

# **The Rajah's Sapphire**

**From a Plot given him *via voce*  
by W. T. Stead**

**by M. P. Shiel, 1865-1947**

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## Chapter I

The Markgraf Stefan von Reutlingen, that rising son of the corps diplomatique, was not in the best of spirits. He felt as if he lacked part of himself, like an animal whose tail has been decapitated; for, while his handsome, knit body was in close attendance on the Kaiser at the Zeughaus, in Berlin, on the particular Sunday afternoon in question, the most important organ of that same handsome body was away truant in a certain western English county. Now, a frame without a heart is like an egg without salt; and thus it was that the Kaiser frowned more than once during the day to find his brilliant protege insipid to his taste, wearing an absent look, and giving spiritless answers to the spirited questions of his volcanic sovereign.

It was the 27th of January, in this year of grace 1895, and so, of course, the birthday of Wilhelm. Stefan's first task for the day had been to attend in the train of his young master at the Palast-kapelle to hear divine service. The soldier-emperor is nothing if not devout, and the days wound up with wine-libations to Mars are usually begun by him with the payment of his respects to the Nazarene carpenter. Stefan, too, like most sons of noble, old German races, had a tincture of a certain haughty piety in his composition. He rose early, full of the great day and all its details, sighed the name of a certain Ada Macdonald, called down with genuine feeling a blessing on the turbulent head of his young master, and, having ensconced his feet in the fur of a pair of wrought slippers and his back in the fur of a dressing-gown of scarlet velvet, sat down to the white napery and the silver service of a dainty private breakfast.

Fritz, the trusty, his right-hand man, the only living being who could satisfactorily wax the sweeping, diplomatic semi-circles of the young Markgraf's radiant moustache, placed gingerly by his right hand the privileged letters of the morning, and it was the very first of these which the Markgraf opened that sealed the fate of his good spirits for the rest of that day. Stefan had a trick of tapping lightly with his knuckles on the nearest convenient surface in moments of high impatience, and for a full quarter of an hour after reading this letter he gazed vaguely before him, and the table sounded forth a gentle, mechanical tattoo under his tapping hand. The note was short, and ran:

*"Dearest,—All is fixed. The ball will be, after all, on the 6th. and you are going to be there. Do not tell me about diplomacy, do not tell me about your too absurd, little Kaiser! If trifles such as these keep you from me at a time when I specially require, and demand, your presence—what am I to think? No, no, you*

*must come. It will be no ball to your Ada if you are not there; I think you appreciate the compliment. And there is danger in your absence, mon ami, at a function such as that. Can you not conceive how poor little me will be nibbled at, fished for, hunted like a stag by the hunters? And how can I save myself? Not mine the fault if the rats prefer Gorgonzola to Cheshire. I did not make the golden vermilion flashings which lure the fishers to linger above my waters. If my hoofs are slender, and the coating of my haunches sleek, I am no more responsible for that than I am for the fact that the hunters persist in preferring sleek and slender quarry. Come, come, and rescue me. And here is some news for you which should spur you: I have had another, my dear; yes, yet another. Think of it! Is this the twenty-ninth or the thirtieth? I forget. I have them all noted down in my diary with the records of my new gowns. And only guess from whom this last comes? Oh, it fills the cup of your Ada's bitterness to the brim! From whom but from the 'High-flyer.' Know you in the Fatherland the fame and prowess of that knight? The 'High-flyer,' my dear. He went down upon one of his little nervous knees and implored me to be his! Art jealous? Don't! Still, I assure you, he did it very prettily, and I was far from really degoute. The man has a certain charm, though he is undoubtedly madder than any March hare that ever scampered over a hill. He called me the Virgin Mary: said that then, for the first time in his life, he bent the knee before the unsullied soul of a virgin. And when I recommended him to rise from his too-absurd position he seemed to forget all about the matter at once, and coolly commenced to talk of—something else. Not one single word of it all did that man really mean! He is simply the creature of sheer, headlong, momentary impulse, and rather a ruffian into the bargain. And yet I like him—and, oh, he is so rich! He is to be at the ball, if he can remember so small a matter for so long a time as a week.*

*"I am now staying at Lord Darley's, in Somersetshire; but shall be in London with the St. John-Heygates in two days: we return west together for the ball. I shall meet you in London without fail, remember.*

*"Yours, yours!*

*"Ada."*

*"P.S.—I have, or had, something—a favor—to ask you. Dare I? But no, I am superstitious—and I love you! No, no. And yet I dearly wish it, too."*

The Markgraf Stefan's immediate reply to this letter was the tattoo with his knuckles on the table. He frowned, he ran his fingers through his hair, he made slender as his toothpick the ends of his moustache. "And—who—the devil." he slowly asked himself, "is the High-flyer?" The one thing he disliked in that perfection, his beloved, was a certain too high respect he had noticed in her for wealth—wealth for wealth's sake. Ada Macdonald "loved" him, and he was not rich: she did not love the High-flyer, but she loved money, and the High-flyer had what she loved. Small things trouble the lover, and Stefan was an intense member of that sect. "Donner and Blitz!"—he was still old-fashioned Teuton enough to swear by the elements in his hour of oaths—"who—the devil—is the High-flyer?" And with this second repetition of the question, a certain reputation flashed across

his memory. "Ralloner, perhaps?" Yes, surely, that must be the man who had received this nickname in England; Ralloner, the incarnate whirlwind, that genius of the hurricane, the typhoon of flesh. The rumor of him had filled Europe, the dollar-compeller, the madcap, the dispenser of palaces, the keeper of zenanas whose inmates were countesses and prima donnas. And this ghoul had been on a knee before his betrothed—a dangerous man, not to be balked in his impulses! Stefan shivered; he pushed the plate from him. And when Ada had refused him, the High-flyer seemed to forget all about the matter at once. How patent a pretence! Such a man must have meant all he said. Why did he think of going to the ball, where she was to be the brightest, most particular star of all? Fashionable functions of that kind were surely not the kind of places to which a wild spirit like Ralloner devoted his time. The ruse was patent. And to think that he, the Markgraf von Reutlingen, was tied here to Berlin, tied for a month at least, by the exigencies of diplomacy, to the heels of the Kaiser, without hope or respite! He cursed fate, and the Chancellor, and the great lady whose ball was to out-dazzle Solomon and the gems of Golconda; and when, by 11 o'clock, he sat on the blue velvet-cushioned pew immediately behind his Imperial Majesty in the Palastkapelle, out of the same mouth proceeded blessings and verdaments.

"To-night—at 10—in my private room, behind the Ballzimmer," said the Chancellor in his ear in low, mysterious tones, as the procession of the Court was passing out of the chapel.

He turned, in wonder, to question, but the Minister had already retired a few steps, and was lending ear to some close words of the Emperor.

After a somewhat hurried lunch, Wilhelm, followed by his staff-officers, the chief of the Civil Cabinet, the Chancellor, and the principal Ministers, drove to the Zeughaus to attend the ceremony of giving the password. Berlin was en fete. Huzzas and flags made a double hedge about him as he sailed through the palisade of the jubilant people. As he passed the University a band sent forth from its deep throat the patriotic song, "Heil dir in Siegeskranz." Stefan, with his back to the horses, in company with some of his superiors in diplomacy, began to give rein to generous enthusiasms, until the sudden curb-bit of the thought of "the High-flyer" ripped his mouth, and instantly he was in the glums again. A salvo of cannon greeted the Emperor at the Zeughaus. The party drew up in the great quadrangle, lined with its glittering array of warriors under arms; then followed the salute and manoeuvrings under the proud eye of the modern Alexander of the Germans; and then, for the first time, an army corps commander stood forth and read, as with the mouth of the trumpet, the famous manifesto of the "Birthday." After referring to the military victories, which were crowned by the foundation of the German Empire, and thanking the army, the manifesto ordered that for a year the banners and standards which received distinction from the late Emperor William during the war should, on public occasions, be adorned with oak leaves. The guns and batteries engaged in the Franco-German War were to be decorated in the same way. Almost immediately on the reading of this document, the Imperial cortege moved off to return to the Palace. A mighty cheer burst as from one throat from the quadrangle of the Zeughaus.

It was now late. The scene in the streets was one of medley, luridness, and grandeur. Only seat strutting young Crudity on an old throne; clap a crown upon

its head; stick a sceptre into its hand; fill its blatant mouth with high-sounding words about God and kingship; and now call down the mantle of night on a great city, illuminated; jumble the hot populace, empty of comfort and thought, in the streets, and bid them howl and roar the agony of their vacuum in wild huzzas; over all the noise let bands brazen out their jubilees and the tongues of a hundred bells talk; and you have a measure of the scene in Berlin on the evening of Sunday, the 27th of January.

After the highly ceremonial State dinner in the Palace, at which sat the Royal guests of Saxony and Wurtemberg, our own Duke of Coburg, and the Prince of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, the Imperial party adjourned to the brilliant performance at the Royal Opera. Berlin through all its width was a city of feasts. Private houses were decorated. Dinners ministerial, dinners official, club, military, were popping loud with corks; and tongues, venting to heaven his Majesty's health, drunk three times three according to time-honored custom. Wilhelm sat in his box at the opera, the high flush and the pride of life on his brow. He was beating time with his forefinger to an overture—for little Willie is a very great musician, and woe to those who deny it! As he sat thus, Prince Hohenlohe entered the box, and instantly the Kaiser's face changed to gravity, and the two leant their heads together in earnest talk. Both glanced simultaneously at Stefan sitting in the stalls near by, and Stefan, looking up, was certain of this singular glance, and with beating heart wondered what it could mean. He had not passed the age at which one blushes at an Emperor's notice, and he blushed. Till near 10 his head was in a whirl, and then he slipped from the theatre, crossed two corridors, traversed the Ballzimmer, and tapped at a tapestry-shrouded door. Hohenlohe had anticipated him there. A voice called, "Come in."

He found himself separated from the Prince by a table littered with documents, under a rather vague red light which swung from a vaulted roof. He made his lowest official bow, his high-bred face telling no secrets of the beating of his heart.

Prince Hohenlohe was buried deep in the perusal of official papers. Presently he looked up, and piercing the young man with his eye said—

"Ah! von Reutlingen, so that is you. Allow me to congratulate you. By the way, how old are you?"

"Twenty-five," gasped Stefan.

"Only twenty-five. Hum!"

There was an awkward silence. Stefan resented it.

"I take it, of course," resumed the Prince, "that you are tolerably well acquainted with the minutiae of the Chino-Japanese affair so far?"

"That is so, your Highness."

"And you know the general tenor of the secret proposals made by England to the Powers on that subject some little time since?"

"Certainly, your Highness."

"It was not at the time deemed prudent that Germany should show any undue desire to interfere between the contending parties. But now the Emperor agrees with me in thinking that the time has come—"

"Really!"

