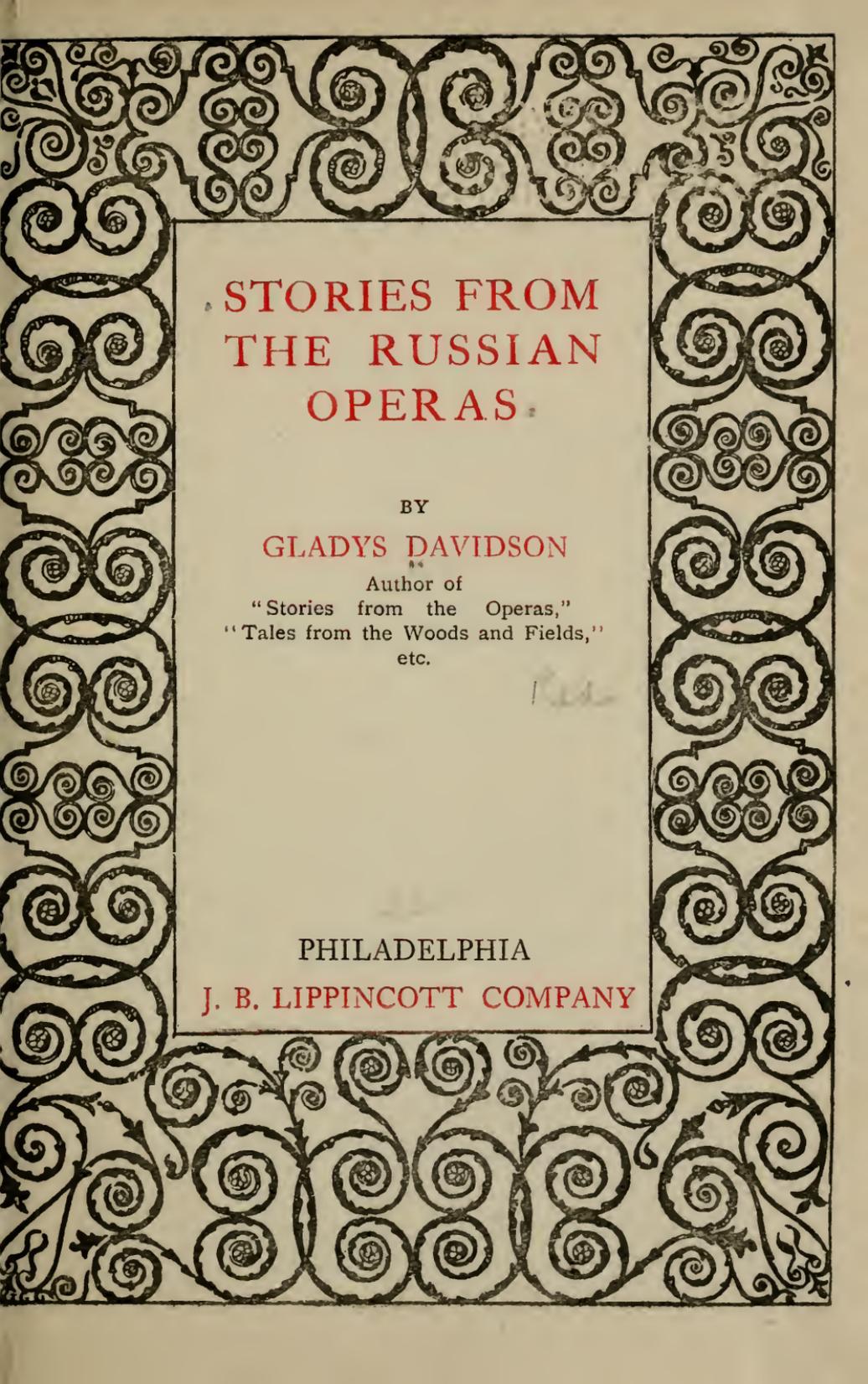


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STORIES FROM
THE RUSSIAN
OPERAS



STORIES FROM
THE RUSSIAN
OPERAS.

BY

GLADYS DAVIDSON

Author of

"Stories from the Operas,"
"Tales from the Woods and Fields,"
etc.

PHILADELPHIA

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PREFACE

THE composers of the Russian Operas have been fortunately placed as regards dramatic and fantastic subjects for the libretti of their operas. The works of their famous poet and romanticist, Poushkin, proved quite a goldmine for several of them; and no difficulty appears to have been experienced in finding interesting and happy subjects for their inspiration.

The stories selected for this volume are those of the Russian Operas best known to opera-goers in this country, most of them having already been performed in London or elsewhere.

The object, as in the case of my former *Stories from the Operas*, has been to present all the incidents of each libretto, exactly as they occur in the various acts and scenes, in the clear, readable form of a short story. The work thus serves the purpose of a text-book

for opera-lovers, while providing at the same time a collection of dramatic tales of considerable interest to the general reader, giving glimpses of Russian history and legendary lore and pictures of Russian scenes and character.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

IT is desired to acknowledge with thanks the information and assistance rendered by Messrs J. & W. Chester, Ltd., of 11 Great Marlborough Street, London, W.1, in the preparation of this volume. It is also desired to acknowledge the source of "Mademoiselle Fifi," the libretto of which is based upon Guy de Maupassant's well-known story.

G. D.

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NOTES ON THE OPERAS

	<i>Composer.</i>	<i>Libretto.</i>	<i>First produced.</i>
ALEKO. Opera in One Act.	Sergius Vassilievitch Rachmaninov.	Adapted from Poushkin's Poem, "The Gipsies."	Imperial Opera House, Moscow, 1893. London Opera House, 1915.
A NIGHT IN MAY. Humorous Fantastic Opera in Three Acts.	Nicolas A. Rimsky-Korsakov.	Adapted from one of Gogol's Malo-Russian Stories.	Mariensky Theatre, St Petersburg, January 1880. Drury Lane, London, June 26, 1914.
BORIS GODOUNOV. Opera in Four Acts and Prologue.	Modeste Moussorgsky.	Adapted by Moussorgsky from Poushkin and Karamzin.	Imperial Theatre, St Petersburg, January 24, 1874. Drury Lane, London, 1913.
EUGÈNE ONIEGIN. Opera in Three Acts.	Peter Ilytch Tchaikovsky.	By Tchaikovsky and Shilovsky, from the famous romantic Poem by Poushkin.	Moscow Conservatoire, March 29, 1879. London, Olympic Theatre, Oct. 17, 1892.
FRANCESCA DA RIMINI. Opera in Two Acts, with Prologue and Epilogue.	Sergius Vassilievitch Rachmaninov.	Adapted from the famous romance of Paolo and Francesca.	St Petersburg (posthumously), December 1893.
IOLANTA. Lyric Opera in One Act.	Peter Ilytch Tchaikovsky.	Based on the story of "King René's Daughter."	St Petersburg, January 1873. London, Drury Lane, 1913.
IVAN THE TERRIBLE; or, THE MAID OF PSKOV. Opera in Three Acts.	Nicolas A. Rimsky-Korsakov.	Adapted from the tragedy by Mey.	London, Drury Lane, 1913.
LA KHOVANSTCHINA. Opera in Five Acts.	Modeste Moussorgsky.	Adapted from Russian History by Moussorgsky (on suggestion of Stassov).	

"MADEMOISELLE FIFI."

Opera in One Act.

Composer.

César Cui.

Libretto.

Adapted from Guy de Maupassant's celebrated story.

First produced.

By the Private Opera Company at the Hermitage Theatre, Moscow, 1903.
London Opera House, 1915.

MOZART AND SALIERI.

A Dramatic Episode in Operatic Form.

Nicolas A. Rimsky-Korsakov.

By the Private Opera Company at the Hermitage Theatre, Moscow, 1898.

PRINCE IGOR.

Opera in Four Acts and Prologue.

Alexander Porphyrievich Borodin.

Imperial Opera House, St Petersburg, October 23, 1890.
London, Drury Lane, July 1914.

THE DEMON.

Opera in Three Acts.

Anton Grigievich Rubinstein.

St Petersburg, January 13, 1875.
London, Covent Garden, June 21, 1881.

THE GOLDEN COCKEREL.

Satirical Fantastic Opera in Three Acts.

Nicolas A. Rimsky-Korsakov.

Zimini's Opera House, Moscow, September 24, 1909.
London, Drury Lane, June 25, 1914.

THE NIGHTINGALE.

Opera in Three Acts.

Igor Stravinsky.

London, Drury Lane, June 18, 1914.

THE QUEEN OF SPADES.

Opera in Three Acts.

Peter Ilytsh Tchaikovsky.

Mariensky Theatre, St Petersburg, December 19, 1890.
London Opera House, 1915.

THE STONE GUEST.

Opera in Four Acts.

Alexander Sergeivich Dargomijsky.

Produced posthumously at St Petersburg in 1872.

STORIES FROM THE RUSSIAN OPERAS

BORODIN

PRINCE IGOR

ONE day, towards the close of the twelfth century, the great Russian Prince, Igor of Seversk, a mighty and renowned warrior, gathered his fighting men together in the market-place of Poltivil, his capital, preparatory to leading them forth to battle with his hereditary enemy, the Polovtsy, a Tartar tribe equally renowned for their bravery and prowess in the field.

A vast crowd of the townsfolk had also met in the square for the purpose of giving a rousing send-off to the departing warriors ; and on the steps of the palace stood Igor's wife, the beautiful Princess Yaroslavna, bidding a sad farewell to her royal husband and her son, the handsome young Prince Vladimir, who was to accompany his father to the wars.

The Princess had vainly endeavoured to prevent her husband from entering upon this expedition, having had a strange foreboding that it would end in disaster ; and the people also tried to hold the warriors in conversation in order to delay their departure, they, too, being depressed by a sense of approaching calamity.

While the expeditionary party thus tarried in the square an eclipse of the sun, which fell due that day, came on apace ; and as the light thus vanished and an uncanny darkness overshadowed the heavens, the superstitious people, taking this disturbance of Nature as a certain omen of disaster to their arms, fell upon their knees and implored their Prince to abandon his project and to remain with them.

Prince Igor, however, was not to be scared by signs and omens ; and having learned that his foes, the Polovtsy, had been driven by another rival prince into the Plains of the Don, he determined to go forward with his plan of meeting them there, expecting thus to take them at a disadvantage.

He, therefore, proceeded calmly to place the affairs of state in the hands of his brother-in-law, Prince Galitsky, and then bade a final loving farewell to his wife ; and as the sun peeped forth once more from behind its enveloping shadow, he marshalled his warriors, and, with his son riding beside him, set forth with them towards the plains.

In the weary weeks of waiting that followed, the Princess Yaroslavna had to face many difficulties and troubles ; for she soon found that her brother, Galitsky, always a dissolute and licentious prince, now intended to add treachery to his other bad qualities. No sooner did he enter upon his duties as Regent, than he began to plot for the usurpation of his brother-in-law's state. In this piece of bare-faced villainy, he was assisted by two clever rogues

named Skoula and Eroshka, who, having deserted from Prince Igor's army, were willing enough to accept the bribes now offered them by the base Galitsky; and as they were also famed as bards and skilful performers upon the native musical instruments of the period, they were welcome guests wherever they went. Thus were the deserter minstrels, while pursuing a seemingly innocent calling, able to carry the seditious messages of the treacherous Regent into the homes of those inhabitants of the city who were sufficiently base to listen to a scheme for the betrayal of their liege lord.

While hatching this dastardly plot, the intending usurper did not fail also to employ his powers as Regent in order to pander to his own pleasures; and by indulging too freely in his libertine vices, he unconsciously brought about the discovery of his secret plot.

One day, as Igor's faithful wife, the Princess Yaroslavna, sat in the reception hall of the palace, sighing as she thought of her absent lord, a party of young maidens suddenly interrupted her musings by flinging themselves at her feet and entreating her protection, declaring tearfully that one of their fairest companions had been abducted for the amusement of the licentious Regent, Prince Galitsky.

Greatly distressed at the story told by the weeping girls, Yaroslavna determined to sift the matter to the bottom; and, on instituting further inquiries, she discovered, in addition, the whole perfidious plot

for the overthrow of her absent lord which had been set on foot by the treachery of her brother.

When, therefore, Prince Galitsky presently entered the hall, followed by the lords of the Court, she denounced him before all as a traitor ; and after a stormy scene, in which she faced his baffled fury unflinchingly, she deprived him of his authority and drove him from the Court with indignation and contumely.

Even as this painful scene concluded, a terrified messenger from the seat of war hastened into the presence of the Princess, bearing the terrible news that the noble Prince Igor had met with disaster to his arms, the Russian warriors having been utterly defeated by the Polovtsy, and that, worst tidings of all, the Prince and his gallant son Vladimir had been carried away with their remaining followers as prisoners into the Tartar camp. Nor was this all—elated with their victory, the Tartar warriors were even at that moment marching on Poltivre, with the object of sacking the city and reducing its inhabitants to slavery.

At first, all were stunned by the fearful tidings brought by the distracted messenger ; but presently their patriotic feelings, stirred by this national disaster and increased by the sight of their helpless, grief-stricken Princess, roused the nobles into an outburst of loyal devotion, and, drawing their swords, they bade their liege lady not to despair, swearing to defend her until death should claim them.

Meanwhile, the defeated Prince Igor lay chafing in the Tartar camp, even though an honoured prisoner; for his captor, the Khan Khontchah, was an Oriental of the noblest type, and, with the chivalrous spirit of his race, treated the brave enemy now in his power with the utmost courtesy and honour, so that the captive Igor experienced no hardship or indignity but only suffered in spirit from anxiety as to the fate of his fair city and of his beloved wife.

As for the gallant young Prince Vladimir, he also was treated as an honoured guest; and his woes were soon forgotten when he was invited into the presence of the Khan's beautiful daughter, Khonchakovna, with whom he quickly fell in love. Nor was it long ere his love was returned; for the Tartar maiden was instantly attracted by the handsome young captive, and, with the fiery ardour of the East, she readily responded to the eager wooing of the Russian Prince.

With the magnanimity of a noble conqueror and the courteous hospitality of the Eastern potentate, the Khan ordered a sumptuous banquet to be prepared in honour of his distinguished guests; and Igor and his son were astonished at the brilliant festivities thus provided for them, which far excelled any entertainment of the kind they had ever experienced before.

After the banquet was over, a number of beautiful dancing girls were introduced into the midst of the company to give an exhibition of the wild barbaric dances of the East, their performance being accompanied by skilful musicians who played exquisite

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airs upon their weird native instruments. The beauty of these maidens, the grace of their movements, and the wonderful music of the players, together with the blaze of jewels and the gorgeous costumes and tent decorations lingered long in the memories of the Russian captives ; and the honour thus shown him helped Prince Igor to bear his woes with more resignation, though he still could not refrain from giving vent to his grief and shame from time to time.

On one of these latter occasions he was approached by a renegade Polovtsy soldier, by name Ovlour, who happened to be a Christian, and who, eager to help a captive of his own religion, laid a plan of escape before the Russian Prince, declaring that this would not be a difficult matter to carry out with the assistance he was prepared to give. But the noble Igor, appreciating the kindness and consideration with which he had been treated by the Tartar Khan, felt an equal honour within himself which forbade him to repay the latter's chivalry by thus breaking his parole ; and, though sorely tempted, he proudly declined the offer. He, therefore, continued to endure his captivity with outward resignation, though inwardly chafing at the hard misfortune which had befallen him. Meanwhile, the young Prince Vladimir and the lovely Tartar maiden, Khonchakovna, pursued their love-making under the most romantic conditions, oblivious of what the future might hold for them, and living only for the joyful meetings each present day brought them.



THE TARTAR MAIDEN DANCES BEFORE HER CAPTIVE LOVER.

(Mlle Nesterosiska as *Khouchakovna*.)

Some weeks later, the victorious Tartar army returned to the Polovtsy camp, laden with the rich treasures recently taken in the sack of Poltivre, bringing in also many prisoners they had captured after breaking down the defences of the city; and upon their arrival great rejoicings were held by the victors, banquets were given, and the wildest orgies of dancing, feasting and drinking took place in every tent.

And now the temptation to escape was more than the wretched Igor could resist; and the sight of his own men being brought into the enemy's camp as captives and the knowledge that his city had been sacked and that even his beloved wife might be in danger of captivity, stirred his chafing spirits to such a pitch of despair that he determined to accept the renegade's offer of facilitating his escape, feeling now that he was justified in doing so.

He sent for Ovlour, therefore, and listened eagerly to his daring plans for escape in company with young Vladimir; and the royal captives arranged to steal out of the camp that same night when the revels were at their highest, knowing well that it would be quite an easy matter to step past the already drunken guards and thus reach the plains in safety, where horses would be waiting for them.

All the elaborate plans made by Ovlour worked out satisfactorily; but just as the time arrived for the departure of the runaways, there came an unexpected and unforeseen obstacle.

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The Tartar maiden, Khonchakovna, seeking her lover in accordance with her frequent custom, discovered the preparations of the plotters just as they were about to set forth; and with true Eastern fervour, she passionately entreated Vladimir not to leave her to die of grief and despair, declaring that she could not live without his love.

The young Russian Prince was now placed in a heart-rending predicament, compelled to choose between love and duty; and after a hard struggle he stifled for a few brief moments the yearning of his heart, and yielded to the stern pleading of his father who, already mounted, now spurred on his steed. He was about to spring upon his own horse and to follow in filial obedience, when Khonchakovna flung herself upon him, and, winding her clinging arms around his neck, held him back by sheer force, declaring fiercely that she would never part from him while the breath of life remained in her. Nor did the passionate maiden relax her detaining hold upon the lover whom the vicissitudes of war had sent to her until Prince Igor and Ovlour had successfully passed the camp's drunken sentries and had vanished into the darkness beyond; and then Vladimir, no longer influenced by his father's domination, and realising that his chance of escape had gone, yielded to the dictates of his heart and willingly enough returned to the revels with his beloved one, declaring himself ready to live and even to die for her alone.

And death came very nigh to him within the next

few hours ; for, when morning broke, the escape of Prince Igor was discovered ; and the Tartar soldiers, furious because their own careless revellings had made the escape possible and eager to vent their wrath and disappointment upon the young Prince, seized Vladimir and would have slain him then and there had not the dignified Khan, still true to his benign and noble character, sternly ordered the prisoner's release, observing with true Eastern philosophy that he had a better plan for reconciling the young Prince to his captivity than putting him to death or even tightening his bonds. " The bonds of Love are stronger than iron bands," he added, as he placed the hands of Vladimir in those of Khonchakovna : " therefore, he shall be wedded to my daughter, who holds his heart in thrall and from whom he will have no desire to escape."

So the young Russian Prince was wedded to the Tartar maiden ; and they lived happily together in the sunshine of each other's love.

Meanwhile, the unhappy Princess Yaroslavna pined and mourned in her lonely palace, which lay partly in ruins ; and though she had escaped from indignity at the hands of the invaders by remaining in hiding until their departure, there now seemed nothing left for her to live for, since she felt that by this time her well-beloved lord and her gallant son were surely dead.

Every now and again, however, a faint hope would creep into her heart once more ; and then she would

take food with the few faithful attendants who still remained with her, and would endeavour to cheer herself and them.

One day, after many weary weeks of waiting had gone by, Yaroslavna went out upon the terrace of the palace, on every side of which lay broken walls and loosened stones to bear witness to the sack of the city by the Tartar hordes ; and as she gazed across the ruined city and over the bare fields beyond, she observed two horsemen approaching at a furious pace.

At first, fearing that these travellers might prove to be Tartar soldiers returning to effect her capture, she was about to fly to her former hiding-place, when a second glance revealed to her astonished gaze and unbounded joy the fact that the leading horseman was her own beloved husband, Prince Igor, whilst his sole attendant was the faithful Ovlour, who had so successfully arranged the escape.

A tender and truly thankful reunion took place between the royal pair, whose love and conjugal happiness had ever been of that ideal and edifying quality only enjoyed by the noblest natures ; and after gathering their few scattered followers around them once more, the Prince and Princess entered the citadel to return thanks for their wonderful deliverance and to take up the reins of government once more.

As it happened, the two minstrel rogues, Skoula and Eroshka, who had assisted the traitor, Prince Galitsky, in his evil schemes, were skulking about the pre-

cincts of the historic edifice as the royal procession approached ; and, in order to save their own skins and to incline popular opinion in their favour, should awkward questions be asked later on, they hastened to the belfry and set the bells ringing merrily—thus cunningly giving the impression of at least present loyalty by their eager haste to acquaint the scattered populace, by their joyful bell-ringing, of the happy return of the well-beloved Prince Igor.

“MADEMOISELLE FIFI”

DURING the never-to-be-forgotten January of 1871, when the Franco-German War was raging and France was still suffering the terrible woes of invasion by her hated enemy, a party of Prussians were in occupation of the pretty little village of Uville, where, owing to the bad weather conditions and the exigencies of the moment, they were compelled to remain for a much longer period than they had at first anticipated.

The invading officers had installed themselves in the fine old Chateau d'Uville as their head-quarters; and here, greatly to their disgust, they were compelled to pass many weary days of inactivity, without even amusements or distractions of any kind. The tempestuous weather and incessant rain made outdoor adventures impossible; and they quickly exhausted such amusement as was to be obtained by exploration of the chateau and interest in its many wonderful art treasures. In fact, they had no admiration, but only contempt, for the latter; and they had even applauded the Vandal-like behaviour of the youngest Lieutenant, the Marquis Wilhem Eyrik, in wantonly destroying many of the most beautiful works of art in their temporary abode.

This latter degenerate youth—who passed by the name of “Mademoiselle Fifi,” owing to his effeminate

appearance, which was accentuated by a fair complexion, a small slender figure pinched in at the waist, and a habit of expressing his scorn for things that did not meet with his approval by the contemptuous phrase “ fi, fi donc ”—found real delight and a continual amusement in defacing the treasures about him which had been collected during many years past by the former seigneurs of the chateau. Evidence of his wanton love of destruction was to be found in every room of the castle—more notably so in the large salon which served as the chief meeting-room of the officers.

