

The
City of
Enticement
by
D. Gerard

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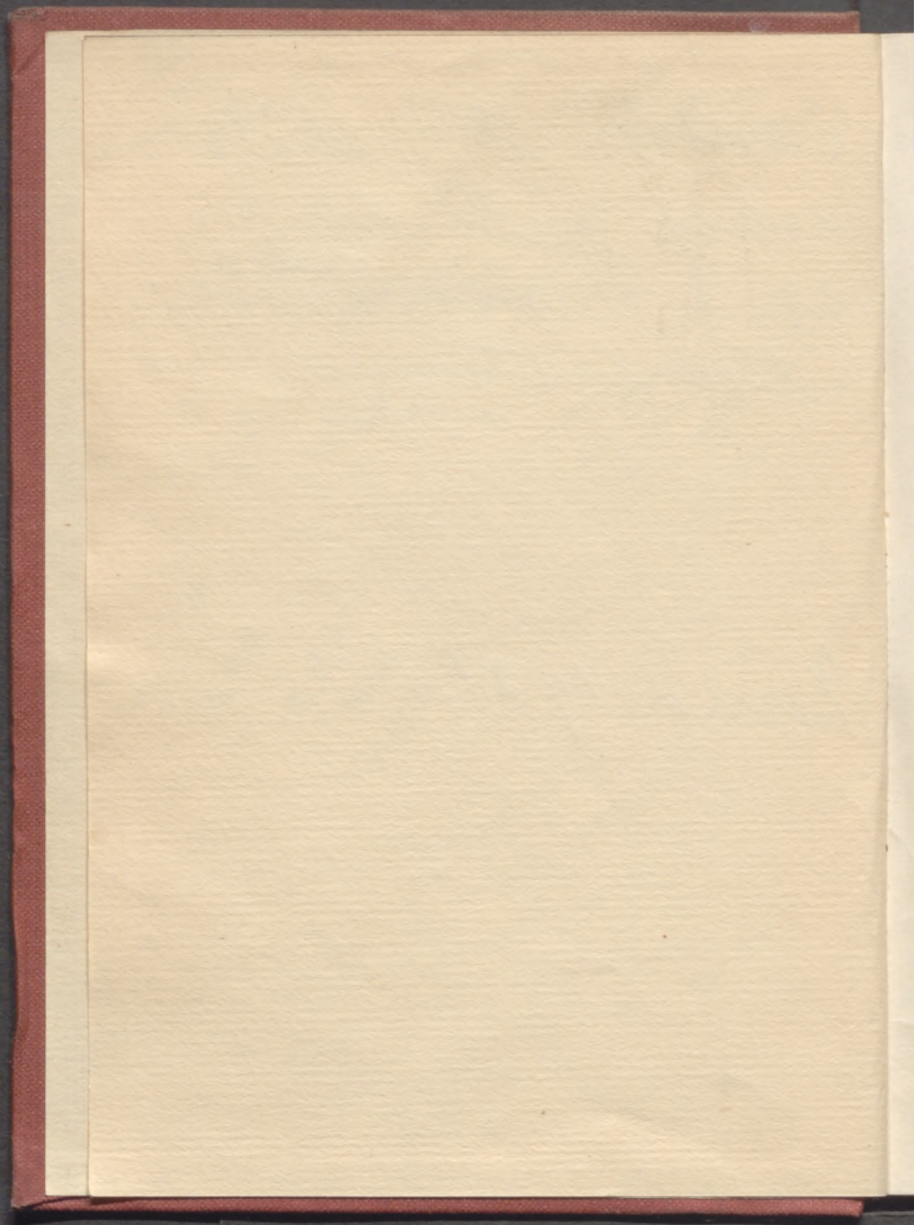
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English girls on a
trip to Vienna, the City of
enticements.

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BY
DOROTHEA GERARD.

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THE
CITY OF ENTICEMENT

BY

DOROTHEA GERARD

(MADAME LONGARD DE LONGGARDE)

AUTHOR OF "LADY BABY," "ONE YEAR," "ITINERANT DAUGHTERS,"
"A GLORIOUS LIE," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1912.

THE
CITY OF ENTICEMENT



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LETTRE
BERNHARD JACOBSON

1812

NOTE.

THE author wishes to acknowledge her mental debt to Herr Eduard Pötzl, whose delicious sketches of Vienna life have been the source of inspiration of more than one of the following chapters.

NOTE.

The author wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to the Hon. Edward Ford, whose valuable criticisms of various drafts have been the source of inspiration of many of the following chapters.

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THE CITY OF ENTICEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

THE ENIGMA.

"If it was not so exactly like Tom I should be inclined to pronounce the whole thing a hoax," remarked Mrs. Wishart to the family circle encompassing her sofa.

Although it was not a big sofa she did not occupy more than half of its surface; for, what between smallness of stature and spareness of flesh, there was almost alarmingly little of this elderly *mater-familias*, though that little was decidedly nice, with the niceness of delicate features and of ivory skin.

A large, official-looking envelope lay on the table at her elbow. The sheet of paper which had recently come out of it—big and imposing and exceedingly crackly—had just been round the family circle, to return to her keeping; but four pairs of eyes, in which gleams of excitement were breaking through clouds of perplexity, still remained fastened upon it.

It was Val who first recovered speech, as befitted the dignity of her twenty-four years.

"But since it *is* like your cousin Tom, Mother, dear—— And he wasn't a myth, was he?"

"Not a myth but an oddity. Even as a boy he had whatever is the male equivalent of a bee in one's bonnet."

"A hornet in one's top-hat," suggested Marjorie, who, in age, ranged next to Val, with the idea of being immediately and scornfully crushed by her plump—some people called him podgy—but not the less caustic brother Ned.

"He wouldn't be wearing a top-hat at the time hornets are in season, stupid!"

"Make it Panama, then."

"And then there was that sunstroke he got in Spain," thoughtfully commented Mrs. Wishart.

"Well, and isn't this the will of an oddity?" declared Val, pointing a triumphant finger at the document under discussion. "You wouldn't expect a person with a hornet in his head-covering to make a will like other people, would you?"

Mrs. Wishart's eyes twinkled in an indescribably delightful fashion. She had a pair of humorous grey eyes, with a chronic twinkle in their depths, which occasionally became acute, and quite saved her thin little face from being inconveniently pathetic.

"I never knew Tom do anything like other people, my dear."

"Exactly what I guessed—by intuition, I suppose. Please let us try and be practical, Mummy. It's a fact, is it not, that he lived at Vienna?"

"He certainly was living there when last I heard of him—years ago."

“Good! That tallies. And now, let me have another look at this document. I admit that, at first sight, it is just a trifle overwhelming.”

“And how about us?” clamoured the “Juveniles,” represented by Susie’s fifteen and by Ned’s sixteen years, while Marjorie hung over her sister’s shoulder, in order to get a better view of the sheet which Val had just extracted anew from between her mother’s unresisting fingers.

“Peace, children! And you, Marjorie, be so good as to relieve my shoulder of the weight of your chin. No need to mob me; I’m going to read the thing aloud, slowly and thoughtfully. No interruptions, please, and no remarks until the end. When we’ve taken it in we’ll discuss it, but not a moment sooner. Now then, Mother, are your cushions comfortable? Here goes:—

“‘This is the last will and testament of Thomas Dowell, likewise known as “Herr Bosnickl”—of which the nearest translation seems to be, Mr. Spiteful, British subject, at present resident in this City of Enticement, which he came to for a week, and has lived in for thirty odd years, having somehow forgotten to go away again.

“‘Being at this time in good health and as much of my right mind as I ever possessed, I have, after mature reflection, decided to dispose of my worldly goods as follows:

“‘To Karl Pfann, the landlord of the Grüner Krug—my Japanese translation of the Bible, in gratitude for the many cool draughts of beer which have slid down my throat under his roof, and in case he should feel moved to acquire the language in his old age.

“‘To Fräulein Melissa of the Apollo Theatre, the mummy I brought back from Egypt, and which, judging from the family likeness, is probably that of one of her ancestresses.

“‘To Franz, the head-waiter at the “Roter Ochs” Restaurant, the mowing machine lately purchased in his name, and which he

will doubtless find useful when he buys himself an estate out of the money he has cheated me of in the course of these last thirty years.

“To Herr Samuel Dottelzweig, my munificent and obliging landlord, five hundred ear-trumpets of the most approved patterns, one of which may possibly cure him of the deafness which overcame him regularly whenever I asked for a new wall-paper or window-fastenings that would hold.

“To his charming wife the packing-case containing fishing-tackle, in order to assist her in her social angling operations. Thus equipped she need not despair of landing suitable husbands for her scarecrow daughters.

“To Poldi Frisch, the *concierge* of this house, my canary-bird with cage; with the remark that if he dares either to wring its neck or to give it away I will not neglect to give him bad dreams.

“To Barbara Krauss, the only person who achieved keeping house for me for over a year, the case of revolvers which will be found in my room—in order to cure her of an inveterate fear of fire-arms.

“To Josef Pflug, the latest and worst of my valets, a silken cord wherewith he is welcome to hang himself, should remorse for his ill-treatment of a long-suffering master drive him to this course.

“To the eldest daughter of my cousin, Mrs. Eva Wishart, *née* Frier, the iron chain which will be found in the cellar. Should she chance to be a suffragette she will find it useful for fastening herself to area railings whenever the brutal police wish to make her move on.

“To the second daughter of the same lady the case of surgical instruments in my press, the mere sight of which will, no doubt, fire her on to the study of medicine.

“To the third and youngest of the sisters—since I understand that there are three of them—the very superior evening suit, with tail-coat and white tie, complete, which will be found in a box in the bottom of my wardrobe. If it should not happen to fit her future husband she can easily have it altered.

“To the brother of these young ladies fifty pairs of white satin shoes, smallest ladies' size (for which likewise see wardrobe) in the hopes that his sense of utility will keep him from marrying a woman with big feet.

“All the rest of my worldly possessions—whether in cash or in kind—I bequeath—though she deserves it not—to my faithless

" 'THE ENIGMA.' "

" 'Twas whispered round Vienna
For many a mile
That old Mr. Spiteful
Had buried his pile.
But would you undig it
I'll give you the clue,
And if you believe me
The work you won't rue.
So open your ears, coz,
And jog up your brain!
All that's wanted is wit
Your desire to gain.
Beneath wind-driven skies,
On the banks of the stream
Which we call the blue Danube,
Though it's often as green
As pea-soup on Friday,
The treasure is hidden,
Nor will yield up its heart
To the hand that's unbidden.
There is snow on the top o't,
And roses as well;
But the snow never melts,
Nor one rose ever fell.
The worms crawl about it,
And at times I have seen
Old Nicky himself
Cast an eye on its sheen,
In vain, for 'tis guarded
As its value befits,
And the thief who comes near it
Would be torn into bits.
There's a watch-dog beside it
Of whose fury beware;
Though he's legless and toothless
Have a care! Have a care!
Shall I tell you the trick

How his rage to disarm?
'Puppenfee!' say it plainly,
And he'll do you no harm.
At sound of the password
Mild as milk he will turn;
And your spade you can use
Without further concern.
The way to the spot?
Not hard 'tis to find.
I have only to lift
The edge from my blind
Where I sit scribbling here,
And quite plainly I view
The signpost whose finger
Points the road you should go.
Now up and ado, coz,
Nor wondering stand,
But dig for the hoard
The clue's in your hand!"

"Well, I never!" repeated Ned, after a further pause of reflective silence, and in a tone of yet more extreme conviction.

"Neither did I ever, if it comes to that," agreed Val, thoughtfully folding up the paper. "And yet if the document were not authentic the authorities would scarcely have forwarded it in this solemn fashion."

"Nobody but Tom could have made that will," pronounced Mrs. Wishart. "It was *he* who had an abhorrence of the commonplace, not I. I have seen him trying to eat his soup with a fork merely for the sake of doing things differently from other people. And did I ever tell you the story of his railway ticket?"

"No. What was that?"

"It was on his way to Nutley that it happened. Three elderly and respectable business-men were his

travelling companions. I suppose it was their obtrusive respectability which goaded him on to the adventure. Anyway, just as the guard was coming along for the tickets Tom made them a confidential and imploring sign and dived clean beneath the seat. Of course the first thing that happened at the opening of the door was that three righteous forefingers pointed significantly to the spot of concealment. 'Come out of that! Tried that trick once too often! Teach you to fool the company!' Amid such and suchlike insults was Tom hauled to daylight and out onto the platform, where a ferocious-looking bobby received him into custody. A jeering mob rolled through the station; and in the heart of it was Tom, with an impassible countenance and the ferocious policeman's fingers closing around his arm. It was when they got to the street-entrance that he for the first time opened his lips. 'And now, gentleman,' he mildly enquired, 'would you please kindly inform me what all this disturbance is about?' He was being run in for travelling without a ticket, he was furiously informed. Upon which Tom, with the most innocent face imaginable: 'My ticket? Oh, is that all? Why did you not mention this sooner? Nobody has asked me for my ticket'—and produced it in their stupefied faces. 'But you were hiding under the seat' they hurled at him. 'And is that against the rules? Sorry I didn't know. I happen to have a preference for that mode of travelling.'"

"That *was* a good one," agreed Ned, with a sigh of appreciation.

"It was Tom all over; and the will, too, is Tom all over. That's why I think it must be genuine after all."

"Fifty pairs of white satin shoes!" grinned Ned. "Great Scott! I'd better be looking out for a Cinderella at once."

"I'll lend you the tail-coat when you start hunting for her," volunteered Susie, who, for plumpness, was merely a female replica of her brother.

"Fancy *me* studying medicine!" smiled Marjorie. "It's clear he didn't know me."

"And imagine the face of Fräulein Melissa when she gets her mummy!"

"Mr. Spiteful has certainly done his best to live up to his reputation, or to die up to it."

"All that part is a joke of course," decided Val. "The only important point is the fortune which he says he has buried."

"It's a delightfully romantic idea!" said Marjorie. "I do wish I had known Cousin Tom."

"As for the romance, I am not at all sure that there is not more in this affair than appears to the naked eye."

Saying this, Val looked somewhat severely at her mother, whose eyes were twinkling in an inscrutable fashion.

"Certainly there is something in the expression 'faithless cousin' which calls for an explanation," endorsed Marjorie in a distinctly hopeful tone. "What we've got to do is to try and look at the matter from a practical point of view. For this an investigation is necessary. Mummy, I'm afraid I shall have to put you through a cross-examination. Are you agreeable?"

"What would be the good if I were not?" asked Mrs. Wishart, with a meekness which was somehow not convincing.



"Do you object to the presence of the Juveniles. Because if you do——"

The grey eyes twinkled.

"Mere empty form, my dear Val. You know perfectly well that nothing short of brute force would turn them out of the room at this juncture."

"Hear! Hear!" fell in the chorus of said Juveniles.

"Well, then—silence in court! To begin at the beginning. That is with your cousin Tom himself. Beyond the fact of his existence we never knew much about him. Also that he was Irish, which of course explains some things, though not all. Please enlighten us. Firstly: how about the degree of the relationship?"

Mrs. Wishart made a whimsical little grimace.

"I should require at least two hours and three wet towels round my head in order to think that out. Let me see. His grandmother's half-sister married somebody who was second cousin of my father's——No; that's not it."

"Try again," said Marjorie encouragingly.

"Then perhaps it was my grandmother's half-brother who married——"

"That will do, Mummy! We'll put it down as 'several times removed.' But you seem to have known him pretty well all the same?"

"Better than anyone else, at one time; but that was so long ago that it scarcely seems real. You see, his parents died early, and his snappy old bachelor guardian didn't want to be bothered with him, which resulted in his spending his holidays mostly at Nutley. He was only three years older than I was, so our ages tallied

all right; and not having a brother, I was glad of someone to fetch and carry for me."

"And that was the time when you used to dig for treasures?"

"Yes and buried them, too. We had lots of games, including the recitations in the hayloft; but this was the favourite. The arrangement was to bury something—it might be a string of beads, or it might be a clay-pipe—at the end of each holiday, make an exact chart of the spot, and dig it up again next year."

"Ned," asked Susie, turning reproachful eyes upon her brother, "why did we never do that?"

"The last treasure we buried was my last doll—a biscuit-china beauty, with golden plaits to her heels. Though I was fifteen at the time it cost me a pang to part with her; but Tom pronounced the possession of a doll at my age to be a disgrace, so I dressed her in her best frock—it was a blue silk, I remember—and put her into a tin biscuit-box, and we buried her in the shrubbery and made a chart of the place, according to custom, although this treasure was not meant to be dug up again; and Tom took the chart away with him, probably because he mistrusted my strength of mind."

"Well—— And then?"

"And then it's a fact that Tom did not come back again, and that from that day on I never set eyes upon him."

"How was that, Mummy?"

"Oh, it came about in quite a simple manner, or, rather, by a series of perfectly simple circumstances. When next holidays came he was ill and couldn't cross the Irish Channel. And the year after that his guardian

sent him on a continental tour—for his health, it was said; but some people surmised that the real object was to keep him away from Nutley. My hair being put up, by that time, and my skirts let down, I suppose Mr. Dinnart considered it his duty to guard against any possible pitfalls dug by designing parents—for Tom ranked as a *parti*—and, after all, he might come to discover that he was not my brother.”

“We’re coming to the romance at last!” put in Marjorie, drawing her chair an inch nearer to the sofa.

“Sorry to disappoint you, my dear; but we’re coming to nothing at all. All that I got from Tom during his travels was an occasional post-card with doggerel rhymes upon it; but the intervals got longer and longer, until they finally stopped coming. So far as I know he never came back from that health trip, for before it was over he came of age and got his money into his hands and began having his fling. The quantity of wild oats he sowed was something prodigious, I’m told; but none of them on English soil. His first taste of continental life seems to have spoilt him for existence at home. Even the doggerel rhymes poured scorn in cupfulls upon the ‘pallid isle’ and its ‘fish-blooded inhabitants.’ In Spain he picked up a sunstroke, which seems to have richly developed his latent—well, let us call it ‘eccentricity.’ I wonder whether it was the sunstroke, too, which curdled the milk of human kindness in him and made of him a ‘Mr. Spiteful,’ for I don’t remember him as ill-natured. For several years he drifted about from one capital to the other—living at Paris for awhile; for another while at St. Petersburg. Finally he remained stranded in Vienna, for what exact reason was never

quite clear. I've heard the excellence of the Vienna rolls made responsible for his stoppage there, and I've also heard the beauty of the Vienna women mentioned as the cause. I believe that the *corps de ballet*——"

"Are you *sure* Susie oughtn't to leave the room, Mummy, dear?" interrupted Val, with what Marjorie called her "responsible face."

"Quite sure, my dear, my information on this point being too sketchy to be perilous. All I know is that Tom stuck fast to Vienna, and the Viennese bakers and the Viennese beauties are welcome to fight for the honour of the conquest."

"I must say I don't see where your faithlessness comes in," remarked Val, gathering her forehead into reflective puckers. "You're quite sure he never made love to you?"

Mrs. Wishart uttered a charming little chuckle.

"I'm sure that by no stretch of imagination can I picture to myself Tom in that rôle. Why, I was only fifteen when he saw me last."

"I don't think it needs a big stretch of imagination to picture you at fifteen, Mummy," said Val, critically eyeing the small delicate figure on the sofa. "You're not unlike a fairy now, so what must you have been then? It seems to me almost unavoidable that Cousin Tom should have talked of marrying you—in joke, I mean."

"Oh, we had plenty of jokes of that sort, and used to play at housekeeping and so on; but, as you rightly say, that was unavoidable and never meant anything."

"To you, you mean. But does not his 'forgiving spirit' sound suspicious?"

"I put that down to the account of the hornet."

"How did he take the news of your engagement to Papa?"

"He didn't take it at all, for by that time his cards had got so rare that I wasn't even sure of his right address. And I don't suppose the letter I wrote ever reached him."

"And was that the last time you wrote to him?"

"Not quite; I wrote to him once more, after I was married, and when you were three years old. I was just going to get you your first doll when I remembered my last one, and the fancy came over me to hand it on to the younger generation. I wrote to Tom's last address, asking him to send me the chart, but no answer came, either then or later. We had finally lost sight of each other for good and all."

"He doesn't seem to have quite lost sight of you, Mother, since he knows how many of us there are. And you say he never came back to England?"

"Not that I know of; though, to be sure, Grigson, the family coachman, did electrify the Nutley household some twenty years ago by bursting in upon my parents one evening with the news that he had met 'Master Tom' somewhere about the grounds and had spoken to him without getting any answer. But as it was dusk at the time, and a Saturday, too, upon which day Grigson always took an extra glass, on principle, the statement did not seem to call for serious consideration, except in the servants' hall, where I rather think that a ghost-story was made out of it. But after it became known that the hero of the ghost-story was alive and

flourishing in Vienna, which he had apparently never quitted, even this theory fell to the ground."

"Perhaps it was his astral body," suggested Marjorie.

"Astral fiddlesticks! It's practical considerations we have to come to now."

Here Val cleared her throat again, with a thoroughness that smacked of solemnity.

"At how much do you estimate Cousin Tom's fortune, Mother?"

"Twenty thousand pounds is the figure I have heard named."

Here Ned whistled, while the three girls flushed from pure excitement.

"Of course I don't know how much he has spent. Very likely there is no more than half of it remaining. Tom always was an epicurean."

"Even ten thousand would be a very acceptable sum. Do you realise, Mummy, that that means four hundred a year? About half of our present income?"

"As yet I realise only that Tom, in his grave, is making fools of us all—just as he made fools of the guard and the station-master."

"That isn't a practical consideration, Mother. Let us come to facts and deeds. The sooner we get hold of this hidden hoard the better for us all."

"You don't expect me to dig for it, do you?" asked Mrs. Wishart, mock-meeek as ever.

"No. *We* will manage the digging—some of us. If Papa had been alive then of course he would have done it; and if Ned was old enough it would be his business. But since he cannot possibly interrupt his studies"—a

remark which was made to the accompaniment of subdued growls—"It appears to me that the duty devolves upon us elders; that is, upon Marjorie and myself."

"And how do you mean to set about fulfilling your duty?"

"By making the earliest start for Vienna that circumstances permit. Susie will have to look after you meanwhile and we can ask Cousin Hannah to come and help her. She is an excellent sick-nurse, you know; and for a couple of weeks or so—I don't suppose it will take longer—I daresay she'll be able to tear herself away from her studio."

"What splendid ideas you have, Val!" murmured Marjorie ecstatically, amid the stony silence of Ned and Susie, to whom the splendour of the idea did not seem to appeal.

"And when you get to Vienna do you mean to wander about the town with a spade in your hand and get run in by the police for digging up private gardens, like the people of the *Daily Mail* competitions?"

"It may come to that. But not until we have got to the bottom of the 'Enigma,' which, of course, can only be done on the spot. We shall begin by going to the 'Klosterplatz, Number Seventeen,' and looking out of all the windows in turn until we perceive the signpost here mentioned"—Val was once more unfolding the document, as she spoke—"I've a notion that, read upon Viennese soil, the 'Enigma' will turn out not to be one at all but perfectly plain reading. Now this watch-dog, for instance. I take it to be a human one; in other words, some person who is entrusted with the secret of the money's whereabouts. So the next thing to do

would be to find out whether Cousin Tom possessed any legless acquaintance. The choice isn't likely to be very large."

"*How* right you are to say that you are the practical member of the family," exclaimed the admiring Marjorie.

"But what about the snow and the roses?" enquired Susie. "Can you make sense out of that, too?"

"And the worms and the devil?" sneered Ned, whose attitude had turned abruptly sceptical.

"Those are the things that will explain themselves—over there. It's useless speculating at this distance."

Mrs. Wishart shook a small and incredulous head.

"Do you know what I think you are starting on? A wild-goose chase. I don't believe Tom ever meant us to find this money, granting that it still exists. It's an experiment at tantalisation, and I could almost bet that he's chuckling in his grave."

"A mere hypothesis, Mummy, dear, which has got to be either proved or disproved. Can you imagine me and the others, sitting still, with our hands in our laps, while a possible fortune lies unraised—over there? I see that you can't. Better give in at once instead of waiting to have consent extracted as painfully as—a back tooth. There are no difficulties to speak of really. It's true that Marjorie and I have never crossed the Channel before, but what does that prove? Why, that it's high time we crossed it now. You are not going to insult your own offspring by supposing that we could by any possibility go astray on the Continent? Why, even Marjorie is twenty-two, and if it makes your mind any

easier I shall refrain from crimping my hair while we're on our journeys, and I'll call myself Mrs. Brown or Mrs. Black, and pretend to be Marjorie's aunt. I should like to know what all those German lessons were for that we took if they can't get us as far as Vienna? Not to make use of this unique opportunity for practising the language would surely be a wicked waste of money."

"If we knew a single person in Vienna——"

"We do know a single one!" came breathlessly from the lips of both elder sisters. "Gertie Melrose!"

"Gertie Melrose!" repeated Mrs. Wishart, with an elevation of hands and eyes that was eloquent of many things.

"I don't say that she is a particularly practical person," admitted Val, "and of course she will be busy with her music; but at least she *is* a person. And since she has been a whole year in Vienna she must at any rate know her way about the place."

After the discovery of Gertie Melrose, and although the wild-goose chase was repeatedly referred to and mention made of needles in haystacks and other equally undiscoverable things, the dice had practically fallen.

"I am beginning to think myself that resistance would only aggravate the circumstances attending the extraction" were the words with which Mrs. Wishart tendered her submission, and the grey eyes twinkled as she said it.

CHAPTER II.

GERTIE MELROSE.

It was on a somewhat boisterous November evening that a pair of travel-worn but eager-eyed passengers alighted at the Westbahnhof of Vienna. The channel crossing had been chastening, and the long hours passed in a tightly packed second-class compartment the reverse of exhilarating; yet neither ordeal had succeeded in quenching the buoyancy of two ardent and enterprising spirits enjoying their first taste of the Unknown.

"Have you got your German handy?" asked Marjorie a little anxiously of her sister. "Mine has somehow got shaken out of my head within the last hours."

"I fancy mine is all right." And Val fingered the phrase-book in the pocket of her cloak. "'Gepäck-träger' and 'Droschke'—those are the two words we'll require first. The only question is where the 'Droschke' is to take us to when we're in it, for, unless Gertie is here, as she promised—and really in this crowd——"

"I see her!" exclaimed Marjorie in accents of ecstatic relief. "At least, I see the very same hat she wore in London last year—and I don't suppose there

could be two of that make in the world; there—bobbing up and down over the heads of that family. She's looking for us. And Sandy as well. Of course it's her."

Another moment and a short-sighted giraffe of a woman, peering about her through a double eye-glass, and leading an orthodox Scotch terrier, severely muzzled, upon a chain, emerged from the seething mass of talking and gesticulating humanity just disgorged by the express. Her head, which was small and set upon a long and slightly drooping neck, almost entirely disappeared under a covering which, in its turn, practically vanished beneath what appeared to be a hecatomb of slaughtered fowls, immolated on the top of it, as upon an altar. Both Val and Marjorie knew that mound of feathers as intimately as they knew Sandy, and before Gertie reached them had time to take note of the increased raggedness of its appearance, which, together with the wisps of reddish hair flying about their friend's face, proclaimed the Vienna climate as none of the stillest.

"You don't mean to say that's *you!*" exclaimed Miss Melrose with a gasp of delight, having all but run the peak of her hat straight into Marjorie's eyes. It was an exceedingly aggressive peak, whose downward formation forced the giraffe-like neck to execute a species of backward curve whenever a good view from under it was required.

Seen close, Miss Melrose resolved herself into a person of anything between twenty-five and thirty, with a featureless, insignificant little face, and in her eyes that unmistakably happy—not to say ecstatic look of a

person with a "cult." Gertie Melrose's cult was music; but if it had happened to be botany or stamp-collecting her eyes would probably have gleamed with exactly that same beatified light.

"Yes, it is us, Gertie. *How* good of you to be here!"

"You may well say so!" agreed Gertie, frankly rueful, "considering whom I have thrown over for the purpose. Burmester, my dear! actually Willy Burmester! Gauge the heights of my friendship by that! If it wasn't for compensations in view—— But we'll talk about that presently. Where are your things? Shall I get you a porter?"

"Oh, we can manage that for ourselves," assured Val, beckoning confidently to an elegant individual in a scarlet cap who happened to be passing at that moment. "Herr Gepäckträger, wollen sie mir gefälligst eine Droschke besorgen!"

At which the red-capped individual smiled an indulgent smile and passed on.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Val, aghast.

"Nothing—only that he's a station-master, or something equivalent. 'Träger! Ein Fiaker.'"

"The Viennese for 'Droschke,'" she explained, while a good-natured giant in a striped overall began to load himself leisurely with the sisters' belongings. "And there's no need to be so choice in your expressions. It's not in their line, and only confuses them. Just look at Marjorie and Sandy. He's pretending not to know her. Of course it would be beneath his dignity to appear overjoyed."

Ten minutes later the travellers found themselves

installed in a roomy conveyance into which an individual with a face as round and as red as a harvest moon, and with a heavy gold watch-chain festooning a marvellously checked waistcoat, had assisted both them and Sandy to mount with as much tender solicitude as though they had been his nearest and dearest relatives. A steady flow of evidently cheerful but unfortunately incomprehensible talk attended the process.

"Surely *that's* not German," whispered Val to Gertie, while vainly straining her ears for some recognisable sound.

"It's the vernacular of the place, anyway."

"Do you understand it?"

"Only partially. He seems to be airing his hopes that you are not too fatigued by the journey, and don't object to the wind."

"But what can that matter to him?"

"Oh, that's just their way. You had better smile and say: 'Schon gut!' That covers most contingencies. Otherwise his feelings might be hurt."

"I wouldn't hurt them for worlds. He seems such a dear! 'Schon gut! Schon gut!'"

Upon which the moon-faced man, with an agility which, taken in conjunction with his girth, seemed little short of miraculous, beamingly swung himself onto the box.

"He certainly *can* talk!" remarked Val gleefully.

"But he can drive as well. Wait till you see!"

In another moment they did see; for, once clear of the mass of vehicles before the station, the fat man on the box cocked his hat onto one ear, put his hands down and settled himself and his glossy, clean-limbed little horses to their work.

"I don't see what you want motors for when you have got *this*," observed Val after a minute of smooth and breathless progress. "They have no time-limit here, have they?"

"If they have, it doesn't work—not for *Fiakers*, anyway. So funny—when everything else simply dawdles. But let's talk now, my dears! What a first-class idea of yours to make this trip! It's not going to be too short, I *hope*? Something about an inheritance, isn't it? I couldn't quite make it out from your letter."

"Yes, it's an inheritance; but there are too many tramway signals and motor horns about to talk about it in comfort now. Wait till we're in the hotel. You are taking us to an hotel, are you not? And you engaged a room, as I asked you?"

"Rather! And got it heated as well. Fancy my having thought of that!" chuckled Gertie with due self-appreciation. "Of course I don't know whether I've hit off your tastes. But since you want to do things on the cheap I thought it best to ask one of my fellow-students at the Conservatorium; and she warmly recommended the Hotel Thalia, where she says her parents always stop. I find it simply gorgeous for the money; and it's at a convenient distance from the Musikvereins-Saal, which comes in useful, as I have taken tickets for you for Saturday. You'll hear Adolf Grünthal and Hilda Munz."

"For us!" exclaimed the sisters in one breath.

"But, Gertie, dear," protested Val, looking appropriately "responsible," "we haven't come here to amuse ourselves; this is a purely business journey; and we have promised Mother to be as expeditious as possible."

"But you can't be doing business all day; and you couldn't have the face to show yourself in England again without being able to give some account of Viennese music. This town is a perfect paradise of music, you must know, beginning with the military bands, and ending with the opera."

"It seems to be a paradise of shops, too," observed Marjorie, whose eyes were wistfully following the line of brilliantly lighted shop-fronts defiling on either side of the Mariahilferstrasse.

Gertie waved a shabbily-gloved and somewhat contemptuous hand.

"Oh, yes, for people who care about those sort of things. If you're of the number you've timed yourselves about right, since the Christmas 'Occasions' will be on presently."

"It certainly would be more amusing to buy our winter things in Vienna than in London," admitted Val. "We'll see. Perhaps if the business goes *very* smoothly——"

"Is that an officer on horseback?" asked Marjorie excitedly.

"Can't see. More likely a policeman."

"Fancy a bobby with such a ferocious spike on his helmet! I suppose he's only got to put down his head and run at people, like a bull. I've seen ever so many soldiers with red trousers already; and the houses are all different colours and different heights. Why, London is dun-coloured beside this!"

The building before which they presently drew up with a flourish which brought half the establishment to the door was certainly anything but dun-coloured. A pillared and stuccoed entrance, and scarlet blinds on

the ground floor conspired with the gorgeously fur-trimmed coat of the porter to produce a combination almost worthy of the footlights.

“‘Gut gefahren, san mer?’ (We’ve driven well, haven’t we?)” exclaimed the jubilant driver, appearing at the window.

But it was the fur-clad man who, putting aside the moon-faced one, took possession of the travellers, as of his rightful property.

“Didn’t I tell you it was gorgeous?” asked the exultant Gertie, when a swarm of black-coated and superfluously fussy menials had ushered them up a brilliantly carpeted staircase to the room engaged in their name.

“Yes, it certainly is that,” agreed Val, casting a vaguely doubtful glance around her.

As to the gorgeousness there could be no question, but Val’s eyes were quick, and she had not been able to help noticing that the porter’s fur-trimmed coat had been rather conspicuously moth-eaten, the stucco ornaments damaged, and the profuse gilding of the entrance hall unmistakably tarnished, details which Gertie’s limited field of vision could not be expected to take note of. The stained carpet and ornate but rickety-looking furniture of the bedroom seemed to tell the same tale. But after all, that might be the Viennese way of doing things; and if the washing table was rather depressingly small, the mirror made up for it by being gloriously big.

“*Must* you have a wash before we set to talking?” asked Gertie, when the door had at length closed upon the quite disproportionate number of tail-coated in-

dividuals which the disposal of four articles of luggage had called into action. "Come here, Sandy, and I'll take off its horrid muzzle. 'Herein!'" This latter word in answer to a renewed knock at the door.

"Der Meldezettel," explained yet another tail-coated person, entering with a sheet of paper in his hand and something of a leer upon his inquisitive face.

Val looked towards Gertie for help; the word "Meldezettel" had not figured in the phrase-book studied so diligently during the journey.

"Oh, something that the police want—sort of catalogue description. 'Schon gut! Schon gut!'" And Gertie nodded affably at the retiring waiter.

"What on earth has the police got to do with us?" asked Val, a little indignantly.

"Far more than is always quite convenient. Ask Sandy: he knows even more about it than I do."

"But we're not Scotch terriers; and neither are we criminals."

"No, but you might turn into that—criminals, I mean. The rule seems to be to look upon every person as an embryo murderer or thief until he has given proof positive of the contrary. It's not quite so bad as in Germany where almost every second thing you want to do is 'streng verboten und furchtbar bestraft,' but still they do shepherd you and father you more than the average Britisher cares about."

"And what am I expected to do with this?"

"Put down your two names and your station in life, and your ages, and the place you came from and the place you are going to, and a few other trifles of that sort."

Not known, before the war.

"And why not the number of my sisters and brothers and my favourite pursuits and poets?"

"I suppose because even official curiosity has its limits. Hurry up, my dear. By the look in that man's eyes I know that he won't be happy till he gets his 'Meldezettel.' Shall I do it for you? Bother! The ink is dried up, of course, but here's a pencil. Now then. Miss Wishart and Miss Margaret Wishart, from Wimbledon."

"Stop a moment, Gertie!"

The two sisters exchanged a meaning glance.

"That's all wrong. Please write as follows: 'Mrs. White and Miss Wishart.'"

"Mrs. White? Who is she?"

"That's me," said Val firmly.

"You're *married?*" shrieked Gertie with a jump which unsettled both her eyeglasses and the usually invulnerable nerves of Sandy, just now occupied with a searching and suspicious perambulation of the apartment. "You dare to be married, without telling me a word of it?"

"I'm only married for the Viennese public—not for you. It's a fruit of deep reflection. We talked it over on the journey. I began by suggesting the idea in joke; but things which Helen Branders told us decided me to make earnest of it. Helen knows Austria; and she talked so much—fortunately, not in Mother's hearing—about the danger of unchaperoned girls being taken for adventuresses that I resolved to cut the Gordian knot by constituting myself a chaperon for the occasion. Since not a cat knows us here—except you, of course——" ("Thank you!" murmured the delighted Gertie) "there

really is no difficulty about it, and it will give us ever so much more liberty of action. So for the present please to remember that I am Mrs. White, travelling with my niece."

"Rather close in age for aunt and niece, aren't you?" suggested Gertie, gleefully. "Why not remain Marjorie's sister? There are such things as married sisters, you know."

"That's not nearly so respectable, and also not so exciting. Besides, we're so unlike each other that it really sounds more probable than our being sisters."

"That's a fact!" agreed Gertie, looking from Val's *élancé* figure—the well-poised and spirited brown head, the eager eyes and impatient mouth, the well-cut and sensitive nostrils, almost as ready to quiver as those of a thoroughbred race-horse, to Marjorie's silky yellow hair, sentimental blue eyes, and complexion of milk and roses, which the absolute roundness of her countenance seemed to present as in a flawless china bowl.

"Of course I shall make myself look as elderly as possible," explained Val. "By dint of eschewing curling irons and banishing all frivolity from my attire, I hope to run up to at least thirty-five."

"And are you a widow, if I may be allowed to ask? Or have you got a husband up your sleeve?"

"Of course I have. If I do the thing at all I do it thoroughly. A live husband in the background will be ever so much more useful than a dead one, who couldn't rise up to protect me, or fight duels with the people who are impertinent to me, or anything of that sort. We've settled all the details. He's a doctor with a big practice, and therefore can't leave England; so that's

why I've come along, in order to raise the inheritance. See?"

"Yes—quite. But I rather think this is one of the things that are 'streng verboten und furchtbar gestraft.'"

"Who is to find out, since *you* won't tell upon us? It's going to be a huge joke," declared the practical member of the family. "I shall be called 'Gnädige Frau,' won't I? and Marjorie has been practising calling me 'Auntie' and 'Aunt Val.' You'll just see the depth of the respect I shall be treated with. That man who brought in the 'Meldezettel,' for instance, seemed half-inclined to make eyes at me. Let him but see in me a 'Doktors Gattin' and he'll soon drop that. Where's that paper? I think I had better fill it in myself, so as to save you all responsibility in the matter."

"Well I think you're very *gritty*," pronounced Gertie, when the leering waiter had carried off the "Meldezettel," into which, even before reaching the door he had contrived to cast a curious glance. "And very determined, too. From Wimbledon to Vienna is a pretty big jump, after all."

"There was no choice in the matter, considering how much of an invalid Mother always is."

"And I suppose the inheritance makes it worth while?"

"Restrain your curiosity until we are washed and fed, and then you shall have a treat."

"The City of Enticement!" Gertie was repeating aloud somewhere about an hour later, as she raised her short-sighted eyes from the perusal of Cousin Tom's will. "What does he mean by that, I wonder? There's no

doubt, to be sure, that the music is enticing. But unless he was musical——”

The travellers, considerably refreshed, were taking what repose they could find in crimson plush armchairs which seemed expressly designed for the combating of somnolence. Upon the table before them stood thick white plates which Sandy had obligingly cleared of the last crumb of “Wiener Schnitzel.”

“And what is your opinion of Cousin Tom himself?”

“Oh! That he was cracky, of course. But I’m glad of that, since nothing else would have brought you here. I only hope you won’t be too quick about unearthing that hoard, so that you should have to stop over my concert. I didn’t tell you, did I, that I am going to give a concert of my very own before Christmas? Quite a wee one, but it’s a beginning.”

“Oh, we shall be at home long before Christmas, of course,” said Val confidently. “Even for the sake of your concert it wouldn’t be right to dawdle over it.”

“But the answer to this Enigma doesn’t seem a thing to be *rushed*, exactly. How do you mean to set about it?”

“We rather hoped that *you* could give us some hints on the subject. You must be acquainted with local peculiarities by this time. Do none of these lines about signposts and roses and snow touch any chord in your mind?”

Gertie shook her head blandly.

“I’m chiefly acquainted with local concert-rooms. And as for the snow—well, of course there *is* almost eternal snow upon the Semmering, which is close at

hand, but there certainly aren't eternal roses; and, besides, that can't be described as being on the banks of the Danube."

"But at least you can tell us what 'Puppenfee' means. 'Doll's Fairy' would be the literal translation, but——"

"Oh, I can tell you that. It's the name of a ballet they give at the opera—a very successful one."

"A ballet?" repeated Val, reflectively. "Can that mean that the person in the secret should be looked for in the theatrical circles?"

"Mummy did mention the *corps de ballet*," observed Marjorie, while another glance was exchanged between the sisters. Then, after a ruminating pause—

"But there can't be such a thing as a legless ballet-dancer."

"Of course not. But, all the same, this suggestion should not be lost sight of. It is no use talking until we have had time to look round us and form our own conclusions. What we require in first line is legal advice. Of course I have brought a power of attorney with me, in order to be able to act in Mother's name. The thing to do is to place the matter without delay in the hands of a competent and intelligent lawyer. You can give me the address of one, I suppose?"

Gertie's face fell.

"If it was a music-teacher I could give you cart-loads of addresses; but lawyers—— You see, I know absolutely nobody but my colleagues and my masters. But I'll tell you what I can do"—and the eyes behind the eyeglasses brightened abruptly. "There is one of my fellow-students whose cousin is a lawyer, and doing

a good business. I remember her mentioning that he was a dab-hand at unravelling intricate cases. I can ask her for his address. That is sure to be all right, for she plays Beethoven like a dream."

"Splendid! Can you get us the address by to-morrow?"

"Easily. And—let me see!—Wednesday? Yes, I'll squeeze out the time for taking you there."

"You're an angel, Gertie! Where should we be without you—our single prop and stay!"

"Much in the same place you'll be with me, I fear! I'll start you off—give you a leg-up, so to say—but after that you mustn't count upon leaning on me—I'm too much of a broken reed for that. What between lessons and practising, I've literally not got the time I want for eating or sleeping——"

"Or buying a new hat," murmured Marjorie, apparently in her sleep, her yellow head abruptly sunk back upon the red plush chair-back in a position which suggested dislocation.

With a chuckle of appreciation Gertie sprang to her feet.

"Time you were in bed, my dears! But before I go I would have you remark that Sandy *has* got a new collar *and* a new muzzle. It's a poor attempt at gilding prison-bars, but all I can do. My spare pocket-money goes to Sandy. I don't know what I should do without him. He's my recipe against what they call 'Heimweh' here. Almost as good as carrying about a little bit of Edinburgh in my handbag," declared Miss Melrose, whose cradle had been rocked on the farther side of the Tweed,

of which the breadth of her vowels was in itself proof sufficient.

"He certainly exactly fulfils my conception of a Scotch 'Elder,'" agreed Val, half-closing her eyelids in order to take a critical view of Sandy's preternaturally grave and unduly elongated countenance. "Every time he opens his lips I expect to hear him give out the lesson for the day."

"Enough of these gibes! I'm off now. Be prepared for a telephone in the morning. I hope you'll be comfortable. Dream something nice; they'll tell you here that first night's dreams come true. Good night—Mrs. White! And if you're in doubt about anything don't forget to say 'Schon gut!'"

CHAPTER III.

THE "PFIFFIKUS."

"DOKTOR CLAUDIUS FEINTUCH, Grüne Gasse 104," announced Miss Melrose, making a breathless appearance at the Hotel Thalia, where, for half an hour past, Val and Marjorie, with their hats on their heads and their handbags on their knees, had been using the window-embrasure as a theatre box, for the better enjoyment of the doings of the street. "It's a good way off, so let's move! You're ready, I see. Rested, I hope? And how about the dreams?"

"Oh, we were too tired to dream much," said Val, a little hastily.