"Listen. You owe it to your known tact and knowledge of affairs that you have been selected to undertake a task of the very gravest responsibility. On your acts

and words, and even thoughts, will depend tremendous issues. And I feel certain you will enter on this mission with a due sense of its supreme importance.”

Stefan bowed.

“By the way,” resumed the Prince, “are you already personally acquainted with the Chinese Ambassador in London?”

“Certainly, your Highness.”

“And, of course, with Lords Rosebery and Spencer?”

“Certainly, your Highness.”

“The siege of Wei-hia-wei, as you know, is now proceeding. The idea is that you should reach the seat of action before it falls. That will mean quick work. You are, of course, aware of that. By the way, I forget for the moment, how many guns has the Tien Shen?”

“Six, your Highness.”

“And the Chen-Yuen?”

“Eight.”

“Well, well. You proceed straight to London to arrange preliminaries with the English Government and the Chinese ambassador. Your utmost time in London will be ten days. You will reach England by the Calais-Dover route—I have my own reasons for specifying this route; these you will learn from this packet. All these three packets I commend to your earnest perusal; in them you will find your whole conduct and policy clearly outlined. I dare say you will wish to start early on the morrow, and as you have had a fatiguing day I will now bid you my adieux and convey at the same time an expression of the Kaiser’s approval, confidence, and thanks.”

Stefan, with overflowing bosom, took the Prince’s hand and the documents, bowed, and retired backward like a crab, only with rather more grace and dignity. He walked home on air, thinking in his swimming brain two things. The first, that he was a made man and diplomat; the second, that if Ada Macdonald did not know before with what a whirlwind swing a happy man can waltz, she would know it for very certain on the great night of the Countess of Yorricks’s ball, till she begged for breath and mercy.

As he entered the door of his Residenz, his man Fritz put a telegram into his hand. He knew not why, but for a second he hesitated to open it. A presentiment, a fear seized him, that the gods were jealous, as in their wont, of his perfect happiness. Then he tore it open. It ran:

*“Before coming over you must go to Friedrich, the pawnbroker, at 13 Canalstrasse, Bremen, and get for me the Rajah’s Sapphire. Don’t let any absurd superstition about the luck of the stone prevent you. I must have it for the ball.—Ada.”*

He paled under the hall lamp, and slowly drew once more from his pocket Ada’s letter of that morning. Looking at the postscript, he read:

*“P.S.—I have, or had, something—a favor—to ask you. Dare I? But, no; I am superstitious, and I love you! No, no! And yet I dearly wish it, too!”*

“So, this,” he groaned, “was the favor. That cursed stone! This—this—this—was the favor!”

He tottered limp to his bed.

## Chapter II

To go to Bremen. Not to go to Bremen? That was the thought which racked him all the night. He had special instructions to proceed at once to Calais; the fate of empires, the lives perhaps of millions, depended on his prompt, his implicit obedience; and, he added to himself, his own advancement, honor; and then he immediately fell to cursing himself for thinking of his own small interests at all when so much else was at stake. To go to Bremen? It could not be. He decided that definitely Bremen meant the North-German Lloyd, and so, a voyage not merely of a few hours to the opposite coast of England, as that from Calais to Dover, but a voyage down the length of the North Sea, down half the length of the English Channel—to Southampton! Then from Southampton the railway journey to London—delay, delay, every where. Lying on the left shoulder he decided sharply and angrily against Bremen. He turned on the right, and the right brought him thoughts of Ada Macdonald; she rose before him, tall, flashing scorn at him from her black diamond eyes, imperious as Queen Boadicea. He knew what fires slept in Ada; and he knew what fires slept in Wilhelm and Hohenlohe, but when it came to a question of real downright fire, he said to himself with a shiver that he would rather a thousand times over be scorched by the fires of Wilhelm than the fires of Ada Macdonald. How could he refuse her—how could he dare? She might not understand his excuses about the exigencies of diplomatic business; she would say that his motive for not doing her bidding was his dread of travelling in company with that vile stone which had proved so fatal to how many others! She would call him a coward—him! “I must go!” he cried. “I must go, come what will!” This was the decision of right shoulder. He turned again on his left. As a door on its hinges, so he turned on his bed; and in ten minutes left shoulder had brought him to the conclusion that on no possible consideration could he venture, could he dare, could he dream of, going to Bremen. The morning was near, and he fell into a nightmare sleep.

By ten o'clock he was in a private compartment of a train. Fritz sat before him, wondering at his master's pallor. The train steamed away. It was bound for—Bremen. Stefan spent the hours of the morning in thinking over the derails of the awful history of the stone which he was about to take into his possession. It was a great sapphire, massive as a hen's egg, pure as the bubbling water of a mountain brook, the very playhouse and home of light. The tradition was that since the Indian Prince, Kashmiri Khan, had murdered his father in the sixth century before Christ for the possession of the wondrous jewel it had never been the property of anyone, never even been, in the temporary custody of anyone, without bringing on them disaster of some kind, mischief in some shape; and, as a matter of historical fact, there can be no doubt that Kashmiri Khan himself, immediately after

committing the murder, was devoured by a lion as he fled through the jungle: and, it is added, by the somewhat fantastic Indian history books, that the lion consumed the entire body of the man except only the hand in which the jewel was grasped, which hand was found lying on the ground by the servants of the late king two days after. It was taken back to the Palace, and, within three months, the town was invaded, the Palace burned, and the stone carried away to Northern Hindoostan by a band of roving disciples of Zoroaster. The Rajah's sapphire, during the course of many centuries, passed through a multitude of hands, and always with the same history; the greedy eye blazed over it; the frenzied brain schemed and plotted to possess it; then came the chuckle of victory; the secret hugging of it, as of the water of life, to the ardent bosom; then, in a day—in an hour—a doubt, a sideward glance of distrust; then disaster, swift, sure, recurrent; then, ah then, the burning lust to be rid of it, the agonised cry—at any cost—at the price of life—to pluck this viper's tooth from the gnawed breast. The same history everywhere.

At the beginning of this century Sir James Macdonald, travelling through Central Hindoostan, came to a State, isolated from the world, in the centre of vast mountains. Here he was the guest of a great Indian potentate, into whose hand the stone had lately passed; the monarch, not at first knowing the history of the jewel, had purchased it at a fabulous price. A week later he chanced to call a meeting of his dewan (council), over which his heir was to preside. At the appointed moment the young man entered the chamber where were congregated the Ministers of State, the jewel glittering, like a constellation of radiance on his forehead. He entered the hall, ascended the steps of the throne, and—dropped dead. Soon after this the old Rajah heard the history of the stone, and the same day received the visit of Sir James Macdonald. Sir James, a man of haughty disposition, and, little careful of observing the customs and prejudices of his host, inflicted, in the course of a day or two, some deadly insult on the Rajah, which, however, the monarch appeared to make light of, and, on receiving an apology, promised to forget. On the third day Sir James departed, but he had not travelled far into the forest when he was overtaken by a hot messenger on horseback, who presented him with the transcendent gem as a token from the Rajah of goodwill and perfect reconciliation. Sir James, in a transport of gratitude, sent back the thing he prized most on earth—a small silver brooch containing a lock of his dead wife's hair. He reached England in perfect safety—to find his credit gone, his character besmirched, and an only brother dead. It was thus that after nearly a century the sapphire had come to be the property of Ada Macdonald.

During that century it had passed from the hand of one banker to another, one pawn broker to another. The immense value of the stone had, of itself, conferred a distinction on the Macdonald family; they were called "the Macdonalds of the Sapphire," and hence they had never had the courage to part altogether with it. But the stone had a strange, strong genius for inspiring panic, and hence it was hardly ever to be found in the actual possession of a Macdonald, for by this time its history had come to be known. Even the pawnbrokers had acquired a strange trick of growing tired of its company; hence its career had been a rather migratory one; and hence, too, it was that on this 28th January an express was sweeping the Markgraf Stefan in the direction of No. 13 Canalstrasse, Bremen.



In the evening of the same day he was closeted in a small dark room in a dirty back street of dingy Bremen, with Melchizedek Friedrich, an old, bent German Hebrew, with fish-hook nose, and torrent white beard. Stefan produced documentary evidence of his identity and position, and his connection with the owner of the stone. He showed the telegram.

Friedrich sat bent, muttering guttural Hebrew and Yiddish to his knowing beard. Presently he looked up, shot a keen cunning ray from his eyes into Stefan, and said—

“And so you come for the sapphire, sir?”

“Yes.”

“I cannot part with it.”

“Thank God!” said Stefan to himself, and then added aloud, “You surprise me.”

“The history of this stone I have now learned,” said old Friedrich, leering craftily. “Six months ago it was pledged with me for the merely nominal sum of 200 gulden, and I claim that at the time I should have been told by the pledger what risks I ran by taking the gem into my house.”

“But that is an absurd claim,” answered Stefan; “it would be laughed at in a court of law.”

“I know that,” said Friedrich, “but on the other hand, you come to me without the legal document, on the production of which alone I am bound to deliver the stone; and I decline to do so unless—?”

“What?”

“Unless the numerous losses—the very numerous and unaccountable losses,” he repeated, “which I have recently suffered be first made good by you.”

“This is mere superstition,” said Stefan, pleased in his heart at this turn of events—“mere superstition. Miss Macdonald has not instructed me to meet any such preposterous claim, nor am I at all prepared to do so.”

The old man’s hand was visibly trembling. “You will, therefore,” went on Stefan, “greatly oblige me by sending me to-night a written refusal to deliver the stone. And meantime—good evening.”

He walked towards the door.

“Stay, stay,” cried old Friedrich, hobbling after him. “In mercy, stay! Your excellency is hasty; your excellency misunderstood.”

“What now?” asked Stefan.

“The stone is yours; take it. Yehovah help me! Old Friedrich is a poor man; take it dear sir, it is yours.”

That night the Rajah’s sapphire slept on Stefan’s dressing-table—a spirit of evil in the garb of an angel of light.

The next evening he stood looking over the taffrail of the great steamer as she rode by the quay of the Bremerhafen. The NELF presented the appearance of an ant-nest or a bee-hive. Stewards ran hither and thither, two great plumed columns of black smoke rose from the chimneys, whistles shrilled, on one side of the ship a chain of boats still lay round her; the air hummed with the adieux and aufwiedersehens of parting friends. Near to where Stefan stood sat a mother, and on her knee a great boy of 14 or 15. He garnered from their talk that the youngster was going to London to be a clerk in his uncle’s business, and he calculated that for half an hour the mother had not once ceased to kiss him. He did not know

why, but the sight made, him feel with his fingers for the sapphire in his breast-pocket Fritz and he seemed the only persons unoccupied on the swarming ship. Gott behut! Gott behut! rose the cry on every hand. He wondered at the shamelessness of German lovers as he saw a young man and lady passionately welded together in the midst of the press and throng of the after-deck; but none seemed to notice them save him. Again through his ulster he felt the bulge of the stone, and sighed. Forward there was a rattle and clash of chains. The ring of boats began to break up and grow thin. Suddenly there fell a sharp shower of sleet, and through it like a shriek of defiance, the steamer uttered a shrill whistle. There was a shoreward scamper, and the defeat of lingering kisses and hand-wringers was turned into a rout when the heart of the great mammoth of the sea suddenly wakened and began its awful beat. Pulse, pulse! "And mind your bedside prayer every night," said the wet-faced mother, "and—and—Gott Behut!"—Stefan touched Ada Macdonald's stone beneath his ulster. It was too late—the panting seahorse was away.