In the salon in question he had allowed his vulgar fancy to run riot, and, out of pure wantonness, had slashed the priceless Gobelin tapestries on the walls into ribbons with his sword, and had cracked the crystal chandeliers and mirrors with well-aimed bullets from his pistol. Even the family portraits had been maltreated ; for, adding insult to injury, he had thought it a good joke to stick ugly German pipes into the canvases representing cardinals, judges and knights in armour, in order to vulgarise the aristocratic features painted thereon by various master hands. Upon the portrait of a proud lady he had sketched in charcoal a huge pair of German moustaches ; and other flagrant examples of his insulting attentions were to be seen here and there.

In this apartment, one day after *déjeuner*, the commanding officer, Major the Comte de Farlsberg, sat smoking and drinking with his subordinates.

As usual, the junior officers soon began to grumble at the atrocious weather and the deadly dullness of their present monotonous existence. The Major commiserated with them good-naturedly, bidding them follow the example of their young companion, Lieutenant Eyrik, who could always find some way of amusing himself, even if the results were disastrous ; but the young men only showed further signs of restiveness, declaring that the childish amusements of "Mademoiselle Fifi" had no attraction for them. Even the story of Fifi's latest exploit—the exploding of a small mine in the art gallery of the chateau, full of famous pictures, priceless ceramics, carvings and other exquisite works of art, most of which had, in consequence of the explosion, been destroyed—did not restore their drooping spirits ; and seeing that, evidently, they had some request to make of him, the Major bade them unburden their minds.

The Captain, Baron de Kelweingstein, pushed forward by the others as spokesman, now begged the Major to allow them to indulge in an evening of festivity, and to invite some lively girls from the neighbouring town of Rouen to join them in making merry for a few hours.

So strong were their appeals, that the good-natured Major—himself secretly pleased at the thought of what promised to be a pleasant respite from the weariness of inaction—agreed to the suggestion. The wily young Captain, fearful lest his senior should change his mind, immediately made the arrange-

ments for the revels to be held that night, and quickly sent a covered baggage-wagon into Rouen in charge of his own servant, who bore to a rakish officer friend there a note requesting the latter to select a party of the most charming of the light-living ladies of the town and to send them to the Chateau d'Uville in the returning wagon.

The Major, forbearing to reprimand the Captain for his precipitancy, the prospect of the approaching frolic being equally enticing to himself as to his juniors, directed the young men to go forward with their plans and to see that nothing was lacking for the pleasure of themselves and their lady guests. He then turned aside and gazed out through the open window at the soaked country-side and dripping trees. As his eyes fell upon the belfry of the little village church near by, he was reminded of the defiance of the brave old curé, the Abbé Chantovoine, who, as a protest against the invasion of the Prussians, refused to permit the church bell to be rung. The priest was willing enough to act as intermediary between the invaders and his flock, and, by his conciliatory conduct, saved the latter from many hardships and woes that might otherwise have befallen them; but he clung boldly and unwaveringly to this one mild form of resistance—the protest of a silent bell, by which he and the humble peasants upheld their national honour. Until the invaders had been driven forth and their land was free once more, the chimes of the village church should not be heard. Strange to say,

the Prussian Major, hardened campaigner though he was and ruthless though he might be on other occasions, respected this peaceful protest of the good old Abbé, whose gentle courage irresistibly appealed to his better nature; and he had given instructions that the latter's wishes in this matter should be obeyed by his men.

This curious clemency on the part of his superior was greatly resented by the hot-tempered, intolerant young Marquis, who was infuriated at the calm resistance of the old Abbé; and not only did he many times call upon the Major to let his men themselves ring the church bell merrily in acclamation of their conquest of the village, but, with all a bully's cowardly love of oppression, frequently begged to be allowed personally to chastise the curé and his village supporters for daring thus to resist the conqueror in their midst.

The Major, however, had refused firmly to allow his junior to interfere with the instructions he had given for the old Abbé's wishes to be respected; and the church bell thus remained silent, while "Mademoiselle Fifi" perforce had to satisfy himself with his destructive amusements within the Chateau d'Uville.

By the time the Major's reverie was at an end, he found that the young men were making lavish preparations for their forthcoming entertainment and were already in riotous spirits. The large dining-table was invitingly laid out for an elaborate supper; and from the well-stocked cellars below an extravagant

quantity of champagne and other rich wines of various kinds were brought up for the delectation of the revellers.

Scarcely were the preparations finished, when the rumbling and bumping of an approaching baggage-wagon announced to the eagerly expectant Prussians that their guests, willing or not, had arrived ; and the officers, shouting with delight at the pleasure now within their grasp, hastened outside, and shortly returned to the room, each escorting a pretty lady upon his arm.

These girls of the town had, for the most part, come willingly enough ; for they had grown accustomed to the presence of the Prussians in their midst, and, with the philosophic good-humour of their class, were quite content to tolerate the amorous advances of even enemy admirers in return for a good supper and any further payment that might also be offered. Therefore, with one exception only, they entered whole-heartedly into the gaiety of the young men for whose pleasure they had been brought to the chateau, eating and drinking all that was offered to them, and cheerfully enduring the rough and frequently insulting caresses of their hosts, laughing loudly at the vulgar jokes and horseplay of the latter.

The only one among these free-and-easy “ joy-girls ” who resented the insulting attentions of her partner was a beautiful young Jewess, named Rachel, who, though she had joined the party of girls with

seeming willingness and even smiled and danced as she entered the room, had not come with them to the chateau for the same purpose of merely amusing the Prussian officers. Having suffered much shame and loss at the hands of her country's foes, she had seen in this adventure a possible means of securing revenge.

Rachel had been handed over as a partner to the lively young subaltern, Wilhem Eyrik; and the insolent behaviour of this degenerate youth had quickly aroused her indignation. For "Fifi," though pleased at having secured the most beautiful of the visitors as his prize, yet treated her with the utmost contempt and rudeness; and the sensitive, high-spirited girl quickly let him see that she hated and despised him for thus displaying his power as one of the conquering Prussians.

On parading round the room with her as his partner, the insolent youth had bent his head as though about to kiss her, but, instead, had blown a full puff of smoke from his cigar into her face; and Rachel, angry at such an indignity, though remaining silent, had cast such a furious glance upon him that the Major, fearing lest the revel should be spoilt before it had scarce begun, called the young man to order, and invited the party to seat themselves at the supper-table.

With the enjoyment of unaccustomed luxuries and the lavish supply of champagne, the fun waxed fast and furious; and it was not long before



"FIFI'S" PARTNER.

(Mlle Dobrovolska as *Rachel*.)

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55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64

the revel developed into an orgy of excess and licence.

However, though her girl companions adapted themselves readily enough to the scene of levity into which they had been introduced, enduring the boorish attentions of their ill-mannered hosts with at least outward good-humour, Rachel stubbornly refused to submit tamely to the rough treatment she received at the hands of Lieutenant Eyrik. The latter had as equal a talent for tormenting as for destroying ; and seeing that the beautiful Jewess objected to his ill manners, it gave him pleasure to tease and aggravate her all the more.

Consequently, he several times dragged her to his knees, twisting his fingers in the dark curls that clustered around her pretty neck, and pinching her arms and shoulders until her black eyes blazed with increasing anger and disgust ; but still she preserved a contemptuous silence.

Frequently the young officer was good-naturedly reprimanded by the Commandant, who endeavoured to keep the revel within bounds by calling for noisy drinking songs, in which all the party, with the one exception of Rachel, took part with great hilarity.

His partner's silence, however, evoked further unwelcome attentions from the young Marquis, who found the girl's increasing contempt both amusing and exasperating, while her dark beauty, enhanced tenfold by her flashing glances and scornful demeanour, became more and more alluring. Suddenly, he

snatched her in a close embrace and kissed her so long and violently upon the mouth that he even bit into the soft flesh, with the result that a streak of blood appeared on her chin when at last he released her. Furious at this outrage, Rachel again cast glances of hatred upon her brutal partner, as she dipped her handkerchief into water and bathed her bleeding lip ; but she still maintained her silence.

As the evening advanced the boisterous conduct of the party increased ; for a long series of toasts were now proposed, to which the young men drank so deeply that they soon threw off all restraint and treated their partners more roughly still.

Though the other girls joined noisily in the coarse hilarity of their hosts, Rachel still endeavoured to remain proudly aloof. The only effect of her disdainful glances, however, was to produce guffaws of derisive laughter from the now half-intoxicated Prussians, and, in particular, to increase the irritation of "Mademoiselle Fifi," who, rising unsteadily to his feet and raising an overflowing glass of champagne, drank to the continued success of the Prussian army and to the utter annihilation of the French, calling upon his companions to do likewise.

The other officers all honoured the toast noisily, but Rachel, her patriotic feelings wounded past further endurance, now broke her silence and hotly reminded the Marquis that it was lucky for him no French soldiers were present, or those blustering words would have been crammed down his throat.

To this, the excited young Prussian replied contemptuously that the French were cowards and runaways, and that all the men of France were in the power of the victorious invader ; and he added tantalisingly, as he set a glass of champagne on the head of the Jewess : “ And all the women of France are our slaves and playthings, too ! Even *you*, beautiful Rachel, came willingly for my pleasure and embraces, you spitfire Frenchwoman ! ”

“ Don’t dare to call me by the honourable name of Frenchwoman ! ” cried Rachel, her eyes blazing with wrath ; and she raised her head so sharply that the wine-glass was dashed to the ground, and the champagne splashed in a golden shower over her black curls.

“ What are you, then, you fury ? ” demanded her tormentor.

“ I am what you brutal invaders have made of me—a creature of the streets ! ” cried Rachel, with bitter scorn : “ yet am I good enough for a Prussian ! ”

Scarcely had she thus spoken than the young Lieutenant, stung to madness by her scorn, sprang up wildly and struck the girl a savage blow in the face. Immediately, Rachel fell upon him like a tigress, and, snatching a knife from the table, stabbed him in the throat—and, as the young Prussian fell back in a dying condition, she dashed out through the open window which led on to the veranda and made her escape before the dazed officers had time to seize her.

The Major and his subordinates, sobered by this

tragic end to their orgy, gathered round the fallen body of their comrade ; and presently as they silently laid the dead body of " Mademoiselle Fifi " upon the hastily cleared table, to their amazement, they heard the solemn tolling of the bell of the old village church.

Upon demanding of the Abbé Chantovoine, who entered the room later on, why the sacristan thus disobeyed the order of his superior, the good old man replied humbly : " I cannot refuse to bid him toll the bell for one who has passed away ! "

Then, falling upon his knees, he offered up a prayer for the soul of his dead enemy.

THE STONE GUEST

It was evening time in Madrid. Soon the quickly deepening shadows would merge into twilight and darkness would reign over the city until the rising moon cast its shimmering mantle of pale silvery light over the violet depths to reveal the mystic beauty of a perfect summer night.

The evening strollers were already returning to their homes, and few people were lingering outside the city gates ; but within the cloister enclosures of the famous Monastery at the entrance to Madrid two silent cloaked forms still lurked in the shadowy background, as though anxious not to be seen, making no attempt to join the stragglers now returning to the city.

These two intruders within the holy precincts were Don Juan, the handsomest and most licentious of all the gay cavaliers of Madrid, and his confidential body-servant, Laporello ; and their reason for thus lurking in the shadows and keeping themselves well out of sight of any chance passers-by was that they were under the ban of exile from the fair city and would be arrested immediately were they seen by any of the officials. For Don Juan was not only famous for his amorous pursuit of numerous fair ladies,

but also for the deadly skill with which he slew his rivals in the duels and frequent night encounters connected with his audacious love-affairs.

At the present moment Don Juan was under the darkest cloud that had ever shadowed his scandalous career ; and despite his usual reckless defiance of authority, he was, to his great chagrin, compelled for the time being to move with caution and to consider every step he took. In one of the many desperate duelling encounters for which he was celebrated, he had deliberately slain a Grandee of Spain—Don Pedro, the Commandant, one of the most respected and highly placed officials in Madrid ; and for this evil deed he had been exiled from the city by the King.

For a few anxious days the shadow of final disaster had hung gloomily over the murderer, who feared for that brief space of time that he might be called upon to expiate his crime upon the scaffold ; but so great a favourite was he with the King—who had himself shared in many of the secret adventures of this gay cavalier—that the latter had decided that justice was sufficiently satisfied by the slayer of the Commandant being banished from Madrid. The family of the Commandant, however—and in particular his young wife, the beautiful Donna Anna—thought otherwise and had sworn vengeance upon the murderer of their distinguished relative, having vowed to kill him should he ever fall into their hands ; and this was the chief danger the venturesome Don

Juan had to fear as he now lurked on the threshold of the fair city he loved so well.

He declared this much to the more timorous Laporello, who had accompanied him very unwillingly, fearing that they would almost certainly fall into the hands of his master's many enemies ; and he added that he was not afraid thus to defy even the orders of the King, whose most favoured cavalier he well knew himself to be and whose very sentence of exile he believed to have been pronounced solely because of his (Don Juan's) personal danger of summary justice at the hands of the dead Commandant's family.

“ Cease to tremble, my good Laporello ! ” he said to his quaking servant. “ If the worst comes to the worst and I am captured by the guards, His Majesty will only order me to be banished again—and I shall be no worse off ! Meanwhile, if, under cover of the darkness and before the moon rises, we can manage to slip unnoticed into the city, we may enjoy our accustomed nightly pleasures in the secret haunts we know so well, without let or hindrance—for, even at this moment, methinks Don Juan still holds sway over the hearts of more than one fair but frail lady of Madrid, none of whom, for the love she bears him, will be likely to betray him ! ”

This fact Laporello knew to be only too true, since the part of Lothario was ever the rôle of his unscrupulous master, to whom the caresses of fair women and the passionate pleasures of youth were as the breath of

life. No wonder, therefore, the young nobleman found banishment insupportably irksome, and pined for the sunny days and romantic nights spent in the company of the dark-eyed beauties of Madrid ; and for the sake of enjoying his old pleasures once more for a few hours, he thus boldly defied the law, risking his liberty and, possibly, his life, by venturing into forbidden territory.

As he moved impatiently amidst the shadows of the cloisters Don Juan whispered to his servant that he now recognised the spot as a place of rendezvous where he used to meet the pretty damsel, Ineza, one of his former conquests ; and he spoke enthusiastically, even regretfully, of the fresh charms of this early victim of his passion. Laporello, well accustomed to pandering to his master's many moods, bade him be of good comfort, since there was never a lack of fair ladies for him to pursue ; and he asked him, casually, whom he intended to visit that night—knowing, from past experience, that his gay lord was never without an assignation.

“ I intend to visit Laoura, the beautiful actress, as soon as we can get within these cursed gates ! ” replied his master. “ She loves me still, and will give me a glad welcome, I know ; and I will learn from her all the news of the town ! How I pine for a goblet of wine and a fair woman's kiss ! Come, let us see if we can make an attempt now to pass the guards, for darkness is drawing on apace ! ”

As ill luck would have it, however, at that moment a monk came strolling through the cloisters, who,

seeing the strangers lurking in the shadows, asked their business, adding : “ Are you of the household of Donna Anna, the widow of the murdered Commandant ? ”

Laporello quaked on hearing this, but Don Juan calmly replied that he and his servant were merely taking a stroll in the cool of the evening ; and, pretending that they were strangers to the town, he inquired further particulars as to Donna Anna and her late husband. The monk, little suspecting with whom he spoke, informed him that the Commandant had been killed by the shameless Don Juan, whose unscrupulous conduct and scandalous orgies were a disgrace to the city and who was now living in exile as a punishment for this last evil deed, which crime, but for the ill-placed favour and leniency of the King, he would by this time have expiated upon the scaffold.

While Don Juan inwardly marvelled that his ill-fame should have penetrated even to these outlying cloisters the loquacious monk went on to inform him that the murdered body of the Commandant had been buried in the grounds of this same Monastery, and that a splendid monument, surmounted by a statue of the late Grandee, had been erected in honour of his memory by his widow, Donna Anna, who came thither every evening to visit the tomb and to pray for the soul of the good husband she had thus lost in such untimely fashion.

Astonished at this exhibition of wifely devotion—having heard the gossips say that the dead man had

been exceedingly jealous of his wife and had always kept a strict guard upon her actions, refusing permission for her ever to venture out of doors alone—Don Juan inquired casually if the bereaved lady were pretty ; and on hearing from the monk that the late Commandant's widow was both young and extremely beautiful but that she shunned intercourse with all would-be admirers and wooers, he became intensely interested and desirous of making her acquaintance, flattering himself, with all a libertine's vanity, that she would not long deny herself to *him*.

At this moment a lady, clad in deep mourning garments, approached ; and the monk informed the strangers that this new-comer was none other than Donna Anna herself, come, according to her evening custom, to pray at the graveside of her husband.

In a low, sweet voice Donna Anna requested the monk to open the gate that led to the Monastery grounds ; and the monk having done so she passed through and vanished from sight—but not before Don Juan's inquisitive gaze had discovered that her long black draperies hid a form of voluptuous grace, that, although her face only showed indistinctly through the heavy veil she wore, her eyes were wonderfully large and bright and that her undoubted beauty must certainly be of a very high order.

With his usual impetuosity, his hot blood fired by the mere thought of this hidden beauty, Don Juan took a hasty step forward, in order to follow and intercept the veiled lady ; but Laporello quickly drew him back

again, reprimanding him, with an old servant's freedom, for desiring to intrude, unasked, upon the grief of the widow whose husband he had slain.

Don Juan, momentarily ashamed, drew back into the shadows, though inwardly vowing to make the acquaintance of the fascinating widow later on. Then, as darkness had now fallen, the two men made their way to the city gates, through which they managed to slip unnoticed just before closing time, and, favoured by the darkness and the long cloaks they wore muffled around them, passed through the streets without comment.

Leaving his servant in a certain spot with instructions to rejoin him later, Don Juan made his way to the abode of Laoura, the beautiful actress, who was, at this time, the toast of all Madrid. Upon arriving at her house, however, he found it brilliantly illuminated; and knowing that this meant that an entertainment was being held within, he was filled with chagrin. Prudently realising that he must not show himself in public when he was believed to be in exile, he decided to remain hidden in the grounds outside until he had seen the guests depart, when he would make his presence known to the hostess, whose lover he had been in the past and who he knew could never resist his advances but would willingly receive him even though she knew him to be under a cloud.

The popular actress was indeed giving a supper-party to a number of her friends and admirers, among whom was Don Carlos, her latest lover; and after

her guests had partaken of the feast she had provided for them, Laoura began to repeat for their further entertainment various extracts from the play in which she had been performing at the theatre that night. Her efforts met with enthusiastic applause from her guests ; and then, eager for their continued admiration, she sang to them a light, dainty song, which they applauded more vociferously than ever.

In answer to their interested inquiries, she told them that the composer of this song was Don Juan ; on hearing which Don Carlos was moved to sudden anger and reproached his inamorata for caring to sing lines composed by such a villainous reprobate as Don Juan, upon whom he violently called down maledictions, declaring that his own (Don Carlos') young brother had been one of the many duelling victims of this unscrupulous libertine.

Laoura was greatly offended at this outburst. Having favoured Don Juan in the past, she did not care to hear him ill spoken of ; and, now realising this, Don Carlos, fearing, with a lover's anxiety, lest her smiles should no longer rest upon him, at once apologised for having given way to his jealous anger, and even entreated Laoura to sing the same song again as a proof that she had forgiven him for his lapse.

The actress, now all smiles once more, willingly enough responded to his request ; and then, when the song came to an end, she dismissed all her guests,

with the exception of Don Carlos, whom, with a tender glance, she invited to remain.

When the other guests had all retired Don Carlos began to talk more confidentially with the fair actress ; and upon learning that she was only eighteen years of age, he said to her : “ While you are still so young, all the world seems fair, for you have many admirers and lovers and are happy because you wield the mighty, but short-lived, power of youth and beauty ; but, have you ever thought of what will happen when youth and beauty wanes and departs, and admirers no longer crowd to your salons ? ”

Laoura, however, did not wish to speak or even to think of anything so unpleasant as a loverless future, for she was gay and light-hearted and took joy only in the present ; and, feeling suddenly shy, knowing that Don Carlos was about to declare his love for her, she gazed out through the open window and exclaimed at the beauty of the night.

Just then there came a loud knock at the door ; and next moment Don Juan, having seen the guests depart and imagining that the beautiful actress would now be alone in her apartments, made his way into the house and unceremoniously entered the banqueting-room.

Laoura uttered a cry of surprise and dismay ; and Don Carlos emitted a curse as he instantly drew his sword and rushed upon the hated murderer of his brother. Don Juan, however, though furious at thus finding Laoura occupied with a new lover, was equal

to the occasion, and, whipping out his own sword, instantly engaged in a deadly duel with his rival, whom, owing to his wonderful dexterity as a swordsman, he soon stretched lifeless at his feet.

As Don Carlos fell Laoura shrank back, covering her face with her hands ; but the ever-successful Don Juan, always an adept in such scenes, drew her tenderly into his embrace and led her away into an adjoining room, where she quickly fell under the spell of his personal attraction once more and readily enough received him upon his old footing.

But Don Juan had not forgotten his sudden infatuation for the beautiful Donna Anna, whose half-hidden charms had so fired his imagination, and next evening he repaired to the Monastery at the entrance to Madrid. Here, in the disguise of a monk, he hoped not only to make the acquaintance of the fair widow, but, at the same time, to find a safe refuge from pursuit as the murderer of Don Carlos—for which new crime he was already being sought by the officers of justice.

