moving and noble as it was, given with fascinating charm, was discounted as that of an actor—were not such arts to be learned by any strolling player? Could not even a mountebank be trained to wear a royal mantle, carry a royal crown and sceptre with such dignity?

The King's graces and talents went against him.

Johan von Engerstrom, the obscure fanatic who had suddenly forced forward in the ranks of the nobles, would have pushed the Opposition to violent extremes, but Fersen, coldly correct, restrained him; the leader of the Opposition could afford to be moderate, the measure granting that the charges of the army be moved from the local taxes to the treasury, the bill nearest the King's heart, was defeated, and in a manner that indicated that the Riksdag had no confidence in Gustaf, and would not trust him with armed forces easily raised and controlled.

The supplies had hitherto been granted indefinitely, now they were granted only for a period of four years; another defeat met the King on the bitter question of the Distillery Bill, financially the monopoly had been a failure, and the Committee set to report on the matter advised that the King surrendered it for an annual sum and left the distilling of brandy free to all his subjects.

Gustaf objected to this on his old grounds that if every peasant had his own still, then the corn, already scanty, would be almost wholly diverted from bread making, but the personal feelings of the nobles against the King, the personal interest of some of the Burgesses and the Peasants for their one luxury, brandy from their own grain, matched the claims of the Clergy that this was a measure for the public good, and the support given them by some of the Burgesses; after furious debate the bill whereby Gustaf suggested a compromise was lost by a high majority, and every Swede was allowed both to drink and starve to death as he pleased.

The King could not any longer deceive himself, though he had been most reluctant to believe that the body of the nobility were against him, and disposed to blame Fersen, Pechlin and a few discontented intriguers only, now was he forced to admit that the Opposition that Fersen led was united and animated by a sentiment of hostility to himself that was unreasonable as it was implacable.

He was finally persuaded that he had nothing to hope for from the Riksdag, when his proposition of a fund, free of interest, to supply the stricken areas with food during famines, was most doubtfully passed, though as this was to be taken from the credit on the Bank of Sweden enjoyed by the King it would cost the country nothing.

"These men are my enemies," declared the King to Schorderheim and his decision was swiftly taken; he dissolved the Estates when they had sat for eight weeks only, addressing them from the throne in terms of dignified rebuke, leaving the judgment of his deeds to posterity and remitting the revenues granted him for the fourth year of the limited period ordained by the Riksdag, as a relief to his subjects during the bad harvest years.

Chapter 53

Gustaf left for Haga to console himself, his enemies sneered, for his defeats, so unexpected, so bitter, so definite, in the Riksdag, by inspecting the foundations of the grandiose palace that he hoped to raise near the neat little mansion where he so often retreated. Pechlin, Fersen and their followers believed they had this restless monarch, whose ideas were so uncomfortable, even so dangerous, to their caste and privileges, confounded, he would now be reduced to his proper importance, that of a palace king, like his father, a position to which he, the amateur of the arts, the patron of the playhouse and the concert room, the designer of ladies' dresses and scarves, the dilettante, the dandy, the universal charmer, with his passion for splendour and etiquette was, his opponents considered, well suited.

The position was simple, it had been that of other Kings, without the Riksdag he had no power, neither that of the purse, the sword, nor the law, and he would never, after this experience, dare to summon a Riksdag, he was caught by the Constitution of his own creation, that he had, with so magnanimous a gesture, presented to Sweden when, at a moment of complete triumph, he had been able to do as he pleased.

Gustaf took few attendants with him to Haga, only Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt in whom he put an increasing trust, and an escort in charge of the two Gaards officers who had until recently been his pages, the sons of men who had always been intimate with him, Count Klaus Horn and Count Pontus Liljehorn.

Gustaf, apart from his personal tenderness for all the members of the Swedish aristocracy with whom he had surrounded himself since he had made the court a model for the nation, always remembered that these aristocrats had, as children, been members of the charming group of pages he had seen in the Queen Dowager's apartments on the eve of his Coronation and the triumph of his *coup d'état* of '72. Such was his concern with the fortunes and prospects of these young men who would be, he hoped, future leaders of Sweden, that he had inquired after Anckarstrom whose dark face he had lately missed from the Guards. That discontented youth had thrown up his commission, after a short term of service and retired to his small estate where he spent much of his time in litigation with his neighbours over boundary rights and in quarrelling with his wife and relatives; he had recently been accused by one of these of uttering seditious speeches in public, on the debates in the Riksdag, and a trial threatened him, but the King had quashed the case privately, without Jakob Anckarstrom knowing of his act.

It was this trivial incident that came to him now, as something insignificant, even frivolous, will obtrude into the mind that is disturbed by stress of emotion, and the King's mind was as near disorder as his acute and stable intellect could be, force of character and training enabled him to maintain a cheerful composure, but beneath the shield of his exquisite deportment, the force of his passions exhausted him. Humiliation, the affront to his pride, to his own sense of the value

of the services he had given his country, indignation at the senseless opposition to measures entirely for the good of Sweden—(even his wish to exploit the mining industry of the Dales had been denied) added to his considerable astonishment that he and his ministers should have so totally miscalculated the feelings of the nation, while all these intense and bitter resentments were touched by a fear that overrode them all—a repetition of the fear of '72, that Sweden abandoned by selfish, corrupt and unyielding parties would be seized as Poland had been seized, and cease to exist as a nation.

Gustaf's personal ambition, pride and self esteem were involved in this fear, he could not endure to imagine himself, after the glories of '72, the considerable place he had since occupied in Europe, his own private splendours and pleasures, his public show, so noble and regal, reduced to the position of a puppet, perhaps an exile or an outcast, that most pitiful of figures, a King without a throne. He had besides, the most zealous desire to establish a dynasty, to see the glories of the House of Vasa carried on in his sons, he had designs of annexing Norway, perhaps Denmark, of establishing, under a wise and liberal rule, a Northern confederacy that would, armed, rich and resolute be able to hold in check the Eastern barbarians, whatever adventures and adventurers of genius might control their backward but powerful empire. But none of these personal pains and personal hopes agitated the King as much as his fear for Sweden. He had sent in this fear for the one man who he believed could help him, Colonel Toll, the man who had helped him before, who had worked for him loyally and quietly and with brilliant efficiency during fourteen years, who was so modest and free from self seeking that few knew that he was of any importance, and none attached any political meaning to his presence at Haga.

Chapter 54

When they met, the King spoke of Anckarstrom, and from that Johan Toll understood how moved he was, so rare was it in him, not to come, with brilliant candour, to the point, at once.

But now Gustaf remarked on the pity of this man who had been a royal page and a Guards officer, leaving the army and wasting his life in foolish agitations and disputes; since a boy he had been meddling with paper sedition. "These disaffected people are dangerous, they make the nation uneasy, Toll."

"It is your Majesty who taught them to be so liberal and so confident," replied Toll with emotion, he could not long remain silent about the behaviour of the Riksdag. "Consider how bold tongued these modern agitators are—even in the Riksdag—Engerstrom and his like—with their 'rights of man'—even Fersen had to check him—"

"And you blame me for that?" asked the King. "You have warned me—so often—that I was too lenient and too liberal. Did I flourish too much? At twenty-six years of age, one likes to be generous. I had those who admired my actions. Would you have had me clap up Engerstrom—a moody savant—"

"No, no," said Toll, "but Pechlin and Fersen, who now encourage such men, and make an underground party."

"This foolish Anckarstrom spoke seditiously, I have quashed the case, because he was in the Guards." The King spoke obliquely.

"Better to have made an example of him," said Johan Toll bluntly, "but he is of no importance."

"None—nor do I regret he left the army, those I have in my Guards are my personal friends, all, I hope."

"Some I would not trust."

"All," repeated the King firmly. "All the officers, they are my friends or the sons of my friends, such as Pontus Liljehorn, who make me merry with his pleasant ways and Klaus Horn, whom you saw now in-waiting as you came, a noble youth."

"Sire," replied Toll. "It is strange you concern yourself to say that—who could doubt the loyalty of these men belonging to your personal establishment—always intimates of your household—"

Gustaf was silent and Toll perceived that, for the first time, his complete trust even in his friends was shaken by his most unexpected defeat in the Riksdag, as if reading him, the King said, at last:

"I could never doubt *you*, Toll. I am as open with you as I have ever been since you first came to me, a stranger with the secret that was my life, in your hands."

"You might have sent me to the block," Toll reminded him smiling. "You still had sufficient power."

"I did well, instead, to trust you. Yet you urged me to use sharp measures—even the block, for other men."

"Certainly, Sire. Not for men like myself though but for Pechlin—the Sprengtportens. You, Sire, could never have been misled as to the difference between Toll and Pechlin."

"No," smiled Gustaf. "Yet I do not regret, Toll, that I did not use arbitrary power."

He looked with deep affection at the man who had supported him, with little reward, no flattery, no promotion in return; the man who had been content to work through others and to allow them to have the credit of his labours, whose loyalty had never been shaken, whose interests had never for a moment been allowed to interfere with the interests of the King; he said so now: "You never thought for yourself, Toll, always for me."

"For you—Sire, and I take you to be Sweden."

"That is the whole point!" cried Gustaf with a sudden blush of colour. "You do believe that I am a patriot?"

"Yes, I do—it is a word men are shy to use, as it is so often misused, as it is easy to use, and difficult to detect when falsely used—but I believe your Majesty's first thought is for Sweden. I know there are such men, true patriots," he added simply, "for I am one of them."

"I love Sweden," said the King. "In blood I am not so true a Swede as you, and the Vasa link is fine drawn enough, but since my infancy I have loved the country—all of it, Toll, from one coast to another, and all that is on it, the minerals beneath the earth, and the very skies above. And Sweden was—is—entrusted to me—I am the King."

Johan Toll curiously considered him, puzzled why Gustaf had so many enemies, after his personal and political successes, even he, Toll, who had warned the King so often as to the forces that would surely be insolently pitted against a prince too magnanimous, was baffled by the opposition of the last Riksdag. He saw that Gustaf was much disturbed by his defeat, perhaps broken, and it crossed his own anxious thoughts that perhaps the King had summoned him to announce his intention of abdication, of retirement to Gripsholm or Drottningholm, to the life of a grand seigneur, or to a Roman palace, a retreat such as Queen Kristina had chosen; no doubt, Toll thought, the Duke of Sudermania would willingly become a puppet Regent to a child monarch. But when Gustaf had said—"I am the King," without pomp, merely stating the central fact of his life, Toll knew Gustaf meant to remain at his post and the servant felt a lift of excitement as he wondered how the master would extricate himself from his cruel situation.

He was walking up and down the room, wearing the costume made famous by the cartoonists and pamphleteers whom he always ignored, the full Gustaf Adolf II sash across one shoulder, the Parisian scarlet heels, the bright hair in the rolled curls, one side dressed lower than the other to conceal the depression in one temple; the catch in his step, due to his slight lameness was notable to Toll's sharp scrutiny, as was the pallor of his long face, naturally fresh coloured.

Now in the prime of his years Gustaf had not much changed from his appearance when Toll had first waited on him in '72, he was still slight, graceful and active, moving with the ease of an athlete and the precision of an actor, every gesture accurate, perfectly timed, word, look, meaning all co-ordinated, and without any touch of self consciousness or vanity, or watching for the effects of his behaviour, whether he spoke to one man or to hundreds, he never appeared aware of his audience, yet he was able to make the individual or the assembly believe that he was deeply concerned in their particular interests.

Toll knew that this had given him his reputation for duplicity even more than his keen delight in subtle means, but Toll admired what he termed a royal gift, this absolute control of so many brilliant talents, well ordered so that they could be directed towards any purpose or person the King chose, and Toll knew that behind all the arts and all the finesse Gustaf employed there was the sincerity, implicit in the statement he was the King, and he loved Sweden.

"Sire, what will you do?"

Gustaf in his turn considered Toll, the man who had gone to Scania with nothing but a few ducats and won the province.

"I shall promote you—to First Adjutant General, you have long been my most important subject, I intend to make you supreme."

Toll gravely thanked the King; he knew that he deserved this honour; he had acquitted himself well to amazement on the difficult foreign missions on which the King had sent him, which included a first hand report on the condition of Poland and another on the state of Frederik of Prussia's famous army; Toll knew also that Gustaf was aware that he did not wish for this sudden promotion and was content to work in the background or even underground, for the security and prosperity of Sweden.

The King looked at him keenly, admiring the tall, magnificent man with the tranquil face, diplomat, soldier, patriot, one tried and tested in every way and

found true. Gustaf trusted him now as he had trusted him fourteen years ago—with a secret of the utmost national importance.

"I shall overturn my own Constitution," he said, "and make myself absolute."

Toll waited, intent, on the King's mobile face, flushed with emotion.

"It is either that, or to deliver the country to destruction. Consider the state of Europe—Sweden's one ally, France, supine, shuddering, as I fear, to a revolution, Russia resolved on dividing Turkey, and the Empress has two savages of genius in Potemkin and Suvarov—recall that she and Denmark are pledged to overthrow my Constitution of '72—recall all this, and how much more that you know, and tell me, Toll, if there is anyone besides myself to save Sweden?"

"No one, Sire."

"I made that demand to Fersen—he could not answer, Toll, I do not know how many of them are actually sold to the enemy, but, now, after the last Riksdag, I am firmly persuaded that none of them—these men who oppose me—wishes to enter into a protective war, that none of them would sacrifice anything for Sweden, that all of them are absorbed in petty jealousies and fooleries."

"It is so. What will you do, Sire?"

"You are with me, Toll? This enterprise is even more perilous than the last."

"I am with your Majesty."

"I counted on you," replied the King, "and on a few others—such as the Bishop of Vexio." And he rapidly disclosed his plans for accomplishing what most men would have considered impossible. Swiftly, yet so quietly as not to attract public attention, all those who the King could not rely on to help his most daring venture, were, under one excuse or another, to be removed, promoted to harmless dignities or retired, their posts were to be given to young, bold patriots, such as Toll already employed by the hundred in his secret service work, Liljenkrantz, the worthy, but conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, must be removed from his Senatorship—some puppet must be found who would cover the fact that the King was his own finance minister, Bishop Vallquist, always the King's friend, and Nordin his friend since Schorderheim had been removed from the office of Vicar-General would answer for the clergy, in every direction the laws would be undermined while the form of them was left untouched.

"The end of all this is war—on Russia and Denmark," concluded Gustaf. "And you and I will prepare for that—with a conspiracy of two."

Toll had not expected the King to unfold a design as simple, as audacious as this, it appealed to his resolute active nature, to his liking for what was difficult and perilous, to his love for Sweden, the chance offered him he felt to be worthy of him; the fact that the King had not expressed any doubt as to his acceptance of so mighty an honour he took be a high reward for his fourteen years of unswerving service.

"You and I, again, Sire," he smiled.

"This time there'll be no Sprengtportens," said Gustaf swiftly. "I shall not entrust my secret, even to Vallquist or Nordin—not the inner secret. How long will your preparations take, Toll?"

"Longer than your Majesty will care to wait. I must consider, draw up a plan."

"You will do it, and swiftly. Toll! Had I not a man like you, I could not undertake this." Gustaf paused, then added. "Do not think, because I have spoken abruptly, I

have not deeply pondered on my position, that I do not know the risks—do not suppose, that, though I need not justify myself to you, I am not aware how I shall appear to others—ambitious, greedy, lunatic, a mock Karl XII—worse, destroying the liberal Constitution I was so lauded for creating—I have considered it all—though I have given you no time to consider. I must have you, Toll."

"It pleases me to be used, Sire."

Toll had never made a profession of personal devotion to the King, he was not a courtier, seldom at court, hardly the King's friend, he neither expected, asked or obtained the warm affection the King gave to Gustaf Armfelt, and others, his interests were not those of the King, but they had served one another, like two hands of one body, and in their common devotion to Sweden, their relationship passed affection and friendship.

Toll asked for some details of the undertaking—"The Princes?"

"They will be given posts when war is declared, I do not doubt their loyalty at that point."

"The excuse for war?"

"As I suggested before—insult the Danish flag, provoke Russia—an ultimatum to her, while we spread it that she sent an ultimatum to us—repeat the tactics of '72—spread reports of an invasion."

"The opposition of the nobles?"

"They are Swedes and soldiers, when the country is actually at war, they will not fail me."

"And the immense amount of secretarial work this conspiracy of two will entail?"

"Schorderheim will undertake much of that without asking questions—and what he cannot do, I shall undertake myself."

Gustaf smiled brilliantly, his spirits, so lowered in the last weeks, rose as he put into words the audacious design arrived at after such agonised inner debate, as he discussed it with a man of this metal, who was never fearful, astonished or hesitant, who employed the utmost prudence in the management of his affairs and who yet knew how to accept a great occasion without sombre words of foreboding or regret, of crawling caution and prosy argument.

They were allies who might not seem to have much in common, indeed it was because they were so little of the same temper that the close understanding between them was not known; even Toll's part in '72 remained obscure and the credit of the success in Scania was given to Abraham Hellichus, who had been the mere instrument of the unknown adventurer who the King had secretly sent from Stockholm. Neither did these two, master and servant, share their pleasures, in what private life he had, Toll remained apart, compared to Gustaf he was inscrutable, even mysterious, despite his agreeable address and easy carriage in any society, he seemed a man who existed only for vast undertakings and important labours, moreover he had never made a mistake, and the King had made many mistakes, though he was the more accomplished, versatile, adroit and skilful of the two men.

Yet none of these differences clouded their common confidence, that had always been unpledged, for no vows had passed between them, and undisturbed.

"You do not remind me," said Gustaf, "that I have had to follow your advice of fourteen years ago—but you must be thinking of it, Toll."

“It would have been easier, then, Sire, you could have been absolute, with the nation behind you.”

“But it would have meant bloodshed. I avoided that, and shall again.”

“This situation—so dark and terrible,” said Toll earnestly, “would not have arisen had your Majesty sent to the block the men who trouble Sweden now—has clemency to Baron Pechlin, for example, Sire, been worth while?”

“Yes,” responded Gustaf swiftly. “I had to establish the principle that no man is punished for his politics.”

Toll’s steady, handsome eyes narrowed.

“But treachery? Your Majesty would punish that?”

“Yes—treachery to Sweden.”

“I would like to be assured of that, before I begin this work—we may have another Sprengtporten to deal with.”

“Neither of the Sprengtportens is a traitor.”

“I trust neither Count Magnus nor Baron Goran, Sire,” replied Toll. “Now, if I have permission, I leave to put in hand my projects.”

With no more than that he was leaving, and the King urged him on his way, only asking:

“Do you, at least, never leave me, Toll.”

Toll, by the screen of yellow brocade that stood before the door, paused, looking too large, heavy and magnificent for the elegant chamber, and made the first definite profession of duty he had ever given the King.

“I shall never leave you until your Majesty sends me away.”

Chapter 55

The King juggled with the laws and the ministers, altering them here, moving them there, until there were but the names of the first, and none of the second, after Liljenkrantz had been removed from the Treasury to give place to a man who was Toll’s instrument, Baron Ruuth, Gustaf had no minister, he and Toll ruled alone, with some support from Olaf Vallquist, Bishop of Vexio, and Karl Nordin, Bishop of Hernosand, both the King’s secret managers in much. Elis Schorderheim had his part also, that of constant service and mute obedience, but none, not even the King’s friends, Armfelt, Essen or Munck, knew of the design of war that Toll and the King were so swiftly and secretly working at; neither the clubs nor the inns, the journalists or the pamphleteers had any suspicions of what the King with Toll was planning behind his usual show of a splendid court, a patronage of the arts, a passion for brilliant entertainments.

Even men like Pechlin, Ribbing or Fersen, who might have feared the King would try some counter move after his defeat in ‘86, could not, as the time went on, credit that any political design lay behind the lavish brilliancy of the King’s ceremonial existence, where he, as it were, acted in public, being continually present at some spectacle or entertainment or the central figure of the elaborate

etiquette of the court, even though he had deceived them once, and so completely, they believed they had him defeated and helpless now.

He could not, they argued, possibly find the time for serious matters, with his dramas, operas, balls, concerts and orations, his troops of poets, musicians, dancers, painters. Only Toll and Schorderheim knew that the King sat up alone at night writing the secret dispatches that he was sending to all the courts of Europe in an attempt to form parties against Russia.

Gustaf's uncle, Frederik of Prussia, was dead, his successor was embroiled with the Netherlands, France went, as every new dispatch from Paris stated further towards chaos, Great Britain and the Emperor stood aside watchful. The Porte, anticipating Katherine's move, declared war on Russia, and the Empress, furious at having her plan for a division of Turkey with Joseph H, over set, taken by surprise, and nearly overwhelmed when the Turks held her army helpless at Ochakov, withdrew her troops from the frontiers of the King she despised, leaving in St. Petersburg only a small garrison, while she sent all possible reinforcements southward.

Chapter 56

"It is the moment," Gustaf spoke the words aloud, but he was alone; in this crisis, requiring swift decision, he had not even the confidence of Toll, for his one close friend, the man who so far had shared all his secrets, must not share this, he must be deceived, indirectly, almost casually he must be deceived, this would not be difficult, for Toll, who knew the intricate and patient dissimulation that the King could practice, never suspected the candour with which the King dealt with him. They had worked, long and cleverly to deceive the Senate as to the designs of Russia on Sweden, sending in, from here and there, alarming reports of threatening advances on the frontiers, of belligerent navies in the Black Sea, faking the news, suppressing the news, pushing forward shipbuilding, the making of equipment and provisions for the army, the purchase of arms and gunpowder, so that even the Bishop of Vexio was deluded into supposing that the Empress did intend to attack Sweden under cover of her war with Turkey.

These men deceived by the King in their turn deceived others, even the shipbuilders at the docks had heard the King mutter—"Well, if the country is to be attacked, I shall know how to defend it."

Gustaf considered all these dissimulations justified and his pretences not far from the truth, for he did expect the Empress to attempt the annexation of Sweden but not now. It was not so easy to justify his deception of Toll—yet necessity pressed.

While the Turks held the bulk of the Russian forces at Ochakov Gustaf wished to fall on St. Petersburg that was poorly defended, and he knew that Toll would not agree to declare war without being certain that the King's finances could support the vast charges of an attack on Russia, that Toll had worked out to a rix

dollar—so much and no less, for every day that the land and sea forces were on a war footing.

Gustaf assured Toll that he had that needful amount of bullion in the Treasury and more, and as he now personally controlled the public money he was able in this conspiracy—for so he himself regarded his design—of three men, to deceive both Toll, and Ruuth, the nominal chancellor of the Exchequer, who, however, had been wary enough to demand a letter under the King's hand and seal, acquitting him of all knowledge of the national revenues.

It was when Gustaf had found that Toll would prefer to miss the present opportunity of falling on St. Petersburg sooner than declare war with insufficient funds, that he resolved to play false the man with whom his relations had always been candid—founded on candour, conducted in truth and honour.

"Do you not see," he had argued, for him with passion, "that now is the moment—this spring? I know that you, with your genius for organisation, can have everything ready."

Toll had stood out for July; the commissariat was entirely in his hands and he had difficulty in laying up sufficient biscuit and forage; the King insisted that July should be the very latest date for the ultimatum to Russia, and forced Toll, by the sheer vehemence of his eager determination, to suggest the opening moves of the campaign for the capital of Russia.

"If you will not, I shall consider that you are too cautious, Toll, never have I known you to hesitate before a daring enterprise."

"It is the money, Sire. I hesitate until I am sure of the money." Gustaf had repeated that the Porte had promised an annual subsidy, that the French revenues were untouched, that heavy loans were being raised in the Netherlands, and Toll had believed him. But these assurances were only partly true, for though these monies were promised, they were by no means all in hand.

"Nothing could be more simple, than to set two pistols one at St. Petersburg, one at Kronstadt," said Toll. "Twenty thousand men for each venture, and reinforcements sent from Northern Finland to join them when they meet at the capital—I believe the Swedish fleet is capable of holding the Russians in the Baltic, and the plan should be a swift blow, if we land at Oranienbaum—eighteen miles from St. Petersburg. We must risk the attitude of Great Britain. I suppose that her traditional policy of the balance of power will incline her to wish Russia checked, and we must risk the Danes invading while our backs are turned—but we must not risk, Sire, the fleet, the army, with an empty treasury."

Then Gustaf had passed his word that the money was in his hands, and Toll had proceeded with his preparations. Gustaf sent a mock secret envoy to Katherine, protesting at her menace to his frontier and ignored her pacific reply as a feint, in June the Duke of Ostrogotland put to sea as High Admiral of the Swedish Fleet; he had not been informed of the King's secret intentions and affected not to be interested in them but accepted his formal mission, which was to patrol the Baltic, with a watchful eye for the Empress's men o' war.

"Do we break a silver coin as you and Karl did in '72, Gustaf?" he had asked when he had taken leave of the King; the memory these words evoked emphasised the long tacit estrangement between the brothers; the King knew then that Frederik realized he was not being trusted and replied quickly.

“You shall know my mind as soon as any man knows it.”

As Frederik sailed in his yacht for Karlskrona where the Fleet lay, Toll embarked for Finland, and Gustaf laid before the Senate the false news that the Empress had a vast army on the frontiers that any day might, without even a declaration of war, march on Sweden; this alarming report had the effect the King desired, he was prayed to do his utmost to put the nation in a state of defence, and at once went on board the AMPHION and set sail for Helsinki where the Swedish troops had already disembarked. It was midsummer day, anniversary of the date on which Gustaf Adolf II had landed in Pomerania, and the army of forty thousand men that Gustaf commanded ‘was as fine in appearance and equipment as the famous troops that had once followed those of the Lion of the North to his German victories.

“What do you think of my good fortune, now?” the King asked Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt, as he dispatched a haughty ultimatum to Katherine, demanding Karelia and Livonia for himself and the Krimea for Turkey. “Madame Arfmedsson did not forsee this in her coffee dregs!”

Chapter 57

Three days after the arrival of Gustaf in Finnish waters Frederik played his part as coolly and successfully as he had played it in ‘72, leading the Swedish men o’ war and frigates in his flag ship, he sought out the Russian fleet, commanded by the Scots Admiral Grieg and, after an engagement of six hours drew off, leaving the enemy crippled, and for a time, out of action.

“Frederik has done well,” said Gustaf on receiving this news, for the Russian losses were far higher than his own, “but it once more proves, Toll, that our one chance is in speed. The Empress will soon rally—and her fleet, though for the moment halted—has proved stronger than mine—ay, for the moment, time is everything, we must at once advance on St. Petersburg by land. There is nothing to oppose us,” he added, “save a motley of untrained troops, frantically gathered together.”

Johan Toll agreed with the necessity for instant action.

“St. Petersburg *should* fall to your Majesty immediately all the men and equipage are ready to march.”

Gustaf instantly detected a sombre note in the steady voice, a shade of more than physical weariness on the face of the overburdened man who was performing the duties of a complete staff, with little help and that casual and unwilling.

“Are you despondent, Toll, *now?*”

“There is much awry. I have had to attend to a hundred complaints.”

“Well, you can set everything right,” replied the King swiftly. “Complaints? Are Swedes dissatisfied to follow me?”

“The officers,” remarked Toll. “The nobility.”