The NELF left Bremerhafen at about 5 p.m. For about half an hour she stopped, on her way, at Nordenhamm, then turned her bows over the open sea bound for South Hampton and New York.

The night fell deadly dark. She had not been cuffing and butting at the piled billows of the open Atlantic an hour before the engineers were down in the depths of the engine room mending broken gear. The gusts drew deeper-mouthed, roaring like hungry lions, and Stefan, summoning his sea-legs on the poop, touched with his forefinger the Rajah's sapphire beneath his ulster.

### Chapter III

Ralph Ralloner was a person of "no occupation" and "no fixed abode." He was a vagabond; he was as much without anything in the nature of a character as the outside of an egg is without hair. And yet he was highly respected, too; he was even feared. If he had condescended to put his arm around the neck of you or me, we should have been highly flattered and pleased; we should have gone and straightway told our mother and our pet enemy that good old Ralph Ralloner had put his arm around our neck. The fact is he was a millionaire. "Charity covereth a multitude of sins," but that is only in heaven, where they have queer ways of looking at things. On earth, where people have got to be practical if you want anything covered, from the roof of your house to your sins, you must have what the Yankees call "the shingles," or what we call "the tin."

Ralph was a Yankee, and he had "the shingles" with a vengeance. The shingles roofed in the sins from the rain of the world's censure—not entirely, for the sins were really quite too huge for that, but to this extent, that they didn't have the look of sins at all and seemed to be mere unpleasant peculiarities, or, as people called them, "idiosyncrasies."

For example, Ralloner, the High-flyer, was a great sportsman, and one of the sports which he liked best was that of tandem-driving. And he never drove a

tandem but he drove it furiously, so that when he held the reins of his glittering turnout it became, under his hand, not a tandem at all, but a Juggernaut. Everything flew and sprayed before it like the foam from a ship's bows, or else rolled and writhed under it like the clay under an advancing plough. Woe to an old tippie, or a blind man, or a woman with child when the High-flyer in all his bravery came Juggernauting along! The report was that in Chicago he had sacrificed ten human lives to the divinity of his tandem. The magistrates were, of course, compelled to fine him, but they did it lovingly; their sympathies were mostly on the side of the tandem. They thought it such a pity to check the enthusiasm of headlong, generous sportsman-like youth! And, besides, as they said, the thing was common enough. In Chicago not a day passes but an electric car rolls over the agony of some crushed human being; the ear has become accustomed to the shriek of death, and the eye to the squirt of the blood of men. Ralloner, bless you! was not the only Juggernaut about. Juggernauts have grown common and multiplied in the earth till they are past counting; and though they do say that there is an Eye which sees and reckons up these things, the fact of the matter is, that though the Eye sees, it is not seen, and so counts for precious little. The ostrich which pokes its head into the bushes knows that the hunter can see its great awkward body, but so long as it can't see the hunter it cares not a button for him; and Chicago, which is the most perfect embodiment of the whole spirit of the world as it exists to-day, is as much like an ostrich in nearly every respect as two little twinkling stars are like each other.

Ralloner was a tandem driver; he was a steeplechase man; horses of his magnificent stud had twice won the Grande Nationale in Paris. His brain was made of burning lava. The two engines of his great and splendid steam yacht had once broken down on the high seas because he would insist on driving the overworked ship twice as fast as any other ship had ever gone. He could not write a letter—hardly even a word. If he attempted to write, the pen made a thick stroke, or else broke to splinters under his hand. The mad fire in him would not permit him to form the letters. His eyes never rested; they shifted, and shifted, and shifted, like those singular electric eyes one sees in some advertisements at railway stations. What was he looking for? What did he hunt? He did not know. Only the necessity was strong on him to be in motion—to burst the bands of space—to pass like a fiend over the warm entrails of some poor old beggar-woman—to plough his frenzied way through obstacles towards impossible goals. It was the madness which comes of the possession of great wealth—the same which took hold of Nebuchadnezzar, and Nero, and many of the old Roman emperors. Some people call it “Caesarism,” and make of it a special and separate disease. Little Wilhelm, across the water, is perhaps affected in that way. But Ralloner had a particular tendency to this form of frenzy; his enormously rich father had died in an asylum; and in the blood of the High-flyer had taken root diseases of various obscure and insidious kinds.

In figure he was very slight and short, and wore in all weathers loose thin jackets, much too long for him, which sailed out behind, giving him an appearance of eager swiftness even on the rare occasions when he was not over-hurried. A great red scar traversed one side of his forehead and face, and one eye squinted much smaller than the other.

On the evening of the day following that on which he had gone on his little nervous knee before Ada Macdonald, he rushed into the smoking-room of the Hotel Victoria, sat down at one of the small marble tables, and in an almpst illegible hand dashed off on a telegraph form the words:

*“To Anderson, captain, the Treaty, Solent I. W.—Have Treaty ready day after tomorrow for trip to Norway. Want to do distance at rattling rate. Make water know we’re there. See to everything.—Ralloner.”*

He had promised to be at the Yorrick Ball, but had clean forgotten all about it.

“Hullo!” he cried, taking, in the corridor, the hand of Lord Pierrepont without stopping in his headlong walk. “Hullo, Charlie, that you? Like see sea-water boil like kettle? Come ‘long with me, if like; going coast Norway.”

“Stop a bit Where are you dragging me to—?”

“Come ‘long. Nice little supper—John’s Wood-road. Tandem waiting door. Like see sea-water skip like mad?”

“Skip? I? No, thanks; I am not passionately attached to it even in its more serious moods.”

“Ah, dry land man! Like to see it swirl and sing for mercy. Everything on deck wet, beds in cabin wet, foam hissing past frightened like, like woman with white face; ship nearly done up, groaning like the deuce, begad! Cap’n frightened; down on his knees—‘For God’s sake ease her, sir!’ That’s kind of man I am.”

“Well, ta-ta; I am going into the smoke room.”

“Not going—John’s Wood? Tandem waiting, know.”

“Not to-night, thank you. Bye-bye.”

## Chapter IV

The night was utterly black. The NELF was in the middle of the raging German Ocean.

The 370 odd passengers of the great liner were in their berths below. One only kept watch on deck—Stefan von Reutlingen. It was near morning; but it seemed as though morning would never come. There was a coating of ice on the back and front of Stefan’s ulster as he now paced, now clung to the railing of the bulwark. The light-colored funnels before him, the characteristic feature of the Norddeutscher Lloyd boats, were invisible to him in the thick gloom. He heard the throb of the engines, heard the whish of the sea, saw the glare of the engine-room, and looked again and again at the heavens, praying for morning—but for morning.

The third officer, who, with the first was in charge, passed near him in his peregrinations.

“How is she now, Mr. Hollberg?” he asked.

“She goes S.S.W., your excellence.”

“No; as to the position and speed I mean?”

"She is about thirty miles from the Hook of Holland and forty from Lowestoft. Her speed is fifteen knots. Don't you think of turning in to-night?"

"Fifteen, eh? That's pretty well for a sea like this, isn't it?"

"Not more than so-so, I think."

"Won't the morning ever come?"

Mr. Hollberg laughed.

"Yes, it will come; It always comes. You are not nervous; I hope?"

"I? No, not nervous. What light is that? You see it away yonder, don't you, a green light?"

"On the port bows? some steamer. I have noticed her for some little time. She is rapidly approaching us."

"Does her course lie across ours?"

"Seemingly not quite at right angles."

"We are showing our lights, of course?"

"Oh, yes, red and blue, as usual."

The officer moved away. Stefan looked toward the sky as they that watch for the morning. And then his eye fell on the green light, small and clear in the blackness, coming nearer, nearer, mysterious as life, certain as death. He thought of the mother and the boy; and how indecently the two lovers had kissed on the deck.

Below, the 370 slept—mostly slept. Of those that waked some were thinking of Southampton and the things they had to do there, the words to say, and the others spoke in this way to their own minds: "Well, of all the ills which may possibly befall a man in his course through life, the ill of seasickness is certainly the worst!"

\* \* \* \* \*

The soul of Ralph Ralloner, the High-flyer, danced. It was a death dance, but a dance for all that. Like the fling of the man in the ballad—

*Sae wantonly, sae rantingly, sae dantingly gaed he,  
He played a tune, and cut a jig beneath the gallows tree!*

He stood crouching close to the helmsman, clinging to the railing near him like a barnacle. He had a cloth cap on his head, and on his back the rags of one of his thin loose jackets which the wind had torn to shreds; the shreds whistled and flapped out behind him like an old flag in a hurricane. He looked like a mad beggar. The winds were shrieking awful music into his inmost ears. The wide lake of foam that whitened and whirled and curdled round the frightened TREATY seemed to yell to him "hurrah! hurrah!" His dark soul danced as the shadows of a shaded light dance, flickering upon a wall on a gusty night. The TREATY was stabbing and butting at the heaped-up waves of the storm, as they came to meet her. A continual rain of spray hissed over her from fore to aft; she, and all aboard her, were as wet as though she sailed beneath the surface of the water. Had it been possible to increase the speed of her toiling engines by the fraction of a point she would have burst into sky-high atoms, or plunged to the bottom of the German Ocean like a piece of lead shot from a cannon. There was no one on deck but Ralloner, the man at the wheel amidships, and the lookout man doing his

watch for'ard. This last was clinging to the fore mast, with one leg lashed to it. He was coated with an inch of ice and near to death. The desertion of the decks was Ralloner's arrangement. He liked to fancy himself alone on the ship in some dim frozen sea of a far-off world, racing for life with some hunting destiny. The captain, after praying him almost with tears to stay the horrid flight of the vessel, had given warning that after this voyage he must leave, the ship, and had retired to his cabin. The hearts, of all were in their mouths. But Ralloner drank in the champagne of the battling elements till his wild eyes flashed a sulphurous light of their own, and he trembled with the impulse to fly, to fly faster than the ship would go, with the flaming forked wings of a demon, madder than the sea, intenser than the cold, swifter than the blast.

"Ship coming right across our course, sir," chattered the man at the wheel.

"Let come," he said.

A fiercer squall followed his words, seeming to howl a menace to his ears, battering him against the railing to which he clung. An avalanche of solid sea thundered down upon the two men, half drowning them. To Ralloner it was sweet as the embrace of a lover.