With his usual cool daring, he put aside all thought of his own personal danger and gave himself up to the joy and excitement of the fresh conquest he hoped to make. The half-concealed features and graceful form of Donna Anna had impressed and interested him more than he had thought possible, so that he found himself wondering, for the first time in his amorous career, what he should say to the object of this sudden passion. In order to calm himself somewhat, he made his way to the monument erected to the memory of the late

Commandant and began to admire the excellent likeness and fine detail work of the life-size statue of Don Pedro which surmounted it.

While he was thus engaged, Donna Anna, still heavily veiled, came through the open gates and made her way to her husband's graveside, where she was much surprised to observe the stranger monk, who immediately raised his bold eyes and gazed so eagerly upon her that, to hide her embarrassment, she turned as though to move away, saying in her soft, gentle voice: "Pardon me, good Father! I fear I have disturbed your holy meditations!"

"Nay, not so!" replied the pretended monk; "it is I who must ask your forgiveness for intruding upon your grief and prayers!"

Donna Anna now asked the young monk to pray with her; but, to her amazement, he replied: "I cannot pray with you, fair lady, but, I prithee, grant me the happiness of admiring you while you pray!"

These audacious words confirmed the growing suspicion in the mind of Donna Anna, who now threw back her veil and looked searchingly upon the bold stranger, as she said coldly: "The holy Fathers do not speak thus! You are no monk, sir, and I must request you to leave these sacred grounds immediately!"

Don Juan, though his heart leaped at this first revelation of the lovely features of the Commandant's widow, replied humbly that she had indeed guessed the truth and that he was no monk. He added that

he was a young man of noble birth, and the victim of a hopeless love, having donned his present disguise in order to have the opportunity of gazing upon his adored one, who had no knowledge yet of his passion.

So bold was the burning gaze she now encountered that Donna Anna quickly lowered her eyes, asking confusedly : “ What, then, do you desire, sir ? ”

Don Juan, with affected humility, replied that he was but an unworthy person who deserved not the love of a beautiful lady ; and he added : “ All I now wish for, madam, is death, and the privilege of being buried here at the gates of the Monastery, so that your fairy-like footsteps may pass over my grave every evening when you come hither to pray at the tomb of your husband.”

Donna Anna, though truly amazed at the audacity of the bold stranger, could not fail to realise that she herself was the object of his passion ; but, despite the fact that his reckless avowal was not unpleasant to her and that the handsome looks and admiring glances of the young man caused her own heart to flutter strangely, she endeavoured still to speak coldly and reproved him for daring to address her thus at her husband’s grave.

But Don Juan had seen and read in the one short tender glance she had been unable to repress that she was not indifferent to him ; and he was confirmed in this impression when she stopped his next hot flow of passionate words by saying that she could no longer listen to him there, but that he might visit

her at her house in the evening if he had anything of importance to say to her.

Then, as though afraid of having acted rashly, Donna Anna hastily dropped her veil and hurried away, leaving Don Juan full of triumph in his conquest and delighted at the prospect of a new love affair. He quickly sought out his servant Laporello, who was waiting in the background, and when the latter reproved him laughingly for his shameless audacity in making love to the fair widow over the grave of the husband he had slain, he dared him to go back and tell the Commandant's statue what was afoot and to invite it to be present also at his meeting with the lovely Donna Anna.

Laporello, entering into the joke, ran back and delivered his master's invitation, in jocose fashion, to the statue of the Commandant; but, to his horror and dismay, he observed that the statue actually bowed its head gravely, as though in acceptance of the invitation. Trembling in every limb, he staggered back to his master and related to him the uncanny occurrence in terrified accents; but Don Juan laughed at the tale, declaring merrily that his servant must be intoxicated, or dreaming, to imagine that a stone statue could move.

"Nay, master, I tell you the truth!" declared the quaking Laporello, in a scared whisper. "If you do not believe me, go and see for yourself!"

Still laughing at the fears of his servant, Don Juan gaily returned to the monument, and, with great

bravado, repeated his impudent invitation to the statue to be a guest that evening in his own house and to witness the love-making between his fair widow and his murderer ; and, strange to say, even as he ceased speaking, the statue again bowed its head in acquiescence.

Sobered by this weird circumstance, Don Juan now allowed himself to be hurried away by his terrified servant ; but though Laporello endeavoured to dissuade him from keeping the assignation he had made with Donna Anna, his sudden infatuation for the Commandant's beautiful widow was so great that he refused to be deprived of the joy of seeing her again. Besides, the curious chain of circumstances that had led up to the meeting and the mystery connected with the strange movements of the Commandant's statue, which pointed to supernatural agencies being at work, only added zest to what promised to be a delightful and exciting adventure. Later that evening, therefore, he repaired, with an eager step and the air of an expectant conqueror, to the splendid mansion still occupied by Don Pedro's widow, into whose presence he was ushered at once and whom he greeted audaciously with all the fervour of an accepted lover.

But though Donna Anna received him kindly, she appeared to be very sad, weeping frequently as though unable to restrain her grief ; and she begged her visitor to excuse her tears, because her bereavement was so recent.

Don Juan, though he declared that it was happiness

to him merely to be in her presence, notwithstanding her tears, could not refrain from giving vent to his jealousy for the cause of her grief. Seeing this, Donna Anna reassured him by saying that there was no need for him to be jealous of her tears, as she only wept as though for the loss of a kindly and respected friend ; adding that she had never felt a lover's affection for her late husband, who had been considerably older than she and whom she had been desired by her parents to marry because of his wealth, her own family being very poor.

To this Don Juan replied that the Commandant must indeed have been happy in having secured such a beautiful wife ; and he added passionately : “ Would that *I* deserved such happiness ! I would gladly be your slave and do your bidding for ever, and would even risk my life for the sake of one smile from you, my beloved lady ! ”

Donna Anna, though she did not look displeased, now turned away her head and declared that she could not listen to such words, for she believed it was her duty to remain true to the memory of her husband.

“ Sweet lady, do not name that virtuous gentleman to me again, I beg of you ! ” cried Don Juan, exasperated by her constant references to the dead Commandant. “ Say not that my love is hopeless, but have pity upon me, though indeed I deserve no pity, but, rather, dire punishment at your hands ! ”

“ But why should you deserve punishment at my hands ? ” demanded the astonished Donna Anna.

“ You have done me no wrong, and I did not even know you before this evening ! ”

Don Juan, realising that, in his extravagant recklessness, he had gone too far, replied confusedly that he could not tell her this reason ; but the more he refused the information the more did the beautiful widow persist in her demand, her curiosity being now intensely aroused, so that she reproached him bitterly for refusing to grant her first request, adding almost tearfully that he must certainly have been only deceiving her when he had declared himself willing to be her slave, for he evidently did not care to please her.

Don Juan was now in a quandary. His sudden infatuation for Donna Anna had already strengthened into a much deeper feeling, so that he hesitated to make himself known to her for fear of being denied the pleasure of ever seeing her again ; but so persistently did she importune him that at length he realised that he would have to tell her the truth, since she was bound to learn it sooner or later, and he sought eagerly for the gentlest means of revealing his identity.

He adroitly turned the conversation round to the subject of her husband’s murderer, asking her casually in what way she regarded the shameless Don Juan and how she would treat him should she ever come face to face with him.

“ I hate the vile wretch ! ” she cried, indignantly and with great vehemence. “ If ever I meet him, I

will stab him with my poniard and gladly send him to the eternal torments he so well deserves ! ”

“ Then, take up your dagger now, madam, and stab me to the heart, for *I* am Don Juan ! Your enemy stands before you ! ” cried the young man, dramatically opening his vesture as he spoke.

On hearing this astounding announcement, Donna Anna, with a cry of horror, fell back in a fainting condition ; and when, after the anxious and tender ministrations of her visitor, she had recovered somewhat, she endeavoured to denounce him with a great show of indignation and contempt for one whom she had always regarded as an unscrupulous scoundrel. But the fascination of Don Juan’s dazzling personality and charm of manner was more than she could resist ; and his present air of deep humility and well-simulated contrite penitence, coupled with his continuous protestations of love and devotion to herself, made such a great impression upon her that she soon found her righteous anger melting away. She even began to show anxiety for him to get to a place of safety, away from the fear of arrest, declaring that his presence in her house might be discovered at any moment should her friends or relatives appear unexpectedly.

From this Don Juan rightly gathered that the beautiful widow was by no means indifferent to him, and seizing her hand in a tender clasp he said in his most ardent tones : “ Beloved one, your words put hope into my despairing heart ! Your anxiety for my safety proves that at least you do not hate me ! ”

“ Alas, it is true ! I only wish it were possible for me to hate you ! ” murmured the distracted lady. “ I know and feel that I ought to do so, but I find I cannot ! ”

Encouraged and further emboldened by this confession Don Juan put his arms around her ; then, saying that he must indeed depart, it not being safe for him to remain longer, he humbly begged her to kiss him once, in token of her forgiveness, so that he might have courage to visit her again another evening. To his joy, Donna Anna, unable to resist his passionate appeal and the promptings of her own heart, returned his embrace with an equal warmth, and for one short, supreme moment, happiness filled the hearts of both.

But only for one moment, for, even as they embraced, they heard the heavy measured tread of approaching footsteps, followed by a loud, ominous knock upon the door.

After a few moments of terrified silence Don Juan opened the door ; and there, to the horror and amazement of the lovers, upon the threshold, stood the now animated statue of the late Commandant, Don Pedro, with a fierce look of righteous wrath upon its marble face ! As Don Juan stepped back involuntarily the statue said sternly : “ You invited me to come hither to-night as your guest and I have come ! Vile murderer and libertine, your end is nigh ! Do you not tremble ? ”

But Don Juan, for all his wickedness, was no coward, and he replied boldly : “ No ! I am not

afraid ! I invited you to come and witness my meeting with this fair lady whom I love ! I now bid you welcome ! ”

“ Then shake hands with me ! ” commanded the Stone Guest unrelentingly ; and the murderer, with bravado, but powerless to resist, placed his hand in that of the animated statue, which grasped it savagely, and held it as in a vice.

Then Don Juan shrieked aloud with pain and terror as he now realised that justice was at hand and that he must at last expiate his many crimes ; and as the Stone Guest held him in a remorseless grasp and he felt himself becoming stiff and cold, he cried with his last breath : “ The end has come ! Farewell, my beautiful and beloved Anna ! ”

BORIS GODOUNOV

A LARGE crowd of the humble people of Moscow and the outlying districts were gathered one evening during the year 1598 in the outer courtyard of the Monastery of Novodievich, near the great capital of Russia. Though the majority of these ignorant, down-trodden peasants had not the slightest idea of the reason why they had been summoned thither, they meekly followed out the directions of certain military officials in charge of them with the same dull, blind obedience that had brought them forth from their homes, unquestioningly, earlier in the day, at the word of command. When the officials sternly bade them sing aloud hymns and prayers of supplication to their "Father, protector and guardian," entreating him not to desert them in their hour of need but to bring them comfort and safety once more, they willingly enough obeyed ; but though they sang out the prescribed words of entreaty lustily, the why and the wherefore of their supplications mattered little to them, because long years of oppression, suffering, and ignorance had made them impervious to everything except their own bodily comforts and discomforts. All they knew was that they had been commanded to sing these songs of supplication and

that if they ceased from doing so they were beaten and cuffed by the officials—therefore, they sang obediently when the latter were close at hand to hear them, and sank back into silent apathy or chattered and squabbled among themselves as to the reason of it all when their prompters were at a safe distance.

Towards sunset, after they had been singing most of the day, some of the more enlightened among the crowd at length and rightly guessed the reason for their presence and performance, and gradually communicated the information to the others—that they were there to secure a new ruler for their country, and that by their songs of supplication they were entreating the all-powerful Regent, Boris Godounov, to accept the throne of Russia and to become their Tsar. Little did it matter to them that the ambitious Regent's own secret agents were thus bullying them into entreating him to accept the throne; all they realised was that they were to have a new ruler—the imbecile Tsar Feodor having just died—and that Boris, the Regent, might just as well be their sovereign as any other tyrant, the more so as they were already used to his rule. Neither did they trouble to remember the dark rumours that had been rife some years ago and which had whispered the sinister words “murderer” and “regicide” in connection with the Regent's name—all that was over and done with, a tale that was told.

But for the powerful Boris Godounov himself there was no forgetting, only torturing remembrance.

When the great Tsar, Ivan the Terrible, had died, his son Feodor had succeeded him ; but as the new Tsar was of weak intellect, Boris Godounov had been appointed Regent. The next heir to the throne was Feodor's young brother, Dmitri, a beautiful boy, who early gave promise of brilliant achievements in the future ; and Boris, who was intensely ambitious, knowing that the half-witted weakling, Feodor, was not likely to live long, soon came to regard the latter's fair young brother as the only obstacle to his donning the purple himself in due course. Already he held the reins of power ; and though power was sweet to the ambitious man, the thought of kingship was sweeter still. The consequence was that the young Dmitri was found dead one morning, stabbed by the hand of an assassin ; and though for a short time suspicion pointed an accusing finger at the brilliant Regent, the latter defended himself so ingeniously that his innocence came to be believed in and his powerful position was unassailed.

When, therefore, Feodor died in the year 1598 Boris Godounov had little difficulty in securing nomination as his successor, in default of a direct heir to the throne. He took the precaution, however, to send out his secret agents to gather the common people together and to force them to utter supplications to him to become their Tsar, with the idea, chiefly, of impressing the Boyards, or nobles. To give colour to the idea that sovereignty was being thrust upon him by the people against his own wish he at first

cunningly declined to become their ruler—so that the songs and prayers of entreaty had to be renewed with greater fervour still. Then, finally, he feigned to give way to the insistent desires of the common people ; and Boris Godounov was crowned Tsar of Russia amidst great pomp and splendour, and was received by the populace after his coronation with a tumultuous and inspiring song of welcome and adulation, in which they called down upon him the heavenly blessings of glory, peace and contentment.

But although glory and the splendour of a powerful King were certainly added unto him, peace and contentment never came to the remorseful soul of Boris Godounov ; for ever and anon the memory of the innocent child, Dmitri, murdered in years gone by to pave the way for the attainment of his earthly ambitions, would rise up to torment his guilty conscience, so that he never knew the joys of a peaceful mind. At the time of his coronation he had vowed to heaven in a sincere prayer of consecration that he would be a just ruler, and had prayed for wisdom and strength to use well the vast power for which he had paid such a terrible price ; but though he hoped that by exercising mercy he might also receive mercy and absolution for that one dark deed, peace of mind was denied to him, and many were the woes that fell upon him. Though he kept his coronation vows sincerely, happiness did not come to him, and much of the good he desired to do turned to evil. He hoped to make a joyful marriage for his beloved daughter, the young

Tsarevna Xenia, but misfortune overtook his plans and the proposed bridegroom met with an untimely death before the betrothal was consummated. His nobles plotted against him; famine and pestilence ravaged the land and drove his people to despair; and finally, after he had reigned for six years, a gigantic conspiracy arose in Poland, from whence there marched a powerful army of rebels supporting an audacious Pretender to the throne of Russia, who succeeded in bringing disaster and death to the conscience-stricken usurper.

Though Boris Godounov, despite his ever-present remorse and fear of retribution, hoped that his secret crime would never become known and that in the pages of history he would not be branded as a regicide, having taken great pains to cover up the traces of his guilt, there was one humble man of peace who knew all and had placed this black deed on record. This humble man, who was to prove himself the Nemesis of Boris, was a pious old monk named Pimen, who was an historian and the most industrious chronicler of his time. In the Monastery of the Miracle, old Pimen would sit up late into the night after his devotions for the day were over, writing out his chronicles in feverish haste, for he always had the fear that he might die before he had completed his great mission, which he believed had been divinely assigned to him—the mighty task of setting forth his country's history in all truth and faithfulness. As his task drew nearer to its close he worked more con-

tinuously than ever, feeling his strength to be waning, and could scarcely be persuaded to take rest at all ; and one night he sat in his cell writing until the dawn and brought his chronicle up to the accession of the present ruler, Boris Godounov.

As old Pimen worked through the night by the light of a solitary candle, scarcely lifting his cramped hand from the closely written parchment, a young monk, named Gregory, slept in a corner of the cell. Every now and again the sleeper would utter incoherent words and toss his arms high in agitation, as though excited by some strange dream—as indeed he was. Gregory's young and ardent spirit had not yet been crushed or subdued by his brief monastic life, and he had never been able to beat down the thoughts of the bright world without, where adventure, fame, glory and love awaited those who sincerely sought such earthly joys, and often in his sleep he would dream of these forbidden things.

Gregory was specially attracted by the gentle old Pimen, who had taught him much of his own learning and whose knowledge of the great world and of the history of the past had a strange fascination for him ; and he would often pass the night in the latter's cell, listening eagerly as the old man read out to him from his chronicle, until, from sheer youthful weariness, he fell asleep. This had happened on the night when Pimen had brought his chronicle up to date. When the young monk had at length fallen back into a deep slumber, tired out, he was visited by a strange

dream which had come to him three times lately—a dream in which it seemed to him that he stood on the pinnacle of a tower with all the people of Moscow at his feet, who at first acclaimed him with rejoicing and praises which later turned to such execrations and mocking laughter and caused him such terror that he fell from the tower to the ground.

The realistic force of this dream caused Gregory to awaken suddenly as dawn was breaking ; and seeing old Pimen still writing by the light of the now guttering candle, he drew near to him and craved his blessing, telling him of the strange dream that had visited him. He then begged his revered friend to tell him about the wonderful days of his own early youth, when he had beheld and spoken with Ivan the Terrible in all his glory, when he had fought against the enemies of his country, and when he had loved beautiful women, had worn sumptuous garments, and had eaten at splendid banquets. Old Pimen smiled indulgently at the eagerness of the youth, reminding him that such earthly joys were but vanity, and that even the magnificent Tsar Ivan had known sorrow ; and he added that the present ruler, Boris, though outwardly glorious and seemingly to be envied, was inwardly filled with the wretched and ever-present remorse of a regicide. But Gregory was not thus to be put off from indulging the natural longings of youth by these gloomy pictures, and he eagerly asked for further information about the murdered Tsarevich, Dmitri, and of what age he would have been at the present

time—for old Pimen had related all the circumstances of this crime to his young companion, whom he desired should continue his chronicle after he himself had been called to his long rest. The good Pimen replied that had the young Dmitri lived, he would now have been of the same age as Gregory himself. Then, as the voices of their brother monks were now heard in the adjoining chapel chanting their early morning prayers for grace, the old chronicler, though weary and tottering from his all-night labours, reached for his staff and departed with his young companion to take part in the devotions of the day.

But though Gregory knelt with the good brethren and appeared to be joining in their prayers and chants, his thoughts were far away; for an audacious and daring scheme had suddenly presented itself to him, and his quick, active brain was already planning how to carry it out. The murdered Dmitri would now have been of his own age had he lived—why, then, should not he, Gregory, appear in Russia and impersonate that royal youth, giving out to the world that though news of his untimely death had been circulated years ago, he had not been murdered as then believed but had been hidden in a monastery until the present time, when, learning his true identity accidentally, he had effected his escape and had come to claim the throne usurped by Boris Godounov? Even though his representation would be a fraud, was not the deception justified if he brought retribution upon the criminal Boris? Was it right or seemly that

a regicide should reign as Tsar of Holy Russia, when he, Gregory, an innocent young man who had never sinned, would be a more worthy ruler, and had now, by means of the knowledge revealed to him in old Pimen's chronicle—at present a secret known to no one else—the chance of thus avenging the assassinated royal youth, and, at the same time, of fulfilling his own ambitions and aspirations ?

The more the adventurous Gregory considered this stupendous scheme, the more determined he became to carry it out ; and night and day he thought out his plans, arranging all his subsequent actions carefully beforehand. From the conversations he had held with old Pimen in regard to the political situation of the country, he concluded that the most advantageous spot from whence to launch his career as the Prince Dmitri would be Poland ; for the Poles had ever been at variance with their Russian rulers and were at the present time in a state of great disaffection against the reigning Tsar, Boris. They would, therefore, be the more willing to accept the story he had concocted and to gather around him an army of rebel supporters to march against the usurper, whom they already hated. Having thus boldly planned, Gregory's first step was to find a suitable opportunity of escaping, unnoticed and unsuspected, from the monastery where he had lived since his early childhood.

After patiently waiting for some considerable time a chance at length presented itself ; and the young

monk, Gregory, slipped out from the monastery grounds in the dead of night and started forth upon his adventurous career as Pretender to the throne of Russia. He was strong and of a good courage, and had, moreover, infinite faith in his own powers and such absolute confidence in the story he had to tell that he came almost to believe himself actually to be the long-lost Dmitri. Strange to say, so successful was his audacious imposture, so well-conceived were all his plans and so remarkably did circumstances and events play into his hands, that he actually attained to the height of his ambition and sat upon the throne of Russia upon the death of Boris, reigning as Tsar for a short time until he, in his turn, was cast down from the pinnacle of glory to which he had so presumptuously aspired and was slain with his adherents—so that the warning prophecy given to him in the strange dream that had visited him three times in succession before he started upon his mad adventure was fulfilled in all its details.

After escaping from the monastery Gregory first of all fell in with a couple of roving friars, named Varlaam and Missail, who, though wearing the ragged garb of holy pilgrims, and having once upon a time probably been attached to some monastery, were now merely vagabonds, wandering from place to place and securing a precarious living by begging alms and food at the homesteads and inns they passed on their way. These two vagrants were willing enough to admit Gregory to their companionship for a short time,

wisely refraining from asking him awkward questions, and feeling that his respectable garb as an orthodox monk would certainly secure for them better hospitality and consideration than they were accustomed to enjoy, owing to their own disreputable appearance. The three travellers, therefore, journeyed on together for some considerable distance ; but on reaching a certain inn on the Lithuanian frontier, circumstances compelled them to part company. Here they were received very graciously by the hostess of the inn, who had great reverence and respect for such " holy hermits," as she termed them, and who spread before them a gratuitous meal with plenty of her best wine in which to drink her health.