The truth of the matter was that, on comparing notes in the morning, she and Marjorie had made the strange discovery that they had both dreamt about fleas. But since to mention this might be to imply that the dreams had not impossibly rested upon some material basis—a suggestion which could not fail to cast a certain slur upon Gertie's achievements as quartermaster—it was better to leave that ground untrodden.

"He sounds exactly like the person you want," explained Miss Melrose, as she hurried her friends down the hotel staircase. "His cousin calls him a 'Pffifikus,'

which means being as sharp as needles. She's been so obliging as to make an appointment for us, so we sha'n't be going to the ends of the town for nothing. The Grüne Gasse is in one of the new suburbs, quite beyond my ken. You'll see a good piece of Vienna before reaching it."

"How kind of the sun to be shining!" cried Marjorie, casting rapturous eyes about her, as from under the stuccoed entrance they stepped into the street.

"Did you hear the porter saying 'Küss die Hand, Gnädige?'" asked Val, in a triumphant whisper. "That's the firstfruits of the 'Meldezettel!'"

"Hurry up, or we'll miss our tram! There's one at the corner now!"

Though the sun was certainly shining, the wind was as unmistakably blowing; so what between its stormy advances and the length of Gertie's legs, the sisters had the impression of being swept to their places in the "Elektrische" by a species of composite whirlwind. Once there, and having recovered breath, there was so much to look at—both inside and out—that the only difficulty lay in choice. For, if out there the architectural glories of the Ringstrasse—the only street in the world fit to hold a candle to Princes Street as Gertie presently declared—and the festive-looking flowerdecked lamp-posts were showing to particular advantage under a pale blue November sky, in here there were figures whose strangeness drew the travellers' eyes like loadstones. On this their initial excursion Val and Marjorie's fellow-passengers happened to present a very fair assortment of those somewhat exotic elements, which are at once the pride and the despair of the Austrian Empire, including a

red-capped Bosnian, a short-skirted, yellow-stockinged Moravian peasant-woman, a Tyrolese mountaineer, besides an ever-shifting variety of light and dark blue and green and grey uniforms upon which medals and gold cords flashed in various combinations. Conspicuous among the wearers of these was an elephantine individual in baggy red trousers, whom a little experience would have taught the sisters to classify as a dragoon-orderly, carefully balancing upon his scarlet knees a large and exquisite nosegay from which dangled a note tied up with pink ribbon. The eyes of most of the women in the tram, Marjorie's included, were turned somewhat enviously upon the sheaf of nodding carnations; since even inexperience could not fail to recognise Cupid's messenger in the elephantine warrior. Altogether that tram contained plenty of sights calculated to convince you on the spot that you were *not* travelling in a London bus.

"How much more amusing uniforms are than plain clothes!" sighed Marjorie, when after a journey of twenty minutes which had appeared to her as five, the three girls alighted. "I have counted seven sorts already. And oh, *how* I wish I was the girl who is getting that bouquet!"

The most conspicuous thing about the Grüne Gasse was the penetrating smell of mortar which, in turning its corner, met the searchers full—this new suburb being so aggressively new that the more everyday odours of humanity had not yet had time to assert themselves. Judging from the amount of scaffolding still about, the period at which the new-built street had been literally as green as its name—with the greenness of the surrounding birch and beech-woods—was still comparatively

recent. Balconied mansions, presenting a pleasing variety of pale green and pale red and creamy tints, lined two sides of what was evidently a thoroughfare of the future, with walls still immaculate of the smoke of the capital, a fair proportion of yet empty window-sockets and door-posts on which the paint was not yet fairly dry.

Number 104 belonged to the completed and inhabited buildings; but so disconcerting was its obvious spotlessness that Val and Marjorie, in crossing its threshold, instinctively trod more lightly, and Gertie felt glad that she had left Sandy at home.

"You have got all the papers you require with you?" whispered Miss Melrose, while they mounted the staircase upon whose shiny balustrade they all three instinctively refrained from laying their hands, for the inside of the house smelt of varnish quite as unmistakably as the outside did of mortar.

Val pointed dumbly towards her bag—not feeling absolutely sure of her voice, for the moment was crucial.

"What are you going to do about introducing yourself?" enquired Gertie, coming to a halt as sudden as the thought which had struck her. "The power of the attorney isn't made out in Mrs. White's name, is it?"

"No, of course I shall have to be Miss Wishart to our legal adviser. Mrs. White exists only for the hotel people—or anybody of that sort."

"Won't that make rather a muddle?"

"I don't see why it need; they won't come into contact. Do let's get on, Gertie!"

A few more steps and they had reached a door adorned by a brand-new plaque upon which brilliantly gilt letters seemed to be screaming the name of Claudius

Feintuch, "Doktor der Rechte," into the face of the world.

After a wordless pause, heavy with expectation, it was opened wide by a youthful individual with a pen stuck jauntily behind his ear, and a singularly disconcerting pair of eyes, inasmuch as they were not really a pair at all, seeing that each of them looked in a different direction, and neither of them at the person addressing their owner. In a voice which seemed much too guttural for his age, this nondescript youth—having ushered the visitors into what appeared to be a dentist's waiting-room—begged them to take patience, the Herr Doktor being "stark beschäftigt"—and forthwith shut them in to the depressing company of oil-print landscapes and green rep chairs which appeared never to have been sat upon.

It was upon Val that the depression weighed heaviest. The tramway ride had been too absorbing, and the progress up the Grüne Gasse too breathless for reflection; but in this forced interval doubts began to assail her. Not doubts as to the reality of Cousin Tom's legacy, but only as to the feasibility of convincing Doktor Feintuch of this reality. The Enigma, in itself, was a thing which, in order to be taken seriously, presupposed a spark of imagination; and could a cut-and-dry man of business be expected to possess imagination? Supposing he declined to trouble himself with so preposterous-sounding a matter? It was a reflection productive of nervousness which could scarcely have been greater if this had actually been a dentist's waiting-room from behind whose closed door the groans of victims penetrated. Something of this same oppression

rested upon Marjorie, intently turning over the periodicals upon the table, which proved to be the only things not new in the room, and even upon Gertie, who had gravitated instantaneously towards the music-stand in the corner, beside the closed and locked piano.

To all three it felt like a deliverance when the office-boy—if indeed he were such—appeared on the threshold of an inner sanctum, to announce in his guttural voice, and with one eye turned to the porcelain stove and the other to an Alpine view upon the wall, that the Herr Doktor stood at their service.

Nothing could have been more appropriate than the small, neat manikin who rose to receive them; for if not precisely as "new" as his walls and ceilings, he seemed—doubtless with a view of harmonising himself with his surroundings—to have recently gone through a process of renovation, with results that were at least creditable. The jet-black and shiny hair whose carefully trained locks were artistically plastered onto a very round head, suggested not only paint and varnish, but even glue, while the pink nails, polished to a degree that was almost blinding, might easily have rivalled the brilliancy of the spick-and-span mirror in the lobby. The somewhat *brouillé* complexion, too, showed signs of being "doctored," with the result that at a little distance the impression of thirty was successfully produced, though at close quarters Doktor Feintuch quickly ran up to his rightful age, which was on the wrong side of forty. The features would have been quite ordinary, but for a pair of really fine, mysteriously dark-brown eyes with a yellow gleam in their depth, which somehow suggested that the nose had been defrauded of its

rightful "hook." The manner was distinctly more effusive and the smile more dazzling than is generally looked for in a business man.

While placing chairs for the two sisters—Gertie having elected to cleave to the music-stand—Doktor Feintuch was profuse in apologies for having kept his visitors waiting, an offence which nothing but his overwhelming engagements could condone; likewise warm in his hopes that the distance from the centre of the town had not proved inconvenient. This move to the Grüne Gasse was quite recent, as he informed them, and done for the sake of his children's health and the excellent air out there. He might have added—though he did not—that his pocket was likely to profit quite as much as his children by this premature taking possession of what promised to be fresh fields and pastures new for an intelligent legal adviser—Doktor Feintuch having acted on the principle that it is the early bird that secures the worm—or the client.

"We don't mind the distance at all," assured Val, much cheered by this informal talk, as well as by Doktor Feintuch's appearance and manner—so very far from cut-and-dry. A person with such exotic-looking eyes could scarcely help possessing imagination, she told herself hopefully. "The advice we seek would be cheaply bought by a tramway ride. For it is a rather peculiar case we have to consult you about—perhaps you will even find it too peculiar for your taste."

"On the contrary," put in Doktor Feintuch, flashing out another smile; "I like peculiar cases."

"But this is a *very* peculiar one."

"My cousin mentioned something about an inheritance, and that the ladies"—he swept his eyes from one sister to the other—"have come straight from England. Is that indeed so?"

"It is."

In her best German, a trifle marred by nervousness, Val put the lawyer in possession of the chief facts of the case, and explained further that she had a power of attorney with her.

"But it is in English," she added, as she opened her bag, "and I suppose you do not speak——"

"On the contrary, I learned your noble language at school."

"That simplifies matters greatly. Then this document will not require to be translated. It is the will of my mother's cousin, Mr. Thomas Dowell. It is no use saying anything further until you have read it."

With a hand which shook slightly she handed over the document, and then settled down to the endurance of the unavoidable five minutes of suspense.

Having abruptly banished the unbusinesslike smile from his face, Doktor Feintuch bent his jet-black head over the sheet of paper in his hand. Both Val and Marjorie's desire would have been to peruse his countenance while he did the same by the will, so as to gauge the impression made; but the lawyer's head having entirely disappeared behind the sheet, they were reduced to contemplate the bare and spotless office walls, and to speculating on the sum likely to be enclosed by the iron safe in the corner.

When at length, with a final rustle, the paper sank

to Doktor Feintuch's knee, both the girls' hearts gave a leap of expectation.

"Not an everyday case—certainly not an everyday case," he observed, scratching himself gently behind his ear with the end of the pencil in his hand.

The inscrutable eyes were fixed full upon Val as he spoke, but there was absolutely nothing to be made of their fathomless depth.

"Have you read the Enigma?"

"I have read it."

"And—and are you sure you have understood it all?" asked Val, a trifle mistrustfully, reflecting that, after all, it must have been some time ago that Doktor Feintuch left school.

The pink nails flashed in the sunlight as he waved a reassuring hand.

"I have studied the language. And if it so be that you prefer conversing in your own dongue," shunting without more ado into what he considered to be English, "I stand at your zervice."

"Oh, I don't mind speaking German," said Val, hastily. "What I want to know is whether you think the Enigma a thing to be taken seriously, or whether you are inclined to consider it a bad joke?"

"On the gontrary, I see no reason for considering it as zee joke."

"Has a will in doggerel rhyme ever come your way before?" asked Val, sticking as firmly to her German as Doktor Feintuch did to his English.

The pink nails flashed once more in the sunlight, this time with a gesture suggestive of an all-embracing experience.

"Everyzing has gome my vay!"

"And you are actually willing to take up the matter?"

"Zoftly, my dear young lady—zoftly!"

The lawyer was now leaning back in his chair, with the tips of his fingers brought together and his eyes, under their somewhat bulging lids, fixed in what seemed to be rapt admiration upon his shining nails. The moment that the inscrutable glance and the dazzling smile were withdrawn his face became hopelessly commonplace.

"Before replying to zis question zere are certain ozzer questions weech it iz my duty to put to you. About zees Mr. Dowell, virstly; he vas—no offence meant, of course—but not absolutely—vat shall I zay?—*normal* in his intellect?"

Having given a rapid account of the deceased's eccentricities, Val found herself involved in a skilful interrogatory which embraced most of Mr. Dowell's biography, as well as the exact degree of relationship and the existence of other possible claimants.

"And now perhaps you can tell me——" she said at last, burning with impatience.

"Zoftly, zoftly, my dear young lady! Before giving you a final rebly it would be ungonscientious of me not to boint out to you that this is likely to be a matter involving considerable exbence. Zerefore the virst question to put to yourself runs zis vay: Iz zee game likely to be worse zee gandle? In ozzer vords—and now we gome to the chief boint—vat iz subbosod to have been ze amount of Mr. Dowell's fortune?"

"My mother estimates it as certainly not less than twenty thousand pounds."

Doktor Feintuch sat up abruptly in his chair, abandoning the contemplation of his nails, and unveiling his inscrutable brown eyes.

“‘Pfund’ sterling?” he enquired, dropping into his native tongue under the shock of what was evidently a pleasing surprise. “You are sure you do not mean ‘kronen’?”

“Quite sure. Though probably the capital is not intact, since our cousin was something of a *bon-vivant*.”

The lawyer, sinking back in his chair, had resumed the contemplation of his nails.

“I take the liberty of supposing,” he remarked in accents of ostentatious discretion, “that the present financial position of your family would make the acquisition of such a sum—or even a portion of it—a desirable event?”

From under his prominent eyelids a critical glance shot forth, though in truth, the details of the sisters’ appearance—down to their very shoe-laces—had been accurately gauged within a minute of their entrance.

“So desirable that my mother told me to spare no expense so long only as the search could be quickly conducted.”

“Ah! And your honoured mother herself has remained at——”

“At Wimbledon.”

“The name of the family property?” suggested Doktor Feintuch, with artistic carelessness.

Val explained, adding that the name of her mother’s villa was Fern Walk.

“A villa?” repeated the lawyer, in a tone faintly tinged with disappointment. “I did not know you had

villas in England. One usually hears of castles and halls. But I am aware that house property has quite a different value from here," he added quickly, as though to balance the apparent disparagement.

And now, before Val in the least realised what was happening, she found herself gliding into what was apparently a friendly chat, at the conclusion of which what Doktor Feintuch did not know about the position of the family, both financially and socially, was a perfectly negligible quantity.

When again she burst out with her impatient request for his decision, it was only to be told once more that she must go "softly," and that this was not a matter to be "broken over the knee."

"I must request you to accord me twenty-four hours' time, in order to study this document," he declared, taking the sheet once more in hand. "By to-morrow I shall be able to decide whether I feel justified in devoting my time to this exceedingly interesting—I might almost say, romantic—affair."

That was all that was to be got out of him for the moment, despite the brilliant smiles with which he ushered his would-be clients to the door.

"Shows only what a safe and prudent man he is," pronounced Gertie. "If he decides for yes, this will only enhance one's confidence in him."

"His eyes alone are enough to inspire confidence," decided Marjorie. "I never saw such a colour before."

"But will he have enough imagination?" speculated Val. "Though I *am* the practical member of the family, I can't deny that imagination does come in useful at times."

Late on that same evening, while Frau Feintuch—out of regard for her embroidered pillow-cases—was carefully brushing the pomatum out of her husband's hair, the touching process gained much in liveliness by the following conjugal dialogue:

"I mean to go in for it, after all, Sarah. I believe it's going to be a 'Geschäft.' All the information I have taken since this morning make of Mr. Dowell a 'Sonderling' and a capitalist—not a bad combination. And since he had no one to spend money on but himself, there is pretty sure to be enough of the twenty thousand pounds over for settling my bill."

"But that riddle, Claudius! Could anyone but a maniac do a thing of that sort?"

"Oh, yes, an Englishman could. This one was only a trifle more cracked than the bulk of his compatriots."

"But supposing you never find it?"

"Then the villa at Wimbledon will have to go to pay my bill—supposing they can't manage it out of their eight hundred pounds a year, which, after all, is quite a respectable sum, though, of course, four children and an invalid mother are a heavy drag upon it. But the look of their clothes is *most* reassuring. I'm quite alive to the risk. But you know my principle of taking everything that comes my way so long as there is a ghost of a chance in it. It's even possible that the case may turn out sensational. I shouldn't like Karnfeld or Rosenstock to get hold of it. Besides, it's such a chance having two girls to deal with who evidently haven't the most distant inkling of business, and don't know a soul

in Vienna who could coach them up. Oh, yes! trust me, Sarah—it's going to be a 'Geschäft.'

"Ah, I know your enterprise, Claudius!" purred Sarah, whose upper lip showed a heavy shadow, and whom an accumulation of fatty matter in her organism compelled to breathe rather noisily.

Next day at the appointed hour Doktor Feintuch announced to the sisters in his best professional manner that, after ripe consideration, he had decided to put his valuable time at their disposal, and, as a first step in this direction, had been devoting his sleepless hours to the study of the Enigma.

"With what results?" asked the overjoyed girls in one breath.

"With the result that we must go softly, my dear young ladies. There exists a danger of awaking attention, and thus putting the clue into the hands of an un-called-for person, since it appears that anyone using the password will be able to raise the hoard."

"But for that he would require to have recognised the signpost and discovered the watch-dog," objected Val.

"No doubt—no doubt! Yet do not forget that among Mr. Dowell's acquaintances there may be some one to whom the signpost is more easily recognisable than it is to you. Therefore I strenuously recommend you to keep the matter quiet; and in particular not to mention the Enigma to anybody of whose discretion you are not absolutely certain. Far better not mention it at all."

This sounded so rational that both sisters immediately registered vows of silence.

"Ought we not at once to visit the house in the Klosterplatz and see what can be seen out of its windows?" asked Val, impatience written large on every line of her face.

"Leave everything to me!" admonished Doktor Feintuch, with one of his comprehensive waves of the hand. "I shall visit the house, and likewise I shall institute all necessary enquiries regarding Mr. Dowell's habits—his friends, and so on."

"I am sure you will agree with me that particular attention should be paid to the friends he may have had in theatrical circles. The legacy to Fräulein Melissa is in itself enough to prove that he did have acquaintances in these—in these regions. Did she"—as a sudden inspiration visited Val—"did she by any chance act in the 'Puppenfee'?"

"The 'Puppenfee' belongs to the Opera House, and Fräulein Melissa to the Apollo Theatre. But, fear not—no stone shall be left unturned. Leave everything to me."

"And now we can write to Mother that the search is fairly under way!" declared Val, when presently the sisters descended the immaculate staircase, having deposited two hundred Kronen upon Doktor Feintuch's writing-table, as a first modest contribution towards the unavoidable expense of the investigation.

CHAPTER IV.

NUMBER SEVENTEEN.

It was all very well for Doktor Feintuch to preach patience; but if he imagined that his counsels would be implicitly followed it could only be because—despite the vast experience hinted at—his acquaintance with British enterprise was limited. So little inclined were the sisters to “go softly!” that no later than the afternoon of this decisive day they concluded as to the impossibility of sitting with their hands in their laps, while their legal adviser collected information. There was plenty to occupy them meanwhile. In whatever direction they turned their eyes they seemed to themselves to be looking at a big picture-book—or rather at a cinematograph show—in which hypermodern and quaintly mediæval figures gaily jostled each other, and seasoned by faces of more different types of prettiness than they had hitherto even known to exist. But despite the allurements of the Kärnthnerstrasse down whose length, at given hours, the whole social life of Vienna seems to be pouring, as through a trough—despite the walls alive with playbills, and the plate-glass windows behind which hats worthy of Paris seemed to be nodding to them, familiarly, and the most entrancing *boubonnières*—such

bonbonnières as no British fancy ever invented—appealed to both eye and palate—the call of conscience kept them true to their mission. Of Val's conscience chiefly; for to steer Marjorie past either the shop-windows, or the doorways of old, grey palaces flanked with coats of arms hewn in stone, and affording glimpses of peaceful, pigeon-haunted courtyards proved a task fraught with difficulty. Both the hats and the palaces appealed to her imagination in a way that was not always convenient; and her first sight of an orthodox court-carriage, the gilded spokes of whose wheels, flashing in the sunlight, proclaimed the presence of royalty, bade fair to transpose the mild form of mental intoxication from which she was suffering, from the chronic to the acute stage. The most strenuous appeals to her sense of duty were required to stiffen her somewhat against the allurements which lined their path. It was to unearth the inheritance that they had come to Vienna, Val sternly argued; and to spend either their time or their money upon anything not leading to this end would be a wicked abuse of their mother's confidence.

As a first object of legitimate activity the house on the Klosterplatz irresistibly presented itself. Despite the confidence inspired by the colour and depth of Doktor Feintuch's eyes, the temptation to use their own was of course irresistible. Judging by what they had grasped of Mr. Dowell's peculiarities, the signpost mentioned in the Enigma was not likely to be so obvious as to force itself upon notice—in which case three pairs of eyes would certainly have a better chance than one.

“I suppose he couldn't *mind* us going—behind his back, so to say,” suggested Marjorie, who occasionally,

though rarely, suffered from attacks of faint-heartedness.

"It's not going to be behind his back; I shall tell him—after we've been," retorted Val, with some sort of obscure idea that Doktor Feintuch was not particularly anxious for their personal assistance in the search.

How to set about it now called for consideration, Number Seventeen being in all probability re-let by this time. Gertie, when consulted, could give no help—the melodious waves of her profession having by this time once more closed above her distracted head.

"I told you I was a broken reed," she pleaded in excuse. "But, unless the heavens collapse, I'll make shift to dine with you to-morrow, and then I'll hear what success you've had."

Thrown upon their own resources, the treasure-hunters decided to have at least a look at the outside of the late Mr. Dowell's residence. Merely by standing upon the doorstep and casting searching glances round the Klosterplatz it ought to be possible to judge of what choice there lay in the way of signposts.

"For the signpost is clearly the first of three things we have to turn our attention to," as Val expounded. "The other two are the watch-dog and the password. But it seems only logical to begin with the signpost."

A plan of Vienna having been pored over for the best part of an afternoon, revealed the Klosterplatz as belonging to the I. Bezirk—that is to the heart of the town.

With the necessary turnings firmly imprinted in their memory, the sisters sallied forth on the following forenoon, filled with the delightful consciousness of their first in-

dependent step. Despite the printing process the counsels of several fiercely helmeted, but remarkably affable policemen were required before the Klosterplatz was reached.

"Oh, but this is as good as a dream!" exclaimed Marjorie as they turned the decisive corner.

Undoubtedly there was something vaguely dream-like about this curious spot, lying like a forgotten morsel of "Alt Wien" in the midst of fashionable thoroughfares. Within a few hundred paces motor-cars were tooting, and shop-windows displaying the latest thing in science as well as in millinery; yet to look at these hoary grey housefronts was, in one moment, to feel all those things uncountable miles away. Across two sides of the small square a monastery and a palace gazed at each other gravely—as they had no doubt gazed for at least a couple of centuries past; while a stone fountain adorned with the life-size statue of some mediæval Saint dominated the centre. The splash of its falling waters was often the only sound near at hand, except when some stray and terribly anachronistic motor happened to tear round the corner, scaring off the pigeons drinking upon the fountain's edge, and sending them fluttering for protection to other Saints who stood in a closely packed row upon the skyline of the church roof, which grew out of that of the monastery.

"That he should have chosen this spot to live in proves that Cousin Tom must have had some artistic tendencies," pronounced Val. "I suppose it was a pleasing contrast to—other things."

Number Seventeen was not very hard to find, lying as it necessarily did upon one of the two sides not oc-

cupied by the monastery or the palace. Its look was almost as venerable as the palace itself, if less magnificent—the sober, solid stone front having seemingly borrowed the expression worn by the well-to-do, God-fearing *bourgeois* who had inhabited it in the past.

“Oh, look at this, Marjorie!” said Val eagerly.

Upon one of the wings of the wide-open *porte cochère* her eye had been caught by a big card affixed.

“Lodging of five rooms to be let in the second storey.”

Already as they picked their way across the Platz the sisters had cast curious glances at the windows of the house. From Gertie they had learnt that in Vienna everybody except millionaires and beggars lived in flats, and had already noted that one row of windows were curtainless—a distinctly hopeful symptom.

“But was it the second storey he lived in?” speculated Marjorie.

Whereupon Val came to an audacious decision.

“Never mind whether it was! It will do for a pretext. We simply go in and ask to see the rooms. Why on earth should we not want to take them as well as anybody else? Once in the house it won’t be difficult to find out in which storey Mr. Dowell lived—and besides the view out of the front windows will be more or less alike everywhere. That will be ever so much better than standing on the doorstep and gaping about!”

“All right!” agreed Marjorie, rising abruptly to the occasion.

Resolutely they walked into the covered entrance and came to an equally resolute standstill before a door marked “Hausmeister”—from the other side of which

voices, that of a lustily singing canary-bird amongst others, and the clatter of crockery was audible. A somewhat irascible "Herein!" followed upon Val's knock.

Turning the handle she only just saved herself from falling headlong down the three steps which led to the semi-subterranean dwelling. Her first impression was one of wonder at the amount of objects contained by the tiny room below, a cursory glance having already disclosed two beds, one press, one table, two chairs, a sewing-machine, a porcelain stove, a bird-cage, and at least a dozen flower-pots in a space not much bigger than a ship's cabin, not to speak of the two people who sat at the table before two plates of steaming soup.

"I am afraid I am disturbing you," said Val, a little remorseful for not having remembered the almost matitudinal dinner hours of the country. "We have come about the lodging that is to let."

In the same moment she shrank back in alarm, for one of the soup-eaters, a round little man with an up-standing wisp of red hair as bellicose as the comb of a fighting cock and a clean napkin tucked under his chin, baby-fashion, had sprung to his feet, fiercely flourishing his tin spoon.

"'Die Sekkatur! Schon wieder die Sekkatur,'" he angrily lamented. "Can't a man get hold of one beggarly half-hour in which to restore his body? One has to live, has one not? But on what, I should like to know? On air, perhaps, or on the complaints of the lodgers? I'll leave the place to-morrow! No, Gusti, you mustn't stop me this time. I'm going to Herr Dottelzweig this very evening! 'Zum Kuckuck auch mit der Sekkatur!'"

Though the torrential speech was delivered in the most orthodox "Wienrisch" its drift was too unmistakable to be missed.

"I am very sorry!" murmured Val aghast. "Don't mind it, please, we shall come back another time."

She turned with the intention of flight, a movement which seemed only to fan the anger of the red-haired "Hausmeister."

"What's the sense of that?" he vociferated. "Wasn't it the lodging you were after?"

"Yes, but there is no such great hurry!"

The man with the aggressive cockscomb burst into an exasperated laugh.

"Just listen to her!" he shouted, in order to be heard above the voice of the canary-bird, which had resumed its ear-piercing song. "No hurry! And yet without need of hurry, she breaks in upon an honest man's repose! and having put my digestion all wrong for the day—you know how bad anger is for my stomach, Gusti—she would go out again with an excuse upon her lips! Ah, yes, to be sure, life is a cross!"

"Surely we had better go?" asked Val, looking for guidance towards the calm, grey-haired woman, who seemed old enough to be the irascible man's mother, instead of his wife, as she was; and who had been eating her soup unperturbed by the interruption.

"What for?" she blandly asked. "Don't you want to see the lodging?"

"Yes; but your—husband doesn't seem quite disposed."

"Poldi? Oh, he is all right; he only *looks* as if he

was angry—a bit quick in his speech. He would be very much put out if you went away without seeing the rooms. Have you got the keys, Poldi? There they are! Now, wipe your mouth like a decent man, and take the ladies up.”

Having unfastened the napkin which shielded a brilliant waistcoat, dusted a few crumbs off his sleeve and smoothed the obstreperous crest of hair, she proceeded gently but firmly to relieve him of the spoon to which he had given one final and regretful lick.

“I’ll keep the soup hot meanwhile,” she said with an encouraging little pat on the shoulder, of the sort given to unreasonable children. “And don’t forget to show the cupboards in the kitchen, and to point out the new wall-paper.”

“Trust me for that—so long as you don’t forget that if I like my soup hot I like my beer cool. But, as for that, it will be safest to take it with me, I’m thinking!” and with the words he made a dash at the tankard upon the table. When his face emerged again from behind it his red moustache was white with foam, and every trace of ill-humour gone from his face—drowned it would seem in the golden liquid. The transformation was such that Val had some difficulty in believing her eyes.

“Nothing like being on the safe side!” he grinned, with a friendly wink of comprehension which embraced both sisters. “This way, ladies, since it has to be!”

Preceded by the rotund “Hausmeister” they now mounted the stairs, reflecting upon various things—amongst others upon the fact that this was in all probability the Poldi Frisch who figured in Mr. Dowell’s will,

and that therefore the canary-bird whom they had perceived in the cage adorning the crowded little room downstairs was—in a certain sense—an historical bird. Furthermore, Val was telling herself that Herr Frisch was likely to know a good deal about Cousin Tom's habits, and wondering how far it would be prudent to go with her questions, since to reveal their identity might possibly not fit into Herr Feintuch's plans.

"You wouldn't believe the 'Sekkaturen' which an empty lodging brings upon one," Herr Frisch held forth as they mounted. "Never an hour without somebody wanting to be trotted round. And nothing good enough for them nowadays. The house too old-fashioned, they declare, and nothing to see out of the windows but pigeons and Saints. And why doesn't Herr Dottelzweig make a lift and put in the electric light? As if *I* could answer them those questions! Yes, life *is* a cross—I always say so; but bless you, *I* don't mind, so long as I get my beer cool and my soup hot. Perhaps you ladies thought me a little impatient just now? I seem to remember having said things that were not exactly compliments, ha, ha!"

"We certainly gathered from your remarks that you were not delighted by our appearance," admitted Val, whose ear was already beginning to get attuned to the peculiarities of Viennese speech.

"How could I not be delighted with the appearance of such beautiful ladies!" exclaimed Herr Frisch, with a complimentary but respectful flourish of the keys in his hand, and a friendly twinkle of his small eyes, from which the rage had long since departed. "It's only that my speech is a bit quick at times. Gusti

says it comes from the colour of my hair. Here we are, to be sure, and none too soon!"

With bated breath the sisters followed their guide across the threshold.

"A most elegant lobby, you perceive," discoursed the "Hausmeister," falling into the automatic tone of a showman, "and not nearly so dark as people always declare" (the interpolation being made in his ordinary voice). "And this alongside is the dining-room. Newly papered, as you perceive, and conveniently near to the kitchen. This way, please!"

To look round the empty dining-room and after that, to gaze critically at the kitchen-range—ardently and volubly praised by Herr Frisch—belonged to the process of keeping up appearances, but a consuming inner impatience made the task a hard one. These spaces all looked to the back, while the sisters' thoughts yearned towards the windows at the front.

"And which is the drawing-room?" asked Val, unable to contain herself longer.

"This way, ladies! The drawing-room looks onto the Platz, as does the bedroom and the library—that is to say I call it the library because our late lodger used it for his books."

"Was not your late lodger an Englishman?" asked Val, hesitatingly, as another door opened before them.

"So he was, worse luck for the English nation. May Heaven preserve us from getting a second Herr Bosnickl into this lodging!"

Speaking so Herr Frisch hastily crossed himself, as was his habit to do at mention of evil spirits.

"Then it *is* the right lodging!" whispered Marjorie to Val.

"Yes, but is this the right room?"

Without another word both girls hurried to the nearest window and looked eagerly out.

Viewed from here the Klosterplatz showed them pretty much the same objects which their first cursory glance around had revealed, but, seen from a bird's-eye point of view. The palace was there with its curiously twisted iron balconies and with a venerable-looking porter visible in the entrance; the church front strangely foreshortened, and upon whose roof they only now discovered the row of stone Saints, to whom the staircase had brought them considerably nearer—while the chief Saint presiding over the fountain was now seen full-face instead of *en profile*. A handful of figures enlivened the quaint spot, most of them as quaint as the frame in which they were set. An Italian chestnut-seller at the corner, pushing about the roasting chestnuts with a wand of peeled wood, a monk in brown habit, with large strides of his sandalled feet hastily regaining the shelter of the monastery, of which the church was but an excrescence; a shopman, in blue apron, making a brilliant picture as he stood at the door of his humble shop, flanked by pyramids of golden oranges; an old woman on the church-steps, surrounded by baskets and pots, which obviously contained a miscellaneous stock-in-trade; two little girls feeding the pigeons, under the superintendence of a nurse in some bright national costume. But nothing more nearly related to a sign-post than a lamp-post might be supposed to be.

“Was it in this room that Mr. Dowell used chiefly to sit in?” asked Val, turning to the “Hausmeister.”

“What! You know his name? Were you perhaps acquainted with him?”

“No—but we are English, too, and we have heard of him.”

“Ah, then maybe you have heard of the godless will he left behind him? I know it got into the papers. You should have seen Herr Pfann when they gave him the Japanese Bible. It was all we could do to keep him from throwing it at somebody’s head. And Josef, with his silk cord! He was so angry that I thought he was going to hang himself with it on the spot. The only person who didn’t mind was Herr Dottelzweig. ‘Ear-trumpets can be turned into money as well as anything else,’ he said, ‘and so can fishing tackle’—and sent off the whole lot to the Dorotheum, where the auction brought in quite a nice little sum.”

“And you got a canary-bird, did you not?”

Herr Frisch emitted a sound as of a rising wind, which was his manner of sighing.

“Did I not get a canary-bird! And what a one, too! Bless you, I like music well enough, especially when it’s a properly stocked barrel-organ, or, best of all, the ‘Burg Musik’; but to have a beast start screaming at the first ray of light and not leave off until the last, is too much for an ordinary Christian. Gusti’s hearing and my temper have both suffered awfully by it. It’s since we’ve had that detestable bird that my nerves have got so jumpy.”

“Then why not give it away?”

“I can’t do that because of the bad dreams he has

promised me," declared Poldi Frisch, his voice sunk abruptly to an alarmed whisper. "And Herr Bosnickl would be the one for doing it, too; unless the bird did so itself, for it's not an ordinary Christian bird, I always say so."

"Maybe. But please tell us whether it was here that Mr. Dowell's writing-table used to stand?"

With his usual abruptness of gesture the "Hausmeister" slapped his thigh.

"Queer that you should ask me that! Just the same question was put to me by a gentleman who came here yesterday—not after the lodging, but upon business—something to do with that unchristian like will. A gentleman with black hair and pink nails."

The sisters exchanged a glance. Even from this brief description it was not hard to recognise Doktor Feintuch, whose zealous promptitude in their service could not but fill them with admiration.

"And the questions I had to answer! And there's more of them coming, since he has booked me to come to his office to-morrow morning. It's another 'Sekkatur.'"

"But, about the writing-table?"

"That was in the library. This way! A very cheerful room, with plenty of morning sun and the stove just renovated," reeled off Herr Frisch. But his tone abruptly sank as he pointed to one of the two windows of the square space.

"Here it was that Herr Bosnickl used to sit; ah, many times I have seen him!" The "Hausmeister's" round eyes stared at the spot with as fixed an expression as though they still saw the dreaded lodger.

Already Val and Marjorie stood beside the window designated. There was no blind to lift now, as there had been at the time of the Enigma's composition, so all they had to do was to strain their eyes and their wits over the puzzle before them, which they did in silence for more than a minute.

The difference in the view seen from this window and from the last was necessarily small, chiefly consisting in the possibility of seeing further into a side-street, flanked by the chief wall of the monastery with its small, grated windows and grimly blank spaces of wall. Here a group of women, shivering beneath tattered shawls, some of them holding babies, and all of them various-sized pots, were standing around a nail-studded door, obviously waiting for some dole. They were almost the only addition to the medley of figures already observed, and most of which were still visible. Seen from here the extended arm of the Saint upon the fountain presented itself in a somewhat more aggressive fashion. It was upon this figure—after all, the most conspicuous object within sight—that the sisters' eyes now fastened themselves with a doubtful question.

"Does he not almost look as though he were pointing?" suggested Marjorie.

Val's lips curled sceptically, yet not so sceptically as to keep her from catching at even this straw.

"What is there beyond there—in that direction?" she asked.

Herr Frisch's eyes grew round.

"In that direction? Many things. There is the Singerstrasse, for one thing, and the Park Ring."

"And beyond?"

"Beyond that you come to many streets, to be sure."

"And where do those lead to?"

"To the Prater, mostly. Is it the distance to that you are wanting to calculate?—maybe because of your morning walks. If so, the Stadtpark is much handier. Herr Dowell used to walk there daily—for his digestion. He was very particular about his digestion."

"What else was he particular about? You must have known him well. Was he really so very disagreeable?"

In reply, the "Hausmeister" crossed himself a second time.

"Disagreeable? I've never known him do a good turn to anybody. It was he who told the baker's apprentice that the butcher's boy was after his girl—and only because it amused him to watch them out of the window and see the faces they made at each other when they met. Disagreeable? Ask those old women over there. At first he used to amuse himself by dropping English pennies into their pots while they stood waiting for their soup. They began by blessing him, but when they found out that no one would take the coins they went on to cursing him and even mobbing him, so that he couldn't pass up that street at midday."

"Was he never kind to anybody at all?"

"The only thing he was kind to was that diabolical canary; he used to feed it himself, and even buy the bird-seed for it and bring it home in his pocket. He never treated a human being as he treated that canary."

As they listened the eyes of both Val and Marjorie

were still sweeping round the Klosterplatz with a closeness of gaze which seemed determined to tear its secret out of its grey and stony heart.

"If he was like that," hazarded Val, "then I suppose he hadn't many friends?"

"Many? He hadn't one that I know of. No one ever visited here."

"Not even any of his neighbours?" she asked, her gaze still following the house-fronts visible. "Who lives in that palace, for instance?"

"Nobody lives there. It's mostly empty, except when the Herr Graf looks in for a few weeks."

"And do you know the names of the people who live in the other houses?"

"Most of them. We don't change our lodgers here much. The greatest number have been here as long as I have."

"Do you happen to know whether there is any legless person among them?" asked Val abruptly.

"Legless person?"

The gaze which the "Hausmeister" gave recalled Val to her resolutions of prudence. Clearly it was time to break off the interrogatory, unless Herr Frisch's suspicions were to be aroused—though the gaze was in itself enough to tell her that personally, he was not initiated into the mysteries of the Enigma.

While, therefore, he was volubly assuring her that all the inhabitants of the Klosterplatz possessed their full complement of legs, she started a movement of retreat, which was executed rather hastily, and ended on the ground floor beside the door of the semi-subterranean dwelling, where Frau Frisch stood in waiting to assure

her husband that his soup had been kept hot and to receive him back into her keeping.

"And is the lodging likely to suit you?" she enquired, while settling Poldi's necktie, which had got displaced.

"Oh, the lodging, I am not sure about it; I shall have to think over it"—said Val who had clean forgotten that she was a supposed lodger; as, for the matter of that, Herr Frisch himself seemed to have done.

It was only after the two sisters were gone that it occurred to him that such a trifle as the price had not been so much as mentioned.

"Let us take one turn round the Platz," urged Val, as they stepped out of the entrance. "I don't suppose there is anything more to see; but still——"

So just as the midday hour was striking from the church tower and while round the corner of the monastery the nail-studded door had opened and the women with the pots and the babies were jostling each other for the first helpings, the sisters walked slowly round the square—past the palatial gate-way, past the open doorway, through which they had seen the hurrying monk disappear, and which afforded a glimpse of a long, cloistered passage. When they reached the chestnut-seller Marjorie stood still with a sniff of enjoyment.

"Oh, he's got roast apples as well, Val! Do let's get some! I'm starving!"

"We'll only spoil our appetites for dinner"—declared Val. "And you know that Gertie has promised to take us to something superior in the way of restaurants. But those apples *do* smell good!"

So great was the privacy of the surroundings that

the apples could be devoured on the spot, without inconvenience.

"It's much more amusing to buy things in the street than in shops," declared Marjorie. "Oh, look at that old woman! We must get something from her, too!"

It was the same old woman whom they had perceived out of the windows of Number Seventeen, with her wares displayed on the church-door steps. Seen close these resolved themselves into a basket containing bundles of dried lavender, diversified by match-boxes, paper flowers and a few rosaries; a box or two of bird-seed stood alongside, and in the background loomed various earthenware pots containing such unexpected things as an exceedingly "maggoty" looking flour, and equally "wormy" looking mould.

"'Was gefällig?' (What is your pleasure?)" asked the possessor of these riches, emerging partially from the shawls in which she was swaddled, as a preservative against November winds and the chill of stone steps. Thanks to a sunken mouth and a drooping nose she might have successfully stood for the model of a sixteenth-century witch; yet despite the rather wild-looking moustache fringing her upper lip she was not in the least terrifying.

There was nothing as enticing here as the roast apples; yet, after a rapid review of the wares the sisters decided for a bunch of lavender, as the least objectionable of the objects presented.

"And one of these beautiful roses, perhaps?" suggested the moustachioed woman, temptingly presenting a glaring pink flower. "All made by the hand—not factory work, and good enough to wear in the hair."

"I'll have the rose!" said Marjorie heroically, "She looks so cold, poor old lady. What a pity we've got no use for maggots and bird-seed as well!"

The dried lavender and the pink paper flower were the sole trophies brought back from the raid to the Klosterplatz, from which the sisters returned rather silent and somewhat crestfallen.

CHAPTER V.

THE "BLAUER ANKER."

VAL'S spirits, at any rate, were as constitutionally unable to droop for long as is an elastic ball to refrain from bounding off the ground. By the time the Hotel Thalia was regained her mind was already busy in a new direction.

It had been settled that Gertie was to fetch the sisters for that one o'clock dinner to which the slenderness of continental breakfasts had already reconciled them; their first dinner outside the hotel dining-room, the taste of whose food and the look of whose company somehow failed to appeal to them; the former being occasionally rancid and the latter noisy and gaudy. But Gertie would, of course; be late; and before her advent there would be time to study the map of Vienna for the fiftieth and the Enigma for at least the hundred and fiftieth time, joined to one more attempt at torturing some sense out of its doggerel. So far, even read upon Viennese soil, the riddle remained as much a riddle as ever; and not even the Klosterplatz had been able to shed light upon its darkness.

"There is no doubt that that stone Saint is the only thing that could possibly be construed into a signpost"

—decided Val. "You are right, there, Marjorie; and if we go ahead in the direction in which he is pointing who knows what we may come to, nor what light may suddenly break in upon us. Let me see—he stands with his face towards the church and his right arm extended this way—that is due east—yes—that certainly leads to the Prater if you go on long enough; and, as you see here, the Danube flows by the Prater, and it is on the banks of the Danube that we are told to search for the treasure. I am sure something ought to be made out of that, somehow."

The brown and the yellow heads were still bent over the plan, in earnest consultation, when Miss Melrose burst in, breathless, with her hat almost upon her nose, and Sandy in tow.

"I'm not late, am I? It's only because I had to make enquiries about the restaurant—since you want quality and cheapness combined—not always an easy matter. But I've got it now, thanks to Signor Peletti—a colleague with *such* a tenor voice! He assured me in that same tenor that the 'Blauer Anker' is the best place in Vienna for sea-monsters, and the only one where you get 'Risotto' properly cooked. And exotic things are in your line, you know. Let's move!"

The "Blauer Anker" proved to be one of those rare institutions which elect to hide their lights under a bushel—a gastronomic violet blooming in the shade, disdaining to court the gaze of the passer-by by an outward adornment, at most wooing his nostrils with the delicate odours, which, at certain hours, issued from its subterranean kitchens. A funny little out-of-the-way place in a funny little out-of-the-way street, whose irre-

gular pavement was much trodden by the feet of gourmands. For it was not genuine modesty—rather it was a sort of deep-seated pride which lay at the root of this disdain of a quite superfluous advertisement. In the cul-de-sac flanking the insignificant house upon whose corner a blue anchor of moderate size and sober tint figured as sign, there were generally at least a couple of motors in waiting—not to mention the many *Fiakers* which clattered away after having unloaded their cargo.

To Val and Marjorie, elate with the prospect of their first restaurant dinner, the look of the place was a distinct disappointment. But by this time they were too hungry to criticise.

A double set of swing-doors created something like a tiny lobby at the entrance. Gertie had just got through the first of these and was on the point of pushing open the second when Marjorie caught her by the sleeve and pointed to a huge placard affixed to the wall.

“Oh, look at that, Gertie! What on earth are we to do with Sandy?”

Miss Melrose stopped short in order to give to her neck the necessary curve backwards and then to run the peak of her hat into the placard.

“‘Das Mitnehmen von Hunden ist strengstens verboten!’ (It is strictly forbidden to introduce dogs)—she read aloud. “Well, what about that?”

“Only that if Sandy can’t go in we can’t go in either of course.”

“And why on earth shouldn’t Sandy go in?”

“But don’t you see that?” Marjorie pointed yet more strenuously to the placard.

"Oh, that? That's only dust in the eyes. Nobody bothers about such things here."

"But shall we not get into trouble?" asked Marjorie, and even Val looked a trifle staggered.