"Great Jericho! we're getting rather near that ship, sir!" said the wheelman, after three minutes.

"What ship she?"

"Looks a great big monster of a thing; p'raps one of the North-German Lloyd."

"How we going?"

"Nothe half-west, sir."

"How she going?"

"Bout south-west, seems to me."

"A' right I want to hug coast England. Keep her so."

There was silence for half a minute.

"Shall I prick her off to nothe, sir?" said the man at the wheel.

"No man! No! Keep her nose to it. Let fly, begad!"

"But that ship, sir—"

"Hang ship! Sea-water b'longs to me as well as them, s'pose. Let fly."

And there was silence for yet another half minute, filled by the trumpets and penny whistles of the wind.

"Oh, I'm agoing to prick this ship off to nothe, sir!" cried the helmsman.

"Going do what!" shrieked Ralloner. "Going do what! Disobey my orders?"

"I'm just going to prick her off to nothe, that's all," answered James Ray, a thick-set Cockney seaman; "or we bash smack into that ship, and I've got a fam'ly."

"Hang self and fam'ly! White-livered, 'long-shore fish'man! Discharge you from this minute—discharge you! Give me wheel!"

Ralloner lurched and rolled across to the wheel and seized on two of the spokes. Ray still persisted. Ralloner planted a blow on his chest with the force of high passion, and just then a deep dive of the Treaty into the sea upset the man's balance, his hold on the wheel relaxed, and he surged and butted forward. The High-flyer was in possession.

He put his mouth to a speaking-tube communicating with the engine-room, whistled, and cried through it—"See if can't get her go half a knot faster!"

“Can’t!” came the reply.

“Quarter knot, then.”

“Can’t!”

And the TREATY sped away “nothe” and by west making “sea-water boil like, kettle,” making “sea-water skip like mad.”

The two ships drew near; for so, from the foundations of the world, it was appointed. The binnacle light shone full on the face of Ralloner, as he half stood, half crouched, steering—ragged, wild, a creature of the storm, bent on ruin and overthrow. To the great ship, laden with life, he showed a green light; she to him a blue. They came very near—two cables’ length divided them, but in the dense blackness of the morning looked like ten. “Sea-water b’longs to me as much as to them, s’pose,” said the High-flyer to himself. “I’m as good a man as North German Lloyd, s’pose.”

“That ship, sir!” cried James Ray, crouching near. “That ship!”

Juggernaut, earless, eyeless, was abroad.

\* \* \* \* \*

“I fancy she’s only a small ship, your excellency, of about 400 or 500 tonnage,” said the third officer to Stefan; “and she sees our light. She is sure to prick off a point when she comes near enough.”

Stefan touched the Rajah’s Sapphire beneath his ulster.

“You notice,” continued the officer, “that she shows her green starboard light, and a white mast-head light. She is approaching about two and a half points off our port bow, and she is steering about north by west; you will see that when we come a couple of cable lengths nearer she will, according to the rule of the road, port her helm to about north, and pass close under our stern.”

The officer moved away bowward, and Stefan, clinging with his now numbed hands to the rail of the poop, leant forward, waiting, his heart strangely beating. Suddenly—as it were in a moment—the TREATY loomed on him, immense, terrible—no longer a light curving and hovering unreal above the water—but a ship, big, tangible, monstrous, the swift unswerving messenger of doom and horror. For a second he all but swooned; in the next, as the huge death swept nearer, he saw—distinctly saw—the face of the man raised high on the bridge where the wheel stood; he saw the face, the great red scar across forehead and jaw, the face of a rabid fiend, played upon in the darkness by the lurid light from the binnacle, and lit, as by a second fire of the lake of brimstone, by the mad hilarity of the insensate eyes.

“Port your helm!” shrieked Stefan, his whole agonised soul yelling in his throat; “port your helm, you devil! don’t you see—”

But at that moment the TREATY had rammed the Nelf. Stefan, leaning wildly over the side, was hurled into the sea by the concussion. Sense failed, and he began to sink.

The bows of the TREATY entered the NELF just abaft the engine-room, penetrating two sleeping berths, near the mail-room. The ships were not in contact a minute; the poop of the Nelf swung round; the yacht, broken in the bows, recoiled; in a moment she had disappeared into the darkness. And the only man in

the liner who, for one single instant, had seen the wild face of Ralph Ralloner was the Markgraf Stefan.

Instantly the NELF began to settle down sternwards. Her bows rose in air. The captain had rushed up, and flew to the bridge. Then followed a mad stampede of half-naked passengers to the deck.

“Boats out,” sang out the captain; “but don’t lower.”

The sea ran almost mountain high; there was a driving wind from the E.S.E., bitterly cold. A swell rolled over the poop, and two ladies, slipping on the ice of the deck, flew down the inclined plane of the fast sinking stern, and were washed away by the surge. “Everybody on deck; crew to stations,” rang the clarion of the captain’s voice.

At that moment a prolonged shriek swelled from the cabin, in which hundreds of the passengers were still cooped. The berths on the port side had suddenly flooded, many drowning where they stood. A group of men amidships, without orders, took to firing rockets. The TREATY, as if mad with the taste of blood and havoc, was flying away, away to the north. The bows of the NELF rose up wards like two hands clasped, and raised appealing to heaven. The seamen, wild with panic, but yet quite obedient to orders, rushed forward to loose the boats, but slipped down the iced incline of the deck, and were battered against the masts and hatches, or else fell broken into the engine-rooms.

There were ten boats. The lanyards and gripes of all were frozen; but amidships on the port side the men succeeded in chopping away two. The ship was careening heavily over to the port side, and here the sea broke furiously over her, half swamping the boats. This, perhaps, was why the captain bellowed forth: “Women and children to the starboard side to be saved first;” but on the starboard side, there were no boats lowered! And the end was near. The German pilot standing close to the poop was suddenly aware of a singular swirling and gurgling sound made by the water. He rushed instantly towards the port bows, and—stumbling over a prostrate lady on the way seized her in his arms, and plunged with her into one of the boats. All this while, through the din and the thousandfold shrieking of the passengers, the engines kept up their throbbing travail, and the Nelf was moving painfully forward with the fore part of her keel above the wash of the swell.

Stefan, at the first shock, had been projected into the water. He was a stout swimmer, but this was of no value to him, for whilst he was being hurled from the ship, he had received a stunning blow across the forehead from a spike, and, at the moment when the waves caught him like a flung ball, he was utterly unconscious. He floated for a minute on the heave of the billows like a washed seaweed, buoyed by his bagged, ulster. Then he began to sink like so much lead. All hope seemed gone for him; no power under heaven, a man or an angel looking at him would have said, could now save him. He began to sink. The jaws of ocean opened expectant to swallow him.

Without pain, without consciousness, he commenced to drown, quiet as a child on its mother’s bosom. But the NELF, having vomited him, turned again to the vomit. The shock of the collision had, in stopping the speed of the liner, thrown him forward; as both ships were moving at great speed at the moment, it had been a great shock, and so it had thrown him far forward. But the engines of the Nelf still continued to work; she therefore moved onward, a prey to the sea-wash on



her starboard quarter; and it was thus that as Stefan began to descend to his deep resting-place, she swerved near him, stooped deeply to port, on which side he lay, and caught him by a hook which projected from her side a little above the line of her coppering near the bow. The hook passed through the neck of Stefan's ulster at two points, and he hung limp, like a rag on a rock, ducking deep into the water with every downward swoop of the vessel, and again rising high into the air.

It was these alternate immersions and breathings of the fresh wind that brought him back to consciousness. His eyes opened; the turmoil and screechings of the deck fell on his ears; he recognised his position. Presently the NELF dipped and plunged him afresh into the depths. On rising he roared for help. Could they hear him? Was the ship sinking? He did not know. Once more he was sunk into the black and bitter water. "Not thus, not thus will I die, like a hung rat," he groaned. He tugged at the rubber cloth, but it was stout. And then he thought that he had but to loosen a few buttons, and he was free. But even then he recollected that in an inner pocket of the coat lay the Sapphire of the Rajah; and even then his loyalty to Ada Macdonald was proof against any other motive. Only with life would he part with what she prized. All at once, after another dive into the denser gloom of the sea, he remembered that there was a knife in his pocket. He felt for it and drew it forth, but his fingers were frozen hard; he could not open it. Again and again he tried with all his force; then, with a curse, flung it far into the sea. In the next moment he breathed a prayer and resigned himself to die.

The agony and clamor on the deck had now become a high continuous wail.

All this time the lower part of his body had hung in the water, except for instants when the ship swung specially far over to starboard; but the bow now suddenly kicked high up in the air, and he was lifted clean out of the reach of the waves. His whole weight hung by the hook; he heard the cloth crack; he tore at it with all his force, and tumbled with a splash, free, into the sea. The NELF, with the upper rim of the stern under the water, forged past him, and he was left alone in the silence and darkness of the ocean.

Immediately afterwards, the ship jerked her bows straight up into the air and shot stern downwards into the depths. Stefan did not see, but he heard the last long wail of unisoned despair from the decks, and he felt, as the ship sank, a gentle sucking sensation round his legs. It was the cajolery of the deep—the fawning lick of the beast before it springs. Some such thought passed through his mind. Ever and anon a yell still reached him; separate, vague with the gurgles of the flood and the rales of death—"the bubbling cry of some strong swimmer." He was well without the sphere of the ship's suction; but his strength was going, almost gone, and with every cuff of the swift-succeeding rollers he thought his hour had come. Suddenly he was aware of voices—speaking—floating low in the air around him like tones from another world. With his last breath he gasped a shout; a boat, dim and vast to his failing sight, loaded with people, drifted near; instinct urged him to one last superhuman effort to reach her; hands of men reached out to draw him in, and he tumbled, without consciousness, into the bottom of the cutter.

This was one of the only two boats which had put off from the ship. The other, having a sail, sailed away and soon foundered in the heaving sea. In Stefan's boat was a mast, but no sail. He lay, with the lady saved by the pilot, half immersed in

water. At last the day broke. No sail in sight. The spray from the sea froze on the sides of the boat, while now and again a wave broke over the tiny craft and drenched its occupants. The sea ran hill-high, and the efforts of the officers and men were less directed towards making land in the shortest time than to the urgent need of keeping the boat's head to the sea. With constant vigilance there was hope, for the spot where they found themselves is a frequented one—the haunt of the “Blue Fishing Fleet” from the English coast.

Several vessels were sighted at a distance; but all efforts to attract their attention failed, for the boat, if seen at all, must have appeared the merest speck on the sea. At 9 someone drew attention to a ship which appeared to be coming toward them. She was anxiously watched for a long time, and hope burst into flower when she was ascertained in very truth to come nearer. The officers made her out to be a trawler at work. From that moment someone or other of the castaways was constantly waving signals; but it seemed an eternity before they were noticed. By this time it was 12 o'clock. The sea had risen still higher, and the boat could make no headway with the oars.