Gustaf flushed, the words recalled his humiliation in the Riksdag, he turned, leaning on the taffrail and gazing into the dark summer blue waters of the harbour. “I have noticed nothing,” he said quickly.

“No—it is worse than that. I think it is a conspiracy.”

The King laughed.

“Impossible!”

“Why, Sire?” asked Toll, dryly. “They have their excuses, when they left Sweden, they did not know, officially, that the country was at war—a war declared without the consent of the Riksdag.”

“Such quips!” cried the King impetuously. “For men of honour, for Swedes! Cannot they see that we cannot fail?”

“Perhaps success is what they dread, they do not wish to see you powerful. I speak for some only,” he added, turning from the look on Gustaf’s face. “But a few malcontents will infect an army—I beseech your Majesty to punish severely, and instantly, any signs of mutiny.”

“Mutiny—that word has never been spoken before—even by you, Toll—you who see more clearly than any man I know.”

Gustaf spoke slowly, glancing at the royal banner than flapped in the stiff sea breeze.

“I did not think of it,” replied Toll, “until I reached Finland and learned the temper of the officers. I may be mistaken, but these incessant difficulties, reproaches, disputes—”

“Is there any cause? I see none, but you are more experienced than I.”

“There are causes, though good will would overcome them. Yes, Sire, there are faults, lackings, confusions.”

“Toll!” cried the King flushing, “we were in this—you and I and I trusted you—and your genius—to see all was well.”

This was the first time that Gustaf had even hinted at a reproach to the most faithful of his servants. Toll answered calmly. “Your Majesty forced my hand, I required another two months—had I had longer, there would have been nothing for these gentlemen to complain of.”

“Who are they? Not General Armfelt—or his nephew? Not Essen?”

“No. I have no names. The Finnish regiments are difficult—say they require firmness—then, the Guards—”

“There are my friends—I am their Colonel.”

“The junior officers, at least, are incompetent, more courtiers than soldiers. Names? I will give you those of the young pages who galled Count Sprengtporten—Horn, Liljehorn—then Ribbing, Kalling—Essen is your friend, and Munck.”

“Toll, I will not listen, as if I really were involved in a conspiracy,” interrupted Gustaf earnestly, putting his hand on Toll’s cuff.

“Your Majesty engineered a conspiracy against them,” smiled the Adjutant General, “to force them in a war without their knowledge. They might enter into one to get out of it.”

“Do they not consider that they are Swedes?” the King returned to that aspect of the matter with the exasperation of a clever man baffled by his own intensity of purpose.

“Ah, if all had your Majesty’s spirit, we should be in St. Petersburg very shortly!” exclaimed Toll, he added quickly, “Your Majesty knows that I am blamed for all that goes wrong?”

“Of course, because you do everything.”

“Not only because of that, Sire. I am not popular. I am not a noble by birth, I am not known. I have no splendid connections, influential relations, I have worked in the dark, no one knows my services.” Toll spoke without rancour, the King pressed his hand warmly as he continued. “Perhaps Colonel Toll served your Majesty better than General Toll can, Sire, perhaps I should have remained in the background, not come forward, an outsider, to take command.”

“These mischief makers are all inconsiderable men,” replied Gustaf swiftly. “Recall how in ‘72, these nobles followed me, they will again, they must.”

“And so I pray, Sire, only beseeching you, since I seem destined always to offer you good advice, strike instantly at any disobedience or insolence.”

Gustaf watched the splendid figure descend the ladder into the boat, and then watched him being rowed ashore, erect, motionless, his light summer cloak round his shoulders, the pommel and quillons of his sword shining in the sun that cast gold over the city beyond the harbour. The King remained motionless, also, he was fatigued and Toll’s words had made him melancholy, this was the first pause in his constant labours for many a day and night, for the routine spectacles and pleasures he had been forced to take part in while working incessantly with Toll and Ruuth, at secret meeting after secret meeting had been no relief, but in the careless gaiety he was obliged to assume, and in the active part he was forced to take in drama, concert, oratory and balls, an added burden.

Now, as Toll in his rowing boat disappeared round the quays of Helsinki, Gustaf turned away from the taffrail and went down to his cabin.

He knew that much of what Johan Toll had said was true; the nobles were jealous of Toll, even those who were the King’s personal friends disliked this sudden rise to eminence of the resolute, inscrutable man of whom they knew so little, and who, though always affable and courteous, took no pains to conciliate anyone and no part in the fashionable occupations of Stockholm.

Gustaf thought wearily, “Perhaps it was an error to raise him up. I went so carefully in everything save that, but there was no one else.”

This reflection brought him sharply to a check, “there was no one else.”

He glanced at the oval mirror hanging on the polished wall of the cabin as if to take some comfort from his own face; he had always been alone, never so much alone as now; he missed François Beylon, always there, constant, tender as a woman, Elis Schorderheim was in Stockholm, the friends with him, even Gustaf von Armfelt, disliked Toll and knew nothing of the long intrigue to save Sweden by this daring war. And Toll had said, Toll who was always truthful, that some of the young officers, boys he had watched grow up, members of that little group he recalled so vividly from his Coronation eve, were disaffected and complaining.

The Queen had no inkling of his design, she had wept at his departure, but in pure fright, at the noise of the men and guns in the streets, the sights of the ships at the quay, and the general stir and abrupt end to all the court ceremonial, she had crept away from personal dread of the uniform, her old terrors of death and imprisonment returning; she had even broken out against Gustaf, accusing him of

wishing to put her away and to make war on her country, the little Prince, too, had screamed himself nearly into a fever at the coming and going of officers in the palace, the salute of the guns from the royal yacht, the departure of his father to whom he was affectionately attached.

Nervous, unstable and fragile the child was beautiful save to a very keen eye that might have detected the signs of degeneracy that touched the full blue eyes, the arched nose, the narrow forehead, the flaxen locks, almost into a delicate caricature of the famous Vasa traits.

Gustaf recalled them, the terrified mother, the frightened child, with added melancholy, Ulrika Lovisa's last words seemed to coil about them, as if the hatred with which she had regarded the Danish House was not spent with her death.

"My heir," the King tried to reassure himself, "my heir. He is very young, he will grow strong. I shall train him very carefully. When I have secured Sweden, I shall devote myself to him."

Neither Karl nor Frederik had children, in that fragile boy alone lay all the hopes of the House of Vasa.

The King raised his blue eyes, heavy with fatigue, to the mirror again, and smiled at his reflection, half in pity, half in scorn.

He could look back on youth now as something lost; those early fervours and enthusiasms were memories now, sometimes Jeanne d'Egmont was no more than a memory; it seemed so long since he had seen her, so long even since he had received the letters that had encouraged him in '72. What would she have said to this venture?

He was still the brilliant cavalier who had shone at Versailles, but his face was that of a man in middle age, with many weighty anxieties to bear alone; he could look back on some of his actions as those of an impulsive youth—why, was not even the wearing of the knot of ribbons with the mourning thread the commonplace of every student in love? That ride through the snow with Beylon from Haga—the invocation of the dead in Lojo church, the poet's grave, these were forever in his dreams, with the roundabout at Gripsholm, the engines for the spectacles, the sombre perspectives of the mad engraver's plates, crossing the vistas of vast ball rooms where the soldiers tramped and jingled up spiral staircases to arrest the maskers, Struensee on the scaffold, Kristian gibbering in his chamber, Matilda Carolina dragged to prison in her night clothes. When his wife and son had cried out at his departure, sensing dread and violence, Gustaf had seemed to hear those other shrieks; the child had once come upon his father wearing a mask, and had shrieked, showing the whites of his eyes horribly; this had driven a fierce pain into his father's heart, why should he, who had never given anyone cause for fear, frighten his own son?

The child's unutterable and ineffaceable dread of any disguise, of the stage, of mumming was hardly to be understood by his father who from his infancy had delighted in pageantry; he thought with pain of this heir of the Vasas who fell ill at the beating of a toy drum, who had to be carried away by Armfelt, half unconscious, from the refurbished room with the merry-go-round at Gripsholm. When Gustaf was away from him, as now in the state cabin of the AMPHION, he considered the boy with a dread neither to be voiced nor denied, that fragile figure of Sophia's son strayed through the visions that haunted a tired mind, the man

who tried to escape from the stone labyrinths of the nightmare vaults and dungeons, had now a weeping, lost child beside him, and the imbecile face of Kristian, the wanton face of Matilda Carolina, hung menacing, like the charlatan's masks in Lojo church, behind him, before this scene floated Peyron, the brow bandaged where the rapier had entered, the cerise cloak about his rigid body.

The warning music of the *Iphegénie* overture sounded in the King's ears; still he waited for money, still he played a solitary, a desperate game, and now youth was behind him—and what, after all, had been achieved?

He tried to think of Sweden, the beauty of the land, and the opera of *Peleus* where all the waterways, fountains and springs had been shown in glittering fantasies, but it was the picture of the Riddarsholm church that fell, like a drop cloth, before the evoked images of purple mountain, violet lake, dark castle and swans flying northward, the torn flags, the two buff coats, pierced by bullets, the coffins of silver and copper, the wooden horsemen who suddenly, by nightmare mechanics, beat on dusty drums that were slung round their necks by the linked rapiers of the collar of the Order of the Swords.

Chapter 58

"I'll put it to the test, I'll not lose another day," said Gustaf, when Toll laid before him fresh complaints that the officers set forward as pretexts for not wishing to proceed at once to St. Petersburg—there were not sufficient muskets for the dragoons, only half the heavy guns had been got ashore, the Guard's quarters were damp—"the more reason for moving," put in the King.

"I know, Sire, that these are frivolous obstructions, I tell you of them to show you the spirit of the men—especially of the Finnish regiments."

"The Finnish regiments? Then I shall give the order for them to march first—and at once, to the Russian frontier."

The immediate result of the King's commands was the resignation of Count Kalling, commander of the Regiments of the Grand Duchy, who declared he could not lead his men in the condition in which they were. "Cashier him before the entire army, treat him with the utmost ignominy," said Toll, but the King remembered Kalling in '72, and how he had tried to fight out of the Council room at the Palace, sword in hand and been, ignominiously turned back by Ensign Hjerta.

"He has never forgiven that affront and will now be revenged on me," said Gustaf, "these ancient Cap leaders—Kalling, Ribbing, Cedarstrom, are not suited for war, I accept his resignation, what do I want with men of so poor a heart?"

The day after Count Kalling left the encampment outside Helsinki, fifty officers sent in their resignations from His Majesty's army; now they showed their hands for they made no comment on the temper or equipment of their men, the excuses of Kalling, but stated roundly that they would not take part in a war waged without the consent of the Riksdag.

On the heels of this news came that of Baron Goran Sprengtporten's flight from his Finnish estate to the Empress, he had been for some while intriguing for the independence of the Grandy Duchy, and among his fellow plotters were some of old General Armfelt's staff officers, including such influential men as Jagerhorn and Klingspor; the intelligence of this came from the elder Armfelt himself, with two thousand Finns he had gone to the aid of his nephew who was clashing with the Russian outposts at Summa, and taken by surprise by these desertions and by the news that Goran Sprengtporten had taken a commission in the Russian army.

General Armfelt wrote from Hussula, near Frederikshamm, a small fortress that he was investing by the land as Admiral Ankarsvard bombarded it from the sea; this was the meeting place to which the King intended to lead his troops, the last stage on the march to St. Petersburg. He received the resignations while he was on shore, and immediately summoned representatives both of those officers on whom he was assured he could rely, and those who might be, possibly, faltering.

When they had left him he sent for his first Adjutant General Johan Kristopher Toll.

Chapter 59

"It is not three weeks since I left Sweden," said Gustaf, "and already the plan of campaign has partially failed and the army breaks in my hand like a clay sword."

"I feared they would not fight," replied Toll.

"Yes, you warned me, often enough, and seriously enough. You have always warned me, Toll. Yet though Magnus Sprengtporten works against me secretly and his brother is openly a traitor, I still do not regret I did not have them put to death in '72."

"You have, Sire, the obstinacy of your virtues."

"It is impossible to govern justly by violence," said Gustaf passionately; he was seated at a table, and placed his elbows on it, taking his head in his hands; he wore his uniform as Colonel of the Guards, and his bright hair only lightly powdered, fell over his fingers.

"What will you do now, Sire?" asked Toll.

"March to Hussula."

"With how many behind you, Sire?"

"They will march."

"Did you persuade them, Sire?" Toll believed that Gustaf could at a pinch fascinate even these rebellious officers.

"No, I bought them," replied Gustaf with intense bitterness and without looking up.

"You have the money?" the words were struck out of Toll whose complication of tasks would have been made infinitely easier could he have got more than the very lowest sums needful for his gross expenses out of the King.

"I did not buy them with money."

"With favours?"

"You can term it that. My friends advised me to this, yet I did not heed them much, it was my own decision."

"*If* they are satisfied—*if* you can trust them—"

"Neither," replied Gustaf. "I had to cajole them, to conciliate. What does it matter? They will be loyal when I have taken St. Petersburg."

"There is still a chance," conceded Toll, who never forgot how Gustaf had succeeded in face of odds as long as these, in '72.

"Yes, a bare chance. I had to seize that bare chance." Gustaf rose, supporting himself on the back of his chair, as if faint, this action, with the accompanying shudder and ashen look was so common with him, and he recovered from these fits so quickly, that his intimates took no notice of them, but Toll gave him a keen glance now, and took a step forward, fearing that the furious disappointments of the last few days might have overborne the King.

Gustaf saw this movement and smiled swiftly.

"Your services are excellent," he said. "You and I—we have been in this together, alone. Ruuth for all his abilities was a figurehead only. You, steadfast and untiring—you alone have made it possible for me to launch this expedition that may yet be successful. There is no reward I could offer you that would be high enough. Yet I know that you do not work for rewards."

"The reward of seeing Sweden secure," replied Toll, looking earnestly at the King.

"I am relieved that you spoke of Sweden. What I have done I would not have done save for Sweden. Toll, I must keep the army together."

"Without a doubt, by all means."

"By all means, yes. They put every fault and flaw on you, Toll."

"I know."

"And you know why—because you are loyal and competent, because you are truly my friend."

"That is probably the reason, Sire."

"They agreed to follow me, to overlook their grievances if I would let you go, Toll. That is the favour that they demanded."

"And you gave it?"

"Yes."

The one word was more poignant than any regrets or excuses, Toll looked away that he might not see the King's humiliation. "I am to leave the army, Sire?"

"No!—not that—even these men, Toll, find you useful—but I must go to Hussula alone. You are to remain here as Chief-Commissary—the dirty work, the odd jobs, Toll."

"I shall do them."

"I know. That is my keenest pain, Toll. You will not even complain."

"Why should I? I always took the adventurer's way—total hazard! A gambler's way."

"I shall never forget how you secured Scania with a few ducats and your wits. Others had the credit then—and now, I forsake you."

“I am not ambitious,” replied Toll. “I have no personal feuds with these men to make this downfall sour to me. I am lucky in being solitary. I scarcely know them. But will my disgrace make these malcontents loyal?”

“Disgrace is not the word, Toll.”

“They will consider that it is,” replied Toll firmly. “And what does a word matter? I shall remain here and do what has to be done.”

“What no one save yourself can do.”

“You believe that, Sire?”

“And yet let you go? I know what you would say, Toll, it is only that there are so many against one—you and I can plan a war together, we cannot fight it single handed. Disgrace!” he added suddenly. “If anyone is disgraced, it is I.”

“My advice,” said Toll, “has never been acceptable to your Majesty, yet your Majesty has trusted me and listened to me, so perhaps I may venture on this advice—beware of the Finns, I believe they are in a confederacy against Sweden. Your Majesty may rely on young Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt, Essen and Munck and Vallquist, there are few others among your friends in whom head and heart combine.”

He pulled sombrely at his fringed gloves and looked at the King with narrowed smiling eyes that made Gustaf say as if replying to a challenge.

“There is no other man whom I would have ventured to put down like this, Toll, no one else who would not have been bitter, rebellious, who I should not have changed into an enemy.”

“Ah, Sire,” said Toll. “You have cast me off in vain—I am the most useful man your Majesty has—for the drudgery—and it is a mistake to let me go, it will but be taken as a sign of weakness.”

“I must endure that. Toll, you have the right to ask much of me—is there anything, any way in which I could please you?”

“I shall take my orders and do my duty, with zeal,” replied Toll. “As your Majesty knows, for Sweden. But I can never work with your Majesty again, as I have, as a friend. The favour I ask is that I may remain in obscurity and never see your Majesty again.”

“You have the right to make that demand. Farewell, General Toll.”

Still smiling, Johan Kristopher Toll turned to leave the tent, at the flap he paused and asked quietly.

“Sire, did you have the money—that money I asked for as a minimum?”

“No, I deceived both you and Ruuth.”

“Lately I have begun to suspect that, Sire.”

“It is the only time I have deceived you, Toll.”

The King, standing straightly, looked straightly at the other man; the years seemed to scroll up, and he to be facing this man in the room in the Stockholm palace, putting all his stakes into a stranger’s hands, both young, both with the future as their heritage; Gustaf remembered that Toll had said—

“I shall not leave you unless you send me away.”

Toll was gone, the canvas fell into place behind him.

Chapter 60

The King marched to Hussula and joined General Armfelt who was about to summon the commandant of the fortress of Frederikshamm to surrender, or face combined operations from land and sea, but on the night of Gustaf's arrival at headquarters, the Finnish regiments broke into open revolt, some of the officers forcing into the royal tent, exclaiming about the disaffection of the men and swearing that they would not continue a war that had not the sanction of the Riksdag; the King's personal appeal to the men proved useless, neither General Armfelt, nor his nephew Gustaf Mauritz, nor any of those loyal to Gustaf could persuade the mutineers that they were turning their backs on certain victory.

"We need General Toll," said Karl, maliciously.

Having exhausted his eloquence, his strength, his wits and passion in vain, the King gave orders for retreat, and sailed for Kymmegaard in the AMPHION, while the army fell back on Liikala and the fleet withdrew from the invested fort to Sveaborg.

It was Karl, who had maintained his air of amused aloofness throughout the disasters of the campaign, who received from the hands of the rustic postman a letter to the King from a Colonel Hastjehr, who was stationed at Savolax, this contained the news that General Armfelt had taken it upon himself to open peace negotiations with St. Petersburg being half duped, half overcome by the Finnish officers, who had revealed themselves as a confederacy, in close touch with Goran Sprengtporten; one of them, Jagerhorn, had gone to Petersburg with the offer to Katherine, and Hastjehr enclosed a letter from the Commandant of Viborg offering to buy his services.

Gustaf at once sent a messenger to the elder Armfelt, desiring him to retire within the Swedish frontier, at Anjala; the Finns in response and mockery, assumed the name of this place, and termed themselves The Confederacy of Anjala—a union for freeing Finland from the tyranny of Sweden.

"It is amusing," remarked Karl. "Now, I fear, Gustaf you will be forced to convene a Riksdag."

"You know that to do so would be ruin."

"These men will never be satisfied until you do," smiled Karl. "Certainly the Estates behaved very badly last time, but what else?"

Gustaf's distress was so acute that he envied his brother's heartlessness, elegant, competent, amiable, with as easy an air as if he were taking part in some mimic fight staged to pass the tedium of a long summer afternoon in the park at Drottningholm. Karl had supported the King without either complaint or enthusiasm, and appeared to view the possible overthrow of his House with indifference.

"You are philosophical beyond my understanding," said Gustaf. "There is much else that I can do besides give way to these traitors."

As he spoke the last word his blue eyes flickered over Karl and the long doubt of his brother became another prick in his anguish; Karl behaved well, perhaps too well, he still amused himself with séances, with Swedenborgians, with free

masonry, he still had the machinery for a vast conspiracy ready to his hand; he had never asked why he had not been entrusted with the secret of the war, perhaps he was waiting his chance—"that sickly child and I could be assassinated so easily."

The Empress had openly sent bribes to the Finnish officers, the simple device of the peasant post carrier had been used to convey a bill for two thousand rix dollars to Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt, the price of his desertion; the King had this under his arm now, on the small table in the state cabin of the Amphion.

Karl had shown himself as brave as Frederik in the recent sea engagement as he himself had been in the land engagement of '72, he had not done or said anything suspicious, he was 'the most efficient officer that the King possessed, but the doubt went deep in Gustaf's mind, emphasising the agony of his loneliness, his humiliation.

"You *will* always stake everything on a single throw," remarked Karl good humouredly watching him. "And why so restless? This war now, we were very well without it."

"We were very well! I thought, I think, of Sweden."

"That is your mistake," smiled Karl. "Leave Sweden to look after herself—after all, she might do very well with Russia as Suzerein."

"You speak to vex me," replied the King quietly, "and I admire your cold heart. Though only feeble spirits reveal the extent of their miseries in public, yet when we are alone together, Karl, we might show one another the comfort of compassion."

Still the younger man did not disclose himself; his fortitude seemed that of one who was indifferent to both life and death; he had the air of watching a comedy that only slightly amused him; he considered the King's ravaged face with faint surprise.

The mutiny of the Finnish troops coming so closely on the long toil and strain of the secret preparations for war and the parting with Toll had afflicted the King physically as if he had been struck by a deep rooted illness: his control had not broken, but his body seemed to be fainting under the pressure of his suffering, as he remained, helpless as a prisoner, in the royal yacht, expecting, any moment, evil news, an object, he knew, of triumphant mirth to his enemies, of compassion to his friends.

"Perhaps you smile at me, Karl, my bold throw—and this! harder to endure than a pitched defeat!"

"I? Oh, I laugh at myself and all the world."

Karl adjusted his rich cravat, and black velvet neck band, at the round mirror.

"The news from France could not be worse," said Gustaf. "I hardly dare to read the dispatches that last were forwarded from Stockholm. The unhappy Queen! I never admired her, Karl, but I would give much to rescue her now—besides this revolution is dangerous, the King has no character—"

"We shall get no more subsidies from France," put in Karl briskly. "As for Marie Antoinette's troubles, Gustaf, you are hardly in a position to indulge your passion for knight errantry."

"If I could force an honourable peace out of Russia," sighed Gustaf rising, "then, I would try to help France, who helped us, Karl, to whom I owe—"

He checked the words, passionately sincere, but sounding thin and feeble in his own ears; he thought, with a strong gush of feeling, of Jeanne d'Egmont; in this, his utter failure and helplessness, she seemed near to him, as if her loss had been recent, and only yester winter, the ride with Beylon from Haga to evoke her spirit.

"Do you ever go to Madame Arfmedsson's, Karl?"

The Duke of Sudermania was never taken at a loss, but no question could have been more unexpected by him and he answered carefully.

"Sometimes. Her house is a convenient meeting place when one wants to meet eccentric characters. The police have become used to her. And I do believe that she has second sight."

"She did not foresee this!" sighed Gustaf. "No, Karl, all these mystic pretensions are lies, and follies, I have tried everything, sweated over all their mummeries—Toll was right when he exposed the charlatans and advised me to send them off—"

"Toll was always right," smiled Karl. "I suppose that was why he had to go."

"You could have helped me more, Karl," said Gustaf, "though you have served me well, your heart has not been with me."

"Toll's heart was with you and he had to go," persisted Karl, but the King was also persistent in his theme. "So much treachery and treason, sometimes it seems to me as if the air was full of invisible knives. I have always dreaded assassination, Karl."

"Why should you? No one has attempted to touch you."

"It would be the last throw of my enemies—not the Swedes, never that, but a Holsteiner or a Finn, or a Jacobin—those French scoundrels will guess what I intend against them."

"Wear steel or a quilted waistcoat, Gustaf."

The King did not listen, rapidly, pursuing a desperate thought, he asked—"Were Ito die before the boy was old enough to rule, you would be Regent, Karl—would you reverse all my policies?" The last words came glibly, he had thought of them so often—"reverse my policies."

Karl picked up a book that lay on the bureau.

"*A Thousand and One Nights*, so your Majesty reads fairy tales! A pretty edition!" The Duke of Sudermania's blue eyes turned blandly towards his brother's bitterly downcast face.

"They are no stranger than what happens to me, fairy tales," said Gustaf. "You evade my question," he added severely. "And I was foolish to ask it. I shall put the matter in another way. Do not meddle, either with serious intent or lightly—with my enemies. I also visit the Arfmedsson, I also have my agents among the secret societies and the Freemasons."

"I believe it," replied Karl, exceedingly easy. "We all learned from our mother to spy on one another. What did the old seeress tell you the last time that she read your fortune?"

The King laughed, it was a sound of utter woe, wrung from his weariness and shrinking of soul, he tossed the insulting frivolity of the question back to Karl, as if he had flicked a scrap of tinsel from his sleeve.

"Ah, yes, she held my hand, and went into a trance—no coffee dregs this time—and told me to beware of a man in red garments—was she not cunning? There is

no such suit in the country, such a colour is never worn, so she was safe in her prediction."

Young Gustaf Armfelt broke in upon the brothers, he had dispatches from the rebellious Finns who termed themselves the Confederacy of Anjala, and other papers from Stockholm.

Gustaf tore open the last—"the news is excellent!" he exclaimed and dashed aside the Finnish letters. "I shall not need to treat with the traitors—"

"What news from Stockholm can be excellent?" asked Karl.

"The Danes have declared war, and the Prince of Hesse leads them to our frontiers."

PART V

Dangerous Victory.

Chapter 61

"My position, Schorderheim, is little better than that of the King of France."

The Herald could not reply; at last in his high spirits, his gay patience were overcast; it was but a few weeks since he had seen Gustaf leave Stockholm with every likelihood of reducing St. Petersburg and dictating terms to Russia, now he had returned, travelling so swiftly he seemed in flight, and sat in his private closet, wearing a worn stained uniform, soiled linen, his hair in a mean ribbon; he would not attend to his attire until he had sifted the news given him from the one person available in the capital whom he could completely trust.

Yet he was cheerful, and assured Schorderheim as he had assured Gustaf Armfelt, who had accompanied him to Stockholm "that the Danish invasion was excellent news."

Schorderheim was almost persuaded that the King's anguish had darkened his naturally acute mind and that he spoke in a wild bravado, for, granting that a foreign army in Sweden might rouse the nation to arms, Gustaf was, on every count, at the nadir of his fortunes.

Karl had been left as nominal commander of a non-existent army, most of the officers had joined the Confederacy of Anjala, the men had either followed them, straggled homewards from the Russian borders as best they could, or were useless on board the ships of the Fleet blockaded at Sveaborg, Danish men o' war were in the Kattegat, the flotillas of the Empress in the Gulf of Bothnia, while the Prince of Hesse led King Kristian's forces towards Goteborg and directly threatened the great fortresses of Venersborg and Elfsborg.

Elis Schorderheim believed that the King was ruined, and Sweden about to become the spoil of Russia and Denmark, an oppression of desperate misery overwhelmed him, as he considered the achievements of the King's reign. He could not answer Gustaf's stern jest about the state of France, provoked by the pile of gazettes, letters and pamphlets lately arrived from the Swedish Embassy in Paris.

"How often," added Gustaf, "have you and I, and Beylon, sat in this, or another room, in this palace, and discussed our affairs. I have lost many good friends, Schorderheim—Toll, the last—"

"General Toll displeased your Majesty?"