"Perhaps it would have been better if we had left him at the hotel"—she said doubtfully. "But I don't quite see how we can dispose of him now, short of leaving him in the charge of that *chauffeur*, who, by-the-bye, would have to be woke up first."

"Yes, and have him carried off at the rate of fifty miles an hour! As though any *chauffeur* ever born would be able to resist the temptation of stealing the only real Scotch terrier at present extant in Vienna! Don't you trouble about Sandy, but just follow me in blind confidence. The thing isn't nearly as dangerous as it looks. I know their ways."

Whereupon the intrepid Gertie pushed open the second swing-door and penetrated into the haunts of sea-monsters and "Risotto."

The inside of the "Blauer Anker" was quite as unpretentious as its outside, consisting of three or four low-ceilinged little rooms dotted over with small tables, at which men and women—generally too much absorbed by their food to talk much, which made for comparative quiet—sat in various numbers and combinations. If the appetites of these men and women spoke well for their digestions, the look of their clothes was equally creditable to their tailors and dressmakers—the combination of which various circumstances produced a whole very different from that presented by the dining-room of the Hotel Thalia.

Scarcely entered, Marjorie gave a tiny gasp of dis-

may, for the first thing upon which her eyes fell, thronging upon a sham mantelpiece adorned with beer-jugs, was a duplicate of the interdiction concerning dogs—and, while averting her alarmed gaze, what should she meet but a third copy of the grim decree firmly affixed between two windows. Not a loophole left for the pretence of having overlooked the matter, since even he who runs could not here help reading. Already Marjorie's lively imagination began to conjure up troubled visions in which the spiked helmets of policemen figured largely.

Meanwhile Miss Melrose, both physically and morally blind to the placards, was steering straight for one of the only two unoccupied tables, which happened to stand side by side. Long before they had reached it a black-coated, napkin-flourishing waiter had flown to meet the new guests.

"Now we're in for it!"—thought Marjorie, noting his winged step. "Will *all* of us be arrested, I wonder?"

But the man with the winged step and the napkin was far too much occupied in helping Miss Melrose out of her jacket and in beckoning to a second black-coat to do the same by the other ladies, to have any attention over for Sandy. To hide him under the table would have seemed to Marjorie the only hopeful proceeding; instead of which her incredulous eyes saw Gertie elaborately unmuzzling her darling and installing him—naked and unashamed—on a chair beside the table—a manœuvre which the "Speisekellner" continued to ignore with the most finished diplomacy. It was deep gratitude for his tact which caused Val and Marjorie to

order such a dinner as they had never before enjoyed, accepting each one of his suggestions blindly, even when they took such unknown forms as "arancevoli" or "calamatti," for the "Blauer Anker," though as good a Viennese burgher as any "Roter Ochs" or "Goldene Gans," still occasionally remembered its Italian origin. This lavish expenditure—thus Val and Marjorie reflected—could not fail to act as a "soother!"

If the "Speisekellner's" sympathy was passive that of the "Piccolo" who, from the middle distance was making signs to Sandy, expressive of goodwill, was distinctly active. To the signs Sandy deigned to respond by a thump or two of his stumpy tail upon the chair, before turning his attention to the grease-spots upon the "Speisekellner's" coat well calculated to afford a few delicious sniffs.

The orders once carried off, both sisters breathed a little more freely.

"I told you it was all dust in the eyes"—confirmed Gertie. "As if anyone could object to so well-behaved a dog's presence! It would be more to the point to feel honoured by it."

"Perhaps they don't believe that he really is a dog at all"—suggested Val, with a critical glance at Sandy's long and hairy body. "Possibly they take him for one of their own sea-monsters."

"Wein oder Bier gefällig?" piped the Piccolo at her elbow; and having received his order, the peaky-faced boy—whose miniature tail-coat had a certain pathos of its own, moved off, but not without dealing a surreptitious pat to Sandy's head.

"Certainly the waiters don't seem to mind him"—

admitted Marjorie. "But if any of the guests should object——"

Her apprehensive glance went round the room, only to fall upon bent heads and rounded shoulders. The food was evidently too absorbing to admit of side-issues.

But now a short, clock-faced man, upon whose countenance importance was to be read as plainly as the hours upon a dial, was bearing down upon them. Although Marjorie did not know that this was the head-waiter—she said to herself instinctively: "*Now* it is coming!"

"Have the ladies given their orders?" asked the great man with *empressement*. "Yes? That's right! But how about the dog? Shall I not tell them to bring a bowl of scraps from the kitchen? We have always got dog-food put aside."

In a sort of joyful stupefaction Val and Marjorie looked at each other. As for Gertie she smiled indulgently.

"It would seem that you are not such rabid haters of dogs here as those placards would lead one to suppose"—she observed; and once more Marjorie caught her breath at this audacity.

"Ah, those placards? We have to stick them up, because of the police, you see"—explained the clock-faced man confidentially. "And we can't call them quite useless either since now and then it does happen that some guest allows himself to be frightened off from bringing a dog—or at least a very big one—not dogs like this one of course—such a curious race too, most interesting! I'll just go and see about his food and have

it properly cooled. It's so bad for their digestions when they get it hot."

And he hurried off.

In wordless triumph Gertie looked at her friends.

"But then what do they mean by the placards?" demanded Val, a little indignantly.

"You heard what he said—to scare off the timid. I've taken Sandy into dozens of forbidden places without so much as a hair of his tail being turned. Remember for the future that the Austrian bite is not nearly so bad as the Austrian bark. They do their best to copy the Prussians, but they're far too 'gemütlich' to succeed. Things here are quite as 'streng verboten' as there, with the difference that it never comes to the 'furchtbar bestraft,' or hardly ever."

"Then that sumptuous order was superfluous, it seems"—laughed Val. "But oh, dear, I wish they would hurry up! I feel positively jealous of that man alongside; he seems to be enjoying himself so much."

The table to their right still remained unoccupied, while at that to their left a middle-aged gourmand was chewing away with such vigour as to cause a sausage-like roll of brick-coloured flesh formed by the tightness of the collar, regularly to rise and fall with the effort of mastication.

"Hurrying up isn't much in the line of the country"—assured Gertie. "We had better pass the time with conversation—and rolls. I presume your minds are now sufficiently at rest to permit of this. Begin by telling me what success you had at the Klosterplatz?"

"Oh, as good as no success at all"—began Val, when the repose of mind so barely attained was roughly

broken into by the renewed opening of the swing-door for the admission of a new guest, and also—so fate would have it—of a new dog. This latest of intruders was a youthful and excitable fox-terrier, who, having been relieved of his muzzle in the interval between the swing-doors, and after one keenly inquisitorial glance round the room, immediately proceeded to impair the peace—and consequently the digestions—of all present by making straight for the unoffending Sandy, whose mere presence seemed to act upon him as a direct challenge. One leap was enough to bring him to the level of the Scotch terrier's throat, enabling him to fix his teeth firmly into as much skin as the wiry hair would allow him a good grip of. Surprise inevitably paralysed whatever measures of defence Sandy might otherwise have taken, with the result that attacker and attacked, toppling over the edge of the chair, rolled simultaneously floorwards.

In a moment the three girls were on their feet; and amid a rushing together of many black tail-coats, and a violent moving of napkins intended as weapons, almost every head in the room was enquiringly turned; Gertie, scarlet with anger, seemed on the point of attacking the aggressor with her fork, when the animal's owner intervened apologetically.

"Pardon! A thousand pardons! I know we are the offending party! He is an ill-mannered brute. 'Couche,' Foxl, 'couche!' Just let me get hold of his collar——"

A thing more easily said than done, considering the tightly interlocked nature of that grey and white, rough and smooth-haired mass upon the floor. For Sandy

peaceable Scotchman though he was, inclined as little as any Scotchman to pocket an unprovoked affront, and had by this time recovered the use both of his senses and of his teeth.

"Now we shall *have* to be turned out!" thought Marjorie—"but at least it won't be us alone."

And yet, five minutes later peace and goodwill had been fully restored without any evictions having taken place. The fox-terrier, dragged off its supposed victim and severely cuffed, had been sternly relegated to a growling passivity beneath its master's chair, while Sandy, still somewhat ruffled in temper, found himself reinstalled in his former position and was applying himself to the food brought from the kitchen by a waiter, who assured the ladies that with his own breath he had cooled the stuff to a desirable temperature. Incredible though it might seem, all the gourmands had returned contentedly to their food, without one of them having demanded the blood of the disturbers.

"*That* is the sort of dog for whom the placards are intended," declared Gertie, with a vindictive glance at their neighbour, for the offender's master had necessarily taken place at the adjoining table, as the only vacant one.

Val, who had the best view of him, described him to the others as "ugly but nice, and neither young nor old."

"He can't be nice with so horridly brought up a dog"—declared Gertie wrathfully.

"The bringing up is barely started, I fancy. And he is doing his best by him, he really is. Just now he is frowning at him in a positively judicial fashion."

And then Val looked away quickly, for their neighbour, raising his eyes at that moment and seeing himself observed, had indulged in one small smile of mutual comprehension, executed less by the lips than by the eyes, which seemed apt to become hilarious upon the smallest provocation.

"Let's talk of something else!" voted Gertie. "I'm too angry for the dog topic. You haven't told me yet about the Klosterplatz."

Then they told her—adorning their narrative with a portrait of Herr Frisch and his canary.

"And are you going there again?"

"I think not—for the present, anyway. We want to wait and see what Doktor Feintuch has got to say about it. He promised to let us know as soon as ever he got hold of the very tiniest clue. You see, there is nothing else that we can do with the Klosterplatz just now, since to go from house to house in an *enquête* for legless people doesn't seem quite feasible, somehow."

"Then what are you going to do? for I can see by your eye that you are going to do something."

"Sharp girl! Of course we're going to do something, this very afternoon. We are going to raid the Prater. We had just made up our minds to it before you appeared."

"The Prater? What do you expect to find there?"

"Possibly—mind, I only say *possibly*—the inspiration which must be hanging about somewhere in the air. It is in the direction of the Prater that that Saint is pointing; and you must not forget that it's on the banks of the Danube that the treasure is supposed to be buried."

"That's rather a large order, surely."

"Of course it is. We don't really expect to make discoveries; though we mean to let nothing escape us. There is no saying what light may not suddenly break in upon us. The whole thing is probably as simple as A B C—so long as you catch the right light. And if we don't catch it, well, we will just have had a nice walk; it's a perfect afternoon for it."

"And you consider yourself competent to reach the Prater unguided?" asked Gertie doubtfully. "The Electric's A B C isn't quite so easy to grasp as the one in the spelling-book—and it's the right tram you've got to catch there—not the right light. I can't possibly offer my services, having a big rehearsal on."

On this point even Marjorie pronounced herself quite confident.

"Well, do what you can't leave—as they say in this country. But if you take my advice you'll make an early start. November afternoons are short, and if you *will* wander about the banks of the Danube don't do so after dusk. I've never myself been in the Wilder Prater, but have often heard it mentioned as a favourite haunt of foot-tramps and vagabonds, and—and suicides, if I remember right. There are nice steep banks to jump off, I am told."

"Oh, we're going quite early—the very moment we have swallowed our dinner, in fact. But will they ever bring it?"

It was being brought at that very moment, with smiles and apologies fit to disarm a starving epicure. But to swallow the meal, ordered under the pressure of circumstances, proved a somewhat lengthy proceeding. By the time the procession of succulent fishes, of sea-

spiders and other picturesquely named inhabitants of the deep had turned into one of sweets with equally fantastic appellations, several of the tables had been vacated. But the man to the right still chewed steadily on, the sausage-like roll of flesh working above his collar with the regularity of a machine—while the man to the left tempered the solitude of his dinner by means of a newspaper, over the edge of which a glance occasionally went towards the English party, enlivened by a gleam which might have made an observer suspect that the language was not quite Chinese to him.

“Surely he won’t have the tactlessness to move when we do,” said Gertie, when the bill had been settled; and observing that the fox-terrier’s master, by means of a frugal repast, had easily caught them up, and had apparently nothing more to do but read his paper. “That brute is evidently spoiling for another go at Sandy.”

But, beyond the application of a warning kick beneath his chair, their neighbour did not stir during all the time that the entire complement of waiters were helping the ladies into their jackets and taking an affectionate leave of Sandy.

Not until the swing-doors had closed upon them did he lay down his paper and pronounce the word “Zahlen,” upon which followed a singularly prompt exit, the exit of a man who has some distinct object in view.

As he turned the corner of the cul-de-sac the figures of the three girls and of their four-footed companion were still visible ahead.

He stood still to light a cigarette while keeping them in his eye.

"'Couche,' Foxl!"

This to the impetuous terrier, on the point of starting forward.

Then, in a tone of one appealing to the reason of his hearer:

"How often have I explained to you that *that* is not the way of encompassing your ends! You want to get at that door-mat of a dog? Good. Who tells you that I've not got my object, as well? But: 'Chi va piano va sano.' That should have been a Viennese proverb instead of an Italian one, by-the-bye. And now, come along—at my pace. It seems to me, Foxl, that we're in for an entertaining afternoon!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE "BLUE" DANUBE.

"THERE'S a fox-terrier racing us," said Marjorie, as, from her seat in the "Electric," she craned her neck towards the window behind her. "He looks exactly like Sandy's assailant. How could the beast have got here?"

"It is Sandy's assailant," confirmed Val. "It probably means that his master is somewhere in the 'Electric.'"

A little craning of necks discovered the person in question in the neighbouring compartment clearly visible through the glass door—dropped from they could not say where—paper and all, and seemingly not having raised his nose from the sheet since they had seen him last in the restaurant.

"Is he going to the Prater, too, I wonder?"

"Maybe—for the dog's constitutional. A good thing that Sandy isn't here."

The surmise did not seem far wrong, since—the terminus reached—the person under observation proved to be among those who had made the full journey. As the sisters turned their faces in the selected direction the joyous barks of Foxl, reunited to his master, rang in their ears.

The chief avenue had to be crossed before they could engage in the network of paths threading bush-grown expanses of grass. With the map of Vienna in their hands, and by the aid of the tiny compass upon Val's watch-chain, it became comparatively easy to steer for the Danube; but before they had got well underway the desirability of hurry recommended by Gertie, began to make itself felt, for both the length of the *menu* and of the tramway-line had carried them far into the brief November afternoon. Already the sun—though possibly still shining upon the ploughed land beyond the area of houses—had slipped behind the canopy of mingled smoke and haze and vapour, which hovers like a pall over every accumulation of men and of their works. Between the all but naked trees shreds of mist were floating like fragments of the evening dusk.

It was towards the so-called "Wilder Prater" that the girls had, by agreement, turned their faces. Its comparative loneliness, as well as the neighbourhood of the river, seemed to point it out as the most promising ground for researches. Once the bank of the Danube gained, they would follow it as far as possible, on the look-out for that inspiration, of which they had by no means abandoned the hope.

The farther they drew away from the big avenue the fewer were the strollers they met, and the more unkept grew the paths, until even the surroundings had become so countrified as to make it difficult to believe in the near neighbourhood of a capital. By the sandy soil and the predominance of willows they presently began to guess at the vicinity of the Danube, whose chilly breath reached them before even they caught the

glitter of its waters. Another minute, and they stood upon its bank, looking down at the majestic sweep of the river.

“On the banks of the stream
Which we call the Blue Danube”—

declaimed Val just above her breath—

“Though it’s often as green
As pea-soup on Friday—
The treasure is hidden”—

“There *is* a little snow remaining from last night’s fall,” observed Marjorie, scanning the holes in the bank.

“Yes, but certainly not of the sort that never melts. Why, it is almost gone already! And as for roses, there is not a single one visible to the naked eye.”

Val’s glance passed over the shivering willows, stripped long since of their last leaf; at the dead grass flecked here and there with flowers which had once been red and blue and yellow, now all bleached to one uniform tint.

“There is nothing for it but to follow the bank with the Enigma well in our minds.”

This they proceeded to do, at first in an almost solemn silence, their eyes aching with the intensity of the attention with which they turned them from side to side; standing still every now and then to crane their necks over the edge and gaze down at the river below as intently as though they expected to decipher upon its secretly-whispering waters the answer to the portentous riddle. There was a charm, and at the same time a species of secret horror about both the spot and

the hour which took hold of them unawares. This loneliness so near to the crowd—this silence with the tempered roar of a capital in the background, held suggestions which would have kept them tongue-tied, even without Cousin Tom's Enigma to speculate upon. And with the approaching dusk and the lights that began to twinkle upon the distant bank, both the charm and the horror grew.

"Have *you* got any ideas?" asked Val at last, coming to another halt on the edge of the bank.

"N—no; I'm afraid I haven't. But that policeman over there seems to have some, doesn't he?"

Val, looking in the direction indicated, saw among the gathering shadows one which showed the unmistakable outline of a spiked helmet.

"I have noticed him for some time past. He seems to be following us."

"That's absurd!" declared Val. "What should he be following us for?"

"Perhaps to protect us from the tramps Gertie spoke of. Let's move on," urged Marjorie a trifle apprehensively, for in her secret heart of hearts she had never quite got over the awe-struck feeling inspired by her first view of a spiked helmet.

After a moment she glanced back.

"He is close now. What *can* he want?"

"Well, I am not going to let my movements be hampered by him," Val decided. "Let's stop here and wait till he has passed."

And another halt was made, on the very edge of the bank.

At the same moment she felt Marjorie's hand tighten

upon her arm, and the spiked helmet seemed to surge up beside them.

"Was tun Sie hier?" demanded a gruff voice, almost in Val's ear.

She turned with a movement of exasperation.

"We are looking for something," she said impatiently.

"What for?"

In sullen silence Val stared at the river. "If I tell him we are looking for a treasure," she reflected, "I suppose he will take us to the nearest asylum. I wish I knew whether this is one of the cases for saying 'Schon gut!'"

"What for?" repeated the mouthpiece of the law.

"What can it matter to you what I am looking for?"

"'Nun,' you will have to look for it another time. And what you've got to do just now is to come away from that bank."

Instantly Val's head went up, her British spirit leaping to arms.

"Why should I come away from the bank?" she asked haughtily.

"Because it isn't safe. The river is very deep here, you knew that, didn't you? Yes, yes, it's quite unnecessary your telling me what you are looking for. I know it well enough. But it sha'n't be for to-day—no, not for to-day! Just you come away this moment! And, mind, the smallest resistance will end at the police-station."

With the words he laid a capacious paw upon Val's arm. Indignantly she wrenched herself free. By the

look of her eyes as she faced him, that which she was on the point of either saying or doing would inevitably have led to the police-station—as the trembling Marjorie told herself—when a sudden diversion was created by something white and four-footed rushing so violently between the helmeted man's legs as all but to upset his balance.

When he recovered it another figure had been added to the group—a tall, masculine figure in a faultless top-hat, which he slightly raised as in excellent English he enquired—

"Can I be of any use, perhaps?" Then turning to the policeman: "What is it you want of these ladies?"

"To come away from the bank," explained the limb of the law in a tone abruptly grown several shades milder. "It is not allowed to walk so near the edge."

"I'm not accustomed to being prescribed to, like a baby," said Val, breathing rather hard from sheer indignation.

"Of course not—being English. The ladies are strangers," he explained, turning again to the policeman, "and therefore not acquainted with the regulations. I can answer for their intentions being perfectly blameless. I happen to be acquainted with them."

There was something humorously deprecating in the glance which, with the words, he shot towards Val.

"There is no need to trouble yourself further, Herr Sicherheitswachmann; I shall see the ladies safely back to town."

A few more soothing assurances were required ere the spiked helmet felt itself justified in dropping into the background.

Before the shadows had swallowed it up the top-hat was once more raised.

"I am not sure what I ought to do first—introduce myself, or apologise for the liberty I have just taken. After all, it wasn't quite a lie that I told, since we were neighbours at dinner, if I do not mistake."

"No, you do not mistake," said Val, taking a closer look at their new acquaintance, one which sufficed to show her that she had been technically right in calling him ugly, and this chiefly owing to a general irregularity of feature, each one of which was curiously unexpected in its way, and none of which appeared to stand in any particular relation to the other; the nose, which inclined to the order of "snubs," being distinctly too small for the wide, expressive mouth, barely shaded by a mere brush of a moustache; a mouth that was continually at work, as though played upon by some inner vivacity of thought, what might have been taken for its mockery, contradicted by a pair of singularly kindly and singularly merry brown eyes. As for age, Val, in her mind, taxed him as somewhere about thirty-six, and as for station in life the one thing clear was that he was that cosmopolitan and unmistakable article—a gentleman. It was this latter observation which, even more than his excellent English, decided her in favour of accepting his services, not without a rather anxious backward glance at the conversation at table.

"My name is Wallersdorf. Do you agree to put up with my escort in preference to that of the policeman?" he asked, with a smile lurking quite close, and yet not venturing into the open.

"It seems that we have no choice in the matter,

since, to tell the truth, and in spite of the map, I haven't a notion in which direction to turn."

"That partly depends upon what point you want to reach."

"The Hotel Thalia. It is there that we lodge."

"The Hotel Thalia in the Papier-Gasse?" he asked with a note of surprise in his voice.

"Yes. Do you know it?"

"I know *of* it."

"Then please put us in the way of getting there."

"I am at your service. This way, then!" He turned towards one of the paths which dived into the willow thicket.

"Are your policemen always so interfering?" asked Val, when they had proceeded for some minutes in silence, with the fox-terrier—a phantom dog among the shadows—frisking on ahead.

"We don't call that interfering—only conscientious."

"But what did he want with us?"

"To save your lives, presumably. To keep people from jumping into the Danube, or to pick them out after they have jumped in constitutes almost his everyday occupation."

"Oh, so he imagined that we wanted to drown ourselves?"

Both girls laughed, and then stopped abruptly, as though touched by some chill. What Gertie had said about the haunt of suicides had come back into their minds. That subtle sense of horror of which they had both been aware was now explained.

"Perhaps you, too, imagine that you are saving our lives?" asked Val, after a moment.

"No, I do not. I feel quite sure that you enjoy your lives far too much to think of throwing them away."

"How can you know that?"

"By several things—your appetites at dinner, for instance."

Both girls laughed again, irresistibly.

"Also by what I should like to call the intuition of sympathy. I happen to be an enthusiast of Life myself—though I quite admit that there is a great deal to be said against it—and I have remarked that optimists generally manage to identify each other, as unmistakably as masons do, even without a preconcerted sign. Whatever attraction the Danube may have for you, I am ready to wager that it is not that of destruction."

"Well, I suppose our conduct *was* a little suspicious," admitted Val. "Did you think us quite mad, I wonder?"

"Not quite," he soothingly assured. "You see, one has a special standard for judging your great and glorious nation."

"Thank you!"

Val laughed once more and once more checked herself at the recollection that she had known this man for barely five minutes. A little more reserve would, under the circumstances, certainly be more decorous.

It was with an attempt at dignity that she now said—

"I will not deny that the Danube has an especial—significance for us; but that is a matter which could not interest you."

Although their companion refrained from contradicting, the expression upon his irregular features seemed

to indicate that the matter might possibly have interested him a good deal.

"You have not been long in Vienna, I presume?" he presently observed.

"Only for three days. We have come on business."

"And you have friends here?" he asked a little anxiously.

"Yes, we have one friend."

"The lady with the poultry-yard upon her hat? I beg your pardon—I mean the lady with the Scotch terrier. Is she the sum of your acquaintances? This catechising is unpardonable, I know"—he interrupted himself with a short laugh—"but I'm a native, you see; and we Viennese are all incorrigibly interfering people. I don't know how it comes, but each of us seems to feel personally responsible for the town and for its treatment of strangers. I believe it is only rank egoism, after all; we're all so foolishly vain of our 'Kaiserstadt' that we couldn't bear to think of people going back to their native countries and there painting it black. I make no doubt that the lady with the Scotch terrier possesses all the virtues of her sex, but—by-the-bye, was it she who took you to the Hotel Thalia?"

"Yes, it was. One of her colleagues—she is a student of music—had recommended it?"

"Music? I begin to understand. And are you comfortable?"

"Well—more or less."

"That means less, rather than more. Don't you find it a trifle noisy?"

"Ye-es."

"Then why not change your quarters?"

"Because we don't know where to go to. It is so difficult to select."

There was a tiny pause; and then their new acquaintance cleared his throat.

"I wonder if you would allow my sisters to select for you? They are perfectly competent, being as unadulterated natives as I am."

"That is really very kind of you," said Val, surprised; "but perhaps it is scarcely worth while to change. We hope to get done with our business very soon."

"If it was only a matter of two days I should think it worth while," he remarked emphatically. "The fact is, the Thalia's reputation is not exactly—well, spotless. A favourite resort of stage experts," he added with evident hesitation.

"So *that* is why there are so many choruses at night!" exclaimed Val, on whose mind lights were breaking. "Good gracious! yes, I suppose we had better get out of it; and if your sisters would be so kind as to advise us——"

"My sisters shall call on you to-morrow," he said, with decision. "We will go by the English fashion in this instance. And they shall bring you an address. My mother would come herself, only that she is an invalid."

"My mother is an invalid too," exclaimed Val, feeling as though a new point of contact had been established.

"If you will kindly tell me what name they are to ask for," he began, glancing towards Val with an interrogation not entirely devoid of curiosity.

Val had all but said "Miss Wishart," when, feeling

the warning pressure of Marjorie's fingers upon her arm, she swallowed the words, barely in time.

"Please tell them to ask for Mrs. White," she replied with at least outward intrepidity.

"Mrs. White?"

In the faint emphasis upon the "Mrs." a person of suspicious mind might have thought to read a tinge of something related to disappointment.

"Yes, and this is my niece, Miss Wishart."

"Your *niece*?"

Another emphasis, and this time an accent of frank surprise.

"Is there anything wrong about my having a niece?" asked Val a little loftily, seeking confidence the while in the thought of her uncrimped hair and of the ribbon bow which she had so wisely refrained from fastening at her throat.

"Oh, no—of course not."

Again they proceeded in a silence that was presently interrupted by an almost wrathful remark.

"And Mr. White saw no objection to his wife undertaking this journey without his aid?"

"He has no choice. His profession keeps him in England. He is a doctor."

It was a little hastily and a little nervously that Val reeled off her lesson, for this was the first time that she was playing her assumed rôle in detail, and she was astonished to find that it required an effort.

"No doubt he is impatiently awaiting your return?"

"He will have to wait some time, I fancy, judging from the leisurely rate at which things seem to move in this country."

"We don't call it leisurely here, we call it 'gemütlich,'" observed their new friend, just as they emerged onto the chief avenue.

CHAPTER VII.

EPISTOLARY.

HOTEL BRAUSS,
SEILERSTÄTTE,
VIENNA,
WEDNESDAY.

"DEAREST SUSIE,—Here is the special report promised. I'll begin by explaining our new address. Fact is we found the other place a trifle too—musical—especially at night. Also the breed of fleas they cultivate were a bit too lively. This here is what they call a 'garni,' that is very much of a family hotel. (Please point this out to Mummy, in case the music and the fleas should have made her feel at all nervous.) The people by whose advice we moved are called Wallersdorf (with a Baronial handle to their name, if you please), and consist of a mother, two sisters and a brother. The brother, who got us out of a fix with a policeman on the banks of the Danube, which we were exploring with a view to the Enigma, seems a jolly sort of a person, and with a jolly fox-terrier—who, by-the-by, nearly murdered Sandy. Next thing was that his sisters called upon us, for the sole and special purpose of giving us good advice. For some unaccountable reason they seem to feel responsible for us. This is, ap-

parently, the Viennese way of doing things. The sisters aren't young a bit. In fact—and not to put too fine a point upon it—they are what Mademoiselle Leblanc scolded me so for translating as '*vierges antiques*'—don't you remember? But I can't imagine why they were allowed to become old maids, for they are quite as jolly as their brother, and must certainly have been prettier than he is before their faces began to crumple up and their waists to go wrong—in two different directions, for one of them has expanded, while the other has shrunk. They both of them incline just a little bit to gush, chiefly when they get on to theatrical ground, which is their especial field. The funniest thing is that they don't seem to mind being old maids a bit.

“The mother we haven't seen yet, but are going to see her on Thursday, when she has her 'Jour.' Val began by being doubtful about the 'Jour,' as she said we hadn't come here to amuse ourselves; but I pointed out to her that to refuse would be rank ingratitude towards the Wallersdorfs. *Perhaps* I may have to buy a new hat for the occasion, as I have nothing but my travelling hat; but tell Mummy that I sha'n't get anything expensive, and Val declares she won't get anything at all, as she wants to look as old as possible.

“This place is in the centre of the town, and is kept by an old lady of eighty who wears the remains of her hair in a black thread net, and is almost as small as Mummy and almost as short-sighted as Gertie. She trots about all day, scolding her servants and doing half their work for them; only doing it all wrong, because she is so blind. You ask for a bath, for instance, and she insists on preparing it herself, and of course reads

the thermometer all wrong, and thus—innocently—half boils you. Towards us she is quite great-grandmotherly, we having been placed under her special protection by the Baronial family of guardian angels.

“On the ground floor of the house there lives a hairdresser who is also the ‘Hausmeister,’ and whose stodgy little daughter is in a chronic condition of sweeping the staircase. There is also a white cat who, as chronically, sits upon a dresser beside the glass door, in a good position for observing every person who enters or leaves. At first I thought it was a china cat; but to-day I saw it move; so I think it’s more probably some enchanted Princess waiting for the right Prince. You can’t help thinking of these things here; they seem to be in the air.

“And now I suppose you expect a series of ‘impressions.’ I’m afraid I sha’n’t make a good job of it, by reason of the whirl in my head. You know how little champagne I can stand without getting muddled—and the atmosphere here acts upon me exactly like champagne. How funny it is that one never hears anything about Vienna! If it weren’t for Cousin Tom I suppose we should never have discovered it. Only to see the big, clumsy court carriages rolling along upon their gilded wheels, it’s worth while to come this distance, you can’t help feeling sure that in another minute it will turn into a pumpkin and the coachman and footmen—smothered in fur and decked with gold-braided hats—into rats.

“And these are not the only things that come straight out of fairy-tales. The old women who sit upon the steps of churches and under archways, selling

all sorts of unclassifiable things which you can't imagine anyone really wanting, are quite as suggestive in their way. Their wares vary with the seasons, as Gertie tells us. Just now their baskets are full of paper bishops and flannel 'Krampusen.' The bishops all stand for Santa Claus, whose feast comes off on 6th December and the 'Krampusen' are some special breed of devil that always attend his footsteps in order to punish the bad children while he is rewarding the good ones. There is a perfect eruption both of bishops and of devils all over the town at present, even the confectioners' shops are full of them—in a superior edition, of course—the former armed with gilt crosiers, the latter with terrifying birchwood rods, and red flannel tongues hanging half-way down their chests. Both bishops and devils are made to open, and are indiscriminately filled with chocolate creams. How does that make you feel, Susie?

"Then there are the Bohemian women at the street corners, in short skirts and bright stockings, staggering under the weight of baskets slung round their necks and filled with either vegetables or flowers. Just now many of them are doing a roaring trade in—what do you think?—little bunches of dry twigs, which they call 'Barbara-Zweigl.' They are twigs of cherry and plum-trees; and almost every girl that passes buys one. The idea is to put them in water on St. Barbara's Day, and if you are to marry in the coming year it will have flowered by New Year. Val scoffs at it; but that is only because she has got no imagination; and in spite of her, I got two of the twigs, one for myself and one for her. She laughs at me, and says that of course we

shall be home by New Year, and do I want to travel with a glass of water in my hand? But considering the price (ten Hellers a piece) it isn't much of a waste; and besides, it isn't *quite* sure that we will be done with our business by New Year, though there's no need to mention this to Mummy.

"But to return to Vienna in general, I think even Val is beginning to understand what Cousin Tom meant when he called it a City of Enticement. But the question as to whether it was the Viennese rolls, or the pretty faces that kept him stuck fast here still remains an open one. The rolls are certainly A1; and as for the faces, Val and I have agreed that it's scarcely worth while being pretty here, good looks being so common—and in such variety too—blondes and brunettes, North and South, East and West, all higgledy-piggledy. And the way they dress! But I turn from that subject, as inexhaustible. Another equally inexhaustible subject are the uniforms—from which for the same reason, I likewise turn.

"Where was I? Yes, about Vienna in general. It all starts from the Stefans-Kirche or rather has grown up around it. The huge Austrian eagle sprawling upon its roof (in tiles) seems to have the entire show under its wing. The Stefans-Platz smells eternally of incense—mingling with the petrol of the motors—also of horses; for it's from here that all the buses start—just the dear old exploded horse buses. Any day you can meet both men and women in full mountaineering rig-out, with nailed boots and 'Alpenstocks' in their hands, waiting for the right bus to take them to the station for you must know that these happy people here have got real,

proper mountain climbs within a few hours' reach, and that your having drunk your morning coffee on the 'Graben,' is no objection to your enjoying your afternoon coffee in a sheltered hut, on the verge of eternal snow.

"From the Stefans-Platz all sorts of streets radiate towards the enchanted circle of the Ringstrasse, one more enticing than the other, but the Kärnthnerstrasse is the pick of the basket. Most streets are full of coffee-houses, and these again of people who seem to have nothing whatever to do but to enjoy themselves and show off their best clothes. Everyone seems always to be in a good humour and never in a hurry. Personally I find this delightful; but their leisurely ways occasionally get upon Val's nerves.

"When I spoke of universal good humour, I forget the beggars of which there are certainly too many. Of course, begging is forbidden, but that doesn't seem to matter here; and the collection of dwarfs and hunchbacks and cripples generally make a rather dreadful foil to the pretty faces, though they too seem to belong to the fairy-tale. And ah—by-the-bye—one of them gave us such a disappointment this morning; a wretch in a bath-chair which gets wheeled about between different advantageous points. While giving him a coin we discovered that he had no legs. The same thought struck us both simultaneously, and in one breath, we burst out upon him with the mystic word: 'Puppenfee.' He was the first legless person we have met here, you see! so it seemed obvious to try the password upon him—alas only with the effect of frightening the poor devil half out of his senses, and causing him to drop the coin. We repeated the word more gently, and then asked him, if

he had known Cousin Tom—but were answered by a blank stare.

“I must close. We are going to a concert to-night with Gertie, and it is time to crimp my hair. Our first outing in Vienna; I’m all of a tremble with excitement,—
Best love to all, from
MARJORIE.”

“P.S. (added by Val after perusal of Marjorie’s letter, and addressed specially to her mother).

“DEAREST MUMMY,—This is only to explain that the tickets for the concert had been taken for us by Gertie before our arrival, so that we had no choice in the matter. I hope you don’t mind. Also I want to say that if Marjorie *must* have a hat for the ‘Jour’ she speaks of, I shall see that it is a cheap one. I wasn’t inclined to accept this invitation, but the fact is that, until our legal adviser summons us, we have really got nothing to do. Our own ideas have come to an end for the present, so we are dependent upon his. Egging him on would be worse than useless; people here only do things at their own pace.

“We are being as economical as possible. In my next letter I hope to send some definite news.—

“VAL.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "JOUR."

"THE little lady with the cream-coloured face and the black etceteras is Ilka Kalnay. It's the Hungarian blood that produces the blackness—and the liveliness."

"And those two twin youths—surely they are twins!—hovering about her?"

"The brothers Herzig, forming together a standing dish served up at almost every second Viennese 'Jour.' They are warranted safe, in spite of being quite moderately entertaining—guaranteed never to become boisterous, even at champagne suppers, nor so much as to pinch a lady by mistake, as happens to others when the electric light goes out. Steadiness *not* paired to dullness is so rare a combination nowadays as to make these brothers almost priceless—in maternal eyes."

"Good children! What a pity they don't wear pinafores! And that snaky lady in the wonderful green frock?"

"That isn't snakiness, it's Slavic grace—and the cream of it too, which means Polish. She is one of our walking fashion-plates; gets snapshotted every day in the streets by ambitious dressmakers who lie in wait for her passing, only to discover when they develop their films

that it wasn't the frock that was wonderful, but she herself. The man holding her tea-cup for her is another of our show-people, a member of Parliament who gained prominence by inventing a new sort of instrument—an improved kettledrum, I think it was—whose piercing sounds rendered invaluable service to the opposition when fighting down the government speeches."

"Is that the way prominence is gained in *your* Parliament?" asked Val, turning indignant eyes upon her informant.

Baron Wallersdorf's answer betrayed no consciousness of the indignation.

"For the time being it means the surest road; though, given the necessary power of lungs, there is equal fame to be gained by talking for five hours on end, by preference in a tongue which will be Greek to the majority."

"And which of these methods do you patronise?"

"I? Oh! I'm not one of the elected. No ambition in my composition, you see. Politics are far too much trouble, I consider; apt to spoil one's temper, and consequently one's enjoyment of life."

"And you think enjoyment of life is everything?"

"I confess that it has always struck me as the only rational occupation for a reasonable human being," drawled Wallersdorf, with his brown eyes evidently enjoying themselves prodigiously.

"You are frank, at any rate," admitted Val, while her glance roamed over the big drawing-room, whose continually fluctuating tide of guests of both sexes and all descriptions made the moral support of a showman distinctly desirable.

The family resemblance to an English tea-fight was

unmistakable, the difference lying chiefly in the less exclusively feminine element, and in the merciful absence of the musical terror.

Big, large-featured, round-shouldered, with *caques* of grey hair puffed over her ears and giving her the appearance of a round-eyed, benevolent ram, the mistress of the house did the honours of her "Jour," throned in the invalid's chair, which she never exchanged for anything but her bed, while her two *passée* daughters flitted to and fro between the various groups of visitors with the vivacity of two elderly butterflies, anxiously alive to the most various sorts of needs, ranging from caviare sandwiches to lovers—most particularly alive to the latter want, and having by long practice acquired a fabulous adroitness in steering promising young men to the sides of enterprising young women, as well as in engineering "flirts," of which a fair percentage was destined to bear matrimonial fruit. Small wonder that the Wallersdorf "Jours" should enjoy so wide a popularity, or that a meeting with the Wallersdorf sisters should cause most people to remodel their conception of old maids. The proverbial drop of vinegar had in their case evidently been left out of the recipe, nor had the equally proverbial rôle of dog-in-the-manger, for which the husbandless female seems so readily cast, found representatives in the case either of the ample Lizzerl with the comfortably sleepy eyes, nor of the lean Bertherl, whose skin seemed to have been prematurely creased only by the profusion of smiles which put bundles of tiny wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and mouth. One of the first cares of each of the two sisters had been to lead a captive warrior to the side of Marjorie, whose tastes in

this matter had not been hard to penetrate. As a result Miss Wishart junior now sat between two uniforms of different shades of blue, her happiness—to which the new hat reaching half-way down her back not a little contributed—only disturbed by the difficulty of making up her mind as to which of the two shades she preferred. She was looking delicious, thought Val, a most creditable niece to take about, and only hoped that in her black costume and somewhat stern *coiffure* she was looking as creditable an aunt.

"Is the cream-coloured lady a particular friend of yours?" she now asked of her informant.

"Not more particular than every other owner of a pretty face. I'm an incorrigible 'ladies' man,' I must tell you. But why do you ask?"

"Because I feel dreadfully inclined to remark that those eyes and eyebrows on that face make me think of flies drowning in a basin of cream."

"Could drowning flies be as rampageous as that, do you think? Anyway, they are making a good fight for their life."

Val laughed.

"That they are! Why, they are positively kicking! But I wonder why they look as if they wanted to kick *me?*" she added, just then encountering the black eyes under discussion, whose attention the "safe" youths at her side had apparently proved powerless to enchain.

"Oh, well, drowning people clutch at straws, you know, so why should not drowning flies hit out at whatever happens to lie nearest?"

Val laughed again, and then, mindful of her dignity, drew up.

"What dreadful nonsense we are talking! Please let's return to the catalogue. Who is that big, handsome girl in blue, whose face somehow looks too young for—the rest of her?"

"Yet another of our show-people. Fräulein Netti Hinterhuber—commonly known as the 'Kaiser-Dirndl.' Our Emperor discovered her some years ago at Ischl, where her parents have a villa, and where she walks about in peasant dress, which shows her off far better than modern gowns can do. I don't know whether it was the roundness of her cheeks or the calves of her legs which captivated the monarch's fancy; anyway, he spoke to her—unprovoked—and since then has accepted nosegays innumerable gathered by her robust fingers, and paid for in the shape of autograph letters—I have seen them myself—and of an occasional gold bracelet. It's a sort of grandfatherly 'flirt' which some people find ridiculous, but which, personally, I find rather touching. I fancy that the sight of this exuberant youthfulness warms Frances Joseph's old heart, and cheers his Imperial spirit, by speaking to him of the magnificent human material to be looked for from such future mothers as this."

"Material for what?"

"For the army, of course. Don't forget that our Emperor lives in uniform."

"Canon-food, in other words—that is what she is expected to furnish," remarked Val, as she looked towards the big, young person with the features of a child and the bust of a woman, who steadily and a little stolidly was demolishing more sugar-covered cakes than seemed desirable for even the most vigorous of digestions.

The stare of the infantile blue eyes, which Val now encountered, was at least as steady as the process of mastication.

"But she is looking at me too," exclaimed Val, a trifle annoyed at the accumulated evidence of general attention.

"Put that down to the fact of your being strangers, and to our national curiosity. You must not take it amiss, Mrs. White, if we stare rather harder than is customary. It's one of our failings. The story of the inheritance which you are here to claim, and of some peculiar circumstances attending it, has already leaked out somehow, and has unavoidably awakened interest—not of an unkindly nature, believe me. I will not undertake to exculpate Lizzerl and Bertherl entirely from responsibility in the matter; for they can do everything in the world but hold their tongues."

"It would seem that that's a thing that Marjorie can't do either," retorted Val, throwing a wrathful glance at her unconscious sister. "*I* certainly have never gone beyond the most general explanations. So we are being gossiped about already! What is it they say?"

"I have heard something about an eccentric will, in rhyme, and of a buried treasure; but I did my most conscientious best not to listen."

"I'll give it to Marjorie when we get home!" murmured Val. "And after our legal adviser had so strenuously recommended silence!"

For a moment after she had spoken, the article in question fell between Val and her companion, who seemed to have taken a moral header into some new sea of preoccupation.

Presently his head came up again, with curiously apologetic eyes.

"Mrs. White, do you happen to remember what I said to you that day in the Prater about feeling responsible for strangers?"

"I do not happen to suffer from shortness of memory," she somewhat curtly replied.

"Well, it's that feeling that pushes me to put an indiscreet question regarding the legal adviser you have just mentioned. Would it be impertinent to ask his name?"

"He's Doktor Claudius Feintuch," said Val, with much enjoyment of utterance.

"H'm! Don't know the name, but it is unmistakably—well, not Aryan anyway."

"I have no anti-semite prejudices whatever, Baron Wallersdorf."

"I am sure you haven't. And I suppose you are satisfied that he is quite reliable?"

"Quite satisfied," said Val, still upon her dignity.

"May I ask by whose advice you employed him?"

"It was Miss Melville who procured us the address."

"The same lady who procured you the address of the Hotel Thalia?"

The brown eyes were once more enjoying themselves, in a discreet, semi-veiled fashion.

"The same," assented Val, with an access of dignity.

"And yet you do not feel homesick for its attractions?"

This remark Val found it more convenient not to hear, upon which the brown eyes dropped the veil which had been tempering their merriment.

"Come, Mrs. White—admit that Doctor White owes me a vote of thanks for having rescued you from the 'Thalia' horror! If he is at all particular in that way——"

"Oh, he isn't particular at all," asserted Val recklessly, and flushing hotly as she was angry with herself for doing at every mention of the mythical husband with whom, of her own free will, she had saddled herself.

"Isn't he?" said Wallersdorf, with an eagerness which seemed out of proportion to the subject. "So much the better."

"Oh, Mrs. White, you just *have* to come with us to the 'Burg' to-night!" broke in Bertherl Wallersdorf, before Val had found a retort to the last somewhat enigmatical remark.

"'Kainz in Morituri!' I should never forgive myself if you missed it. Such an opportunity for spreading the fame of our stage! We've got a box. You'll come, won't you? Your sister has already consented."