Stefan stirred in his long swoon; but the lower part of his body seemed already dead. At last some of the men in the smack were seen to go up the rigging a little way and wave their hats. A shout went up from the boat as the smack began to bear down upon them. She was soon within hailing distance, and one of the fishermen shouted something which could not be heard in the boat. In a few minutes a rope was thrown out, and caught as well as the benumbed hands of the men would allow; but it was no easy matter to make fast the rope, so slippery was everything with ice, and boat and smack rose and fell, see-sawing on the waves. At last, however, the rope was secured and the boat pulled round to the side of the smack. But in this effort the rope parted under the tug and stress of the billows. The smack captain at once put the tiller down, let go the jib, and brought her up to the wind; and, having got near enough to the drifting boat, a stouter line was thrown out and made fast. Four of the men were quickly got on board the smack. The lady still lay in coma in the bottom of the boat without boots or dress, but wrapped in a cloak. She, with Stefan, were lifted by those who still remained in the boat, and received into the smack. When the last man was on board a sea lifted the boat, the rope once more parted, and she drifted away. Hot blankets and rugs brought back something of life to the buffeted seafarers. That night they landed safe in Lowestoft.

## Chapter V

Ninety-five had begun to win fame in her youth. Nature, as if trying to resemble man, had turned her heart to ice. The great frost had set in in earnest. Groups of shivering, ill-clad men and women were crowding round the water companies, missionaries who came to open up in the middle of the streets wells as of living water; for the famine was sore in the houses, and pitchers, jugs, beer-cans poured forth from the doorways to celebrate the advent of the great Moses of the

companies, when he came with his magic wand to strike floods from the rock. The parks flitted and twinkled with flying skaters. In the veins of active and healthy and well-to-do folk ran and caroled the vivid blood. But the poor shivered, and moaned, and starved under the inhumanity of heaven, and the unwisdom and pitilessness of earth.

In a low tap-room in Southampton sat two men before a roaring fire, a small table between them bearing glasses and brandy. The room, but for them, was deserted.

“Now, what you mean, hey?” said Ralph Ralloner to the other. “You know it’s—what they call it?—‘blackmail,’ hey?”

“Yes, yes, guv’nor, I know all about that. But you know it’s murder, hey?” said James Ray, winking brazen-faced at the other man.

“Murder, if you like. Sea-water belongs everybody, s’pose. Drive my own ship on sea, and you call that murder. Call it what like. Well, how much you want?”

“A cool two thousand, per hannum,” said Hay, bringing down a sledge-hammer fist on the table.

“Playing jokes, ain’t you?” cried the High-flyer, looking dangerous.

“If you thinks I’m playing jokes, as you call it, you just keep yer two thousand, and I’ll please myself by walking round to the nearest police station. Murdering four hundred people ain’t no jokes, I can tell ye.”

“And you think I am going pay whole rowsing crew o’ you two thousand a year each, do you? Not if my name’s Ralloner.”

“That’s all fudge,” said Ray. “You know as well as I do not a bloomin’ man of them knows anything about it. The lookout man was washed clean overboard by the collision; the cap’n, expecting to be drowned, was lying drunk below decks; the others felt the shock, but when they saw the jib-boom and bows stove in, you know very well you told ‘em we had run foul of a wreck. So us two are the only ones as knows anythink about it.”

“Dangerous for you!”

“How so?” asked Ray.

Ralloner whipped a small revolver from an inner pocket and pointed it at the seaman’s head. Had James Ray been a coward, had he so much as winced or winked, he would at that moment have been a dead man. He looked, like a bulldog, straight and stout into the eye of the millionaire, and quite coolly said—

“Why don’t you fire, master? Fire away! And I promise you on my Bible oath that within two months from to-night you swing for it.”

The revolver and the hand that held it dropped. At the word “swing” Ralloner turned as pale as paper. The High-flyer was a coward.

“Didn’t mean shoot you, know,” he stammered. “Only want show you I carry revolver, case of need. Always do—here in this inner pocket Always do—all companies. Brave fellow, Ray—must say that—brave; but I’ll do for you yet. Dig your grave yet; see if I don’t. Two-thousand, hey? What going to do with it, hey?”

“Just you leave that to me. I’ve got a fam’ly—two little gels and a mate. And there’s a special kind o’ Highland whisky which I always said, if I was a rich man, I’d be drunk on all day and every day. Every year one o’ them two thousand’ll go to keep my gels and their mother at the height o’ the fashion, and t’other thousand’ll vanish on that whisky. Don’t you trouble your head ‘bout that!”

“Well, look here, s’pose I say yes?”

“Suppose! there ain’t no supposing about the matter. You’re goin’ to say yes—or swing.”

Ralloner shuddered.

“All right—say yes. Drive my own ship on sea-water—still, say yes. And, look here, you know my house in London? Grosvenor Place, know. Well, you come there. Come often as you like. Plenty whisky there. And I make friend of you, Ray. Brave fellow—thought I meant shoot you? Ha! ha! Not a bit. You come to my house; one of my friends; bring wife and children. When a man’s got money, like me, does what he likes; don’t care what people think. You come to my house; introduce you to lords and dukes. Strike hands!”

Their hands met.

The High-flyer was cunning as well as cowardly.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next afternoon the Markgraf Stefan was tapping at the door of the St. John-Heygates in Hyde Park Gardens.

As he stood, soon after, in the drawing-room alone, in tripped Ada Macdonald, all whiteness, like a new-risen moon, her black eyes two flames of soft fire, her rich brown face a-tint with the bloom of peaches, and the surging blood of perfect health.

“Ah, pale! pale!” she said, as she held out both her hands to him, and sweetly bore his kiss.

“Pale, am I? I thought by this time I had conquered that weakness.”

“No! Sit down straight away and tell me all about it.” She took his hand. “Ah, my hero! my hero! what a terrible experience it must have been!”

“It is like a dream now that it is over,” he said.

“Tell me about it! Every detail, every point from first to last. I long to hear from your own lips.”

He drew her arm close to his, twining round it, and told her of the collision, and the mystery of his sojourn in the deep, and all the long eternity of the tossing in the boat on the deserted sea, and of his waking up to the bitter-sweet of living, and of the salvation of the trawler.

The dusk fell upon them, and wrapped them round in the dim drawing-room. They were locked together.

“What an ordeal!” she said; “but you say you saw the face of the man who steered the other ship?”

“Yes; I saw him—far more distinctly than I now see you.”

“Then you can describe him to the authorities. I understand that all efforts to trace him have failed, and that large rewards are about to be offered for his arrest. You, my Stefan, can describe him.”

Stefan knit his brows, passing his hand across his hair with a troubled look.

“A most strange thing,” he said, “has happened to me in reference to that man. No! I cannot—I cannot describe him. I tell you I saw the fiend’s face as clearly as the sun—the light of a lamp shone full upon it. But I have ever since been racking my brain in vain to recall his features, his general appearance. It is just as if the swirl of the sea had washed clean out of my brain the compartment in which the

memory of the man was stored. It is one of those mysterious tricks of memory for which there is no accounting. I cannot describe him."

"If you saw him again perhaps—" suggested Ada.

"Ah! then, perhaps."

"And you can remember nothing whatever definite about him?"

"Nothing—except this, only, that a great red scar ran zig-zag across his face, as when the lightning shoots across a dark sky."

Ada broke into a ripple of laughter.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked.

Ada threw back her head, and shook with merriment.

"Tell me, what are—"

"Oh," she cried, "this is too good! Suppose—suppose it was the—High-flyer!"

Stefan, too, began to laugh.

"What makes you say that?" he asked. "Have you never seen him, then? He has just such a scar as you describe."

"I wish it were he, as punishment to him for daring to be my rival."

Her fingers tightened in a pressure round his.

"But in this case I fear I shall miss my revenge; for is not the man called High flyer to be at the Yorrick ball? He must very likely be in England, then."

"Yes," said Ada; "I believe he is."

"And, besides, the man with the scar was, as I told you, actually steering the ship. Now, millionaires hardly steer their own yachts, in a storm, in the dark of the morning, do they?"

"And about the stone?" said Ada suddenly.

"Oh! the stone—here it is."

"Do you think—"

"What?"

"Do you really think now—"

"Tell me?"

"That the stone had anything to do with the loss of the Nelf?"

"My love—no!"

"Oh, if I thought so, Stefan, I should never forgive myself! And yet it is strange, too."

"It is a little singular, certainly, but—"

"How it laughs and wantons even in the faint light of the dusk!" she said, toying with the great blue egg in her hand. "It will make of me a flitting bit of sky as I dance with it at the ball."

Stefan sighed and wondered why.

"But," cried Ada, glancing like a flash of light to ever fresh themes, "what a frost have we! And the whole world is gone a-skating."

"Is that so?"

"The very royalties on the lake in Buckingham Palace Gardens. The Princess does it with an exquisite finish, you know; it is one of her manifold accomplishments. Yesterday we were at Hendon—such a scene! But the lady ice-gliders mostly lacked a certain—something—which I cannot define. It is an art which few English women attain to the perfection of gracefulness seen, for

example, in the Princess, probably on account of the rarity of very hard winters among us. But I understand that your Ada was rather—”

“Admired? Of course you were! It is your destiny.”

“And would you care to skate now? Yes? I love it. You are not too knocked up? Then I’ll go dress!” and she ran from the room.

She returned furred—not too deeply, but just to the annihilating point of wintry suggestiveness. They descended and entered a cab; dined en famille in a private room at a restaurant; and set forth for the Wimbledon Rink.

The night-lights of the streets had long begun to glow in the wintry air, themselves wearing a frigid look. The parched air burned “frore.” People were dying of it. All you had to do was to lie down in it—and you died. Old Thames, casting back his mind to high old bygone jinks, was hardening his bosom for the roasting of yet another ox; the very gulls that haunted the little icebergs on the river seemed to suffer from cold in the head.

“And have you heard the legend of a British jury?” asked Ada in the cab, flowing with animation. “It is wonderful! The cold is breaking up our free institutions! They met for deliberation over a starved old woman, and almost at once discovered that the room was fireless, unbearable. The only thing that did not shiver among them was the corpse, which had done its shivering—previously. They protested. Even coroners, it seems, are human beings, and the coroner admitted a brumal unease. The upshot was that these seekers of truth disbanded, homewards to their babes, leaving the truth to the company of the cold.”

Then, flitting to another subject, “And, oh! Stefan, just think, a million of them out of work. ‘Workless workers,’ we call them. You perceive the ingenuity of the phrase; it is our very own, and of quite modern invention. But for a nation, by its united wisdom and activities, to invent a million of the actual products; ah, that is not well—not well. Just fancy—quite the largest army in Europe, only waiting for its Napoleon to come along, get into communication with them, collect them, drill them, and lead them upon London; and, hey—presto! in the blinking of a cat’s eye you have a despotism in England, or a socialistic republic—and no more private grandeurs—no big-B balls.—no High-flyers—”

She sighed and laughed at the same time.