"He displeased my enemies," replied the King, as near to open violence as even this intimate confidant had ever seen him. "And I let him go—for a handful of traitors who should have been shot. I could not believe it—not treachery, but this time I cannot delay in talk. Tell me, the temper of the city."

He took up and put down the foreign newspapers and epistles that related the convulsions of terror, confusion and enthusiastic idealism that were rending Paris and overturning the French monarchy. His movements could not be other than graceful for his elegance was in bred, but there was a distraction and a passion about his gestures, his glancing looks, his swift speech, such as the Herald had not noticed before, and, in one so sumptuous in the exquisite richness of his attire and appointments, the dishevelled hair, the tumbled uniform seemed like a disguise, while the sunk cheeks, tired eyes and exhausted voice showed up with a touch of caricature, the arched nose, depressed temple and narrow brow, the traits that the lampoonists delighted to emphasize when they ridiculed the King. Schorderheim knew that Gustaf moved in a void of suffering, a solitude of pain.

Hastily and looking aside, he made, as he was used to make, a report of public feelings; agents, journalists and unpaid partisans of the King's worked for him and he was an adept at arranging and sorting the information he received.

"Confusion—that—yes—indignation, too, opinion is on the side of your Majesty—the mutiny of the nobles cannot be forgiven—desertion in sight of the enemy, it is too much for any honest Swede. The Confederation of Anjala is regarded as a band of traitors—some officers who have returned to Stockholm have been hustled in the streets." He continued his relation of the turbulent incidents in the capital that showed the people to be as warmly on the side of the King as they had been in '72—but the nobles were supporting one another and there were many of them, almost certainly they were backed by Russian money and probably they were counting on the Prince of Hesse brother-in-law of the King of Denmark, advancing rapidly on Stockholm, the situation seemed that of a clear cut issue between the King and the nobles, supported by the two foreign powers he had himself challenged.

"I must save Goteborg," was Gustaf's answer to this report. "And for an army I shall call upon the Dalesmen."

Schorderheim was startled into a protest—was it not the most cruel of errors to rouse the peasantry, so soon inflamed, restrained with such difficulty? And, unarmed and untrained, what use were they against professional soldiers?

"I have been hardly twenty-four hours in Stockholm," replied the King. "And that is time wasted, I intend to leave for Faleen to-morrow—Schorderheim! You see how pressed I am—no time for good advice, what you say, my other friends have said—Vallquist, Nordin, Armfelt—Essen—do not rouse the Dales! What Gustaf Vasa achieved two hundred and fifty years ago is not for you to achieve to-day—nevertheless, Schorderheim, what else can I do?"

He smiled with that fascinating brilliance few could resist, however fantastic his projects, however wretched his situation, he could still flash into that charm and brightness that was like an inner splendour, as if he were but the messenger of some vast invisible power that both urged and protected him; Elis Schorderheim, who knew him so well, was conscious of this shining of the man, as if enthusiasm was made visible, while he posed his direct question.

Chapter 62

Gustaf forgot his wife, as he often forgot her for weeks together, and would have left Stockholm without seeing her, had he not been reminded of her existence by his brief visit to the apartments of the Crown Prince. The child sat in a patch of early autumn sunlight, turning a large globe on its axle; he was dressed in the modern style on which Gustaf insisted, the open bosom, the loose hair, the plain jacket and trousers that the English nobility, believing they were following the liberal ideals of J. J. Rousseau and Madame de Sillery, had made popular throughout Europe.

After a timid peering through his fingers to see if any grotesque actor, clown or dancer, accompanied his father, the Prince ran to him and, as the King knelt, tossed himself into his arms; emotional, over-sensitive and affectionate, the boy loved his father, and found him warmly acceptable in the familiar uniform of the Guards.

Gustaf held the meagre little body tightly, pressed the flushed overheated cheek to his own, felt the fine wisps of locks against his dry lips.

"Why do you tremble so much, dear heart?"

"My head aches and I cannot do my lessons."

For a moment the King did not speak and the child rested contentedly against his shoulder; he felt the small bones, the chill damp cheek, the hurried breath, the signature of disease, and was humbled by the sense of his own inner disloyalty to his wife and to his country by giving her and Sweden an heir born of distaste, almost of horror, and then, the tainted House of Holstein—he put the child away from him and looked anxiously into his sad face, that of the heir of the House of Vasa. One child, and that a weakling—his constant visions of the Riddarsholm church where his ancestors lay, of the empty Piranesi perspectives, of the appeals against fate in the Gluck music blended into one threat—that of the extinction of his line in his own person.

"What disguise will you wear now?"

His wife's thin voice had the power to startle him whose control was so seldom broken. He put the child aside, the boy screamed for Gustaf Armfelt who led him away.

"I did not know that you were here," said Gustaf. "Why do you speak of disguises?"

"I do not know," she replied sullen and furtive. "There are always balls, masquerades and dominoes, nothing is real."

"One masquerade will be the last masquerade," he assured her, with his exquisite lightness of manner. "At present I do not think of them. I go to raise the Dales, my sole chance of an army."

"To march against my kinsmen?"

He would not answer this tedious question, meant, he knew, to provoke a discussion as to the wretched position of Sophia Magdalena, but took her hand, kissed her passive face, beginning to wrinkle into tears, and left her; his position was desperate, he had no time, even for remorse, the word—'desperate' rung in his

ears. But, as he consoled himself with this reflection there came another—"You have time to read The Thousand and One Nights, to write a play—to dwell on Jeanne d'Egmont's letters and miniature; the truth is that you flee from the presence of this woman, your wife, as if whipped by a terrible wind, because of what you see behind her, that palace at Copenhagen as you beheld the squalid rule there, as you heard of the ball, the arrests, the woman dragged from her bed, the man in his gala dress, ay, all this you see and on it impinges the thought of Peyron, in his shroud and cherry red silk mask."

Gustaf, at that moment, revolted against his own fantasy, even against his love for a dead woman, and his hand trembled on the knot of favours at his breast.

Chapter 63

The King now confided, as far as he confided in anyone, not only in Elis Schorderheim, but more and more in young Gustaf Armfelt, who had long been among his inner circle of friends; the young guardsman possessed, besides his splendid person, gifts of courage and sagacity, of loyalty and shrewdness, that induced the King, who never wholly disclosed himself to anyone, to open himself in a large measure to Armfelt, who had the great merit of never discouraging any of Gustaf's audacious projects and of never accusing him of extravagance or bravado.

Young Armfelt had accepted soberly this plan for a King, deprived of revenues, parliamentary support and armed forces, asked help directly of the peasantry of the Dales, thus following the example of Gustaf Vasa; not by a look had he hinted that the scheme was reckless or ridiculous. Because of this attitude, Gustaf intended-to take Armfelt with him to the Dales, and to give him the rank of Brigadier General; Baron Essen, another officer who had remained loyal to the King, agreed to assist in this audacious enterprise, that others of Gustaf's friends to whom it was divulged declared "fantastic, dangerous, and impossible to a fine politician, so perilous was it to rouse and arm the ignorant peasantry."

"It is the Dales, or waiting for the Danes to conquer us on one frontier while Russia advances on the other," declared Gustaf; his intense fervour and enthusiastic belief that by this means and no other could he preserve Sweden as an independent nation was such that he impressed even Bishop Vallquist, who was as prudent as brilliant, and the Bishop of Hernasand, also his secret agent in the Riksdag, with the necessity of his journey to the Dales, the rich, sombre region in the centre of Sweden.

But Gustaf thought of other counsellors who had been with him in his former bouts with fortune, foremost was Johan Toll, whom he had forsaken, almost betrayed, who was serving him, as far as any man could, in the South, but whom he would never see again; then of Magnus Sprengtporten, sulking in the Arch Duchy, of Goran Sprengtporten, now at the court of Katherine, an open renegade.

The bold devices, the total hazards, the vast designs—for Gustaf intended to use them all in order to free his country, defeat the Danes and Russia, so as to secure

his frontiers for ever, then to restore the French monarchy to its ancient glory, for he was very well informed from the agents he had in France, as to the position there—were grand and lofty. Meanwhile, the details, that were essential, were childish, almost ridiculous in his own judgment.

"Is there a costume of a peasant of the Dales in the theatrical wardrobe?" he asked one of his secretaries, and recalled his wife's sneer—"What disguise next?" It was brought—a short black jacket, a silver-lined hat, grey hose and breeches.

On September 11th, Gustaf and six officers left Stockholm for the Dales, the gloomy table-land that slopes from Dovrefield to the Norwegian frontier where stern winds rush over the scanty earth that covers some of the richest and most splendid minerals in the world, where the loaves made from the scanty harvest are served on tables of splendid porphyry and quartz in peasants' huts.

Chapter 64

Gustaf possessed the supreme art of the subtle minded man, he could, at an extremity, reduce a hundred complicated issues to one of complete simplicity, and do this with sincerity. Even Essen and Armfelt, who knew him so well, were surprised at the ease with which he reduced the tangle of his fortunes to this one immediate objective, the appeal to the miners and mineral workers of Dalarne.

They knew that, though he was a superb actor and orator, and though he now brilliantly used all his gifts to forward his purpose, he succeeded because he was not playing a part, because he was, although in a desperate position, still endeavouring to fulfil his conception of kingship. The peasants clearly understood the plight of Sweden and responded. The situation, as told to them in Gustaf's silver voice, was simple and one easily grasped by everyone. The ancient enemy, the Danes, was advancing on the frontiers and towards the wealthy, unprotected city of Goteborg, the army, the nobles, the Riksdag had proved treacherous, cowardly; the King put the country's case directly to the burgesses and manual workers, whose representatives had always supported him in the Estates.

He spoke from the churchyard of Mora, on lake Seljan, the spot from which Gustaf Vasa had made his similar appeal, nearly three centuries before.

His art unconsciously aided his desperate sincerity; the graces that had charmed the most exquisite and accomplished of courts, equally fascinated the gathered magistrates and citizens who had left their desks and shops, the peasants who had left the fields, the miners who had left their pits and the quarrymen who had left their galleries of porphyry at Jeldspar to listen to the descendant of Gustaf Vasa.

The king felt the joy of success, almost as something tangible, a golden apple in the hand, a star on the breast, though his purpose was pure as it was desperate, he did know something of the vivid pleasure he had felt when commanding an audience by his talents, either behind the lamps of the stage, in the Senate, in the public square, or at the rostrum of the Academy.

It was yet another triumphal progress, such as he had often enjoyed; he was alive to the danger of rousing to a war temper these simple, hearty and ingenious people, but he believed that he would always be able to control them; at times, though his passionate resolve was never overcast or his actions delayed, he felt himself managing some magnificent pageant such as he had often directed in the salons of Drottningholm or the glades of Gripsholm. Very splendid to him was this drama in which he took the leading part, the gathering of the Dalesmen at Leksaad, Tuna and Falun, the mounted escort on their country horses, the humble houses lit by tapers stuck in the windows, the workers in the copper mines holding high flaming knots of resin on high as the King, in overalls, descended to the mine, and deep in the Swedish earth drank to the good fortune of Falun; the trooping of the volunteers, thousands of sturdy men, fine marksmen, deft mechanics, the red copper domes of the churches, the dark green lakes, all this flickered through the mind of the actor and dramatist, while the man of action took quick measure and skilful precautions.

Disregarding the despairing dispatches from the capital which was paralysed by fear of advancing armies of Danes and Russians, Gustaf pushed on his preparations, arming and drilling his men as best he could; some of them had seen service, some even had marched under Karl XII, and these ancient officers were still able to offer instruction and advice; young General Armfelt was put in charge of these enthusiastic, though ill-armed and untrained forces, on a message from the Duke of Sudermania stating that the Prince of Hesse, commanding the Danes, had advanced into Sweden, taken by storm the forts of Venersborg and Elfsborg; a few days forced march could bring him under the walls of Goteborg, and all the dispatches that Gustaf received, repeated the warning that Vallquist had given him before he left Stockholm—"the loss of Goteborg means the loss of Sweden, no conquests, no favourable peace would compensate for this disaster."

Gustaf knew that the garrison of Goteborg was small, that the Prince of Hesse had captured a thousand men sent to its assistance, and that General Dumetz, the Governor, was likely to be infected with the treachery of the noble officers who had signed the Anjala pact.

Gustaf wrote to Ruuth—"A few disloyal aristocrats will ruin the state—among the burgesses and the peasantry there is the greatest possible patriotism, their pure affection, simply expressed, is most moving to me, for I know that I am taking away all the robust manhood of the Dales and that those who stay behind would be defenceless should the enemy advance."

He returned to Stockholm, leaving Armfelt in charge of the Dalesmen who had accepted his leadership with warm devotion. The chill autumn breezes were ruffling the lakes and blowing the last leaves off the trees in the palace garden; the air of the capital was sullen, the citizens felt betrayed, it was dangerous for an officer to show himself in the streets, he was likely to be insulted and jostled; no one believed that there was any hope to be placed in the horde of yokels the King was bringing on a scene already confused, but his action was admired, even if he was infatuate, he was active and serene, while the memory of Anjala, of Swedish soldiers who had refused to fight the enemy, the sight of nobles lounging in coffee shops and public places while the commercial capital of the country was in acute danger was deeply irritating to a proud and warlike people; the newspapers

published squibs and cartoons against the nobles, who, in their turn, sneered in their clubs and closets, mocked bitterly at the childish project of opposing the raw levies of the Dales against the regular army commanded by the Prince of Hesse, a singularly ambitious Prince, close to the throne of Denmark.

The King's friends waited at the palace. Count Fersen and Baron Pechlin, chief of the King's enemies, remained closed in their fine mansions, the whimpering Queen and her sickly son had retired to Ulriksdal, Gustaf could not well have endured their presence now; he had to think for the moment and the moment only, to live as if the immediate hour was all he had, to shut out the eternal vistas that led, perhaps, to extinction, to shut out the sound of the dead drums in the Riddarsholm church and of Gluck's dark music, he had to forget even that faint, sad dream of driving in a silver sledge, over the ice, Jeanne d'Egmont beside him, the stars overhead reflected in the frozen lake, their way the wild swan's way towards the Hyperborean regions beyond the Arctic north.

"Do you think I am too much 'head in the clouds'?" he asked Elis Schorderheim, and the King's blue eyes flashed, as they did when he was excited, so deep and vivid a blue that it seemed unnatural; his fair hair hung loose, the drag at his lip and the dent in his temple were noticeable; Schorderheim fumbled with a violet coloured glass, the King had asked for a heavy red wine, Burgundy, that he did not usually favour. Schorderheim had noticed that when he was excited he demanded food and drink, such as he was usually indifferent to or disdained.

"It might seem to many that I am beyond reason," he added, "that everything I do is touched by folly, from my audacious coup d'état to my peasant army, from my social reforms to my operas and dramas. How many costumes have I worn, Schorderheim, from my Karl XII uniform that was so effective to the peasant garb with which I won the Dalesmen!"

He spoke as if in contempt of himself and of the means he had used to establish his monarchy, but recovered with his sweet and ready smile.

"Every harlequinade ends at last, Schorderheim, lights out, at last, one costume is the last disguise."

"Meanwhile," asked the Herald, who understood this mood, "what is the next adventure of your Majesty, who is still young and animated by genius?"

"To save Goteborg."

"So I thought, Sire."

"I wish that Johan Toll were going with me."

"Ah, Toll! He works well in the south, Sire."

"I betrayed him and he will never look on me again; perhaps he will help my son to help Sweden."

"You betrayed him for Sweden."

"That is true," replied Gustaf gravely, "and he understands, but I have lost him, as I have lost so many; these nobles!—they cleave the state in half!"

"And you, Sire, deepen that cleavage by calling on the peasants—will the nobles ever forgive that?"

"I care nothing, I am desperate." Gustaf used a word now common to all who spoke of him, "these men betrayed Sweden, they are corrupt, cowardly, if I survive this war, I shall come to close clutch with them."

“Toll and Sprengtporten—were correct in their judgment in ‘72,” commented the Herald. “Instead of being the magnanimous liberal-minded statesman who gave a modern constitution to the country, you *should* have used the prison, the racks, the block, swept away your enemies and made yourself an absolute monarch—”

“I may do that yet—but always without bloodshed. Never that. My aim is peace, security, I fight for peace, for security for Sweden.”

“No one who knows you could doubt your sincerity,” said the Herald. “Will you not rest?”

“What is rest?” asked the King. “I think that I have forgotten. I sit in a padded chair, as now, and do nothing, but it is not rest. I lie in a down bed and again it is not rest, and if I sleep my dreams awake me. The season that begins, neither day nor night, Schorderheim, is bright, to me, with ghosts and flitting fancies.”

The Herald could have named some of these phantoms but was silent; the King continued, shading his long face with his long hand. “I have sent for Karl and Count Sparre—an old man, but one who fought under Prince Eugen and Saxe, I think I shall have help from an unexpected quarter, neither Britain nor Prussia wish to see Denmark push the terms of the Treaty of Copenhagen to the extent of an annexation of Sweden, M. Elliot, the British Minister at Copenhagen, is crossing into Sweden to take the waters at Medevi—if he arrives in time, I shall see him. I cannot wait beyond six o’clock to-morrow morning.”

“Your Majesty cannot wait for the Dalesmen?”

“No, six thousand of them under Armfelt should be soon on the way to Goteborg, but I cannot wait—nor for Karl, busy, no doubt, with his mystic hocus-pocus, if he delays—I wish that I could be sure of Karl and Frederic, Schorderheim, but at a push, they always fight well.”

The Herald again urged on the King some repose, and Gustaf promised to lie down for a few hours in the private bedchamber that he used when incognito at the palace, but no sooner was he in this apartment than he rang the bell for his bodyservant and commanded the presence of Captain Pontus Liljehorn who was with the officers of the Guards on duty in the palace; this noble had remained loyal to the King who had always favoured him and kept him about his person, with other members of the young aristocracy, whom he hoped to train in his own traditions of patriotism and public service.

Pontus Liljehorn, in his splendid uniform, and the military casque surmounted by the upright white feathers, made a figure of elegance and breeding, of pride and beauty, that the King instantly mentally contrasted with the Dalesmen who were hastening, with the ancient muskets they had re-fashioned themselves, to the relief of Goteborg, and his own daring in thus setting class against class was sharply before his mind—“How different they are—yet Armfelt, more splendid than Liljehorn, has gained their fidelity.” Looking on this young man, he recalled the group of pages whom he had seen before his coronation, he asked the news of Ribbing and Klas Horn.

Captain Liljehorn replied that both were in Scania.

“You see,” smiled the King, “I do not know the whereabouts of my own officers. This has been a most grievous treason, Pontus.”

“Yes, Sire.”

“Can you understand it—noblemen, Swedes, soldiers?”

“It was because of Toll, an outsider, Sire,” said the soldier slightly. “But politics are beyond my capacity, even my interest.”

“This was not a question of politics, Pontus, but of military duty.”

Gustaf was interested in the young man who had been in his intimate service all his life; he led him on to express his opinions, and understood that though Captain Liljehorn was loyal, he felt that his class had a strong case against the King—there was the old, festering grievance, Gustaf had not punished his enemies after ‘72, and the continuing new raw grievance that the King advanced, flattered and even gave his confidence to men like Toll, who were not *frolse*—that is, belonging to the dominant and privileged class.

“I let Toll go,” said Gustaf, too curious as to his companion’s attitude of mind to be offended or disturbed. “Yes, a man of genius, of pure intentions—but the nobles revolted, nevertheless, and on the field, in the face of the enemy.”

“In what other way could they show their displeasure?” asked Captain Liljehorn ingenuously. “It is a matter one cannot explain, your Majesty has set the nobility down.”

“Never—I encourage talent and patriotism in every class.”

“It is the same thing,” replied the young guardsman, with his slight pouting air of a pampered page. “But, for my part, I would have fought for your Majesty and I am prepared to follow you anywhere.”

Gustaf smiled good-naturedly. Pontus Liljehorn was a palace ornament, no more; the King was fond of him, had twice paid his debts and gave him an allowance from his private purse; he believed, too, in the youth’s honesty, but he would not take a gambler, a fribbler, with him to Goteborg, Liljehorn had no depth in his character, as had Gustaf Armfelt, equally brilliant at the Court, in the spectacle, the salon and in the rude Dales.

“This charming fellow,” thought Gustaf, half laughing at himself, “will do very well for the peace celebrations when I have defeated Denmark and Russia, he will not do for my present ragged adventure—”

Aloud he asked for the news of Liljehorn’s companions. “I have lost sight of many of them—the last few months,” he thought of the sallow-faced child who had pointed the toy pistol at him. “Where is Anckarstrom since I saved him from the consequence of his rash pamphleteering?”

The young officer looked aside.

“I do not often see him, he stays on his estate, he is very headstrong and melancholy.”

“Why? He should have remained in the army for which he was trained, he has his fortune, his wife and children—you do see him, then, sometimes, Pontus?”

The King spoke without the least suspicion, he was keeping the young man with him because he did not wish to be alone, and questioning him because he was earnest to come at the mind of the class and generation Pontus Liljehorn represented; that weak and simple-minded youth was easily induced, by so skilful a diplomat as Gustaf, to disclose the little that he knew; it was not much for Pontus Liljehorn was interested only in that life where his rank, youth and beauty were passports to the easy pleasures he found sufficient occupation for his comfortable days.

But he did sometimes frequent clubs, the modest house of the Arfmedsson, he had heard seditious talk even among the guard officers, Ancharstrom and Ribbing made much of Johan von Engerstrom who was a philosopher, Liljehorn said, of some learning and strange ideas, the fashionable dandy Klas Horn was influenced by his father, who was a friend of Baron Pechlin's.

"Pechlin!" exclaimed Gustaf, startled by the unexpected sound of his prime enemy's name, "does that man of over seventy years meddle with the young officers of my Guards?"

"O no, Sire!" replied Captain Liljehorn. "Your Majesty speaks as if there had been—as if there was—a conspiracy."

"What else was Anjala?" asked Gustaf, smiling at the other's childishness. "I do not suspect you, nor your friends, but do not associate with hotheads, nor frequent the meetings of secret societies, nor dabble in any manner of fanaticism—consider France, I dread to consider France!"

"The French nobility are loyal to the monarchy," said Liljehorn stupidly.

"There is another set of circumstances." The King still spoke as if to a simpleton. "Louis XVI has to fear his middle class and his peasants, I have to fear my nobility—and what have they against me? It is merely this, that after having been tyrants so long they resent being deposed from tyranny."

"It is hard to lose what is yours by right," persisted the young officer. "We no longer have the respect we once had—this army of peasants is insulting."

The King laughed pleasantly.

"You can say that, after Anjala? Come, Pontus, beware of fanatics, keep away from that muddled sage, Engerstrom, and that bilious intellectual Baron Ture von Bjleke—come, now, Pontus, do not sulk nor be imprudent, or I must inform my Chief of Police of your activities—"

"There is nothing of which to inform Baron Liljensparre, Sire," protested the young soldier with so ingenuous an expression that Gustaf laughed again.

"I believe that is true—he is too alert to allow a conspiracy in the capital, though he could not prevent one on the field, but keep to you gaieties, my dear Pontus, avoid, not only fanatics, but disappointed men."

"None of these—" began Captain Liljehorn, but Gustaf interrupted swiftly.

"Yes, indeed, they are disappointed, consider, Anckarstrom, I remember him, hanging greedily on the verge of pleasure—that dancer, Carlotta Busoni, he longed for her smiles, but dare not come forward, then, he should have remained in the army, what is he? Nothing. He broods on that and writes treason to the state. Klas Ribbing is resentful because Essen has won the heiress he wished for, your two philosophers are also smarting because they have not had the recognition they believe they deserve—leave them alone, my dear fellow."

Gustaf smiled affectionately and dismissed the confused young man with as much authority as if he had had a well equipped army and a stable government behind him. But as soon as he was alone, his spirits sank, he glanced at the clock, Count Sparre, suddenly called from his country house, was late, there was no one else to be given the task the King had in mind; thinking of this veteran and the two ancient officers who had drilled the willing Dalesmen, Gustaf laughed again, his temperament never allowed him to forget the harlequinade that always flickers round the edge of great events.

These hot-heads! Even Pontus, even Klas, though his affectionate friends and servants, were touched by discontent—that fool, Anckarstrom, whom he had saved once from his own folly's suit, for whom he was a little compassionate, for the fellow seemed so unhappy, with his silly scribblings, Engerstrom and Bjleke with their bitter philosophy—Gustaf thought—"they must be saved from themselves, these clubs and societies must be broken up, I'll speak to Liljensparre about it—after I return from Goteborg."

Chapter 65

The King could not sleep long, an hour or so of forgotten dreams and he was awake; he instantly remembered what he had to do, and that if Sparre had arrived he would have been awakened so, the old General had not come. The palace was silent, and beyond the palace the city, the night watch lamp flame rose and sank on the marble hearth, Gustaf left his couch and threw on his chamber robe, stooping to take the little light. He was unattended save for a body servant who slept in a closet nearby, he heard this man's deep breathing through the half-open door; then, on a sudden desire, born of his agitation and his resolve to undertake perilous enterprises alien to his nature, he passed quietly through the palace, most of the apartments were closed, until he reached the theatre that had not often been used since he had built the Opera House.

The scene that his dim lamp fleetingly revealed was so different from that he had seen, on this spot, on the eve of his Coronation, as to seem unrelated—it did not appear to him to be the same place. "I was dreaming of that old stage machinery at Gripsholm when I awoke," thought Gustaf, "that dream brought me here—always the theatre, the disguise, the labyrinth, too, the imprisoned King—no, not Eric, but the man in the web of stone—the masquerade, Peyron with the cherry red mask."

There were linen covers over the chairs, the curtains of dark blue velvet were pulled aside from the stage that showed a drop cloth painted with a daubed view of Venice, above, were the ropes and pulleys of the flies, slats painted with gray vases showed the wings, bare and dark, in the orchestra pit the music stands were hooded; the stillness had a breathless quality, as if invisible performers were occupying the dusty stage, where the faint light of the King's lamp but feebly disturbed the shadows, interlaced, one darkness on a deeper darkness. Not as much as a spangle remained of that gorgeous pageantry with which Gustaf had preceded his first success—the story of Peleus, the delicate music blending with the cascades of stream water, the dances of the nymphs with their seaweed hair, the glitter of pearl and nacre—those brilliant and exciting hours floated across the King's disturbed mind; they had been the prelude to his first achievement, then they were gone, he was alone in a dusty, disused little theatre and he thought sharply:

"Perhaps there is a huge conspiracy against me, with Pechlin, the spider in the stone web, hidden at the heart of it—these societies, clubs and magicians, these

fortune tellers and Swedenborgians—I thought, once, Karl had a weapon against me there—is he in this? And Fersen, the old traitor to every cause—even those young men—not more than twenty-five years of age, I think, any of them—it might be so—when I recall Anjala—no Swede would ever touch me, but the Holsteiners, the Finns, some Danish or Russian spy—assassinated!"

The mute drums of the Riddarsholm church seemed to beat from the dark orchestra pit, the shot torn jerkins to hang on the limbs of a ghostly pierrot who jerked across the stage, Jeanne d'Egmont robed as Iphigénie, as the bride of Bayard, robed in a shroud, duplicated on every empty chair, showed sad and ineffectual against the painted canal where the masked gondolier grinned from the cracked canvas.