"Marjorie would consent to anything in the shape of amusement, I do believe!" exclaimed Val in accents that bordered on desperation. Yet, the desperation notwithstanding, two minutes had not passed before her own consent had been wrung from her—with a lurking sense of shame, indeed; but from whence take the sternness of principle necessary for the refusal of such a treat, pressed upon you with Bertherl's much-creased smile? And, after all, it was a fact that they must pass their time somehow until Doktor Feintuch's next summons.

"There goes one of the two greatest stage fanatics in Vienna," remarked Wallersdorf with fraternal candour, as Bertherl hurried off to Marjorie with the happy news.

"There isn't a pin to choose between her and Lizzerl on that score. I fancy that their conception of Paradise takes the shape of an eternal 'Première'; and they're far better up in the biographies of every actor and actress in the capital than ever was Professor of History in that of reigning dynasties. I believe that was the reason they never married. Couldn't be sure, don't you see, of being able to go to the play every night, and life is a blank to them without stage trappings."

"Or stage emotions, perhaps?"

"You're right there. It's the emotions that really do it. Their constitutions demand subjects about which to rave just as imperiously as the earth demands rain, and here they find a stream which never tarries. You only have to look at their eyes to see that they live in a chronic state of mental intoxication. Irreclaimable inebriates, in fact."

"Yes, their eyes have got the same funny shine in them that Gertie Melrose's have, only with her it is music. But what can it be with your mother? Her eyes shine in just the same way, and yet she doesn't go to the theatre, does she?"

His plain, expressive face softened suddenly. "No, she has not been inside a theatre for years. With her it is Humanity in general that is the hobby. You have heard of the 'Goldenes Wiener Herz'—the golden Viennese heart—have you not? Well, my mother is, as I verily believe, the possessor of the biggest and most unadulterated article of the kind. There is a story—a perfectly true story—about pins which I should like to tell you if I was not afraid of your laughing—and I could not bear that."

"About *pins*?"

"Exactly. I believe you are laughing already."

"No, I am not; and I promise not to. Don't forget that my mother too is an invalid; and, of course, invalids cannot be exactly like—other people."

"This is the story," he said, having thanked her with a glance. "You must know that it is more than ten years since my mother's feet were paralysed. The natural result is that what she sees of the world is mostly seen through a window. During the long hours that she spends looking out into the street some rather curious ways of passing the time have occurred to her. One of them was to carefully observe all the clients of the greengrocer opposite, and make a note of those most indigent looking. From time to time she would then send for the shopman and settle the bills of these poorest of the poor whose names were drawn in chalk upon a blackboard for five Kreuzers worth of onions, or ten Kreuzers worth of potatoes. Sometimes, too, the greengrocer would receive instructions to the effect that the woman with the tattered red shawl was to be given a pound of apples *gratis*, or the one with a baby on each arm a bottle of fresh milk."

"That's heavenly!" said Val, who was listening with parted lips; "but where are the pins?"

"I'm coming to them. The greengrocer alone did not sufficiently fill up my mother's leisure, so she found out something else. Lizzerl was told one day to bring her a box of pins, which she wonderingly did. It was summer at the time, and the window mostly open, and not far above the level of the street, as you see. Well, what does my extraordinary mother do with the pins

but drop a pinch of them at a time on the pavement below, and then sit with all her senses as alert as those of a sportsman lying in wait. Whenever a meanly-clad girl of the lower classes came along she put her head out of the window. This was the game she waited for. 'Look here,' she would call down into the street, 'there are some pins on the pavement—just under your feet—won't you pick them up?' If the girl stooped in compliance her fortune was as good as made, for not only was she summoned into the house to receive a handsome present in money, but she remained for ever after a protégée. Those who contemptuously pursued their way over the pins never knew what good chances they were treading underfoot; or rather, they did get to know it in time, as a result of which so many abuses stepped in that our united prayers at length prevailed upon my mother to check the rain of pins. Since then she comforts herself chiefly with the greengrocer's blackboard; and out of that she gets a lot of happiness, as you can see."

As he stopped, with his eyes upon his mother, Val was astonished to see them moist. "How very unlike an Englishman!" she could not help thinking, not absolutely clear in her mind as to whether the observation just made touched her agreeably or the reverse.

"The ordeal by pins," she remarked reflectively, while gazing at the ram-like old lady, whose long arms seemed to go out yearningly to every young girl who approached her, as though to gather her to her capacious bosom. "I wonder whether I would have passed it?"

She was still gazing when her view was blocked by

an intervening form and her two hands made prisoners of.

"Oh, Mrs. White, *how* good of you to come with us to-morrow! I do so hope Kainz will be in good form! But what shall we do the day after?"

"The day after?" echoed Val a little blankly. "Is it necessary to do anything?"

Lizzerl's sleepy and yet so smouldering eyes opened wide.

"I should think it is necessary! You don't suppose, surely, that we shall allow you to mope in your hotel? Clearly it's our duty to do the honours of our town, and we never shirk a duty. Bertherl and I have been making a list of all the sights which you will have to see. But we are ready to consult your inclinations. Which way do they incline—towards galleries, museums or architecture? Let's hear!"

And the ottoman on which Val sat creaked audibly under Lizzerl's substantial weight.

"Towards business alone—at this moment," said Val with all the sternness at her command.

Lizzerl laughed a comfortably padded sort of laugh.

"And do you mean to sit with your hands in your lap until that lawyer of yours sends for you? You see I know all about it already; and I've even heard of your visit to the Klosterplatz."

"What's that about the Klosterplatz?"

(The question came from the lady with the eyes which Val had likened to drowning flies, and who, at that moment, stopped short beside the ottoman, on her way to the side of her beckoning mother.)

"I was only mentioning it as a spot which happens to interest Mrs. White."

"It happens to interest me, too, since we've taken a lodging there. Number seventeen. Move in on fifteenth."

"Number seventeen!" exclaimed Val upon impulse. "Why, that's the very number!"

"The very number of what, if I may ask?"

There was a just discernible flavour of insolence in the question, in face of which Val instantly stiffened.

"The number of a house in which a relative of mine died lately," she observed, coldly meeting the black eyes which had now turned upon her, and appeared to be dissecting her in detail.

"Oh, I see," remarked Ilka Kalnay in a tone whose significance implied the fullest information touching the eccentric cousin and his eccentric will.

"It's a wonder the flat has stood empty for so long. The want of electric light does it, I suppose. But it's central. You won't have any excuse for not coming to our 'Jours.'"

This last remark addressed to Wallersdorf, to whom Fräulein Kalnay had turned as suddenly as a moment ago to his sister.

It was an unmasked attack, but he bore it unperturbed.

"What should induce me to seek for an excuse?"

She shrugged her thin shoulders with a certain freedom of gesture which brought home to you the slenderness of the coat of varnish covering elementary human nature.

"Oh, I don't know! Masculine laziness or contrary

interests, or something. Men are never embarrassed for an excuse. But you won't find it dull," she added, with her eyes in full play. "We're going to have a lot of exciting people—painters and poets, and so on; and we've got hold of a live Chinee, too—a perfect duck of a man."

"If I come to the Klosterplatz it won't be for the sake of any duck of a man," assured Wallersdorf, using his eyes almost as frankly as she was doing hers.

"How much more naïvely they do these things here than in England," reflected Val, while she made mental and not entirely approving notes.

The same downright *naïveté* was discernible in the frankly inimical glances which the black, untamed-looking eyes were showering upon herself. That her prolonged conversation with Wallersdorf had brushed the little lady up the wrong way was patent; nor was she at any particular pains to disguise the fact.

A pretty little thing she was, despite her colourless skin, with her full, mutinous lips, and eyes which, seen near, seemed more like smouldering coals than anything as insignificant as flies.

"It's easy to see what's the matter with her," ran the comment in Val's mind, while lending an inattentive ear to the stream of talk which Lizzerl was steadily pouring into it. "But is it all on her side, I wonder? He said she was no particular friend of his. Anyway, I wish I hadn't made that stupid remark about the basin of cream."

CHAPTER IX.

PROGRESS?

“FROM Doktor Feintuch!”

With bated breath Val opened the note which had just been handed her.

In a moment Marjorie's fortunately well-padded chin was upon her shoulder—its favourite resting-place whenever written news was to be shared.

GRÜNE GASSE,
10th December 19—

“HONOURED MADAME!—I allow myself respectfully to implore the presence of the ladies in my office for ten o'clock tomorrow, 11th December; it being my desire to report upon the progress made in the affair entrusted to your humble servant.—With high esteem,—

“CLAUDIUS FEINTUCH, *Doctor of Rights!*”

“At last!” breathed Val. “I really was beginning to think that we should never get away from Vienna.”

“Never get away!” repeated Marjorie in a tone which conspicuously lacked enthusiasm. “Why, we have been here barely three weeks. How impatient you are!”

“Not impatient, only businesslike. Really, Marjorie, you sometimes seem in danger of forgetting what it was we came here for.”

"The danger isn't overpowering, so long as you are here to remind me," pouted Marjorie. "And, after all, it *is* great fun—and I believe you enjoy it yourself, though of course you would rather die than admit it."

"Oh, I've no objection to the fun, so long as it's only for filling up the crevices. No need to make so lugubrious a face, Marjorie. After all, it isn't at all certain that we shall be able to start home immediately. Doktor Feintuch only speaks of progress, you see, not of a final solution."

The very first words spoken within the sanctum in the Grüne Gasse next day were enough effectually to lay Marjorie's fears touching a speedy departure.

"I said from the beginning, my dear young ladies, that we should have to go softly; and the first steps taken in your service have but strengthened this conviction."

"What do these steps consist in?" bluntly enquired Val, whose face had fallen, while that of Marjorie had brightened.

"In the tracing, and partly the interviewing of the legatees named in the will. These, and the few tradesmen with which Mr. Dowell dealt, seem to be our only possible mediums of information, the most careful enquiries having failed to discover anything in the shape of a friend of the defunct. To all intents and purposes your relative seems to have lived upon an island of solitude in the midst of the ocean of humanity, which——"

"That is what we more or less supposed," broke in Val, feeling that she had had as many flowers of speech as would, for the moment, be supportable. "I under-

stand that the friends are ruled out. Let us come to the legatees."

"I have a list of them down here, with corresponding notes." And, stretching forth his beautifully groomed hands, Doktor Feintuch possessed himself of a sheet of paper which lay ready. Having delicately cleared his throat he read off it as follows:

"'Karl Pfann, Japanese Bible. Temper dangerous. Ignorance complete.'

"This interview took place under difficulties," interpolated the lawyer with a patient glance of his luminous brown eyes gliding over the edge of the paper;—"I might almost say at the peril of my life. But, although he can show his teeth, Karl Pfann is certainly not the watch-dog referred to in the Enigma, and was not even aware that Mr. Dowell had any fortune to leave."

"'Fräulein Melissa, of the Apollo Theatre. Egyptian mummy. Temper worse than former. Repudiates any idea of having been in defunct's confidence.'

"She turned me out of her house with her own hands," explained Doktor Feintuch, while another and yet more long-suffering glance went over the edge of the sheet.

"'Franz Kugler. Mowing-machine. Tearful and injured. Knows nothing.'

"That is the waiter whom Mr. Dowell stamps as a cheat, and who can't get over it at all. 'For thirty years that I have served in the "Roter Ochs,"' he said to me with wet eyes, 'no one has ever besmirched my

good name, and now it is cut down to the earth—with a mowing machine!’

“Samuel Dottelzweig. Ear trumpets. His wife—Sarah—fishing tackle. Pocketed fair sum upon both, consequently takes things cheerfully. Doubts existence of fortune.’”

Here Doktor Feintuch paused, in order to scrutinise the two faces before him, as though in search of a corroboration of Herr Dottelzweig’s suspicions.

“Leopold Frisch, Hausmeister. Is quite positive as to defunct having had no visitors. Can give no clue to any person to whom deposit might have been entrusted.’

“This man’s opinion,” added Doktor Feintuch, “is that rather than let anyone enjoy his money after him the late Mr. Dowell would have preferred to sink it in the Danube.”

“But if this is what you call progress,” burst out Val.

“Softly, my dear young lady! There remain yet the servants, upon whom, from the first, my attention has been firmly fixed, as upon the most promising channels of information. It is servants alone who are acquainted with our daily habits. Moreover, they are not only inquisitive, but as a rule—talkative.”

“Why did you not come to them at once?” exclaimed Val, quivering with impatience.

“Because they are too far off to be got at so easily.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that the two people in question—that is the housekeeper, Barbara Krauss, and the valet, Josef Pflug, having united their lots very soon after Mr. Dowell’s death, emigrated to America about a month ago.”

"To America?" repeated both sisters; and this time even Marjorie's voice sounded blank.

"Does that mean that they are lost sight of?"

"Only for the moment. I have taken all necessary steps. Already my efforts have succeeded in identifying the emigration bureau through which they booked their passage. The enquiries set on foot will doubtless, within a short time, put us in communication with the Pflug couple."

"What do you call a short time?"

Doktor Feintuch studied his nails.

"That is a point very hard to decide. It might be only weeks, but equally it might be months."

"Months!"

The sisters exchanged a frankly startled glance.

"It need not necessarily be as long as that—" the lawyer hastened to say. "All depends upon whether they have found employment at New York or have moved further inland. According to your instructions I am sparing neither trouble nor expense, in order to press the matter. Barbara Krauss was in Mr. Dowell's service for over a year, Josef Pflug for over two. If anyone can put us on the track of the money's whereabouts it can only be these people."

"But while we are waiting for the answer we need not leave our hands lying in our laps need we?"

"My dear young lady, what a thing to suppose!"

And Doktor Feintuch threw a gently injured glance upon his pink fingers, as though to deprecate any such possible resting-place for them.

"Convinced though I am that the right clue points to New York, I shall, of course, leave no other stone un-

turned. Already I spend my nights in the study of the Enigma."

It was said with his peculiarly patient smile, accompanied by an eloquent look of the golden-brown eyes.

"I am continually at your service. Already I have laid claim in your name to the smaller legacies bequeathed to your family. Presently I shall have the honour of handing to you the articles."

"That is all right," murmured Val, plunged in thought, and, for the moment oblivious of the nature of those articles.

She was roused from her abstraction by the lawyer's voice, gently hinting that the enquiries made had already exhausted the two hundred Kronen deposit, but adding that another hundred Kronen might do for the present.

So great was the preoccupation under which Val quitted the sanctum that even the office boy—though only able to bring one eye at a time to bear upon her—could not fail to notice it.

"And now we must make up our minds as to what to do next?" declared Val, when, after a somewhat silent tramway journey the Hotel Brauss was reached.

"Can we do anything else but wait till the answer comes from America?"

"But that may take months, as he said. And Mother certainly never bargained for that."

"But also it may only take weeks. And surely to go home meanwhile and then come back again in so short a time would come more expensive."

"I suppose it would," agreed Val, in whose tone Marjorie discovered enough of the element of hesitation to encourage her to press her views.

Rather to her own astonishment, the brief discussion which ensued ended with their triumph. In other words, it was decided to "see the thing out."

"If Mother consents," added Val, by the way of tempering the almost indecent joy that had flashed over her sister's round face.

It was after a brief silence that Marjorie remarked, with as much carelessness as inner agitation allowed:

"Even a few weeks will take us well into January."

"So they will. It seems that we shall have to spend an Austrian Christmas."

"It is in January that the Carnival begins."

"What on earth have we got to do with the Carnival?"

"Oh, nothing, of course; only that those two officers I was talking to the other day were saying what a pity it was to go away from Vienna without having danced one real Viennese waltz, or seen one of their big Redoutes, which are perfect dreams, I believe."

"You must be in a dream yourself," returned Val, with suitable severity, "to imagine for a moment that we could afford anything of the sort."

"They say that it is really not at all expensive," pursued Marjorie with a meek tenacity all her own.

"Is it the wearer of the light blue or of the dark blue uniform who is such an excellent judge of the cost of a lady's ball dress?"

"Oh, they both agreed upon that point, but I think it was the dark blue one who was the most positive. That is the one with the black moustache and the straight nose, you know."

"So it is he who is in favour to-day? I thought it

was the golden moustache and the short nose that were in the first running yesterday?"

"So they were!" sighed Marjorie. "You see they are both so positively fascinating that I know I sha'n't be able to make up my mind which of the two I like best until I have danced with them both. Bertherl Wallersdorf says that they both dance like angels, but in quite different styles."

"I didn't know that angels danced; but I'm afraid your decision will have to remain in suspense indefinitely, since I see no prospect of your applying the test."

"To be sure! I was forgetting," said Marjorie meekly, but with a want of dejection in her glance which betrayed an uncrushed hope.

There the subject was dropped—by Val, at any rate, who had plunged back into new-born preoccupation.

Despite the consciousness that the effort needed to stiffen herself against the enticements of Vienna was growing more difficult to achieve, she fretted honestly at the enforced delay. Both to her nature and to her purse this leisurely progress was eminently antipathetic. Baron Wallersdorf's question as to whether she was sure of Feintuch's reliability, though more or less falling upon deaf ears, yet interested her enough to make her wonder whether he really understood his business so very perfectly. Though she suspected him of nothing worse than of unnecessary delay—possibly an inclination to increase his profits by trailing out the affair—she yet felt dissatisfied. Oh, for an adviser—a perfectly disinterested adviser, to whom to turn! It was almost unavoidable that the mere forming of the thought should

conjure up a vision of Baron Wallersdorf's irregular features and merry brown eyes. Had not he and his sisters already constituted themselves into a bevy of angel guardians, ready to guide the steps of the strangers, and to preserve them from the abysses yawning on all sides?

True, Doktor Feintuch had strenuously advised silence, except towards such persons of whose discretion she could feel sure. In this case she did feel sure, though upon what grounds she could not well have said—not of either Lizzerl or Bertherl, but of the owner of those merry, kindly, brown eyes. Such a rooted Viennese as he was, and with so much leisure at his command, might possibly read the Enigma with different eyes even from the much occupied Doctor of Rights—despite the midnight vigils hinted at. Even his sisters' vast acquaintance with matters theatrical—though they need not be admitted to full knowledge—might, indirectly, be of service in the matter of the "Puppenfee!" Val began to see a crowd of reasons for confiding in the male guardian angel of the family Wallersdorf.

Yes, a talk under four eyes seemed the thing to aim at now. Towards this, her thoughts began to shape themselves. But the thing would have to be thought out without Marjorie's help. Marjorie was such a baby: and after the severe snub administered touching her confidences to Lizzerl and Bertherl, she might possibly make unpleasant remarks.

The simplest course would be to write to Baron Wallersdorf and ask him for an interview; but where receive him, seeing that she had only this bedroom to dispose of? Some neutral ground must be selected, and as such the choice seemed to lie between coffee-

houses and confectioners' shops. Already the sisters Wallersdorf had furnished her with a list of those among these establishments which were "possible." So far she had made no use of the information, since it was more economical to have one's afternoon tea prepared by the shaking hands of the ancient lady who wore her hair in a thread net; but this seemed a case for a coffee-house. She would ask her chosen counsellor to meet her at a given hour, and—Marjorie being suitably disposed of—would lay her difficulties before him.

"It really comes to giving him a rendezvous," reflected Val, a little dubiously, "and of course that looks rather queer for a girl."

And then, with a sudden feeling of relief she remembered that, in his eyes, she was not a girl, but a respectable married woman with a respectable husband in the background.

This settled the matter, since of course a married woman can do all sorts of things that a girl could not.

Remained the disposal of Marjorie.

Here too, a little reflection pointed the way, since, as Val now remembered, some sightseeing had been planned for Wednesday, that is, for the very next day. A sham headache was all that was needed in order to send Marjorie off with the sisters Wallersdorf, and secure to herself an undisturbed afternoon.

This conclusion come to, found Val already sitting at the writing-table, pen in hand.

"DEAR BARON WALLERSDORF," she wrote, without allowing her resolve to be sicklied over any further by the pale cast of thought, "would you be so very kind as to meet me at the coffee-

house Schranz at four o'clock to-morrow (Wednesday)? I have an urgent business matter, upon which I should like to consult you.

"You will oblige me greatly by not mentioning this arrangement to your sisters, the affair being rather private.—Yours truly,

"VALERIE WHITE."

"*What* a splendid idea of mine it was to give myself a husband!" inwardly exulted Val, as she laid down her pen.

CHAPTER X.

THE CAFÉ SCHRANZ.

It was to the pleasing tremors a person standing on the verge of something that almost ranked as an adventure that Val awoke next morning. Under cover of the tremors a little anxious speculation as to the construction which Wallersdorf might possibly put upon the note which must, by this time, be in his hands, was at work.

"If he draws any false conclusions I shall very soon drive them out of his head," she told herself firmly. "I shall be so frightfully businesslike as to crush all idea of nonsense."

It was on the way to the "Blauer Anker" that the first mention was made of the headache.

"You might take a powder," said Marjorie, encouragingly; "or perhaps your dinner will make it pass."

But, despite an apparently unimpaired appetite, dinner proved no remedy; and—the idea of the powder being spurned—there seemed nothing for it but a complete rest, and possibly a darkened room.

"You won't mind going to the Natural History Museum without me, will you?" asked Val, in an appropriately faint voice. "The Wallersdorf's will be here

immediately. I know that the sight of so many stuffed beasts would make my head ache worse than ever."

Having insisted on settling Val upon her bed, with eau-de-Cologne plentifully applied to her temples, Marjorie presently went off, sympathetic but smiling, between the equally sympathetic Lizzerl and Bertherl.

"And now for it!" said Val aloud, as she sprang to her feet, sending the eau-de-Cologne-drenched handkerchief flying to the floor.

In truth it still wanted more than an hour to the moment of the tryst. But she had an employment for that hour. Sitting down in haste she plunged into a copy of Cousin Tom's will, from the one she had retained when handing the original to Doktor Feintuch. This done, and the folded paper stowed in her handbag, she began to watch her travelling clock rather anxiously. She must be punctual, of course, yet not too punctual. It would not do to be on the spot before he was.

The few remaining minutes were employed in severely smoothing her hair, and in selecting the most matronly articles of attire from her small travelling wardrobe. She was feeling very much "Mrs. White," as staidly she descended the staircase.

It was only a few steps to the Graben, and they were traversed with accelerated heart-beats. The mere thought of crossing the threshold of one of those brilliant coffee-houses, whose appearance seemed too enticing not to be a little wicked, was in itself exciting. All she knew of them so far had been learnt by the glimpses got of happy-looking men and women sitting at marble-topped tables with steaming coffee-pots before them, and immersed in illustrated papers. There was

a suggestion almost of a forbidden Paradise about the picture.

On the very threshold she was visited by the terrifying idea that Wallersdorf might not have got her note, or might be prevented from coming, which would mean sitting isolated among the readers of the illustrated papers.

But the moment for such craven thoughts was past. Summoning up the whole of her courage, "Mrs. White" pushed open the swing-door.

The first thing observable about the forbidden Paradise was that it smelt strongly of tobacco. The second that, however engrossed with their papers and their coffee, nobody seemed too busy critically to observe a new-comer. From behind German and French and English-printed sheets inquisitive heads of both sexes emerged, armed with both double and single eyeglasses whose glitter was distinctly disconcerting. What between tobacco-smoke and bewilderment the chances of identifying Wallersdorf, even if present, seemed small.

"I am looking for a friend," she explained to the obsequious waiter who was attempting to shepherd her towards a vacant table. "A gentleman," she added in her desperation, and almost simultaneously wishing that she had not said it. (Was not the wretch smiling in an unpleasantly knowing manner?)

"Ah, Fox!" she exclaimed within the same breath as a familiar white quadruped shot into her circle of vision. Never before had she felt so thankful for the sight of a fox-terrier; yet almost before she had spoken she turned at the sound of an equally familiar voice, to find Baron Wallersdorf standing at her elbow.

"I took the liberty of selecting a table suitable for our little business conversation," he observed, motioning her towards a conveniently retired niche.

Val looked at him gratefully. Before his easy tone and tranquil smile her agitation quickly fell. Since he treated the situation as a matter of course, then no doubt it *was* a matter of course.

It was now only that she began to be aware of the pleasing side of the adventure, yet its real character must be made clear from the first.

Once divested of her jacket and delivered of the waiter's professional attentions, she lost not a moment in establishing this point.

"I hope you are not very much surprised at my request," she began in hurried, though formal tones. "But it was you yourself who offered us any help we might require, and—and I have decided to ask for it. I trust it was not inconvenient to you to meet me here to-day?"

"To such an idler as I am nothing comes inconvenient." He smiled encouragingly. "It is, on the contrary, a positive mercy to help me fill up my time."

Here he stopped short, obviously on the verge of some remark as to the pleasant nature of this actual filling-up.

"If you are really such an idler as you make yourself out to be, then perhaps you will be too unpractical to give me the advice I require."

"Let's hear the case first! I presume I am not going wrong when I connect it with the inheritance you are here to claim?"

"Not wrong at all. Some crumbs of the truth you

have already gathered, to-day I mean to give you the whole."

Briefly she gave him the story of Tom Dowell's will, to which he listened attentively, puffing away leisurely at the cigarette which he had asked her leave to light. When at last she paused expectantly, he began by knocking off the ashes before observing—

"If I know anything of British characteristics you have got either the will or a copy of it in that bag."

"It seems that you do know something of our characteristics," admitted Val, as she opened the bag.

Having read the paper down to the last word, without any change of countenance he would have handed it back again across the table, but Val shook her head in an almost disappointed fashion.

"I meant you to keep it, and to think it over—it was for that I made the copy."

"Thank you!" was all Wallersdorf said at the moment, out of regard for the ears of the waiter who just then dumped down two appetising-looking trays upon the marble table.

"Is it my opinion regarding the possible hiding-place that you are doing me the honour of seeking?" he asked as soon as comparative privacy had been regained, and as unperturbed as though the paper he had just slipped into his pocket had been the most ordinary and every-day document.

In view of this serenity, all apology for the eccentricity of her defunct relative appeared superfluous to Val.

"Partly that. But also I wanted to ask you whether the password does not by any possibility convey some-

thing to your mind which it does not convey to ours. It has occurred to me that possibly two such theatrical devotees as your sisters are might be able to throw some light on the 'Puppenfee.' Only I am not sure whether——"

"They would be able to hold their tongues?" he interrupted with a chuckle. "Let me hasten to assure you that they would *not*. So if discretion is an object—as it certainly seems to be—we had better seek another road. Which is the one which your legal adviser recommends?"

"Oh—our legal adviser—that is another point about which I wanted to consult you."

"You are dissatisfied with him?" Wallersdorf asked quickly.

"I can't say that. He really seems to be doing his best; but oh, his best is so despairingly slow! I wanted to ask wheter you can suggest any means of hurrying up his movements."

"You seem fond of hurry, Mrs. White, if you will pardon me the observation. In order to gauge his activity I should require to know how much he has done so far."

Val told him briefly.

"That doesn't sound bad for three weeks. In London, I don't doubt, they would have reached that much in three days, and in New York in three hours—but for Vienna it's quite creditable."

"Do you always do everything as slowly as this?" asked Val with a half-despairing little sigh.

"Not slowly, Mrs. White—that's not the right word—only leisurely. There is no denying that, as a whole,

we're for taking life easy. To my mind it's half the charm of Austria in general, and Vienna in particular, that things are *not* done in a hurry."

"That they certainly are *not*. I confess that your eternal 'Gemütlichkeit' somewhat gets upon my nerves."

"Does it really?" asked Wallersdorf, introducing into his voice a certain drawl reserved only for special occasions, and which, of its kind, was distinctly provoking. "I should have thought, on the contrary, that it would act as a sedative. Ever since I returned from a world-trip I took a few years ago, my native town has stood to me for an antidote to the fever of modern life."

"I wonder that world-trip did not open your eyes to some of the defects of the Viennese way of doing things," said Val a little wrathfully.

"Quite the reverse! It opened my eyes to qualities I had previously overlooked. In the midst of a seething sea of hustlers, think what it means to possess an island of comparative peace, for whose inhabitants the business of enjoying life always remains the most important business of all; who have actually got time to be sentimental, or soft-hearted, or even a little idiotic, if you will—instead of only successful. It is quite incredible the sort of things we do find time for. Can you imagine a European capital in which a pigeon entangled in a telephone wire will collect a sympathetic crowd in the heart of a thoroughfare—as I have with my own eyes witnessed in the Kärnthnerstrasse? And not a crowd of old women alone loud in their exclamation of compassion—but of *élégantes* overflowing with excited advice as to means of rescue, and of men of all ages and conditions; of which about half seemed ready to take

off their coats on the spot and swarm up the rainpipe; you may not believe me when I tell you that the whole apparatus of the Freiwillige Rettungsgesellschaft was put into motion in order to deliver that pigeon—but nevertheless it is a fact. These are the sort of things that make people say with a half-pitying smile, 'Wien bleibt Wien.' And long may it remain so!"

"No, you are not hustlers, whatever you are," said Val reflectively, and wondering to herself what had become of the drawl in Baron Wallersdorf's voice, and of the fundamental plainness of his features. So earnest were the brown eyes, so expressive the mobile face as he rang the praises of the beloved town, as completely to transform the man.

"I take that as a compliment, though you mean it as a criticism. We are proud of being one of the last strongholds of leisure, proof against the attacks of armies of *arrivistes*. After all, making money by the shortest—and not always cleanest road—is not everything, is it? And though money is a desirable help to the enjoyment of life, it is not always indispensable."

This time Val said nothing, being absorbed in a rapid scrutiny of the company at the marble tables, upon whose young and old, male and female features the corroboration of Wallersdorf's words seemed to be written, since upon more than one pair of lips she could discern the same smile of bonhomie that played about his own, in more than one pair of eyes read that *joie de vivre* with which his overflowed.

Then, with a start, she remembered that this argument had nothing to do with business, and that she had meant to be frightfully businesslike.

"We seem to have got off our subject," she observed briskly, while tossing off the dregs of her excellent coffee, by way of suggesting that *her* leisure, at any rate, was limited.

"What was our last subject? Ah, yes, your legal adviser. Although I am only an illegal article of the same description I should strongly recommend prudence in that direction. I have already called your attention to the fact that Feintuch is a distinctly semitic name, which—with us—is no recommendation."

"And I have already told you that I am no anti-semite," retorted Val, bristling on the instant, principally because the mere idea of having blundered into even doubtfully honest hands was too awful to contemplate, rousing unavoidable resentment towards the person suggesting it. In truth her "illegal adviser" seemed to be abusing the licence accorded him.

"Doktor Feintuch is all right, as far as respectability goes. It is only his way of doing things that I object to. He is too fond of hearing himself talk, for one thing."

"I would gladly muzzle him if I could; but as I know you won't authorise me so far, all I can meanwhile do is to muzzle myself, by promising to hold my tongue, while diligently applying my own brains to the study of the Enigma."

"Thank you!" said Val, giving him a glance of heartfelt gratitude.

What a pity it was, to be sure, that so pleasant a person as Baron Wallersdorf was, could occasionally be so provoking!

She was still saying this to herself when she per-

ceived that the "pleasant person" in question was half-rising in his seat, in order politely to incline his head towards some ladies who had just entered by the swing-door and were now passing in the rear of her chair. A glance thrown into the mirror upon the wall showed her a face she had seen once before—the same face which had suggested to her the fantastic simile of the flies drowning in the cream. Instantly she flushed with annoyed surprise, though in point of fact there was nothing in the least astonishing about the appearance of the Kalnays in a public and "possible" coffee-house. The annoyance remained, which she could best explain to herself by the fact that the surprise was evidently mutual; for the eyes which she met in the mirror were distended to an extent which could almost rank as a glare.

"I do believe she is jealous!" said Val to herself, while furiously biting her lip. "How perfectly ridiculous!"

Already she was pulling on her gloves.

"Would you kindly call the waiter?" she said to Wallersdorf, who perhaps wondered less at the sudden primness of tone than a less-experienced "ladies' man" might have done. "I want to get home, and no doubt you will be wanting to join your friends."

"Not, at any rate, until I have seen you back to your hotel."

"I know my way perfectly, thank you. Did I not come here alone?"

"By daylight. From the moment the lamps are lit the streets of our inner town are not always pleasant places for unaccompanied ladies. I am quite sure that

I shall be acting in accordance with Doctor White's intentions by escorting you to your door."

Val buttoned her gloves in silence, her mouth effectually stopped by the husband she had invented for herself, and whose existence did not, at this moment, seem to her particularly convenient.

Stepping out onto the Graben a minute later, she drew a deep breath of relief, not only because the cold winter air tasted delicious after the tobacco-smoke, but also because it was a deliverance to be out of the range of those so intense black eyes, of whose piercing glance she had been conscious until the swing-door fell to behind her.

On the very threshold of the Hotel Brauss she stopped short.

"Thank you for your escort, though really I didn't need it. And—and perhaps you won't mind not mentioning the talk we have had, before my sister. She too has got difficulties about holding her tongue. That's why I sent her off with your sisters, as otherwise, you see——"

"I see perfectly," interrupted Wallersdorf, in a tone of unimpeachable decorum, yet with eyes that looked merrier than ever and also more knowing than she quite approved of. "Good night, Mrs. White, and thank you for having consulted me!"

The gesture with which he raised her hand to his lips was quite as decorous as the tone had been; yet, though Val—remembering in time that she was a married woman and that this was the custom of the country—did not snatch her hand away, still the incident sent

her upstairs with somewhat hot cheeks and a sudden terror of discovery.

It was the dark and deserted room in which she had to grope her way to the knob of the electric lighting, which gave her back her equanimity. Marjorie was still gadding about, the heavens be praised, and her little escapade consequently unguessed at.

CHAPTER XI.

A PICNIC TEA.

CHRISTMAS lay thick in the air.

Not the mild and murky Christmas of the British Isles, but the white, glistening, keen-breathed Christmas, which had turned the Austrian capital into a series of huge Christmas cards; for from both the ancient palaces and the modern residences the icicles drooped in crystal fringes, and not all the smoke of thousands of chimneys had yet had time to stain the new-fallen snow. Like a thick-piled carpet it lay upon the pavement, mercifully muffling, for a few hours at least, the ear-rending noises of every day. For a few hours only; for already an army of snow-shovellers is at work, a numerous and needy crew, for whom each heavy snow-fall is literally as a rain of Manna from heaven.

And more specifically Christmas signs are not awaiting either. First and foremost the miniature forests of fir-trees sprung up upon everything in the shape of a market-place—ranging from the three-yard high beauty destined to stand in a palace hall laden with costly gifts, to the seedling that, brightened by a few scraps of coloured paper and half a dozen candles, will gladden the child of the labourer. So omnipresent are the fir-

trees that it would almost seem as though half of the Wiener Wald, whose fragrant boughs crowd up to the very suburbs, had become as mobile as the woods of Birnam, in order to invade the capital.

The many-coloured, many-shaped things that are to hang upon these boughs are displayed in innumerable shop-windows, and in the baskets of countless pavement merchants, who thrust bundles of coloured candles into your very face, and dangle glass apples and pears before your tantalised eyes. The always glorious confectioners have touched the zenith of their glory; as have also the class of old women that sit upon church door-steps. This is the season at which *not* to carry at least three parcels is to appear peculiar—a reason which culminates on the 24th, on which day to meet an *élégant* in top-hat and faultless frock-coat carrying a Christmas-tree in his own exquisitely gloved hands is anything but an uncommon sight.

Another symptom of the season: the rising of the flood of uniforms in the streets. "Fresh from the provinces" is written large all over the beaming faces of these lieutenants groomed to an unimaginable pitch, and jauntily wearing their very best "Attilas" and "Uhlankas." It is hardly a few hours since they have been disgorgeed by the special Christmas trains which as they themselves declare, had to be charged at the point of the sword.

Baron Wallersdorf, as he sauntered home from the "Blauer Anker," which he had lately rather frequently preferred to the domestic dinner-table—recognised many faces not belonging to the standing garrison and ex-

changed amicable salutations, for his friends in uniform were as numerous as those out of it.

The midday post had brought a letter which lay upon his writing-table.

“DEAR HERIBERT,”—(he read, letting himself down into his easy-chair): “I have taken the information you asked me for concerning Doktor Claudius Feintuch—with results which, I fear, must be considered negative in so far as I have been able to discover nothing which could justify you in warning your friends against him. It is unquestionable that his business flourishes, and that his circle of clients increases daily. Personally I would not trust him round the nearest street-corner; but that may be prejudice; and I could not say such a thing aloud for fear of a charge for slander. I’ve no doubt at all that he has got ‘Honesty is the best Policy’ inscribed upon his professional banner—which for him means keeping within the letter of the law; for he seems to be one of the artistic sort who never give themselves away. If you are interested in the ladies you speak of I should say: ‘Keep your eye upon him!’—Yours ever,

“CONRAD MÜLLER, *Doktor der Rechte.*”

Having thoughtfully read the note Wallersdorf as thoughtfully tore it into small pieces.

After that he laughed—a very “gemütlich” laugh.

“Time for the illegal adviser to be going into action!” he said aloud as he stretched for a cigar.

The first move of this action—according to a mental programme already made—led to the Klosterplatz, and to Number 17. But there was plenty of time to finish this cigar—and others too—before the advent of the conventional visiting hour.

At its approach he made as careful a toilet as though the smartest of “Jours” was in prospect; although the “Jours” at Number 17 were far from being

inaugurated, the new lodgers having barely gained the shelter of its roof. A call seemed distinctly premature; yet Wallersdorf seemed in no apprehension whatever as to the chances of being turned from the door.

At the last moment and after the final application of both the clothes and the hair-brush he took out of his writing-table drawer a paper which he once more carefully perused and again locked away, previous to sallying forth.

As he turned the corner of the Platz his glance went round it at least as searchingly as Val's had done on a previous occasion. The scene—though not viewed for long—had once been intimately familiar, seeing that years ago, in his earliest childhood, his parents had lodged in one of these out-of-date houses.

“Does Baroness Kalnay receive visitors?” he enquired of the distracted Herr Frisch, who with each of his hands was dragging an empty packing-case across the entrance of Number 17—his red hair very much on end.

“Receive?” he vociferated, wiping his streaming brow with the blue linen apron which covered him to the chin. “You must have come straight out of a lunatic-asylum to enquire such a thing. Does one receive visitors while half the chairs are still wrapped in straw and nothing but packing-cases to sit upon?”

“Packing-cases are not half bad things to sit upon,” said Wallersdorf calmly—“but they are heavy to drag. Let me lend you a hand with these!”

Which accordingly he did, regardless of a brand-new pair of dogskin gloves, and with the result of caus-

ing the "Hausmeister's" ill-humour to melt into grateful confusion.

"What a noise that canary makes! Was that the one that Mr. Dowell bequeathed to you?"

Poldi Frisch looked at him askance—visibly shuddering.

"Oh, you know about that too? Are you perhaps another of his relations?"

"Dear me, no! I'm unmixed Viennese blood—same as yourself. But I happen to have heard of the will. Some day you must show me that canary—I'm a great friend of birds, but I've no time to-day, since I'm going to call on those ladies up there."

"You're losing your time!" called Herr Frisch after him as he mounted the staircase.

"My time has no value whatever," came back the serene reply.

Into the hand of the footman who received him at the open door on the second landing—no need to ring a bell—and whose horror at the suggestion of admitting a visitor was quite as manifest if more decorous than that of the "Hausmeister"—Wallersdorf pressed a calling-card, accompanied by the advice to make sure of the ladies' intentions before committing himself to a refusal. Upon the man—indignant at being caught in shirt-sleeves and with his livery waistcoat unbuttoned—there fell so great a stupefaction that he wordlessly obeyed.

After a brief wait among piled-up boxes and unhung pictures Wallersdorf saw him return with an increase of stupefaction on his face, and on his lips a mechanical invitation to enter.

Having waded through a litter of straw and paper, and skilfully steered past various islands of crockery the visitor entered the bare shell of the future drawing-room.

So far only the grand piano had found a definite resting-place, amid a wilderness of straw-swaddled chairs, rolled-up carpets and gaping packing-cases. It seemed a bold idea indeed to pay a visit in the midst of this chaos; a still bolder idea to receive one. Yet neither Baroness Kalnay nor Ilka seemed to consider an apology necessary, nor appeared in the least embarrassed although both were aproned and thickly gloved and Ilka wore in addition, a scarlet silk handkerchief swathed turban-fashion, round her head in order to keep the dust out of her black hair—where it would undoubtedly have shown like powder.

“To think that you should be our first visitor after all!” she laughed, nimbly descending the ladder on which she had been perched. “Just look at this glorious mess! Isn’t it a joke?”

“An immense joke!” agreed Wallersdorf, steering judiciously for his hostess.

“Mind the mirror!” shrieked that lady from behind a fortress of homeless books and music albums. Rising from her knees she revealed herself as an ample, loose sort of woman in a crumpled blouse, whose grizzled but vehemently waved hair, arched eyebrows, “baggy” eyes and languishing smile conveyed the impression of something that was at once ornate and damaged—such for instance, as a highly decorated, but weather-beaten house-front. Among her large circle of acquaintances she enjoyed two contrary reputations; that of being the

best-natured and that of being the worst-natured woman in Vienna. This came from her invariable habit of saying every vicious thing for which opportunity presented itself, and then at once unsaying it again. By these means two ends were reached, since besides the satisfaction of speaking evil of her friends, she likewise got the credit of not having wanted to do so.

"Do you know what happens to you when you break a mirror?" she asked of Wallersdorf, with the languishing smile well to the fore. "You don't get married for seven years. There now!"

"Heaven preserve me!" ejaculated Wallersdorf—"I mean from getting married after the seven years. But that doesn't necessarily follow, does it?"

"Wretch!" exclaimed Ilka, flicking his sleeve with her housemaid's glove, which she had pulled off in order to shake hands. "You dare to say that in the face of two women!"

"Present company is always excepted, Baroness Ilka."

"We might be forgiving enough to ask you to sit down if there was anything to sit upon," purred Baroness Kalnay, casting forlorn glances about her.

"The only difficulty seems to me to be in that of choice. I am still hesitating in my mind between that packing-case and a roll of carpet."

"I recommend the carpet"—broke in Ilka. "The packing-case will be wanted as tea-table presently—since we are going to push our forgiveness to the point of actually giving you a cup of tea—if so be that I can hunt up enough tea-cups."

There was a ring of glee in her voice and a sparkle

of delight in her eyes. Each one of her lively movements showed her to be in the height of high spirits.

"You won't mind a picnic tea, will you? It will be a little gipsy-like perhaps; but that's quite appropriate, since we've got plenty of gipsy-blood in our veins."

"Most appropriate—with a gipsy-queen to preside!"

It cost him no effort to say it, nor to say it in a tone that went with the words; for Ilka with her jet-black hair escaping from under the scarlet handkerchief and the bright flush in her usually pale cheeks was unquestionably fascinating, and he was as unquestionably susceptible.

"Then I vote that we set about it at once"—declared Baroness Kalnay. "It's rather early, to be sure; and I *had* meant to get those pictures hung before tea; but Istvan has never come back from looking for the hammer, and I'm simply famishing after my labours. Where can the tea-pot be hidden, I wonder?"

"But Baron Wallersdorf hasn't been labouring, Mamma; what has *he* done to deserve his tea yet?"

"I'll deserve it by finding the tea-pot—on the condition that Baroness Ilka acts as guide."

"Come along then!" said Ilka, with one of her elementary gestures that seemed so much too vehement for the twentieth century. "We won't need Geza to help us; it will be much more amusing alone. Don't you think so?"

Needless to say that Baron Wallersdorf thought so.

Together they went off to the next room, where there were more islands of crockery on the floor, and where cups and plates were collected to the accompani-

ment of much giggling and many more or less inane speeches.

On their return they found Baron Kalnay, who was a gaunt, hollow-eyed and somewhat tragical-looking personage, wrangling in shirt-sleeves with his wife over the disposal of the pictures on the wall.

"Have you ever noticed the impossibility of getting a nail to go in at the place it is wanted to?" he lugubriously apostrophised Wallersdorf from the top of the folding steps. The tone was his habitual one, adapted presumably as the only one in keeping with his personal appearance.