Although the two vagabonds drank deeply and made merry with the good wine and food secured for them by the respectable appearance of their travelling companion, Gregory himself remained silent and refused to join in their revels, for he was full of anxiety and knew that he would not be safe from pursuit until he entered Lithuania and could discover himself to the leading Polish nobles as the long-lost and presumably murdered Tsarevich Dmitri. He therefore questioned the hostess as to the roads that led into Lithuania and also learned from her a piece of very disconcerting news, namely, that during the last few days parties of guards had appeared in the neighbourhood searching for a " young heretic who had escaped from a certain monastery near Moscow and who was believed to be attempting to cross over

the border that he might enter into some conspiracy with the Poles." Knowing well enough that this runaway could only be himself, he was about to beat a hasty retreat when a party of the soldiery entered the inn at that same moment and roughly began to question the hostess as to the identity of the three guests whom she designated "holy hermits," which designation they were inclined to doubt. They produced an edict which set forth a full description of the "escaped heretic" whom they stated they were searching for; and as the guards themselves were too ignorant to read what the edict contained, they commanded the "friars," being men who were supposed to have some learning, to read forth the written matter upon the parchment.

Gregory eagerly took up the document and pretended to read out what it contained, cunningly painting the portrait of a person similar in appearance to the rogue Varlaam. The guards thereupon seized the terrified vagabond, declaring that they had orders to hang the runaway immediately when caught. Then Varlaam, in self-defence, declared that he also had a fair knowledge of written characters, and upon the document being handed to him to read, he spelled out slowly the true description written therein, which description could not be taken for anyone else but Gregory. Finding, therefore, that he could no longer deceive the guards, the young monk drew a dagger to defend himself and made his escape through the window. Although the astonished soldiers pursued

him for some distance, he managed to outrun and elude them, and being now well advanced into Lithuania he had no further fear of danger from pursuit, but at once proceeded thence to Poland and set about his mighty task of establishing his false identity as the long-hidden Tsarevich Dmitri.

The Poles received the young stranger and his clever story with surprisingly credulous cordiality and accepted him willingly enough as Pretender to the throne of Russia under the supposed identity of the Tsarevich Dmitri, and the powerful nobles of Poland gathered a large army together in support of his claim and were full of eagerness to march with him against the usurper Boris, whom they hated. Consequently, the enterprising young monk soon found himself a person of the greatest importance and power, and settled down to the excitement of his new and dazzling position with the utmost ease and the keenest enjoyment, as though indeed born to such great honours. He was received all over Poland with astonishing acclamations; and as the months went on his strength and followers grew apace until at last he felt he might relax his efforts for a while and take a short spell of rest and pleasure before making his final raid into Russia, as success now seemed certain.

At this time the young Pretender was living quite royally in the gay city of Sandomir; and here he succumbed to the counter-attraction of love, which at one time threatened to turn him aside from the path



THE PRETENDER'S QUEEN.
(Mlle Germanova as *Marina Mnichek*.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

of ambition. He fell passionately in love with Marina Mnichek, the beautiful and fascinating daughter of the Voyevode of Sandomir ; and loving with all the ardour of early youth and an intensely romantic nature brought suddenly into contact with that all-devouring flame, he ceased for the time being to give even a thought to his mission, being content to experience only the lover's rapture of reciprocated passion, and would fain have dallied for ever in the company of the fair maiden who thus enthralled him. But the beautiful Marina, though she returned his love with equal passion, was also intensely ambitious ; and with all the art and persistence of a clever woman, while returning her lover's caresses, she would not let him forget the brilliant future in store for him, which she meant to share. Marina herself had the regal bearing and the proud manner of a woman born to command, and in the Pretender Dmitri she had instantly recognised one who could bring within her grasp the power she loved and coveted to wield. Already picturing herself reigning with him upon the throne at Moscow, the beautiful Marina, therefore, eagerly listened to the love declarations of the young Dmitri, but, while returning his love, kept ever before him his dazzling mission.

In this effort Marina was strongly supported by a fiercely fanatical priest, Rangoni by name, who entreated her to lay siege to the heart of the young Pretender and to use him as the means of establishing once more the waning faith in Russia. At first

Marina proudly resented the idea of thus exploiting her love for the benefit of her country's religion ; but upon the angry priest's stern threats should she dare to disobey or question the Church's command, she was cowed and humbly agreed to use her influence in the way demanded. Therefore, she encouraged Dmitri to meet her secretly, that his passion might be the more inflamed ; and when he spoke to her only of love, she reproached him for thus dallying and wasting his time in pleasure when he should be driving forth the usurper Boris and be crowning his ambitious career by seizing the throne of Russia and taking up the reins of power. When Dmitri declared with a lover's fondness that all he now desired was her love, she would answer passionately : " Nay, I want not the embraces of a laggard ! Seize the throne of Russia and make Marina thy Queen, and then she will love thee ! " On hearing this Dmitri would be hurt that his beautiful mistress should thus seem to care for power more than for his love ; and then Marina would fling her arms around his neck and declare that it was her great love that made her ambitious for him, and would thus skilfully lead him back to the enterprise he had embarked upon.

While the great rebellion was thus progressing, Boris Godounov became more and more a prey to remorse and a guilty conscience ; and even in the presence of his beloved children he could not shake off the memory of his evil deed, nor the dark forebodings of coming disaster. One day he appeared suddenly

in the apartment of the royal children and surprised the young Tsarevich Feodor in the midst of a merry clapping game with his old nurse ; but though he smiled at the child's eager enjoyment the sight could not drive away his sadness. He saw that his beloved elder child, the Tsarevna Xenia, who was present also on this occasion, was still grieving and weeping for the untimely loss of her betrothed husband ; and after dismissing her with a few tender words of comfort, he endeavoured to forget his own woes for a short time by encouraging the little Tsarevich to talk with him.

The artless prattle of his child, however, was presently interrupted by the hurried entrance of his chief adviser, Prince Shouisky, who came to announce in great agitation that he brought news of a serious rebellion—that a Pretender had arisen in Poland and was already marching into Russia at the head of a gigantic army ; adding in an awed tone that it was whispered among the common people that this bold leader was none other than the young Tsarevich Dmitri come again. Turning pale as death, Boris quickly sent away his little son, and in agitated tones demanded further particulars from the Boyard, whom he then dismissed ; but as Prince Shouisky left the apartment he glanced back and beheld a strange sight. The conscience-stricken Tsar was crouching in a corner, and, with outstretched hands, appeared to be trying to keep back some unseen person—the spectre of his own diseased mind, the murdered child,

Dmitri, whom he now called out upon in agonised tones: "Torment me not with the sight of thy wounds! Begone and leave me in peace!"

The great rebellion now rapidly spread as a huge forest fire, and when the false Dmitri entered Russia at the head of his great Polish army thousands flocked to his standard. The oppressed peasantry received the Pretender with joyous acclamations, and, defying the established authorities, indulged in many acts of lawlessness and licence. When opportunities occurred they seized the partisans of Boris and ill-treated them; nor did they hesitate to torment and pile indignities upon any of the Boyards who were unfortunate enough to fall into their hands, in revenge for the latter's oppression of them in the past. In one village where an orgy of this kind occurred, the vagabonds Varlaam and Missail took part in the tormenting of an elderly Boyard and two Jesuit priests—which vile entertainment was suddenly brought to an end by the timely arrival of the Pretender Dmitri himself, who sternly forbade the repetition of such excesses; and as his brilliant cavalcade departed on its way, followed by the excited rabble, the village idiot—who had himself had to submit to much teasing and rough treatment—was left lamenting the woes of his native land.

As the triumphant army of the Pretender, conquering all before it, drew nearer to Moscow, a special meeting of the Duma was hastily summoned; and as the Boyards gathered together with anxious faces,

waiting for the arrival of their ruler, whose counsel they eagerly desired in this moment of peril, Prince Shouisky entered hurriedly in great agitation to tell them that the Tsar appeared to be in a disturbed state of mind. He then related to them the story of the strange mutterings and actions he had observed when last in his presence—the conduct of a man with a guilty conscience. While they thus conferred together Boris Godounov staggered into the council chamber in disordered attire, and, with wild gestures and distracted mien, beat the air as though to shut out from his sight some fearful vision, shrieking aloud in the tones of a madman: “ Begone, thou bleeding child, Dmitri! Who dares to say I murdered thee? They say thou art still living! Why, then, dost thou haunt me still? ”

As the Boyards gazed upon their distraught monarch, in sorrow and amazement at this strange outburst, Boris gradually recovered somewhat and spoke to them in a more rational manner; and when Prince Shouisky informed him that an old monk waited without and desired to speak with him, he commanded that the stranger should enter, hoping that the good old man of God might bring comfort to his tortured mind.

The stranger monk proved to be old Pimen, who, gazing fixedly and accusingly upon the unhappy Tsar, related to him the story of a miracle that had just been wrought, whereby an old blind shepherd had recovered his sight upon uttering a prayer at the tomb of the

murdered Tsarevich Dmitri, whose childish voice he believed had spoken to him from the grave.

On hearing this the conscience-stricken and remorse-worn Tsar fell back unconscious; and seeing that he was in a dying condition the Boyards gathered around him and sent for the young Tsarevich Feodor, at the same time calling the priests to minister the last rites to him and to cause the passing bell to toll.

The dying monarch recovered sufficiently to bestow his blessing upon the young prince, and to pray that the protection of heaven might rest upon him; and then, as the chants of the priests arose, with a last faint prayer for his own forgiveness, the soul of the unhappy but repentant Boris Godounov passed away.

KHOVANSTCHINA

IN the early days of the mighty Tsar, Peter the Great, the Russian people suffered much, and misery and strife were rampant ; for during the long minority of this afterwards brilliant monarch and his brother, Ivan, who at that time shared the throne as joint Tsars, many rebellions and changes of government took place, and the unhappy people were forced to submit to the misrule and tyranny of first one powerful party or individual and then another, each of whom snatched power for a certain time and enjoyed it to the full, until another and stronger hand snatched it away again.

During the year 1682 a great crisis was close at hand. The beautiful city of Moscow was rife with insurrection and the people were torn in twain knowing not whom to serve in order to protect themselves ; for, at this time, there were two powerful leaders, whilst the Boyards, or noblemen, formed a third party—and all were strong, unscrupulous, and greatly to be feared.

Prince Galitsin, the Prime Minister, had for many years held the chief power in the land, ruling as the representative of the two youthful Tsars and enjoying the somewhat doubtful favour of their Regent sister,

the Tsarevna Sophia, who had chosen him not only as her chief official but also as her lover ; and he had thought to consolidate his position and the authority bestowed upon him by his royal mistress by restricting the powers of the haughty and lawless nobles, who furiously resented his ruthless curtailment of their ancient feudal privileges and means of wealth.

For several years the Boyards fretted and fumed under the yoke of the tyrant Prime Minister ; and then, one of the strongest and proudest of them all, Prince Ivan Khovanstky, who traced his ancestry back to a Lithuanian sovereign, gathered a following of his own together in opposition to the rule of Prince Galitsin, and proved a formidable rival, many of the nobles and the majority of the oppressed populace—who dared not do otherwise—joining his ranks. As Commander also of the famous Streltsy or Archer Guards he engendered fear in the hearts of all who opposed him ; for he permitted his own men unlimited licence, so that they committed all kinds of excesses and cruelties in the name of order and were the terror of the whole community.

Khovanstky's handsome son, Prince Andrew, was a wild young libertine, willing to take part in any roystering carousal or vicious orgy ; and the two Khovanstkys soon caused keen anxiety to the scheming Prince Galitsin, who, with ill-concealed dread, saw them snatching at and seizing his own already waning powers.

But the sudden rise and wonderful success of the

Khovanstkys was not attained without bringing upon them the jealousy and hatred of most of the other great Boyards who now found themselves smarting under the heels of two tyrants instead of one ; and many of them retired to the country Court of the Tsarevna and began to plot there for the overthrow of their rivals and to ingratiate themselves with the youthful sovereigns by revealing the misrule and tyranny of both powerful parties.

The result was that, early one morning, one of these injured and jealous Boyards, by name Shaklovity, entered Moscow at sunrise and accosted a scrivener in the famous Red Square near the Kremlin. He bade the man write out a letter for him, to be addressed to the two youthful Tsars, and which was to the effect that a plot was being hatched against their rule and welfare by the powerful Khovanstkys, who had already gathered a great following together and were endeavouring to raise a rebellion by fostering discontent amongst the citizens and the troops, and even stirring up the peasants in outlying districts. The letter added that when the plotters had thus safely ignited this consuming fire of sedition they intended to overthrow the government by the further aid of a certain religious sect known as the Old Believers, and then to depose the two young monarchs and to set Prince Andrew Khovanstky on the throne in their stead.

Leaving this indictment unsigned and refusing to reveal his identity to the curious scrivener, Shaklovity

snatched the document from the latter's hand, and after paying him for the work, conjured him never to reveal the fact that he had written it or had ever set eyes upon its author, under the threat of enduring terrible tortures and banishment.

As the scrivener fell back a few paces, pale and trembling at the awful threats he had heard and wishing that he had never consented to write so dangerous a document, Shaklovity hurried away to seek a messenger to deliver the letter that should bring about the downfall of the hated Khovanstkys ; and at that moment a number of the latter's famous Archer Guards, the Streltsy, hastened into the square pell-mell, followed by crowds of the populace who were the followers of their leader, in honour of whose approach they now began to sing a song of welcome and praise.

Almost immediately there followed Prince Ivan Khovanstky himself, who entered the square with a proud and haughty air, receiving the song of welcome and the fulsome praises of the people with disdainful complacency. When their song of welcome was ended he called on them to assist him in crushing the tyranny of the Prime Minister and the lawlessness of those Boyards who had not joined his own standard—all of whom he declared to be traitors to the youthful Tsars, whilst he, himself, they might regard as their protector.

While the meek populace thus listened to the harangues of his father and obediently sang his

praises, young Prince Andrew, in a quieter and less frequented spot not very far distant, was enacting the tyrant in another way—the way of a licentious bully, who sought to satisfy his selfish passions by brute force. He held in his arms a young girl, Emma, whom he had discovered in the German quarter of the town, and whose beauty and freshness had inflamed him with a sudden lawless passion ; and although the unfortunate girl protested in agonised tones and struggled to escape from her tormentor, he only held her the closer and kissed her the more fiercely. Prince Andrew laughed derisively at her pitiful requests to be released, for he had exercised great effort and cunning in putting aside all obstacles to his pursuit of this girl. He had caused her father to be slain, her true lover he had exiled, and her mother's pleas for mercy he had refused to listen to. And now that he held the lovely maiden in his actual grasp he intended to compel her to yield to his desires. It was in vain that poor Emma declared she knew him to be Khovanstky, the wrecker of her home and the enemy of her lover, and entreated him now to slay her, since she preferred to die rather than to endure his embraces. Her protestations, however, only inflamed the young man's passion the more ; and he, in his turn, entreated her to accept his love, while still holding her firmly in his grasp.

Just as Emma's strength was beginning to fail, a sudden interruption occurred. There came past that way a young widow, named Martha, who was a

prominent member of the religious sect known as the Rasskolniki, or Old Believers. Only a few weeks ago this young woman had herself been the beloved mistress of Prince Andrew Khovanstky, who, though he had once professed undying love for her—which she had passionately returned—had carelessly cast her aside when his infatuation waned. Seeing that he now held another struggling victim—and an unwilling one this time—in his arms, Martha accosted him sharply, reproaching him for his faithlessness and for thus wantonly seeking the ruin of the unhappy and helpless Emma.

Stung and infuriated by the just reproaches of his cast-off mistress, Prince Andrew loosened his hold upon Emma, who quickly shrank back, still half-stunned by terror ; and then drawing a dagger, he furiously flung himself upon the young widow and attempted to stab her. Martha, however, was ready for him, and knowing well the desperate character of the man she had to deal with, she, in her turn, swiftly drew a dagger from the folds of her own garments and skilfully parried the blow.

As Prince Andrew fell back, angry and baffled at this unexpected set-back to his murderous onslaught, the obsequious crowd of laudatory supporters attached to his lawless father's retinue drew near, followed by that haughty noble himself ; and the young Prince Andrew, unable to escape, was compelled to await the approach of the party.

Prince Ivan Khovanstky greeted his son and

Martha, recognising in the latter an important member of the sect of Old Believers, with whom he was anxious to ingratiate himself ; and then observing the trembling Emma, and being greatly struck with her fresh young beauty, he commanded one of the archers to seize the girl and hold her in readiness for his own pleasure.

On hearing this, Prince Andrew passionately remonstrated with his father, declaring that he dearly loved Emma and that he had secured her for himself ; but seeing that Prince Ivan was not likely to yield to his protestations, he resolved that Emma should not be taken from him alive, and was just about to stab the terrified maiden when Dositheus, the revered leader of the Old Believers, appeared on the scene, and, quickly grasping what was afoot, fearlessly took matters into his own hands. Calmly Dositheus bade Martha lead Emma away to a place of safety ; and when the two women had departed he began to reproach the Princes Khovanstky for their undignified conduct in quarrelling at a time when all their energies and thoughts should be given to righting the wrongs of the people and to firmly establishing the old religion in view of the schism in their midst.

Prince Ivan, inwardly fuming at this interruption, but not daring at the moment to protest, since he desired the assistance of the Old Believers in his own political schemes, called upon his archers and retired with the best dignity he could to the Kremlin, followed by the now downcast Prince Andrew, who, like

all bullies, had but little real courage. When the brilliant party had departed the calm Dositheus, who was an elderly and truly sincere leader of his flock, addressed the humble people gathered around, entreating them, with the passion of the fanatic, to cling fast by their religion and to be willing even to die for its sake.

While these scenes were taking place Prince Galitsin, in his splendid mansion, was sitting alone in a pleasant summer chamber that opened out into a beautiful garden beyond, where sweet-smelling flowers still glowed brightly in the golden rays of the setting sun ; but, despite the fairness of the scene he gazed out upon, the Prime Minister's thoughts were dark and gloomy. He held in his hand a love letter he had just received from the Tsarevna, which, however, brought neither joy nor comfort to his heavy heart. He doubted the sincerity of its extravagant expressions, and reasoned within himself, rightly enough, that with such a woman, when passion wanes, coldness and disfavour quickly follow—and then woe betide the unfortunate lover she has tired of !

As Galitsin thus contemptuously decided not to be deceived or lured into rashness by the present warmth of the epistle he held in his hand—little dreaming, however, that the fickle writer was already showing favour to his enemies and turning a listening ear to their plots for his downfall—his attendant entered, ushering in the Old Believer, Martha, whom he described, to the annoyance of the Prime Minister, as the “ Sorceress ”

whom his master had desired to consult, the young widow having a great reputation in the city as a seer whose foretellings of the future had proved weirdly correct and whose thought-reading powers were regarded with awe.

The harassed Minister had sought the advice of Martha on several occasions, although he regarded her with considerable distrust, knowing her to be a strong adherent of the Khovanstkys ; and as she now entered into his presence with her usual silent tread, he shivered slightly as he bade her curtly to reveal to him his future destiny—for he hoped that her prophecy might disprove his gloomy forebodings, and he waited eagerly for her to speak the words of fate.

Out in the garden beyond, twilight had fallen quickly after sunset and a pale moonlight now gleamed faintly through the trees throwing long silvery shafts into the richly furnished chamber and upon the tall figure of Martha, who, enveloped in a long black cloak, stood at a central table making her incantation. She had poured water into a silver bowl, and now, gazing intently into its clear depths, she revealed to the anxious Prince his destiny as she saw it therein—that he was surrounded by false friends who wore smiling faces and spoke fair words in his presence but plotted against him in secret ; that an ignominious downfall awaited him, hastened by these same traitors ; that he would be dragged in the dust of royal disfavour and lose all his present honours, and that he would end his days in wretched exile, where the sufferings of hunger

and hardship and the hopeless tears of woe should teach him, the once powerful tyrant, the wonderful lesson of Divine justice.

Having thus delivered her prophecy Martha silently glided out of the room, leaving Galitsin with the bowed head of a despairing man whose worst fears have been confirmed. Then, as a drowning man clutches eagerly at a straw, the Prince started up, and calling his attendant, commanded him to follow the seer and have her drowned in a neighbouring sheet of water known as "The Marsh," that she, at least, might be silenced for ever and carry no news of him to his enemies.

Then, as he paced the floor of the apartment in deep agitation, a second interruption came. His arch-enemy, Prince Ivan Khovanstky, entered unannounced, and, with his most insolent and arrogant air, demanded of the Minister why he had presumed to restrict the powers of the nobles and how he dared to interfere with the rights and privileges of such a one as himself, in whose veins ran the blood of the ancient kings.

Galitsin answered his visitor with an equal haughtiness of demeanour and hot flow of words; and they were only prevented from doing each other violence by the timely arrival of the aged Dositheus, the fearless Old Believer, who likewise entered unannounced and calmly began to reason with the rivals, reminding them that by thus pursuing their own private quarrels they would never bring peace or happiness to their distressed country, and that they should

rather stifle their own pride and seek wisdom from on high.

The words of the earnest Dositheus were taken up by a number of his disciples in the antechamber, who now began to chant a hymn of praise for the triumph of good over evil which might only be attained by the righteous doer and true believer.

Prince Khovanstky, who tolerated the Old Believers as his likely followers and had, indeed, caused them to come thither thus opportunely, listened to their song with a respectful countenance. Galitsin, however, was furious at their intrusion and was about to issue a harsh command concerning them, when the young widow, Martha, rushed into the room and clinging to Dositheus, implored his protection, declaring that the Minister's servants had attempted to drown her in "The Marsh," and that she had only been saved by the timely arrival of a party of the Petrovsky or Royal Guards, who had seized her would-be assassins, whom they now held in the outer court.