Peyron was there, slain so stupidly in his cherry red mask, the bitter Prussian mother, trying to blast him through his son was there, good Beylon who had died quietly, giving no one any trouble, was there, passing across but not treading the stage boards.

Gustaf shivered, slowly conscious of his chilled limbs; he had been troubled by his health lately, his body had seemed as if it might break beneath the ardours of his spirit, though yet in the prime of life he was too aware that his youth had gone, there was another terror, that he might die the assassin way before he had secured Sweden—security—was it a fool's word?

"My fantasies," he put out his hand towards the stage, it was empty and in his mind was a sound as of puppets falling together; "it is a clear issue—the King against the nobles. I have the rest of the country behind me, they must go. I shall act on Toll's advice, these men must be reduced to the common level."

In those grotesque surroundings he resolved to destroy the power of the nobility, as they themselves had already destroyed their own prestige and honour.

Chapter 66

The King, unobserved and alone, wearing a circular travelling cloak over his austere Karl XII uniform, rode out of Stockholm towards Karlstadt. A cold rain was falling through the light northern early morning; he was amazed at his own loneliness, he would have been glad of the company of Count Sparre, who had not arrived in time to ride with him on the stages to Goteborg, but it was Toll of whom he thought, Toll, the man who understood him so well, with whom he could exchange thoughts so easily.

Baron Ruuth, Toll's friend, perhaps more truly his tool, honest, able and discreet, had advised the King against the solitary expedition, as he had advised him against the war. "Wait for Sparre, wait until Armfelt is there,"—ah, wait, wait, for this, for that! One man can ride swiftly, one fresh horse, one farm cart, one dray can be found at any post, at any village. The King rode on, inspired by that nameless force that has so many names, foremost the name of destiny.

Chapter 67

The King waited beneath the walls of Goteborg, the pale northern night was unclouded, the rain-drops dripped from his cloak, from his shaggy horse, as he shouted across the moat; the men in the guardhouse hesitated to lower the drawbridge; it was midnight, nothing was clearly to be seen, they knew that the Danes were but a few hours' march away; might not this cavalier be some trickster sent in advance of the Prince of Hesse's troops? Some of the burgesses were roused; the moving orange lights of lanterns and torches showed along the quays; knowing it useless to reveal his identity since it would not be credited, Gustaf had called across the water that he carried dispatches from Sweden. After some tedious delay, the burgesses, without consulting General Deutz, the commandant of the garrison who was known to be preparing for flight, ordered the drawbridge to be lowered.

Gustaf rode across and when he came to the expectant nervous group, their flambeaux spluttering in the sleet, their faces upturned, he pulled off his hat and they recognised the face that had been so often depicted, so often caricatured.

An escort was quickly formed to take him to the Governor's house, the astonished joy with which the marvellous is greeted by simple people, took the place of the gloomy anxiety of the merchants of Goteborg—it was the King, yet could it be the King? The last news had been that he was at Karlstadt; his rough farm horse, his cloak and boots clotted with mud, his hair dark with moisture, his face whipped by rain and hail were noticed, these earthly details that made the King resemble the least of his people, also gave him the air of a hero, of one who has achieved the next to impossible for a splendid aim.

Gustaf was scarcely conscious of exhaustion, though his journey had been delayed by the wild storms of hail and snow that had suddenly arisen and though the last sixty miles had been taken at a gallop on country hacks; in some stages of his journey he had travelled in waggons behind dray horses, in all he had ridden two hundred and fifty miles in forty-eight hours; the adventure and the excitement it caused in Goteborg seemed to him slightly ludicrous, an epic burlesqued; as he changed into borrowed clothes lent by an excited man of wealth he thought—"how many more disguises?" The taunt was a refrain in his mind; he ordered that the steaming horse that had carried him so stoutly might be looked to and his own uniform dried, that General Deutz should be arrested—"Armfelt will soon be here with the Dalesmen, Sparre and my staff also—"

No one reflected, why did not the King come with his army instead of in so bizarre a fashion? Did he not choose this way because he is both an excellent actor and a first-rate impressario?

Completely swayed by his brilliant personality and his dramatic appearance in their midst, the rich, unwarlike citizens of Goteborg surrounded the house where the King lodged, shouting and throwing their caps in the air; now they had no intention of surrendering to the Danes. The King lay alone, at last; he had a few hours before the dawn, when he must speak to the Town Council, inspect the Arsenal, see that the gold in the Bank was buried, the women and children sent

away, all routine preparations for a siege. The city was wealthy—the East Indian merchants might be asked to lend their horses to the artillery; there were the Town Bands, hitherto dispirited, no doubt, but now easily animated; Armfelt would soon arrive, and Sparre with the guards and dragoons.

Gustaf put out his candle and lay in the half light, racked by physical fatigue, but smiling to himself—this was to be a King, to perform feats like this and to be applauded for them, to change the destinies of cities, of peoples—never had he felt a fiercer sense of possession of the land than when he had ridden from Karlstadt to Goteborg alone, through the first tempests of winter, getting a mount or a ride where he could, travelling roads unknown to any but humble travellers, round the vast Lake Vanern, ice green and lashed with the storm, to the great city on the shores of the Kattegat. Sweden was his, to guard, to protect, he was the King, not the master but the saviour.

He felt that the eternal friendly native gods of stream and water-break wished him well on his reckless adventure; and that even the spirits of the storm did not impede his way; soaked in his deep pocket was his copy of *A Thousand and One Nights*, he remembered it with pleasure, as he turned to sleep on his alien bed.

Within a few hours he was inspecting the dusty mouths of the neglected cannon on the ramparts, Armfelt was marching into Goteborg with his Dalesmen, and Sparre had arrived with the staff officers, companies of Dragoons and Guards from Stockholm according to the instructions that Gustaf had left in the palace for the veteran's arrival.

By the time that the Prince of Hesse sent a herald to demand the surrender of Goteborg, the garrison numbered seven thousand men, backed by a resolute and alert population, and the Danish officer was received by Gustaf with carefully calculated pomp, conducted round the efficient defences and conducted blindfold to the Danish outposts with a courteous refusal from Gustaf to entertain any notion of delivering to the enemy so splendid and so well fortified a city as Goteborg. Gustaf was acutely aware that his own dramatic appearance had been the chief means of restoring the spirit of the city abandoned by its natural defenders as his appearance in the Dales had been the chief means of raising the peasant army, but he was using diplomacy as well as heroic gesture. He had met Mr. Hugh Elliot at Karlstadt when on his rapid, reckless gallop from Stockholm, and had spared him a few hours in the local post house, and there the Englishman, who had been following Gustaf from halt to halt for days, assured the King of Sweden that neither Great Britain nor Prussia would endure the military triumph of Denmark.

Mr. Elliot, without the means of either bribery or force, succeeded in persuading the Prince of Hesse, that an assault on Goteborg would be gravely injudicious; in this effort he was helped by the news of the sinking of the Danish transports by some Swedish warships under the command of Prince Frederik. The Dalesmen, in their simplicity, longed to fight, and Gustaf doubted if it would not be wise, now that his fortunes had risen, to establish the prestige of Sweden by a victory in the field, but Mr. Elliot urged him to accept the withdrawal of the Danes from the country as sufficient triumph for his policy and justification of his exertions.

The Dalesmen murmured that they had been called from their homes for nothing, Armfelt declared that he must cut a foolish figure in their eyes, while the King was conscious of a sense of anti-climax at which he laughed himself.

In truth the relief of Gustaf and his friends at the averted invasion was so intense that they could afford to jest at the tame ending of their enterprise—"as for the Dalesmen," said Gustaf, "I can use them—"

"Against the Empress?" asked Armfelt.

"No—Katherine will rage, but she has enough to do—with the Turks."

"What then? Your chief concern is peace, Sire, surely you will send these men home."

"Peace, ay, indeed, peace, at home and abroad, I can rely on these faithful fellows."

Armfelt glimpsed his intentions.

"You will take them to Stockholm?"

"Yes. Perhaps."

Gustaf turned his deep blue eyes on his friend and smiled, he was thinking of the resolution he had taken in the deserted little theatre in the Stockholm palace, he intended to put that into effect; he felt more and more alone with his adamant intention.

His inner life centred round chance pictures of the past, Visby, in Gotland, visited when he was a boy, the ancient Norse fortifications, in winter the blue dark trees, firs and yews, over the tawny brown bubbles of water, the hollow green ice, under the purple-black thunder vapours, the ocean, dark also and stirred with trails of foam, the graves formed in the shape of ships, facing seaward, out of the forest, in the spring flowers growing on the green grass decks, in the autumn wild apples and the bird cherry hanging within arm's reach, in the spring the thick warm white and butter yellow lilies opening on the still lakes, always, on the roofs of farms and cottages, on wayside shrines, the solar symbol, the golden flower of greatest possible lustre, the cross in the circle, the girdling of man's spiritual forces against evil…

"I am alarmed when you smile so thoughtfully," said Arm-felt.

"I think of some beautiful places that I have seen and how I intend to keep them beautiful."

PART VI

Varala.

Chapter 68

GUSTAF convoked a Riksdaf from Goteborg, when the Danish troops had been withdrawn from Sweden; he realized what forces he confronted; nearly the entire nobility had been concerned in the confederation of Anjala, and Sweden's most formidable enemy, Russia, was embittered by the interference of Great Britain and Prussia to save Sweden, even beyond her usual fury against her northern rival. But Katherine was still, in the early winter of 1788, engaged in those ferocious military operations on the Dnieper and before the cities and fortresses of Belgrade, Bender, Akkerman and Passonitz that were the result of her long sustained attempt to defeat the Porte and restore the Greek Orthodox Empire under her tyrannical overlordship. "I have," said Gustaf, "a few weeks only, for I think that the Russians are likely to triumph on all their fronts—then they will fall on me—unless I can fall on them first."

"It will be, as always, a question of money," remarked Bishop Vallquist to whom the King spoke.

"As always—I think I can wring a subsidy out of Prussia and I must obtain large grants from the Riksdag."

Vallquist smiled; the King's audacity was contagious, though now he seemed to propose the impossible, yet had he not, single-handed, raised the Dales and saved Goteborg? The brilliant Bishop believed that moral right was entirely on the side of this monarch, who had given a liberal government to his people, seen it abused, himself betrayed and the land laid open to the invader, and who now, as, with his usual sparkling tranquillity, he informed Vallquist, intended to make himself an absolute monarch.

"The project would appear insensate, Sire, when one considers your difficulties—but when one considers your qualities, your talents, your prudence, your influence over the minds of men—then one has a good hope that you will succeed."

"Anjala," said the King, "means that a portion of my people—subjects I shall never name them—are in a band against me—and the present constitution protects them, I shall abolish the Senate—all the rotting machinery of 1720 that should have gone in 1772—but I was too young."

"The Senate has existed for six hundred centuries, Sire."

"Did I not say that it rotted? Reduce the situation to essentials, my lord—the majority of the nobles are led by a knot of traitors and cowards, rebels and knaves,

criminals who are eager to sell their country, who, indeed, as far as they are able have already done so and pocketed the price."

The King spoke coolly, but the observant Vallquist saw that he was much moved and the Bishop, as deep in his confidence as any, realized what it must have cost the King to acknowledge the treachery of those whom he had trusted, favoured, and in some instances, even honoured with his friendship.

"I have considered their case," Gustaf continued. "And mine. I take it upon myself to judge them, and I find them guilty. They have none but frivolous excuses for their baseness—I am extravagant—because I spent money on the arts, on elegant pleasures that they do not understand, I raise members of the middle classes to posts of influence—and why? Because I cannot find men of equal merit and talent among the nobles. I have given Sweden refinement, culture, learning and splendour that will not soon be forgotten. These men have no just cause to conspire against me, and they must be deprived of all power."

"You will have your life in your hands, Sire," said Vallquist simply.

"I shall be unprotected? I have thought of that—I do not intend either to disband the Dalesmen nor to take them to Stockholm; at first I thought of that, now I see I should disdain to cast this firebrand into the capital—at least, until forced to do so. I have my friends, my agents, they cannot always be with me—one cannot rely on the Burgher Guard, yes, it will mean that I shall be in constant danger of assassination—but I do not believe that any Swede would raise his hand against me."

In the dark of his mind sad phantoms arose, he checked a half-formed wish that he might have died on the field of honour, leading the Dalesmen against the Danes, but the bullet pierced jerkins in the Riddarsholm church mocked him—assassination was easy during a battle, had not Gustaf Adolf and Karl XII perhaps been assassinated?

"Katherine," he declared, recovering himself with a brilliant smile that touched his blue eyes as well as his lips, "will, no doubt, menace me with a bombardment of Stockholm, but I think her generals will be fully occupied until I am ready to meet them, even Suvarov cannot perform miracles."

To his brother Karl the King spoke openly, knowing that neither by candour nor feint could he obtain anything but an amused acquiescence in his plans from the elegant Duke of Sudermania who was neither his friend nor his active supporter, but who had never openly betrayed him or refused to obey orders; treachery might be concealed behind Karl's bland passivity; Gustaf had to chance that, he could not afford Karl's open enmity.

"You scarcely trouble to understand me, Karl; you are a useful but an indifferent ally." He paused, then asked suddenly: "Frederik seems content in the navy, he does very well, but you—I often wonder if you approve of me and my policies."

The brothers looked apart, as if the shadow of their dead mother fell between them; Gustaf recalled her passionate desire for Karl's succession to the throne, her conviction that he would outlive Gustaf, her fury at the birth of Gustaf's heir; "now, if they kill me," thought the King, "Karl will satisfy her ambition, he will be Regent for the child."

He turned to see the Duke's blue eyes regarding him steadily, and asked—

“Have you the good of Sweden at heart, Karl?”

“The question seems to me ingenuous,” smiled the Duke. “I study philosophy and mysticism. Why is one country to be preferred to another? Our connection with the House of Vasa is extremely slight—”

“You, who indulge in meditation and intercourse with spirits, may term it a spiritual heritage,” interrupted Gustaf.

“I really regard things of this world very little,” smiled Karl. “Sweden has not been grateful for your efforts, you may topple over as suddenly as the King of France, who also, I hear, has high ideals—humanly speaking, you should, of course, have listened to Toll and Sprengtporten in ‘72 and destroyed the malcontents, you should also have curbed your passion for the fine arts, very exasperating to a military caste—who dislike to see money spent in that fashion.”

“Stand by me now, and you shall enjoy a long leisure,” Gustaf interrupted again affectionately.

“I shall be discreet, I have no talents as a secret agent, besides you have already so many, but I shall support you—”

“Though without conviction,” the King added with a touch of sorrow in his beautiful voice.

“Princes have no nationality,” remarked Karl. “Our blood is mixed—that of your heir more so. You have made a profession of patriotism, it is not one that interests me very much—Russia might rule more wisely than you in Sweden, or Prussia, who knows? A Swede is, to me, the same as any other man.”

No more than this could Gustaf obtain from Karl; Vallquist and Nordin both advised that the Duke of Sudermania was not trusted far in the King’s affairs; he might be what he affected to be, a fastidious gentleman given to dabbling in all the pleasures open to place and money, doing his duty indifferently when called upon to do so, otherwise equally entertained by the society of his amiable, childless wife, or that of the mistress or quack of the moment, or he might be involved in some intricate conspiracy with the hope of mounting the throne to which he seemed so indifferent.

“Liljensparre has nothing against Karl or his friends,” mused Gustaf. “He meddles with much folly, so, once, did I—”

He thought of the ride to the wise woman’s house and his insane demand for the spectre of the dead—“ay, I was insane. What did it matter to me if she were dead or alive—she was not for me, this love has been like a garland of snow round my heart—will it never dissolve?”

Chapter 69

The King took from a portfolio of peach coloured velvet the notes for his speech delivered before the Riksdag of 1772: they were entirely apposite to the present situation.

“—hatred and discord play havoc with the realm—there have long been two factions splitting the nation, this schism begat bitterness, then vengeance, then

persecution, persecution convulsions that ravaged the whole of society…nothing was sacred in a community exasperated by hatred…an insufferable despotism of the nobles, was in its turn cowed by a few of its most powerful members—meanwhile the common people were neglected, starving amid their ruined harvests—and consider foreign affairs—born a Prince of Sweden, I am ashamed to know that there are Swedes who have betrayed their country—" Gustaf recalled making that famous speech, temperate and polished oratory, but spoken with such passion that he had thrice struck the silver sceptre he held on the table in front of him, and felt the blood hot in his face as the melodious sentences expressed his intense emotion.

A young man's enthusiasm, but it had not been quelled by years of disappointment and disillusion; all he had said in '72 was still true—his truth. Then it had been the warfare between the parties Hat and Cap—"nightcap and plume"—that he had abolished, now it was given a different complexion, but Gustaf saw it was the same strife, the nobles, the privileged, against everyone else; they grasped at all benefits the State could offer and would not even fight for her.

Gustaf thought of Anjala, the name was branded on his memory; putting aside the old, slightly faded notes, he began to make others; his quill moved rapidly over the smooth paper, there was so little time; now he was not preparing a speech—the words would come this time, without rehearsal—he was setting down a list of the Presidents of the Four Estates, all of them nonentities, the King intending to rule through his secret agents; the Clergy were to be managed by Bishop Nordin, his brother Johan Magnus, was the Royalist agent in the ranks of the nobles; these numbered nine hundred and fifty and Gustaf reckoned that at least seven hundred of these were supporters of the confederacy of Anjala.

"There are the enemies," the King muttered to himself, "there the danger lies."

He was sure of the two lowest Estates, who were, indeed, in high good humour with the throne, after coming to the King's assistance in the Dales and at Goteborg and who hoped, not only for some reward for their merits, but for the discomfiture of the insolent privileged aristocracy, whom most of them considered as their hereditary enemies. Gustaf had in his portfolio a sheaf of cartoons and lampoons issued by the middle classes against the treacherous officers, in which every noble was freely termed corrupt and cowardly, if not a spy of Russia. Gustaf also knew, through the medium of the brilliant and tireless Vallquist, that most of the Burgesses had received instructions to vote the fullest possible financial aid to the Crown, and to demand the trial of the officers who had refused to fight when in the face of the enemy.

Gustaf also noted down some of the arrangements he had made for entertaining the Estates during their residence in Stockholm, good lodgings, plentiful food and well-run clubs were worth, Gustaf considered, the money they cost, ill as that could be spared, for these free and convenient comforts would prevent many a deputy from being corrupted by the clubs run by the secret societies. In this manner Gustaf hoped to avoid some such deep poisonous undergrowth as had sapped the monarchy in Paris where filthy Jacobins whom Gustaf thought of with revulsion plotted treason in squalid cellars lit by candles stuck in bottles.

Chapter 70

"Peace is my fondest desire, but only that peace which is certain, sure, honourable. When we prayed to-day in the cathedral Bishop Vallquist preached on the text—*eschew evil and do good, seek peace and ensue it.*"

The King heard his own voice in the silent Riddarhuset, he watched the silent Estates before him as he developed his theme—the war had been justified, it had been successful, it must be continued until peace was secured, always that, peace, to be forced from Russia now that she was engaged in a terrible war provoked by lawless ambition.

Putting his fortunes to the test Gustaf demanded what he had never asked for yet, a secret Committee of Ways and Means, suggesting twelve nobles, six priests, six burgesses, and, for the first time in Swedish history, six peasants, to decide the most vital concerns of Sweden.

While the other Estates at once elected their members, Count Fersen, speaking for the nobles, asked that the King's proposal should be shelved, upon which Baron de Geer, head of the opposition, in whose house the Nobles met, refusing the clubs offered them by the King, rose and demanded that His Majesty be petitioned to search out and punish the scribblers who were constantly defaming the aristocratic officers.

Gustaf had expected some such challenge, but hardly one as frivolous as this that was received by ironical shouts from all save the members of the First Estate.

This struggle of procedure lasted for several days, until passions were no longer to be restrained by the aged Marshal of the Diet, Count Karl Levenhaupt, Gustaf's cat's paw, and the continued delays of the nobles to elect their members of the Ways and Means Committee provoked serious outbursts of temper, even the drawing of swords and fisticuffs, the tumult coming to a climax on the King sending a message to the First Estate, bidding them at once elect their delegates, and not, by their wilful behaviour, waste precious, perhaps vital time, required for warlike preparations against Russia.

Karl de Geer, supported by Count Fersen, rushed the First Estate through a bitter debate lasting two days, at the end of which, refusing the Lord Marshal's attempt either to adjourn the House or to choose the members of the Committee, the more violent of the nobles overwhelmed their leader, even by personal threats, and passed a motion refusing to consider the question of a secret Committee, this motion, in its turn, being refused even consideration by the other three Estates.

Count Fersen, agitated beyond his usual prudence and his usual calm, obtained an interview with the King.

"You have brought the machinery of the State to a standstill," declared Gustaf, with haughtiness uncommon to him, "and this when you are well aware that every moment is like gold to me, since I intend to press the war with Russia at once—"

"The war, Sire," replied Fersen hotly, "should never have been begun and it is not our intention that it shall be continued."

At these words from one who had always been respectful, cool, and in manner at least, moderate, Gustaf to whom the last few days had been a time of extreme

tension, assumed the attitude of a monarch to his subject, curtly told Fersen that compromise or discussion were alike impossible and dismissed him in a manner that further irritated the mounting fury of the ageing nobleman.

That even the expectant crowds in Stockholm, all idle, since the action of the nobility had left them nothing to do, heard that the Dalesmen had been summoned to the capital.

Chapter 71

"Will you, Sire, always the most temperate of men, go to extremes?" asked Vallquist with admiration and anxiety.

"It is these traitors who had gone to extremes," replied Gustaf. "They used violence, overbore Levenhaupt in his chair, and Fersen would have overborne me—"

"Consider," urged the Bishop, "how little force you have behind you—"

But, even as he spoke, he knew that the King would consider nothing but his aim, the unification of the nation and the forcing of a just peace from Russia.

"Fifty Dragoons are the only regular troops in Stockholm," remarked the Bishop, with no intention of influencing the King whom he knew to be immovable, but reckoning up for his own satisfaction, the hazards of this extraordinary situation; "the nobles number nearly a thousand, without their sons, servants, and hangers-on—they have the advantage, also, of being the only Estate that is armed—your Majesty, who so loathes bloodshed, would not wish to bring them into a direct clash with the Dalesmen?"

"You speak in curiosity, to probe my mind," said the King affectionately. "I intend nothing less than a revolution. Arm-felt has his Dalesmen quartered at Drottningholm—but I do not think that I shall need to use them."

Chapter 72

On February 17th, 1789, the Estates met in the Rijksaal in the Palace, with due pomp and stately order, the King and Senators in their robes, Gustaf crowned with the silver diadem and bearing the silver sceptre of Gustaf Adolf II; he now appeared the symbolic figure of a sovereign in full regalia, as impersonal as an effigy in his rich traditional garments, but when he spoke, without study or notes, he was not only the consummate orator, but the passionate and deeply moved human being.

"Fourteen days have passed since I told you of an enemy arming and a realm that requires instant defence—three of the Estates hastened to obey me by electing members to the Emergency Committee I proposed—but you, my lords, delayed, persisted in delays, and even insulted and outraged your president!"

At this direct attack, the nobles moved impatiently in their places, incredulity held them silent; each man wanted to hear for himself to what lengths the King would go in thus daring to rebuke his nobles in the presence of the other Estates.

"I shall not permit a mere fraction of the nation to forward the interests of our enemies—"

Murmurs rose and the King struck his sceptre lightly on the table in front of his throne before which he stood.

"I tell you all that if I am not enabled speedily to pay my army, get my fleet afloat, if our coasts are bombarded, Finland is seized and this capital menaced, it will be no fault of mine, who wear the crown of Gustaf Adolf II as unblemished as when I received it, no, the fault will be with those who wish to welcome the Russians in Stockholm—"

Gustaf's emotion, though well curbed by his practised arts, was now such as to charge his whole person with energy; even his opponents, who heard his words with rage and terror, were fascinated despite themselves by the powerful sincerity of his oratory, his enthusiastic manner, the grace of his gestures and that magnetism that is given off by intense earnestness of purpose.

Gustaf then ordered the premier peer of Sweden, Count Brahe, Count Fersen and Baron de Geer, to depart to the Riddarhuset, there to form a deputation to apologize to their Land Marshal, for their outrageous behaviour towards him, then to conduct him, with due honour, to the Presidential chair from which they had forced him by their threats. As the King ceased to speak, Count Fersen, trembling with agitation, rose and asked leave to reply; this the King at once refused, and again striking the table with the silver sceptre, ordered the nobles to retire as they had been commanded.

"You are not," he exclaimed, "here to argue with me, but to obey me; go, at once, to your own Chamber."

The other Estates, motionless from expectancy and awe, watched, forgetful of any other issue, this contest of wills between one unarmed man and nine hundred armed men, between whom there was the tension of a long quarrel; to Vallquist, one of the keenest and most concerned of the observers present, the moment appeared of tremendous importance, one on which the entire future of Sweden hung; if the nobles were now to revolt openly against the King, he would be as powerless in Stockholm as was Louis XVI in Paris and might soon be in the same plight, while the triumphant First Estate would conclude a peace with Russia that would place Sweden in the same position as Poland.

The King had no backing beyond his own authority and personality, despite the summons of the Dalesmen to the capital, an act that Vallquist considered desperate and likely to provoke a ferocious class war.

For a full moment the slender robed and crowned figure faced in silence the angry gentlemen who stared back with scowls, many of them with their hands on their swords, then they turned for guidance to Fersen and Brahe, awaiting a signal from these, their leaders.

This was given by Fersen, who shuddering into a sigh, said in a voice completely changed from its usual controlled and stately tones—"Let us go!"

Chapter 73

When the last gentleman had withdrawn the King proceeded to consolidate his triumph in the manner on which he had already decided, and again thanking the three Estates who had been witnesses of the humiliation of the nobility, for their loyal services, which he did in a moving, sincere manner, he told them that he intended to abolish all differences between the classes, and to give to the ofralse or unprivileged orders the same rights as the fraise or privileged, “those rights which every Swede should enjoy,” adding an invitation to them to elect representatives to concur with him on the details of this matter, a meeting for this purpose to be held that same afternoon, as time urged them so desperately in the matter of the Russian war.

Chapter 74

The King disrobed, the crown on the desk beside him, sat exhausted in his chamber; Vallquist viewed him with apprehension and awe; the Bishop had been doubtful as to the wisdom of this last audacious challenge to the nobility when the design had been first confided to him, and he still felt dubious, intense as was his admiration of Gustaf’s personal qualities.

“They will never forgive this,” he remarked.

“As I shall never forgive Anjala,” replied the King wearily.

“I intend to put this through—”

“It is a revolution—the second that your Majesty has engineered.”