"Never mind the pictures now, Papa. It's tea-time," decided Ilka. "There isn't any one packing-case big enough to accomodate four people; but we can divide into pairs, can't we? Here's a nice one, why are you pushing it about, Baron Wallersdorf? It's all right here."

"I think it will be better nearer the window, I always like a view when taking my meals; and this one, in especial, has associations for me."

"Has it? Which ones?" She enquired suspiciously.

"Infantine ones!" he hastened to say. "In the days of my tenderest youth, my parents used to live in one of these houses, and our nursery windows looked out upon the Platz. In those days there were no aqueducts yet, and it used to be one of our favourite occupations to shy oranges at the women who brought their pails to the fountain. Bertherl was particularly good at it, I remember."

"Ah, then that is why you wanted to see the place again?" observed Ilka, a little crestfallen.

"Yes, I wanted to see the place, but not *again*," said Wallersdorf readily. "From the moment that it is inhabited by friends it becomes to me a new place."

Ilka sparkled again as visibly as she had panted a moment ago. All her emotions lay so near the surface as to be readable at a glance.

After five minutes of scramble, seasoned by jokes, the party of four sat down at two packing-cases, of which one had been pushed into the window embrasure; the division of the company, needless to say, having been made, not according to sexes but according to ages.

"To make the thing quite consistent we ought by rights to have a kettle suspended upon three sticks," declared Ilka gleefully. "All this is really much too civilised for a gipsy tea; though of course, it isn't quite as comfortable as for instance the Café Schranz. I can't furnish you with either a marble-topped table nor with so agreeable a companion as you had there the other day."

This with an appropriately provocative glance.

"I admit the table," said Wallersdorf unruffled, "but as for the change of companion I don't, at this moment, feel in the least to be pitied."

Upon which Ilka beamed anew, as naïvely as before.

From beside the second packing-case, where she was administering refreshment to her tragical-looking spouse, Baroness Kalnay's voice now broke into the *tête-à-tête*.

"Ah yes—we saw you there the other day with one of those queer Englishwomen—the prettier of the two."

"Queer?" repeated Wallersdorf, with a mild elevation of eyebrows.

"Well, eccentric, or enigmatical, if you prefer it. You can't deny, surely, that what people say about them is very probable."

"And what do people say about them?"

"Oh, that they are just a pair of adventuresses, for whom London has grown too hot, and who have therefore turned their attention to Vienna; and that all that story of the inheritance is the merest sham which they have invented in order to give themselves a sort of atmosphere."

"And upon what grounds do people say this?" asked Wallersdorf, very quietly.

"Because they look like it"—bluntly declared Ilka.

But already Baroness Kalnay—true to her method—was engaged in contradicting her own statements.

"Oh, really—upon no grounds at all worth mentioning. People always *are* so ill-natured, you know! I was only repeating the current rumours. Personally I don't believe a word of it. For one thing we have the 'Hausmeister's' testimony for the existence of the eccentric uncle—or whatever he was, since he actually lived in these very rooms. Not that this proves that he had any money to leave; but neither is there anything to prove that Mrs. White and her sister are *not* quite respectable young women."

"Respectable married women usually wear wedding-rings, do they not?" put in Ilka pointedly. "I think

it's very funny that Mrs. White has not got one on her finger."

"Very funny indeed!" agreed the gloomy Baron who, to judge by the amount of cakes (fetched from the nearest confectioner's) which he was devouring, seemed to be afflicted with a species of nervous greed. Upon principle he always took a pessimistic view of everything, as a further means, no doubt, of consistency with his appearance.

"Certainly it is a little unusual," admitted his wife. "But it is very much the fashion nowadays not to wear a ring. It has something to do with the liberty of the individual, or whatever the right expression is. As I say, it may be all right; but, all the same, I rather hope that they won't call upon us. With a young girl in the house one can't be too careful, you know."

And, across the disordered room, she smiled one of her ornate—and slightly knowing smiles—straight into Wallersdorf's face.

What he felt most inclined to do at that moment was to upset the impromptu tea-table in order to ram that smile down her throat; but remembering in time that this would not fit into his plans, of which a repetition of this visit to the Klosterplatz formed a part, he continued, instead, to sip his tea, apparently undisturbed.

"Do *you* believe in the story of the inheritance?" asked Ilka in a tone which very clearly said that she did not.

"I always on principle believe everything that a lady tells me."

"Oh, when you speak like that, there's nothing to be done with you!"

"I wish they wouldn't shovel away the snow so fast!" he observed, gazing steadily out of the window. "It takes away the Christmas setting."

Ilka made an impatient movement.

"Don't talk of Christmas! It makes me feel quite sick to think that we've got to get settled before the 24th. You'll spend that evening at home, of course; and will you have any guests?"

"I cannot answer for my mother's intentions on that point, Baroness Ilka."

"Towards strangers, homeless Englishwomen for instance?" she suggested with a rather wicked gleam in her eye.

"I suppose those pigeons are direct descendants of those we used to feed"—was his reply, still looking out of the window.

"Ah, you are reviving your nursery memories! There are plenty of oranges over there, you see; but no more water-carriers to shy them at."

"No. Thus times do change! But the stone Saints are as immovable as ever, and so is the old woman on the church-steps, though I suppose she isn't exactly the same one. I never remember having seen those steps without an old woman upon them, and very seldom the square itself without a monk hurrying across it."

Thoughtfully his eyes went round the Platz, where the dusk was gathering fast, while in his head the rhymes of the Enigma jingled.

It was Ilka's rather sharp-toned voice that recalled him to realities.

"Speak the truth, Baron Wallersdorf; you are not enjoying your tea as much as you enjoyed your coffee the other day at Schranz? You didn't look out of the window then."

With a start and an extravagantly worded compliment, coined upon the spur of the moment, Wallersdorf pulled himself together.

"How well you understand your business!" pouted Ilka. "Did you say these sort of things to Mrs. White the other day?"

"I never lose an opportunity of saying them. It's the only way of keeping one's hand in."

"You're dreadful!" she asserted, with a smile rising once more to the surface.

"And you're adorable; especially when you're angry. That's why I like to make you so."

She tossed her red-turbanned head, looking more adorable than ever.

"If you believe in the inheritance, then I suppose you also believe in the existence of Doctor White? Do you happen to know where and in what branch he practises?"

"I haven't allowed my imagination to stray so far; but if you are anxious to know I can call on Mrs. White to-morrow in order to ascertain."

"No need whatever!" said Ilka so precipitately that first Wallersdorf and then she herself laughed outright.

From that point on the picnic tea progressed smoothly; and if Wallersdorf did occasionally squint over his teacup and out of the window Ilka was now too pleasantly occupied to notice it.

"I wonder what I have gained by that?" mused Wallersdorf when presently he stopped within the entrance of Number 17, in order to light his cigar. "A footing in the house, anyway, but nothing more, that I can see."

He was vaguely aware of a few pricks of conscience—mild and very bearable pricks they were, arising from the all too pleasant hour just passed. A "flirt" with Ilka Kalnay might only be a means to an end, but the means themselves were quite enjoyable. The scarlet handkerchief was responsible for much—since Wallersdorf belonged to the order of men for whom "Wein, Weib und Gesang" never become dead letters—which does not necessarily mean that they are born reprobates.

Meanwhile the late Mr. Dowell's canary was singing steadily alongside.

"I must make acquaintance with that beast some day"—was the reflection with which he stepped out into the street; "if only as a means of getting Herr Frisch to talk. My education as private detective can't help gaining thereby."

As he passed by the chestnut-seller he gave a delighted sniff.

"How that takes one back to nursery days!"

Beside the old woman upon the church-steps he felt almost inclined to linger; for that too took him back into the past, since from another old woman—like to this one in all essentials—he and his sisters had been wont to buy Easter eggs, or cherries, or—at the Santa Claus season—dreadful gingerbread bishops and "Kram-puses" ingeniously composed of dried plums threaded

upon skewers. These were as black as any self-respecting devil need be; but he could remember that they tasted very good indeed. To-day the baskets upon the steps were filled with gilt apples and nuts and cheap paper chains—the most primitive of Christmas-tree decorations. No surer symptom of the progress of the season than the nature of a street-seller's wares.

As Wallersdorf turned the corner of the Klosterplatz he was already wondering when he could decently pay his next visit. Exactly because there had been no result so far, it seemed advisable to repeat the experi-
ment.

CHAPTER XII.

NINEPINS.

"It's a fact, I'm told, that there's a million in English gold buried at the foot of the Semmering, and they're only waiting until the ground thaws in order to set about digging."

"I heard that it was two millions, and that it was sunk in the Danube."

"That means that they would have to drag the river. But for that, too, they must wait till the ice goes."

"My own impression is that it isn't a question of digging for a fortune, but of angling for one. The Wallersdorf's have always got an assortment of *partis* in stock—not to mention Wallersdorf himself, who will presently be growing wings, I expect, so very much of the guardian-angel as he is becoming. Just look at him hovering about that chair!"

"Oh, but that one has got a husband already, you know."

"So she says, at least!"

It was to the accompaniment of a distinctly intoxicating waltz that such and such-like remarks flew about. Not a regular ball—oh, no! To such depths

of frivolity Mrs. Wishart's emissaries had not sunk, so far. Nothing more formidable than a "Kegelabend," so called, apparently, because ninepins are consistently neglected throughout the course of the evening. A mere informal gathering of a select, but economical, circle, determined to amuse themselves inexpensively, despite rising prices of everything.

A long narrow space in the "souterrain" of a Ringstrasse café, a "tapeur" at the piano, cold viands and beer served upon demand, a free display of last summer's frocks and last carnival's ball-dresses, freshened up for the occasion, and set off by a thick sprinkling of uniforms—these the modest ingredients of the "Kegelabende."

Such as it was, Val had not yet recovered from the surprise of finding herself here.

It was Marjorie, of course, who was responsible for this—a reflection which failed to salve "Mrs. White's" conscience, since the surrender made could only be explained by the presence of a traitor in the citadel. Here the old argument about filling up the necessarily idle time would not completely serve, so Val felt, remorsefully conscious that the phases of resistance through which she had passed, though numerous, had lacked vigour. Was it possible that, in the atmosphere of the City of Enticement, her usually so stout will was deteriorating?

Undeniably the enticements had lately been on the increase. A Viennese Christmas Eve has charms of its own, from whose influence it was hard to escape, more especially when spent in the bosom of a family whose members vie with each other in making the strangers

feel at home, and whose benevolent matron begs them, with genuine tears in her old eyes and many nods of her ram-like head, to put up with her for one evening as the substitute for an absent mother. To stand beneath a huge Christmas-tree which Lizzerl and Bertherl had decked with their own hands as gleefully as though they had been ten years old instead of somewhere about forty, and whose gifts were destined to be distributed among Baroness Wallersdorf's protégées (the erstwhile pin-pickers among them); to know, amidst the universal stillness which after the fever of weeks had fallen upon the capital, that at this same minute in the homes of rich and poor, thousands of dazzled children's eyes are gazing enraptured at just such lights as these—this was indeed to taste a new experience.

And close upon Christmas had fallen "Sylvester," with its oracles for the coming year to be read out of melted lead; and the punchbowl distributed on the stroke of midnight amid universal good wishes. Lizzerl had unhesitatingly pronounced Val's lump of lead to be a heap of gold, which, of course, meant the finding of the treasure; while Marjorie's bit was variously interpreted as a sword and as a horse's head.

"Well, they've all of them got swords," laughed Bertherl, audaciously referring to the troop of military admirers who were beginning to dog Marjorie's steps. "And most of them have got horses, too—since you patronise the cavalry."

After these two delightful evenings, and others almost as delightful, spent in the Wallersdorf's Opera and "Burg" boxes, the "Kegelabend" had somehow become inevitable. All that Val could do by way of stifling the

voice of conscience, was to remind herself steadily that it was not "a real ball," and that she was not going for her own pleasure, but strictly in the character of Marjorie's chaperon.

These arguments were made the most of in a reply she had lately written to a postscript of her mother's, attached to a letter of Susie's.

"Beware of Cousin Tom's fit of amnesia"—thus the postscript ran, and Val could see the grey eyes twinkling as she read it.

"It would almost seem that, like him, you have forgotten to come away. Have you not yet had enough of the wild-goose chase? I know that my purse has. I am seriously thinking of sending Hannah to fetch you back—by the force of persuasion—so I trust."

Val's reply was written in an eminently soothing and perhaps a trifle laboriously businesslike tone. The reply from America was expected daily; surely it would be a penny-wise and pound-foolish policy to go home now, and perhaps have to return again in a week or two, etc., etc.

This letter too had a postscript to it, in which a further hurriedly written and somewhat shamefaced call was made upon the long-suffering purse referred to above. There was no precise statement made as to what the money was wanted for, yet from a few remarks touching the difficulty of appearing disobliging towards people who had taken so much trouble, Mrs. Wishart was left to gather that the whole of it would not go into Doktor Feintuch's pocket.

Marjorie herself was agreeably surprised at the surrender—partial though it was—and began at once, in

her mild, persistent way, to build upon it hopes which were not yet ripe for utterance. Some glimmering of an explanation, whose starting point was a casual remark made by Val, was already dawning upon her mind. The remark had been to the effect that Baron Wallersdorf was not really ugly, when you came to know him better.

"He only *looks* as if he was ugly," was the definition given, "in the same way as the 'Hausmeister' on the Klosterplatz looks as if he was angry."

It may have been in connection with the train of thought engendered by this remark that one morning Marjorie, with a rather aggressive grin, had announced to Val that her "Barbara Zweigl" was beginning to flower.

"And you know what that means, of course?" Val at once became very scornful, and consequently rather flushed.

"How absurd you are, Marjorie! You forget, surely, that I am Mrs. White."

"But you can stop being Mrs. White any moment you want. That's the advantage of a sham husband; directly he becomes inconvenient he can be cleared out of the way, without any danger of being tried for murder, or even for manslaughter."

"Marjorie, you're a goose! Besides, I'm sure that's not my branch. It's much more likely to be yours—considering your perfectly disgraceful swarm of slaves."

Marjorie sighed eloquently, her round face doing its best to lengthen appropriately.

"What's the good of them, since I can't marry them all, and since I can't make up my mind which of them

I like best, nor even whether I like any of them well enough to marry them! They're all so nice and so amusing that it would break my heart to say 'No' to any of them—supposing they proposed to me, which they haven't done yet. I rather suspect that they're better at flirting than at marrying, which certainly has its conveniences too."

"So you're back in your old dilemma! Will you ever learn to make up your mind about anything, I wonder?"

"Well, you see, one of them has got such ripping black eyes, and the other such lovely, die-away blue ones, and some of them have got moustaches which are simply too much for me."

"And some of them have got dark-blue tunics corded with gold, and others have got light-blue tunics fastened with silver buttons," mocked Val, with a more dispassionate insight into the subject than could be suspected of Marjorie.

And then they both laughed in unison, Marjorie the loudest of the two. How she congratulated herself now upon the brilliant idea she had had of ordering Susie—quite "off her own bat"—to pack up and despatch all the wearable dinner-dresses at Fern Villa, and without disturbing her mother's mind by mentioning the subject to her! The ease with which Val got over the surprise of their arrival was both satisfactory and significant.

Before she was half-way through the evening Marjorie knew for certain that, whatever else she might be able to make up her mind about, the question as to which of her partners waltzed most divinely must remain for ever unsolved. There were slender and artificially blasés

Uhlans, with whom to glide through the mazes of the dance was an almost dreamlike experience; but was it not almost more inspiring to be borne along upon the arm of one of the dark-faced and diminutive hussars, of whom a whole swarm seemed to have been let loose in the room, like a swarm of some brilliantly coloured and exceedingly lively insects? And between the dances, in the little cul-de-sac room alongside, so conveniently beyond the range of chaperons' eyes, what more entertaining than to listen to the flow of military anecdotes of an exclusively humorous character, of which both Uhlans and hussars possessed an inexhaustible fund? Scarcely less amusing to lend an ear to the naïve lamentations touching their financial straits, and the dearth of sympathy to be met with on this score. Nobody above a lieutenant had any broad ideas with regard to money, they assured her; even the captains were apt to grow stingy—which they called settling down. As for colonels, their want of fellow-feeling was simply shocking.

And, in perfect harmony, each omitted a sigh which seemed to blend into one.

“Dans le service de l'Autriche
Le militaire n'est pas riche;
Chacun sait cela!”

cited the Uhlan, with a mournful light in what Marjorie called his “die-away” eyes.

“I certainly didn't know that. You all look so magnificent.”

“Gilded misery! As a matter of fact we've most of us got holes in our pockets.”

“And who mends them for you?”

“The Jews!” they declared in one breath.

“It’s enraging to think what a living they make out of us!” ground out the hussar between his flashing teeth; “but there’s no other way.”

“And are they always ready to patch you up?”

“Ready! Why, they ask it of you as a favour; run after us with their money-bags which they burn with desire to lay at our feet—for a consideration, of course!”

“I can tell you an excellent story *àpropos* of that,” broke in the Uhlán. “Happened to a comrade of mine—one of the lucky ones whose pockets are whole by nature. We had just been moved to a wretched Galician hole. On the very evening that we got in, the Jews were swarming about us with pockets full of bank-notes. One of them knocked at the door of Melski, my friend. ‘Was the Herr Leutnant not by any chance in some small, momentary embarrassment, out of which he, Ezra Baumwall, would be only too happy to help him?’ ‘No, thank you,’ says Melski; ‘I am not in any embarrassment.’ ‘But a little ready money always comes in so useful, especially towards the end of the month!’ ‘I require no money,’ replies Melski very distinctly. ‘But a hundred florins at least, for the first expenses of instalment.’ No answer from Melski, who went on ranging his books upon a shelf with his back turned to the Jew. Having looked for a moment longer at the unresponsive back, Ezra Baumwall deftly slipped a packet of bank-notes out of his pocket, and having selected a crisp, new specimen, laid it upon the table, well displayed, and softly slipped from the room. The moment he was gone Melski cast

a look upon the table and then shouted for his orderly. 'Send for a joiner at once,' he ordered. The joiner, arriving promptly, was commanded to varnish the centre table, which had suffered in the transport. 'Do it here just as it stands, without touching a thing upon it.' But there's a hundred-florin bank-note upon it,' gasped the man. 'Maybe. What's that to you? Won't the varnish take upon paper?' Melski stood over him while he did the job; and only when it was done, returned, smiling, to the ranging of his books. A month later there was another knock at the door, and Ezra Baumwall cringed himself into the room. 'What do you want?' asked Melski, who was brushing his moustache before the glass. 'Only a little business affair. Perhaps the "Herr Leutnant" remembered having graciously accepted a hundred florins a month ago? He had come about the question of the interest.' 'I?' said Melski, with admirable surprise. 'I never took a hundred florins from you!' 'God is witness to me that the "Herr Leutnant" did. On that very table there I laid the bank-note!' 'Oh, did you? Then I should advise you to look for it upon the table. I certainly never touched it.' Ezra Baumwall looked, and then screamed and rushed at the entombed bank-note with frantic nails which in vain attempted to disperse the transparent varnish, through which a hundred wasted florins smiled up at him ironically. Whether he got out any of the fragments I don't know, but this I do know, that Melski was never again troubled with any Hebrew visits."

"I've heard that story, too," remarked the hussar. "It's the only case I know of one of us getting the better of a Jew."

"Your own experiences are different?"

"Very different," said the small brown man emphatically.

"Do the ninepins actually exist?" asked Val of the person who had earned for himself the title of "guardian-angel," and looking back over her shoulder at the space boarded off for the game which nobody was playing.

"I believe they do, though I have not seen them with my eyes. I am told there are such things as genuine 'Kegelabende,' on which you might chance to see a dozen burly burghers, drinking beer and rolling balls as lustily as we are waltzing—that's to say as we *ought* to be waltzing. Would you really not like a turn, Mrs. White?"

"Certainly not!" said Val, all the more hastily because of a certain tingling in her pulses of which she was aware, for just then the "tapeur" had launched into a peculiarly enticing waltz. "I have told you already that I am only here as a chaperon, in order to look after my—niece."

While she spoke her eyes rested rather enviously upon the huge "Kaiser Dirndl," round about whom a handful of hussars had been hopping with the nimbleness of fleas, and who just now was being borne off in triumph by a partner above whom she towered by a head and shoulders.

"Besides, didn't you tell me yourself the other day that dancing was, in your opinion, a quite needless form of fatigue?"

"That's true. So I did."

The words were pronounced with that sporadic drawl

which Val found so irritating; and simultaneously Wallersdorf, by leaning back in his chair as far as its somewhat uncompromising shape permitted, adopted a rather ostentatiously lazy attitude. In moments like these he had a knack of covering up the fun in his eyes until they became almost as sleepy as those of Lizzerl.

"I take it that most forms of exercise are a waste of power. Can't imagine why grown-up people should run about after balls, or beat the air with rackets. Do you know the sort of people I envy most? The people who are wheeled about in bath-chairs, who are never obliged to get tired, or to trouble their heads about anything in the world, except, perhaps, about the taste of their food."

"And who, perhaps, have got to be fed with a spoon?" suggested Val, scornfully.

"That would depend upon who fed me."

Val fiercely bit her lip. Even though she strongly suspected at least half of this attitude to be "put on," it was one which always brushed her up the wrong way, as it was doing now—witness her flashing eyes and vivid colour. From under his half-closed eyelids Wallersdorf watched her with at least as much enjoyment as the warriors over there had recently been watching for Marjorie's brilliant smile. If laughter was the most becoming setting for the younger sister, so was anger for the elder.

"Are you still aware, I wonder, of how very odious you can be when you choose?"

"Yes, I know that I have an exceptional knack of making myself disagreeable," he agreed with complacency. "I am told that there are moments in which

my best friends would knock me down with pleasure. I hope you are not feeling like that, Mrs. White?"

"I rather think I am."

"How can I atone?"

"By talking sense, and, in the first place, business. Have you forgotten your promise to help me about the legacy?"

"Forgotten? Why, I sleep with the Enigma under my pillow!"

"Yet without the inspiration coming, apparently."

"So far it has tarried; but I do not despair. I am educating myself as a private detective—I really am; and the moment I have something to tell you I shall appear—no, to be sure, that won't do, since your sister is to be kept out of it. I suppose I had better write—and perhaps we might arrange another meeting?"

"Perhaps—I am not sure. At any rate, you can write."

Val spoke rather hurriedly, partly because she felt doubtful, and partly because at that moment she perceived Baroness Kalnay bearing down upon them with the ornate smile very much to the fore.

"Oh, Baron Wallersdorf, they are wanting to arrange 'lancers,' and so few of them can dance them. I know *you* can. Perhaps you would be so very good as to let yourself be victimised? Ilka is so anxious for the 'lancers.'"

"I shall be a willing victim—that is to say, if Mrs. White will do me the honour."

He turned promptly towards his neighbour.

"Oh, but I am not dancing!" came Val's quick reply.

"Not round dances, you mean; but this is a square one."

"It doesn't usually turn out very square at the end," put in the Baroness insinuatingly. "So if Mrs. White objects to a romp——"

A second and more decisive refusal had all but risen to Val's lips when, across the room, she caught sight of Ilka's black eyes, jealously watching the result of her mother's mission. For some unaccountable reason she immediately decided to dance the lancers.

"All right, Baron Wallersdorf, I'm ready if you are."

And she went off on his arm, leaving the discomfited Baroness *plantée*. Her request had indeed been fulfilled to the letter—but not, oh, certainly not according to the spirit.

"I do think it's a little extraordinary that strangers about whom nobody knows anything should be admitted to the 'Kegelabende,'" she confided to the friend by whose side she presently sat watching the lancers. "The Wallersdorfs really are a little too *wide* in their ideas. I always had the impression that the younger one—the so-called niece—has something distinctly *demi-monde* about her. Of course I may very likely be mistaken, and I wouldn't for the world breathe a word against her character. I don't really believe that she paints either, although some people declare that her complexion is all enamel. It does seem almost too improbably perfect to be natural."

The receiver of this confidence having warmly agreed as to the improbability, Baroness Kalnay turned to the person on her other side, in order to sow a handful of disturbing seeds in another promising direction. The

sight of Ilka—evidently suffering from suppressed “tantrums,” reduced to dancing the lancers with one of the “safe” young men, whose mere presence would be a damper upon the expected romp—acted as fuel upon the fire of maternal wrath.

But for the mighty protection of the Wallersdorf’s, and for the presence of Lizzerl and Bertherl, who had fluttered in late, straight from the agreeable shivers of Ibsen’s “Ghosts,” in order to see whether anything could be done in the way of patting débutantes on the back, or transplanting neglected “wallflowers” into the sun of public favour, Val and her sister might on this evening already have begun to feel the effects of the suspicion with which they were beginning to be regarded, chiefly by the mammas of marriageable daughters.

As matters stood it was only at the general break-up, which happened at the sober hour of 1 a.m. that Val got her first inkling of the situation.

“Now that the ice is broken, you will surely make no difficulties about coming to the Opera ‘Redoute?’” Berthel Wallersdorf pleaded with Val, while in an outer space sleepy waiters piled the cloaks upon the billiard-table.

Before Val had answered, Ilka Kalnay spoke quickly and in a voice which shook with spite.

“Of course Mrs. White will go to the ‘Redoute!’” What a question to ask! Unless, of course, the treasure is dug up by that time. What a pity the ground is so hard!”

“The ground isn’t always as hard as it looks,” Val succeeded in saying lightly, though she was feeling quite as angry as Ilka was. (So that was the tone in which

their affairs were discussed!) "And even though it was dug up, I don't see that that need make us miss such an interesting sight as the 'Redoute' will doubtless be."

Val was inside the cab into which her "guardian-angel" had shepherded her before she began to recover from the surprise at her own speech and the intention it implied. But then, so many things were surprising nowadays that it was becoming impossible to keep count of them.

It was after a patient, or impatient, wait upon the doorstep of the Hotel Brauss that they were reluctantly admitted by the hairdresser in slippers. As he lighted them upstairs, preceded by the white cat, whose only form of exercise these nightly promenades appeared to constitute, this individual sleepily murmured a message from Frau Brauss to the effect that a lady had arrived in their absence and was waiting for them upstairs.

"Waiting for us—at this hour?" came Val's startled enquiry.

So the hairdresser believed, but could not be sure. All he knew was that he had admitted her and had not seen her go out again.

Having in the ante-room cast a somewhat affrighted glance at a newly arrived trunk which seemed uncomfortably familiar, the sisters expectantly opened the door of their room.

The brilliant illumination—for the electric light was on—showed them a hat flung down upon the table and a cloak hanging over a chair-back. Further it showed them—upon Marjorie's bed—a female form reposing in its clothes, at full length.

Towards this form the sisters rushed in a silence that was not unmixed with terror.

With a start the intruder awoke and abruptly sat up.

"Cousin Hannah!" the two exclaimed in one breath.

"Is that you?" added Marjorie, wide-eyed with incredulity, while Val's question came almost severely.

"What on earth are you doing here?"

Cousin Hannah, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes, answered the questions collectively.

"Yes, it's me; and I'm come to fetch you home. Aunt Eva sent me."

CHAPTER XIII.

WITHIN THE WHIRLPOOL.

"OH, that's it, is it?" said Val, when she had quite taken in the sense of Hannah's words, and Marjorie, through the thick of her own consternation marked with satisfaction the note of displeasure in her sister's otherwise composed voice. "I never would have imagined that Mother could be so unpractical! What a useless expense!"

"You see, she seemed to think it would come cheaper in the end than your sticking on here any longer. I'm to bring you back at once—inheritance or no inheritance—such are my instructions."

"Oh, indeed! And how do you propose to do that?"

Val had by this time settled down into a chair, with a movement that might perhaps be taken as symbolical. From this new post she raised a pair of rather defiant eyes to the face of her cousin, who was still sitting upon Marjorie's bed, vainly clutching at truant hairpins.

Hannah laughed good-naturedly.

"I haven't exactly considered that point. Brute force would scarcely have a chance, considering that I'm one against two. But I presume that you are open to reason."

And she gave another quiet chuckle.

Hannah Boxton was a dark, pale, plain-faced young woman, with a nose of the pug dog order, and an

equanimity which no one had ever seen ruffled. "She's as soothing as a Bromide powder," somebody had once said of her. Although her occupation in life was painting pictures, she carefully refrained from calling herself an artist, chiefly for the reason that financial reasons had decreed the necessity of stifling the artist who undoubtedly lived within her. Her acquiescence in this necessity earned for her as much of Marjorie's scorn as of Val's approbation.

"I wonder you don't go in for sign-painting at once," Marjorie had said to her cousin, not infrequently. "Making up pictures for Christmas numbers and soap advertisements isn't a bit better."

To which Hannah would reply, unruffled,

"That's not half a bad idea! Thanks for the suggestion, Marjorie! I daresay a few telling inn shields, for instance, would help Bob to climb into a better school."

But for the existence of this "Bob"—a brother almost young enough to be Hannah's son—Marjorie's scorn would have been far more scathing. But Bob was undoubtedly a mitigating circumstance.

"Open to reason!" repeated Val, in answer to Hannah's latest remark, and bristling on the instant—for was this not an invasion of her own territory? "Why, it's entirely owing to grounds of reason that our stay has been prolonged, I surely explained it all so clearly to Mother."

"Oh, very clearly. But she didn't seem to see it, quite. For one thing, you know, she doesn't really believe in the inheritance."

"If she doesn't believe in it," pronounced Val with almost judicial severity, "then she shouldn't have let us

start at all. Having engaged ourselves so far as this, it would be folly to give up now. Surely you must see this, Hannah?"

"Aunt Eva talks about throwing good money after bad," observed Hannah, perhaps by way of convenient evasion.

"It will all turn out good in the end—I feel sure of that. Everything we have heard here about Cousin Tom points him out as exactly the person to bury his hoard. We can't let it escape us—after all the trouble we have taken."

Hannah's small dark eyes showed a gleam as quiet and yet as expressive as the chuckle of a moment ago.

"Yes, you seem to have taken a lot of trouble, although, to judge from the present hour and your get-ups you don't appear to spend your time exclusively in digging for the treasure."

It was Val who blushed at this—not the brazen-faced Marjorie.

"Oh, this is a mere chance occurrence—quite unavoidable. For the moment we are forced into a sort of passivity, you see, because of the delay about the answer from America. The best we can do is to wait for that."

"And when is that expected?"

"Any day. But I don't think it's likely to come before the twentieth," added Val quickly, and for a passing moment wondered where she had got just that date from. Ah yes, to be sure, the Opera Redoute, though of course that could not be a determining circumstance.

"But I daren't go back without you—I really daren't. I swore such awful oaths."

"You needn't go back without us. Wait till we're ready to start."

"And what on earth am I to do till the twentieth—and probably beyond?"

"Visit the galleries, of course and the Künstlerhaus which is still open—and the Sezession—that's the Austrian Impressionists, you know. You surely wouldn't miss such opportunities as this, now that you *are* in Vienna."

"To be sure, there are the galleries," remarked Hannah becoming thoughtful. "And there are good private collections too. I've read about them."

"And it needn't cost you much," broke in Marjorie who, seeing the case secure in Val's hands, had hitherto kept herself modestly in the background. "I don't at all mind sleeping on the sofa and giving you my bed—which you've taken possession of, as it is—so that you won't need to hire a room—and you always eat so little, you know."

"Oh, I wouldn't need to starve—if that's what you mean. I've got a little pocket-money with me—dating from the last boot-blackening advertisement," she added with a quietly malicious glance at Marjorie, who, however, did not even wince, recognising that at certain junctures even boot blacking may have its uses. "And, after all, the news *may* come before the 20th, may it not?"

"Ye-es—perhaps," said Val, carefully avoiding Marjorie's eye, in which she knew that anguished suspense was written. "But I don't think it likely. At any rate we had better go to the Künstlerhaus to-morrow, in order to be on the safe side."

"That's the equivalent to our Academy, isn't it?"

I'm not sure that this isn't bribery and corruption," chuckled Hannah again. "But I suppose I may as well go. And after that I'll take the Sezeession as an antidote. It's always the Impressionists that give one the best ideas for advertisement daubs; and I am on the look-out for subjects, just now."

Next day—Marjorie having slept very peacefully upon the sofa—they "did" the Künstlerhaus vigorously, and almost too successfully, as far as Hannah was concerned.

"Of course it's all very well for people who do it for their dessert and not for their dinner to paint pictures like that," she said rather wistfully, as they descended the steps of the temple of Art. "Perhaps if I trumpet the soap and mustard long enough, I may be able to permit myself the luxury of a *picture* some day. But Bob would have to be started first."

"You dear, brave creature," whispered Val with an affectionate squeeze; while Marjorie, preferring at this delicate juncture to avoid disagreement, affected deafness.

"Thanks, Mrs. White," said Hannah, who necessarily had been introduced to the sham husband. Her small dark eyes, still full of the visions of some wonderful landscapes and of some curiously impressive portraits just seen, gazed so abstractedly at an approaching "Electric" that only Val's sharp clutch upon her arm saved her from running straight into its merciless arms.

The shake which she gave herself successfully relegated the artist to her proper place and brought the business woman to the top triumphantly.

"Couldn't we do the Impressionists this afternoon?" she briefly enquired. "That's the sort of thing I require."

"The light is too bad after midday," said Val who, considering that Hannah had to be kept quiet for a full week, could see no reason at all for crowding up the entertainments. "We shall have to leave that till tomorrow. But there are lots of delightful churches to visit, which I am sure you'll want to see."

"Churches aren't particularly in my line; but I suppose it would be stupid not to see them. And, besides—yes—they may come in useful for Christmas cards. Did I tell you that I'm going in for them too?"

By the time the churches—or some of them—had been visited and the Austrian Impressionists revelled in, Hannah herself had discovered quite a quantity of practical sides to her prolonged sojourn, and become proportionately less impatient for the coming of the news from America. Both for Christmas cards and for Christmas numbers, the snow shovellers in the streets and the snow pictures to be had in the Prater were a mine of material—so she affirmed. And then the pigeons and the palaces! The Kodak, without which she never moved from home, was very busy in these days, snapshotting quaint buildings and quaint figures to the right and to the left.

"We must take her to the Klosterplatz," said Val to Marjorie. "It's the most Christmas-cardy place in Vienna."

And accordingly they went; and Hannah's store of films was increased by the portraits of several stone

Saints, and of various old women with pots, grouped in expectant attitudes around the back door of the monastery.

"I *must* have that old woman on the church-steps!" said Hannah, almost excitedly for her. "She's just made for a soap daub—'Before and after use'—don't you know? Only that I'll have to evolve the 'after' out of my inner consciousness. I wish that fat girl who is talking to her would go away! She doesn't fit in a bit. What can they be chattering about so long? She isn't buying anything."

"Telling her fortune, perhaps," suggested Marjorie. "She looks like a witch, doesn't she?"

The witch being snapshotted, came the turn of Number 17.

"Mummy would be sure to like a picture of it," declared Val, while her eyes went round the Platz a good deal less keenly than they had done on the occasion of the first inspection, and yet with the thought of the "signpost" stirring vaguely, though rather hopelessly, within her.

Just as Hannah had given the decisive click, there stepped out of the entrance of Number 17 a figure whose outline was familiar.

Having stood still for a moment in surprise, Baron Wallersdorf advanced towards the group.

"I hope I didn't spoil the picture by stepping out too suddenly?" he asked, the introduction over.

"Maybe you have," said Hannah bluntly. "I can't say till I've developed the films. Anyway, you're too modern to suit the frame."

"Desolated! If I'd guessed your intentions I'd have

made myself mediæval. But for paying an afternoon call, you see——”

“On the Kalnays, I suppose,” observed Val promptly, for she had not forgotten that the Kalnays had stepped into Mr. Dowell’s shoes in the shape of his flat.

“Exactly. On the Kalnays. They are having their ‘Jour.’ You don’t visit there, I believe?”

“No; and don’t feel the slightest desire to do so.”

The asperity of her own tone came as a surprise to Val; but not so to the astute Marjorie.

“But you won’t forget *our* ‘Jour,’ will you?” asked Wallersdorf, veering off dexterously into another branch of the subject. “And of course you’ll bring Miss Boxtton with you. My sisters will never forgive you if you don’t. They dote upon Art only a little less than upon the Theatre.”

“But I am *not* an artist,” began Hannah.

“Hold your tongue, Hannah!—Yes, we’ll bring her with us, if you’ll allow. There is always at least one artist at the ‘Jour,’” she explained to Hannah in an audible aside. “Grillmann, the greatest portrait painter, was there last time.”

“What, the man who did that woman with the muff?” exclaimed Hannah, while the illegal light of enthusiasm dawned in her eyes. “That would be quite too—I mean that it would be very interesting to make his acquaintance.”

“And I suppose Miss Boxtton will accompany you to the Opera Redoute? You could not well leave her alone, could you?”

“Of course she will come to the ‘Redoute,’”

decided Val, before Hannah had had time to open her mouth.

"You'll find a house full of material there," observed Wallersdorf, as though to clinch the matter.

After which remark Hannah gave up the attempt of opening her mouth.

Indeed, the process of keeping Hannah "quiet" proved to be a far easier task than anticipated. She went quite meekly to the 'Jour,' and came away from a prolonged conversation with the great portrait painter with that same wistful look on her face which she had worn on the steps of the Künstlerhaus; quite ready too, to claim the help of the Wallersdorfs, who dazzled her with hopes touching various private collections, as a rule jealously guarded from the public eye. She even—when it had been explained to her that she could hire a domino for the occasion—made no resistance worth mentioning as to the Opera Redoute, and found her reward; for in the crowd of pretty faces of the most opposite types, unmasked after midnight, and to which the stately walls of the most artistically satisfactory Opera House in Europe formed a fitting frame—there was "material" enough to last for a lifetime.

It was during the Opera Redoute that she pledged herself to go to the "Künstler-Abend," since to miss this unique opportunity of seeing the artistic world of Austria assembled—and in costumes of their own designing—would have been criminal, as Grillmann—the painter of the lady with the muff—explained to her. He had procured tickets for Mrs. White and her sister, and he hoped Miss Boxtton would accompany her friends.

Nor did he hope in vain; for by this time the

glamour was upon Hannah—the glamour, in first line, of this direct contact with Art; but in second line also a taste of something which had never yet come into her hard-worked life, and which appealed to the mere girl within her. Where dissipation and Art were so happily wedded as at the “Künstler-Abend” or at the wonderful “Deep Sea” Redoute, at which the huge Sophien-Saal was transformed into a marvellous likeness of the ocean’s floor, where mermaids and mermen glided about among giant branches of coral, and amid the débris of wrecked ships—resistance became hopeless. There seemed no further use in denying—even to herself—that the intoxication of the new surroundings had gone to her usually so steady head.

As for the heads of Val and of Marjorie, there was by this time—so far as steadiness could be spoken of—not so much as a pin to choose between them. Whatever might be the technical composition of the Vienna air at this, the height of the social season, the effect was most wonderfully to level out the differences between the practical and the sentimental members of the Wishart family. Not that Val ever allowed herself completely to lose sight of her actual mission, nor neglected to salve her conscience by the sporadic exchange of notes with Doktor Feintuch, but that she had frankly given up any pretence of being in a hurry to get home, and as frankly discussed with Marjorie the ways and means of covering expenses. These means were daily getting harder to achieve. The last remittance from Wimbledon had been expressly described as “for travelling expenses” and accompanied by the equally plain statement that no more could possibly be sent. There actually seemed

nothing for it but to take advantage of the credit which Frau Brauss, as well as various tradesmen, seemed quite ready to accord on the strength of the Wallersdorf intimacy. Val did so with a qualm, but still she did so, telling herself that Cousin Tom's money—which of course must be found some day—would make it all right. Meanwhile her economical instincts survived sufficiently to help her to do things as cheaply as was possible, and her wits kept alive enough to assist her in writing soothing and apparently reasonable letters to her mother, in reply to more and more urgent ones. In certain lucid moments astonishment at herself would overcome her, but these moments passed quickly. It was seldom her habit to do things by halves, and once having thrown the bridle on the neck of inclination, the surrender was as complete as any other of her actions.

What special reasons she had for just now resuming the crimping of her hair, and casting from her the elderly touches which had underlined the *chaperon*, was best known to herself though possibly not unguessed at by Marjorie. The first time that Val had appeared in an airy white ball-dress—for "real balls" had now crept in between the "Kegelabende" and the displays which as long as it had been decently possible, she had described as part of the sight-seeing process—people who had gauged Val at thirty, felt inclined to give her twenty at most.

"Our Vienna air seems to suit you most admirably," Wallersdorf, with eyes that were at once dazzled and perplexed, had said to her on that occasion. "You seem to get younger every day."

The same phenomenon was observed with delighted wonder by Bertherl and Lizzerl, with ill-disguised rage by Ilka Kalnay and her mother.

"That's something like your old self!" pronounced Gertie, who, together with Sandy, made rare and sporadic appearances at the Hotel Brauss, chiefly in order to reproach her friends—Hannah included—with their shameful neglect of music for the sake of mere frivolity, and then to disappear again into her own especial whirlpool, which, at this concert season, was eddying at a more giddy rate than ever.

An episode which, for many reasons, was enlightening, occurred about this time.

Coming home one evening, very tired and very happy, the girls were admitted by Frau Brauss in person, holding a wooden ladle in her hand—a large portion of her time, to the despair of her domestics, being spent in the kitchen, over-salting the soup or singeing the milk with octogenarian serenity. At this moment the wooden ladle seemed to vibrate in her hands, the result evidently of agitation.

"There are some things come for you," she quavered.

"Oh, the dresses, I suppose?"

"No—not dresses—quite other things."

She waved the ladle towards a pile in the ante-room, of which the most conspicuous ingredient was an iron chain, whose links seemed equal to tethering a full-grown battleship. Alongside reposed a professional-looking case—the sort of case patronised by surgeons. A large paper parcel, betraying the presence of a black,

masculine suit, and a small pyramid of flat cardboard boxes, completed the collection.

As Frau Brauss looked from the pile to the faces of her lodgers, the black thread net which confined her scanty locks might be seen to vibrate, just as did the ladle, with the movement of her shaking head.

For a moment both faces were blank. It was actually Marjorie who said first "The legacies!"

"To be sure—the legacies! I suppose this came from Doktor Feintuch?"

"Yes; that was the name the 'Dienstmann' mentioned. It took two of them to carry up that chain," said Frau Brauss in a voice as unsteady as her head and her hand. That English people were by nature eccentric, her long acquaintance with tourists had of course taught her, but she was no longer of an age to grapple with such occurrences.

"There's one good point about these things," decided Val in the privacy of their apartment, "they can be sold. That will help to pay the dressmaker's bill. You're agreed, I suppose? And the others will just have to be. We're not going to drag back five hundred pairs of satin shoes to England."

"But how about the evening suit?" asked Marjorie with wonderful innocence. "It's destined for Susie's young man, I know, but I'm sure she would not mind passing it on to you—supposing you had any use for it. It's very superior, evidently, and looks as if it would fit a big figure."

"Marjorie, you are detestable," was all that Val found to say—not even very fiercely. Though she added with decision "I'll ask Frau Brauss to send the

things to that place to which Herr Dottelzweig sent the ear-trumpets."

Which accordingly was done, amid a good many more vibrations of the black thread net upon the octogenarian head.

"Some day I suppose we shall come home and find the answer from America waiting," reflected Val, and was rather shocked to discover that the prospect did not gladden her one bit, and that her impatience at the leisureliness of Austrian ways had strangely diminished.

The reflection could not stay her from swimming with the current. That at moments, the current seemed mysteriously to turn against her, was only an inducement to strike out more boldly. Their enlarging circle of acquaintances was, very obviously, split into two camps; those who had adopted the "adventuress" theory and seemed consequently prone to purse their lips, and those who credited the legend of the "millions";—among these latter several of the wearers of the blue tunics, who however hopelessly smitten by Marjorie's charms could not afford to lose sight of the fact that the buried treasure would come in wonderfully useful for settling various financial obligations, which had been over-due—at compound interest—almost from time immemorial.

"You're coming with us to-night, of course?" asked Val of Hannah one evening, when the person who had received strict instructions to bring them back captive had been about three weeks in Vienna, and had quite given up making any remarks about departure.