“And how would you like these changes?”

“I should rather like the Socialism, I think. You know I am a very bad Radical. And I quite intend to convert you when we—”

“Say it.”

“When we are—No! bad luck!”

“And the despotism?”

“Oh! I think I should like that, too—provided I was the Emperor’s Queen.”

He frowned. He had touched on a discord in his Ada’s nature.

They reached the rink, and in five minutes were among the throng of skating couples. Stefan from of old was a skilled ranger, and Ada had acquired all the arts and graces since her school-girl days in far Pomerania. All was motion. The lights of the rink flashed, multiplied a thousandfold in their hurrying eyes, as they forged, and swerved, and skimmed, in delicious harmony of motion, like gulls that sweep, slanting, over the central ocean, wetting an alternate wing in the brine. Ada

was all eyes, pointing out, in whispers, anything specially fine in the figure-skating.

“But look at him!” she said suddenly, jerking her head.

A man had appeared among them, thick cloaked, muffled, his face buried in the collar flaps of a great involving coat; a soft wide-brimmed hat over-shading his forehead.

“Only look at him!” she said again.

She seemed to know something about him, something in his figure. His face she could not see.

“But that is the frenzy of skating!” she whispered to Stefan.

The man threw athwart the ice as if ruin and despair were barking at his heels; he went straight; he did not swerve to right or left; fro and to, to and fro, from end to end. The skaters watched for his coming, marked his going, fled when he was near, seized their chance to cross when he was far. Some laughed, others scowled, some stood still, amazed, to look. He was like the spirit of swiftness, the demon of unrest.

“What a strange frenzy—” Ada was just saying, crossing his path as he came, when, with incredible speed and force, the blind Juggernaut collided on them. They fell in a mass, sliding far over the ice. Stefan was instantly on his feet again.

“Oh, my love!” he cried. “I shall break the lunatic’s head—”

But looking about he could see no sign of the man. Other skaters had crowded round and blocked his view; and, in fact, the headlong career of Ralloner once broken, the spell of his furious excitement had also been broken, and he had left the rink. Stefan turned to Ada, and took her hand to raise her. A look of agony was on her face.

“My ankle—” was all she could gasp.

“Not sprained? Oh, do not say sprained!” he cried.

“I will try.” she said bravely, biting her lip and struggling to rise. But she fell again. As he lifted her in his arms and bore her away—

“Ada.” he whispered, “have you—have you—that thing—that stone—on you?”

“In my bosom—hidden—for safety,” she sighed, and fainted.

## Chapter VI

The night of the great ball had come, and in the middle of the common world uprose fairyland.

“I will go,” Ada Macdonald had said to Stefan, “if my ankle turn to brittle glass under my weight; and I will wear that stone, if it prove my ruin.”

But it was as a penance that she endured it, not as a pleasure. She sat in the centre state drawing-room till at midnight, three trumpeters, attired in white and scarlet with much gold, blew a fanfare on trumpets, and then she painfully, but with an infinite sad pace, hopped on the arm of Stefan in the long procession to the supper-room.

“You will be certain,” she said to him, “on no account to let my misfortune keep you from the full pleasure you may be able to obtain.”

Her words were stiff and formal, spoken from her throat. They were sitting at one of the many little round and oval tables of which the room was full. In the centre of all, at a larger square table, surrounded by her court, sat the hostess, attired as Marie Antoinette, in rich brocade, and wearing the Yorrick family jewels round her neck as a superb collar, a turquoise velvet cap clasped with jewels on her white coiffure, and a bandeau of family jewels under her cap. Her court mantle was fastened at the shoulders with a tiara of diamonds, widened out so as to clasp the cloak from shoulder to shoulder—a presence so really queenly that, on their first entrance, many of the guests greeted her with an obeisance. All the tables were decorated with flowers, some from the South of France—magnificent orchids; while dishes of strawberries, apricots, grapes and pineapples were in luxurious contrast to the falling snow outside. The room was illuminated with silver candelabra containing wax candles. At every arched door were immense screens of magnificent Beauvais tapestry, while here and there, throughout the room, were huge church-candles in gilded stands, five feet high.

“Who was that girl,” asked Ada, “with whom you danced the last mazurka?”

“The Hon. Lillian Harley. Is she not very, very pretty?”

“Very, very! She was jilted last summer by a guardsman. I hear she is only one remove from a mental imbecile. But perhaps you do not object to that in your partners, provided they are very pretty.”

“You are cross to-night; I can well excuse you. And I left you lonely too long, did I not?”

“Did you? I did not notice.”

Silence fell upon them. They felt as if something, a discrepancy, a cloud, had come between them.

Stefan, to fill an awkward gap, fell to making remarks on the glittering fancy dresses of the guests, all attired in the style of Louis XV. and XVI. He himself wore a rich court dress; the coat of mauve brocade, full skirted and embroidered with gold, the waistcoat of mauve satin embroidered in floral design, knee-breeches of shot mauve and gold, silk stockings, court shoes, powdered hair, lace ruffles, jabot and sword, made up a costume, correct in every particular, of one of Louis XVI.’s courtiers. The whole room glittered like one great sun-illuminated gem, myriad lit.

“There was an old man,” said Ada suddenly, “named Foulon, who said at the beginning of the French Revolution that the people might eat grass when they were hungry. After he was hanged they stuffed his mouth with grass.”

“But apropos of what?” asked Stefan.

“Grass, alas!” she went on, not heeding his question, “was in no way to be got at. The dancing nobles had all the land, and with it the grass. No wonder they danced!”

“You govern your moods badly, Ada.”

“And they danced to the end—only, at the finish it was to a changed tune.”

“But why in heaven’s name all this?” cried Stefan, now thoroughly angry. “Why these irrelevant and unpleasant remarks? Would you not have danced if that ruffian had not sprained your foot?”

“I should, at any rate, not have danced with imbeciles!”



They rose from table, and the guests streamed back to the dancing halls. The suite of rooms led one into the other, so that the vista of magnificent and brilliantly-lighted apartments was superb. Over three thousand wax candles were used, in addition to the electric light, which was made to simulate wax candles. The candles were unshaded, in imitation of the style of the French in the last century.

The great Cedar Drawing-room was used as the central ballroom. It is so called because panelled in cedar, a perfect background for the fine Vandyke family portraits hung around it. The ceiling was white and gold, and there were two large arched windows, in one of which the band was stationed, and they, too, wore a white and gold dress of the period. The room was lighted with five great crystal chandeliers with wax candles, suspended from the ceiling, a high candelabra in each corner of the room, and two smaller ones on each side of the great marble and alabaster mantelpiece. Palms were placed about, and flowers, forming Louis Quinze garlands, were festooned from one point to the other. The principal feature of all was the unshrouded light—it was day at midnight, but a chaster, holier day—the noon of the fairies.

The cloud had grown thick and threatening between Stefan and Ada.

“By the way,” he said, as they passed out from supper, “how of—what’s his name—Ralloner, the High-flyer? He was to have been here.”

“I am sorry to say he is not,” she answered.

“You—sorry!”

“Yes, even very sorry. He would at least have had patience with a poor cripple.”

“I can hardly guess for whom your reproach is intended,” he said haughtily.

He deposited her on a couch in the shadow of the recess of the great arch window, the fellow to the one in which the band was just finishing the waltz they had played all through the supper.

“But, talking of this man Ralloner,” said Stefan, standing beside her, “do you know, I have had a thought? From his character, as I have heard it, I should not be surprised if he were the man to whom you owe your inability to dance to-night.”

“You mistake the man,” she said. “He is wild—but, at any rate, a gentleman.”

“He! why, you called him a ruffian yourself a few days since!”

“I like him very, very much indeed!”

He bowed low.

“I know your tastes are always excellent.”

“Hence my connection with you,” she said venomously.

He bowed, and added—

“You are very kind.”

“I may tell you, however,” she went on, noticing his pique, and seeking to increase it, “that I quite certainly do not owe my sprain to the gentleman you allude to. Mr. Ralloner, I have heard, on all occasions chooses to wear a thin coat of a peculiar pattern, and has never at any time been known to put on an overcoat. It is his whim, an outcome of his individuality. But the man who collided with me at the rink was, as you saw, closely muffled up.”

“Then I was wrong. But now I must leave you—”

“Oh, certainly!”

"I really mean 'must!' you know. You see the Chinese Ambassador yonder talking to the Austro-Hungarian Minister? Does he not look wonderfully out of place at a Louis XVI. function? Well, the ball to-night was a rendezvous between us for a long talk. You know I leave for China in a few days—"

"Oh, pray, no excuses. Go, go. Someone will come and talk to me."

But, somehow, she sat long solitary in the shade. The wonderful gem she wore shone at her forehead enclosed in a chaplet of gold. It shed all over her a blue shimmering light. The Yorrick ball was an incrustation of jewels, galaxy flashing to galaxy, but among them all was not one that compared in massiveness and limpid glory with the Rajah's Sapphire. And yet the wearer sat lonely, sad, crippled, washed in her blue bath of light, regretting her presence. She was dressed as the Duchess of Polignac, the friend of Marie Antoinette, in a gown of white satin, the under-skirt full, and embroidered, all round with gold, turquoise, amethyst, topaz, and brilliant jewellery. The upper skirt was caught back with pale blue, similarly embroidered. She wore her hair high and poudree, and, besides the Rajah's stone, had magnificent diamond and turquoise ornaments. She was loveliness itself to see, and her nightly eyes, flashing scorn and anger, outshone all jewels whatever. But it was a long hour before a young attache of the French Embassy, noticing her loneliness, came and sat by her.

Stefan, as he moved away, was met by an old friend, Lord Pierrepoint, with whom for a moment he stood conversing.

"I hear you are off to China," said Lord Pierrepoint.

"In a few days, as ill luck would have it."

"A bad ducking that of yours in the North Sea. Whatever made you come by that route?"

"Ill-luck again. The same luck that drove a mad captain to cross my path just in the nick of time."

"He must be as great a Juggernaut," said Lord Pierrepoint, laughing, "as my friend—what's his name?—Ralloner."

"You know him, then?"

"Don't you? Ah, you should, You have not seen humanity in its sublimity till you have seen Ralloner. The last I heard from him was a pressing invitation to 'see sea water boil like kettle, see sea-water skip like mad.' But I didn't, as we say, tumble to the idea."

"Indeed! Where was he going?"

"To Norway. I think he was to touch at Aberdeen, by the way."

Stefan turned pale.

"By heaven!—" He stopped; then he eagerly asked—

"When—when was that?"

"That was—let me see—about the 29th or 30th Of January."

Stefan's heart throbbed. The Nelf had foundered just three or four days later.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "Did he really sail?"