The rival Princes both heard of the arrival of the Royal Guards with feelings of alarm, each realising that their presence boded ill to one or other of them. Next moment the fears of Khovanstky were confirmed by the entrance of the Boyard Shaklovity, who announced that the Royal Guards had accompanied him as the bringer of a message from the Tsarevna, who bade him say that a proclamation had been posted up to the effect that the Khovanstkys were conspiring against the Empire and that the young

Tsar Peter had commanded an inquiry to be made into the matter.

During the confusion that followed this announcement Martha and Dositheus escaped from the chamber and returned to the district where dwelt the Old Believers, whom they exhorted to further righteousness, in order to strengthen themselves for the ordeal of persecution that might now fall upon them at any moment ; and Khovanstky, still haughty and brave in his calm arrogance, retired to his mansion, refusing to resign his powers until Shaklovity's accusation could be proved, and proudly continuing to occupy his days as before even though his nights might be disturbed by dark forebodings.

After returning to her home Martha became very unhappy and depressed by the sense of coming disaster to the sect of the Old Believers, which, in her present state of mind, she felt was due to her own sin in having loved and been the mistress of the graceless Prince Andrew. In this belief she was supported by a fanatical old member of the sect, named Susanna, who upbraided her sternly for her frailty, refusing to listen to her defence that she had only loved too well and that love could not be evil, and painting for her a terrible picture of the everlasting punishment that she declared awaited her.

Poor Martha's tears, however, only awakened pity in the breast of old Dositheus, who rebuked Susanna for her uncharitableness and comforted the unhappy young widow by telling her that she could yet be of

much service to their cause by seeking news for them, and that, also, by the love she still bore for Prince Andrew, she might be the means of bringing that young libertine back into the ways of grace and thus save his soul alive—whereby her own sin might be cleansed.

While the comforted Martha now spent her days in devoted service to the cause she had espoused, Prince Ivan Khovanstky held up his head as proudly as of yore, and continued to secure new followers and to encourage his old ones, in spite of the repeated warnings of the Boyard Shaklovity, who, seeing that the lawless noble had no intention of altering his plans of insurrection or of submitting quietly to any restriction of his power, sent him messages full of prognostications of coming misfortune and disgrace. Neither was he to be intimidated by the presence in the city of ever-increasing numbers of the Petrovsky or Royal Guards, and of the "troopers" or foreign mercenaries, who were obviously being gathered there for the purpose of suppressing insurrection and crushing the powers of the tyrant leaders. Deliberately shutting his eyes to these ominous signs and turning a deaf ear to hints of personal danger to himself from the quickly growing power and influence of his enemies, he still kept a brave front and continued to hold feasts and festivities in his mansion, as though the tide in his favour had not changed. But at last the storm burst, and the proud Khovanstky fell to rise no more.

One day Prince Ivan sat feasting in his splendid banqueting-hall, surrounded by his attendants and

serving-maids who, as he feasted, sang for his cheering the lively ditties of youth and the laudatory songs beloved by their lord. Just as a troupe of beautiful Persian slaves had concluded a voluptuous and graceful dance for his further amusement the Boyard Shaklovity entered, unannounced as usual; and angry at this interruption to his revels, Khovanstky haughtily demanded the intruder's business.

Shaklovity replied boldly that he brought yet a further message from the Tsarevna to the effect that, owing to the disturbed state of the country, she had convened the Grand Council that day and desired Khovanstky's attendance at the same, commanding that he should set forth for the conference at once without delay.

Prince Ivan immediately arose from his board and fearlessly announced that he was willing to attend the conference and to give the Tsarevna the benefit of his counsel; and he called for his magnificent robes of state and caused himself to be arrayed in them and to be decorated with his most splendid jewels and the dazzling insignia of a powerful noble of high degree.

When he was ready to leave the hall he bade his serving-maids once more to sing his praises as he set forth; but little did he dream that this song of fulsome flattery now raised by the obedient maidens should also serve as his dirge! As he was about to pass over the threshold, a dazzling figure, supported on either side by his attendants, there came the sudden flash of



DOSITHEUS CALLS UPON HIS FOLLOWERS TO DIE FOR THEIR FAITH.

(Chaliapin as *Dositheus*.)

CCJ 100
A 100
C 100

a dagger—and the mighty Khovanstky uttered a loud cry of agony and fell to the ground, dead !

The attendants and serving-maids fled away in terror, but Shaklovity approached the corpse and gazed down in mocking triumph upon the still form of his rival and victim, rejoicing in the fact that his plot had thus far succeeded.

The downfall of the Prime Minister quickly followed this tragedy, for the Tsarevna, tired of the lover whom she had raised to power, listened only too readily to the accusations made against him by her jealous counsellors—and the result was that the once powerful Prince Galitsin was deprived of all his dignities and was driven forth from his beloved country a disgraced and a despairing exile. Thus was the prophecy of the young widow Martha fulfilled.

After the death of their chief the followers of Khovanstky were quickly dispersed, though the famous Streltsy were won over to the royal side ; and Prince Andrew was forced to keep in hiding as his life was in constant jeopardy.

The Old Believers, learning that instructions had been given to the fierce troopers to slay every member of their sect, retired to a hermitage in a wood near Moscow, there to await their end—but not at the hands of the soldiery. Old Dositheus, seeing that they could not now escape death, bid them build up and fire a huge pyre of wood, upon which they could mount and perish as did the martyrs of old for the faith they held.

Whilst these sinister preparations were afoot, Martha had sought for and found Prince Andrew who, craven-hearted now that death threatened him on every side, entreated the mistress he had tired of and flouted in the days of his own prosperity to save him now from his enemies ; and he fled gladly with her to the hermitage, where he quickly changed his tone and angrily demanded of her news of the fair maid, Emma, whom he still loved and had vainly sought for many days past. Martha, however, told him that Emma was safe from his pursuit and would shortly be united to her own faithful lover who had now returned from his unjust exile ; and bidding the distracted young man think no more of this girl nor of earthly matters at all, but rather to bend his thoughts upon heaven, since his death was nigh, she succeeded in persuading him, by the power of her own love, which had never waned, to mount the now burning pyre with her.

When, therefore, the troopers arrived at the hermitage, thirsting for the blood of their expected victims, they were greeted with a great blaze of light ; and as the flames sprang up around them the Old Believers went cheerfully to death, singing a song of praise and thanksgiving, inasmuch as they were accounted worthy to suffer death for their faith.

ALEKO

IN a certain peaceful spot on the banks of a river which flowed through vast country wilds a tribe of gipsies had pitched their tents ; and here, late one evening, the careless wanderers gathered about their blazing camp-fires, or stood in groups outside the tents, chatting and singing snatches of merry songs as they waited to refresh themselves with the savoury supper which already steamed and bubbled in the huge cauldrons hanging from tripods over the fires.

They were a simple, happy folk, these wanderers, who lived and loved and died amidst the beauties of nature, knowing not the many evils and doubtful joys of civilisation, who loved freedom above all things, and whose code of honour, while forbidding them to judge any man, would not permit them to dwell with a wrongdoer in their midst.

This evening as the rising moon, silvery bright, appeared above the glittering stream, a strange feeling of uneasiness had crept over the gipsies ; and in order to distract their minds and to make the time pass by more quickly while their supper was in process of preparation the young men and girls called upon the Chief to tell them a story.

The leader of the gipsies was a venerable and digni-

fied old man, whose sad yet glowing eyes and deeply-lined face revealed the secret of passion's fiery touch and sorrow's bitter sting ; and a host of unhappy recollections having intruded themselves upon his broodings this evening, he gathered the young people about him and told them the story of his own early love and of the grievous wrong that had been done him by a stranger not of his own tribe.

" Years ago," he said, " I loved and wedded the most beautiful maiden of our tribe, and for one short year I enjoyed the divine rapture that only those who truly love can know. Had a fabulous fortune or even a kingdom been offered to me in exchange I would have laughed such a gift to scorn ; for the love of my fair Marioula was more precious to me than all the wealth and honours that the world could lay at my feet. When our child, the maiden Zemfira yonder, was born, I felt that my joy was almost too great to bear, and alas ! I soon found that it was certainly too great to last !

" Marioula, free, loving child of the desert as she was, proved herself to be as fickle as she was fair ! Another tribe of wanderers pitched their camp beside ours just after my joy had lasted for a year ; and though they rested in our neighbourhood but two days, when they struck their tents my beautiful but false Marioula went with them—her love having been stolen from me by one of their hot-blooded youths, for whom she forsook me, her adoring husband, and her helpless babe ! Ah me ! The woe of that cruel hour

struck deep into my heart and the pain of the still bleeding wound will never depart whilst breath remains in me ! ”

While the old Chief thus related the story of his life's tragedy, his lovely daughter—the same Zemfira whose fickle mother had deserted her in infancy—shivered slightly as she glanced furtively from her husband, Aleko, to the handsome young gipsy who was now her secret lover. By a strange fatality the faithlessness of the Chief's wife was actually at that moment being repeated in her daughter who, whilst inheriting the mother's alluring beauty, also showed an equally capricious and fickle temperament, chafing at restraint, fitful as the wind, and claiming love from all for the satisfaction of her passionate nature.

A year ago Aleko, her husband, had come as a stranger to the tribe and, declaring himself weary of the trials and disappointments of ordinary civilised life, had begged to be allowed to remain for a time with the gipsies, who received him with the courtesy and hospitality of their kind.

Aleko, a disappointed and somewhat melancholy man, past his first youth, soon recovered tranquillity and peace of mind among the simple-hearted wanderers ; and, on becoming acquainted with the Chief's beautiful daughter, he had fallen passionately in love with her, loving with all the intensity of a man who had never before felt the magic thrill of a woman's attraction.

The ardent young Zemfira on her part was equally

attracted by the stranger, about whom hung an air of mystery and romance ; and upon her accepting his love and surrendering her own in return, the pair were wedded in accordance with the quaint gipsy rites and customs.

In one short year, however, the fickle Zemfira tired of the stranger husband who adored her and began to accept the attentions of a young gipsy of her own tribe, whose passionate love-making she eagerly responded to and whom she met in secret whenever the opportunity occurred.

This evening as the Chief's tragic story came to an end and his hearers trooped off to partake of the savoury supper now ready, Zemfira and her lover snatched a few moments' conversation and arranged to steal away together from the camp that night after the moon had set and all was dark.

The young gipsy scornfully laughed away Zemfira's timid expressions of fear lest Aleko should discover their secret plans and her declarations that he was already suspicious because of her coldness and indifference to him. She added that he might prove dangerous in his jealousy, which he had plainly exhibited in a sudden outburst of anger on hearing the old Chief's story—the circumstances of the latter having evidently caused him to doubt still more the constancy of his own fair wife. Her lover, however, succeeded in reassuring her ; and after many tender embraces the pair parted, as Aleko was observed to be lurking near.

Zemfira retired at once to her tent, where she sat beside the cradle of her infant child and began to sing a cradle-song which, however, instead of being a gentle lullaby soon developed into a wild gipsy song, in which she railed recklessly at her husband and hinted audaciously at a secret lover whose embraces she meant to accept.

Aleko, upon entering the tent at this moment, was shocked and angered on hearing the song, which strengthened his suspicions of her change towards himself ; and he sternly rebuked the wild Zemfira who, however, paid no heed to him, but hurried from the tent still recklessly singing her tantalising song of defiance.

Aleko, now sadly realising that the love of his beautiful gipsy wife was indeed lost to him for ever, at first gave himself up to despair and grief. Then a fierce, unrestrained anger seized him, and, vowing that none other should enjoy the favours of his beloved one, even though these were denied to himself, he hastened after the now flying form of Zemfira who had vanished in the darkness.

Meanwhile, the lovers had met at the appointed spot and Zemfira, full of fear for the anger of her jealous husband, was eagerly urging the young gipsy to hasten their departure, which the latter continually delayed in order to enjoy the intense joy of the moment, when Aleko himself suddenly appeared before them, upbraiding the pair for their perfidy and threatening the young gipsy in furious accents.

Zemfira bravely met the wrath of the husband whom she had wronged, declaring that true love was free and not to be restrained and adding that she was willing to die rather than to return to one who no longer held her heart. Almost in the same breath, however, she entreated her lover, in terrified accents, to fly from the vengeance she could read in her husband's flashing eyes ; but, ere he could escape, Aleko, in a frenzy of jealous passion, sprang upon the young gipsy and stabbed him to the heart.

Zemfira, with a cry of despairing grief, flung herself, weeping, upon the dead body of her lover, uttering wild curses upon his murderer ; and Aleko, still further infuriated, drew forth the dagger again and plunged it into the breast of the unhappy girl.

By this time the whole camp had been aroused by the noise of the quarrel and the cries of the lovers as they fell ; and the old Chief and his scared companions now appeared upon the scene as the beautiful Zemfira expired.

The passion-tossed Aleko, soon filled with remorse and despair, knelt over the corpse of his beloved Zemfira imploring forgiveness ; and then, standing bravely before the bereaved and grief-stricken father, he awaited sentence, humbly expressing his readiness to expiate his crime by death.

But the old Chief, with calm and beautiful dignity, merely rebuked him sternly for thus bringing bloodshed and strife into the peaceful gipsy life ; then, declaring that while he and his simple tribe judged not and

took no man's life in expiation, they could not permit a murderer to abide in their camp, he commanded the young men to carry away the bodies of the dead lovers and returned to his tent, followed quietly and sadly by the rest of his people.

Thus was the wretched Aleko left alone without love or companionship, to wander forth into the world, an exile, who must expiate his sin and bear his grief as best he might.

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

WITHIN the First Circle of the Inferno gigantic black rocks led down into the terrible abyss below. Gloomy darkness reigned for the most part, but every now and again the sombre blackness was suddenly illuminated brilliantly by red gleams from the everlasting flames and steel-blue lightning from the lurid clouds that were rushing through the storm-riven sky.

When the subterranean rumblings and the ominous rolling of the thunder ceased for a few brief moments, heart-rending cries and the hopeless sighs of souls in torment could be heard; and these again would quickly be drowned by the awful crashing of fresh peals of thunder and the roar of the returning whirlwinds.

Into this awe-inspiring scene, breathing the sultry atmosphere with difficulty, appeared the great Italian poet, Dante, according to the wonderful vision he afterwards pictured so exquisitely in his masterpiece, the "Divine Comedy," which tells of the imaginary experiences of a soul after death in the three stages he believed it to pass through, and described as the "Inferno," the "Purgatorio" and the "Paradiso."

As Dante appeared on the fearful rocky heights of

the First Circle of the Inferno, he was accompanied by the Shade of the Roman poet, Virgil, who was to be his guide through the wonderful and mysterious paths and by-ways of these subterranean regions. As the two travellers drew near to the edge of the precipice, the spectral guide suddenly drew back and shuddered, as though with fear ; and then, turning to Dante, he announced that they were about to descend into the yawning abyss and that he must be of a good courage and follow closely.

Dante replied that it was not encouraging to follow one who appeared obviously to be afraid of what was before him ; but the Shade of Virgil told him that though he shuddered and drew back for a moment on approaching the precipice, he did so voluntarily and that his action was not one of fear, but rather of compassion for those unhappy souls who were suffering torments below. He then called upon Dante to hasten ere their courage should in truth desert them ; and, without further pause, the pair began their awful descent into the abyss and were soon lost in the darkness below.

Dense black clouds gathered around and enwrapped them as in a stifling mantle and at first nothing could be distinguished through the thick atmosphere ; but after the travellers had descended for a considerable distance the air cleared somewhat, and, though an intense gloom reigned supreme, objects and landmarks could be observed once more.

Dante now saw that he stood with his companion

on the summit of a high rock which ran down sheer into the abyss. On every side overhanging rocks were to be seen, while the angry crimson horizon stretched far away in the distance like a streak of blood, from whence came the warning sound of a quickly approaching storm, still mingled with the cries and moans of the souls in torment which never ceased.

As Dante discovered himself upon the summit of the rock his spectre guide informed him that they had now arrived at the place where eternal darkness reigned in company with an eternal and terrible tempest which drew in its wake the spirits suffering in anguish and continually gathered in its tumult souls from everywhere with no hope of release from their endless sufferings.

“Who, then, are these unhappy souls?” asked Dante in compassionate tones; and the Shade of Virgil replied:

“These are the tortured spirits of those who, in earthly life, permitted the passions of love and desire to reign uncontrolled, so that they dominated over reason and ruined their lives! Behold! Here they come!”

Just then the noise of the approaching whirlwind drew nearer and, next moment, the tempest burst upon them in all its fury, so that the voices of the travellers could no longer be heard. In the wake of the storm came crowds of phantoms rushing past them with the loud sighs and lamentations only uttered by those in anguish.

Dante was horrified at this fearful spectacle and drew back, aghast ; but the Shade of Virgil was bolder and called to several of the phantoms by the names they had borne in their earthly life.

After awhile the storm grew somewhat less violent, there was a slight lull, and the ranks of the suffering spirits became thinner ; and presently there appeared the phantoms of Paolo and Francesca, the devoted lovers of Rimini, whose interlocked arms and appearance of loving one another still even in their agony strangely attracted Dante, so that he inquired of his companion their names, expressing a wish to speak with them.

In reply to his request Virgil said : “ In the name of the love which has drawn them to this suffering, ask them, and they will speak to you ! ”

As the spirit lovers came floating by, united still even in the midst of their torment, Dante approached them, therefore, and called out to them compassionately :

“ Unhappy spirits, your sufferings make me weep ! I prithee, if it is possible, draw nigh unto us, and while there is a lull in this terrible tempest, tell us where you hail from and how you came to fall thus ! ”

As if in answer to the poet's plea, the lover phantoms drew nearer ; and at the same moment the dense clouds descended once more and darkness reigned. But, out of the darkness, the voices of Paolo and Francesca were heard saying : “ There is no greater

suffering in the world than the remembrance of happy days when happiness has fled ! ”

Then they related the story of their tragic passion to the sympathetic poet, knowing that he who had also known the joys and sorrows of a beautiful love would have mercy and compassion upon their trials, temptations and sufferings.

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THE LOVE OF PAOLO AND FRANCESCA

Within his splendid palace at Rimini the powerful and successful Commander, Malatesta, was engaged in discussing with a famous militant Cardinal his plans for the defeat of the Ghibellines, the great enemies of the Pope. For a long time past these powerful foes had threatened to secure the upper hand, but now a plan of campaign had been formed for their defeat. When this new scheme had been discussed and approved, the mighty leader, Malatesta, entreated the Cardinal to bless him, his sword and his troops. Willingly and with confidence the Cardinal pronounced his solemn benediction upon the enterprise, and then he departed, with his attendants, in pomp and dignity.

After the departure of the prelate, Malatesta addressed his own attendants and generals, desiring them to bid farewell to their wives and friends, and to go forth and make their preparations for immediate

departure to the seat of war. He then dispatched a servant to bring into his presence his wife, Francesca.

As he now waited in the chamber alone a dark frown overspread the stern countenance of the Commander-in-Chief. He was a prey to that torturing malady, jealousy, having reason to fear that his fair wife did not return his love, but that, although her hand was his, she had bestowed her heart elsewhere. So strong a hold had this tormenting suspicion taken upon him that even the sound of the trumpets' fanfare calling the soldiers and strong young men together to go forth to fight the enemies at their gates—a sound which had formerly been wont to thrill him and to fill his heart with rejoicing—had now no power to stir him even slightly, for his jealous thoughts would give him no peace.

Yet he had only himself to blame, having done his wooing by proxy. Having beheld the beautiful Francesca he had immediately desired to wed with her, but, being occupied with military affairs and also unaccustomed to social dalliance, he had sent his young brother, Paolo, as the bearer of his proposals to the maiden's father asking her hand in marriage.

The proposals were willingly accepted; but, whether carelessly or for some reason known only to himself, Francesca's father permitted her to believe that it was Paolo himself who was the suitor for her hand. Possibly he may have thought that the maiden would be afraid of the black-browed Malatesta and that he might have trouble in forcing her consent to a marriage

with one so much older than herself, and one, withal, of so serious and gloomy a disposition ; or, perhaps, on seeing that she was instantly attracted by the grace and charm of the young Paolo and that she seemed naturally to regard him as her suitor, he preferred to leave her thus unenlightened in order to secure her willing agreement with the proposals brought.

However the deception may have arisen, Francesca and Paolo had no sooner looked into one another's eyes than a deep and abiding love sprang up in their hearts ; and the fair maiden, imagining that it was Malatesta who stood before her, placed her hand in that of the latter's ambassador, declaring that she willingly gave it to him, that her heart was his also and that she would love him for ever.

When the nuptial day arrived, however, and she realised the awful mistake she had made, or had been permitted to make, and that it was the grim warrior who was to be her husband and not the handsome young Paolo, she was overcome with grief and the sunshine of joy left her heart for ever. Although she was compelled to give her hand to Malatesta and went through the marriage ceremony as one in a dream, she could not also give him her heart, having already bestowed her love upon another. She became a dutiful and obedient wife, but her lack of warmth to him was a constant source of disappointment to her gloomy husband, whose own passion was the more strongly kindled by reason of her coldness.

All this passed through the mind of Malatesta as he now sat in his audience chamber waiting for his wife to come and bid him farewell before his departure to the war, and he wondered if, had she never seen Paolo, Francesca would have loved him, Malatesta. Accustomed to compel attention and to carry all before him, Malatesta was inclined to think that the latter would have been the case, and a jealous anger grew up in his heart against his young brother. He decided that he must get rid of the latter by some means or other; and so strong a hold did this dark thought take of him that he even went so far as to invoke the aid of infernal agencies in his evil scheme.