"What's up to-night?"

"An Ice Feast. Starts with a costumed pageant, and goes on to ordinary mortals being let loose—by limelight of course and with a military band going. It's said to be like a chapter out of a fairy-tale."

"Costumes again? How fond they are of dressing up! Yes, of course I'll go; it sounds rather jolly," said Hannah, who—following Val's lead—had given up laboriously labelling her actions, just as she had given up attempting to repress the artist, who, hopelessly broken loose, revelled unashamed in her true element.

The silver mirror of the "Eislaufplatz," round whose edge the gaily costumed groups circled like a moving frame, might indeed be taken for a bit out of a fairy-tale. The February night, though keenly cold, was so mercifully still that in the pauses between the bursts of music, the crisp ring of skates upon the ice could be heard against the murmur of the streets.

To many waiting couples it was only when—the pageant having broken up—the arena was thrown open to all comers, that the real fairy-tale began.

Although both Val and Marjorie declared themselves out of practice it did not require much persuasion to allow hired skates to be affixed to their chilled feet, which strongly felt the need of exercise—while Hannah elected to share the Wallersdorf sisters' seat and fur rug. Marjorie, with brilliant cheeks and shining eyes, tottering along between two uniformed supporters, came near to wondering whether in time, this might not rival dancing. Val, under the protection of her "guardian angel" was already quite sure that it could.

"I can promise to keep my balance," he explained,

as, cautiously, they glided forward, "but I can't promise more."

"I'm sure you'll do that," agreed Val, who, despite her own uncertain feet, was enjoying a sensation of delightful security. "I only wonder that you ever took the trouble of learning skating at all. Isn't this another form of useless exercise?"

"Oh, one picks up that sort of thing when one is young and foolish, and then it sticks to one—willy-nilly."

"I hope I'm not pinching your hand too hard?"

"Not nearly hard enough for my taste."

"I've never known before what good ice is," observed Val, preferring to ignore not so much the last remark itself as the tone in which it was made. It was one of which Doctor White, had he existed, could not possibly have approved, and gave rise to the reflection—not quite for the first time either—that Baron Wallersdorf must be something of a "loose dog."

"It's funny to see so many grown-up people *not* looking like fools, although they are costumed. (Just look at that big snow-man picking up the tiny devil, and dusting him so carefully too!) Now in England, all those masques would be calling upon the ice to open and swallow them up."

"Or else they'd be turning the place into a bear-garden. You've got nothing between. You either take your pleasures much more sadly than we take our medicines, or else, you romp. Romping seems to be the only battering-ram ever successfully applied to the national shyness."

"What's the matter with Hannah, I wonder?" observed Val suddenly.

"*Is* there anything the matter with her?"

"Yes—she's waving her muff almost frantically for her—at me or at Marjorie, I suppose. Let us get back to the benches, please, I want to know what is up."

They glided forward as swiftly as the gay crowd, enlivened by the scattered fragments of the pageant, would allow of, Wallersdorf skilfully threading their way between costumed, and un-costumed, single and hand-linked skaters. Val's eyes, fixed upon the figure of her cousin, saw nothing of the obstacles in their path, and it must be supposed that Baron Wallersdorf's aroused curiosity had likewise for a moment caused his attention to stray, else the collision which happened could not well have taken place.

At any rate the next thing that Val was aware of was of sitting upon the ice, still slightly dizzy from collision with another moving body, while at two paces off the second party in the collision sprawled, star-fish fashion upon his back. Already a turbaned Indian prince—how incongruous he looked upon skates!—was coming to her aid, seconded promptly by Baron Wallersdorf who had only been brought to his knees.

"You haven't hurt yourself, have you?" he asked remorsefully.

"No, not at all; but how stupid of that boy! I suppose he isn't hurt either?"

"Thanks, no—I'm as fit as a fiddle," replied a voice whose sound caused the blood in Val's veins abruptly to congeal, and which apparently proceeded from the human star-fish.

Clinging helplessly to Wallersdorf's arm, she opened upon the youth, just now regaining the perpendicular, a pair of incredulous and affrighted eyes.

Not before he had quite regained it did certainty come.

"You!"

It was in a sort of suffocated shriek that the monosyllable was said; for the face into which she found herself gazing—illuminated beyond possibility of mistake by the searching limelight—was the plump and guinea-pig like face of her dear and only brother.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARJORIE TO THE RESCUE.

"KEEP your hair on!" remarked Ned, carefully dusting the knees of his knickerbockers, and broadly grinning with the delight of the astonishment caused. "Likewise I should recommend you to maintain your eyes within their sockets. Hannah has done enough staring for two, as it is. Yes, it's me, in the flesh, and no mistake."

To which Val, still steadying herself by Wallersdorf's arm, replied with quickly recovered self-control and with the frown of a judge: "Explain this, please! What are you doing here?"

"Skating; same as yourself. Just missed you at the hotel, and since the funny old lady who wears her hair in a net told me that you were on the ice I had the presence of mind just to drop my portmanteau and stick to my cab. I'm straight from the railway, you know—not even washed yet," explained Ned with another grin—of evident zest. "But that didn't seem a valid reason for missing a good skate."

"All this explains nothing. How do you come to be here at all? Don't tell me that Mother has sent you; because I wouldn't believe it."

"Well, not exactly *sent*," admitted Ned, the unabashed. "It was I who volunteered to come."

"And she consented?"

"Not exactly *consented*, either. Fact is, Mother has been worrying a good deal lately about your stopping away so long, and about Hannah having stuck fast too; so I suggested myself as far more competent than Hannah, and that she'd better let me fetch the whole lot of you home. Upon which she laughed and said that perhaps it might come to that yet. Well, it happened that next day I had to go into London to have a tooth stopped—a real tooth, you know, honour bright! and when I got out at Victoria there was a boat-train just getting up steam, and it struck me how tremendously it would simplify matters to start straight off. Or perhaps it may have struck me a little earlier, for I happened to have all my savings in my pocket, and those of Susie too, which a sort of presentiment had caused me to borrow. And then there was the money for the dentist which wouldn't be wanted now. I reckoned up that by travelling third and living on bread-crusts I could just manage it—and I did; but, Lord, ain't I hungry! I haven't had a square meal for thirty-six hours!"

"Poor boy!" exclaimed Val, relaxing for a moment, only to resume the judicial attitude in the next.

"In other words: you bolted?"

"Well, you may call it bolting if you like; but that was only in order to save Mother from any agonies of indecision she might have had about sending me. And it isn't particularly different, either, from what you are doing yourself—overstaying your time in this disgraceful way. Did it never occur to you that other people

might want to get hold of some of the good times you seem to be having? Marjorie's letters to Sue weren't a particular inducement to stay at Wimbledon, you know. And wasn't I just jolly right to come? though a skate wasn't a thing I reckoned with at all. We're up to our ears in slush at home."

"So I suppose the next thing to be expected is Susie's appearance?" said Val dropping the judicial attitude in favour of a lighter treatment of the subject, which, on the whole, seemed desirable.

"She'd have come with me like a shot if it hadn't been for leaving Mother alone. Of course she's feeling dreadfully out of it, poor brat, but I promised to bring her a box of chocolate from one of those ripping confectioners mentioned by Marjorie. But, I say—talking about eating—how about supper?"

"There's an excellent restaurant close by," put in Wallersdorf, breaking the discreet silence in which he had till now assisted at the explanatory dialogue. "Shall I summon the other ladies, Mrs. White?"

"Mrs. how much?" enquired Bob with a gape.

"It's all right—I'll explain later," Val managed to whisper, though a shudder of cold, not due to the temperature, had very palpably run down her spine. This, certainly, was not the moment to be unmasked as Miss Wishart.

"Hadn't you better go back to the hotel and wash before you eat?" she suggested aloud.

"Wash!" almost shouted Bob, with as much horror in tone and mien as a hydrophobia patient could have shown. "To the Dickens with water! It's food that I want!"

The supper which followed, and which Baron Wallersdorf insisted on watering with champagne, in honour of the starving traveller, was among the gayest spots of this gay winter, and was done full justice to not by the starving traveller alone. Yet upon the gaiety of the evening there inevitably followed for Val one of those lucid moments, which unfortunately never lasted long enough to bear substantial fruit.

Ned's appearance on the scene was not only startling in itself, but likewise highly inconvenient from a financial point of view; meaning, as it did, the hiring of another room, however modest, and the feeding of another mouth—and this not a modest one. The simplest thing, certainly, would be to send him straight back again; but to this course there were two objections: the first, that means to make him go were conspicuously absent, the second, that the money for even a third-class ticket was so very badly needed for other purposes—for the wind-up of the carnival, for instance, now close at hand.

Of course, there was another and still simpler solution; that of their all going back together and at once, leaving the carnival to its own devices. But this solution was not looked at very seriously. To decamp now, on the verge of the social season's climax, was almost beyond human nature. Inevitably it would look like flight. How the inimical section of their acquaintances would chuckle and wag their heads! How a certain pair of black eyes would sparkle with satisfied spite! Why, even the family honour called upon them to stay, since their disappearance at this particular moment would undoubtedly stamp them as adventuresses.

No, the best they could do was to see the carnival out. If by the time it was out the answer from America had not yet come Val would turn a deaf ear to further allurements and her back on the City of Enticement. True, from what she had gathered, the cinders of Ash Wednesday were not able quite to extinguish the revels of the light-hearted capital; true also that there had been some talk of one of these charity shows which are among the features of Lent, and of one too which would borrow from its frame a special charm, seeing that the veteran monarch had placed Schönbrunn at the disposal of the committee; but about these things Val meant to be firm. And, in order to make a beginning of firmness, she would pay a visit to Doktor Feintuch next day, and would likewise stir up her "illegal adviser" to a greater activity than he had, so far, displayed.

As for keeping Bob "quiet" until Ash Wednesday there was no problem here, as there had been in Hannah's case. So long as the ice lasted he would be happily occupied; and already he had found out—from Baron Wallersdorf, who had been most ready to enlighten him, that there was excellent tobogganing to be had within easy reach of the capital. Another soothing letter would have to be written, of course, but she was gaining practice in that line. Thus Val reflected in the solitude of her room while Marjorie and Hannah slept soundly after the long, enjoyable evening, and while Ned, recovered from his fit of hydrophobia and properly tubbed, snored somewhere in the neighbourhood.

The visit to Doktor Feintuch was paid next day, with the usual negative result. For although the as-

surances she received in the Grüne Gasse were at least as soothing as those given to Mrs. Wishart, they presented no concrete foundation upon which to lean. The enquiries had not gone to sleep—oh, certainly not—but these things were always apt to move “softly.” It was a great deal already to have ascertained that the Pflug couple had disembarked at New York. In due time—presumably within the next few days, though Doktor Feintuch could not state his professional honour that it might not be weeks—their present abode would infallibly be ascertained. He would write again; yes, with pleasure, he could even cable, if desired—but that of course, would increase the expense.

“Oh, no—don’t cable!” said Val in a fright. The word “expense” had already begun to get onto her nerves. “Only be sure to let me know the moment you hear.”

And after that it was time to see about her frock for next day’s ball—merely a freshened-up frock, but which, on this very account, demanded more thought—and America sank back into a distance for whose dimness the leagues of ocean were not solely responsible.

It was on Ash Wednesday itself that the next lucid interval occurred.

In the early morning hours of that day, Val, goaded by the spurs of conscience, and with a head that ached from last night’s dissipation, sat down resolutely to compare the remaining resources with the liabilities incurred. Some obscure instinct had kept her from doing it earlier; she did not want to have her last palmy days darkened by the shadow of any too distinctly outlined

cloud. But now the moment had come for analysing the cloud.

She had expected unfavourable results, and yet she felt appalled. Never before had she lived upon credit, and was now tasting of the pernicious fruits of that so banefully facile fashion of *not* paying one's way.

Having made exhaustive calculations Val, for the first time in her life, experienced a real feeling of panic. To leave for England at once was absolutely impossible, for the simple reason that a small army of creditors would bar the passage. The alternative seemed to lie between giving them the slip and writing for more money, one being exactly as unfeasible as the other. What other course remained?

With her aching head between her hands, Val considered the question. For one wild moment the name "Walersdorf" had flashed through her mind, only to be indignantly put aside. Exactly because she knew them to be both rich and open-handed would she rather incur public disgrace than apply to them in her need. At the mere thought of doing so the blood burned in her cheeks.

"It's a horrible muddle!" she sighed in a fit of despondency, for which the Ash Wednesday atmosphere was partly responsible. The consciousness that the end of this delightful episode was near—*must* be near, the consciousness in especial of how Ilka Kalnay's face would beam over the field cleared of all rivalry, weighed upon her with depressing conviction.

And her face must have mirrored her feelings; for presently, as she still sat there in a brown study, she

felt a soft arm stealing round her neck; and Marjorie still in her nightgown—asked with a kiss:

“What’s it all about, Val? There wasn’t anything wrong with last night, was there?”

“No, not with last night, but with to-day and to-morrow—there’s a lot wrong there. Oh, Marjorie,” it was the touch of that soft arm which had somehow determined the burst of confidence; “the fact is we’re in an awful fix. I think I must tell you about it.”

“Tell me,” encouraged Marjorie, looking, as she sat down upon the nearest chair, like one of those very superior wax dolls that are sold in muslin shifts, and destined to be dressed up by deft maternal hands.

“You’d better begin before Hannah comes back!” for Hannah, be it here observed, had been revelling in some distant gallery since the early morning hours.

“You see, I had really meant not to wait for the American news any longer, but just pack up and start for home as soon as the carnival was over.”

“Oh, had you?” said Marjorie in a slightly more reserved tone.

“Yes, and I’ve just discovered that it’s impossible.”

“Ah!”

To look too ostentatiously relieved would be indecent at this moment, as Marjorie felt, for which reason she kept her eyes carefully on the carpet.

And then Val unbosomed herself, for the mere sake of the relief—for how should Marjorie be of any use at so critical a juncture, or how should her empty head discover a solution where Val’s own businesslike one had failed?

“But if it’s only that we can’t pay our debts and

can't take our tickets, surely the obvious thing is to stop on here and wait for the legacy?" was what Marjorie said, and very serenely too, having attentively listened.

"Make more debts, in other words? I could almost decide for that if it was a solution, but it isn't; because, you see, we haven't even got enough for current expenses; not enough to pay for our daily dinner, nor for cabs or anything."

"Ah, that's another matter!" agreed Marjorie with abruptly clouded serenity.

"I can't possibly ask Mummy for more money, you see. Ned tells me that she is beginning to be in straits already."

"No, of course you can't."

And with great decision Marjorie added:

"The money has just got to be found!"

"Find it, then!" said Val, laughing a little hopelessly.

To this Marjorie did not immediately reply. She had fallen into a pensive attitude, elbow on knee and chin in hand, such as might be assumed by the doll if highly articulated.

With an amused smile upon her lips Val contemplated her sister.

"What are you thinking of, Marjorie?"

"Of how to find the money. I don't think it ought to be a bit difficult."

"To steal it, you mean? From Frau Brauss, perhaps?"

"No—to borrow it—from the Jews. You probably don't happen to know that this capital just swarms with

Jews, whose sole occupation is to run after people and lay their money-bags at their feet. It's the easiest place in the world to get money in—so I've been told."

"By whom, if I may ask? You seem wonderfully well informed."

"By Lieutenant Mohacs, amongst others—" replied Marjorie readily. "He assured me that nothing makes them happier than being asked for money—and he told me such an amusing story about a varnished bank-note."

When Val had heard the story she laughed—less hopelessly this time, for she had caught a glimmer of a possible road out of the present pass.

"Well, if a charitable Hebrew would lay a bank-note on this table here, I would certainly *not* get it varnished."

"He'll not lay one—he'll lay a dozen bank-notes, if you want them—unless Lieutenant Mohacs was talking nonsense, which I'm sure he wasn't; his eyes are too beautifully black for that," assured Marjorie, with a lapse into her usual system of logic.

"It sounds tempting, certainly; but how do you mean to get at these useful Jews? Won't it be a little awkward to ask Lieutenant Mohacs for an address?"

"Awkward? Not a bit of it!" asserted Marjorie who seemed, unexpectedly, to have assumed the guidance of events. "To an Austrian cavalry officer, borrowing money is a far more normal state of existence than not borrowing it. I've learnt a great deal more about the army here than you have," explained Marjorie with conscious satisfaction. "I'll just tell him that we're afraid of being ordered home at once if we write for

more money—the truth, in fact—and ask him for the address of his own tame Jew—I know he has got one especial one. It can be done to-morrow, since it's the Wallersdorf's 'Jour' and he happened to mention that he would be there."

"I suppose there is really no other way for it. If it wasn't for Cousin Tom's money it would be foolish; but it stands to reason that the hoard has got to be found some day soon."

"Of course it stands to reason. But, I say, Val, you won't borrow more money than we need just for going on with, will you?" asked Marjorie with a recrudescence of anxiety. "The percentages are rather high, you know. To borrow the journey money for instance, would surely be an extravagance."

"I suppose it would," agreed Val, though without meeting Marjorie's eye.

CHAPTER XV.
THE "COLLECTOR."

WHATEVER Lieutenant Mohacs' feelings may have been on being consulted by Marjorie next day at the "Jour," it is safe to assert that their nature was mixed. To be asked by a young lady whom you ardently admire and have been accustomed to view illumined by the halo of millions, for the address of a money-lender, is to receive a shock in various parts of your constitution. True there had been whispers touching the hollowness of these millions, but Lieutenant Mohacs and various of his comrades had been among those who had turned a deaf ear to these insinuations, perhaps because it was a case of the "wish being father to the thought." The inevitable money-marriage which alone could save the career of these promising youths was ever before their eyes, but in the shadow of that fate sentiment still flourished. If the same end was to be reached by means of a delightful little "Engländerin" with a complexion of milk and roses in place of a creature with a Semitic profile and the voice of a peacock—what bliss! The belief in the buried millions was far too pleasant to be easily relinquished.

But—warrior as he was—Lieutenant Mohacs was

trained to bear shocks; and after the first moment of consternation, compensating reflections came to his aid. Firstly, it was gratifying to have been selected as confidant rather than Przozowski, for instance, who would have been equally competent in this matter. Secondly and chiefly, came the rescuing thought that future hopes stood as intact as ever, since, as long as they remained buried, the millions could, of course, not be of much good, and therefore the fact of the heiresses being in monetary straits was perfectly reconcilable with their existence.

These combined reflections helped the Lieutenant quickly to regain his presence of mind and manfully to rise to the situation.

A few hundred Kronen? Was that all that was wanted? Nothing easier than to procure them. It would only require a word of his to Herr Rappaport, with whom he was rather well acquainted, to produce them. When should it be? To-morrow? By all means. The address? Oh, he begged that the ladies should not burden their memories with the address. Nothing would give him greater pleasure than to be allowed personally to conduct Mrs. White and Miss Wishart to the presence of the holder of money-bags. Long before the end of the "Jour" the hour and place of meeting for next day had been fixed.

At the last moment Lieutenant Mohacs seemed to be seized by some sort of scruple.

"You know, it is just possible that he may prefer to give you the money in kind rather than in cash," he explained rather hurriedly to Marjorie, ere they parted. "He is not a money-lender alone, he is also a dealer—

in various things, though he prefers to call himself a collector."

"I don't quite understand," began Marjorie. But Mohacs, aware of the approach of his comrade with the Polish name and the "die-away" eyes, could only reply in a hasty whisper—

"It is quite simple. You will see to-morrow."

Nothing could exceed the punctuality with which the two parties to the arrangement met at the appointed spot. Val and Marjorie, who, with the idea of being unobscure, had donned their soberest attire, were almost shocked at the splendour of Lieutenant Mohacs, in whom the elation of the chosen guide had quite triumphed over any wish for obscurity.

"I am so sorry to give you this trouble," began Val, reeling off a carefully prepared and studiously airy speech; "but I think my sister has explained what would be the result of our writing home for more supplies."

The lively little hussar said that she had explained, and that the mere thought of that result would have driven him to coin gold from the pavement stones, had it been necessary, which, however, it was not, since Herr Rappaport would, doubtless, come up to all requirements.

In the "Electric" which bore the party eastward conversation of any private nature was difficult, for which reason Marjorie could place no further question touching that remark which had puzzled her yesterday.

"It is not a very elegant quarter of the town,"

Mohacs explained apologetically, when they had alighted. "Something like a scrap of Palestine. It calls itself the Leopoldstadt, but by rights it should be called 'Abrahamstadt!'"

The names above the shops, the number of hooked noses, as well as something indefinably slovenly about the noisy thoroughfare, seemed to confirm the truth of the definition. The side-street they presently turned into was not noisy, but made up for this by being doubly dirty, and adorned with a gutter which smacked far more of the province than of the capital. Carefully, yet intrepidly, Lieutenant Mohacs' beautifully varnished boots picked their way along. The girls followed in some dismay, their confidence kept up by the unhesitating bearing of their guide. It did not look like a place to come to for money, but apparently Lieutenant Mohacs knew what he was about.

"Here we are!" he said, standing still before an entrance which looked as if it had got here by mistake, for a flight of countrified stone steps, flanked by a defective but curiously wrought iron balustrade, led up to a door which had once been painted green. The whole house, for the matter of that, seemed to have got here by mistake. To a connoisseur in buildings the steep roofs and square corner-tower adorned with a clock which had long since ceased to go, together with the clumsy shutters bearing traces of the same green colour which adorned the door, would have proclaimed the former "Jagdschloss"—the shooting-box of some sporting noble once standing amid the freedom of field and forest, but long since made a prisoner of by the invading town. A pair of antlers over the entrance door

would undoubtedly have been more in place than the tin shield which dangled there.

"Do we go up those steps?" asked Val a little doubtfully.

"No, that's the way to the beer-shop. It's down these steps that we go," explained Mohacs, once more apologetic, and indicating another flight leading down to the "Souterrain," which in former days had presumably housed the followers of the noble sportsman. "I hope you don't mind? Herr Rappaport is very economical in his habits—except in his dress, by-the-by; but that works into the business."

In a silence full of uneasy surmises, the two girls followed their guide down the steps, hollowed by the rains of a couple of centuries. In a low-ceilinged passage within, a much arabesqued calling-card nailed to a door announced that Laib Rappaport dwelt here. Without wasting any time in looking for a non-existent bell the Lieutenant rapped loudly upon the door with the hilt of his sword, which he had unbuckled for the purpose.

The sound was probably a familiar one, for almost immediately a key grated in the lock.

The first sight of Herr Rappaport—for the door was personally opened—was to Val and Marjorie a mixture of relief and disappointment. A patriarchally white beard, surmounted by a pair of cunning eyes, and balanced by a general "cringe" of manner, had been the very least they had expected. About the costume, too, some touches of the picturesque had been instinctively looked for, such, for instance, as horn spectacles, down-trodden slippers, and possibly a flowered

dressing-gown. A money-lender without a beard and without slippers seemed an anomaly. And now they found themselves confronted by a man in middle years, whom at the first cursory glance—provided that it was very cursory—might almost have been mistaken for a gentleman, wearing a distinctly "smart" tweed suit, a collar of the latest pattern, and a necktie of unmistakably sporting character. Instead of slippers, patent-leather shoes almost as shiny as those of Lieutenant Mohacs' himself; in place of the spectacles a gold-rimmed pince-nez, and in place of a beard, a stiffly waxed brown moustache, one shade lighter than the carefully parted and pomaded hair. But for a certain exotic-looking gleam in the brown eyes—a gleam which gave him a family likeness to Doktor Feintuch—doubts as to his nationality would have been quite admissible.

It is true that he had but to open his lips in order to dispel these doubts, even in Val and Marjorie, little versed as they were in varieties of pronunciation.

"Ah, Herr Leutnant!" came the ready greeting, together with a radiant smile of welcome. Here he stopped short, for he had perceived the Lieutenant's companions.

"Friends of the Herr Leutnant, no doubt? They are as welcome as himself. Pray enter, ladies! Pray enter!" And he stood aside to let them pass, which they did with a duck of the head, the doorway having been by no means calculated for the dimensions of modern hats.

"'Will you walk into my parlour?' said the spider to the fly."

The line hummed persistently in Val's head, though, to look at her, no one would have guessed it, so bold a face did she put upon it.

Within, the first impression received was that they had got into a curiosity shop by mistake, or possibly the mistake was not really so great as it appeared. Not only the number but also the nature of the articles of furniture was bewildering—cabinets, tables, sofas, screens, none of which seemed to have any relation to the other, stood as closely packed as space permitted, groaning under the weight of antique-looking clocks, of moth-eaten draperies, and of whatever pictures had not found place upon the low walls. Despite a vaulted ceiling, which you could almost touch with your hand, it was a large apartment—probably the erst-while kitchen of the "Jagdschloss"—witness a fireplace whose dimensions seemed calculated for the legendary "whole ox," and now serving as a niche for a miscellaneous collection of damaged statuary. Many may have been the freshly killed stags, the blood-stained wild boars which had been cast down upon this stone floor, where rolled-up Persian carpets and yet more superfluous pictures now helped to make progress difficult.

"The ladies will excuse," explained Herr Rappaport; "my apartment is always a little full. It comes from my incorrigible habit of collecting. It is something in the make of my mind. There is no pleasure in life to me equal to that of antiquities and of Art. A little bit of a *connessor*, that's what I am," he modestly added. "And somehow I never find time to put the things into proper order."

At this moment Marjorie uttered an exclamation,

for out of the wilderness of furniture, from behind a Japanese screen, there had appeared a uniformed figure, whom even by the somewhat doubtful light of the high-set, grated windows was recognisable as the Polish lieutenant who waltzed so divinely, and whose "die-away" eyes abruptly became very much alive at sight of Mohacs' companions.

The pause that followed was one of mutual consternation. Upon which Mohacs, with recovered presence of mind, waved his hand in a vaguely explanatory fashion, in which the pride of his confidential position managed to find expression.

"'Servus,' Przozowski! We've got a little business to do with Herr Rappaport, as I see that you have. Hope you've made a good job of it."

"Much the same as usual, thank you. Good day, Mrs. White!" murmured the Pole, transferring from his right to his left hand a case containing a pair of silver-mounted pistols which he had been in the act of examining and which were an obstacle to shaking hands.

"Will the ladies not take place?" broke in the voice of Herr Rappaport, as he pushed forward two chairs of completely different patterns. "I fear I have no suitable refreshments to offer, since this 'Slivowitz' is somewhat strong for such tender palates; and I don't know whether I dare suggest cigarettes," indicating as he spoke a small inlaid table upon which stood a liqueur bottle and smoking utensils—things which no doubt had played their part in the enticement of some fly into the parlour.

"No, thank you; we don't smoke," said Val, a little stiffly, for the inopportune meeting annoyed her, and

ignoring the chair. It seemed safer, somehow, to keep to one's feet. Meanwhile Marjorie, in the background, was rapidly explaining matters to the still-amazed Lieutenant Przowski, who was passing through exactly the same emotions undergone yesterday by his comrade, aggravated by the thought that he was not the chosen helper, and that it was Mohacs who at that very moment by a flowery little speech was playing the protector. In that speech great stress was laid upon the purely temporary nature of the embarrassment, and appeal made, with much eloquence of gesture, to the many occasions in which Herr Rappaport had proved himself obliging, the confident hope being expressed that he would not cover him—Lieutenant Mohacs—with confusion, by disappointing the ladies.

"It is quite against my principles to disappoint ladies, or gentlemen either," assured Herr Rappaport, with a bow which had been as carefully modelled upon the manners of the military as were his clothes upon those of his civilian clients. Had his heels worn spurs they could scarcely have clicked more sharply together.

"Let us talk this out, by all means; but surely not standing?"

"Better sit down," whispered Mohacs to Val. "Puts him in a good humour."

"It is only a question of five hundred Kronen, and of a few weeks," explained Val, rather loftily, as she reluctantly complied. Without further invitation, Herr Rappaport followed suit, carefully hitching up his tweed trousers as he did so, and giving to his legs a position which reduced the danger of creasing to a minimum.

"Five hundred Kronen!" he repeated with a fine shade of consternation laid into his voice, meant to imply that the mention of so vast a sum almost took his breath away.

"Let's leave out the preliminaries and come to the point," promptly broke in Lieutenant Mohacs. "We all know that money is as common with you as straw. The only question is whether you are willing to part with it."

"As straw!" repeated Herr Rappaport, raising his eyes to the vaulted ceiling, as though calling it to witness of this monstrous imputation. "That is the mistake you young gentlemen are always making about me. Am I a money-lender? Not a bit of it. How should a modest person like myself, who happens to have a knack for picking up odds and ends, have money like straw? It all comes from my so foolishly soft heart, and from my not being able to see a young man in difficulties without hastening to his aid. He comes to me, for instance, and says: 'Herr Rappaport, I must have a hundred florins before night, or I am a lost man.' I haven't got the hundred florins handy, but neither can I let him go away in despair. So I say: 'Look round my little place and choose something that takes your fancy. I will give it you in place of money, at a merely nominal price. You can turn it into cash at a moment's notice.' All he has to do is to sign a paper. And he does so and comes back to thank me next day, and as likely as not brings another comrade with him who also is in difficulties; and again I am so foolish as to listen to their supplication and part with another of my treasures, which to a *connessor* is a real pain. That is the way I have so many friends, in especial among the

cavalry. Always had a weakness for the cavalry. You can see how I stand with them by those photographs over there, and by the postcards they write me. Bless you, the number of merry nights I have passed with those dear boys, and the number of champagne bottles we have emptied together!"

With a wave of his heavily jewelled hands Herr Rappaport indicated a line of photos on the wall, of an exclusively military character and flanked by two rosettes cunningly composed of picture postcards.

The mystery both of his attire and of his manners seemed explained, since a person accustomed to show himself in public in juvenile military company may be excused for cultivating "smartness" by all the means at his command.

"That's not the question," observed Mohacs. "The question is only whether or not you are going to give the ladies five hundred Kronen?"

"You ask of me the impossible," said the *connessor* in an almost heart-broken voice.

"Then I don't know what we came here for," said Val, rising as she spoke.

She would have added "Good day!" and turned to the door, had she not at that moment caught Mohacs' undismayed eye, and read there some sort of assurance that matters were not nearly so hopeless as on the surface might appear.

Before she had spoken Herr Rappaport was off again.

"If the ladies had happened to mention half of that sum," so he mournfully suggested, it was just within the bounds of possibility that he might have managed to scrape that much together. And for the other half—

supposing it was really pressing—perhaps they would discover something within this apartment which they might be sure to turn into money before the evening. One of these old cabinets, for instance; or else a picture?

"I have so many pictures here that I cannot even hang them all up," he explained with a patient smile. "It is for my pleasure that I buy them, but should the ladies insist upon it—and to oblige Lieutenant Mohacs—I could make up my mind to part with one or two of these. I often have to part with my pictures. Only yesterday a cadet insisted on carrying off a whole collection of Arabian pictures which I was particularly fond of."

"He means pictures of Arabian horses," expounded Przowski from the background.

"Maybe. They were horses. He declared that since he was entering the cavalry he must have horse pictures in his room, or else he would be laughed at."

"Are you sure it wasn't you who said that to him?" suggested Mohacs. But Herr Rappaport was apparently deaf upon that ear, for he continued undisturbed.

"I never can resist them. I'm butter in the hands of these young men—positively butter. Now my watch, for instance. I had picked up a very curious old watch which had quite taken my fancy, and which went as well as any new one. And just imagine what occurs! I happen to pull it out the other day while a visitor is here, and immediately he takes a fancy to it and insists upon having it. Why, the very rings off my fingers I have sometimes had to give up."

"Yes, we know all about that, Herr Rappaport," cut

in Mohacs, aware of signs of impatience about Val. "But this doesn't further our business."

"To be sure, to be sure! Now, one of these pictures, for instance. If the ladies have anything of my love of Art—I confess that I have the same weakness for Art as for the cavalry."

"The ladies have far too much love of Art to buy any of your pictures," decided Mohacs. "You had better come out with those other two hundred and fifty Kronen."

"Or one of these Rococo clocks?" went on the money-lender, assailed anew by the convenient deafness. "No? Jewelry then. That is the thing for ladies! And I happen to have recently purchased some rather curious articles. Picked them up by the merest chance."

As he found his way to a distant safe Mohacs followed on his heels, talking in an emphatic undertone, which no doubt was rich in information and assurances.

Val, left standing alone—for Marjorie was flirting with Przozowski—swept a rather despairing glance about her. Already the fly was beating its wings within the net. It is true that in this case the walking out of the parlour would have been comparatively simple—with empty hands. But how do without the money? Rapidly she reviewed the situation, only to reach the old conclusion.

By this time Herr Rappaport was back again, holding two rather handsome-looking rings in the palm of his hand.

"Here we are!" he said, with sudden cheeriness. "One for each of the ladies—just in case they should prefer to keep them, after all. I think the sizes will fit.

A sapphire for the blonde lady, a ruby for the brunette—nothing could suit better. Such a beautiful setting! And such a bargain, too! One hundred and fifty Kronen for the two! A ridiculous price, but I happened to pick them up below their value, and so can afford to let them go cheap! It's a disgrace to me to make so bad a bargain, but I cannot bear to see ladies in even a temporary embarrassment. Shall we close the bargain, Madam? Two hundred and fifty Kronen down, and these beautiful rings in place of the rest? It's positively the same as if I put five hundred Kronen into your hand."

"But I don't want to buy rings," said Val, exasperated by the situation as well as by the eagerly insinuating tone into which the money-lender had instinctively fallen; "nor to sell them either. I should not even know how to set about it."

"That part is quite simple," murmured Mohacs beside her. "Only got to give them to a 'Dienstmann' and send him round."

"It is the only way I can do it," sighed Herr Rappaport. "And even this is a sacrifice—to oblige the Herr Leutnant. But if the ladies are not agreed—shall I lock the rings away?"

"Not yet!" broke in Marjorie, who with dread saw the so necessary sum escaping them. "Let me look at them again!"

"They're beautiful rings," she whispered to Val. "We're sure to sell them for more than he says."

"Do *you* think so?" asked Val of Mohacs in French, for she was floundering in the depths of perplexity. "Shall I take them?"

Just perceptibly Mohacs raised his shoulders.

"That depends upon whether you really must have the money. At any rate, there's no other way of doing business with him."

Val stood irresolute. "Must have the money?" Alas, yes. Had not the dressmaker sent in her bill for the second time?

"There is a piece of paper all ready," Rappaport's voice, still insinuating, was saying.

"I'll write it out. You have only got to put your name below the declaration and the two Herren Leutnants will kindly be witnesses. Now, what shall I do? Shall I bring out the inkstand or put away the rings?"

"Bring out the inkstand!" said Marjorie decisively, and by a silent shrug of her shoulders Val acquiesced.

Her British spirit was in revolt at this illegal way of doing business, for in the bottom of her heart she was quite sure of being "done"; yet the desire to put an end to the distasteful scene was almost as urgent as the urgency of the case itself, producing together a sort of "devil-may-care" mood, of which she would never have believed herself capable.

The inkstand being brought, and the declaration of having received five hundred and twenty Kronen (the twenty representing the interest, for three weeks, as was explained to her) being written out, she might still have hesitated, had not at that moment another sword-hilt rapped sharply against the door. An end, at any price—an end without further witnesses! was the thought in her mind as with tight-set lips and a hand that she forcibly steadied she put her name to the document—her fictitious name, necessarily. It was only as she took

the pen that she recognised the necessity, and the thought as to the possible complications thus entailed put the crown to her perturbation.

With the rings safely stowed in her handbag and two hundred and fifty Kronen in her purse, having responded to Herr Rappaport's effusive farewells by a grim silence, she now mounted the hollowed-out stone steps with the rest of the party behind her.

"I don't really think you have made such a very bad bargain," remarked Mohacs as they gained the level of the street.

He had resumed his apologetic tone, abashed by Val's mien.

"I hope, anyway, that you'll have better luck with the rings than a friend of mine had with a picture which that vampire fastened on to him," observed Przozowski, whose escort they now likewise enjoyed. "It's supposed value was two hundred Kronen, but it took a 'Dienstmann' three months' hard work to place it for fifty Kronen, of which twenty represented the value of the frame."

"Good gracious! Is *that* the sort of person he is?" exclaimed Val, with a shock of terror.

"No, no, it is not so bad as that," came Mohacs' soothing assurance. "It's true that he's rather exorbitant, but he's far the most convenient money-lender in Vienna, so far as securities go."

"Not even the most penniless cadet ever leaves that place quite empty-handed. And if it amuses him to call himself a collector instead of a money-lender, what are the odds, after all?"

"That picture," pursued the Pole, who seemed to be

thoroughly enjoying the discomfiture of the fair ones who had *not* confided in him, "was made a present of by the buyer to a man at Budapest, who sent it back by return of post, with a declaration that he declined to live in the same house with it. I believe it occasioned the severance of a lifelong friendship."

At this even Val laughed, and closed the subject by saying—

"Well, before evening we shall know how much Herr Rappaport has made out of us."

Before evening they did know—approximately.

It was on their return from the opera, to which the Wallersdorf's had taken them, that they found the little wizened old "Dienstmann" to whom the rings had been entrusted, sitting in the ante-room with his red cap between his hands.

"I've got old without such shame coming upon me!" he exclaimed pathetically as he rose. "To eighteen jewellers and to nine pawnbrokers have I been, and out of each door I had to go, blushing. They laughed in my face when I spoke of two hundred and fifty Kronen; one hundred and ten was the highest they would give; and that I daren't take for fear of your gracious anger. Here are the rings back again. And when next you want to sell them choose a younger man than myself. The young are unabashed; but my white hairs cannot stand the ridicule."

And he went off, with his hard-earned pay in his pocket, still mumbling and apparently still blushing at the recollection of the ignominy incurred.

"He's an old cheat!" decided Marjorie. "We'll take them round ourselves to-morrow."

They took them round; and, at the end of an exhausting day, wrote an indignant letter to Herr Rappaport—for another personal interview not even Val could summon courage—and received a doubtfully orthographical but charmingly amiable reply. Herr Rappaport was so desolated to hear that the beautiful rings had not yet found the appreciation they deserved, and which they were sure to meet with, given a little patience. As to the suggestion that he should take them back, he was truly sorry not to be able to entertain it, such a course being entirely against his business principles, which were of the strictest.

"And this is the man who has my signature for five hundred and twenty Kronen," thought Val as she read; "and three days of the three weeks are gone already! Oh, Cousin Tom! Cousin Tom! *Where* have you hidden your money?"

At that very moment Marjorie entered, radiant.

"Oh, Val, such a treat! I've just met Netti Hinterhuber, the Emperor's flirt, you know, and she's offered to take us to Schönbrunn on the 27th—it's the dress rehearsal; almost as good as the representation, and won't cost anything. We'll go, won't we?"

"Why not?" recklessly laughed Val, once more seized by the "devil-may-care" mood.

"After all, why not be hung for a sheep as well as for a lamb?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DRESS REHEARSAL.

ON the 27th of February among the traffic of the Mariahilferstrasse a string of carriages might have been observed closely following upon each other, and affording glimpses of youthful heads of every imaginable shade of darkness and fairness, but none of which seemed to belong to the present century. For this was the day of the dress rehearsal for the grand charity performance at Schönbrunn, and Petyl—the court-hairdresser—had just sent forth from his premises this collection of *têtes parées*, which were presently to be kept in countenance by the “Altwiener” costumes to be donned on the spot. Their fresh faces made brilliant by the inevitable *rouge*, and framed by quaint bunches of curls, coquettishly set off by roses, lilacs, poppies, forget-me-nots, they peeped out of the windows, seeming to the passers-by like a tangible promise of the spring which already lay in the air, and before whose balmy breath the ice had already vanished, to the great aggrievement of Ned, at this very moment consoling himself among the more stubborn snows of the Semmering.

In one of the carriages sat Val and Marjorie, in the company of Netti Hinterhuber whose massive charms the straight-parted, thick hair and the two solid pink

roses plastered behind her ears, set off to perfection. Her naïve eyes were untroubled by the thought of the coming ordeal. What amused her chiefly was being rouged—"like a real actress" as she had observed to Marjorie. But the colour had been sparingly applied. Where natural roses so abounded artificial ones were well-nigh superfluous, so the court-hairdresser had judged. Although his scrimpiness somewhat disappointed Netti, nothing else disturbed her. The "Kaiser Dirndl's" digestion was too good to allow of the existence of "nerves"; but her small and fussy mother made up for it by writhing in her corner and sweating at every pore. The honour done to her daughter—for the charity show bore a highly aristocratic character, and Netti would be almost the only untitled performer—had gratified her to the point of almost turning her head, while at the same time plunging her into a sea of anxieties. The mere thought of any possible hitch, of Netti, for instance, having forgotten the steps of the "Schubert Tanz," practised so assiduously for a week, and of her consequently not shining as it was her right, almost her duty to shine at Schönbrunn—was enough to undermine whatever composure Frau Hinterhuber may ever have possessed. But for the aged Emperor's fancy—so her strong commonsense told her—Netti would never have had this chance, and the thought of its not being fully exploited spelt agony.

"Are you sure you remember at which exact bar your turn comes?" she asked spasmodically at intervals. Or else: "We haven't forgotten the powder-box, have we? You know your arms will have to be powdered."

"No, we haven't forgotten the powder-box, and I know

exactly when my turn comes"—Netti would answer with a placidity which was the despair of her mother's heart.

"She's looking perfectly lovely, even without the powder," remarked Val, by way of settling the maternal nerves; but only got an agitated smile in reply.

Val's own state of mind was not exactly of the calmest, for which an incident occurring at the very moment of their departure from the Hotel Brauss was responsible.

She was in the act of stepping into her *Fiaker*, when another *Fiaker* with a portmanteau upon the box had drawn up alongside.

"Oh—Ah—Miss Wishart!" she heard herself addressed in a high-pitched key which seemed familiar; and turning, perceived an alarming length of neck surmounted by a hen-like profile—likewise familiar—protruding out of the window of the second cab.

"Professor Exwold!" she exclaimed in amazement, for she had recognised one—the most eccentric and at the same time the most learned—of their Wimbledon neighbours.

"Ah—er—so glad not to have missed you!" cackled the Professor, hopping to the pavement in order to wring the hands of both sisters, "Ah—seems that I've only just hit it off!"

The learned man laboured under a chronic difficulty about starting a speech; even the simplest phrase being preceded by various inarticulate sounds, emitted in different keys. As to whether this was a mere form of embarrassment or the result of internal construction opinions differed among his friends. Once under way, he was even capable of fluency. In appearance he

could only be likened to a hen wearing spectacles, and whose eagerly stretched neck and quickly glancing eyes seemed ever on the look-out for some welcome grain—of History, in this case, this being the Professor's special form of learnedness.

"I'm very glad to see you," said Val, a little bewildered," but what would have happened if you had missed us?"

"I—ah—er would in that case not have been able to deliver my message from your revered mother, of course."

And then, in all sorts of different keys, he justified his presence, explaining how, being on the point of departure for Rome, where important excavations were taking place, he had been asked by Mrs. Wishart whether he could not help her to recover her truant family.

"Your revered mother was seriously thinking of applying to the British Embassy"—finished the Professor, quite fluent by this time. "But instead, I suggested that I should take the way round by Vienna—which, at any rate, I've never seen. Unluckily I've got only one day to spare."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Val, visibly freezing.

Then almost primly:

"I'm sorry you have been put to this inconvenience, which was really quite superfluous. We are coming home, at any rate, very soon, that is as soon as ever our business is accomplished. I have just written to Mother about it."

"Ah—oh—that's right then!" breathed the Professor happily delivered of his message and caring nothing whatever about its results. "Were you going anywhere? I'm not detaining you, am I?"

"The truth is that you are"—said Val bluntly—"We are starting for Schönbrunn and are behind time already."

"For Schönbrunn?" repeated Professor Exwold, this time without any preliminary sounds. "The home of Emperors? The quarters of Napoleon? The gilded prison of his unhappy son? Ah, I cannot leave Vienna without resting my eyes upon it!"