“Yes,” said Gustaf; his intention was so firmly taken, that he did not wish to discuss it even with so close a friend as Vallquist, who, after all, did not wholly understand either the King’s purpose or his temperament; there were none left, Gustaf reflected, who would wholly understand. Toll would have been with him, hand and glove, but Toll was in the South, sending routine dispatches, Karl did not disclose himself, Frederik, who had arrived unexpectedly in Stockholm, was inclined to hedge, the Queen sent messages expressing only fears for her own safety and demanding double guards, the Archbishop affected a fit of gout, so as to be out of the way, and even Arm-felt complained that he could not much longer keep the Dales-men quiet with their pay in arrears, cheated of their fight with the Danes at Goteborg and now held off the rebellious nobility. Gustaf tried to think of other subjects than these harrying matters; he wished that he could listen to music, rehearse a drama, make an oration before the Academy, or forgetting everything about him read an Eastern fairy tale.

He travelled into some of the perspectives of the past, to recall his first meeting with Toll, in this very room, his handling of Jeanne d’Egmont’s letters, the weapons that Toll had refused to take with him to Scania, the loss of the little white glove, Peyron in Paris, now a city of horror and confusion, dead with the red silk mask on his face, the Crown Prince, his child, screaming as the cannon was

fired at sunset from the royal yacht, until these threads, these corridors, these labyrinths into the scenery of fantasy, blended into one shining road across the blue ice, the way of the wild swan's flight, beyond the eternal snows to eternal summer.

Count Brahe, as premier peer of Sweden, delivered to the King the result of the First Estate's deliberations, a written message stating that the nobility refused to apologize to the Land Marshal.

Gustaf could imagine how stormy, how furious that meeting of the gentlemen had been, and with what difficulty Fersen had induced even the degree of calm needful to draw up and send this formal defiance. With this document in his pocket, the King met the Commons in the Velvet Chamber, within a few hours they had elected their delegates to the Privilege Committee and seemed prepared to perform the King's commands cheerfully; they were, however, completely taken aback and at a loss, when Gustaf read the document he had prepared without consulting anyone, and which he had written entirely in his own hand. He termed this "an act of Unity and Security" but neither that ambiguous title, the King's persuasive oratory, his flattering compliments to his loyal subjects, or the magnificent bribes he gave to these commoners by offering to them all the privileges and opportunities hitherto reserved for the nobility, could disguise from the three Estates that the King was proposing a revolution, and one that would leave him an absolute monarchy, save that the revenues of the country would remain in the hands of the Riksdag.

Before a proposal so audacious and unexpected, the leaders of the Estates wavered, and the meeting broke up in speechless astonishment.

Gustaf had been prepared for this, and informed Vallquist,

Armfelt, Frederik and Schorderheim, that he intended to force the Act of Security, or, as it truly was, the New Constitution, on the States in Congress; he had been assisted in this resolution by a petition from the three commoner Estates imploring him to "set the machinery of government in motion again."

"They wish me," said the King, with understanding and even affection, "to take on myself to decide all their hesitations, doubts and waverings. I shall certainly do so—"

"Your Majesty intends," exclaimed Vallquist, "with one Estate rebellious, the others dismayed and fearful, to insist on this new constitution?"

"It is too late to turn back, my dear Bishop, the entire adventure is fantastic, but there is no reason why a revolution should always begin among the nobles or the people—I have shown that a King can accomplish one—entirely for the benefit of the country," he added simply; "it is true that I had Toll, and the Sprengtportens in '72, and that now I am much alone, yet I hope to succeed, by reason of my very desperation—no one fights as skilfully and strongly, as the cornered man with his back to the wall."

Immediately after receiving the petition from the three lower Estates, the King gave orders to the Burgess guard to arrest twenty-one members of the opposition, these included Gustaf's arch-enemy, so long left untouched, Baron Pechlin, Count Fersen, probably as active an adversary, though a man of a better reputation, Brahe and De Geer, as leaders of the opposition, Count Horn, father of Klas Horn,

and Engerstrom, long since marked down by the King as a dangerous man, tinged by Jacobin ideas.

The citizen soldiers, aided by the efficient Chief of Police, carried out their orders without difficulty; no such daring move on the part of the King had been expected by the nobility, who were even inclined to be elated by the obvious reluctance of the other Estates to support the new Constitution, and each nobleman was quietly taken in his own house, by a file of Burgess guards, and when the short day ended, all were in prison.

The King learned of the complete success of his coup de main from his brother Frederik, who presented himself at the royal supper table with the remark.

"I have done with wavering, I now perceive, Gustaf, that right and justice are entirely on your side."

Gustaf understood him perfectly; he was much easier to handle than Karl, as long as he was sure he was on the winning side, he was a good and loyal servant.

"I shall make you military Governor of Stockholm," smiled the King, binding fast to him this useful ally, and the blue eyes of the brothers met in a good-humoured glance of mutual toleration. "And to-morrow I shall force the Estates to accept the Act of Security."

"And then we shall defeat Russia," added the Duke of Ostrogotland, who greatly relished the naval warfare in which he had proved himself an expert and where he had gained considerable glory.

"We must do so," rejoined Gustaf; "that is our entire aim—to wrest a favourable peace—a durable peace, from the Empress; this can only be achieved by destroying, or at the very least, severely crippling her fleet."

"The Swedish marine is in a fine condition," smiled Frederik complacently, "and I have no fear of the outcome of the combat."

"To your post," said Gustaf. "Keep in touch with Armfelt and his Dalesmen at Drottningholm, with the police and the Burgess Guard—order above all."

"Oh, there is no fear of trouble, very few in Stockholm know what has happened—the streets are empty, save for a few poor sinners who shout for the House of Vasa."

"We could do with more of these loyal supporters," observed the King. "I shall speak to the Chief of Police about it—I intend to overawe the Estates by my presence during the next few days, and the shouts of my faithful citizens outside the Riddarhuset would be of much assistance to me."

Chapter 75

That evening the King waited for Vallquist in his formal chamber; he had already sent to Schorderheim the fair copy of the Act of Security that was to be read before the Estates in Congress on the morrow, and his broad desk was covered by notes and jottings such as the most accomplished orator in Europe seldom used for his speeches.

But the strain of months, the forced rides and marches, the sleepless nights, the constant gathering of himself together to persuade, to fortify, to cajole others, the continuous and pressing sense of urgency, had begun to exhaust the King, like an actor who makes a brave show on the stage, but who, when the curtain is down, falters away, weary and forlorn.

Gustaf, who had displayed so superb a confidence in public, when he had held in check, by the sheer authority of his personality, the hostile First Estate, felt his burdens when he was alone, his solitary position, his immense responsibility, an increasing physical weakness. All life seemed quenched in his face, save in the lustre of his blue eyes, as he sat leaning on the desk, his head propped in his hand, the purple, the ermine, the chains of his orders tossed over the green brocade chair that stood before the long velvet curtain that hung dramatically to screen the entrance of those who waited on the King, Gustaf never glanced at these draperies without a flicker of the fancy back to the day when Toll had stepped round the heavy folds, from the shadow beyond, for the first time.

Now it was not the Bishop, for whom the dishevelled, weary King was waiting, but another, of whom Gustaf had not thought, who, presuming on his privileges, had swept his way past pages and servants—the young guardsman, Pontus Liljehorn.

At the sight of him, pausing, brilliant in his young splendour, within the curtains, as if he stood on the threshold of a room, the King came as near discomfiture as was possible to his nature and training; he even felt conscious of his own careless attire, the fur jacket over the fine ruffled shirt, the lace cuffs tucked back, the hair unrolled, the cravat unloosened, he felt for a second as if he had been surprised without his mask, as if the regal raiment over the chair was a mummer's disguise; then he was poised again and spoke affectionately, though his beautiful voice was slightly hoarse from fatigue.

"Pontus! I had not expected you—"

"I had not expected to come," the youth's fair face was distorted, he displayed a violent and crude emotion that seemed out of keeping with his trim, costly, formal uniform, "but these arrests—Klas told me—his father!"

"The fathers of others of your friends also," replied Gustaf. "Be satisfied. I do not intend bloodshed, no, never that, as you should be well aware."

"Who of us care for your clemency, Sire!" exclaimed Liljehorn passionately. "We have been degraded, humiliated!"

"At Anjala," put in the King quickly, "not now."

"Long before Anjala," replied the officer with fury, "when your Majesty first began to meddle with your Majesty's subtle tricks, pitting one class against another, delivering us to our enemies, refusing to be revenged on them, then falling on us."

"You are a strange mouthpiece for these grievances," smiled Gustaf indulgently. "You understand nothing of politics."

"No, Sire, but I understand the privileges of my caste that your Majesty has taken from us."

The King was thinking wearily, "Liljehorn, of all! The silly, petulant, pampered youth, whose debts I have paid, only a few years ago, my page," he thought of the group of noble children of whom Liljehorn had been one, playing together before

his Coronation, whom he had regarded as ornaments of his reign, now they were all his enemies. Privilege—that word must be altered in its meaning, no one must be born privileged.

"At least you came to defy me to my face," he still smiled. "No secret club or bond for you, I think."

"Your Majesty used such means in '72," answered the young man sullenly. "I do belong to the Freemasons."

"I have had police reports of meetings of such societies at *The Dolphin* and *The Mountain Lily*," said Gustaf. "Of malcontents, freemasons, yes, and Jacobins. I have the French players and dancers carefully watched. I do not think any Swede would be so disloyal as to play with treasons, no, not even after Anjala do I credit that. Anjala was, at least, open."

Liljehorn took advantage of this forbearance to display further anger; in hot words he accused the King not only of overturning the constitution of Sweden and of making himself a despotic monarch, but of being frivolous and inconsistent.

"Here your Majesty overturns the nobility—in France your Majesty tries to save them, your Majesty is a disciple of Voltaire, well, so are the members of the third estate in France, the revolutionaries, the Jacobins, and you desire to declare war on them."

"Who says as much?" asked Gustaf. "No one knows my plans."

"That one is clear enough. Fersen and many other Swedes are your private agents in France, intriguing to rescue the Queen of France, all the clubs know this, and it is too daring—to imagine your Majesty can beat Russia to a standstill, then to turn on France."

"And perhaps Norway," interrupted Gustaf lightly. "France is in the hands of—"

Liljehorn snarled the words, unmannerly in his headstrong fury—"impudent intellectuals and soon will be in those of the rabble! In the hands of such men as your Majesty has encouraged in Sweden during your entire reign."

"Never," declared Gustaf firmly, "the most dangerous men whom I have encouraged are those like yourself, idle, vain young aristocrats, who will not even fight for the privileges you clamour for."

"We will not fight a needless, hopeless war."

"You would prefer the fate of Poland?"

"Yes, sooner than be dominated by the burghers and the peasantry. Your Majesty knows perfectly well that Armfelt can hardly hold in the Dalesmen and that if they were to break loose in Stockholm, they would be no easier to control than the Paris rabble."

"Whatever one does one must contend with and control the rabble—my Dalesmen are not to be compared to the fanatics and gutter scum of Paris."

"They soon will be insolent, Sire, already they are undisciplined and set above their low estate," retorted the young officer. "And how can your Majesty defend your Majesty's own position? Your Majesty encouraged freethinkers, atheists, the mystagogues, the Swedenborgians and yet, Sire your chief supporter is a Lutheran bishop—Vallquist, whom, Sire, you prefer above the Archbishop."

"I never heard of any one reaching his goal in a straight line," remarked Gustaf. "You speak with a childish accent, Liljehorn, but your matter is repeated from someone who is not childish—I pray you do not mingle with dangerous men, leave

alone these plotters and fanatics and secret societies, band or clubs of malcontents. I heard," he added swiftly, "that Jakob Anckarstrom is again in Stockholm, scribbling for seditious presses. Do not consort with him, a weak, bilious man, empty and meddlesome."

"Your Majesty warns me of all the means whereby your Majesty yourself seized power."

"I am the King," smiled Gustaf, and his weary blue eyes held a glitter that seemed unnatural to the excited young man who muttered uneasily:

"A tyrant! One understands when they talk of Brutus."

"Who talks of Brutus?" asked the King rising quietly.

Liljehorn drew back, seemed more deeply troubled, flung out that it was on every lip, in every street, and left without ceremony, the soft flowing curtains blowing behind him.

Gustaf was neither offended nor alarmed, he was interested in the enormous value these men put, not on riches, or power, or honour, talent or pleasure, but on privilege; he regarded Pontus Liljehorn as a foolish youth, but loyal and one who, he hoped, would be a brave soldier at a pinch, he had stood apart from Anjala, but now he had spoken with a passionate clarity as to where his feelings were, and Gustaf knew that he voiced the indignation of the extremists in the opposition, Klas Horn, Ribbing, the Voltairean philosopher Ture Bjleke, von Engerstrom—the chief of police had warned him against these fanatics. They did not plot a revolution, Liljensparre thought, but ranted in clubs, flaunted in the streets, published libels against Gustaf from the private press that the King allowed to function, following the plan of the rebels in France that they so loudly denounced.

"The boy put the case well enough," mused Gustaf out loud to himself as had lately become his habit, "that shows he has been much corrupted by able vicious men—yet his own passion inspires him. Brutus! Pechlin or—who? No I can think of no one besides Pechlin who might hire a Jacobin to murder me—of no potential Brutus among my good friends." He thought of his many close supporters, of Karl who was not perhaps his good friend or his supporter, or even his friend at all, but who still visited the wise woman and held *séances* there, in the narrow house, of his timid, hysterical son, of his hostile wife, of the enemy's House the lunatic Holstein, and he felt desperately alone, as if poised above an immense staircase that led to a monstrous perspective where gigantic figures stalked, Vasa kings in marble, similar to the statue of Gustaf Adolf II in front of the Opera House or in buff waistcoats resembling the wooden dummies in the Riddarsholm church, carrying the ragged, dusty flags, beating the long silent drums. He knew where the stairway and the vista of cold pillars led to, the ballroom in the palace, where Gluck's music appealed to, defied the gods, where the soldiers, wearing upright ostrich plumes tramped after their prey; he was a King and fled before them, up a winding stair, he turned and threw a bunch of keys at their upturned faces, but he fled, his face was the face of the King's son, that was a caricature of the Vasa features and had something of the look of the lunatic Dane, his mother's brother. It was a masquerade and Beyron was dancing in a bright domino and a cherry coloured mask, and Struensee was being dragged away, his trailing sables over his arm, and the Queen was trying to escape, running in and out the huge pillars, beating on closed doors, but the soldiers seized her and tore the bloom coloured

gown off her back, revealing her pale, sweet shoulders. Then it was the festival in the palace, on the eve of the first revolution, delicate sea gods and foam clad goddesses, nacre water green represented the guardian rivers and streams of Sweden, and among them was Jeanne d'Egmont holding a lost white glove and Ulrika Lovisa's revolvers and dagger, fading herself, until she seemed one of the gentle fountains in the groves of Versailles where now there were no more lanterns of festival, but loneliness fitting for phantoms and ruin.

Brutus, the boy had thrown the name of that noble assassin at him, the classic, blind busts that Piranesi engraved, pagan, heroic, were blotted by the crooked mask of harlequin, there was no end to the disguises—yet one day there would be an end—there must be a last kiss, a last masquerade.

The King dropped his arms on his desk, his face on his hands—so much to do, so many handicaps, such weariness, so little hope that he could achieve anything that would endure, and yet the unconquerable desire and determination to go on, to abate nothing, to force his will on Sweden in order to save Sweden, never to be avenged on his enemies, never to use violence.

He forced his thoughts to travel out over Sweden, over the untrodden snow ruffled by the wind that now lay deep, deep and deeper over the wild swan's way, to the magic land of the Laplander and his drum, the reindeer, the midnight sun. Then over the country as he remembered it, the blossoming white hawthorn hedges at Goteborg, the blue fruited sloe hedges at Scania, the little wild fruits on the ground, the horses with rope harness that never stumbled, the ancient Codex in the University of Upsala, the Gospels in Gothic script, silver letters on parchment stained violet, the mascules in gold, the house where Linneaus, lately dead, had seen his double, while numbering the plants in his garden, the white winter hares, the small dun coloured horses, the sleigh bells, the church bells, the copper mines, the Dales people in their dresses of Turkish yellow and white, the birches like silver fountains, like Jeanne d'Egmont rising from the moss. The great purple blue dark forests, the rainbows and the water breaks, the machinery in the attics at haunted Gripsholm, that ground and squeaked, the old roundabout, the ruddy peasants cutting the barley with a scythe, the women working at their quilts of wool, the houses of the wealthy Scots merchants of Goteborg, with the rich painted furniture, the bridges with masks of knights and horses, all this he saw flowing before his aching eyes. The drift sand, the shallow lakes, the fishermen's church at Visby, the dark sea slipping foam onto the shore, the white and yellow lilies, the ancient deserted forts, Gotland with the crab apples and the wood violets, Stockholm, with the blue black thunder clouds coming up across the lakes sliding into the sea, then gliding through all these scenes, the man in the red dress of whom Madame Arfmedsson had spoken, according to Karl—why had Karl repeated that? No one in Stockholm would wear a red suit, if she had given this prophecy it was because she knew as much; some trick here.

Gustaf thought of his friends—Armfelt, Essen, Bishop Vallquist, Axel Fersen, Stedingk, Sergel, the other Swedes who worked for him in Paris, men who admired him and vowed that he shone over Europe, he thought of the palaces and factories, the forts and arsenals, the ports and harbours that he had built, the academies he had founded, the men of wisdom, wit, art and learning he had encouraged and how aristocrats as Ribbing and Liljehorn, young dandy Life Guard

officers despised him for all this, hated him and spoke of Brutus—and what was Caesar's crime?

"To attempt absolute power as I am attempting it. And when they had slain him there rose a more powerful tyrant in his place."

The King's loneliness increased, what he had to do seemed unbearable; he tossed his head on his arms and fainted into sleep; when Schorderheim found him he appeared lifeless, the side of his face uppermost was crooked by brow and lip, a distortion that never showed when he was well and speaking, but that now, in his sick exhaustion made his face between the fallen curls, above the fallen face, look like a pinched plaster counterfeit.

Chapter 76

Gustaf did what he had set his hand to do in definite strokes of action, that he could note when they were accomplished, on one page of his small notebook bound in green and silver brocade. In February 1790 he made himself absolute master of Sweden, gave the country another constitution, arrested his main enemies and abolished all the main privileges of the nobility, while conserving those of the other estates, he continued the war with Russia, while receiving *émigrés* from France in Sweden and helping the royalists by underground means. By April the power of the Riksdag was broken, and Toll was in command in Scania, as General of the Fleet at Karlskrona, the great Swedish navy under Duke Frederik held the Russians at Oland and Stedingk beat the traitor Sprengtporten at Uttismalm, the first struggle at Svenskund was a costly victory for the Empress. Armfelt and his Dalesmen, however, successfully stormed Elgso in the Barosound and the war concluded by the Swedish naval victory, at which the King was present in his yacht AMADIS, off Viborg. By the peace of Varala Gustaf achieved one of the main objects of his reign, Katherine agreed to terms that left Sweden secure from Russian aggression and even entered into an alliance with Gustaf to check the success of the revolutionaries in France, who were setting a precedent dangerous to all monarchies.

Gustaf's domestic enemies were silent, and the triumph of his return was marred by nothing but his wife's cold look, his son's tears and screams at the fireworks over Stockholm and his own thought of the tombs in the Riddarsholm church—"Will this poor child be the last of the Vasa Kings?"

PART VII

The Last Masquerade.

Chapter 77

THE King spoke to the duc d'Escars, one of the most intelligent and delightful of the French *émigrés* who had come to Stockholm to intrigue for the Royalists in France. Anyone on such an errand would have been welcome to Gustaf, but M. d'Escars had become his friend, owing to his personal qualities, his subtle, ironic mind, his Gallic vivacity, his wide and profound interests in the arts; Gustaf agreed with everything that M. d'Escars thought, there were no concealments between them, the two men were not only useful to one another, but took considerable pleasure in one another's company.

Since he had made himself master of Sweden, the King's manner of life had changed abruptly; when he had returned from the Russian wars, where he had proved himself as valorous as Karl XII without his enemies giving credit to these qualities in a King who had always been sneered at as a mere dilettante, he had lived secluded, to a large extent, from the flashing, gorgeous society that he had himself created. Popular gossip whispered that this was the result of the deep offence he had given the nobility; though they had accepted defeat in 1790 and gone quietly, even supporting the King in the fierce campaigns against the Empress, they had shown bitterly their sense of injury, by holding themselves apart from the King's intimate life. Most furious were the patrician women; since the day when, led by the Fersen beauties, the ladies of the disgraced nobles had come to the palace to beg for mercy for the imprisoned members of the First Estate and been refused audience by the King, these charming, lovely and witty creatures had refused to attend court and worked so pitilessly against the King, that the Chief of Police termed them the Fifth Estate.

Since the Queen had no influence and there was no Princess of character in Gustaf's family, these insolent ladies had matters their own way, there were no more plays, spectacles, festivals, no public dinners, suppers, no petit-lever, tournaments, skating parties by lamplight, sledge races by moonlight, or reading aloud of poetry in the great salons of Gripsholm, Drottningholm and Ulriksdal.

The King lived like a private gentlemen; the palaces where he had been so splendid as to startle Europe were closed save for a small suite of rooms kept for his personal use; he no longer appeared on the boards of the theatre in classic costume, nor spoke orations before the Academy, embroidered scarves or wrote verses; his patronage of the arts was liberal and steady, he encouraged science, he sought for and rewarded talent and merit among all classes but without any of his former éclat and brilliancy. This judgment of the vulgar as to the change in the

King's manner of life was only partly shared by those who had close access to his person; these believed that while it was certainly true that the aristocrats refused to adorn the King's court, it was equally true that the King no longer wished for that life of splendid extravagance whereby he had tried to build up the prestige of Sweden, the prestige of the King, to allure the nobility and to give employment to the middle classes, as well as to cast a glittering disguise over his political designs.

Now these designs were clear, the power of the nobles had been broken, the Russian frontiers had been secured and the King had no need to disguise his intentions, since all were known and the issue clear between himself and his enemies.

For these reasons, the King's friends argued, he lived austerely, worked hard and entertained privately. Moreover he had, as always, very little money, with the ruin of the French monarchy the French subsidies had ceased, those wrung from Russia were insufficient for the King's plans, nothing was now spent on extravagance, and travellers who had once found Stockholm as brilliant as Paris now returned home S disappointed and blamed the King for breaking with his nobles.

In truth Gustaf had still many friends and followers, Armfelt alone was surrounded by hundreds of dashing officers and their ladies, many of the nobles remained loyal to the King, Duke Karl and Duke Frederik both maintained elegant courts and Gustaf still offered sumptuous hospitality to noble foreigners, to Swedes distinguished by rank, position, knowledge or fine achievements, on public occasions he appeared splendid as ever, nor was Stockholm dull, in the winter masquerades took place in the Opera House, Italian music and French plays were performed as well as those native works the King had so warmly encouraged, the number of superb French aristocrats living in Stockholm, many of them with their ladies, increased the gaiety and vivacity of the capital and helped to disguise the near bankruptcy of a country that had just concluded a successful war.

But the King lived apart and the Queen lived in a separate seclusion while Baron Pechlin and Count Fersen whose imprisonment had been neither long nor severe had retired in bitterness to their country estates.

M. d'Escars sat with the King in his chamber in the Stockholm palace, that chamber with the onyx clock and the heavy curtain dividing the room, the window overlooking the lake where the roses tapped in summer but against which the snowflakes now blurred and melted. Fire and candle light filled the room and the faint chill perfume of some forced pallid arctic roses floated in the warm air. The King wore a rich costume of violet velvet with the gauze sash and red heels that it was no longer the fashion to caricature; his costly appointments were no affectation, but the expression of his own character and design, it was as natural for him to wear these clothes as it was for a peasant to put on his smock and wool stockings; when at the war he had worn the plain Karl XII uniform and his fair hair loose and it had not seemed incongruous among the superb equipments of the Lifeguards, all his appointments always became him justly.

The duc d'Escars was also brilliantly dressed; he had been among those who had left France discreetly in the early days of the nobles slide to ruin, and had taken with him some of the valuable property, that, lumbering in waggon after waggon out of France, had inflamed the French Revolutionary government into the

degree that declared forfeit the lives and properties of the émigrés who were stripping their country.

M. d'Escars had been one of those who had advised the King to summon a Riksdag, since the Diet had still the power of granting money, and without money the sailors at Karlskrona would mutiny, the Dalesmen revolt and none of Gustaf's plans came to fruition, and the Bourbon cause lost.

"I must have money before the Spring," the King said moving and flashing in the firelight. "I must move before the snow has quite gone—all must be ready by the first thaw."

It was the fervent purpose of M. d'Escars to persuade the King into invading France as soon as possible, for the position of the French royal family was desperate and their only friends were the Swedes who so far had in vain endeavoured to rescue them and now the adroit Frenchman expressed his gratitude with elegant fervour for Gustaf's promise of aid.

"Though I am aware," he added, "that your Majesty will undertake this war mainly for Sweden."

"If it was not for Sweden's sake I should not undertake it at all," replied Gustaf smiling. "I should merely endeavour in the name of humanity, to secure the release of your royal family and as many others as possible from these rascals—but if I could get the Emperor's help," he paused, and repeated "these rascals."

"Your Majesty," commented M. d'Escars, "finds no one to tolerate among these followers of Rousseau and Voltaire?"

"I know you would say, Monseigneur, that I encouraged such fellows myself in Sweden. Voltaire wrote me an ode in '72." A pleasant irony sharpened his fine features. "But no, I admire none of these scoundrels, neither your mouthing Gironde, your discredited traitor Mirabeau—your sham philosophers Condorcet, Roland, your foul Jacobins, we have such men in Sweden, Ture Bjleke, von Engerstrom, to match your Desmoulins we have Anckarstrom who has just been tried for sedition—"

"And let off too lightly with a mere fine," said M. d'Escars. "I have too fair a hold on the country for such fellows to harm me," replied Gustaf, "this is a mere windbag. I shall not do him the honour of making a martyr of him. He was my page," added the King abruptly, "then in the Guards, conceive it, he has a good estate, a pleasant wife and family and might have had a fine career—all thrown away for these crochets!"

"He has courage at least, Sire," remarked the Frenchman, "his opinions are probably shared by most of your nobility—but they keep safe and quiet."

"No!" exclaimed Gustaf. "Save for Pechlin, Fersen and a few others, the First Estate have been loyal to me, though angry with me—none of them would break into revolt—riot, perhaps. I do not trust the capital, therefore I have ordered the Riksdag to be held at Gafle in Bothnia, where it will be very cold, my friend, and very uncomfortable, but where the burghers are extremely loyal and there are wide fields for encamping the Guards."

"Will these aristocrats, many of whom your Majesty last saw when you ordered their arrest, go to these outlandish parts?"

"They will not dare to stay away, for fear of what the other Estates will do behind their backs—besides, there are men of merit among them, Adelebeth, the

noble poet was my friend, one of the most difficult things I ever had to do was when he appealed to me, before the whole Riksdag, to spare the peers, and I had to refuse, then Klas de Frietzsky is moderate and honourable."

The living blue of the King's eyes sparkled with emotion, as usual he made no effort to justify any of his actions, or policies, he stated his plans and reasons with great simplicity, it was the Frenchman who said, with impulsive admiration—"Your Majesty has always been right, though you put down the nobles here and raise them in France, both designs are for the good of Sweden."

"Yes," assented Gustaf. "If Sweden and Russia between them could restore the stability of France, assisted by the Emperor, keep Denmark in her place—"

"And Norway," put in M. d'Escars.