"Yes; I am sure. But for some reason or other, he never completed his voyage, for he is now, I believe, in London. But why so much interest?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing," said Stefan. But as he turned away to seek the Chinese Ambassador, he said to himself—

“My first business when I return to London to-morrow will be to seek out that man and, at any price—by hook or by crook—to see his face.”

## Chapter VII

The Chinese Ambassador, who looked like a saffron-flower in the middle of a garden of roses, had taken his seat in the recess of an alcove with Stefan. Here the white glamor of the candle-light came more subdued. At every second, as they talked, the whiz and wind of a waltzing couple swept dose by them.

“You see my position,” Stefan was saying; “I go to China with the avowed object of peace-making. And, of course, if I have your representations of the view taken by the European Powers of the situation, my influence at headquarters in China will be by so much increased.”

“And what is that view, sir?” asked the Ambassador.

“Oh, that you know as well as I. It is that the struggle is a hopeless one for China.”

“That is not my view, however.”

“Quite so, quite so. I only say it is the view of Europe, and it is, further, our view that if Wei-hai-wei falls—as fall it must, sooner or later—the difficulty of keeping the conquerors from the gates of Peking will be enormously increased, and the partition of the Chinese Empire heave in sight.”

“Poh! Poh! but Wei-hai-wei won’t fall.”

“Port Arthur fell.”

“Ah! another matter if it be true. Here you have strong land garrisons, splendid fleet in Wei-hai-wei Harbor, Admiral Ting commanding, great man, grand man, soon drive the Wajin back to their own country. Don’t you believe newspaper talk.”

“Still, facts are facts, and the men of the peaked caps are quite certainly no imbeciles. Allow me to recall to you in outline the course of events so far. By a really masterly strategy the Japanese have contrived to hem in the greater part of your fleet in the port, and are now keeping watch at the harbor mouths—as you are aware, there are two—cutting off escape from the entrapped ships. With consummate skill they had already manoeuvred a land force to the neighborhood of Wei-hai-wei, and, when all was ready, drew a cordon of men and guns landward of the place and commenced a cannonade, having, with infinite toil, dragged the siege pieces into position over the wintry roads. Their land batteries thereupon, uniting efforts with the fleet, shelled the Chinese out of every open spot, and have already captured three large forts; nor is the fate of the Island Lin-Kung-Tan, at the mouth of the harbor, any longer in doubt. All this is real fact; and I mean to say that the men who have done it are not very easily driven back.”

The Chinese Minister first sighed, then immediately looked at Stefan with a light hearted smile.

“Poh! we think nothing of them over yonder. They are what you call savages; but what terms of peace will you propose in Germany’s name?”

“Well, you know,” said Stefan, “Count Ito, the Japanese Prime Minister, is on the point of receiving a peace embassy from Peking, and the terms he then dictates

will be a basis on which future negotiations may go forward. Of course, if Wei-hai-wei falls, that practically finishes the war, for even if any of the imprisoned Chinese ironclads escape, there is no longer any refuge whither they can betake themselves. Mukden can be seized almost with the trouble of marching upon it, and with the first warmth of spring the united land and sea forces can move on to the end of the Gulf of Pe-chi-li, and occupy Peking itself. This being so, it is clear that any terms of peace must involve compensation for the prodigious exertions put forth by the victor. Japan will demand, too, the undisturbed protectorate of Corea, the cause of the war; a commercial treaty giving freedom and favor to her goods, payment for the expenses of the war, as well as an indemnity of, say, fifty or sixty millions in money; and Port Arthur and Wei-hai-wei will doubtless be held as security, as well as the Island of Formosa. These, I think, will be the minimum demands of the peaked caps."

"Peaked caps!" laughed the Minister. "He! he! he! Peaked caps!"

But at that moment a Louis XVI liveryman, attired in cream and crimson satin, was seen to dodge his way among the now hushed and fast-hurrying dancers. He bore in his hand a golden plate, and having spied the recess in which the two diplomats conversed, steered his way skilfully towards it, and presented to them the plate. On it were two dispatches—one for Stefan; one for the Ambassador. They tore them open.

"These have come by special train, I am told," said the waiter.

"Wei-hai-wei fallen! Wei-hai-wei fallen!" screamed the Chinaman. "Oh, it can't be true! Don't believe! don't believe!"

"It is too true!" said Stefan. "This of mine is from headquarters in London. I am ordered to hurry instantly to Brindisi to catch the P. and O. boat which has already left England. 'Peace at any price' are my instructions. I must leave instantly."

He hurried straight to Ada Macdonald. She still sat with the young attache, flirting desperately, an ill-humor raging in her, her eyes a-flame with animation.

"Ada—excuse me, please—I am ordered instantly to China. Can you give me five—?"

"Really? So sorry! Good-bye." She held out her hand with a smile.

"But—we cannot part like—this!—for many months—Ada!"

"Don't you see I am engaged?" she asked, arching high her black brows.

He took her hand. His eye fell on the sapphire blazing on her lit brow. He was gone. It was the virtual breaking-off of their engagement.

As he stood on the departure platform at Victoria the next day, he saw the placard offering an immense reward for the capture of the ship which had run down the Nelf and for the arrest of her unknown captain; and he thought with bitterness that his chance of seeing the face of Ralloner was gone—perhaps for ever.

## Chapter VIII

Some months passed. At the moment when Stefan von Reutlingen was stepping on board the steamer at Dover, en route for China, Ada Macdonald was lying half-way across a bed in London, sobbing, tearing to pieces her headlong humor at the ball, cursing her childish caprice. Surely some power outside of herself had possessed her! But through all those months pride kept her from writing a line to Stefan; and he, busied with many things in China, waited and waited, I hoping against hope, for a letter, thinking that she would repent and relent, and write him. The first step, he thought, was surely due from her, and he had been careful to leave an address at the St. John-Heygates. But he waited in vain. Fate had come between them.

One night, about a couple of months after the ball, two men stepped from a house in Grosvenor Place. One was drunk—tottering and blind; he leaned heavily on the other, who led and supported him. That special brand of Highland whisky which James Bay loved had lately flowed like a river for him; he had but to stoop and drink freely of that water of life. (Is not brandy, of all things, I an eau de vie across the Channel? Monsieur's views of "life" not being altogether identical with those of St. John.) Ray had freely accepted Ralloner's invitation to visit him often. The two formed excellent companions. Ralloner opened the sluices of the river of life; Ray stooped and drank. They sat together in a small high room of the great mansion, and drank till the cock crew or till Ray slipped in a heap beneath the table. Ray could tell excellent sea stories when he had the use of his tongue. Ralloner liked to sit and hear sea stories.

"Brave f'low, Ray—must say," he said of ten.

"I likes you, Mis'r Ral'ner, likes you!" hiccoughed Ray. "No hang'd psalm singing 'bout you."

One day, after a month, Ray discovered that two thousand a year would be altogether insufficient for his growing needs, and mildly hinted as much. Ralloner looked hard at him for a minute, and then said—

"All right—make it three thousand. That suit you?"

Ray was delighted. That night, as they drank together, he kept repeating—

"Likes you, Mis'r Ral'ner, likes you." Soon after this Ralloner did a singular thing. A tumble-down house in one of the vilest slums of Whitechapel was for sale, and Ralloner bought it. Through all his life he had hardly ever glanced at a newspaper; quite lately he had taken to rushing through every newspaper he came across, and, in one of these, he had come at last upon what he sought: At No. 11 Fry Alley, Whitechapel, said the paper, a family had died within two days—a whole family—of galloping small pox. The house had been cleaned out by the scourge; it lay empty, condemned, infected—a death-trap. Ralloner read no more papers after this; he made inquiries, dived into the office of an estate agent, saw that the vile property was for sale at any price, and bought it on the spot. He went about with the front door key in his pocket, and sat and heard James Ray say, "I likes you, Mis'r Ral'ner—likes you."

It was a dark windy night and verging on towards morning. The two men jerked and stumbled a little way from the house in Grosvenor Place, and then, a lucky cab coming within hailing distance, Ralloner plumped Ray into it and followed. He gave the address of the alley in Whitechapel, and told the man to drive like mad.

Ray lay back on the cushions of the cab helpless, paralysed. Presently he woke up for a moment and grunted in his throat, feeling the motion.

“Where ‘m I?”

“Going home.” said Ralloner.

“Home. Ha! Ha! Tha’as goot!” spluttered Ray. “Pass whisky.”

The cab dashed through the city. “Where ‘m I?” asked Ray, waking up again. “Near home,” said Ralloner. The cab drew up at the entrance of an extremely foul and narrow and dark alley. Ralloner dragged out Ray and paid the man. In a few minutes the two stood before the door of No. 11.

“This not my home,” said Ray. “Wha’a’s this?”

“In you tumble,” answered Ralloner.

“No tricks, mas’r, I hope?”

“In you jump. There’s a truckle-bed on second floor.”

He pushed the drunkard in, slammed the door, and locked it. Then turned and walked with the swiftness of an ostrich westward.

When James Ray next passed from that house he was borne in a plain board coffin, and his corruption was already many days old. The name of the mysterious victim of smallpox was unknown, for his face was unrecognisable.

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Time passed, and found the High-flyer in agitation. If you are one of those who hunt for “new sensations,” go and murder 400 people and see, how you feel after it. That is very “new” indeed when you are unaccustomed to it. It tends to agitate the mind, and if your mind was in a high state of agitation beforehand, as was the bubbling mind of the High-flyer, then, after the incident of the 400, you get a perfect tornado of agitation, agitation in the frantic spinning-top state—the maelstrom state. As the months went on, Ralloner was certainly mad. The hereditary diseases in his blood took deeper root. The “Caearism,” arising from his unlimited wealth, broke all bounds within him. While James Ray lived there had been a fetter on him, and this had acted as a healthy check upon the development of the peculiar kind of insanity which his millions had produced in him. But now he was free. Ray was dead, and his fears of “swinging” were gone; the only eyes whose evidence could convict him of any connection with the collision were shut. The cheek was removed. His free limbs ran, and leapt, and danced. He could defy everything. His little, strange, diseased mind was by nature profoundly superstitious; nobody had been enabled to induce Ralloner to pass under a ladder or sit thirteenth at table. But now, if he spied a ladder in the distance, he made a rush for it and passed under it again and again, till a crowd gathered round him. He began giving small dinners, and always invited twelve others, so that he might be the thirteenth.

“Charlie,” he said to Lord Pierrepont, “I kill superstition out of this world for good and all, see if don’t!”

“That’s right, Ralloner,” said Lord Pierre point; “go for it! kill it! Only what is superstition?”

“What is?” answered the High-flyer. “Why, thirteenth at table, conscience—that’s superstition. No more of that! Don’t leave it a leg to stand on—kill it dead as nail!”