He was interrupted, however, by the entrance of Francesca, who came and stood before him submissively with folded hands and listened quietly and without any emotion as he informed her of his departure that night to fight the Pope's enemies, and added that, therefore, he must leave her for a time. Francesca asked that she might be permitted to enter a convent during his absence, but her husband refused her request curtly, saying that he had appointed his brother Paolo to act as her guardian during the wars. He gazed searchingly at her as he made this announcement, but Francesca had her feelings well under control and replied quietly that she would obey him.

Her calmness and apparent resignation served only to exasperate Malatesta. He asked her roughly and fiercely if she ever intended to love him or, at least, to treat him with some degree of the warmth expected by

a husband of his wife, and he bade her look upon the havoc she had wrought in him—the wreck of his former self, owing to his unrequited love for her.

To this outburst Francesca replied very gently : “ Forgive me, my lord, but I cannot lie by saying that I love you when I do not ! ”

She then asked him when he would return ; and he replied ominously : “ When the Pope’s foes are beaten and when I have slain *all* my enemies ! ”

Though still raging with jealousy and unsatisfied passion Malatesta then hastily dismissed Francesca ; and after giving instructions to his brother to act as the guardian of his wife, goods, and chattels during his absence, he departed for the wars at the head of his troops.

After the departure of Malatesta a period of great happiness dawned for Francesca and Paolo, for, owing to the latter’s trust as guardian of his brother’s wife and property, they were now able to meet frequently and to pass many joyful hours together. At first they tried to meet as ordinary friends, endeavouring earnestly to avoid the tender intercourse of lovers, but, after awhile, they found that it was impossible to resist the imperative call of youth and the passionate love that consumed them both.

The constant fear of her stern lord’s wrath and her own sincere desire to fight the temptation of disloyalty to him caused Francesca to struggle valiantly against the eager pleading and passion in the eyes of Paolo, whom she forbade to speak to her of love ; but though

she succeeded for a time in crushing down the smouldering fire she could not extinguish it nor prevent it from bursting forth eventually into unquenchable flames. For these two young people, so fresh and so fair, seemed to have been created for one another, and their rapture was so beautiful a thing that it seemed as natural for them to love as for the flowers to bloom and the sun to shine. Cruel, indeed, was the fate which ordained that so perfect a love should be unlawful ; still more cruel the temptations placed in their path ; and most cruel of all the vengeance and punishment meted out to them for following the dictates of their young hearts.

When Francesca found that Paolo could no longer refrain from speaking of love in her presence, she brought forth a book and made him read to her instead ; and, for a short time, she gained a further respite. But the book she happened to produce told of the immortal passion of those fairest of lovers, Lancelot and Guinevere, and it was not long before these readings added fuel to the fire she thus sought to quench, for the enthralling story of those royal lovers of olden times was a perfect picture of their own love.

Thus the weeks and months went by, swiftly and enchantingly, like a beautiful dream. Paolo and Francesca were so happy that they almost forgot that Malatesta was at the wars and would one day return to claim his own and that gloomy darkness would follow the golden sunshine they now rejoiced in.

The end came with tragic swiftness.

First came the day when Francesca could no longer keep Paolo from declaring his overwhelming love for her and entreating for hers in return. According to their usual custom she sat at her tapestry frame plying her needle while Paolo lay at her feet and read aloud to her from the beautiful story they both loved so well. After reading of the many wonderful exploits performed by the chivalrous knight, Lancelot, in honour of his fair lady, Paolo asked Francesca if she believed that the Queen would receive the hero in answer to his plea.

Francesca replied : " Surely ! She would be cruel if she refused to do so ! "

" You also are cruel, for you often refuse to see me ! " began Paolo, but Francesca gently stemmed the coming outburst and bade him read further. Then Paolo read on, describing how the Queen received Lancelot kindly, and both agreed that they must have been very happy. But when the next few lines pictured how, upon the Queen's inquiry as to what reward Lancelot sought for the deeds he had done and, how, for answer, the knight had gazed into her eyes and they both understood, Paolo could read no further. Flinging himself at the feet of Francesca he sobbed forth his own love, which refused to be repressed any longer, and entreated her to have pity upon him and to love him in return.

Francesca made one more desperate attempt to resist the fierce answering call of her own heart, gently bidding the kneeling youth to remember that

though they must suffer renunciation in their present lives, yet joy would be theirs in the next world. Paolo, however, declared that love in Paradise seemed cold and a long way off, and that he longed only for love now in this present life ; and he added passionately : “ I would gladly renounce Paradise and all it means for one sweet kiss from thee, for that kiss would hold in one moment all that Eternity could give ! ”

He endeavoured to draw her towards him as he spoke, but Francesca, pale and frightened, drew back, bidding him remember that she belonged to another, and that if she should thus prove unfaithful to her wedded lord—even though she loved him not—she believed that the punishment of the Inferno awaited her and her fellow-sinner.

“ What of that ! ” cried Paolo, once more drawing her into his grasp. “ At least, we should be together ! We were made for one another ! Therefore, let us love and live and suffer together ! Come, love me, my Francesca, and let the memory of our kisses be eternal happiness for us ! ”

Francesca could no longer resist the passionate pleading of Paolo and the call of youth within her, and, with a cry of joy the lovers fell into each other’s arms and resigned themselves to the exquisite happiness of the love that consumed them.

Thus were they found by the returning conqueror, Malatesta, who took up his sword and slew them both as they lay clasped in their first embrace ; and so passed away, in that moment of perfect joy, Paolo and

Francesca, from the dazzling golden light of love into the blackness of oblivion, to awaken in the abode of lost souls.

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EPILOGUE

As the unhappy Shades of Paolo and Francesca finished the recital of their tale of love and woe and passed on with the other phantoms upon the rushing wind of the eternal storm, Dante, full of compassion for their sufferings, fell back unconscious. At the same moment the sad dirge of the lost spirits could be heard in the distance chanting their chorus: "There is no greater sorrow in the world than the remembrance of happy days when happiness has fled!"

A NIGHT IN MAY

ONE warm evening in May great merry-makings were taking place in a certain village of Little Russia, for it was the season of Whitsuntide or the Week of the Water-nymphs, when the youths and maidens of the country-side decked themselves in their gayest attire and met to play their national games and to dance and sing together in happy groups.

This was the most joyous season of the year for the young people, for Love was in the air and many a pretty maid secured a bold sweetheart during these springtime festivities, and first one couple and then another would slip apart from the noisy throng to wander away together into the more unfrequented woodland paths, there to exchange their sweet vows, or to sit by the lake-side, waiting, hand locked in hand, for the water-nymphs to appear. For at this particular festival-time the superstitious village folk believed that the spirits of unhappy maidens who had sought oblivion from their sorrows by drowning, appeared again in the form of water-nymphs and might often be seen dancing in rings on the banks of streams and lakes, weaving wreaths of flowers and singing mysterious songs of love, now sad, now gay. But the silence and air of mystery pervading these

more unfrequented sylvan scenes soon oppressed the newly-made lovers, and most of them were glad enough to rejoin the light-hearted revellers in the village after a short absence.

On this particular evening the young people had chosen for their meeting-place a pretty spot at the end of the village, opposite the cottage of the village belle, Hanna, and here they held high revels. Not very far distant there stretched a large lake, set in somewhat gloomy surroundings, and beyond this, in the distance, stood the ruins of a nobleman's ancient mansion, once the scene of a grim tragedy and now reputed to be haunted. The shadow of mystery that hung over the sombre lake and castle beyond, however, did not cloud the high spirits of the rustic revellers, and they still pursued their games and dances as untiringly as at the beginning of the day, although the shadows of evening were already creeping down the hill-sides and darkening the forest glades beyond.

Such interest did the villagers take in this festival that quite a large number of the old folks and gossips of the place had gathered together near the abode of the favoured beauty, Hanna, and formed a delighted audience, renewing the memories of their own young days, while the youths and maidens played the celebrated "Khorovods" or country games, in which the players not only acted the various "plots" in a very spirited manner, but also sang and danced in artistic rhythm to a musical accompaniment supplied by an energetic performer on a pipe.

Special interest and applause was accorded to an enthusiastic rendering of the favourite game known as "The Millet," for, in addition to the combined singing and actions of the performers, intricate solo dances were introduced into the game by a young man named Kalénnik, the best dancer of all the village youths. So great a favourite was this famous game that it had to be repeated at various points of the village, so that all might enjoy its merry measures ; and after it had come to an end outside the cottage of Hanna the lively party tripped off to begin it again at the other end of the village, while the old folks returned to their cottages to gossip and to criticise the performance they had just witnessed.

Thus, as the twilight deepened, the open space in front of Hanna's abode became quite silent and deserted ; and presently a graceful youth slipped out from amidst the shadows and, approaching the cottage, began to sing in subdued but passionate tones a love-song to the low accompaniment of the bandoora, a native instrument upon which he was a very skilful player.

This serenader was the son of the village Mayor and was a handsome young man named Levko, who was the favoured admirer of the fair Hanna, and who had given the slip to his gay companions in order to steal a few blissful moments with his beloved one, whom he well knew to be waiting within her closed doors for his expected arrival. However, although the love-sick youth sang more passionately than usual beneath her

window, entreating her to come forth, Hanna—who, like most other fair maidens, delighted in teasing her lover—did not immediately appear ; and it was not until Levko was about to depart in a pet that she at length came forth with a sweet surprised smile of welcome which at once scattered the threatening clouds from the young man's face.

The lovers indulged in happy converse for a short time, and when Hanna tearfully expressed fear that their happiness might not last, because she occupied a humbler position in the village than did the Mayor's son, Levko comforted her tenderly and declared stoutly that he would soon gain the consent of his father to their union, even though that all-important person withheld it at present.

By this time the twilight had deepened almost to darkness and the stars were already shining overhead : and as Hanna's gaze travelled back from the glittering heavens and across to the mysterious lake and haunted mansion beyond, she shuddered for a moment. Then, suddenly, she begged her lover to relate to her the story of the tragedy that had happened years ago in the castle before it was deserted and had fallen into ruins—a story of mystery which had never been told to her, but which she knew the old village gossips sometimes spoke of to one another in awed whispers. To-night, as she gazed across at the ancient mansion over the sombre depths of the lake, her curiosity was aroused afresh, and she entreated Levko to repeat the story to her. For a long time, however, Levko,

although he was well acquainted with the story, tried to avoid repeating it to her, declaring that it was too sad and grim a tale for a young maid to hear and would only fill her with fears and keep her awake at nights ; but Hanna desired all the more to hear the story, and became so importunate in her entreaties that at last the young man yielded to her wish and related to her the old legend, which was as follows :

In the early days of the castle a certain nobleman had lived there with his beautiful daughter and only child, whose name was Pannochka, and who loved him with such passionate devotion that her whole life was bound up in him, so that she had no love left to bestow even upon a sweetheart. But, as the daughter grew to maidenhood, the father, who was a widower, decided to marry again ; and one day, to the great grief of the lovely Pannochka, she was bidden to give greeting and place to a stepmother, who, though also of great beauty, bestowed such an evil glance of jealous hatred upon her husband's child that the latter was frightened and fled from her presence. With tearful entreaty she clung to her father and begged that he would still love her and caress her as before, and she refused to be comforted until he promised to do so.

But that night, as Pannochka sat alone in her chamber very sad at heart, feeling that she was no longer first in her father's affections, a fierce black cat suddenly approached her, and, with a snarl of rage, pounced upon her with its dreadful claws ex-

tended. The maiden sprang to her feet in terror and seizing her father's sabre, which happened to be lying close by, struck wildly at the strange cat and drove it, still snarling and screeching, from the room.

The next day the nobleman's new wife kept her chamber and was not even seen at table, and for another day also she did not appear. When, on the third day, she came forth from her chamber, it was seen that her hand was bound up with a linen cloth, as though wounded; and then the nobleman's daughter realised the dreadful truth. Her beloved father's new wife was a wicked witch, and by means of her enchantments had transformed herself into a black cat on the night of her arrival, hoping, in that disguise, to bring about the death from fright of her beautiful stepdaughter, of whom she was already jealous.

Her first plan having failed she was quick to find another; and, by her evil influence, she succeeded in poisoning the mind of the father against his child. That same day Pannochka was commanded to perform the menial tasks of the humblest servant and was forbidden to enter her father's presence, and before the fifth day was ended she was driven forth from the castle gates, cold, hungry and clad in rags—this cruel deed being done by the nobleman himself at the bidding of his witch-wife, whose evil influence he was already powerless to resist.

The heart-broken Pannochka wandered but a few steps; and then, in her mad despair, she flung herself

from the top of a steep bank into the depths of the silent lake below, and was seen no more in mortal form.

“ Poor, unhappy Pannochka, how my heart bleeds for her ! ” murmured the sympathetic Hanna, as she clung to her lover’s arm ; and Levko, with great tenderness, drew her closer to his side as he continued : “ But that is not the end of the tale, my Hanna ! As the years have gone by the legend has come down to us with mysterious additions. It is said that as the despairing Pannochka plunged into the lake she was received there by the water-nymphs who dwell in its depths, and that she became their Queen ; and with them, every now and again, so the gossips declare, she would come out into the castle grounds at night to dance and play in the moonlight. On one of these occasions, the legend says, she saw her stepmother walking on the lawn, and, enticing the wicked woman to the edge of the water, dragged her down into the lake. The witch, however, was quick to save herself from destruction, and, by means of her magic, instantly transformed herself into a water-nymph, and thus escaped.

“ The old wives of the village,” added Levko, “ say even now that at intervals Pannochka still dances with her nymphs in the moonlight, and that if any mortal happens to come by she compels the stranger to guess which of the water sprites is her witch-stepmother, declaring that she can never be light and gay as are her fairy companions until she

has discovered this evil enemy of her mortal days, whom she seeks persistently.

“ But do not tremble, my Hanna, for these are but old wives’ tales and you must not pay heed to them nor let them affright you ! Hark ! the merry revellers are approaching once more, and we must part until to-morrow. Good-night, my beloved one, and may sweet dreams visit thee ! ”

With a last hasty embrace Levko slipped away once more into the shadows of the trees ; and as Hanna retired into her cottage and closed the door, the rustic dancers returned, more lively than before.

This time the dancing was fast and furious, for now that darkness had fallen the fussy old Mayor of the village had commanded that the revels should cease and that the young people should retire to their homes at once, that they thus might be prevented from getting into mischief or indulging in unseemly pranks. The young men, however, thought otherwise, and were determined to keep up their frolics as long as they pleased ; and for a short time the girls also lingered to applaud the wild dancing of their favourite, Kalénnik, who, now in a half-intoxicated condition, was vainly endeavouring to dance the “ Hopak,” another national dance which required careful balancing on the part of the performer, and which, rendered by the young Cossack with his already unsteady legs, caused much amusement to the onlookers.

Seeing that the girls were laughing at him, Kalénnik

gave chase to them, declaring that he would snatch a kiss from each one ; then, finding that the girls were too quick for him and that they were all clever enough to elude his random embraces, he announced his intention of resting for awhile in the first house he came to, no matter whose it might prove to be, even the Mayor's, adding recklessly and with drunken bravado : " Who cares a fig for the fat, old, one-eyed Mayor ? He's a silly dotard, wanting to stop our revels just when we are beginning to enjoy ourselves ! I'll look for his house, and when I find it, I'll go in without being asked and tell him I don't care a jot for any Mayor ! I'll be my own Mayor ! "

With these words Kalénnik reeled down the street in the direction of the Mayor's house. The maidens, now somewhat alarmed, fled hastily to their homes, but the young men hid in the shadows, waiting, with stifled laughter, to see what would happen next. Very soon they were in the midst of a glorious prank, for Levko, who was also hidden amongst the bushes, quickly enlisted their services on his behalf.

The young serenader had observed a cloaked figure approach stealthily to the door of Hanna's house and knock thereon. Full of surprise and curiosity to know who this nocturnal visitor—who was of bulky figure—could be, Levko drew nearer, though still keeping in hiding, and he was just in time to hear a declaration of love uttered by the stranger as soon as the village beauty appeared in the doorway in answer to the request for admission. Then, to the utter

amazement of the young man, he recognised the voice of this new suitor to be that of his own father, and he realised, at first with indignation and later with amusement, that the pompous and fussy Mayor, although so fond of preaching propriety to the youths of the village, was nothing more nor less than a vain old philanderer himself, who, in secret, ran after pretty girls and indulged in many unseemly frivolities not in keeping with his years and exalted position.

In his present pursuit, however, this elderly Don Juan met with no success and with scant civility, for, to the great delight of the concealed Levko, Hanna indignantly refused all the advances of the Mayor with great scorn, expressing disgust at his daring to make love to her, and threatening to reveal his baseness to her own true lover, Levko. Nevertheless, the old libertine was not easily got rid of; and in wheedling tones he continued to entreat the pretty girl to accept his advances, promising to give her in return fine necklaces and to deck her gaily as became the fairest maiden in the village and the chosen of himself. With inordinate vanity he reminded her that when the great Empress Catherine had visited the Crimea he had been chosen, as the cleverest and handsomest of the Cossacks, to accompany her, and was accommodated with a seat on her coach of state and given fine garments to wear; and he declared that, although he was certainly now grey-haired and had but one eye, he was still a fine Cossack, and that it was an honour for any girl to receive his attentions, adding that his son

Levko, who had had the impudence to declare love for her, was but a foolish boy, too young to know the meaning of love.

This last remark was more than Levko could stand, and, determining to teach his ridiculous parent a lesson, he sought out the other youths in their hiding-places and whispered the suggestion to them that they should seize the importunate suitor and make a laughing-stock of him. Needing no second bidding, but full of delight at the thought of such a prank, the young men flung themselves upon the astonished Mayor and began to hug and kiss him, to the great relief of Hanna, who quickly retired within her cottage and bolted the door; and it was not until after much struggling and angry expostulation that her elderly and unwanted admirer managed to free himself from the encircling embraces of the boisterous youths and to break away from them and hasten back to his own house.

But Levko did not intend to let the foolish official off so lightly, considering that such an absurd old humbug deserved a more salutary punishment for refusing consent to his son's marriage and then attempting to make love himself to the latter's sweetheart. So he gathered his boon companions together again and taught them a disrespectful song about the "one-eyed, crazy Mayor," which he composed on the spur of the moment, and which he arranged they should presently sing beneath the windows of the "great man's" house.

Meanwhile, the Mayor had quickly recovered his equanimity and lost dignity within the safe and respectable confines of his own home ; and here, a little later in the evening, he entertained a visitor in the person of a noted distiller, who had been sent by the present owner of the haunted castle to establish a distillery upon that ill-omened spot.

The Mayor's sister-in-law, a prim and fussy old maid, who had kept house for him since he had been a widower, was paying obsequious attention to the guest, who was very desirable in her eyes, in spite of the fact that he was extremely rotund in appearance and was, in addition, the possessor of a loud coarse laugh, which shook the whole of his fat, flabby body every few moments ; and both she and her brother-in-law waxed enthusiastic in their approval on hearing that the distillery would be built and in working order by the autumn, and that the jovial distiller himself would live in their midst for the next few months as a gay " grass-widower."

The three were laughing heartily at the new-comer's comic description of his conjugal dullness when suddenly the door was burst open and Kalénnik, the drunken dancer, reeled into the room, still declaring in maudlin tones : " What is the one-eyed old Mayor to me ? I am my own Mayor ! "

Paying no attention to the occupants of the room the roysterer coolly flung himself on to a bench, where he promptly fell asleep and was soon snoring loudly ; and the distiller quickly dissipated the indig-

nation of his host by declaring with his fat laugh that such a spectacle boded well for the new distillery.

Next moment, however, a stone was flung into the room through the unbarred window, and the Mayor, now suspecting that mischief was afoot, angrily called down maledictions upon the impudent thrower of the missile, wishing that it might return and choke him. On hearing this the distiller turned pale and in trembling tones begged the Mayor not to utter such a curse, lest the same fate should overtake him as had befallen his (the distiller's) mother-in-law, who, having once, in a fit of rage, uttered a similar curse upon a greedy guest who had eaten at her board more heartily than was consistent with good manners, wishing that the food might choke him, had been horrified at the sudden consummation of her wish, the stranger having choked and died the next instant—and his ghost had haunted her ever since.

As the recital of this comical yet gruesome tale came to an end the sound of music came from outside the windows and, next moment, a number of youths' voices were heard singing the disrespectful song about the "one-eyed, crazy Mayor" which had just been composed by Levko.

The Mayor was furious at being thus held up to ridicule in the presence of a guest of importance, and hastened out of doors angrily to catch the ring-leader—little dreaming that this was his own son; and presently he returned dragging in with him a youth who was indeed Levko, but whom he did not

recognise, as the mischievous youth had disguised himself very effectively by wearing his sheepskin coat turned inside out and by blacking his face with soot.

There was a small lock-up adjoining the Mayor's parlour, and seeing that his irate father was about to thrust him within this undesirable chamber, Levko managed to wrench himself free and to rejoin his companions outside; and at the same moment a sudden gust of wind extinguished the lights, so that the angry Mayor, seeking to recapture his prisoner in the dark, seized his sister-in-law by mistake, and, heedless of her frantic expostulations, clapped her unceremoniously into the lock-up and barred the door.

He was just recovering breath after his exciting chase when the village clerk bustled in, puffing and blowing also, declaring that the rowdy youths had caused a tumult in the street by their ribald singing; and he added with great satisfaction: "But I have caught the ringleader, Mr Mayor, that rascal in the sheepskin coat turned inside out, and I have him safely under lock and key in the penthouse adjoining my poor dwelling!"