"Perhaps Norway," said Gustaf, laughing; the Frenchman knew that the King had no confidant for his inmost secrets, not even Vallquist, Essen or Armfelt, d'Escars also knew that Gustaf was really moved by political not merely chivalrous motives in his concern for the French Royal family and their friends. Moreover, M. d'Escars was delicately aware that Gustaf who felt and expressed a lively sympathy for the Queen of France had no admiration for her and that he despised Louis XVI. Gustaf did indeed intend the restoration of the monarchy in France as merely part of wide plans for making Sweden secure, powerful, respected. Nor did Gustaf judge favourably the majority of the French nobility, who had left the royal family to the traitors and the rabble, while they fled to the army M. d'Artois kept in idleness on the Rhine where it was supported by baskets of English gold, such men Gustaf put on the level of so many of his own First Estate, it was aristocrats such as the duc d'Escars, and there were many of them, who laboured incessantly for the restoration of the old order in France, who Gustaf wished to put back in power in their country, loyal, honourable men who would keep Europe stable. "You have taken all possible precautions at Gefle?" asked the Frenchman anxiously.

"Yes—by choosing that town I have lost the support of the capital, but it was impossible to risk provoking riots here. Armfelt will be in command with the Life Guards, the Light Dragoons will be in the neighbourhood—I shall issue a proclamation ordering everyone not directly concerned to come to Gefle—the Primate of Sweden is the Lieutenant of the country and my good friend. We shall reside in the castle and make a show, the money must be found for that, even at the cost of pawning some jewellery. The lustre of Sweden must not be allowed to be dimmed just now, Monseigneur—think of the tale of the beseiged garrison dying of thirst who used their last bucket of water to hang wet clothes on the wall, and so sent the deceived enemy away in disgust."

"I meant precautions for your own person, Sire—there might be some would be Brutus—"

"That name is often mouthed now," smiled the King. "I remember Pontus Liljehorn flung it once at me—some while ago, now he is a good fellow again and writes excellent verse. March, too, they mutter about that, and the month has always been unfortunate to me, but I shall be in Stockholm by March."

"Still," urged the Frenchman, "you are very free, Sire."

"Were Ito cease to be free that would be the beginning of my death," smiled Gustaf. "I have never been armed, save by my sword. Do you not understand? He

who begins to guard his life has already lost it. This is not bravado, monseigneur, I fear assassination, a cur's death, taken unaware. I often think of the bullet torn jerkins in the Riddarsholm church, but I will not suppose those bullets came from Swedes," he added with vivacity, "they fell in battle, both those Vasa monarchs. I hope that I may, for I think there will be war for many years and I shall always be in the field. My brother Karl is a very brave man, and so is Frederik. I owe much of the recent victory to them, and Stedingk," he added.

"I could wish their Royal Highnesses dealt less with the secret societies and the spirit raisers."

"There is nothing in that but folly and a folly in which I once indulged myself," said Gustaf, but he thought, "I shall never know Karl, or trust him, no, nor Frederik either, were I to die they might refuse to acknowledge my son and reverse all my policies." Aloud he added: "It is time that we showed ourselves at the opera," remarking, "you are right, d'Escars, a single villain is easily dealt with—one must be watchful over confederations of them."

Gustaf now did little more than show himself at any public function, though he would mingle carelessly with the crowd at masquerade or ball for a while, and converse gaily with friend and abhorrent, always silencing, by courteous irony, the sarcastic quips of the latter. But his heart was no longer in these rich entertainments, he no longer directed the spectacles, chose the companies, nor did he often sit out the entertainment; his mind was on other matters and he was often weary so that, when not working, he had need of rest, the repose of withdrawal into solitude.

M. d'Escars felt a warm personal affection for the splendid prince who was the one hope of his own caste in France, and coming and going secretly from Paris knew what a country on the verge of anarchy could be. He knew that Gustaf had this advantage over Louis that he could count on the middle classes and the mob, as M. d'Escars termed the Dalesmen, but then Gustaf had almost the entire aristocracy against him, and the Frenchman thought highly of his own caste, even when disloyal, and it seemed to him possible that men like Pechlin and Fersen, supported by nearly all the grandees of Sweden, might, without so much difficulty provoke a counter revolution—in the matter of the unpaid sailors for instance. The summoning of the Riksdag seemed to him dangerous, though in his desperation he had been one of those who had urged this course.

He spoke his thoughts, but Gustaf assured him that the First Estate had really no power, adding—"All my life I have been in dread of assassination, now, no more than at any other time."

M. d'Escars wrinkled his broad brow; the imprisonment, flight, legal murder of sovereigns taken place in history, but assassination, no—not since the Prince of Orange two hundred years ago.

Gustaf smiled at him. "You think I press the point, but all my policy depends on me. Could they—my enemies—remove me, there is no one who could withstand them, neither Vallquist or Armfelt—Toll might have done so," he added in a voice of deep sorrow, "but Toll is estranged from me, he works in a distant part of the Kingdom, out of touch with events—no, there is no one, there would be a long minority, a Queen who is a child in politics—that is why I am taking my son to Gefle, Monseigneur, he is perfectly safe."

“I believe that your Majesty is, also.”

“From Swedes, yes, Pechlin, a Holsteiner, might hire some Jacobin to play Brutus,” he smiled, radiantly, adding. “You see, M. d’Escars, I really am a tyrant—they forced me into that at last—I have had to hold the Riksdag far from the capital to overawe the people with troops, Liljensparre is brilliantly active also.”

“He has discovered nothing?”

“No—some clubs of ranting hot heads, O, all the means I employed!” Gustaf walked up and down, smiling, his blue eyes sparkling, the Frenchman thought, he is in great agitation, but not from personal fear. Who would be Regent? His brother Karl and who knows his mind? Does he hate the King and the boy who cost him a throne?

“Liljensparre,” continued Gustaf, pausing by the fireplace where the light from the flames made him sparkle from head to foot, in diamonds, in sequins, in emeralds, “is almost absurdly careful. For a while now, some years—a certain Madame Arfmedsson, a fortune teller here, has been foretelling danger to me from a man in red—at last I have sent her, with her hangers on, to Finland, whence she came, but at intervals Liljensparre receives letters bidding him watch out for the activities of such a man in red. Of course he has not been seen—if the old woman spoke thus, it was because she knew that no one would wear this colour.”

“A British soldier would.”

“But not in Stockholm, my dear duke,” said Gustaf. “The point is that someone is trying to play a trick on me.”

“Everyone knows that your Majesty is above superstitious fears.”

“Maybe, though we might disagree as to what is meant by superstition—it is just possible this might be a genuine warning, for me not to go too far, in holding this Riksdag, for instance, or someone trying to make me afraid and so draw back.”

“He means his brother Karl,” thought d’Escars, “who, very likely, plays here the game M. d’Artois plays in France.”

“It may be merely the work of a malicious fool,” he suggested aloud, and he thought of the young Guards officer Gustaf had mentioned, Pontus Liljehorn.

“My lack of precaution greatly annoys Liljensparre,” smiled Gustaf. “I have dealt so much in disguises, it amuses me. My part has been something that of harlequin, M. d’Escars, who now assumes the pose of a tyrant.”

“So your Majesty said—but your Majesty’s intentions have always been of a startling magnanimity and liberality.”

“My intentions, yes. I roused the Dales, yes—some of those honest, simple fellows will never return home, some will return maimed. If my cause were not good, I have something to answer for there—the sailors rotted in the ships at Karlskrona, floating lazar houses, my necessary wars cost Sweden as high as Karl XII’s extravagances, the price of victory for the underlings, d’Escars, makes us who set them on ashamed.”

“If you had not set them on, they would all be in Siberia, or working their own mines as slaves for Russia.”

“I know, I would do it again. But, d’Escars, I have had to use fire to put out fire—can it be done? I have been too impatient—in my time it cannot be

accomplished, but if I live until the boy is a man and can set my friends about him, something might be achieved—if only a little—towards peace."

Chapter 78

The King did not leave his box, but watched the masquerade leaning on the rose velvet ledge, he wore a purple silk domino and mask, but the sparkle of orders of Vasa and the Seraphima on his heart made his identity clear; in his lapel was a knot of ribbon, lilac, green, silver, and a mourning loop of black.

"You ask me what are my colours? They are those of your new order, wear them, as my knight."

Her voice sounded far away in the maddening whisper of the dead, she was gone, like last year's snowflakes, he was no longer sure if he had ever seen her, but he could not forget her, nor the wild ride from Haga when the delayed letters came. Beylon, who had shared that ride, he had gone too, worn out with labour he had slipped away, like a modest guest from a brilliant festival, disturbing none by his farewells; the King missed him sorely. And Toll, who was still alive, who still worked for him, Toll whom he had forsaken, who would never look at him again; the King saw the maskers beneath in the cleared space of the opera house as a blur of colour; far clearer to him were his dreams, which he nearly always had to put aside for business. His friends, Essen, his chief Equerry, Armfelt, Lowenhjelm, M. d'Escars, and some of the young officers of the Guards, among whom was Count Klas Horn; his father had been one of those nobles arrested by the King and the son had asked and been refused permission to share his mild captivity, at first he had railed violently against the King, but then appeared to have forgotten his grievances and frequented the court as an officer, a wit, a poet and a man of fashion.

The Chief of Police could find nothing against him save his association with the young retired Colonel Ribbing, who had always been in opposition to the King and Gustaf, not only because of his persistent policy of conciliation, but because of a liking for his one time page, encouraged the brilliant young courtier.

"Sire, is not that Baron Liljensparre's man in red?" asked Count Klas Horn lightly; leaning over the King's chair, he pointed to a mask who was moving with the swiftness of a dancer through the press of grotesque disguises. The King, roused from his muse glanced with curiosity at this mask, who wore a cloak of taffeta silk in a clear bright cerise colour.

"I never thought of that!" he exclaimed with animation. "Not of it being at the masquerade, of course, here any colour is possible, go below, my dear Horn, and ask the name of this fellow."

His interest was wholly in his own mistake, he had always thought of the street, the chamber as the background for a man who would be wearing either pure red, or vermilion that is red with orange, or a crimson that is red with blue, these details were interesting to one who was so intimate with the theatre. The unexpected hue the mask was wearing was cerise, Gustaf used the French word

instinctively, he knew the shade and even the material, not the colour of the cherry, but an artificial hue, crimson diluted with white, touched with blue, very clear and shining, the hue and material of Peyron's mask—that was why he remembered it so clearly.

He watched Horn move impetuously towards the dancers and speak to the cerise domino, who was leaning against one of the lower boxes, speaking to a lady in a Venetian *beauté* who leaned towards him, Gustaf saw Horn salute the stranger and return.

"He refuses his name, Sire, he says it is the matter of a bet," reported the young officer.

"A coincidence, perhaps," smiled Gustaf. "Yet no doubt all Sweden has heard of the mysterious man in red—perhaps the bet was to dare anyone to appear in the garb the witch said my assassin would wear." He spoke with a natural lightness, adding: "Have you any suspicion as to who it may be, my dear Horn?"

"None, Sire, as you, his hood is drawn forward, his mask fringed with lace."

"His name must be on his ticket—the stewards will know," said M. d'Escars anxiously.

"Yes, but I shall not trouble myself further," replied Gustaf. "No suspect character could enter here."

"Of course the mask will declare himself when your Majesty enters the ball room and commands his attendance," said Count Klas Horn.

"I shall not leave my box to-night," said the King.

"Your Majesty fears?" suggested Count Horn respectfully.

"Ay, I fear many things," returned Gustaf. "I even fear the knife of a Damien or a Ravaillac or a Gerard—but I take no single precaution against it, as everyone well knows."

"You fear nothing, Sire," declared M. d'Escars warmly, "save what all brave men dread."

"It will disappoint everyone if your Majesty does not go into the ball room," urged Count Horn. "There are certainly no Jacobins present, the French actor, La Perriere, of whom our suspicious Chief of Police is doubtful, must be still on the boards."

"No," said Gustaf, "to-night I shall have to work—the calling of the Riksdag means a good deal of business. There will be another masquerade before we go to Gefie and I shall mingle with the dancers then, to show my confidence in my people."

"And I shall accompany your Majesty," cried Count Horn, "with my new pistols I bought the other day in Stockholm—fine English workmanship—and a dagger that I have given to a friend of mine, he has sharpened it to a razor blade fineness, barbed it, also—these weapons shall be used in the defence of your Majesty."

"Nothing fantastic!" smiled Gustaf. "I have my guards and my police."

His tone was as near as he ever came to rebuke unless deeply angered, but Klas Horn, an officer whose carriage was proud to arrogance, though respectful before the King, pressed his point, he spoke rather loudly.

"I request permission to show these arms to your Majesty—they are most unusual, in the case of the pistols was a shrivelled strip of doeskin, I think some jewels, arms and initials have been removed from them all."

“I have an armoury of such weapons,” smiled the King, “and no interest in them, my dear Horn.”

The young officer bowed and withdrew.

“What did he mean, Sire?” asked M. d’Escars, doubtfully.

“To turn some witticism of which I do not see the point,” replied Gustaf. “He can be insolent, but has himself well in hand, he would never be actively disloyal, probably he arranged for the appearance of the red mask, as he purposely turned the conversation on arms—that are certainly fictitious.”

“Who does your Majesty suppose the red mask to be?”

“One of the opposition,” replied Gustaf indifferently. “It is all trickery, to make me unable to carry out what I have to do—I had thought Horn had been better bred, but he is fantastic, writes gloomy verse and is a Swedenborgian.”

The Frenchman thought—“Duke Karl may be behind this, I am certain the King thinks he is, and therefore will not pursue the matter.”

The orchestra was playing loudly above the hum of talk, the maskers swayed to the dance, the lamps, delicately tinted, cast a tender light on the gilt cornices and rose coloured velvet draperies of the baroque interior of the grand saloon; valets in brilliant liveries moved about discreetly, snuffing candles and replacing them, the cerise mask, followed by Horn, had disappeared. Gustaf forgot both of them; pleasure of the gorgeous scene began to animate him; he had built this fine theatre, dedicated to the muses of the North, he took pride in it, in the elegant men and graceful women dancing below, even now he could hardly believe that any of them, even the members of the opposition, really hated him or worked against him, they could, surely, be no more than pettish or sulky—some of them had much merit—the aged Klas Frietzsky, for example, who had done so much for agriculture, surely the old wounds were nearly healed—when the benefits of Varala began to show, then the nation, even the nobility would turn to him.

He roused himself from his reverie.

“Forgive, my dear duke, I am distracted by the arrangements for this Riksdag and the holding of it in a place so inconvenient. I shall be thankful when March is here and all this struggle is over.”

Chapter 79

The King went to Haga before leaving for Gefle, as the dim, five hours day had slipped into the pale night he rode in the royal sledge with M. d’Escars, the Equerry George Lowenhjelm, Baron Essen and Gustaf Armfelt to see the vast plan of the new palace he intended should rise in Haga park; the design was for a building as ambitious and grandiose as the château of Versailles; the outline of the foundations were no more than marked out of the ground, the tracings of stonework being almost hidden by the drifts of pure snow that lay luminous on the grass, making the earth lighter than the sky that was covered by low clouds, dappled like the breast of a grey goose.

In this whiteness the figures of the men, wrapped in mantles of sables and velvet stood out darkly and sharply; work had ceased on the building, workmen's planks, barrows and huts stood about the foundations; only the King had seen the architect's prints, the others could not easily understand how the frontage would rise from the tracery in the large prepared place from which the trees had been cleared. A little wind blew chill, from the North, the small pavilion of Haga showed prim and square, the long windows, unshuttered showed the pale yellow of lamplight in the blue dusk, it was the hour of nostalgia, of creeping cold, of the melancholy of empty rooms giving onto an empty landscape.

"Does your Majesty ever expect to live in this palace?" asked M. d'Escars, thinking of the Tuileries, of Versailles, already abandoned, stripped, sacked or deserted.

"If I live to the allotted span," said the King with his disturbing smile, "I may live here for a few years. An extravagance, you think? It should absorb all the unemployed, all the natural products of the country that we cannot import, and all our native artists and craftsmen, for at least ten years and then it will be something that will fetch travellers from far and add to the renown of Sweden."

Armfelt, with his cheerful exuberance, praised the magnificence of the design, the other two Swedes agreed that it would be an added splendour to their country; their boots crunched the snow.

"It will mean the founding of several new factories," smiled Gustaf, "and the purchase of all the product of the peasants' looms. If I had had the money, the building would never have ceased. Ah, if Katherine and the English, asking your forgiveness, my dear d'Escars, had given me the gold that they scatter on the useless army of M. d'Artois and the French idlers who gather at St. Petersburg, I would have restored the Bourbon monarchy by now. M. Fersen has written hopefully from Paris—M. de Bouille's son should be here soon."

"Yes, your Majesty," replied the Frenchman, "this weather delays travelling, but any day now."

The group of gentlemen turned on the drive, marked in dark treads by the recent passing of their horses, before them stood the little mansion, square and simple as a child's toy cut out of paper with a transparency behind the windows, lit by a candle. M. d'Escars thought: "The house is like a target, and as for anyone standing at one of those windows—He is certainly very careless." And the Frenchman shivered, drawing closer his heavy furs, for in Gustaf lay, with literal truth the faint, perhaps the only hope for the French monarchy. Prussia, Great Britain, the Empress, these might move, but assuredly very slowly and assuredly too late. "The grounds are guarded?" he asked, "the house is protected?"

"There are sentinels at the gate," replied the King, "the park is easy of access—of course, one could hardly ring it with spies."

"Ay, surely too easy and, Sire, it should be guarded," replied d'Escars anxiously.

Armfelt asked him what he meant—"You do not take seriously, my dear duke, these vague hints of possible danger to His Majesty?"

The air blew colder, the light lessened. The Frenchman was obstinate, his face withered in the freezing air.

"If troops of horses are needed at Gefle, why not here?"

“Because,” replied Gustaf kindly, “at Gefle there might be riots an attempt at counter revolution, what could be stirred up here?”

“Your Majesty might be kidnapped by a determined band.”

“No such band exists,” said the King. “No Swede would touch a Vasa.”

The two officers supported him in this argument, and the Frenchman was silenced. “Besides, as I remarked to you,” added Gustaf as they entered the straight house, “once I begin with the sentinel, the corselet, the dreary apparatus of fear I might as well be dead—is it not charming, M. d’Escars, this little mansion?”

Chapter 80

Gustaf had dismissed his bodyservant and put away the last of the papers he had brought with him to Haga; since he had no one in his absolute confidence he had to do much of his secretarial work himself, even Gustaf Armfelt, even Elis Schorderheim were not trusted with his inmost secrets. Norway—to annex that country to Sweden? By the laws of nature it was one land, was not that worth trying for? France, whose potential wealth was immense once restored to order would be able to pay handsome subsidies to Sweden, then Poland, Katherine was hinting at a further division of that unhappy country, could not he, Gustaf Vasa, possibly save Poland as he had saved Sweden? Perhaps he might scheme for that, the other Powers might agree to let him, a neutral, hold this debated land; his thoughts spread wide—a federation of the North, of more and more powers, locked together against tyranny and war.

These projects glowed in his mind; there were no more difficulties in the way of achieving them, than there had been in the way of other projects that he had achieved; he had created an atmosphere of good fortune about himself, so that people began to believe he could succeed even in face of impossible odds.

He himself knew that his success lay in his own character, his immense labours, his concentration on his purpose. Now he was weary, too weary to go to bed; he trimmed the lamp low, stirred up the logs on the marble hearth and threw himself into the low couch by the fire.

Here in Haga he had listened to the fiery insolence of Sprengtporten, who had since fought against him and was now at the Russian court, here he had opened his heart to Toll now estranged from him for ever, here he had received the delayed letters, with faithful Beylon and ridden to Stockholm to demand of a poor old woman: “Can you raise the dead?”

An odd wisp of recurrent fancy came into his tired mind, “there must be one winter that is the last winter, one winter after which we shall never see the roses again, or the grain, or the flying swans, or the snow once more.”

He rose abruptly and drew aside the stiff curtains that concealed the tall ground floor window that he had desired to be left unshuttered, the lamplight revealed him distinctly in his chamber, robe of gold brocade, velvet lined with sables, standing, as a portrait in a frame in the tall window against the yellow blur of the

dusky room, that was the only colour in the blue cold twilight of the landscape, for all the other windows in the house were shuttered; for a moment he saw nothing but the sunless gloom of the blue Northern night, faintly lit by the risen moon; the clouds had loosened and vanished Northwards, leaving only a film of silver violet vapour over the sky, then as he became used to the pale illumination of the scene, he discerned the shapes of trees, the naked boughs outlined against the filmy azure of the background where land and sky merged into a colourless haze.

Close to the front door and the window where Gustaf stood were some tall stone jars, supporting alabaster pineapples, in summer they held flowers, these cast blue shadows on the façade of the house. He opened the window longing for the cool air after the heavy work in the overheated room, and leaned forward while the breeze rushed in, sharp, with the chill of ice, stirring the thick curls that had come unbound on his forehead; the vapours thinned against the moon and a ghostly shaft of light fell on his upturned face, pale as the snow between the whitened tresses, above the white lace cravat, the heavy robe being bleached to a dead colour, the gold lost under the silver.

Two men dressed in black, with black masks, were standing flat against the house behind the vases; one whispered to the other, “Now—he is alone and defenceless.”

The other replied. “No, I cannot do it, he has a terrible look on his face. Besides it is too easy.”

“Before it was too difficult.”

“No, no, sooner at Gefle.”

“Is he in a trance that he neither sees nor hears us?”

Gustaf was absorbed in his own vision; the outer air blew out the lamp, he did not notice it, but stood, outlined against the firelight, as a portrait in the window frame; the two watchers were upright in the blue black shadow of the vases that came as high as their heads, they stood erect and very still as if hiding behind a screen; one of them held an unsheathed knife beneath his cloak, anxious that it should not gleam.

Gustaf, as the maskers watched him with desperate keenness, sighed, put his hand to his face, as if in a trouble so deep that he was unaccountable to human affairs; one of the hidden men stepped out into the snow, in front of the window, Gustaf saw him and stood silent, erect, staring, the other moved his mantle and showed a blur of cerise silk, the unnatural colour gave him an air of tragic frivolity in that lonely winter midnight scene, as if a figure bedizened for the stage had been shut out in the bleak landscape.

The King stood motionless, without a quiver in his face, the stranger gave a cry and ran across the park, his companion darting after him; Gustaf watched them go, two dark flying shapes their blown cloaks filled with air, seeming to be driven, without their own volition by the chill wind. He closed the window, drew the curtain, then fell across the couch in utter loneliness, the failing fire glow showed his eyes, ghastly blue in his fatigued face, his fixed smile, the deformity of his brow and lips, as he stared, unseeing, on those sinking flames.

Chapter 81

The King clattered into Gefle in a green and gilt coach drawn by horses rough shod against the frozen roads; outriders preceded him, accompanied by trumpeters, who blew lustily as the little town was approached. Among the cavalcade that surrounded the coach were torch hearers, for though the Northern night was light enough for travel, a slight fall of snow confused the sight; the flakes hissed into the ragged flames and showed to Gustaf the soldiers, their cloaks sprinkled with white, the shining, polished bodies of the stout bronze coloured horses, the glitter of the plated harness; he thought of the manner in which he had travelled to Goteborg, wet, ragged on a farm nag after that desperate ride to be kept waiting about the drawbridge by the suspicious burgher guard.

"No one would suppose," he remarked to Gustaf Armfelt, sitting opposite him in the padded dark of the coach, "that we were in so many financial difficulties."

The cavalcade was received with much pomp at the gates by the Primate of Sweden, the Lord Lieutenant of Bothnia and representatives of the three lower Estates, Gustaf at once noticed that the nobles had not sent a deputy. "How childish they are!" he murmured.

It was a splendid pageant that moved slowly through the pale night, broken by the torch flames and the snow scurries, to the Castle of Gefle, that the loyal burghers had furnished splendidly.

The citizens of Gefle were extremely flattered at this royal honour and delighted secretly at what they hoped would be the final discomfiture of the nobility; they knew that the King had majorities so large in the other Estates that his triumph was already assured, the aristocrats could do nothing but make trouble and the burghers of Gefle were prepared to see them do so and be promptly brought to heel, as they had been at the last Riksdag.

Flattered also were the citizens of Gefle by the appearance of the Crown Prince who had outgrown much of his delicacy and now grave and sweet tempered, displayed the most exquisite politeness and the most fervent devotion to his father; his person dispersed, too, any last fragments of gossip that might have remained after the scandal raised by the Queen-mother at his birth, for he resembled the King in figure and feature, and showed an emphasis on the Vasa traits that might, when he had lost the grace and bloom of youth, touch on the fantastic, so long was his elegant body, so blue his eyes, so spare his face and so delicate his ways.

An added lustre, the citizens thought, would have been the company of the Queen, especially as a series of balls were to be given for the ladies, but it was known that she lived a very secluded life and never travelled in winter, very different were these ways from those of the Brandenburg queen, who had delighted to display herself in splendid sleighs and sledge, clad in ermine and powder blue velvet, with clusters of diamonds in her hat.

Chapter 82

Gustaf was weary, true to his promise he had appeared at a masquerade at the Opera House the night before he had left Stockholm, and had remained until a late hour, mingling among the guests as the Comte de Haga, to avoid formality, though everyone knew his identity. He believed that he had seen a flash of cerise silk behind the black domino of a masker, but had not been able to approach this man in the press; the figures of the two who had run across the park at Haga had been, owing to their dress and the moonlight, so confusing and yet commonplace, that he had no chance of recognising them; it was never in his mind to speak to the Chief of Police of an incident of which he was aware. Baron Liljensparre would take a grave view, because he was strongly inclined to believe that Karl, and perhaps Frederik, was behind the double encounter with the cerise domino and Klas Horn's talk of the weapons that he had purchased. Such a trick would be in keeping with Karl's taste for underhand intrigue, he was much in the hands of the Freemasons and attended frequent séances where he acted as a trance medium and assisted in the raising of and communicating with spirits; he would easily have at his command men who would annoy the King—this foolish warning, "the man in red". Karl might know that Peyron had worn a cerise mask, Gustaf himself might have told him, Karl might be one of the men himself, both seemed taller than the Prince. What was the reason of the tricks? To make me unsettled, nervous? He must know he cannot frighten me. Perhaps it is not Karl, but Pechlin, Fersen, behind this? No, he is too austere, too honest. Or hot heads like Horn and Ribbing? No, I cannot believe that anyone save Karl would dare. And he dares because he knows he is safe, because he knows I should think it beneath me to notice this.

He pulled off his fur lined gauntlets and let slip his fur lined coat, tossed off his fur cap with the ear flaps and smiled at Gustaf Armfelt across the fire glow.

"Everything arranged?" he asked, turning his attention abruptly to the present.

"Yes, Sire, open tables for yourself and all the great officers of state, cooks, and wines from the royal cellars, *vin ordinaire* for the common folk, frequent *levées*, hazard tables that I shall run, as well as public banquets."

"I fear, my dear Baron, that your magnificent tastes make you unpopular."

"To the opposition, Sire, yes, they may gain me some popularity with your friends and the waverers, your first levée is tomorrow, Sire."