"Then perhaps you could come with us," suggested Val, considering that this would be the simplest way of disposing of the Professor. "I'm not sure, though, whether I can take the responsibility. It's a dress rehearsal, an invited affair, you see. Besides, there will be no room in the carriage, since we've got to pick up two ladies at the hairdressers. But perhaps——"

"Perhaps Baron Wallersdorf will take the responsibility," broke in Marjorie. "There he comes!"

"I'm despatched by Frau Hinterhuber," explained Wallersdorf, descending from the third of the *Fiakers* which now blocked the entrance of the Hotel Brauss; "with a request for expedition. All the heads are fixed up already, and most of them on their way to Schönbrunn."

There followed five somewhat flurried minutes, at the end of which the bewildered Professor found himself installed beside Wallersdorf, while the sisters hurried off to the hairdresser's.

"Ah—er—oh! Such a chance! Such an opportunity!" the learned man declared, all but pecking at the two windows in turn and putting Wallersdorf, the while, through a severe catechism touching each building about which he scented the "Historical" interest.

"The Professor is swimming in bliss," Val explained to her companions. "It's so kind of Baron Wallersdorf to take him uninvited as he is."

"Oh, Baron Wallersdorf's acquaintance is invitation enough," said Netti Hinterhuber with her slow, broad smile. "We call him our 'Mädchen für alles' (Maid-of-all-work) because he is always helping everybody to everything. It is wonderful how he manages to find time—such a busy man as he is."

"Busy man!" repeated the sisters in one breath of amazement.

And Val added,

"Why, he never seems to be doing anything——"

"That's just the way he's got. And yet the 'Stadt-rat,' and all the committees he's on and all the undertakings he's at the head of could tell a different tale."

"What sort of undertakings?" asked Val still incredulous.

"Philanthropical," jerked out Frau Hinterhuber, breaking off in the air of a "Schubert Tanz," which she had been nervously humming in her corner. "Without Wallersdorf the Children's Refuge would never have been built, nor would the soup-kitchens flourish as they do. If there was any justice in the world he'd be our burgomaster—By the way, Netti, what is that the ballet-master told you about the way of leaving the stage?"

Val sat silent, trying to reconstruct things in her mind. It is true that she had always had suspicions as to that so ostentatiously flaunted indolence; but the picture painted of their protector—in the few sentences just heard, had nevertheless been a revelation.

It was the turn of the carriage into the Schönbrunn Avenue which woke her out of her ruminations.

"You can see the façade very well from here," observed Netti in the tone of one doing the honours of the place.

"These are the windows of the apartments inhabited by His Majesty."

Presently, with a hollow sound, they were rattling past the guards and through the chief entrance, to draw up in a vast, paved courtyard, adorned with fountains, and looked down upon by stately rows of green-shuttered windows.

"Ah, it is coming now!" breathed Frau Hinterhuber, replunged into her maternal agonies. "For goodness sake, Netti, take care not to knock your head in getting out. And be quick, or else we'll get the worst dressing-room. Where's the bag with the things? And whatever shall we do if Kathi is not there with the dress?"

And the agitated mother hurried off the placid daughter into the interior of the building, oblivious of the existence of the sisters.

They had scarcely had time to realise their abandonment when rescue arrived, in the inevitable shape of Baron Wallersdorf.

"It will be quite three-quarters of an hour before they have rigged themselves up," he explained, surging up at Val's elbow. "I suggest a turn in the park, meanwhile. It's exactly the day for it, and I know the Professor is dying to tread the walks trodden by the Duke of Reichstadt. Aren't you, Professor?"

"Oh—ah—eh—dying—yes, of course dying," crowed the Professor, whose long neck was darting from side to

side in the effort to take in as many features of the residence as one pair of eyes could embrace.

"This way, then! It's from the 'Gloriette' that one has the best view. There will just be time for that."

He had taken the lead already—by Val's side, leaving Marjorie to the mercies of the Historian.

"How absolutely perfect of its kind!" exclaimed Val, as emerging from a second gateway, they stepped into the park.

If she had ever been at Versailles she might have thought herself there, so symmetrical were the walls of still bare beech bordering the straight paths, so severely clipped each bush and tree standing upon the well-tended lawn which stretched like a carpet to the feet of a Neptune-adorned basin.

The further they penetrated into the stately grounds, peopled by the stone figures of gods, and with the sunshine filtering through the transparent screens of bare branches, the more palpably did its old-world charm lay itself about Val's spirit. In front of them, crowning the slope of gently ascending ground, the "Gloriette" loomed in all the grace and majesty of a Grecian temple. To the rear the variety of keys in the Professor's cackle spoke of the ecstasy he was enjoying, but grew fainter every moment, the many stoppages required to satisfy his cravings necessarily increasing the distance between the couples. By the time the "Gloriette" was reached the stragglers had vanished from ken.

"They are sure to meet acquaintances who will put them right," said Wallersdorf in answer to Val's anxious question. "Don't let solicitude spoil your enjoyment of the view. It is really rather unique of its kind. Besides,

it is ten to one they will be included in the view, since we overlook the grounds."

"Ah!" was what Val said as she stepped out onto the platform.

It was not so much the extent of the view as its so varied and suggestive character which, on the spot, captivated her imagination. For at her feet, bathed in the spring sunshine and tinged with the first and tenderest shimmer of young green, the princely grounds fell away towards the severely simple and yet so stately palace in which so many monarchs had rested from state labours; the home to which Marie Thérèse had given its final stamp of majesty, from whose door luckless Marie Antoinette had made her first step towards the guillotine—between whose walls Napoleon had housed as a conqueror and his son pined as a captive. And close by, under its inevitable canopy of haze and enclasped by the blue ribbon of the Danube, the Kaiserstadt lay massed around the dominating tower of Sanct Stefan, the noise of its traffic reduced to a murmur no louder than the hum of the first bees already on the wing. When tired of the sight Val had only to turn her eyes to the left, in order to rest them on the wooded spurs of the Wiener Wald, descending to the very gates of the town, in billowy curves, which the swelling husks of leaf-buds had coloured with that reddish-violet which comes before the green.

But it was towards the town, looming through the softening haze that her eyes ever returned with a strange sort of yearning that seemed related to homesickness. "The City of Enticement" lay spread out before her, and in advance she knew that its charm would

haunt her for ever; it's charm, and something which she had found there and would, no doubt, have to leave behind her. And soon, in all likelihood. This wonderful, fantastical winter was at an end, that shimmer of green said so, and so did the blueness of the sky. Did it not also mean the end of all that the winter had brought?

But how was the *dénouement* to come? With or without exposure and disgrace? This was the question which weighed upon her as she stood on the platform, erect and slender in her well-fitting grey dress, the bunch of violets upon her breast rising and falling with each breath she drew. This was the dread which, for her, darkened the spring sunshine and poisoned the balmy air. Only one more week remained until the day upon which the debt to the human vulture called Rappaport fell due; and how to meet it she could not imagine. Of the two hundred and fifty Kronen received in cash and of the hundred and twenty obtained for the rings, the settling of the most pressing debts had left only a fraction. Doktor Feintuch continued "daily" to expect the news from America. What if it did not come before the end of the week? What if it should prove another false clue?

She was asking herself these questions in an agony, while her eyes took in the view. Something must undoubtedly be done, and without delay, something that would save her the so humiliating and probably useless application to her mother whose financial resources she knew already strained to breaking-point.

Then she remembered that the man who stood silent by her side—being far too wise to play the Cicerone in such a moment as this—was—besides other things—

her illegal adviser. Upon a sudden impulse she turned to him.

“Baron Wallersdorf,” she began—and then stopped short, disconcerted, for she had taken him unawares, and in the eyes fixed full upon her she had surprised an expression which she had never before seen there and which, clearly, had not been intended for her notice. It would almost seem that while she had been revelling in the view, he had been indulging his eyes in quite another fashion.

The wave of colour which surged to her cheek seemed the recognition of that indulgence, and filled her with anger against herself, which anger was a help to the recovery of dignity.

“Baron Wallersdorf,” she continued rather breathlessly because of a strange and sudden upheaping of the heart—“I have a reproach to make to you. You have not kept your promise.”

“What promise?” he asked in the tone of a man speaking in a dream, and for which the insinuation of the spring air was perhaps partly responsible.

“The promise of helping me to trace Mr. Dowell’s legacy. Can you honestly say that you have taken all the trouble that you might have done?”

He looked first towards the wooded heights and then straight into her eyes, a certain mist of emotion chastening the usual mirthful quality of his own.

“I can honestly say that I have done nothing of the kind.”

“Why?” asked Val a little faintly, feeling herself suddenly upon the verge of a crisis.

“Because the finding of the inheritance means

your departure, and because I cannot bear to lose you."

His hand resting upon the balustrade within a few inches of her own, had only to make a slight movement in order to enclose her fingers in a grip which hurt deliciously.

For one moment Val shut her eyes, the better to enjoy the rapturous pain, but at his next word she opened them again in dismay.

"Mrs. White," he began, in a voice to which emotion had given a new and deeper tone.

Instantly she snatched away her imprisoned hand, abruptly sobered. To be sure—she was "Mrs. White!" It was to a married woman that he supposed himself to be making love. It was not a question of wanting to unite his lot to hers, but probably only the question of one of those illicit *amours*, examples of which she had not failed to observe in this gay and easy-going city. Under the light of this reflection the idyll seemed, in one moment, to transform itself into an intrigue.

"Baron Wallersdorf, you surely forget," she began in a rush of mortification.

And at that moment, casting down her eyes, she perceived both Marjorie and Professor Exwold approaching, close already, but no longer either together or alone; for around Marjorie there fluttered a small cloud of uniforms, while at the Professor's side walked a lady, who—foreshortened as she was, could be identified only by the liveliness of her gestures—yet that unmistakably, Ilka Kalnay, of course—and in great form too, to judge from the way in which she was both talking and listening. Strange that she should prefer the Professor's society

to that of the hussars' around Marjorie, or even to that of the "safe" young man, who followed by the side of her mother. Was it History that she was drinking in so eagerly, and with so many nods of her flower-decked head?

"The others are coming," said Val in a sharp tone of warning.

To which Wallersdorf, from between his teeth, replied: "I see them!" and moved off to the other side of the platform, though not without having given her a glance in which supplication and remorse seemed inextricably mingled.

In another moment the "Gloriette" was invaded by a laughing and chattering group.

Ilka and the Professor were the last to appear; and in the very moment of meeting the Hungarian's eyes, Val instinctively braced her nerves, much as soldiers automatically close their ranks in face of a threatened attack.

It came quickly too; for patience was not Ilka's virtue—nor that of her hot-blooded nation, accustomed to make with elementary directness for whatever ends it has in view. Having discovered a weapon which she hoped would prove fatal to her rival, she trembled with impatience to use it. And by what a mere chance, too, it had come into her hand! For it was in the midst of the boredom caused by the historical rapture that she had been suddenly struck by the possibility of extracting from this acquaintance of the hated "Engländerinnen" some interesting information touching their social status, which she had always mistrusted. Immediately the black eyes turned with favour upon her elderly companion.

Nor had the reward been wanting. At any rate the discovery which the Professor quite unwittingly—had helped her to, threw a most ambiguous light upon the Wallersdorfs “protégées.”

“Ah—and what do you say to our view—*Miss Wishart?*” she asked, rushing straight for Val, and speaking at the top of her rather acute voice, with a special emphasis laid upon the name. “Have you anything like this in England?”

“Not exactly like this,” replied Marjorie supposing herself addressed, although Ilka was not looking at her. “But we have plenty of lovely views too.”

“Are you of the same opinion as your sister, Miss Wishart?” asked Ilka, still more pointedly, her black eyes seeming to snap fire from out of her white face.

This time there was no mistaking the intention. No one was now looking at the view; the varied prospect having become suddenly neglected in favour of an incident which was evidently meant for publicity. With awakened curiosity the standers-by looked at the two women facing each other. Already upon Val the explanation of the situation had dawned. She had overlooked this danger; and, in truth, the hurry of the start had left no time to warn the Professor, who now stood by, uttering inarticulate sounds from out of the depth of his perplexity.

Aware of the circle of attentive faces and inquisitive eyes, Val had already pulled herself together. Her colour indeed she could not command; but, as her head went up, her fine-cut nostrils showed a war-like quiver. If Ilka had hoped to revel in the spectacle of her discom-

future, she was disappointed; for it was an undaunted face into which she found herself gazing.

"Yes, I think with my sister that we have quite as lovely views in England and also quite as amiable and well-bred people," said Val with icy distinctness.

Ilka's eyes looked positively dangerous; and for a moment her small, white gloved hands might have been observed to open and close convulsively, after the fashion of a kitten's claws. More than one of the lookers-on was asking himself whether her next move would not be straight for her rival's face—when above the edge of the platform there surged a faultless top-hat worn by the second and "safest" of the two model brothers, who appeared breathless, a saviour to the general embarrassment.

"They have almost done dressing," he explained between short pants. "We'll have to race, in order to get to our places before the curtain goes up."

"Then let's race!" echoed his good little brother. And with a general feeling of deliverance, everyone made for the staircase.

As she passed Wallersdorf Ilka cast a keen glance into his face, the first she had dared to give him to-day. Ah, but this disappointment was more than the other, for in place of the trouble she had hoped to see there shone in the eyes eagerly following Val Wishart a radiancy which looked almost like a new hope. Was it possible that the weapon which she had used—so blindly, had wounded only herself?

Of the performance which followed neither Val nor Ilka took away a very distinct impression. For Val the

picture of the miniature theatre with the miniature stage upon which figures out of last century moved rhythmically to the enchanting music of the Schubert dances, remained for ever after blurred by the emotions of the afternoon. By her side Frau Hinterhuber mopped her heated brow, as she agonisedly watched her serene daughter who in her full-skirted frock, and short-waisted bodice, looked like some over-grown child—towering above the heads of “Baronessen” and “Komtessen.” Now and then the large limpid eyes went towards the centre box, deserted now, but in which at next day’s performance Francis Joseph’s white head would be conspicuous—attentive to the delectable display, his old eyes lovingly seeking out the figure of the child whose robust beauty cheered his old heart and upheld his faith in at least the physical future of his people.

Superfluous maternal tremors! What could a false step now and then signify, when even the Komtessen were bound to admit grudgingly that the Kaiser Dirndl bade fair to prove the *close* of the performance?

CHAPTER XVII.

ILKA'S SCORE.

"'Twas whispered round Vienna
For many a mile,
That old Mr. Spiteful
Had buried his pile.
But would you undig it
I'll give you the clue,
And if you believe me
The work you won't rue.
So open your ears, coz,
And jog up your brain!
All that's wanted is wit
Your desire to gain.
Beneath wind-driven skies,
On the banks of the stream
Which we call the Blue Danube,
Though it's often as green
As pea-soup on Friday—
The treasure is hidden;
Nor will yield up its heart
To the hand that's unbidden,
There is snow on the top o't,
And roses as well;
But the snow never melts,
Nor one rose ever fell.
The worms crawl about it;
And at times I have seen
Old Nicky himself

Cast an eye on its sheen—
In vain, for 'tis guarded
As its value befits,
And the thief who comes near it
Would be torn into bits.
There's a watch-dog beside it
Of whose fury beware;
Though he's legless and toothless
Have a care! Have a care!
Shall I tell you the trick
How his rage to disarm?
'Puppenfee'—say it plainly
And he'll do you no harm.
At sound of the password
Mild as milk he will turn;
And your spade you can use
Without further concern.—
The way to the spot?
Not hard 'tis to find.
I have only to lift
The edge of my blind
Where I sit scribbling here,
And quite plainly I view
The signpost whose finger
Points the road you should go—
Now up and ado, coz,
Nor wondering stand,
But dig for the hoard!
The clue's in your hand."

"The clue's in my hand!" repeated Val, as slowly and reflectively she laid down the much-fingered sheet.

Then, instinctively, she looked at her hands, as though astonished to see them so empty. What was almost as astonishing was the comparative novelty with which the Enigma had struck her. Time had been in which she had known it so perfectly by heart that, at any hour of day or night, she could have reeled it off

upon demand. Lately, curiously enough, it had fallen almost into oblivion. It was in an access of something like despair that she had to-day taken it once more to hand. Yesterday's incident at Schönbrunn had stripped the situation of its last shielding cloak. It was, of course, impossible to go on playing Mrs. White any longer, and doubtful how far these brand-new acquaintances would be inclined to accept the true explanation of the episode. The absolute harmlessness of jokes of this description does not always meet with unconditional belief. Clearly the only chance of confounding whatever calumnies might be afloat lay in proving the existence of Cousin Tom's hoard—by unearthing it.

This is how Val came to be studying the Enigma this morning.

By a coincidence which, considering yesterday's events, was not particularly strange, it so happened that at this very moment Baron Wallersdorf was engaged in exactly the same way. He too had, of late, shamefully neglected the Enigma, and for the reason which, on the platform of the "Gloriette," he had truthfully given. The thought of the separation which success would bring had quickly withered up the excellent intentions with which he had taken up his mission. To-day, however, he felt suddenly moved to resume his investigations, and with a far lighter heart, too, than the one he had lately owned. Since yesterday he was not nearly so afraid of the discovery as he had once been. The old gleam of merriment, which had been dulled for some time past, was in his eyes once more as he perused the Enigma.

Yes, he deserved the reproach made to him yesterday. He had not kept his promise; had been a con-

temptible private detective. But he would better himself—would “jog up his brains,” according to Mr. Dowell’s own recommendation. This very day the first step towards betterment should be taken and, inevitably, this first step led towards the Klosterplatz, lately shunned. It was the Kalnays’ “Jour,” too. So much the better. To meet Ilka after yesterday’s episode would rather amuse him than otherwise; still the presence of third persons might have its tempering uses.

That afternoon, accordingly, Baron Wallersdorf, groomed to perfection, rang at the door of the flat once inhabited by Mr. Dowell, by the mere act sending an electric shock through the nervous system of Ilka Kalnay. She had been suffering a succession of such shocks ever since the arrival of the first guest, who had started the series of disappointments. Would he come? Would he not come? The alternate questions beat like hammers upon her excited brain. And, if he came, what sort of a face would he show her? In a mixture of longing and of dread she awaited his appearance; for, in her secret heart of hearts, she was terrified of the effects of her yesterday’s experiment. Had she but taken a little time for reflection she would surely have found a better way of unmasking the adventuress. But when did Ilka ever take time for reflection? On the whole it would be better if he came, for she had other things to tell him, interesting items which, by dint of keeping her eyes and her ears—especially her ears—open, she had successfully gleaned. Oh, would he ever come? And at that very moment she became aware that he had come already.

While handing round cakes with a smile on her

lips that came near to being a grin, Ilka, from out of the corners of her black eyes, watched Wallersdorf wending his way towards her mother, between tea-tables upon which, beside the cups, reposed muffs as large as pillows, and arms laden with bracelets, for this was no picnic tea to-day, packing-cases having been long since replaced by satin-covered chairs, and straw matting by Persian carpets. No holland pinafore to-day covered up Ilka's exquisite light-green *toilette* whose innumerable paillettes scintillated with each movement of her lithe and lively body, and no red handkerchief hid her carefully dressed black hair. Both in her and her surroundings the gipsy note was conspicuously absent, whether to her personal advantage or not might remain an open question.

Even before Wallersdorf had reached his hostess he became aware that the subject uppermost in his own mind was under discussion among the group of matrons assembled around Baroness Kalnay.

"It's positively certain that they are borrowing money," this lady was asserting in a high-pitched voice, calculated to be heard above the cackle of twenty other conversations. "Lieutenant Fellner—a great friend of ours—met them coming out of a Jewish money-lender's place, and under Mohacs' escort too, and one knows that he's all but swamped by his debts. I call it positively scandalous for two young girls—since we know now that the elder one has no right to call herself Mrs. White—to go about like that with young men. That's to say——" for at that moment she perceived Wallersdorf close by—"it may be an English custom, you know, and therefore all right. And, after all, most

of us *do* get into tight places at times, don't we? so I don't see why there *need* be anything wrong about the matter. Ah, Baron Wallersdorf, is that you?"

The languishing smile seemed to spread itself right up to her "baggy" eyes as she tendered him a jewelled hand.

In her magnificent but tumbled-looking purple silk gown, and with her grizzled hair waved with abnormal vehemence, Baroness Kalnay appeared even more ornamental but also more damaged than usual.

"Yes, it is I," said Wallersdorf, shaking hands rather thoughtfully with the whole circle of matrons, some of whom bestowed rather guilty looking smiles upon him, and all of whom seemed to find a new interest in the study of his physiognomy.

He had just come to the end of the circle when he felt a touch on his arm, and, turning, found Ilka at his elbow, tea-cup in hand.

"Here is your tea, Baron Wallersdorf," she said with nervous archness. "I've put in the right number of lumps of sugar, and there is a table free over there beside the mirror."

"Is there really?" he asked, with that quizzical smile of his which both angered and attracted her. "What a fortunate chance!"

Once seated at the small table beside the mirror, Ilka wasted not a moment in coming to the point—indeed she had none to waste, since the "Jour" was at its height, and the room crowded with people who expected to be both fed and amused. Had the need not been so pressing, she never would have dared to snatch

even this qualified *tête-à-tête* in the face of such glaring social duties.

"You are not angry with me about yesterday?" she asked, point-blank, looking at him straight and a little deprecatingly.

"Angry, Baroness Ilka? What on earth should I be angry about?"

"Oh, you know quite well!"

Ilka glanced aside, in order to avoid the quizzical smile, which had reappeared. "About Miss Wishart (if that really is her name—for how is one to know anything for certain now?), and my having let out the secret in that way. Of course it was disagreeable to her. And I know she is a friend of yours," added Ilka as pointedly as she dared.

"Peace to your scruples! I give you my word that what I feel is not anger, but rather gratitude."

"Gratitude! For what?"

"For having helped me to a discovery which simplifies a great many things in the immediate future."

Ilka's naturally creamy pallor turned a little chalky.

"You surely don't mean to say that——" she began.

But at that moment a shadow fell on the table, and the tragical Baron Kalnay, looking even more unhappy than usual, surged up at their side.

"Ilka, the Herzbergs have just arrived," he said, with a mournful reproach. "And I think Countess Balfy wants more tea. Ah, Wallersdorf, glad to see you!"

With a movement almost of exasperation, Ilka sprang to her feet, giving Wallersdorf a glance which plainly said, "I'm coming back!"

For a minute or two Wallersdorf lent an inattentive ear to the maledictions which his hollow-eyed host was pouring upon the inventor of "Jours"; and then Ilka came darting back again, zigzag fashion between the tables, and Baron Kalnay, looking, among the bright *toilettes*, like some bird of ill-omen, stalked off again to take up his share of the burden.

In the interval, momentary reflection had perhaps forced itself upon Ilka, for her former sentence was started anew in a somewhat modified form.

"Do you mean to say that your confidence in the 'Engländerinnen' has not been in the least shaken by yesterday's discovery?"

"My confidence," replied Wallersdorf, as he deliberately stirred his tea, "when once it is established, does not stand upon such weak legs as to go down at the first knock."

"And you still don't believe that they are adventuresses?"

"Let us first settle what you exactly understand by 'adventuress,'" suggested Wallersdorf, helping himself to an anchovy sandwich.

At this Ilka, stung by his serenity, and once more scattering prudence to the winds, burst out—

"I mean people who talk of inheritances that don't exist; people who palm themselves off as married women when they are not married; who give themselves false names—and then there is something else still, something which— Oh, bother! There's Mamma beckoning to me."

And once more she darted off with the zigzag movements of a dragon-fly, and with something of its

green brilliancy too, thanks to those scintillating paillettes.

If it had not been for that "something else," which he really wanted to hear about, it is quite possible that Ilka would have found the table beside the mirror deserted on her return. As it was, Wallersdorf sat tight, very slowly sipping his tea, by way of giving himself a semblance of occupation.

"Well?" he said, as Ilka dropped once more into her chair; "I'm waiting for the rest, Baroness Ilka."

"The rest is simply that they are evidently at their last penny (all that talk about a villa in England is evidently moonshine), and that they have been borrowing money from a Jew, just like any—any cavalry officer," finished Ilka, unable to find the right substantive.

"Yes, I caught a remark to that effect just now; I should like to hear more. Are they really in difficulties, do you think?"

He was looking at her in so undisguisedly anxious a fashion that Ilka broke into a bitter laugh.

"Why, you look as if you too would like to lend them money! It would be just like you. They certainly need it. I happen to know that they've got quite a lot of bills unpaid."

"Have they really?" asked Wallersdorf, wrinkling his brow in a fashion that was far more solicitous than disapproving, though Ilka, misconstruing the symptom, thought to read therein a new hope.

"Yes, really. The next thing to happen will be an execution. A fine end to the millions, indeed! Their things will be seized; just see if they are not! And

who knows whether they themselves won't be locked up. To give a false name is punishable, you know."

"I know. But they won't be locked up, all the same. I've seen to that."

"You've seen to that?"

"Yes. I happen to have a good many friends in the police force, which comes in useful at times. You see, it had occurred to me that some ill-natured person might possibly make use of the imprudence committed, by calling official attention to the circumstances. And, just fancy, Baroness Ilka, this is what actually had occurred! This very morning an anonymous note—in a disguised handwriting, of course—had arrived, pointing out that the person calling herself Mrs. White had no right to that name. Can you imagine so base an act?"

Apparently Ilka could not imagine it, for she sat dumb opposite to him, her pale face dyed suddenly to a burning red. Her one desire at that moment was to rise and disappear in the crowd. And it should have been so easy, too; were not social duties shouting in her ears? But those ears had turned deaf for the moment, and her limbs seemingly, to lead, so impossible had it become to move.

"I'm glad I went," continued Wallersdorf, mercifully intent upon his sandwiches, and having, apparently, not noticed her silence. "I was just in time to prevent any harm coming of it, since they were sensible enough to accept my explanations."

"But how could you explain without knowing?" Ilka managed at last to utter. "And what other motive but a—a dark one could a person have for giving a false name?"

“Possibly a merely thoughtless one—what we call ‘eine Hetz.’ I cannot tell you that exactly until I have spoken to Mrs. White—no, to be sure—to Miss Wishart.”

The smile which broke over his homely face was so eloquent of happiness that once more Ilka sat speechless, convinced at last that her score was settled, for good and all, and that, whoever was unmasked it was not the “Engländerin.”

“Whatever her motive may have been, I am sure it is a harmless one; and that all those ladies over there who are throwing up their hands and their eyes at the thought of having nourished serpents in their bosoms will very soon see their fears dispelled.”

“But—but—you look so dreadfully pleased!” stammered Ilka in what seemed only a fragment of her usual voice.

“I plead guilty to feeling pleased—and grateful, too—as I said before. But for you, Baroness Ilka, I might still be believing in the existence of Mr. White. Dear me! is that not someone wanting you again?”

It was. And this time when Ilka, still choking with mortification, and with all sorts of retorts trembling upon her lips, came back to the retired corner beside the mirror, she found only an empty tea-cup.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SIGNPOST.

By what means he had succeeded in reaching the door unmolested, Wallersdorf had never been able quite to comprehend. Yet within three minutes of the last words exchanged with Ilka Kalnay, he was—in return for his overcoat—pressing a coin into the hand of the liveried servant, and immediately afterwards was descending the staircase with the one question in his mind as to whether or not he would find Herr Frisch at home. For it was at Herr Frisch that his visit had aimed all along, the “Jour” having only been taken as an inevitable adjunct. The habit of exchanging a few words with the “Hausmeister” on entering or leaving Number 17 was established already. The cultivation of this individual’s acquaintance as a means of gleaning information regarding Mr. Dowell’s habits, had formed an important item of the original programme, but, with the rest of it, had fallen into disuse. His intention to-day was to take up the neglected habit and pursue it with a new vigour.

The canary was singing so lustily that he did not immediately hear the invitation to enter.

Within, Herr Frisch and his wife were consuming

their afternoon coffee, with more relish, probably, than tea was being consumed upstairs. It was the hour of the day at which the "Hausmeister" was in his mellowest mood, which promised well for Wallersdorf's quest.

"I've stolen a piece of sugar from upstairs for the canary-bird," he explained, as he descended the steps into the box of a room. "Don't let me disturb you! I like sticking it between the bars myself."

"Sugar is too good for such a brute," declared Poldi Frisch, wiping the coffee off his red moustache, though otherwise taking full advantage of the invitation not to disturb himself. "But it's very kind of the gentleman to trouble his head about the bird. How gladly would I make him a present of it! But I daren't risk the bad dreams. I was just consulting Gusti yesterday whether it would be against the pact with—*him*, you know, if we left the cage open and the window as well. But Gusti says it wouldn't be fair upon the bird, as he'd be dead sure to get into the hands of some devil of a boy; though if the beast himself is possessed by a devil—as I firmly believe—I don't quite see what that would matter. I've also thought of keeping a cat——"

"I consider it far more likely," asserted Wallersdorf as he fastened the sugar between the bars—"that this canary is inhabited by the soul of the late Mr. Dowell. If your reading on the subject of soul-transference has been as extensive as mine, Herr Frisch, I have no doubt you will come round to my opinion."

In reply Herr Frisch made a hasty sign of the cross.

"There was nothing taught at school that had a name like that," he uttered in hollow tones of alarm. "But it sounds something unrighteous. I always said

that bird was not a Christian bird. Are you actually meaning to say that——”

“Oh, I can't vouch for anything, of course; I am only surmising. And now, when I come to think of it, the theory doesn't tally; since the canary was in existence simultaneously with Mr. Dowell, and it couldn't well have room for two souls in that small body, could it?”

But these shades were beyond the mental grasp of Herr Frisch who was reduced to staring, open-mouthed at his visitor, his red crest of hair visibly stiffening with horror.

“Don't gape like that, Poldi!” admonished his elderly better half. “Can't you see that the gentleman is only joking?”

“I wish he would joke about other things than Herr Bosnickl, then,” said Poldi, a little sulkily.

“So I will in a minute, as soon as ever this canary has done pecking my fingers. Just look how keen he is upon the sugar! I daresay he hasn't seen a lump since his late master's time; now, has he, Herr Frisch?”

Herr Frisch growled out that of course he hadn't; and wanted to know why he was to drink his coffee bitter because of such a “sekkatur” as that canary was?

“He's had good times enough, better times than most Christians have,” he volunteered, warming once more to his subject. “Didn't *he* always feed the brute himself, yes, and bought the bird-seed too, himself, and the maggots and worms, and brought them home in a paper bag with his own hands.”

“Was Mr. Dowell, then, the sort of person who didn't mind carrying a paper bag in the street?” asked Wallers-

dorf, chiefly by way of drawing out the "Hausmeister" a little further.

"Oh, he didn't mind what he did; but, for the matter of that, he hadn't far to carry it, since he always bought the stuff from that old hag at the corner, who is there winter and summer, rain and shine. You've seen her on the church-steps, perhaps, in passing. She seems sort of grown on to them."

"Yes, I fancy I have seen her."

"It was Barbara—the housekeeper, you know—who had recommended him to try her. They were rather thick, Barbara and she; and Herr Bosnickl seemed quite pleased to have a good supply close at hand; declared she had the finest bird-seed in Vienna, and the fattest worms."

"Barbara was the person who inherited the revolvers and married the valet, wasn't she? By-the-way, you don't ever happen to get news of them, do you?"

"No, the faithless couple had sent no news," Herr Frisch resentfully explained, "in spite of having solemnly promised a series of picture post-cards from 'over there.'"

"Such bad luck, too!" he sighed. "I do believe that lawyer-man would have paid us every post-card we got in heavy gold. He's looking for them, you know, like a needle in a stack of hay."

"Yes, I know. Well, let's hope he won't prick his fingers on the needle when he finds it! there! that's the joke I promised you! Pray don't choke, Herr Frisch!" for the "Hausmeister's" facile sense of humour, colliding with a fresh gulp of coffee, had well-nigh produced a

catastrophe, which only some vigorous clapping on the back by his attentive spouse was able to avert.

Before normal conditions had been restored there was another knock at the door, and at sight of a neighbouring crony come in for a chat, Wallersdorf perforce beat a retreat.

Having lighted a cigar within the entrance, he started slowly and somewhat despondently on his homeward way, for his impression was that he had just drawn another blank. The mildness of the evening allowed of loitering, and the cloudless weather plainly brought home the lengthening of daylight. Though the bell from the convent church was tolling out the six o'clock angelus, it was far from dark yet. On all sides stood the symptoms of the season's change. Among the stone Saints on the church roof the pigeons were billing and cooing. The chestnut-seller no longer kept his hands buried in his pockets, and no longer covered over his iron stove. Soon he would have disappeared completely, thought Wallersdorf as he glanced at him. Both he and his stove looked unseasonable already. Even the old woman on the church doorsteps was no longer so winterly a figure, partly emerged from her muffling shawls, and with bunches of fresh-gathered "catkins" prominent in the basket at her side. At this moment she was engaged in one of those absorbing conversations which went far to enliven the solitude of her days, and served to diversify the existence of most of the domestic servants of the Klosterplatz and its immediate neighbourhood. It looked more like a consultation than a conversation, thought Wallersdorf, so emphatic were the

words and gestures of the old woman and so strained the attention of the younger one.

"Seventy-six!" he just caught the words as, having pressed something into the wrinkled hand, the buxom girl turned to go. "I'll put it in this very evening; and if the number comes out I'll ask you to the wedding, Frau Pupper!"

And she tripped off, her homely face one broad smile.

Wallersdorf, his curiosity gently aroused, stopped before the church-steps. The characteristics of his native town were a mine in which he never tired of delving, whose interest for him never flagged. The servant-girl's words had already revealed to him the presence of one of those oracles, beside whose powers of reading the significance of the most unlikely dreams those of the Egyptian Joseph might have paled. It was a type that was fast disappearing, and therefore worth cultivating. With unmoved eyes he glanced over the miscellaneous wares filling both pots and baskets, and which the old woman was just in the act of packing up for the night. The "catkins" were not the only thing which spoke of spring, for, "cheek by jowl" with the paper roses nestled small bunches of fresh green herbs. In a pot alongside he caught sight of some bird-seed, and remembered simultaneously that this was the same woman from whom Mr. Dowell used to buy his canary-food.

Already he was being assailed with offers of the most miscellaneous description. Was it catkins that the gracious gentleman wanted—or perhaps ants' eggs—the very first of the season, and certainly the first to be found on the Vienna market. Or meal maggots? They

are particularly well-fed to-day. If the gracious gentleman had a bird at home he could not do better than lay in a supply of them.

"If I must buy something I should object least to one of those boxes of matches," observed Wallersdorf with his kindly smile. "How much? Ten hellers? No, you needn't give me any change."

"God bless you!" mumbled the hag between her hairy lips, for it was a silver Krone that had been tendered. "If I could do anything for the gracious gentleman——"

She threw a hasty glance over her wares, as though in search of some medium for the expression of gratitude. After a moment she had apparently found it, though not in her baskets.

Having sent a searching look up and down the square she bent towards Wallersdorf.

"You wouldn't like your fortune told, would you? The policemen interfere sometimes, but there is none within sight. Or maybe the gracious gentleman has had a dream and is wondering what number to put into the lottery?"

"Oh, I'm aware of your powers, Frau Pupperl. That's your name, isn't it? I heard it from the young lady who has just left you and who evidently *has* had a dream. I gathered that the wedding depends upon the result of the lottery. But I'm afraid that *my* wedding depends upon quite other things, over which neither you nor I have any control."

"I'll make it the finest wedding that has been in the district for ten years, and I'll make her the most beautiful and the most charming bride that has ever

gone to the altar," gabbled the hag, evidently burning to put the seal upon her gratitude. "Only take off your glove, gracious gentleman and let me see the lines of your hand!"

"You can't make her more beautiful or more charming than she is," laughed Wallersdorf, as with such an elevation of his hat as Frau Pupperl had never in her life been treated to, he escaped from a conversation which was becoming a trifle too personal, feeling nothing but a passing amusement at an incident which at first sight, appeared to be entirely trivial.

It was not until, awaking between two and three in the morning—without any cause that he knew of—that a new and startling significance forced itself upon him. Had he been dreaming of the witchlike woman upon the church-steps, whose quaint visage had undoubtedly occupied his imagination, or was this the fruit of subconscious brain-work?

Be the case what it may, the fact remained that, from out of the profoundest slumber, he found himself suddenly very wideawake, with a brand-new idea in his mind.

"Puppenfee!"

It almost seemed to him that someone had said the word in his ear.

And, now that he was awake, an echo answered:

"Frau Pupperl!"

The weird resemblance between the two words was a mere coincidence, in all likelihood. But even as he told himself this he remembered with extreme distinctness that this was Mr. Dowell's purveyor of bird-seed, his regular purveyor, according to Herr Frisch, and like-

wise the person with whom the missing housekeeper Barbara was reported to have been "rather thick?" Was it utterly out of the question that the weird resemblance above mentioned had determined the choice of the password?

By this time Wallersdorf was sitting up in bed and had turned on the electric light. Another moment, and he was on his feet and making for the writing-table. The Enigma was the prize with which he returned to his couch, though not to slumber.

"The worms crawl about it," he murmured as he read.

Worms there certainly had been in Frau Pupperl's pots, "and roses as well," though only paper ones; but of snow not a trace. Nor did other things tally; for where was "old Nicky?" And, besides, though the seller of bird-seed was minus a good many teeth, she enjoyed her full complement of legs, rheumatic maybe, but yet normal limbs.

No, Frau Pupperl would not do for the watch-dog. But might she not stand for the signpost?

"Winter and summer, rain and shine," Poldi Frisch had said when defining her presence on the church-steps. There seemed little doubt that every time Mr. Dowell had lifted the edge of his blind she had necessarily come full into view.

Baron Wallersdorf became aware of a—for him—very unusual sensation: that of a growing excitement.

How it all hung together he could not even surmise; yet, despite all discrepancies, there seemed enough remaining to constitute something which looked like a clue. To try the password upon Frau Pupperl could

not possibly do any harm, and might lead to unexpected results.

Baron Wallersdorf lit a cigar, supremely aware that for him there was no more sleep to come. With an impatience which far from tallied with his usual habits of mind he lay awaiting the daylight, and thinking of many things, amongst others of the joy of being the instrument by whose means the person he had hitherto known as "Mrs. White" would regain prosperity. Ever since, in Baroness Kalnay's drawing-room, he had discovered the existence of "money difficulties" he had been cursing his own remissness in the mission accepted. It was not only her future that was at stake—it was also his own; for so long as she was in financial straits the offer of his heart, which necessarily entailed that of his—for Austrian ideas—very considerable fortune, would bear an awkward resemblance to an act of Christian charity. He thought he knew her well enough to know that this would not better his chances; while, once in possession of the inheritance, there was far less danger of her sensitive pride taking alarm.

As to the size of the inheritance he had no overstrained expectations.

"So long as there is enough to pay the bills with a decent margin over, that ought to make *that* part of the matter all right," he reflected as the daylight crept in through the lowered blinds.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WATCH-DOG.

THE shops were taking down their shutters as Wallersdorf, having swallowed a hastily prepared cup of coffee, hurried towards the Klosterplatz. The church-bell was ringing for early Mass, and at the back door of the monastery a file of old women waited for their morning dole. But Wallersdorf had eyes and thoughts for only one old woman to-day. Would she be at her post already?

As he turned the corner he narrowed his eyes and then fetched a deep breath of satisfaction. Some women with prayer-books were going up the steps, but behind them he had caught sight of a bent back muffled in shawls. Frau Pupperl, barely arrived, was busily ranging her wares, finding safe places for the pots, disposing paper roses, catkins and rosaries to the best advantage. When presently the women with the prayer-books came out again, no doubt she hoped to do a little business.

Wallerdorf, slackening his steps, waited until the bell had ceased tolling and the stream of church-goers had trickled out of sight. Then he drew near.

His original intention had been to come out with

the password point-blank; but now that the moment had come he felt strangely inclined to postpone the crisis. His own hopes appeared to him all at once to be absurdly fantastic. In another moment he might know that he had drawn another blank. His latest illusion might be murdered. Why not cherish it a minute longer?

Therefore he began by wishing Frau Pupperl an almost diffident "good morning."

She turned at his voice, with a pot in one hand and a bunch of rosaries in the other, which she thrust towards him in a gesture long since become automatic.

"Splendid maggots, gracious gentleman! Beautiful rosaries, all strung with the hand. Or maybe——"

She stopped short, and peered up at Wallersdorf from under the pent-house of shawls which protected her from the keenness of the morning air.

"I'll be blessed if it isn't the gracious gentleman of yesterday!" she exclaimed in tones of quavering pleasure. "Ah, I know what it is! A dream! You've had one to-night, haven't you? Let the gracious gentleman tell me quickly what it was about: flowers? fleas? Oh, the gracious gentleman has no need to blush; fleas are very good things to dream about. Now—before we are disturbed—what was the dream about?"

"About you, Frau Pupperl, if I'm to tell the whole truth."

The shawls were convulsed by an earthquake of wonderfully hearty laughter.

"I felt sure the gracious gentleman was one for jokes! Maybe it was what I said about the wedding which kept me in your head? Was that it?"

"Partly, but not exactly. It was something, at any rate, that made me feel inclined for a little more conversation with you, Frau Pupperl. I'm interested in the habits of my fellow-men—that's just my nature—and I'm curious to know how you spend the time which you don't spend on these steps. Do you—do you, for instance, ever go to the play?" asked Wallersdorf, casting wildly about for some indirect means of approaching the subject which he shrank from directly attacking.

"To the play?"

Frau Pupperl stopped in the act of tying the rosaries round the handle of a basket, and stared at him with alarmed, blood-shot eyes, in which doubts as to his sanity were visibly written.

"Yes, to the play. Surely the bird-seed and the rest must occasionally rise to a gallery ticket—on Sundays, for instance, when you're not sitting here."

"On Sundays I go into the church instead of sitting outside," said Frau Pupperl, with a touch of severity. "What should I do in a theatre?"

"Forget the maggots for a bit, for instance! You don't mean to say that you've never been inside one?"

"I've been—I've been—four times altogether. Pepi and I used to go once a year to the play, and as we were married four years, that makes four, doesn't it?"

"It seems to. But that was rather long ago, I suppose?"

"Not so very. It's about forty and a few years since Pepi broke his neck, falling from a scaffolding. He was a mason, you know."

"And since then you haven't been to the play?"

"Not since then. The last play I saw was the

‘Müller und sein Kind’ on All Souls’ Day. Lord, what a good cry I had then! By the time that poor girl had coughed herself dead my handkerchief was so wet that Pepi had to lend me his. And before next All Souls’ Day came round I was making paper roses for the wreath on his grave.”

From out of the shelter of her shawls Frau Pupperl—lost in memories—blinked across the Klosterplatz.

“But didn’t you ever go to the play to laugh instead of to cry, or else just to admire? Did you never see a ballet, for instance?” asked Wallersdorf, suddenly drawing the circle close.

“That’s where they wear the short skirts, isn’t it, and show their legs? No, I never had a fancy for seeing other women’s legs—nor for letting Pepi see them.”

“And yet I’m sure some of the ballets they have at the opera would make you open your eyes, Frau Pupperl, ‘Excelsior,’ for instance, or ‘Flick und Flock,’ or else the ‘Puppenfee,’” said Wallersdorf, saying the last word with extreme distinctness, while, lynx-eyed, he watched her face.

“Eh?”

The pot which Frau Pupperl had been holding crashed onto the stone steps, scattering maggots to the right and the left, as quickly she turned to stare at Wallersdorf, with hairy lips fallen apart.

“Did you say ‘Puppenfee?’”

“Yes, I did. You know the word, do you not? I see you do. Tell me quickly, Frau Pupperl——” he paused, in order to let a belated church-goer pass, “what does the word tell you? What does it mean to you?”

He was speaking precipitately now, his impatience having suddenly broken bounds, while new-born exultation stirred within him.

From out of her shelter of shawls Frau Pupperl looked at him askance and suspiciously.

"Do you belong to the 'Engländer'?" she asked, her voice sinking abruptly to a hoarse whisper.

"Yes; that's to say, I'm a delegate. Tell me the truth, Frau Pupperl; you know what Herr Dowell—Herr Bosnickl, as they called him—did with his money? Can it have been to you that he confided it?"