"Then, who is the rascal in *my* lock-up, for me-thought I caught the ringleader myself!" demanded the stupid old Mayor; and hastily unfastening the door of the strong-room, he was amazed at being confronted by his infuriated sister-in-law, who poured forth an angry tirade upon him for having dared to imprison her. Nearly choking with rage the offended

spinster ran out into the street, where she was instantly seized by the rowdy serenaders, who had already managed to effect the escape of Levko from the clerk's lock-up, and who now, still bent on mischief, hurried the struggling female along and deposited her in the penthouse in place of their merry leader. Then they dispersed quickly, well satisfied with their frolic for the time being.

The consequence was that when, a short time later, the pompous old Mayor came along with the distiller and attended by the triumphant clerk to examine the supposed roysterer within the penthouse, upon the door being opened, he was again confounded by beholding his irate sister-in-law, whose vituperations on this occasion were even more venomous than on the last. After declaring spitefully that the insinuations in the ribald song of the roysterers were true, that she had known of his dallyings for a long time past, and that he was a vain old dotard to run after young girls, the indignant female stalked away to her home, leaving the Mayor to follow in sober silence, cowed by her violence and obliged to endure the quizzical side-glances of his guest and of his subordinate.

Meanwhile, Levko, the mischievous cause of all this commotion, had escaped from his companions for a short spell, and, after washing the soot from his face, had wandered off to the now deserted lake-side to collect his scattered wits. Quickly the thoughts of the ardent young lover came to the object of his passion, his fair sweetheart, Hanna; and soon he

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brought forth his bandoora and began to play upon it with a tender touch and to sing to its accompaniment a sweet love-song in honour of his adored one.

So engrossed was he in his happy thoughts that at first he did not notice that strange happenings were taking place around him. Almost immediately after he commenced singing, a window in the haunted castle hard by was flung open, and at the same moment the pale reflection of a lovely maiden was seen in the water below—the reflection of the drowned Pannochka—who called softly to the love-sick serenader to sing on, since his music was welcome.

Not until the spirit-maiden had called the second time did the rapt Levko realise that he was not alone ; and then he suddenly sprang to his feet and rubbed his eyes in amazement as his gaze fell upon a marvellous sight—a scene which he had thought until this moment was only to be met within the dreams of childhood. While he had been singing a host of ethereal water-nymphs had stepped out from the lake and were now singing and dancing lightly upon the banks and dew-sprinkled lawns beyond ; and as the silvery beams of the moonlight shone upon them, their shadowy forms appeared to be almost transparent, though their clinging white draperies and long tresses of hair sparkled with water-drops and sprayed the mossy ground with crystal showers at every movement.

These pale yet lovely beings were the ghostly spirits of drowned maidens who had sought in watery

graves oblivion from the persecutions of the wicked or from the heartlessness of faithless lovers; and it seemed that the sweet music made by the young Cossack had brought them forth and that for the time being they had cast aside their melancholy and were happy once more as they sang and danced or wove wreaths of the pale spring flowers which gemmed the banks and grassy dells.

As Levko gazed upon this fair company with mingled awe and admiration, Pannochka, the most beautiful of all the nymphs—of whom she was the Queen—came and stood beside the young man and said to him in her sweet unearthly voice: “Sing on, kind youth! Your music brings joy to my maidens and me, and helps us to forget the sorrows of the past! Play on, brave Cossack, I prithee!”

Levko needed no second bidding, for he was thrilled and fascinated by the fairy-like scene; and he played willingly and enthusiastically upon his bandoora, and even joined in the songs of the water-nymphs as they tripped lightly as butterflies in the rhythmic measures of their fantastic dance. At first they sang gaily as they danced with garlands of flowers in their hands; and then, suddenly, their song came to an end and they cast their wreaths into the lake and stood with drooping heads, sadly watching the drowning flowers.

Whilst her maidens thus enacted in song and dance the joys and sorrows of their mortal days, the lovely Pannochka flitted to the side of Levko and whispered

in his ear : “ Find my wicked stepmother for me, good youth ! Even now her evil spell is still upon me, so that I cannot swim freely through the waters, but am stifled in their depths ! She is here amongst the nymphs, but I know not which is she ! Find her for me, brave Cossack, and I will reward thee by giving thee thy heart’s desire ! ”

So full of entreaty was the voice of the drowned Pannochka that Levko longed to grant her request, though he knew not how to do so ; but just at that moment the nymphs recovered their lost gaiety once more and began to play the game known as “ The Raven,” which, as luck would have it, gave the young man the clue to the information he desired to obtain. In this game one of the performers represents a raven which desires to harry and peck to death the rest of the players, who represent chickens, supposed to be the family of another member of the company representing a brood hen, who, in her turn, endeavours to protect her chicks from the attacks of the fierce raven.

The game was quickly played through by the nymphs, who immediately desired to play it over again a second time ; but soon they were in a quandary, for the nymph who had played the “ raven ” refused to play it again, being so tender-hearted that she did not like to peck the “ chicks ” even in play. Soon, however, another nymph came forward and said that she had no such objection to playing the “ raven ” ; and so eager was she to take this thankless part that Levko’s attention was drawn to her and he watched

her subsequent actions with curiosity, fascinated by her strangely realistic animosity to the harmless "chicks." As the game proceeded he became suspicious as to her identity, and when, at the end, she pounced upon the "chicks," such a baleful light gleamed in her eyes that he cried out accusingly: "The nymph who plays the 'raven' is the wicked witch!"

Full of joy at the young man's discovery the players seized the spiteful nymph who had played the "raven" and disappeared with her into the depths of the lake; but, next moment, Pannochka again appeared beside the still gazing Levko, and, thanking him for having discovered for her the wicked enemy of her mortal days, whose evil spell was thus removed from her for ever so that she could now swim freely in the water with ease and pleasure, she desired the young Cossack to name the reward he desired for the good service he had rendered to her. Upon his modest refusal to do so, she placed a sealed letter in his hand, and said softly: "You love Hanna, the fairest maiden in the village, and your selfish father refuses consent to your union. But now let him know the contents of this packet and he will no longer refuse. Fare thee well, brave youth, and may you be happy evermore with your adored one!"

With these words the Queen of the Water-nymphs vanished, and Levko was left rubbing his still astonished eyes and trying to believe that he had been dreaming. But no! The letter which the

drowned Pannochka had given to him still lay in his hand ; and the young Cossack, not stopping to consider its supernatural source, but thankful for the gift of the beautiful stranger, hurried back to the village without further ado, to test its magic powers.

He found that, followed by a gaping crowd, the Mayor, accompanied by his clerk, was still endeavouring to discover the ringleader of the roystering youths who had so rudely disturbed his peace of mind ; and upon Levko suddenly appearing, still wearing his sheepskin coat turned inside out, he was at once seized by the clerk as the culprit and brought before the irate official.

As the Mayor glared at the captive, thus learning with amazement that the saucy rogue was none other than his own adventurous son, Levko calmly handed to him the sealed document placed in his hands by Pannochka, and the clerk was bidden to read it aloud. To the astonishment of all, including Levko himself, the document proved to be an official letter from the Governor of the district, stating that as the Mayor had behaved himself in an unseemly fashion of late he must straightway make amends for his misconduct by giving consent to the union of his son, Levko, with the village beauty, Hanna. The Governor further commanded that the marriage should take place at once, and that he expected to find that his order had been carried out upon his next visit to the village, which Levko now added was to be the following evening, declaring mendaciously that he had just met

a special messenger who had given him the news ; and the young man advised his father to prepare feasts accordingly.

Although angry and deeply mortified, the Mayor did not dare to disobey the command contained in this document which bore the official seal and signature of the tyrannical Governor ; and the consequence was that the marriage ceremony of Levko and Hanna took place next morning, to the great joy of the happy lovers and the satisfaction of their many friends, who all came to take part in the festivities.

To Hanna alone did Levko reveal the true origin of the lucky document that had secured happiness for them, leading the Mayor and others to believe that the Governor's own messenger had indeed handed it to him ; and, full of joy, not unmingled with awe, the bridal pair knelt to offer up thanksgiving for the miracle that had been wrought on their behalf and to pray together for the soul of the drowned Pannochka.

IVAN THE TERRIBLE

ONE summer evening during the latter part of the sixteenth century a number of light-hearted maidens were playing games together in the gardens surrounding the mansion of Prince Youry Tokmakov, the Tsar's Viceroy and Governor of the ancient city of Pskov, and the air rang with the music of their fresh young voices and resounded with their happy laughter as they flitted hither and thither in the merry romp of "Catch who catch can."

These lively girls were the guests of Princess Olga, the Viceroy's fair young daughter, who, however, had slipped away from their merry ranks and was now standing a little to one side, half concealed by a clump of thick bushes, listening eagerly to a message brought by her chief friend and confidante, Stesha, with whom she shared a wonderful secret. For the beautiful Olga, although already betrothed against her wish to the Boyard Matouta—an elderly suitor of mean disposition, whom she disliked and despised—had recently made the acquaintance of a handsome young burgher, by name Michael Toucha, between whom and herself there had sprung up a passionate love and to whom she had plighted her troth in secret. With the aid of her friend, Stesha, who acted as

messenger and go-between, the lovers were able to meet now and again at twilight in unfrequented parts of the Viceregal gardens to snatch brief moments of bliss, even though realising only too well that the future held little hope for the consummation of their union. Apart from the fact that Michael was not of noble birth, there was another reason why he would never find favour in the eyes of Prince Tokmakov. The young man was also a revolutionary, and, fired by a patriotic love for his native city and the freedom and rights of her inhabitants, his soul rebelled against the despotic rule under which she was compelled to exist. He was already an ardent leader of the more advanced and soaring spirits among the community who sought to break away from the tyranny of the all-powerful Tsar, Ivan the Terrible, whose stern belief in the invincibility of "Divine Right" had led him to take fearful vengeance on all those venturesome souls who dared to defy his iron rule in order to secure absolute dominion over the vast lands he held.

The message now brought by Stesha to her friend was to the effect that Michael Toucha intended to visit his beloved one that same evening and might arrive at any moment ; and, full of joy that she was so soon to feel the arms of her lover around her, Olga hurried with her friend to rejoin her guests, whom she was now eager to get safely within the house. By this time, the young ladies had tired of their romping games and had persuaded one of the old

nurses in charge of the party to tell them a favourite story, in which a fierce dragon of terrible aspect played an important part. The girls were so deeply interested in this exciting tale that the sudden sound of a shrill whistle which came from the other side of the bushes startled them so much that they all fled away into the mansion at once, followed by the grumbling old dames—to the intense relief of Olga, who knew well that the whistle was the signal of her lover's approach.

The new-comer was, indeed, Michael Toucha, who stepped forth from the bushes and sat on the fence beyond, singing softly to himself, until he saw the cloaked form of the Princess Olga slip out from the house and trip lightly to the trysting-place, when he hastened to her side. After their first happy greetings were over Olga was quickly plunged into grief on learning from her lover that he had come to bid her farewell. Realising that Prince Tokmakov would never consent to wed his daughter to a portionless suitor, Michael announced that he was resolved to journey to the borders of Siberia, where he meant to trade in furs and silver; and then, when he had become quite wealthy, it was his intention to return and to lay his riches at the feet of the Viceroy, in the hope of securing his favour and the hand of the beautiful Olga.

As he concluded the recital of his hopeful plan and begged the young Princess to bestow her blessing upon him ere he departed, Olga flung her arms around his

neck and tearfully entreated him not to leave her nor to risk the terrible dangers of the unknown snow-clad land of Siberia ; and she declared that, in spite of the fact that she was betrothed to the Boyard Matouta, she would now reveal to her father the secret of her passionate love for Michael and entreat him to consent to their union.

Gently, but insistently, her lover endeavoured to set aside her clinging arms, knowing only too well that her entreaties would be of no avail ; but the more passionately did Olga cling to him and announce her resolve never to be parted from him.

Darkness had now fallen ; and whilst the lovers were still engaged in earnest discussion of the future which looked so gloomy for them, comforting one another by repeated declarations of their intense love, they were startled on seeing two persons approaching from the mansion. To their alarm, they quickly recognised these as the Viceroy and the Boyard Matouta, who sought the cool evening air and the privacy of the gardens as they spoke together on urgent personal matters. With a hastily whispered farewell the lovers parted, Michael escaping over the fence and vanishing into the darkness beyond, whilst Olga crouched in the bushes close by, afraid to move further away until the nobles had retired. Thus the young girl overheard a piece of news not intended for her ears and which filled her with an additional sorrow.

At first the two nobles discussed matters of state, for the disturbing news had just been received that

the Tsar Ivan had wreaked terrible vengeance upon the neighbouring city of Novgorod because the sons of the freemen and burghers there had rebelled against his rule, fearful massacres having been ordered by the stern tyrant, whereby the innocent had suffered with the guilty and the whole town was filled with lamentation.

The Viceroy expressed the hopeful view that Pskov was not likely to share a similar fate, as he had himself discharged his duties as Viceroy with unblamable loyalty, and had so far been able to keep the revolutionary element under reasonable control ; but Matouta was full of fears and doubts, declaring that such daring spirits as the young malcontent, Toucha, had caused much disaffection in the city, so that the Iron Tsar, following his inflexible resolve to rule as an absolute autocrat, might well cause dire punishment to be inflicted upon all the citizens of Pskov because of the few who had dared to resist his power.

So full of fear was the craven-hearted Boyard that he trembled at every sound, even at the rustling of a leaf ; but having been assured by his host that there was no danger of their conversation being overheard in these private gardens and that they might talk there in safety, he recovered somewhat and began to speak of his betrothal to Olga, expressing the desire that their marriage might soon take place. The Viceroy, however, who well realised that the young Princess regarded the match with repugnance,

desired, for her sake, to put off its consummation a little longer, hoping that the maiden might thus become more reconciled ; and he even went so far as to endanger the Boyard's withdrawal from the contract altogether by confessing to him that Olga was not, as supposed, his own child, but was the daughter of his dead wife's sister, Vera, who had died years ago without naming the father of her child. The little one, he continued, had been taken into his own house and brought up as his daughter ; but though Vera's faithful old nurse, who alone knew the secret, still served and cherished the fair maiden, Olga, the mystery of her true parentage had never been revealed—beyond the fact that her unknown father was of the highest rank.

The concealed Olga, on thus learning that the Viceroy, whom she loved tenderly, was not her real father, could no longer keep her feelings under control, and uttered a faint cry of woe. The sound was instantly caught by the Boyard Matouta, who was about to hasten in the direction of her hiding-place when, suddenly, a bell pealed forth loudly from the neighbouring Kremlin. At the same time a distant glow appeared in the sky ; and realising that the bell, which now pealed on unceasingly, was the tocsin to call the townsfolk together, and that the beacon fires had also been lighted around the city to warn the inhabitants of outlying districts of coming danger, the Viceroy hurried his now terrified guest away at once and proceeded with him to the market-place to

address the people already gathering there. Thus the unhappy Olga escaped discovery and hastened within doors overcome with grief.

At the sound of the tocsin the townfolk had come hurrying forth from their homes, their curiosity being mingled with fear, for the great bell was only rung at long intervals, when it was necessary to gather the people together to hear the announcement of important news or proclamations, or in times of great danger. The market-place, which was already brightly illuminated by the now blazing beacons, quickly filled, and hasty greetings were called to every new arrival of note, whilst eager questions were asked on all sides as to the reason for the assembly. Soon it was noticed that a dust-covered, travel-stained messenger had entered the square, and all crowded round to hear his message as he mounted the platform for the speakers.

The Viceroy, accompanied by the Boyards, Judges and all persons of authority in the city, having now arrived, the messenger after saluting the company announced that he had brought a greeting to Pskov from her fair sister city, Novgorod, which lay in smoking ruins, whilst her few remaining inhabitants filled the deserted streets with lamentations. He went on to describe how the mighty Tsar, Ivan the Terrible, had come with his savage soldiery, the Oprichniki, and had ordered a massacre of the people and a sack of the city because of a rebellious faction there which had had the audacity to resist his laws,

and how, in consequence, hosts of innocent persons—men, women and children—had been slain to satisfy the vengeance of the tyrant, who was now marching on Pskov and might arrive at daybreak.

As the people heard this terrible news loud cries rent the air, for they were full of fear lest the same fate might befall them as had laid low their sister city, Novgorod ; but soon they were somewhat comforted by the calm demeanour of the Viceroy, who next addressed them. Prince Tokmakov reminded the frightened people that they had done no wrong and that so long as they showed themselves loyal and obedient to the mighty Tsar, their ruler, and sought his royal favour, they were not likely to meet with the sad fate of Novgorod, where sedition had been rife. He then bade them cease from moaning and hasten to bake loaves of fine meal, to prepare mead and to set forth in the streets bread and salt as the symbols of welcome against the arrival of their exalted guest, whom he counselled them to greet with deep humility and to implore that he would show clemency towards them. He next informed his white-faced listeners that the Tsar was also passing through their city on his way to pray at the shrines of local saints, which fact they might take as a favourable sign that he was coming in peace, and that it would be foolish, therefore, to attempt to arm themselves or to make any show of resistance, which would only bring upon them the anger of their powerful ruler.

The words of the Viceroy—whom they loved and

revered—brought back hope to the hearts of the majority of the people ; but another section of the crowd called upon their favourite, Michael Toucha, who was also present, to speak, the young revolutionary having kept ominous silence throughout the foregoing speech, his set face and impatient gestures having revealed to them that the advice of Prince Tokmakov was not to his liking.

Michael needed no second bidding to speak out his mind, and, mounting to the platform, he made a speech full of fire, repudiating with scorn the idea that the people should humble themselves before their tyrant ruler, declaring that as they had done no wrong they neither deserved punishment nor needed to crave for mercy. He boldly called upon his followers and all others who were of his way of thinking to refuse to pay homage to one who respected not their rights, but, instead, to arm themselves and march out of the city now with him, to dwell in freedom as out-laws rather than lose their self-respect by abasing themselves before the terrible Tsar, and to seek some means of striking a decisive blow for their rights and for the liberty of Pskov, their beloved city.

This inflammatory speech quickly caught the vivid imaginations of the younger and more revolutionary members of the assembly, so that a considerable number of bold and reckless young men immediately went over to the side of Toucha, whom they had always recognised as their leader ; and refusing to be guided by the more sober counsels of the Viceroy,

the rebel band marched out of the city singing their songs of freedom as they went.

The rest of the community, however, followed out the instructions of Prince Tokmakov, and spent the remainder of the night baking loaves and brewing strong mead. At daybreak they began to set out tables in the streets, upon which they placed bread and salt as the symbols of hospitality and welcome ; and they brought forth their banners and their icons and crosses to carry in procession as the Tsar entered the city, that he might be pleased with his reception and that his anger might be turned away from them.

Whilst these hasty preparations were taking place in the early hours of the morning the Princess Olga appeared on the balcony of the Viceregal mansion, attended by her faithful old nurse who, quickly observing the unhappy looks of her young charge, begged for her confidence in this evident trouble. Olga, with many bitter tears, related to the old dame the story contained in the conversation she had overheard the previous evening between the Viceroy and the Boyard Matouta, bemoaning her sad fate as an orphan and expressing her grief because of the misfortunes that were falling upon her. Then, somewhat comforted by the kindly sympathy of her nurse, she dried her eyes once more and expressed the hope that her troubles might be set aright upon the arrival of the great Tsar Ivan, for whom she had an unaccountably sacred affection and respect and had always

cherished an intense longing to see him in the flesh, having, from her earliest childhood, been taught to regard him as second only to her Divine Father.

Even as Olga and her old nurse spoke together the great square in front of the mansion became crowded with a host of excited people, whilst the simultaneous pealing of all the bells in the city and the sound of loud acclamations from the adjoining streets heralded the approach of the dreaded tyrant ; and as the noise of the tumult drew nearer, the people fell upon their knees, bowing their heads to the ground in sign of their deep humility and reverence.

First came a procession of fierce Tartar warriors clad in full battle array, followed by the celebrated Oprichniki Guards, resplendent in their rich trappings and awe-inspiring of aspect ; and then, mounted upon a fiery steed, the mighty Tsar, Ivan the Terrible, appeared in the square—a man of noble beauty and regal bearing, who gazed proudly upon the kneeling populace thus humbly greeting him and pleading that he would show mercy upon them.

With calm dignity the Viceroy approached the silent sovereign and bade him welcome to the city of Pskov ; and the Tsar, pleased with his reception, graciously desired his representative to lead the way into the Viceregal palace, where he wished to partake of refreshment.

When the party had taken their places within the handsome reception rooms of the Viceregal mansion, Prince Tokmakov standing at the right hand of the

exalted guest and the trembling Matouta upon his left with the other Boyards grouped around, the Tsar commanded that a goblet of mead should be presented to him by the mistress of the house. The Viceroy explained that his wife had long since been dead, but that his daughter would be honoured to wait upon her sovereign, for whom she had ever had the greatest respect and affection; whereupon Olga entered the room with eager yet trembling steps and deeply bowed head, and, kneeling, presented the goblet of mead to the royal guest. She was followed by her friend, Stesha, and a bevy of other fair maidens bearing salvers of the choicest sweetmeats and rarest foods the city could produce.

As Olga approached him the sternness of the Tsar's features relaxed and he greeted her gently and inquired her name, afterwards addressing her in a caressing manner by the pet-name "Olenka," and bidding her to greet him with a kiss—the privilege of a welcome guest. When the maiden looked up with a startled glance he stepped back suddenly and gazed into her beautiful face with amazement, as a host of tender recollections rushed upon him—for Olga was the exact living image of a fair girl whom he had loved with all the strength of a passionate nature many years ago in the romantic days of his early manhood, when the call of youth meant more to him than the powers of kingship and when love was the only thing that mattered.

Olga, on her part, gazed affectionately, yet timidly,

at the Tsar, whom she had revered from her earliest days ; and she replied modestly that it was too great an honour for a humble maiden thus to salute her sovereign. The transformed Ivan, however, still smiled upon her and took off a handsome ring, which he slipped upon Olga's finger, at the same time stooping to kiss her reverently and gently, for a strange emotion thrilled him ; then, recovering himself somewhat, he greeted the other girls and bade them sing to him.