"I know," replied the King on a checked sigh. "It is a waste of time courting these people, traitors, many of them, when I could be employed on the important business in hand, France, Russia, the Emperor."

He shuddered, adding: "The cold is arctic, everything must be done to distract the people from noticing that they have been brought here in the worst of the winter. Is the Riksdag Hall built yet?"

"Yes, Sire, they have been working on it day and night, it is covered inside with purple cloth and finely furnished."

"We shall not be as splendid as in Stockholm," smiled the King. "We shall miss my brothers and their brilliant suites, the Senators too, will be a loss, how

impressive their purple velvet mantles, their feathered hats and weighty gold chains!"

Armfelt sympathised with the King's love of a spectacle, but assured him that this would be far from mean—"though the French tapestries sent from Stockholm are much too small for such a vast hall."

Observing that the King was profoundly agitated and that the long hands he held to the blaze trembled, Armfelt tried to encourage him by reminding him of all the good friends he would-have at the Riksdag, Vallquist "I have designed him the new vestments that he will wear at the cathedral," interrupted the King quickly. "It is a chance for him to impress everyone."

"Then your Majesty has Elis Schorderheim, Erik Ruuth, noble, loyal and industrious, who will be Marshal of the Diet, your Majesty's personal friends…"

He continued with the imposing list of those who would not only support the King, but work for him, had he not had, during all his reign, the foremost men of talent and genius of all classes, to work for him?

Gustaf remembered Johan Toll, while warmly agreeing with Armfelt, he asked him if he thought there were many malcontents in the Guards?

"No, Sire. None of those who did not join the Anjala pact, have been disloyal since, this Republican pose is but a fashion—this talk of Brutus—"

"Brutus?" interrupted the King sharply, "do they talk of him—seriously?"

"Not seriously, Sire," replied Armfelt, startled at this, "for where is Caesar?"

"Oh, I am Caesar, I have that compliment, I am the tyrant, Armfelt."

"No," assented Armfelt earnestly, "it is the rabble of the coffee houses where the nobles—the disaffected nobles—gather, who really less republican than they? Who gives any heed to Ture von Bjleke or von Engerstrom, who mutter about a republic on the classic lines—it is a mere fashion, caught from France—there it is dangerous, for the people are behind it—here it is but a disaffected clique and the people are all behind your Majesty."

Armfelt knew that the King was perfectly aware of all this, that he must have conned over hundreds of times the entire European situation, but the young man spoke as he did reminding him of the littleness of his adversaries because he wished to ease the King's agitation; in only a few hours he would have to hold his first levée and meet all the members of the opposition, who would be watching his every word and gesture, listening to his every intonation, weighing all his words, so now this enthusiastic and brilliant friend tried to encourage his master's weary spirit.

"I must persuade Pontus Liljehorn to leave these mischievous clubs, Klas Horn, too, they are good fellows—Adolf Ribbing is violent against me, as his father was, but be has left the army—how loud the gale roars! Had I not given the money power to the Diet, I might be planning the French campaign by now, instead of idling here, with this mummery to put through—"

"If you Majesty had tried for the money power," said Armfelt, "you would have lost all, *that* the Diet will never give up."

"I know—yet they might trust me with their revenues," Gustaf smiled. "The Crown Prince pleased, you think?"

Armfelt, to whose handsome dashing presence the frail boy was devoted, was able to respond with warm sincerity that the Prince Gustaf had indeed pleased everyone.

"I shall sleep on the couch, Armfelt—don't fear for me tomorrow, I know how to act a part."

Chapter 83

It was on a day of dark storm that the gorgeous procession wound to the cathedral to attend the service held by the Bishop of Vexio, then to the temporary wooden Rikssaal to hear His Majesty's speech.

His extreme fascination had overcome the coldness of the stiffest of the members of the First Estate, and brought a smile even to the lips of the young premier noble of Sweden, Count Brahe, his sternest opponent, on the day of his first levée, when he had moved among them with the grace, ease and courtesy that few could resist; those whom he had not seen since he had ordered their arrest, he had met with a graciousness and a wit they could not withstand. The throne had been set on a dais, either side were the tabourets, one for the Marshal of the Diet, Erik Ruuth, who had been Finance Minister during the Russian campaign, and the Lord High Steward, their rich costumes were covered by flowing white silk mantles. Behind the throne were grouped the King's pages, wearing black and red capes and sashes, and Armfelt's bodyguard, in black and silver uniforms, the Life Guards with their upright white plumes, and the King's equerries and friends, in their costly attire. The nobility, with a reserved air, stood on the right of the throne, the other three Estates to the left.

The King wore a suit of cloth of gold, the crown of Vasa round his pomaded curls, and held the sceptre of Vasa in his fine hand; the day was so cold, that even the large stoves set in the building could not warm it, and so dark that scarce a gleam of light penetrated the tall windows, while frequent gusts of North-east wind beat on the temporary building. The King, and the little Prince seated on the tabouret by his side, wore mantles of ermine, the nobles, sables, fox and marten fur, the three lower estates the hides of more common beasts or cloaks of thick cloth, yet everyone was cold, shivered, and all save the King, huddled into their furs.

Armfelt and Schorderheim, both of whom stood near to the King, and both of whom had been watching him uneasily for many weeks, fearing that one so sensitive would sink beneath his burdens, were astonished at the vivacity and enthusiasm with which he, as he himself had said—"played his part".

His speech was superbly prepared, superbly rendered, simple in effect and coloured by a profound sincerity, it yet was the product, as were his voice and gestures, of the most finished art; his melodious tones, his bearing of an incomparable distinction, the animation whereby his looks took in each member of his audience, and seemed to address, to plead with him personally without a touch of fear or hesitancy, all this his enemies as well as his friends must concede

could only be termed a fascination, and one so absolute that while he spoke there was not one there could remind himself that this was a well trained, well graced actor speaking, as well as the most persuasive orator in Europe; all that he said was truthful and full of enthusiasm, he reviewed the events of his reign, recounted the advantages they had bestowed on Sweden and gave all the credit to his valiant Estates, even including the Nobility—"I see among your ranks many patricians who have stood gallantly beside me against the enemy."

The speech, so tactful, so full of conciliation, even of a generous appeal, roused great delight in the ranks of the three Estates who were already loyal, but did not stifle the suspicions of the opposition; the Nobles had come to this outlandish spot in a mood of angry doubt, some of them believed that they might be going to be arrested, and, determined to defend themselves bore pistols as well as swords under their cloaks, they resented the splendours of General Armfelt, the fact that he was in charge of the soldiers, and the fact that these were obviously quartered to overawe Gefle, but they did not know how to meet the royal tactics; they had no leader, Pechlin cautiously remained aloof, Fersen was in permanent, sullen exile, the premier peer (and a violent opponent to Gustaf) Baron Brahe was young and unversed in politics, Fritz was too moderate and reasonable, moreover the number of the nobles hostile to the King had been reduced by nearly half, from nine hundred and fifty, to five hundred, since the Riksdag of 1789, for many of their ranks had now joined the King's party, the patriots, Royalists and careful men also mistrusted the extremists among them, men like the fanatics Bjleke and Engerstrom, Ribbing or the Counts Horn father and son, who might have even more dangerous notions in their heads than the King cherished in his designs. So the First Estate could do nothing but rejoice in the alarm and confusion shown by the other Estates when they learned of the condition of the national finances revealed by Hakonsson the Finance Minister; they therefore proceeded to elect those of their members who were most rancorous towards the King as their representatives on the Secret Committee, not being able, however, to avoid sending the invaluable Frietzsky and Lantinghausen, both of whom were liberal moderate men.

For days with sessions of five to six hours the King led the debate in the stone chamber of Gefle castle, humouring all alike, spending his charm, his tact, his wit, his knowledge, all his graces to gain his point—money for his policies.

Each evening he found some relief from his fatigue and often his melancholy, in recounting to Armfelt or Essen, Lowenhjelm or any other of his intimate friends who shared his confidence, the humours of the day, that despite all his cares, he shrewdly noticed.

Elis Schorderheim who was of the Secret Committee would notice how, in a flash, the King had turned the tables on any of the lords who ventured on sarcasms and instantly silenced them, making them look foolish before the delighted burgesses and peasants; yet this irony he employed only on those who were his deliberate enemies. So amused was the Secretary, though he liked better his title of Herald, at all the incidents of the sessions that he made notes of them for the future entertainment of the King—how absurd, for example, that some of the nobles had taken offence at the screen behind the royal chair, that showed a wooden carving of a harlequin leading bears, they pretended to take this as an

insulting reference to themselves, when it was really an odd piece of furniture brought down by some servant from the attics to shield the King from the heat of the huge fire behind him—so ready were these disloyal men to be affronted.

After the Secret Committee had sat for a fortnight, the King was able to tell Armfelt that he had triumphed, even the nobles, largely owing to Frietzsky, had agreed to report to the Estates, that the rise in the National debt was due solely to the most successful war with Russia, and that the Bank of Sweden, extremely wealthy through the wise management of the King, could liquidate this, and that the present subsidies could be continued until the next Diet.

There remained only the formality of each Estate to discuss these measures separately.

Gustaf had with difficulty held himself in check during these fourteen days, though he knew he could not have hoped for an earlier settlement, but this business of raising money was to him increasingly a tedious waste of time, the affairs of the royal family in France were worsening every hour, M. de Boullie not—being able, at the last minute, to leave France had sent his son to Gefle and Gustaf, after discussing French affairs with him, was passionately impatient to return to the capital as soon as possible.

"I must return by March," he stated this so frequently, as if he had some appointment there, that his friends wondered if he had forgotten his dislike of that month that he considered always as unfortunate for him, and that he, in his dread of assassination had always associated with that day in March when the murderers had crowded round Caesar, but none of them mentioned this now, partly because it was supposed that the King had outgrown all superstitions and partly because there had been lately so much ranting of Brutus and his bloody deed over all Europe, that it would have been crude to mention this ancient tragedy that had suddenly become so popular, so discredited, so vulgarised, to one of the King's wit.

The King ordered his baggage to be packed, his horses and carriages got ready, despite the black and stormy weather, when he discovered that the First Estate after all, were preparing to obstruct his measures. While the other three Estates at once accepted the findings of the Secret Committee the nobles prepared to debate them with considerable bitterness.

Gustaf, aware that if he did not move in the early spring, he would miss the summer campaign, aware of the unprotected state of the capital, and burning with a passionate longing for action, took an instant revenge on his opponents.

The Act of Security with which, at the last Diet, the King had deprived the nobility of most of their privileges had never been entered in statute books of the laws of Sweden; he therefore arranged that a deputation from the three Lower Estates should wait on him, begging for the public and formal recognition of this law which had hitherto only been tacitly observed, and outwardly ignored by the nobles though they had had to accept that their privileges were extended to others. To this open affront they reacted with the utmost violence, even the King's friends, even Armfelt, implored the King not to provoke old quarrels that were on the point of healing; one after another, in the black weather, while the baggage horses were being loaded, they pressed on him in his closet.

The King's face was terrible; he was overworked, exhausted, depressed by the strange, gloomy, almost barbarous surroundings, the dark, stormy weather, during his stay in Gefle no ray of sun had been seen, nor had the tempest ceased, he also believed that the opposition was thwarting him out of mere malice, he had already got his majority, the nobles were only capable of causing delays, of trying to shake his nerve, perhaps, of rousing riots in Stockholm, a clash between the citizens and the Guards, or the Dalesmen and the Burgher patrols. Anything as long as the King's designs were postponed, ruined—and this after his offers of conciliation, his frank disclosure of the importance of the issues at stake, after the justification of his entire reign by the benefits he had given Sweden, the glorious Peace of Varala.

The King believed also that there was a taint of personal insult and ridicule in the actions of the nobles; no doubt among them were those two who had appeared before his window at Haga, in the masquerade, or the employers of these two; he believed these men had followed him to Gefle; he had not his usual walks because of the intense cold and bitter winds and snow, but he had frequently seen, two men loitering about as he descended or ascended his coach, two men of the same tall figures with their fur mantles thrown across their faces, their hats pulled over their eyes, the silly conspirator tricks he had employed in '72—and yet which had been successful. Even through the murk of the murky storm he thought he had once detected a fold of a cerise silk scarf at the neck of one of these silent followers of his movements. They were trying to torment him, to humiliate him into guarding himself, into showing signs of fear—who might those two be? He would not think of names, he could not endure to consider anything disloyal of his Swedes, not even after Anjala, but he would not endure this treacherous obstruction of the Opposition, in the ranks of which these two, or their masters, no doubt sheltered. Fiery and haughty in his demeanour, he continued with his preparation for a return to Stockholm by the end of the month, first forcing a formal recognition of the Act of Security on the First Estate, then dissolving the Diet; he listened indifferently to the entreaties of his friends; the nobles, on their side, though alarmed and conscious they were in the minority, refused to give way, uttering rebellious threats against the King and his advisers, though, in time the King stood alone, there was no one who stood out with him.

The First Estate was shaken, however, by hearing that the King's favourites even Armfelt, even Schorderheim, had pleaded with him in vain, to their appeals not to bring them all to ruin he had offered silence and a face of ghastly anger. Some men of tact and patriotism, the principal being Erik Ruuth advised the First Estate to give way on the finding of the Secret Committee before the King had answered the deputation from the other three Estates.

This they did, alarmed, feeling they had gone too far though with bad grace, and on hearing of this concession, which was all he wanted, the King forbore to place the Act of Security among the Resolutions of the Diet.

Chapter 84

Amid the darkening storms, the gusts of snowflakes, the sombre light that escaped, for a few hours from the low purple clouds that moved over the trampled icy mud in the streets of Gefle, the houses where lights showed all day at the windows, the cumbrous massive castle, the fur clad soldiers in their tents, or seated round their fires, the Diet of Gefle was “blown out” by the traditional fanfare of trumpets.

Everything had gone smoothly on the final session, the King, with an uplifted heart, had been able to thank all the Estates for standing by him, and to hold out promises of a fair future for Sweden, the three lower Estates were enthusiastic in their support, and even the Opposition, relieved that the King had given way and not publicly humiliated them, showed no open hostility.

Unable to control his native generosity, Gustaf sought for some tangible means of thanking the First Estate for their acceptance of a compromise, and in gracious terms such as he alone knew how to employ so effectively, he offered, in the Diet, the order of Vasa to Frietzsky, his resolute opponent, but an honest, able, patriotic man, whose moderation at the Secret Committee had been most marked.

Overcome with astonishment and gratitude, the veteran statesman stammered his refusal, since he had taken a vow never to accept this order that he had been accused of intriguing to obtain.

Gustaf’s subtle wit, noted, however, that the old man was moved, almost confounded by this honour, and that he did not hesitate to express his admiration of the King’s services to freedom.

“Your refusal, given on those grounds, does you honour,” he replied warmly. “Your name will always be associated with Swedish agriculture—if not with the Order that rewards those who serve it.”

Nothing pleased Gustaf more than magnanimity, whether in friend or foe, and he left the Rikssaal with pleasure in his heart—“thus I shall win them, one by one, for Sweden.”

Some of the more violent members of the Opposition crowded round Frietzsky, affecting to congratulate him on a subtle scorn of “the tyrant’s bribe”, one even remarking “that fox has gone away with his tail between his legs.”

“Not at all,” replied the old man sharply, “do not dishonour a noble action. All the First Estate ought to share my gratitude to the King.”

Chapter 85

The Crown Prince slept against his father’s glossy sables during the slow dark journey to the capital, he had not outgrown his horror of the glittering theatre, the swirling mask, he remained affected by cannon fire that he had heard only in salute from the Amadis lying at anchor outside the palace and by tales of war, but he had become used to soldiers, to the splendid uniforms of the Guards, to the ceremonial of the palace, he had found that in his father’s friends, especially in Gustaf Armfelt, strength and splendour might be combined with tender kindness

and he was no longer alarmed by the upright white plumes that increased the stature of the Life Guards to gigantic proportions, to the yellow plumes that floated above the casques of the dragoons.

He had followed the proceedings of the Riksdag with grave interest, for he was already well read in the history of Sweden, and had admired passionately the brilliant appearance and consummate eloquence displayed by his father, for he now was deeply imbued with the glories of the House of Vasa.

Now, disregarding etiquette, Gustaf had taken the child in the coach with him and clasped the slight body to his breast, while his thoughts spread over him like protecting wings, as the carriage jolted over the icy ruts, strewn with straw.

"If only I live long enough to give him his chance of kingship—I have many faithful men of talent and genius to help me—to help him—the Danish taint does not show—he is less fearful than he was, little by little, I can train him, he has graces—how charmingly he behaved in Gefle." Gustaf permitted himself to hope. Once more, despite the trembling forebodings of his friends that he had carried through a dangerous enterprise that would mean he could, with the Russian subsidies at once begin the war with the French revolutionaries then these other projects…the reputation of Sweden would be much enhanced now that it was proved that the King was master of the Riksdag, nay, more important, that he had the great majority of the nation behind him in solid support; it had been in no mean or reluctant spirit that the Estates had voted for the striking of a gold medal to celebrate the victory of Svenskund and the peace of Varala, they had all save for a few malcontents, really felt pride in the national achievements.

The future showed full of toil, of difficulty, of hazard but the King's spirits were high, confident in his own genius, he believed that he could win every Swede into his friendship, restore order in France, revive Poland with a liberal government, unite Norway to Sweden, thus forming the long debated Northern confederation where all the arts of life might flourish in peace. Always his aim was peace; he touched the floss like tresses of the sleeping child, the soft face warm under the rich cloak, and dared to hope as well as to wish that Gustaf IV would reign in peace—"Perhaps Toll will serve him."

The royal cavalcade moved slowly through the darkness flecked with snow flakes that showed, softly floating, in the lights cast by the torches, the sumptuous uniforms of the escort of Guards, of the troops of Dragoons were outlined with white, snow was also on the harness round the metal bosses that gleamed in the torch light. The pallid glow of the Northern night made the blue dark of the white landscape luminous as the low clouds furled aside revealing the moon; the chains and leathers of the horsemen and their mounts scraped and clattered, the wheels of the heavy coaches rumbled over roads softened by the passing of the advance guard and the strewing of straw; the sudden disclosing of the moon turned the tossing plumes of the soldiers into silver and struck stars of light from the cuirasses revealed here and there, beneath their thick mantles.

At many a wayside cottage, at many a posting station, the yellow glow of lamp or candle showed where the curious waited to see the glimpsed pageantry of the royal procession returning to Stockholm; never before had the King, the court, the four Estates, the foreign ambassadors, travelled thus in formal pomp across the winterbound landscape; those who peeped, shivering, seemed to gaze on some

pageantry of spectres, some vision evoked by a wizard, so strange, so remarkable this procession appeared, half seen shadows, dark unexplained forms, blazing torches, swinging lanterns, the huge chargers with rough shod hoofs moving slowly, many with grooms at their heads, the coach horses helped by running grooms and guided by ropes, sparks from the resin fed flames and the flaring pine knots flying into the clear air, quivering with moonshine.

It seemed a magic show, as if all the state and glories of the house of Vasa passed across the frozen fields of Sweden in phantom pageantry.

When the watchers had heard the last shout and jingle, seen the last horseman disappear into the distance, the solitary landscape was very still, the clouds rode over the moon again, the snow fell and before the royal cavalcade had entered Stockholm all trace of its passing had been blotted from the road, a covering of pure white lay over the hoof marks, the carriage ruts, the straw, the flakes from the torches, effacing every sign of the procession that had passed in such splendour and had vanished, like a parade through a winter's night dream.

Chapter 86

On March 16th the King attended the last masquerade of the season that was held in the Opera House; it was the second at which he had been present since his return from Gefle; though determined to countenance all the pleasures that softened the rigors of the Northern winters, he was longing for these festivities to be over, in order that he might devote himself entirely to business. France was foremost in his mind; he had been stimulated by the interview with the son of the duc de Bouille, emissary of the royalists, (though approving the plan of campaign he had asked: "Where are we to find the money?") and by the dispatches from Fersen to whom he had written three days previously. His spirits had also been raised by the events of the morning, he had been with friends at Haga, given orders to the master mason that a certain amount of work was to be re-started on the new palace, as soon as the weather broke, then driven in a sledge to Brunsvik, a small village near by. Winter sports were taking place, and the King watched them, as he knew nearly all the members of the opposition were present; as a compliment he waited until the final procession of racing sledges had passed, and then returned to Stockholm, after cheerfully saluting the sportsmen.

His spirits were further raised by being told by George Lowenhjelm that a far larger number of the first Estate had attended this ball than at any time since '89; many nobles known to be the King's opponents had taken tickets—at least a hundred of them who had lately disdained the royal entertainments.

"This is the result of the Riksdag at Gefle," said the King. "At last they begin to understand me—certainly the grand saloon is very full."

He occupied the royal box, with the room behind in which he had interviewed the French ambassador shortly before his Coronation, when Beylon and Schorderheim, reducing themselves to the offices of servants for his sake, had sat waiting on the dark empty stage.

He remembered this with some regret, he was fatigued, he had visited the French theatre where *Les Folies Amoureuses* of Regnard had been played, in order to distribute his patronage. He had supped in the little room behind the box with Lowenhjelm and Essen, four lackeys and a page were in attendance, and Liljehorn, who was Captain of the Guards on duty that evening, had several times reported to the King; a brilliant orchestra was playing and the costumes were rich and elegant; while at supper the page Tigerstredt had brought the King a letter that Lowenhjelm perceived to be written on common paper in a vulgar hand. This epistle the King read twice; then with a smile had placed it in his pocket, without asking Tigerstredt where he had come by the latter.

"Shall we mask now, Sire?" asked Lowenhjelm.

"You go, my dear fellow, and join your charming lady below—I shall come shortly."

The young officer obeyed and the King remained alone with Baron Essen, he then pulled the letter out of his pocket and read it aloud, it sounded grotesque in his charming voice.

It was a wordy and abusive scrawl, obviously an educated person trying to write as a petty trader, and warned the King not to join the dancers, but to remain in his box. "It is many months now since a band of patriots have formed a plan to assassinate one who has so wounded the liberties of Sweden, Brutus would remove the tyrant, but save the friend."

"Brutus again," smiled the King easily. "I am no Caesar—nor do I know any one of my *friends* who would play Brutus—he was Caesar's *friend*."

Baron Essen, extremely alarmed, urged the King to take stringent measures, to return at once, under guard to the palace, to close the doors of the opera house and send for Liljensparre so that the maskers might be searched for weapons.

"No. How could I? I should be suspected of making mischief, of finding an excuse to arrest members of the opposition—and just now, when I have conciliated them—it would be madness."

"Suppose someone out there was found to have secret arms?" suggested Essen. "Then your Majesty would be justified and some plot exposed."

"Most of them came to the Riksdag with pistols under their cloaks," smiled Gustaf keenly. "None of them shot at me. No Swede would. There is no plot—if there were, they could have killed me before now. This is mere impertinence—Brutus you observe, and March!"

He thought of the cerise mask, of the two men at Haga, of his suspicions that he had seen them again at Gefle, he had rapidly decided that it would be foolish to create an alarm, and that there was nothing to do but ignore these mischievous tricks; deep as was his dread of the miserable death of assassination, there was no one he knew who he could believe capable of this baseness, he was aware that he had no personal enemy, having never done anyone personal wrong, all his opponents were political.

"Come, let us go into the box again," he said. Essen protested, and at least begged the King to wear a coat of mail. "I can easily procure one."

"It would not save me, if a mischief is intended."

Gustaf stood up, his long narrow body was clad in pearl coloured satin, encrusted with bronze coloured sequins in the huge cuffs and on the pockets,

revers and shoulders, his sash was of golden gauze, his cravat of guipure and the azure blue velvet ribbon that held his full, long powdered curls was brought round to the front and fastened with a sapphire brooch; across the ruffles of his cravat he wore the ensignia of the three orders, these crossed swords, seraphim heads and knots made his breast blaze in the candle light, then he was extinguished into darkness as he moved into the shadow beyond the girandole.

"You will not go out like that," entreated Essen. "It is not safe."

"A deserter is never safe."

"At least put on your domino and mask."

Gustaf took down from the side of the box, a pale grey satin Venetian domino, heavily bordered with bullion, a three cornered hat of the same material and a black mask that covered only his eyes and the upper part of his nose, like a gigantic butterfly for it was exactly shaped to his face and there was no veil or face fall.

"You will be recognised at once, it is no disguise," said Essen with apprehension.

The King went to the front of the box, and stood there erect, like a portrait, as he had stood at the window in the palace of Haga, framed, a target.

He at once noticed a group of black dominoes with white masks, who were just entering the grand salon, they advanced to near the royal box, then turned about and scattered, they were men, tall and of soldierly bearing; any one of them might have been the mask with the cerise domino, one, moving rapidly through the dancers, suddenly flung out a scarf of this colour.

"It is a stupid and malicious trick," thought Gustaf. "The warning is given in the hope that I shall take heed of it, and then to-morrow there will be squibs to declare with taunts that I was afraid to mingle with the dancers in the last masquerade of the season."

He had stood for a quarter of an hour gazing down at the frivolous scene, without moving, save for the rise of the lace on his heart, the tremble of the lace at his wrist.

Then, the watchful Essen, regarding him anxiously, heard him remark—"So, you see, no one is intending to assassinate me, I have been standing here motionless for some time, and no assassin would lose such an opportunity."

"They would have to consider," replied Essen, "their own escape—I do not like the hundred members of the opposition being here to-night—after that letter, no."

"You take this brutal jest seriously?" asked the King. He threw his domino over his shoulder, hiding his orders, but he was in no way disguised, since he had been standing long enough in his box for everyone in the theatre to be acquainted with his attire.

"Ah, well, I have more important matters to attend to than this," he smiled. "I am glad this is the last masquerade."

He left the box, and passing along the passage at the back that a porter kept, he entered the theatre near the stage where the orchestra in the royal livery was playing a gavotte. The King passed round the alcoves that were occupied by card players and coquetting couples, in one of them he saw Lowenhjelm and a lady in a green and lilac domino; his fingers touched the knot at his lapel, he saluted them

as they rose, he smiled—“Ah, pretty mask, you should be gracious to your cavalier, since he deserted me for you.”

He then went into the green room behind the stage and spoke to the manager about the arrangement of the curtains looped behind the orchestra and the light of the massive chandeliers, both he said, were too bright; he commended the musicians, especially the violoncellist—whose instrument was one he diverted himself with—“but not so often now.” After a few moments he returned with Essen to the crowded floor, he had only moved a step forward when he was surrounded by black dominoes with chalk white masks, and falls, they came in two directions, closing him in, then one of them tapped him on the shoulder and cried out in French—”*Bon jour beau masque!*”

A muffled shot sounded, then a voice whimpered—“Ah, he does not fall!”

The King snatched off his mask and his terrible blue eyes glistened round the black dominoes; Lowenhjelm came running up—“Who is letting off fireworks! That is not allowed!”

“Some villain has wounded the King!” cried Essen, drawing his sword, as did Lowenhjelm, and one of the Guardsmen on duty, rushing up instantly, their three swords flashing out drove back the black dominoes, one of whom threw two pistols and a dagger on the floor and mingling with the crowd raised a cry of “fire!”