Frau Pupperl was shaking all over, as though struck with sudden palsy.

"I know nothing about his money. I know only of the box which he gave us to take care of. We never saw what there is inside—though it's not so much as locked. But he made us swear—on the Gospel—not to open it, and, of course, we didn't; not only on account of the Gospel, but because he said that if we did or if we gave up the box to anyone who did not bring us the password, he'd pay us visits out of his grave."

With a shaking hand she signed herself, just in the way that Poldi Frisch was apt to sign himself at mention of the defunct's threats.

"But I have brought you the password, so you cannot object to hand it out to me, can you, Frau Pupperl? But who are *we*, by-the-bye? I thought you said that your husband was dead?"

"My sister Resi and myself, to be sure. We've always lived together, even while Pepi was alive. She never had a Pepi of her own, you know."

"How many legs has your sister got?" asked Wallers-

dorf, holding his breath for the answer, though in truth this seemed but a trivial circumstance now.

"Ah, poor Resi! not so much as one leg has she had to stand upon, ever since she fell into that saw-mill as a child. Cut off by the knee—both of them. That's what makes her temper so bad," added Frau Pupperl, in a tone of apology.

"Take me to her at once!" said Wallersdorf, decisively. "No, never mind about losing your time! I'll buy up all you have here if you show me the way at once, but it must be this very minute!"

"All the maggots—and the rosaries too?" she asked, incredulously, her business instincts evidently outraged.

"Yes, every bead and every maggot, at your own price! Just pack them up while I fetch a *Fiaker!*"

Five minutes later he had hurried Frau Pupperl, together with her entire stock-in-trade, into a cab, and had taken place beside her, balancing two baskets and several pots upon his knees.

Now that the first shock was weathered, the old woman's spirits were rising with her confidence.

"Whatever will Resi say?" she kept gleefully croaking. "She's as anxious to get rid of the box as I am. Anything belonging to Herr Bosnickl is far better out of the house than in it? Whatever will Resi say?"

It was a long drive to the Donaustrasse which Frau Pupperl had given as address, but Wallersdorf improved the time by gaining as much useful information as seemed available. Thus he learned, by judiciously questioning, that the housekeeper, Barbara, had been one of her most assiduous clients in the matter of

dreams and lottery-tickets, just as Mr. Dowell had been in the matter of bird-seed.

"He used to pick out the best grains with his fingers," explained Frau Pupperl, through the rattle of the cab, "and he used to talk, too—such funny things!—not in the way the gracious gentleman talks. He would look over all my wares and grin; and once he bought a 'Krampus' on purpose to frighten the baker's child with it; and the poor little thing cried itself hoarse, though it was only a paper 'Krampus,' after all."

"Ah, so you sell devils in their season?" said Wallersdorf, with an increase of satisfaction, since this clearly meant the discovery of "Old Nicky."

"Beautiful devils!" asserted Frau Pupperl, with a proper pride of trade. "Both of paper and of cloth, and with wire horns. It's Resi who makes them. She's very clever at the 'Krampuses,' and also at the paper roses. You'll see what a lot she's got at home. It's she who strings the rosaries, too. It's all she's fit for, poor thing—not able to move as she is."

"Then how did the 'Engländer' make her acquaintance?" asked Wallersdorf, guiding back the conversation into its proper channel. "He must have gone to see her, since she could not come to see him."

"Of course he went to see her. It was this way, you see. He had asked me once who made the devils and the roses, and I told him, and also that we had a roomful of them at home. And it seemed to tickle his fancy somehow, for he said he wanted to see the place the devils and the roses came from. So I gave him the number, and he went and poked his nose into everything, and was mightily amused at Resi's temper—for

she has a temper, you know," added Frau Pupperl, with a drop in her voice. "And then one fine day, when he was coughing very badly already—almost as badly as that poor girl in the play—a *Fiaker* drives up, and who gets out of it but Herr Bosnickl. In he comes with a box under his arm—not a big box at all, and wrapped in paper. 'I want a watch-dog,' he says to Resi with his hateful grin, 'and I think you'll do splendidly, since you've got a good chain that will keep you to the spot.' That was the box we had to swear not to hand out until someone came and asked for it under the name 'Puppenfee.' We weren't really for taking it, but that he laid a hundred Kronen on the table, and we could not well let that slip, you see. We had to swear as well not to say a word about it to anyone—but we wouldn't have done that anyway, for fear of being murdered in our beds because of what might be inside the box. Barbara knew about it, but I don't think anyone else did. We've scarcely had a quiet night since then. But, thank the Lord, we'll sleep quiet now! Ah, she'll be pleased, Resi will be, when the gracious gentleman comes!"

"Let's hope so. But we're not there yet. Do you know what I'm wondering, Frau Pupperl? Why you do not look out for a set of church-steps in your own neighbourhood, instead of taking this journey twice a day?"

Whereupon Frau Pupperl, in her croaking voice, explained that in former days—some thirty and odd years back—she and Resi had lodged nearer to the centre, and that having once established a *clientèle*, to shift her position would be fatal to trade. It took a little time,

of course, to go backwards and forwards, especially when the baskets were full, but by getting up at four in the morning it was quite possible to reach her post by eight, even though Resi's coffee had to be cooked first and the room tidied up. Besides, she didn't always walk. Now and then, when trade had been good or she was afraid Resi might be wanting her supper, she would treat herself to an 'Electric'—which was a real treat, to be sure.

After that Wallersdorf asked no more questions, but sat ruminating over the ignorance possessing one half of humanity as to the manner in which the other half passes its life.

The Donaustrasse at last! A row of mostly new-built houses of the most rickety description, looking out over the waters of the Danube, which to-day were as blue as anyone could wish—with the blueness of the spring sky overhead.

It was a tiny house before which the cab stopped, an apparently forgotten cottage, jammed in between two raw and yet already shabby-looking buildings. From here Frau Pupperl would, at any rate, not have far to go for the catkins which flourished on the banks of the river, nor probably for the ants' eggs either.

Leaving the pots and baskets in the *Fiaker*, Wallersdorf, upon her heels, entered the humble dwelling.

Close before an inner door the old woman stood still.

"The gracious gentleman will not mind if Resi screams a little, will he?" she asked in what looked like a sudden access of timidity.

Then she opened the door of a small, low-ceilinged

room, on whose threshold Wallersdorf stood still in astonishment.

A room full of roses—even if they be only paper roses—was a thing which he had had to come to the Donaustrasse to see. For Frau Pupperl's assertion had been no mere figure of speech. But for the spaces occupied by the very modest furniture, the four walls of the small space were literally lined with the paper roses, not festooned, nor disposed with any attempt at artistic disposal, but packed, head by head, in a primitive sort of mosaic, regardless of pattern—pink roses, white roses, red and yellow roses blooming cheek by jowl in an amiable sort of chaos, and devoid of the relief of green leaves.

Subsequently—for his acquaintance with the strange pair of hags did not end with this visit—Wallersdorf learnt that the arrangement, carried out by Frau Pupperl's rheumatic fingers, was the product of her own fertile brain.

"It makes it more cheerful for Resi," she explained in due time. "The poor thing can't get out to see the real flowers, you know, so it cheers her up to see the paper ones. And it isn't really an extravagance, since I only use the failures, or those that have got damaged with wet or other things. It does look nice, doesn't it? Even people from other streets come in to see our roses."

"Yes, it does look nice," Wallersdorf said with conviction.

The neat room with the spotless white curtains framing the small window could not possibly be called anything but nice.

But this conversation was of later date. To-day

Wallersdorf stood without clue before this eruption of roses. For it was not the walls alone. In earthenware pots ranged on the top of a deal cupboard and upon the surface of a huge painted chest which helped to block the scanty space, more roses flaunted their brilliant petals upon their wire stalks, beside other pots in which no doubt maggots and earthworms disported themselves, and among rolls of coloured paper and coils of wire which would presently turn into more of their own kind.

And in the midst of this very bower of roses, whose cheap brightness both startled and pleased, glaring from under a pair of bushy, snow-white eyebrows, there sat the most terrifying old woman whom Wallersdorf had ever beheld, an old woman beside whom Frau Pupperl herself seemed almost young and almost pleasing of aspect, and with a moustache which put that of the younger sister into the most ignominious shade. A black cloth cap, adorned with cloth rosettes, and fastening under her triple chin, gave her silhouette, seen against the light, the appearance of being horned, while the blanket tucked across the lower part of her person, by the looseness of its folds, clearly revealed that that lower portion was altogether wanting. At her elbow stood a table with an empty coffee-cup and various utensils upon it, while in her huge lap a heap of coloured strips reposed.

As the door opened she raised her head sharply, and glared towards the entrance, the scissors she held in her right hand becoming transfixed with astonishment at sight of her sister.

"What's this for?" she broke out in a sort of voci-

ferous mumble, caused by absolute toothlessness. "What are you doing here at this hour? Whatever's to become of us if you don't stick to your post? And where are the baskets, you lazy-bones? Eh? And whoever is that behind you?"—this with a fresh glare towards Wallersdorf, whom she had just perceived, and pointing at him with her scissors. "Since when are you used to bring gentlemen home with you? Picked up a lover, eh?"

At this Wallersdorf, judging that the psychological moment had come, gently put aside the shrinking Frau Pupperl, who had hitherto vainly attempted to get in a word, and made a step forward.

"I have only come to bring you a message, Madam," he soothingly observed—to call this female monster Fräulein Resi was a thing against which his tongue rebelled—"and the message consists in one word: 'Puppenfee.'"

He had bent down a little to say it, and now straightened himself again, looking for the effect.

It was altogether different from what he had expected.

Upon a moment of immobility and another silent glare, there followed a fresh burst of rage.

"Another of you! Ah, my fine gentleman, you've got up too late to get the better of Resi Kleinmüller—that you have! 'Puppenfee,' indeed! How many of you are there, pray?"

This was certainly not becoming as "mild as milk," reflected Wallersdorf, disconcerted. With explanations upon his lips he drew a little nearer to the chair; then, mindful of the warning in the Enigma, stood still again, just out of reach of that enormous, gesticulating hand,

armed with the scissors. With laborious patience he introduced himself as the delegate of the Engländer heirs, in whose name he had come to claim the box which lay here in deposit.

Resi Kleinmüller listened, with her toothless gums displayed in what was probably intended for an ironical smile. Then, with a hand on each padded chair-arm, she leaned forward to fling the words in his face—

“I have no box in deposit.”

“No box?”

Wallersdorf, with something like a shock of terror, looked towards Frau Pupperl, whose head had already resumed its palsied shaking.

“But Resi,” she timidly ventured, “you cannot have forgotten about the Engländer’s box?”

“I’ve got no box,” said the terrible Resi sullenly.

This could only be pig-headedness, Wallersdorf told himself, trying to keep a hold on his own temper.

“What’s the good of this comedy? I know that you have got the box. It was your sister who told me that it had been given into your keeping.”

“Did I ever say it hadn’t?”

“Haven’t you just denied it?”

“I deny that I’ve got it: I never denied that I had it.”

Here Frau Pupperl collapsed onto a deal chair, the only other seat in the room.

“You mean that you have it no longer?”

“That’s just what I mean?”

“Since when?”

Resi Kleinmüller glanced at the cottage clock which ticked among the roses, and upon whose top a black

cloth devil—was he a failure too? or was he perchance waiting for his season to come round again—sat pertly astride, his red flannel tongue hanging half-way down his chest, his wire horns as brilliant as scarlet wool could make them.

“Since about an hour, by this time.”

“And where is it now?”

She shrugged her humped shoulders.

“Do I know? It will be wherever the gentleman who fetched it will have put it.”

Something between a groan and a shriek escaped from Frau Pupperl’s lips.

“‘Ach,’ Resi! you gave it up without the password?”

“Who says that? I’m not such a fool as some people. The password was there, right enough. And that’s why I say that this fine gentleman of yours whom you’ve picked up in the street is no more than one of those swindlers I’ve read about in the papers. Because he’s got hold of the password he thinks he’ll get hold of me; but he’d better look out, or else——”

There was a fresh burst of fury under way. While it spent itself Frau Pupperl sat upon her chair, all of a heap, and Wallersdorf, plunged in an almost equal dismay, struggled to collect his scattered senses.

“Who was the gentleman?” he asked, as soon as he could obtain a hearing.

“Some lawyer or other. He had a calling-card with him.”

Already, among the pink paper, Wallersdorf had espied a scrap of white cardboard, which he eagerly took up.

“Doktor Claudius Feintuch.”

Exactly what he had expected.

"And you say he was here an hour ago?"

"Something like that. I was just drinking my coffee, and wishing Milli to the devil, because of having singed the milk"—this with a vindictive glance towards the cowering figure—"when he walked in upon me—just as you have tried to walk in, my fine gentleman—only that you'll go out again with empty hands, which he did not."

Wallerdorf stood discomfited, with the very vivid impression that the Krampus upon the clock was putting out his red flannel tongue at him personally. From the bottom of his heart he distrusted Doktor Feintuch. The idea of the inheritance being in his hands, and in a box which, according to Frau Pupperl, did not so much as lock, filled him with vague misgivings. Though devoid of proofs against him, he felt that he must lose not a moment in controlling his further actions. The address he had had down in his notebook for long.

With a hurried word of farewell he turned towards the door, but was intercepted by the anguished gaze of Frau Pupperl, and abruptly remembered that there was a cab full of as yet unpaid-for baskets and pots waiting at the door.

The settlement was short and of a nature which showed its mollifying effects even upon the watch-dog in the chair.

"That's on condition you take a holiday," he explained to the speechless Frau Pupperl.

Once more he reached the door, and once more turned back.

"Would you mind showing me where you kept the box?"

Whereupon the watch-dog herself, turned mild at last, volunteered the answer—

“In the chest, to be sure! He had to dig for it himself, seeing that there was nobody at hand. Milli, show the gentleman where the box was, since he has a fancy that way.”

“Ah, but he’s made a fine mess of the linen!” exclaimed Frau Pupperl, as having cleared the top of the big, painted chest, she raised its massive lid.

As Wallersdorf stood gazing into the contents of the chest, he told himself that the Enigma had given up the last of its secrets. For the piles of coarse but dazzlingly clean sheets and towels which filled the chest—just now somewhat tumbled by Herr Feintuch’s recent researches—might well, by virtue of a poetical licence, stand for the snow that “never melted.”

A few minutes later he was back in his cab and flying towards the Grüne Gasse.

And again a few minutes later Frau Pupperl, leaving the room in order to fetch a glass of fresh water for Resi, nearly tumbled over her own baskets deposited in the entrance, with Wallersdorf’s card stuck in between the catkins, and with not so much as a rosary or a match-box awaiting.

“That’s as good as two holidays,” she declared to the now quite pacified Resi. “I won’t have to gather any catkins to-night, nor to dig for worms by moonlight. I declare I’ve not had such a piece of luck for forty years!”

CHAPTER XX.

THE BISCUIT-BOX.

"Is Doktor Feintuch disengaged?" asked Wallersdorf of the office-boy who answered to his imperious ring.

The office-boy carefully brought one of his ill-matched eyes to bear upon the visitor, before answering in a tone of gentle rebuke:

"The 'Herr Doktor' is never disengaged during office-hours; but these have not yet begun."

"That means that he *is* disengaged? Please take in my card at once."

Focussing his vacant eye upon the card—which he yet refrained from touching—the youth, with a deepening of rebuke, spoke again:

"Although office-hours have not begun, there are three people waiting in the sitting-room already."

"Oh, are there? All the more reason for hurry. Just take in this card by a back-way—there is a back-way, isn't there? and take this as well. And tell Doktor Feintuch that the matter is pressing—and—and may be to his advantage. Do you hear?"

The coin which had been pressed into his hand, presumably found favour in at least one of the office-boy's eyes, for within three minutes of the short interview

Wallersdorf found himself being admitted by byways which represented a virtual fraud practised upon the three persons at present patiently contemplating the Alpine landscapes on the walls of the sitting-room.

Within the sanctum Doktor Feintuch stood with his back to the light, so that Wallersdorf, at the first glance, was not able to read his face as he would have liked to read it, but the tone in which he asked the newcomer to be seated was not of the best-tempered, as Wallersdorf immediately noted.

"Your business is pressing, I understand?" he asked, perching upon the very edge of his chair, with a certain want of repose in his attitude which spoke of nerves off their balance. "I don't think I have the honour of knowing your name?"

"No. But you know the name of some friends of mine—the Miss Wisharts—do you not?" asked Wallersdorf point-blank, having reflected that to take the man by surprise would be his best course. Already in entering he had cast a scrutinising look about him, as though expecting to see Mr. Dowell's money-box standing somewhere about.

The effect of his experiment surpassed his expectations; for at the word, Wishart, the manikin bounded from the edge of his chair, and seemed to be on the point of vehement speech—though in the next moment he had perched back again and recovered at least some measure of self-control.

"Are you—have you been sent by the Miss Wisharts?" he asked in an ill-governed voice, while his fingers played nervously upon the arms of his chair.

"No; I have not been sent by them. But I am here

in their name, all the same, having been honoured by their confidence. I know that the box containing Mr. Dowell's legacy has been handed out to you this morning. I have come to ask whether Miss Wishart has already been informed of this fact—and—if—not—to insist upon her being informed without a further moment's delay. You have a telephone here, I see."

To this speech, uttered with a calm and well-balanced emphasis which could not but carry conviction with it, Doktor Feintuch listened in what was evidently a fever of impatience. Scarcely was the last word spoken than he bounded once more—and this time definitely—from his chair.

"Yes—I have got the box—and the 'legacy,' as you call it—though how you have found that out I cannot imagine—but I have not telephoned to Miss Wishart yet. There isn't anything to telephone about. Just wait till you see!"

Without another word, Doktor Feintuch rushed at a cupboard at the further end of the room, and came back a moment later, holding in his hands a square object partially muffled in brown paper of unmistakably British origin. With the light full upon him the disturbance of his face became revealed, as did also the unfavourable effects of a hurried morning toilet. Before starting for the Donaustrasse there had been no time, either to plaster down the jetty locks into their customary positions, nor to polish the taper nails to their usual dazzling pitch. As he stood there with thin wisps of hair scantily covering surfaces of bare skull, and with grizzly bristles showing upon his unshaven chin—Doktor

Feintuch presented the appearance of a person who, under the stress of some recent shock, had lost his balance, both morally and physically.

"There!" he said, with a laugh in whose ring, "nerves" were clearly discernible, and dumping down the untidy brown-paper parcel upon his writing-table. "There you have the legacy which we've been hunting for all winter!"

With hands which jerked with agitation he put aside the paper, revealing to Wallersdorf's incredulous gaze an ordinary tin biscuit-box, of the sort furnished by Huntley and Palmer, amongst other firms—very battered and rusty, and with only a few flakes of the paper which had once covered it adhering to its sides. Having wrenched off the lid, which owing to the rust, did not come easily, Doktor Feintuch again said, "There!" holding the open box in vicious proximity to Wallersdorf's nose.

"Take it out yourself! It won't bite!" he added with his exasperated laugh.

Then Wallersdorf, feeling as if he had suddenly stumbled into the middle of one of the most fantastic of "Hoffmann's Erzählungen," almost timidly put out his hand, and out of the battered biscuit-box, lifted the most improbable of all objects—a flaxen-haired, china doll, dressed in a faded silk frock, which had evidently once been blue.

Having turned the creature over in his hands, he first gazed blankly at Doktor Feintuch, and then, rather desperately, into the empty box.

"You don't mean to say that this is all?" he asked in a voice charged with stupefaction.

"All that *I* was able to discover, anyway. But perhaps your eyes are sharper than mine."

"Perhaps they are!"

Wallersdorf, as he said it, was not looking into the box, but straight into the other's face. As the legal and the illegal adviser confronted each other, the latter's vague suspicions seemed to take sudden shape.

"This box never had a lock to it—couldn't have a lock," he said in what he intended to be scathing accents; "and it has been in your hands for two hours at least. You will have to prove that this doll actually represents its entire contents."

Instead of looking scared Doktor Feintuch laughed again—unpleasantly.

"It would seem that, after all, your eyes are not sharper than mine. Look again! The box is not empty yet."

Then Wallersdorf, peering down, perceived upon the bottom of the biscuit-box a folded scrap of paper, which he took up eagerly. It proved to be no more than a half-sheet of note-paper, covered with a few lines of doggerel verse.

"Break not your heads, my heirs beloved
Touching what cash I may be worth;
Mince-meat I'll make of the last shilling
And, grinning, quit this shabby earth."

With the paper in his hand Wallersdorf stood rigid, while in his mind there dawned the conviction of a monstrous hoax. Verily had "Mr. Spiteful" been true to himself—until the bitter end. Where the flax-haired doll came in the bewildered witness could not of

course pretend to say—but doubtless those more nearly interested would be able to read the ghastly joke aright. About all Mr. Dowell's actions there had evidently been a sort of grim consistency which would be sure not to deny itself here.

It was Feintuch's voice which roused him from his abstraction.

"Well? Is that proof enough?" he sneered.

"Yes—it is proof enough," said Wallersdorf. As he spoke his suspicions died a natural death within him. Those four lines, traced in the handwriting of the Enigma, carried conviction on the face of them. Whatever intentions Doktor Feintuch might originally have entertained, he was innocent of any blameworthy action. Want of opportunity, if nothing else, had kept him honest. The state of his temper alone was enough to attest this. He too was a victim of "Mr. Spiteful." Ah, what a dance he had led them all, to be sure! So alert was Wallersdorf's sense of humour, so keen his appreciation of the monstrous joke that he had all but laughed aloud, when another thought intervened: the disappointment of the sisters—of one of the sisters in particular—and of what this meant to them. Since yesterday he knew them to be in actual distress. On the instant his merry eyes grew grave, while his open brow ruffled with anxious thought.

Doktor Feintuch, meanwhile, casting reserve to the winds, was seeking relief in loud-voiced lamentation.

"Why do you say nothing? You look as if you thought it a joke? It's not one for me, I can tell you—after all these months! Last night when I got the letter from America—from Chicago it was—I thought I

was at last going to touch the fruits of one of the most amazing investigations that had ever come within my practice. And now who is to pay my bill, I should like to know? Those women are paupers, evidently; and what's the good of prosecuting paupers? I don't believe in the existence of that villa—it was madness to take up the affair without seeing the title-deeds of the villa. Sarah was right. She warned me against it. But it looked so like a 'Geschäft!' And now who is to pay my bill?"

Thus wailed Doktor Claudius Feintuch, pacing restlessly about the room, his fingers with the unpolished nails, passing recklessly through the thin forest of lank locks.

"Who is to pay my bill?"

"How much is your bill?" asked Wallersdorf, who had been thinking hard all this time.

Doktor Feintuch stopped before him, all of a piece, so to say, his fine and to-day absolutely pathetic brown eyes fixed with a sort of astonished hopefulness upon Wallersdorf.

"I could not take less than three thousand Kronen"—he said tentatively, watching the other from under his prominent eyelids.

To his relief not a muscle moved in the face opposite to him.

"Very well. I will pay it."

"*You* will pay it?" came the joyful incredulous question. And then, precipitately: "When?"

"To-day, this minute, I will give you an order upon my bank. But under one condition."

"And that condition?" asked Feintuch suspiciously.

"The condition is a little complicated, and entails some calculation. Give me a few minutes to think it out."

With the doll still in one hand, and the doggerel verses in the other, he stood there, reflecting.

"If only I had a clue to the figure of the debts"—something in this way his reflections ran. "They are not likely to be more than a few thousand Kronen, the time has been too short for that; but there must be a margin over—for travelling expenses, and so on, and another sop to throw to this hyena. I suppose ten thousand would do it."

"I am ready," he said at last to the anxiously watching Feintuch. "Here is my condition. I shall leave you now, and within an hour I shall return, bringing a certain sum of money with me—beyond the amount of your claim—which you will deposit before my eyes in this biscuit-box. Then you will do up the parcel again and telephone to Miss Wishart that the legacy has been found. In case my motives should interest you I have no objection to explaining that I am a friend of the Miss Wisharts, and desire to spare them a too great disappointment, it will be big enough, as it is; but I should like to prevent it's being a disaster."

By this time Doktor Feintuch, together with the sense of security, had recovered some of his composure.

"In other words you are asking me to practise a fraud upon my clients?" he observed, drawing up his dapper figure to all the height it was capable of.

"If it's a fraud—it's a pious one. Anyway it's my condition. And the fraud won't be permanent, either. It is only during a limited period that I ask you to

preserve silence regarding the original contents of the box; say three months from to-day"—added Wallersdorf after another rapid mental calculation, "unless I give you leave to speak sooner. Do you accept?"

"And my professional honour?" asked Feintuch in the deepest tones which his narrow chest could produce.

"Your professional honour, believe me, will come out of it precisely as undamaged as—as it went into it," asserted Wallersdorf, sending his shrewd gaze deep into the exotic-looking eyes. "Do you accept? I may mention, too, that I shall have no objection to your presenting a second bill—though of more modest dimensions—to Miss Wishart, one of one thousand Kronen, for instance. Do you accept?"

Upon which Doktor Feintuch dropping all further mention of professional honour, handsomely surrendered.

"So it was from Chicago that the clue came?" asked Wallersdorf, when a few more particulars had been settled.

"Yes, from Chicago," explained Doktor Feintuch, all smiles now, and mechanically smoothing down the locks so recently ill-treated. "There is the letter!"

"HONOURED SIR!" (read Wallersdorf from off the sheet of cheap, transatlantic letter-paper which Feintuch laid before him) "My wife Barbara, not being sure of her pen, has told me to write. If Herr Dowell left any money—which we neither of us believe, seeing the way he took to spending it at the last—it can only be in the box which Barbara carried downstairs for him, wrapped in brown paper and handed him into the cab I had been told to fetch. The address he gave to the driver was Donaustrasse 56. Barbara says that the old woman who sells bird-seed at the corner lives there, and that she has got a sister without legs. That ought to suit you. We can't either of us say why he should have given it

them to keep; but Herr Dowell never did do things like other people."

"No, that he never did," commented Wallersdorf as he glanced at Joseph Pflug's signature.

Subsequent reflection forced him, however, to admit that, in this particular case, Fate had conspired with "Mr. Spiteful"; since but for the unforeseen circumstance of the emigration the Enigma could not fail to have been solved long ago.

"And the doll?" asked Feintuch at the very last.

Wallersdorf looked down at the figure in faded blue lying upon the table.

"Both the doll and this paper remain in my keeping—until the end of the three months; unless, possibly I may see reason for producing them at an earlier date—but that does not depend entirely on myself."

"He is either mad or in love," said Doktor Feintuch that evening, while expounding matters to Sarah during the evening toilet.

To which the wise Sarah answered:

"Probably both."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE "BURG-MUSIK."

"It's an awful sell!" said Marjorie, for at least the fifth time.

"Yes, it's a sell, but it's also a relief. Those bills have been weighing upon me like lead for weeks past, and Herr Rappaport had become almost a nightmare. Now at least I can settle everybody all round, and have plenty over for the journey, and even a little something to hand over to Mummy."

"You *have* come down in your pretensions!" said Marjorie, on whom the word "journey" had had a visibly depressing effect. "How can ten thousand Kronen satisfy you, after expecting just double that number of pounds?"

"I never said that it satisfied me. What satisfies me—partially—is the consciousness of having pulled myself out of a quagmire—by the skin of my teeth. The only thing I'm wondering is——"

"What?"

"Whether—I've got no right to say it, perhaps—but whether there wasn't more inside the box when Doktor Feintuch claimed it."

At this Gertie Melrose, whom, together with Sandy,

the sisters had found installed in the Hotel Brauss on their return from the Grüne Gasse, spoke indignantly.

"Of course you've got no right to say it! Surely you forget that Doktor Feintuch is the cousin of my colleague! If the legacy has been tampered with, it can only have been by those two old sisters who had charge of the box."

"I don't like suspecting anybody, but it certainly is strange there not being so much as a scrap of paper, mentioning the sum."

"It's stranger still the money being put into a biscuit-box, instead of into one with a proper lock to it," observed Miss Melrose, putting the front of her hat into the box in question. "What *can* be the joke about this?"

"We ought certainly not to leave Vienna without fully investigating the matter," declared Marjorie, with great decision.

"Oh! I've had enough of investigations; and, besides, I shouldn't know how to set about it."

"Ask Baron Wallersdorf!" said Marjorie, encouragingly. "He's always ready with advice."

Val finished counting over the notes in her hand before replying.

"He was ready to advise Mrs. White; but will he be as ready with Miss Wishart? He has probably put us down as frauds by this time."

"We'll see that when next we meet, for, of course, we can't go away without saying good-bye to everybody—that would be indeed marking ourselves down as frauds. And we mustn't drop a single one of our plans either. Goodness, Val! It's nearly twelve o'clock!

You seem to have clean forgotten the rendezvous at the 'Burg!'"

And Marjorie jumped up with alacrity, and began pulling on the gloves which she had barely taken off.

"We're booked to meet Hannah and the Professor and Ned—and—and possibly some other of our acquaintances, for the change of guards at the 'Burg,'" she explained to Gertie. "We've been meaning to do it for ever so long, and *I* certainly sha'n't leave Vienna without seeing one of its chief sights. You're coming, Val, aren't you? And how about you, Gertie? There's music in it, you know!"

"Very good music, too. Yes, I think I can squeeze out the time."

The streets were full of spring sunshine, and partly also of spring *toilettes*, springing up between lingering muffs and boas, like early flowers among snow and ice. A hint of Easter lay in the air, finding chief expression in the confectioners' windows, where the carnival dainties which had taken the place of snow-men and Christmas-trees, had lately retreated before the victorious onmarch of an army of Easter eggs of every colour and description, led on by triumphant Easter lambs, bearing scarlet silk banners.

In the inner courtyard of the Imperial residence the daily crowd was beginning to collect, in expectation of the daily spectacle, loafers chiefly, with the word "unemployed" written all over their shabby clothes, servant-girls with baskets on arm, the contents of which were no doubt being anxiously expected in some kitchen of the neighbourhood; here and there a tourist, looking helplessly about, guide-book in hand. Old hands at

the game had already secured good points of vantage upon the steps leading up to the central monument, while the others wandered aimlessly about, feeding the pigeons which were too well fed already to trouble much about the crumbs. At one moment the loiterers craned their necks, in order to see which of the Archdukes was inside the emblazoned court-carriage which stopped before a private entrance; and every now and then, at the shout of the sentinel on duty, whose eyes scanned the horizon for uniforms, the guard—Tyrolese “Jägers” they chanced to be—stood to arms, in a compact, blue-grey line.

“Ah, here is Hannah!” said Val, who likewise had been scanning the horizon, although not for uniforms. “What will she say to our news?”

For Hannah, who had lately taken to copying in the gallery of the Court Museum, was still in ignorance of latest events.

What Hannah did say, when told the legacy was unearthed, was concise, though it might sound irrelevant.

“And I can’t get done with my copy under a week! What a bother!”

“Oh! we’ll take at least a week to pack up and pay our farewell visits, won’t we, Val?” put in Marjorie, with an enquiring glance at her sister.

Possibly Val had not heard the question, for all she said was—

“I wonder why Ned has not turned up yet? He says he knows his way about, and he was keen about the ‘Burg-Musik.’”

“Oh, he’ll come all right, and so will other people, perhaps. Ah, there is one of them!” as once more the

sentinel's cry rang against the walls, at sight of a couple of hussar uniforms emerging from the shadow of the monumental gateway opposite.

After this Marjorie was provided for, and Val, for the time being, reduced to the society of Gertie and Hannah, presently supplemented by that of Professor Exwold, fresh from an inspection of the monuments in the outer yard, whose charms had all but submerged all recollection of the rendez-vous.

"Oh—ah—but they're nowhere beside that bit of earth-scarp just opposite the University," he explained in the highest key of his vocal scale. "I don't know if you have noticed it; actually a bit of the old fortress embankment, and riddled with Turkish balls. With a little imagination you can see turbans hanging over it. It's wonderful, certainly, that I should never before have thought of visiting the spot where East and West shake hands!"

"Somebody was saying the other day that two minutes East of the Graben it begins to smell of the Orient," observed Val; "and I rather agree."

"There's the band!" exclaimed Gertie, with eyes glistening behind her glasses.

Ever louder grew the martial strains approaching, while the "Jäger" stood "to attention," and the loiterers, massed now to a triple and quadruple wall, fell back slowly before the uniformed orderers.

"We shall see nothing of this show unless we get to the front," suggested Hannah. "Marjorie's there all right. Suppose we use our elbows?"

"Dear me, Ned is going to miss it, after all!" said Val, regretfully.

The words were barely audible, for already, from out of the gateway to the left, the voice of drum and fife, of bassoon and clarion, burst in harmonious but deafening clamour, and the red-capped band marched out into the sunlight, with the jaunty bandmaster—hand on hip, and huge bâton raised high—at its head, and with what looked like half the rag, tag, and bob-tail of Vienna hanging on its skirts, children just released from school, and with oilskin bags full of books strapped onto their backs, idlers with hands in frayed pockets and pipe between unshaven lips, boys waving their caps above their heads as they kept step with the band, old men tottering along in the same vain endeavour—and these mostly with a war-medal upon their breasts—along they came, the daily crowd, as fresh as ever for the daily treat, and with faces like a lot of happy children, as indeed they virtually were—the “grown-ups” and even the slight sprinkling of well-dressed individuals included—for even people who don’t buy their clothes ready-made are not always able to resist the “Burg-Musik.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Gertie, making the most of her giraffe-like neck; “isn’t that Ned among them? and waving his cap as madly as any of them, too!”

It was Ned indeed, but not alone, as the next minutes proved; for presently, the impromptu escort having, under pressure of authority, gone to thicken the wall of spectators, Hannah laconically remarked—

“There they come!”

“They?”

Val turned her head to peer about in the crowd,

and then, with a little start, turned it back again towards the waiting guards, for Ned's companion was Wallersdorf, who yet had not been present when the rendezvous was arranged. She had not seen him since Schönbrunn, two days ago, and the thought of all that had happened on the top of the "Gloriette" filled her with a flurry, mingled of gladness and apprehension.

"They're looking for us! Wave your hand!"

"Wave yours!" said Val, seized with sudden shyness.

"Isn't this just quite too jolly!" said Ned's voice in her ear a moment later, and she turned to see the guinea-pig face transformed almost beyond recognition by the martial and musical atmosphere.

But beyond the transformed face there was another, which, though it's expression was not martial, showed remarkably shining eyes.

"I hope you don't think that I've been leading your brother into bad ways," said Wallersdorf, raising his hat. "We met on the Ring, just as the band was coming along, and as he told me you were waiting for him here, it seemed the simplest to join on. It was only a few hundred steps that we went, you know."

"When the band stops playing we'll tell Ned the news," said Hannah, hasty greetings having passed.

"News?" enquired Wallersdorf, infusing as much curiosity into his voice and expression as an inherent love of sincerity made possible. "Is there any news to tell?"

It was at Val that he was looking as he spoke, so it necessarily was she who answered.

"Yes, there is."

"Good news, I hope?"

"Not very, but not quite bad, either. The point is, our quest is at an end."

How it happened exactly she could not say, but by this time both Gertie and Hannah, as well as Ned, had got massed into the crowd of spectators, and she found herself standing beside Wallersdorf, in comparative isolation, behind the living wall.

"That means, I suppose, that the fortune has been found?"

"It is found, but it isn't a fortune. It is only a very modest sum. But, such as it is, to say the honest truth, I am glad of it."

"Then I am glad too."

"At least there is nothing now to prevent our starting home."

"Of that I am not so glad," said Wallersdorf, dropping his voice a little, for, with a final clash of instruments, the martial air had come to an end.

"The story of how the money was found," hastily resumed Val, "is almost too absurd to be believed."

Then briefly, though nervously, she gave him the particulars, to which he listened as dutifully as though he had never before heard of the existence of either Frau Pupperl or the biscuit-box. While she spoke—at a few paces off—Ned was using bad language in reply to the same piece of news, administered by Hannah.

"The idea of having to go home now, just when the mountaineering season is setting in!" he growled. "Might at least have kept it till we got back to the hotel, instead of poisoning this show for me. I say, just look at those green feathers, ain't it ripping?"

Shouts of command, grounding of arms, clinking of swords, and now the two lines of guards drawn up, on one side the big, fair-haired Tyrolese "Jägers," with the shining cocks' plumes waving on their hats; on the other the small, dark-skinned, red-capped Orientals—for it was a Bosnian regiment whose turn had come to relieve guard. At the two ends of the double line two lieutenants facing each other, as rigid as figures of cast-iron, their drawn swords glittering in the midday sunshine.

"East and West—East and West, indeed!" murmured Professor Exwold, jammed in between two tattered elbows, and peering from the green plumes to the red fezes and back again.

"There isn't anything more to be seen for the present," explained Wallersdorf to Val, who seemed inclined to gravitate towards the living wall. "It will take quite half an hour before the inside sentries have been relieved, and before the respective commanders have inspected all the corridors and personally assured themselves that there are no regicides waiting with daggers behind corners. We have nothing to do now but listen to the music. It's rather good, isn't it?"

It was more than only rather good, thought Val, as upon her ear there arose a new strain, not martial this time, but voluptuously sentimental—the "Barcarole" out of "Hoffmann's Erzählungen." For the band, installed now in the centre of the yard, was putting the crown onto the daily treat, by the daily open-air concert, of a quality well calculated to shorten the tedium of waiting. The bulk of the public, indeed, for fear of missing the final act, listened with their backs

turned, but not, for that, with less gusto. But neither Wallersdorf nor Val, to judge by the way they had resigned themselves to their disadvantageous position, seemed particularly keen about that final act.

"Have you much music of this sort in England, Mrs.—no, I beg your pardon—Miss Wishart?"

Val turned towards him impulsively, feeling that the strain of the last few minutes must be broken at any cost.

"Baron Wallersdorf," she said, colouring deeply and beautifully, "I owe you an explanation—I know I do—but it is so difficult. It is quite true that I am not Mrs. White—never have been Mrs. White. I invented a husband because I thought it would be a protection—and partly also for fun, I think. But I see that it was very foolish. What must you be thinking of me?"

In answer to which Baron Wallersdorf said—

"Don't you find the music rather loud, Miss Wishart? It is difficult to get oneself understood. If you don't mind walking a little bit away, I shall try and tell you what I am thinking of you."

Over there the pigeons still strutted among the crumbs, and the strains of the "Barcarole" rang with as soft an insinuation as though these same bassoons and clarions had not lately been thundering out a battle-cry. And on the platform before the palace entrance the two lieutenants still faced each other, motionless, forgotten and unheeded by at least two people.

The three months which had been mentioned in Doktor Feintuch's office had not quite run their course,

when on a warm May day Baron and Baroness Wallersdorf returned from a brief honeymoon to be folded in the arms of Lizzerl and Bertherl, and to be pressed against the capacious bosom of the benevolent, ram-like mother.

"You'll never guess how we blessed Mr. White for not existing!" Lizzerl whispered in Val's ear in the middle of a hug. "To see Heribert really in love at last—a thing we had all been sighing for—was enough to make one swear—at you, for having a husband."

That evening Val, alone with her husband who, this time, was real enough, ended a train of thought by a sudden laugh.

"So it is only me, after all, whom the 'City of Enticement' has held fast! I thought it much more likely that it would be Marjorie."

"It will be Marjorie, too, in time, never fear! If she comes to visit you often enough, she may actually end by making up her mind which of the uniforms she likes best. I'll trot her round as much as you like. Excellent way of killing time."

Val, with her head thrown back against the cushions of the easy-chair in which she was taking her first rest after the journey, stretched a compelling arm up to the neck that bent above her.

"Oh, you fraud of a man! If I hadn't found you out long ago, I believe you would go on posing as an idler to the end of our respective days. And to think that but for Cousin Tom and his biscuit-box, this hideous example of deceit would never have come under my notice! That biscuit-box! I can't understand it yet! *That* part of the Enigma has evidently got no solution."

Wallersdorf gently put away the compelling arm, straightening himself in the act.

"And supposing that, after all, there is a solution?"

She turned up to him her happy face, just touched with perplexity.

"A solution to the biscuit-box?"

"Just so. Wait a moment!"

Followed by her astonished eyes, he went into the next room, soon to return with something carefully wrapped in silver paper.

"Perhaps this is the solution," he said, putting it into her hands.

Still with that dazed look on her face, she unfastened the paper, and found her uncomprehending eyes staring straight into the glass ones of a china doll, whose flaxen tresses flowed over a frock of faded blue.

"I don't understand——" she said slowly.

But Wallersdorf was already kneeling beside her, encircling her with his capacious arms.

"I will help you to understand, darling. I have a confession to make—absolution to ask. Let this chair be the confessional. Incline your ear and listen!"

Then he told her the true story of the day on which together they had listened—or not listened—to the "Burg-Musik."

"It was because I could not bear the thought of your complete disappointment," he concluded, "that I bought Feintuch's silence; also a little because I had heard of your straits, and because to begin by lending you money didn't strike me as the best way of winning a hearing."

At that their eyes met, and they both laughed—
Val rather helplessly.

"And weren't you lending me money this way?"

"No, I wasn't—since I was conceited enough to believe that I was only forestalling events. I don't mind confessing even that, now that I know for certain that 'mine is thine,' for good and all."

Again she put out the compelling arm.

"Did I not say that you were a fraud?"

"That means absolution, I suppose? But the doll was not the only thing in the box. Look here!"

And, out of his pocket-book, he produced the half-sheet of note-paper which he had first seen in Doktor Feintuch's sanctuary.

Val took it and read—

"Break not your heads, my heirs beloved
Touching what cash I may be worth;
Mince-meat I'll make of the last shilling
And, grinning, quit this shabby earth."

"That settles the question of Doktor Feintuch's honesty, anyway!" she said with that same bewildered laugh. "I wonder what Cousin Tom did with his money—or the remains of it?"

"Shouldn't be surprised if he sunk it in the Danube, while leaving the biscuit-box on the shore. But about that biscuit-box—tell me, dearest, for I too have my small curiosities. *Is* the doll a solution? Does it explain anything to you? I began by imagining that she might be stuffed with gold-dust, at the very least, but anatomical experiments have assured me that it is only saw-dust."

Val was turning the doll over in her hands.

"Flaxen plaits—a blue silk frock—what does this remind me of? Ah! I know—the doll that Mummy and Cousin Tom buried in the shrubbery at the end of his last holidays. Oh, Heribert!"—and in her excitement she sat up straight—"I do believe this is the same! 'A biscuit-china beauty with plaits down to her heels'—that was Mummy's description, and it tallies! it tallies! Of course I understand the biscuit-box now—it is her coffin! And these spots upon her skirt are damp, of course—underground damp! Look!"

Wallersdorf looked, and then, below his breath said—

"Poor Cousin Tom!"

"Yes, it almost looks as if it was a case of 'Poor Cousin Tom,' doesn't it? I always suspected a romance, though a perfectly one-sided one. I suppose he had always meant to come back for Mummy some day, and couldn't forgive her for not guessing his intention. Heribert," and she nestled against his shoulder as he still knelt beside her, "how dreadful it is to miss one's happiness in that way! Perhaps 'Mr. Spiteful' would never have been 'Mr. Spiteful' if he had had the chance of becoming my father."

"Perhaps not," said Wallersdorf. "And perhaps, too, it was that which made the earth so 'shabby.'"

And for a moment longer they both gazed at the doll, dumb messenger of a dead lover and a dead love.

"So, after all, it was no ghost that the coachman met in the shrubbery—and no astral body, either. What shall we do with her, Heribert? Send her back

to Mother? It's her property, after all, and perhaps she ought to know."

"What for? In order that she should worry herself with self-reproaches? And besides——"

"Besides what?"

"Besides," said Wallersdorf, with a tenderly humorous gleam in his brown eyes, as he bent to kiss his wife, "it would appear a much more practical arrangement for us to keep the doll, since who knows how soon we may have a use for it!"

And so it was decided.



THE END.

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"Besides what?"

"Besides," said Wallersdorf, with a tender gleam in his brown eyes, "I don't think it would appear a good thing for us to keep the doll, and she may have a use for it some day. And so it was decided."



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