Someone told him of an old palace among the mountains of Bohemia in which it was said no person had ever lived for more than three weeks, because, at the end of that time, a figure clothed in black appeared before him, lifted its veil, and the sight of the horror of that face was such that no mortal could live an hour after beholding it. The High-flyer raced across Europe, purchased the palace for many thousands of pounds, and, with a heart racked with terrors, slept in the house for just four weeks. He returned to England mad with his triumph. Superstition was dead as nail.

But—how had he forgotten the Rajah's Sapphire? That, that he must have, if it cost him his fortune. Superstition was not quite dead until that had been tried and tested. He had heard the fame of the stone, but had clean forgotten it. Now he remembered with a vengeance. Madness seized strongly upon him. He had just returned from his victory among the mountains of Bohemia. The Rajah's Sapphire! All his labors were useless without the possession of that. And Caesar swore that he would possess it, or burn Rome and the world.

The next day an agent waited upon Ada Macdonald, who was then in London. He made a fabulous offer for the jewel, but did not mention the name of Ralloner. Gladly would Ada have been rid of it, quite apart from her love for money. But family pride restrained her; the sapphire was a Macdonald heirloom. Her answer was that on no possible consideration would she part with the gem.

"I'll have it! I'll have it!" cried Ralloner, when the agent brought him the answer, "if I have to marry the girl for it!" And then he remembered with joy that he had once before, in a mad whim, gone on his knee before her. Good! That was all in his favor. She would take it as a proof that he was really fond of her.

He visited Ada, put on extraordinary society manners, and passionately proposed. She smiled on him, not unkindly, and refused. How she hoped and hoped but for one line from Stefan—one line to help her pride to write for his forgiveness! The line did not come. Caesar, not to be balked, invested the not very strong fortress with all his fiery forces, battering-ram, and catapult, and Ada yielded.

## Chapter IX

The Markgraf Stefan returned to Berlin in about a year to receive high promotion in the diplomatic service, and distinguished compliments from the Emperor William. He was immediately dispatched on a new and important mission to Washington, and having accomplished this, he travelled to New York, and prepared to return to Europe.

It was two days before his intended departure that, as he was leaving the offices of the Consul, that gentleman said to him: "Oh, by the way, I suppose you have not many engagements in this strange city, and there is to be a great social function to-night given by a new married couple, at which you may care to be present. I am au courant at the house, and can invite you. Will you come? It is at No. 215 Fifth Avenue."

Stefan had many matters of business to see to that day, and was rather pressed for time. So he hurriedly said—

“Thank you; I shall be delighted, if I can come;” and at once went out into the street.

Thus it was that when he reached the brilliantly-lit mansion at about 10 o'clock, he remembered that he had forgotten to inquire the name of his newly-wed host and hostess. The alabaster stairs up which he struggled were crowded with décolleté ladies burning with the diamonds with which the Americans load their woman-kind, and with black coated gentlemen, all shirt-front and watch-chain. The balustrades of the wide white steps were of porphyry; and pink-shaded lamps threw a halo, as of soft moons, round the palms and tree-ferns of the hall and conservatory. Some of the guests wore plain evening-dress, but most were in fancy-ball costume. Exclamations, laughter, and waltz-music floated through the air. The crush of fashionable humanity was really alarming. Above, a series of lofty-lit halls opened one into the other, giving a panorama of the assembly from end to end. Heads, heads, half-bare bosoms, black coats every where! The rooms received upon their bright delicate summer hangings and curtains of fine gauze the strange variegated illumination of innumerable Chinese, Moorish, Persian, and Japanese lanterns, some made of perforated tin, cut into ogives like mosque doors, others of colored paper resembling fruits; and great, swift-darting, bluish jets of electric light would, all in a moment, cast pallor over these thousands of other lights and, as it were, the full moon's frosty radiance over faces and bare shoulders, over the whole phantasmagoria of feathers, fabrics, bows, and ribbons, crushing each other in the dance or ranked tier upon tier on the broad staircase. From where Stefan managed to squeeze to a seat under a verandah-like gallery he was able to gaze out upon this sight through a network of green bushes and flowering creepers, which blended with the gay scene and formed a frame for it.

He sat lonely among the greenery for a long time before he was joined by a stranger in the dress of Russian monk. Being alone together they entered into friendly conversation.

“This is surely a very splendid function,” said Stefan.

“All the elite of New York society are here. MacAlister himself, I understand.”

“Ah! I have heard of him; he is the acknowledged pacemaker and lookout society man in New York, is he not?”

“He is. When he dies nothing will be left worth living for. After him, in fact, the deluge.”

“I have for some time,” said Stefan suddenly, “been noticing a peculiar movement in the crowd. It is like the setting in of a current in the sea. They seem to be all moving and pressing in one direction.”

“I can explain that,” said the other, “it has been announced that the host is going to make a speech in the hall at the far end of the suite of rooms, and the crowd is moving forward to that end.”

“A speech!” cried Stefan. “A speech! Is this, then, a ball or a lecture hall?”

“It is very absurd, certainly,” said the stranger; “but our host, as you may know, is no ordinary mortal. He has his little whims, and nobody resents the whims of a millionaire. Besides, in this country, we are never very much opposed to novelties. He has, it seems, some announcement to make to his guests.”



"Of what nature?"

"Ah! that I do not know. Something strange, you may bet."

"At what hour is the ceremony of the speech to come off?"

"Sharp at midnight, before supper."

"It is close on that now," said Stefan. "Shall not we, too, join the procession?"

"Certainly, if you will."

They rose, passed through the shrubbery, and walked together into the ballroom. The tide of moving humanity was very slow. The rooms behind them were already nearly deserted, and those in front were well thronged with the advancing phalanx of the company. Laughter, too loud to partake of Vere de Vere repose, cries of every cadence, remarks on the novelty of the occasion, rose like a mist of sound above the sea of heads. Fans were flung out, and began to flutter like a hundred butterfly wings. Gradually the press became uncomfortable, and some few of the ladies only saved themselves from fainting by beating a difficult retreat, and thus momentarily checking the flow of the progressive current. Herded in this way into a compact mass of life, all covered with brilliant jewels, the company presented the appearance, under the myriad lanterns and the occasional blue flash of the electric light, of a wide coruscation of dazzling refulgence.

Stefan found himself at last in the middle of the last hall. At its end was a raised dais, on which stood two thrones of what looked like solid gold. The speaker had already begun, but Stefan had no ears, no eyes for him. His whole wild gaze was fixed with infinite surprise on the woman who sat on one of the thrones. The other was empty, for the speaker had risen and was talking, standing on the dais.

Stefan gazed—his eyes starting from their sockets. There she sat—Ada—his own—in the very dress she had worn at the Yorrick Ball a year before. A dream—and yet no dream. There she sat, lovely as light, glorious as dawn, before him, throned a queen—but the queen of another king. And who was he? He had not long to wait for the answer, for the speaker, lifting his voice to a high falsetto pitch, at that moment compelled him to tear his eyes from the dear dark face they had been resting upon. Stefan looked at the man and saw him holding up to the light, between his finger and thumb, a vast blue jewel, which winked and rayed under the light, like one of the gems from the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem.

"Yes, friends," cried the speaker in the shrill eager voice of a man frantic with excitement. "Yes, friends—here it is—the Rajah's Sapphire. This is stone that brings bad luck everybody soon as they touch it. Why don't it bring bad luck me? Can't! that's truth of matter. I get married, have it in my pocket—nothing happens; ring not lost, parson there with white surplice, everything right as beans; cross Atlantic with my wife, have it in my pocket; there's a chance for stone! nothing happens!—sea-water calm as water in a bath. Stone can't—that's what's the matter! Superstition's dead as nail. Stone's a sham—a sham, tell you! I have digged grave of superstition, I, Ralph Ralloner—not left it leg stand on. And with superstition dead 'n' buried, away goes everything. Some of you p'raps inclined to b'lieve in Bible; well, look up at this stone, this sham—"

But the lecturer got no farther. There was a commotion in the crowd. A man was urging, and forcing, and elbowing his way forward with a pallid face and wild eyes through the serried ranks. It was Stefan. At the moment when he had turned his eyes on Ralloner for the first time, a spasm seemed to convulse his breast. He

had staggered, and passed his hand slowly across his brow; and with the action, it seemed as if he had drawn a film away from before the eyes of memory. Once more, with utter distinctness, he saw the lurid-lit face of the man who steered the Treaty into the vitals of the Nelf; and with the sight, reason forsook him, and a horrid impulse to fly at the throat of the fiend and tug and tear at the life in his windpipe possessed him. He dashed forward, wild rage urging him rapidly through the crowd: a buzz arose, a turmoil, stifled cries from all sides; but when Stefan had reached a point of some few paces from the dais, he raised his right arm, pointing with his forefinger straight at Ralloner, and his voice rang out thrilling as a clarion, silencing the tumult of the crowd:

“I charge that man with being the murderer of four hundred people; the wrecker of the Nelf; and the man for whose arrest a reward is now offered throughout Europe.” There was a dead silence. Ralloner had staggered backward. His face worked horribly like the face of a man in a fit; he was trying to speak, but the struggling words stuck rasping in his throat. The Rajah’s Sapphire was still in his hand.

Suddenly he stiffened straight with a jerk, and took a step forward. At last words came.

“So,” he hissed, “so I swing, do I? But you die with me, tell you!”

And so saying, he whipped out a revolver, which, as he had once told James Ray, he always carried with him, and pointed it at the head of Stefan. But at the moment when he fired Ada Macdonald had leapt from her seat on the throne, and struck his hand a blow; the shot swerved and entered the breast of a lady, who instantly fell. A yell of rage and execration rose from the whole company. But Ralloner heard it with ears already half dead; for on realising this fresh, crime of his hand, he had turned the weapon against himself. Simultaneously with the crack of the report, and the thud of his fall, there rang forth a solitary scream above the tumult of the shouting company. It came from the throat of Ada. Then she fell fainting on the bosom of Stefan. In the dead hand of Ralloner was still grasped the Rajah’s Sapphire.

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Yet a year, and they meet once—Ada and Stefan. It was on board a dainty little steamer that plies her brisk way between Naples and Syracuse. It was only necessary for them to be near in order to flow together again like two dewdrops on the same petal. Ada had saved his life, and he did, not require this proof of her love for him to make him love her. To her he had never wavered, nor, at bottom, had she to him. And now sadness had made her wiser, firmer, clearer. Their coming together was quite simple. They sat in a deserted nook of the cabin as the little vessel neared Naples Harbor. Her hand fell to his; their lips met. And with this there flashed upon her the full realisation of how much more precious is the gold of a little vein of simple love in a human heart than millions of rubies, heaped in a casket of pearl.

“But, darling,” he said, “that stone. We must not keep it. Where is it now?”

“The sapphire? It has been cut up by the jewellers into at least fifty small bits, which are being sold to the London public one by one.”

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