“I am shot in the back above the left hip,” said Gustaf clearly, leaning on Essen, “they were surprised that I did not fall. Discover who did this and protect him—it must be some witless Jacobin.”

All the black dominoes were now crying “fire!” and rushing about in a confusion, but Captain Pollet of the King’s guard shouted out to the sentinels to close the doors. Gustaf sent Lowenhjelm to bid the orchestra to continue playing, and helped by Essen returned to the little room by the box; dropping his mask and that he still held, he sank onto the sofa. “A good thing that it is red,” he smiled, showing his domino dripping with blood.

His composure was such that Lowenhjelm thought that the wound was not serious, and therefore obeyed his orders to return to the ballroom, make inquiries, tell everyone who had heard of the attempt on the King’s life, that it had utterly failed. Lowenhjelm found some of the dancers unaware of what had happened, as the gay music still filled the crowded room, but Ribbing, unmasked, stopped him and asked, “how the King did?”

“It was but a trifle!”

“God be thanked,” said Ribbing. “May the murderer be brought to justice.”

At this moment the Spanish and Russian envoys arrived in a tumult, they had heard rumours of the crime as they were stepping from their coaches, and requested immediate audience of the King.

“He will see your Excellencies,” replied Lowenhjelm hastening on his duty.

The two diplomats were admitted by the porter of the door to the King’s apartments.

They found him lying on the red couch, cheerful, even animated, he gave them an exact account of the dreadful incident and they left him reassured, after protestations of loyalty; Gustaf Armfelt, who had been detained at the house of the Danish minister, now entered the ballroom, a carelessly flung Venetian cloak over his uniform.

As he left the crowded grand saloon to find the King, the porter at the royal door said—“Ah, General, you may enter, but you will not be allowed to come out!”

Taking no heed of such insolence, Armfelt passed the man and opened the door himself; then the man whispered: “The King has been shot—the Chief of Police has been sent for—they are trying to find the assassins.”

Armfelt staggered against the wall, unnerved by shock, then went into the ante chamber to the ante room; it was lit by one candle and Tigerstredt the page was sitting by the stove, sobbing.

“Where is the King?” stammered Armfelt.

“In there—on the red divan,” sobbed the boy.

“Wounded?”

“Yes.”

Armfelt found the King lying in a tranquil attitude on the red couch; the door to the box was closed and the candles of the girandole, burning to their sockets, cast a fitful light on the elegant cabinet; Armfelt, observing the blood on the domino wrapped round the King, sank speechless onto a chair.

The King, raised on his elbow, smiled tenderly at his friend.

“Take a glass of water, and calm yourself, my dear Armfelt—you know what a wound is—and I feel no pain.”

“Where is everyone? Have doctors been sent for?” stammered Armfelt, drinking the water, spilling it, seeing all the future in ruins.

“No doubt, we shall see my good surgeon Hallman soon, come nearer, Armfelt,” as the young man instantly threw himself on his knees by the couch, the King whispered: “I thought I saw the face of La Perriere among the black dominoes—send to see where he is.”

“But I cannot leave you alone.”

“I have already received two members of the *corps diplomatique* there will be others—I could not refrain from remarking to M. de Carrol that it was strange that I, who had been in a hot campaign should be shot in the back—but it was no Swede—some fanatic Jacobin,” pausing he added on an effort, “send that poor child—young Tigerstredt home. I hear him sobbing, tell him it is nothing, nothing—” pausing, his hand over his brow he added: “It could not have been a Swede.”

Armfelt, amazed that no surgeons had been sent for hastened away, taking with him the sobbing child. Gustaf was relieved to be alone, he knew how soon there would be an oppressive crowd and how he must act his part before them, so as not to disturb the plans he had in hand. “It might even help,” he thought. “It might even bring the opposition round to me—this cannot be their work—a few fanatics.”

He lay still, patient; the music sounded from the grand saloon—no minuet, surely, but the defiance of death, the defiance of the Gods, in Gluck’s poignant music, the design of his life seemed accompanied by that music; he raised himself on one elbow, felt the blood gush out from his body, the warm wetness of it, sickened him, he felt dizzy, and suddenly the staircase of Piraniesi, then the stone web, opened before him, there was the little figure of the man trying to get out, there was Peyron—Jeanne d’Egmont—who besides Karl knew of the cerise silk mask?—the man had nearly escaped from the labyrinth.

Chapter 87

When Gustaf Armfelt, panting with his haste, returned to the Opera House, he found that Lowenhjelm had, on his own authority, ordered fifty of his own soldiers into the grand saloon, and that the Chief of Police had arrived and was making personal investigations. Already he had issued a summons to all the armourers and cutlers in Stockholm, in order that they might, if possible, identify the pistols and dagger that lay, under guard in the green room, forcing his way through the excited press of people who had now gathered in the Royal apartments. Arm-felt found the King still lying on the red divan, surrounded by a crowd of brilliant people, among these was Duke Karl, who was fainting in a chair and being attended by one of the surgeons, so uncommon was this display of emotion on the part of the King's brother, that, distracted as he was, Armfelt glanced again sharply at the Prince, who had been roused from his bed, and wore a sable cloak over a chamber robe.

Then he turned to the King whose blue eyes were gazing at him with a look of searching inquiry.

Armfelt passed Sir Robert Liston, the English envoy, and Stackelberg, the Russian envoy who were immediately near the King, and leaning down behind the red couch, whispered in his ear—"La Perriere has been in bed for some hours."

"Ah, then it was a Swede, after all," whispered the King in a desolate tone, then, "but there may be other Jacobins."

The Russian was who deeply nervous and distressed, exclaimed: "Ah, Sire, how could your Majesty risk a life so precious to the cause of peace?"

"When a man has decided to take your life, even at the cost of his own," replied Gustaf, with an instant return to gaiety, "one has little chance of escape."

Armfelt asked what the surgeon had said, for he observed that the King's body was bandaged, beneath the sequined waistcoat.

"I charged him to speak the truth," said Gustaf, "for kings should not be trifled with."

"I cannot say until I have probed with the proper instruments," protested Dr. Hallman. "His Majesty must be taken to the palace—all this crowd is too much."

"They are my friends," interrupted Gustaf quickly, anxious even now to use the sympathy his situation had provoked for political ends, "do not send any of them away. It is a trifle."

Resting his hand on Armfelt's shoulder as he knelt beside the couch, he rose, but after a few steps, sunk onto his friend's breast, shedding his blood on the pale carpet.

"Fetch a sedan chair," commanded Armfelt to the lackeys, "see that the carriage is at the door—at once."

Still smiling, speaking with composure, with that mingled gaiety and tenderness that fascinated even his enemies, he jested about the sedan chair that he entered with difficulty. "I travel like the Holy Father."

A jostling crowd, hardly kept at sword's length from the King by Armfelt, Essen and Lowenhjelm, who formed the royal escort, accompanied the slow driven coach that crossed the square, past the artillery yard where the King had given the signal for '72, past the statue of Gustaf Adolf II, over the first drawbridge, over Norrgro, the island Helglands, over the second drawbridge, to the old town in which the palace Nicodemus Tessin had built stood, the air was so cold it seemed like a tangible veil of ice round the faces of the curious, compassionate and angry crowd that pressed about the regal carriage with the four horses. The King began to feel pain from the jostling of the wheels, but continued to talk cheerfully; at the North entrance to the palace he was again placed in his sedan chair and carried up the wide stairs to the state bed chamber, the royal apartments being the nearest to this entrance, he would have preferred his smaller private room, but realised that it would not accommodate this large number of people, none of whom it was advisable to offend, most of whom he wished to conciliate.

When, after a tedious hour of compliment and sympathy during which his perfect easy courtesy did not fail, he was alone with his friends, he turned quickly to Armfelt. "Do not hope too much. This may be serious. I shall certainly be worse than I am now. There must be a Regency—how hot the room is! Did you mark the English envoy? Usually so cold, he knelt and kissed my hand and wept."

"Yes, Sire—everyone of feeling is profoundly moved by this foul crime."

"The Regency must investigate—if I die—what matter? If I live I will not hear the names of the Swedes who stooped to assassination—they must be Jacobins, no Swede would be so base, so cowardly—a shot in the back—Armfelt, what if a foolish domino cloak should join the leathern jerkins in the Riddarsholm church?"

"You must not think of such matters."

"Destroy it, Armfelt. A trifling garment to be stained with royal blood. I must see Karl to-morrow, early—promise me—no punishment—"

He fell unconscious suddenly, holding Armfelt's hand.

Chapter 88

The wind blew East, from Lake Malaren and the sea, North from the Norstrom, it was keenly cold in the great state apartment; the physicians had said that the stoves must not be heated, because the sick man had flushes of fever, and there was warmth only round the fire.

It was the seventh day after the King had been shot and he had not been well enough to give his usual number of audiences, so the vast apartment had been cleared earlier than usual. Arm-felt, Essen and Lowenhjelm sat over the slow burning fire, wrapped in their sable and astrakhan cloaks, for their breath showed before them in the icy air, everything, even their fingers, seemed brittle with cold, their powdered curls were frozen on their shoulders, they had just come in from the streets. The King had at last been induced to take an opiate, for he had never used such aids to oblivion, loving a clear mind, or wine, for he had his own natural stimulant, and now he slept, inside the tall Chinese screen of black

lacquer burnished with golden figures that surrounded the state bed. Inside this screen only a faint light glowed, touching faintly the plumes above the canopy, in the vast room itself a small lamp only was lit, pages and lackeys slept on mattresses on the ground covered with rugs, in a far corner another screen closed off the physicians. Elis Schorderheim sat on watch inside the screen. This was the quietest hour since the King had been carried into this chamber after the last masquerade, Arm-felt, his handsome face haggard, shivered in his furs.

"This is a dreary room," he whispered glancing round at the overlapping shadows that blurred the confines of the state apartment, the outlines of the draperies, the splendid furniture, the baroque ornament, staring at Essen whose profile was nearly hidden by his upturned collar and the partly unpowdered locks of his fair curls, Armfelt added, wearily: "I have been shut up here a week, such bustle, and such anguish, I hardly know what is happening abroad—I've not seen a news sheet—and the King will not have this fiendish plot spoken of—tell me, has Liljensparre discovered *all* the conspirators?"

"He has discovered more than a hundred—all nobles, his cross examination is ruthless, of course he could have prevented—this attempt—if the King had trusted him to police the masquerade—and told him what he knew."

"What did he know, beyond the warning letter?" asked Arm-felt sombrely.

"Anckarstrom—who fired the shot, as you know—and Ribbing have been following the King for weeks, without the opportunity they needed, either they had no chance to approach him, or no chance to get away. Once they hid beneath his window at Haga, he threw it open and gazed out on them—they said he looked terrible as in a trance—inhuman—his eyes, they said—and they thought he fainted, they could not do it, but fled—strange, after that, these devils *could* do it—they were at Gefle, at the other masquerade, one where he did not leave his box, another when they had not enough accomplices in the crowd—on the 16th they were desperate—it was the last masquerade."

"They fooled it badly," said Lowenhjelm bitterly. "So many to one, and he unarmed save for his sword he had no time to draw."

"Anckarstrom," whispered Essen, "declared that is why he shot him in the back—so as to give him no time to draw, and not to see his face, his eyes—he did not fire the other pistol, or use that hideous knife, because he was so alarmed when the King did not fall—if he had fallen he would have been dispatched on the spot."

"Perhaps better," sighed Armfelt on a sob. "His sufferings are atrocious—when the surgeon searches the wound, when the linen is changed—yet he never murmurs only now and then sends us all away on the pretence he must sleep, but creeping back, to listen at the screen, we hear him groaning."

"Don't think of it," muttered Essen. "He will not have any of them punished, he will not hear their names but the Duke of Sudermania told him of Anckarstrom."

"How did the police actually find him?" asked Armfelt. "I have heard, yet forgotten, I speak to distract myself."

"Liljensparre was in a fury, no other word for it, that the King had been so careless, he made all the guests pass between a file of soldiers before they left the Opera House, they were all searched, when Anckarstrom came up, he exclaimed, 'I hope you do not suspect me?' that turned Liljensparre's attention to him, he was

watched, and then when the armourers and cutlers were called together one of them identified the weapons that had been dropped, they had been bought from him by Klas Horn, and cleaned by him for Captain Anckarstrom. They were not new weapons, but fine, this gunsmith said he had bought them from another since dead. He supposed they might have been stolen—jewels seemed to have been removed and engraving scraped off—also from the case, in this was a scrap of leather—a lady's glove, maybe."

"Pellets of leather were found in the King's body," said Arm-felt harshly, "rusty nails and bullets—they are not all extracted."

"Yes." Essen nodded, staring into the fire that he saw wavering through his tears. "Anckarstrom confessed that he had made pellets of this glove, and sharpened and barbed the knife—"

"Yet he had not even the coward's courage to use it—but fled when Lowenhjelm's sword defended the King—does he express remorse?" whispered Armfelt fiercely.

"None. He is a fanatic—brutal to his family, cruel to his animals, bilious, bitter, several times up for sedition, saved by the King jealous of him, too, he raves about seeing him in the wings of the opera house with Carlotta Busoni years ago, raves of the King's life of vice. Jealousy I think. Consider! He was young, rich, with a family—an estate—everything to lose. He admits that there has been a loose plot against the King for some while, but it had no design, no purpose—until Anckarstrom offered to kill the King. Horn and Ribbing had thought of seizing him as hostage, but Anckarstrom was always for murder."

"They hoped, in the confusion, to raise revolt?" asked Armfelt wearily. "The fools! Not to know the mind of the country!"

"They would never have done it, they were too ill organized, not sufficient people were behind them—Engerstrom had drawn up some crazy plan for a new constitution—Pechlin was in it, no doubt, he has been arrested, but there is no evidence against him—General Horn has been attacked in his house—the dragoons had to arrest him to save his life—Klas is over the frontier."

The three men, looking monstrous in the rich furs and appointments by the red light of the fading flames, spoke obliquely, at random, exhausted and hardly believing what they said, their words passed from one to another like threads thrown carelessly; their faces were lined by fatigue and watching; a little moisture from melted snow still lay in the folds of their thick mantles, they moved their feet cautiously so as not to ring their spurs, Lowenhjelm himself carefully put a log on the fire, glancing towards the screen; all was hushed, overladen by silence; now and then the door into the ante chamber was pushed softly open, and some one peered, a dark figure before the strip of light, then quietly withdrew.

"The Duke has done very well," whispered Essen. "His measures have been very firm—the people might easily in their rage have murdered every nobleman in Stockholm."

"A good Regent," agreed Gustaf Armfelt, "so far—he keeps order, an inscrutable man—odd that this plot which was to have established a republic, should give the Duke of Sudermania his chance—the Queen Dowager would have been gratified."

The men looked away from one another.

"If the King does not recover," said Essen, "there will be a Gustaf IV."

“A very delicate and timid child,” remarked Armfelt. “The King has commended him to us—and to Toll, should he be allowed to stand by him?”

No one answered this; they spoke again of the labours of the Chief of Police, recounting to one another things that they already knew, Bjleke’s body, he had taken poison—would be buried under the scaffold, even Liljensparre had not been able to make Pechlin incriminate himself—“Can no revolution take place without me?” he had asked smoothly.

“Pechlin!” exclaimed Armfelt softly. “Toll was right—he should have been beheaded in ‘72 and a few others.”

“What is the King’s secret temper?” asked Essen. “He has that beguiling charm that conceals one knows not what.”

“His personal concern was for the wound being in the back and dealt by a Swede, but first of all he implored that there should be no bloodshed. He made the Duke promise never to tell the Crown Prince the names of these men. Of course it was by his order that the Duke stopped Liljensparre’s investigations.”

“Always this policy of conciliation,” whispered Lowenhjelm, “even now. The Chief of Police is in despair.”

“The First Estate were afraid of the vengeance of the people—the King was delighted to meet them half way, delighted—that is not too strong a word, full of joy, of hope, of pleasure.”

The three friends agreed that the visit of Count Brahe to the sick room had so raised the King’s spirits that he had seemed to throw off his pain. The leader of the nobles had come instantly to the palace after he had heard the news, begged for an audience as a special favour, and, on his knees had entreated the King to believe that the opposition had no knowledge of so foul a plot.

The King had embraced him when he would have kissed his hand, and had cried—“This is indeed a happy accident that brings two old friends together!”

“He meant that,” declared Armfelt, “the Count was sincere too, he was much moved, and wept as he withdrew.”

“Yet for all that,” muttered Essen, “Liljensparre could have brought half the nobles into his net—how many letters did he find in the postbag that left Stockholm on the morning of the 16th with these words—‘at midnight he will be no more—prepare for that’.”

“It was vile, cowardly and stupid,” sighed Lowenhjelm. “It could never have succeeded. Anckarstrom confessed to a personal hatred of the man as well as of the tyrant, no Brutus there, but a petty enemy—he offered to kill the King, he said he wore the red domino because of Madame Arfmedsson’s warning, in order to torment the King—how understand such malice?”

“It was cerise, not red,” remarked Gustaf Armfelt, “he flaunted that colour before the King young Peyron, I remember, wore that peculiar colour at his last masquerade.”

“It can have no meaning other than red,” said Essen. “Anckarstrom is gross and knows little nicety in these matters—whose glove would it be in that case? A woman’s glove—it must have been lost years ago—and then fired into the King’s body!”

“He need never know. How much does he know?” asked Lowenhjelm. “How much must he know?”

“That Anckarstrom fired the shot—he seemed little moved, merely saying—a poor fanatic—was he the cerise mask? We told him yes. He did not seem surprised that the two assassins had followed him so long. On hearing that the conspirators had drawn up a plan of constitution he asked to see it—‘there might be something it it,’ he said. That was at first, now he no longer talks of politics or domestic affairs.”

A tall, hastening figure slipped from the ante chamber, the duc d’Escars quietly joined the group by the fire, asking with anguish how the King did, if he had heard that the Emperor was dead and that Dumouriez had declared war against the Empire in the name of the French Republic?

“He cannot be told,” said Armfelt sadly.

The Frenchman shivered; he knew that there was no hope now for the royal family of France, or for the loyal French nobles, Gustaf had been struck down just when he might have been able to use the forces of the empire against Revolutionary France—“besides that,” he murmured, continuing his thoughts aloud, “I hold him in great affection. Does he suffer?”

“I fear it—he often asks the time, though a clock hangs on the column of his bed, he seems ever watchful and asks who is in the ante chamber.”

“What do the doctors say?”

“They know nothing precise—yet.”

The duc d’Escars thought of this great chance lost, of the agonizing news he would have to remit to the royal captives in France, of the irony that had changed the course of history by the shot fired by the hand of an obscure assassin.

“The churches are full of the people praying for the King, perhaps the good God knows something about this crime,” he said with the serenity his Gallic breeding gave his despair.

Chapter 89

The King was propped up in bed, the coverlet of blue brocade with silver flowers flowed over the blankets, the light green velvet curtains, lined with white satin were drawn back from the tester, that bore four upright clusters of white ostrich feathers, the Sweden three by three crowns were scattered in golden stitches over the curtains. The King was eased by immense down cushions and wore a chamber robe of purple with a large sable collar that fell open on the laces of his shirt; his hair was dressed powdered and fastened by an azure ribbon, fallen by the bedside was a map of Norway, some drawings of stage costumes and a copy of *The Thousand and one Nights* bound in pale calf, scattered as they had dropped from his languid hand. The distortion of his face was very noticeable, so were his blue eyes, whose brilliancy seemed unnatural; inside the high screens of black and gold sat the Queen shivering in the icy cold, beside her the Crown Prince, on a tabouret stool; they seemed like waxworks, pale, smooth, with glassy eyes and strained lips, shuddering in the cold, the boy whimpering a little, his teeth chattering. Neither spoke nor had answered the King’s low greeting; as he looked at the woman who

appeared to be sunk into imbecility, withdrawn and hostile, at the child, with his frightened face that was yet the face of the Vasas, he decided not to say any of the matter he had prepared for them; it was not worth while.

"I shall see you a little later," he whispered, "when I am stronger."

He smiled wistfully at his son, begging for kindness. The wife rose at once and curtsied, the boy hung on her hand a little, turned his prominent eyes towards his father and stammered:

"Shall you soon be recovered, Sire? No one will tell me what happened."

"An accident," said Gustaf, still tenderly. "Sleep well, trust Gustaf Armfelt—be brave and merciful."

The boy kissed his hand, Gustaf kissed his twitching face, and the two withdrew round the screen, the woman moved stiffly like a puppet, bunching her pelisse about her ears, never looking back.

Gustaf closed his eyes; he had so little time, but there was very little left to do; all his interests had become futilities.

The surgeon had told him he had five or six hours of life left. "That gives us until eleven o'clock," he had said; he had then taken leave of all his friends and servants, thanking them all with a gracious courtesy that never faltered, he had received, on Armfelt's suggestion, the last rites from the hands of Vallquist; earlier when any had spoken of religion he had been silent, then he had conceded, with great pleasantness—"Orthodoxy always helps affairs like this, these rites can do no harm to me and will please the people—see they keep the churches gay, Vallquist, pink, gold, the rosy cherubs, in the North one needs to be able to find God warm and welcoming."

That was over and his wife and son gone. Karl came round the screen. Gustaf thought: "Now I shall never understand, Karl. I am too tired to ask him if he ever told anyone of Peyron's cerise mask—nor is it worth while—so many others might have known."

"Is everything quiet in Stockholm, Karl?"

"Everything, Sire," the Duke spoke formally, but his face was worn and swollen by weeping; he had come from the palace chapel where the royal family were praying, and he added, in a passion uncommon to him—"Ah, Gustaf, Gustaf!"

"If you were able to take my place, to carry out my policies, Karl, my death would benefit the nation for I am reconciled with the First Estate—Count Brahe is my friend," he spoke with pride. "My death will have done that."

"You must live, Gustaf."

"Call in Bishop Vallquist, Armfelt, Lowenhjelm—any friend who is there."

He raised himself on his elbow and his blue eyes cast a glittering smile on his brother.

Karl went immediately to the little group by the fire and addressed them in a whisper. "He has sent for you all—is he going to demand the names of the assassins?"

"He will not hear them," said Armfelt. "I told him Klas Horn was in the plot, but not in the attempted murder, for he expected to see him—no need to account for Ribbing, whom he never sees."

"He has asked for Liljehorn," said Essen sternly. "I said he was ill with grief. The King did not ask again."

All were silent; the Chief of Police had traced the warning note the King had received in the opera box to a baker's boy who had been bribed by Captain Liljehorn to give it to one of the royal pages for the King; Liljehorn had been arrested and confessed to complicity in the plot; he had been in the assassination attempt and had answered for the Guards on duty that night, then he had lost courage and sent the note.

"The King had a great affection for him," said Armfelt, "and he lived on the King's bounty."

"They were all his pages at the Coronation—even Anckarstrom," said Essen again. "Bred in his mother's house."

They passed behind the screen and Gustaf said he would rise and sit by the fire, as he moved the thick scent of perfume rose, used to overcome the odours of the tainted blood. In the chair by the fire, still supported by Armfelt, the King turned to Karl and said, most earnestly:

"Karl, as your King, and as your brother, I charge you before these gentleman, not to take vengeance on anyone concerned in this plot. I will not have my son's reign darkened in the beginning by acts of political vengeance—let him live in tranquillity."

"I swear, Gustaf," murmured Karl. "For all save Anckarstrom and for him—no torture."

"I know what you all think," the King, though his face was much changed, smiled brilliantly, "that if I had destroyed the leader of these men, Pechlin, they would not have destroyed me. But it is they who will be destroyed—leave them to their destinies and they will be as nothing. I behaved as men must behave if civilization is to endure—not in our time—but some time," he paused and took a glass of water from Schorderheim. "I abolished privilege and a fanatic shot me in the back for that but privilege will go—we cannot have the unprivileged, the privileged—everything must be open to all—to every worthy citizen. There must be no military castes who feed on war—no corruptible magistrates," his voice was vibrant, his graceful fascinating oratory flashed out. "Some of you thought me a fribble, perhaps a fool. I gave the *people* music, literature—festivals—I set gifted men, born humbly, near the throne—they fought the war against the aggressor, my peasants! while the nobles laid down their arms. I was the first citizen only, in my person I tried to be the examplar—all this will come—the liberal commonwealth—I was termed extravagant—it is the wars that are extravagant, not the academies, the arts of peace—my battles were to secure Sweden—I secured her, at Varala."

He paused and none could answer him for emotion, nor did he heed their silence, there was not far to go now to the Vasa tombs in the Riddarsholm church, the wooden horsemen, the drums, the flags; the spiral staircase opened before him, the man was running up, nearly out of the stone labyrinth, nearly out into the clear Northern blue, where the swans fly towards the land of the Hyperborean, where the sledge travels on the ice—across this came a vision of his Coronation days, the group of pretty pages, the dark boy pointing a toy pistol at him…in his mother's house.

"Help me back to bed," he smiled; Armfelt and Essen held him up, either side, into the cold behind the black and gold screen, into the blue bed, that, in the one

little light that was all he could endure, showed pale and cold between the green curtains like one of the scenes he had designed for his first opera, the waters of Sweden, the lakes, the rivers, the seas of Sweden, by him protected, armed.

He pulled a ribbon from the breast of his chamber robe and gave it to Armfelt. “You will know what to do with it—my Vasa ribbon, and the portrait and the letter, dear friend.”

He smiled on all of them and his head drooped; his shadow enveloped him in the bed, as the small wick fluttered.

“He is a rare being,” whispered Vallquist, weeping.

“I thank you all,” whispered the King faintly. “What time is it?” He peered at the clock hanging on the bedpost, but could not see it.

“Half past eleven at night,” whispered Armfelt, holding the King’s hand.

“Karl,” said Gustaf, searching for his brother’s face among those at the bedside. “You shall answer before any God you have if you are not clement. I signed three papers Karl, Armfelt is to be Governor General of Stockholm—another appoints tutors for my son.”

He coughed violently and could say no more; Schorderheim who had drawn up the documents had already shown them to Karl, they were blotted and almost unreadable.

Recovering, the King whispered.

“Armfelt, never forsake my son—serve him, as you have served me. And ask Toll to forgive me. I regret little save what I did to him,” he sighed, choked again. “Is the orchestra playing Gluck’s music outside?”

The nightlight flared and showed his blue eyes brilliant as he looked blindly round the faces of his friends.

“Let no one else in—I remember King Frederik’s death chamber was like a market place.”

He lay still awhile, the pain was beating into a rhythm like the clop, clop of the horses’ hoofs over the ice, towards the land beyond the snow; he rallied from his last dreams.

“Remember, Karl, what you swore, remember it will all have to come—tolerance, no privileges, no catch words nightcap and plume—the dotard and the ruffle—”

As he paused again Vallquist bent low and whispered: “Shall I fetch the Queen, the Prince?”

“No, I shall sleep a while, I shall feel stronger when I have slept—leave me.”

He seemed to revive and they obeyed him, only Gustaf Arm-felt remained with the icy dark, the fluttering shadows, and out of fatigue and grief he drowsed, when he heard the King speak. Gustaf was smiling at him from the pillow; he spoke two words, then his blue eyes closed forever.

“Sweden. Peace.”