His eyes, however, never left the sweet face of Olga, whom he kept by his side and continued to caress ; and when, presently, she retired with her friends, he dismissed his own attendants also and bade the Viceroy remain awhile with him alone. He then eagerly demanded of his host : " From what family did you take your wife, Prince ? This fair maid, Olga, is the living image of one I loved long years ago ! "

Prince Tokmakov replied that he had wedded a lady of the noble house of Nassonov, at which name the Tsar appeared violently agitated ; and then, too proud to deceive his sovereign, he told him simply that although he had wedded Nadejda, the elder daughter of that house, Olga was not her child, but was the daughter of her erring sister, Vera, the name of whose unknown lover had never been revealed. With feelings of the deepest emotion the Tsar now realised that the fair maiden to whom he had felt himself so strangely drawn was, indeed, his own



THE TSAR REALISES THAT OLGA IS HIS DAUGHTER

(Chaliapin as *Ivan the Terrible*.)

daughter—the child of the beautiful Vera Nassonov, whom he had loved so passionately in the golden days of his youth and who had gladly shared with him in secret for a brief spell the magic bliss of a stolen joy, which her own equally passionate nature made her powerless to resist. Bowing his head humbly before this realisation of the inscrutable workings of the Divine Father, the chastened Ivan registered a vow then and there to make an end to war and bloodshed, and declared devoutly : “ God is the Protector of the City of Pskov and her people may rest in peace ! ”

Great rejoicings were now held by the inhabitants of Pskov when it became known that Ivan the Terrible had no evil intentions towards them, but had only fatherly blessings to bestow upon all ; and for a short time the softened Tsar remained in the district, engaged in hunting and other peaceful pastimes. Then he determined to carry out his original intention of visiting the local shrines and set forth for the Monastery of Pechersk, where a number of pilgrims also went out from Pskov at the same time to return thanks to the saints for preserving their city ; and whilst his tent was pitched upon the banks of the River Miededna, as he journeyed thither, he had another and unexpected meeting with Olga—a meeting that was destined to end in tragedy.

When the chief inhabitants of Pskov, following the example set them by the Tsar, set forth to visit the Monastery of Pechersk and to worship at the shrines

of the local saints, there came with the pilgrims, attended by their nurses, a party of young girls, among whom was Olga, still regarded by her friends as the daughter of the great Prince Tokmakov. Olga's object, however, was not only a religious one. She had received tidings again of Michael Toucha, who had contrived to send her a message, asking her to meet him in the forest during her journey to the Monastery, and the young girl's sad heart had been filled with joy at the prospect of seeing her outlaw lover once more. The consequence was that as the girl pilgrims journeyed through the forest, singing as they went, Olga managed to slip away unnoticed from the rest of the party and made her way to the place of tryst chosen by Michael—a lonely spot at some distance from the more frequented paths. It was late in the evening and darkness had already fallen—for the party had been delayed on the way by a thunderstorm and had been compelled to take shelter from the rain—and Olga trembled with fear at finding herself alone in the darkness surrounded by all the terrors of the forest.

She had not long to wait, however, before she was joined by Michael Toucha, and the lovers quickly clasped one another in a glad embrace, forgetting their troubles for the moment in the intense joy of meeting. Then, a little later, they began to talk of their future, and Olga told her lover that no one could now keep them apart, since she also was an outlaw. She then related to him how she had learned that she was not

the daughter of Prince Tokmakov, so that, not knowing her paternal parentage, she was thus free to wed with a burgher; and again the now happy pair rejoiced in the seemingly rosy prospect before them, Michael declaring that they would go away together and make their home on the far distant banks of the Volga.

But fate was against the union of Michael and Olga, and their fair castle in the air was soon dashed to pieces. Even as they spoke thus happily together a gang of armed men suddenly sprang out from the neighbouring bushes and set upon them. Michael endeavoured to protect his beloved one; but he was quickly dragged from her side and flung to the ground, insensible. At the same time a cloak was thrown over Olga's head and she was lifted up, half-fainting, and carried away through the forest.

This outrage had been carried out by order of the Boyard Matouta, who, having learnt by means of the spies he employed that the young Princess had arranged to meet her outlaw lover in the forest, had determined, in revenge for her unfavourable reception of his own suit and for the Viceroy's contempt for the craven spirit he had shown at the time of the Tsar's arrival in Pskov, to use the circumstance as a means of disgracing her in the eyes of the terrible Ivan—little dreaming that the latter was the unknown father of the girl.

Therefore he bade his men carry the captive to the rocky banks of the River Miededna where the Tsar's

tent had been pitched not far from the Monastery of Pechersk ; and here, in a few hours' time, the party arrived, and Matouta insolently demanded admittance of the royal pilgrim's chief attendant, Prince Viazemsky.

Within the tent the Tsar Ivan sat alone at a table reading certain documents spread out before him, but stopping every now and again to gaze fixedly in front of him and to lose himself in deep reflection. The tent had rich appurtenances, such as became its royal occupier. Splendid furs were spread upon the ground and over the seats, the table was covered with cloth of gold and bore silver candlesticks, and heavy curtains of gorgeous Eastern handicraft had been hung before the tent opening.

So deeply engrossed was the Tsar in his reflections that he resented the sudden entrance of his Chief Counsellor, Prince Viazemsky, with the request that the Boyard Matouta desired an interview, having brought with him a fair maiden whom he had snatched from the arms of a rebel lover in the forest ; but on learning that the captive was none other than the beautiful Princess Olga, the startled and now angry Ivan commanded the Boyard to enter and sternly bade him explain why he had brought the girl thither and at such a late hour.

The craven Matouta, trembling with fear now that he found himself in the presence of the powerful tyrant, declared that although the young Princess Olga had set forth from her home ostensibly with the

object of praying at the local shrines, she had managed to escape from her companions in order to meet her burgher lover, Michael Toucha, a dangerous rebel from whose polluting touch he, Matouta, had arrived just in time to snatch her away ; but Ivan, furious at the Boyard's covertly insulting accusation against the fair girl in whom he himself was so intensely interested, with scornful anger dismissed him from his presence.

He then sent for Olga, who entered weeping and flung herself at his feet, imploring his pardon and protection. The unhappy girl confessed her love for Michael and admitted that she had indeed gone to keep tryst with him that evening when she had been so roughly taken captive by order of the hated and despicable Matouta.

At first the Tsar listened to her explanations with cold displeasure, sternly reprimanding her for forsaking her pilgrimage in order to meet her lover, and declaring harshly that she must now travel with the royal party to Moscow and choose a husband from among the nobles there. He added that the young man, Toucha, should be sent in chains to prison ; but Olga's tears and distress quickly broke down his harsh resolutions. With passionate words of entreaty the grief-stricken girl implored the Emperor to have mercy upon her ; and she went on to declare that, so far from believing her listener to be only a cruel tyrant, she regarded him as a loving and gracious father of the people, who would protect and care for

her as her own unknown father would have done. She added that as a little child she had been taught to pray for him night and morning as her "father, the mighty Tsar Ivan," and that in her dreams he had visited her always with a gracious and benevolent aspect as though he indeed loved her as a father.

On hearing this impulsive outburst and realising the undoubted sincerity of the maiden's words, the Tsar was deeply moved and now spoke tenderly to her, bidding her to dry her tears and have no fear that he would deal harshly with her; and he was almost on the point of revealing himself to her as her true father whom she had seen in her dreams and for whom she had prayed, when there came the ominous sounds of a disturbance taking place outside the tent, and the voice of Michael Toucha was heard demanding that Olga Tokmakov should be given up to him.

The young rebel had soon recovered consciousness after Olga had been abducted by Matouta's men; and quickly calling his own outlaw friends to his aid, he had followed in the wake of the ravishers. A few hours later, learning that his beloved one was in the tent of the tyrant Tsar, he determined to rescue her at all costs. The rebel band was instantly engaged in a hot encounter with the guards, who imagined that the outlaws were about to make an attempt on the life of their royal master; and Olga, hearing her name passionately called in agonising tones by her lover, tore herself from the grasp of the Tsar—who vainly tried to restrain her—and rushed outside into the

midst of the fight which was taking place on the banks of the river, into which Toucha and his adherents had now been driven and were already swimming across to a place of temporary safety before making a second attempt to rescue the captive.

As the distracted Olga broke away from his grasp and fled outside, the Tsar heard almost immediately afterwards the sound of a shot; and next moment, the unhappy girl's dead body was brought back into the tent and laid at his feet—and Ivan the Terrible who, by his tyrannies, had brought woe and despair upon thousands of wretched parents, himself now felt the poignant anguish of a loving father bereft of his child, and as he knelt beside the corpse of the fair daughter he had found and lost within so short a space of time, he humbly bowed his head beneath the chastening hand of a just God.

MOZART AND SALIERI

THE famous Italian Kapellmeister, Salieri, sat alone, buried in deep reflection, in the music-room of his fine house in Vienna one day during the year 1792. Despite the fact that the warm sunshine of fame and good favour now shone brightly upon him after many years of hard struggling through the gloomy clouds of stupendous labour, disappointment, and continuous perseverance, his thoughts were not pleasant ones. Although he had attained to so high a position in the world of music, and now lived in comfort and honour secured after years of toil spent in the pursuit of his well-beloved art, happiness and peace of mind were not his. For he, whose talent was greatly admired, who had thought himself so secure in his fame as the premier musician of his day that he could even afford to smile indulgently upon other struggling aspirants and to hear them spoken of without envy, was now plunged into the black abyss of jealousy by the advent of a rival in the wonderful musician and composer, Mozart, who possessed the heavenly gift of music genius—and genius is to talent what a planet is to a twinkling star.

Yet, this same Mozart had not his, Salieri's, comfortable and honourable position, but was poor—and

never likely to be otherwise, since he had no idea of the value of money, but lived, like all real bohemians, from hand to mouth. True, he had not the Italian Kapellmeister's strength of mind and determination of character to struggle against the difficulties and obstacles in his path; but then he did not need to wear himself out by endless toil and laborious effort in order to produce the divine harmonies with which his imaginative brain teemed. For genius is a thing that cannot be attained merely by the will of man, but is, like physical beauty, the blessed gift of God; and Salieri, in his blind jealousy, railed at what he regarded as Divine injustice in thus indiscriminately bestowing this same immortal gift of genius upon certain favoured individuals here and there, to swamp in a moment the loving toil of lifelong devotion to Art given by such lovers of Art as himself, who merely possessed talent.

Mozart lived the careless, happy-go-lucky life of a man whose every action is the outcome of impulse, and to whom routine, service, and discipline were things abhorred, who only worked when he felt inclined to do so, and whose very labour might almost be called a pastime, since he composed without any apparent effort at all the marvellous harmonies which poured forth from his brain in such rich profusion.

Of what use, then, was it for such an artist as Salieri—highly talented and sound musician though he knew himself to be—to spend months and even

years producing and perfecting a composition, admired though it might afterwards be, when the careless, but heaven-gifted Mozart, the genius, could sit down and pour forth in a few hours a perfect flood of divine melody, such as he—the merely talented Salieri—could never hope to equal in a lifetime of laborious work.

While Salieri was thus indulging in morbidly jealous reflections about his mighty rival and railing because the chance gifts of an inscrutable Providence should ever and anon light upon—in his opinion—some undeserving, idle trifler and so cause him to wear the evergreen crown of immortal glory, passing by the industrious and serious devotee of Art, Mozart himself entered the room unceremoniously. For Salieri, notwithstanding his envy, received his rival on a friendly footing, being, despite himself, as attracted by the latter's irresistible charm and personality as by his genius—and to listen to the music of Mozart, played by the composer himself, was to forget one's earthly surroundings and to pass for the moment within the portals of Paradise.

An illustration of this unwilling but irresistible admiration and homage to genius—undreamt of by the modest recipient, who was himself strangely unsusceptible to flattery and adulation—was quickly forthcoming. Mozart, gay, careless, debonair and still young enough to appreciate the mere joy of living, entered the room with a brisk step and fair greeting, laughing light-heartedly as though at some

merry jest. When Salieri, after a somewhat strained return of greetings, inquired the cause of his amusement, the harum-scarum musician replied with another burst of laughter that on his way thither, on passing the open door of a tavern, he had heard an old blind fiddler playing an air of his own—Mozart's—and making such a comical travesty of it that he had bribed him to come along with him at once and repeat the performance that Salieri might also be entertained thereby.

He thereupon called into the room the decrepit old blind musician he had spoken of, bidding him play the same composition he had just heard him perform in the tavern; and the old man willingly enough took up his fiddle and played one of the graceful airs from "Don Giovanni" so execrably that Salieri, despite his envy of his rival, angrily bade him depart and play no more, declaring that it hurt him as much to hear such exquisite music thus murdered as it would to see Raphael's beautiful "Madonna" bedaubed by some novice, or to read the inspired lines of Dante with the impudent additions of some wretched rhymster.

Mozart, however, still laughing, gave the fiddler a coin—which he could ill spare, money being ever scarce with him—and after dismissing the old man told Salieri that he had come to ask his opinion upon some musical themes that had been worrying him insistently all morning, until he had, at last, in self-defence, scribbled them down. He added, casually,

that he would come another time, if more opportune, observing that Salieri did not seem to be in a favourable mood; but the jealous Italian, who, though filled with fresh envy on thus hearing of this new composition so obviously inspired, could never resist the personality of the careless, happy-go-lucky Mozart, nor the intense joy of listening to his enthralling music, invited him to remain and to let him hear the melody.

Mozart thereupon went to the piano and after describing the subject of his composition in a whimsical fashion—a youth in love with some fair lady, both very happy, when, suddenly, a dark cloud of gloom and mystery envelops them—his fingers strayed over the keys and a flood of exquisite melody filled the room.

Salieri, in spite of the gnawing envy tearing at his heart, was completely carried out of himself, and, overcome by spontaneous admiration and delight, poured forth burning words of praise. At the same time he reproached Mozart, the composer of such a priceless gem, for having cared to stop at a tavern door to hear a blind beggar murder another of his loveliest airs—a proceeding which he, Salieri, greatly deprecated as unworthy of an artist, being undignified and belittling.

Mozart, however, who never could be persuaded to take himself seriously, and was as modest and as simple as a child—which characteristics naturally annoyed the self-important and flattery-loving Salieri, who, like many merely talented individuals

lacking the force of true genius, had a considerable amount of vanity—expressed wondering surprise that his friend should be so deeply impressed and moved by what was to himself a mere trifle. Then, merrily declaring that, whether a genius or not, he was nevertheless mightily hungry, he made as though to retire.

Still under the spell of the wonderful music he had just listened to, Salieri immediately suggested that they should dine together at the "Golden Lion," a favourite inn, and Mozart, nothing loth, cheerfully accepted the invitation and said that he would meet him again at the inn as soon as he had been home to inform his wife that he was dining out.

When his prospective guest had hurried away with a merry song on his lips, Salieri quickly fell back again into his morose mood, more jealous than ever of his heaven-gifted rival; and he realised with despair that it was absolutely hopeless for him—Salieri—or any other devotee of musical art even to attempt to reach the golden heights of fame while Mozart, the wizard of harmony, still lived to soar ever above them. In a frantic burst of envious rage he called down curses upon the master musician, who had just held his heart in rapturous thrall when playing the simple composition that had come to him as direct inspiration from the Divine Bestower of genius; and, in his blind jealousy, he vowed to slay him that day, that he might no longer obstruct his own path to glory.

In feverish haste the Italian now drew forth from a secret hiding-place a tiny flask containing a deadly poison which had been given him eighteen years ago by a friend, and which he had himself been tempted to take on many occasions when luck had gone against him, but which he had always set aside again in the hope of a rosier dawn to come, or for the silencing later on of some deadly foe whose machinations might overcast his life.

“Such a foe is Mozart!” he now cried, passionately. “He blights my life and prospects, even while he enraptures me! The contents of this phial shall bring oblivion to him this day, and leave me alone on the path of fame!”

Placing the fatal flask in an inner pocket, the Italian Kapellmeister sallied forth to keep his appointment at the sign of the “Golden Lion,” where Mozart presently joined him; and the two partook of dinner together.

Salieri was excited and in high spirits and ordered the best foods and the most expensive wines, but Mozart, on the other hand, seemed strangely depressed, having suddenly become sad and silent, so that he spoke little and his thoughts seemed far away. When Salieri presently rallied him on the subject he admitted his abstraction, saying that it was due to the fact that his thoughts were engaged with the composition of the great Requiem Mass he had quite recently received a commission for under strange circumstances, with which he had thought all his friends

were acquainted ; and finding that his host had not heard of it, he told him the story which has since become so famous, and which was as follows :

A mysterious stranger—who afterwards turned out to be a rich nobleman—had called at his house twice during his absence from home, and had been so eager to see him that he had actually called a third time, when he saw and commissioned the famous musician to write for him a Requiem Mass in memory of his wife, whom he had loved passionately and for the loss of whom he was clad in the deepest mourning ; and Mozart had agreed to do so, and had at once commenced the work, to which he had grown so much attached that he did not now wish to part with it, but hoped that the mysterious stranger would never appear to claim it.

Then, as Salieri listened to this tale of a strange commission with increased envy still gnawing at his heart, Mozart added in a hesitating tone as though somewhat shy of confessing to superstition, that ever since he had been writing this work he had fancied that the piece would be his own Requiem, that the black-robed stranger seemed to be dogging his steps wherever he went, and that even now he imagined his shadow to be seated at the table beside him.

Salieri, though he shuddered involuntarily, rallied his guest upon his low spirits and for succumbing to such morbid thoughts, bidding him put these idle superstitious fancies away from him ; and he advised him, when he felt dull, to take a drink of good wine

and to read the lively story of "The Marriage of Figaro."

This chance remark, however, brought up the subject of Beaumarchais, the author of "Figaro"; and Mozart suddenly asked his host if he believed, as was popularly supposed, that Beaumarchais had met his death by poison. To this, Salieri, with a violent start, replied hastily that he did not think so, as that author had ever been of particularly lively and cheerful disposition, not likely to have taken his own life nor to have had enemies who might wish to destroy him. Mozart agreed with him, adding that Beaumarchais was also a genius and, therefore, not likely to commit a crime, it being his—Mozart's—belief that genius and crime were never found together.

This last remark sounded unpleasantly ominous in the ears of the envious Salieri, who, however, became more excited in his manner; and filling up both their glasses to overflowing, he bade his guest drink with him again and again to each other's health and to their lasting friendship.

Under this cloak of seeming hilarity, however, the Italian kept a keen eye upon the master musician; and when the latter's glance again wandered aside and remained fixed as though his thoughts had just strayed into unknown regions far away, he stealthily produced his hidden phial and poured forth the poison into the other's glass. Then, hardly able to conceal his agitation, he called upon his companion to drink yet once again; and after Mozart had, un-

suspectingly, swallowed the poisoned draught, he filled up his glass again with fresh wine and bade him drink still more.

But Mozart refused to drink again, and, rising, went over to the open piano saying he would play to him some passages from his "Requiem."

As the glorious music, so perfectly played by the master's loving touch, filled the chamber, Salieri once more fell under its magic spell, and, against his will, was moved to such sincere and irresistible admiration that the tears rolled down his cheeks ; and when Mozart stopped for a moment, astonished that his wonderful harmonies should have thus moved his host to tears, the latter entreated him to continue, declaring that his tears, though bitter, were yet consoling.

For a short time longer the magnificent notes of the famous Requiem filled the room. Then, Mozart rose, somewhat unsteadily, announcing that he felt suddenly unwell ; and, saying that he would go to his home to rest for awhile, he bade farewell to his host and retired.

"Yes, rest, Mozart, but from that sleep there will be no awakening in this life!" muttered Salieri, as his rival departed ; and then, a horrible thought came into the murderer's mind. Suppose, as the master musician had said, that "crime and genius never go together?" If that were the case, then he, Salieri, could never win the fame of a genius, even though he now had no longer a rival to fear, and his dark deed had thus been committed in vain !

Then he pulled himself together and endeavoured to comfort himself with the reflection that he had heard it whispered among the common folk of his own country that the great master sculptor, Michaelangelo—of whose genius there had never been any doubt—secretly slew the man who designed the Vatican.

But in vain he sought for comfort, and he now realised with the anguish of a stricken conscience, that for ever afterwards there would ring in his memory the last marvellous harmonies of a true genius as the Requiem for the death of his own peace of mind.¹

¹ There has never been any proof, or even any definite suspicion that Mozart was poisoned by Salieri, or that he met his death by poisoning at all, most of his biographers having written to the contrary; but the fact that the Italian Kapellmeister was known to be inordinately jealous of his brilliant contemporary and that it was said by some of his friends that Mozart himself believed, when dying, that he had been poisoned, gave rise to the suspicion upon which Poushkin based the poem from which the libretto of this opera has been taken.

THE GOLDEN COCKEREL

THE mighty and famous King Dodon sat upon a gorgeously gilded and feather-bedecked throne in the magnificent hall of his palace, surrounded by his courtiers and the Boyards or lords who formed his Council ; and over all the brilliant assemblage there was a solemn hush and an air of anxious expectancy.

It was a lovely spring-time day and bright shafts of sunshine pierced their way into the richly-gilded hall between the thick columns of a balustrade which gave out on to the streets of the capital beyond, where even the common people who passed by spoke only in whispers as though fearful of the sound of their own voices.

Against a background of brocaded hangings and rich carved work the Boyards were seated in a semi-circle—most of them men of advanced years with venerable beards and all splendidly attired ; and on either side of the throne were seated the King's two sons, the handsome young Princes Afron and Guidon, who both showed clear signs of youthful impatience at the ceremonious and respectful silence of the Counsellors, and awaited with scarcely restrained eagerness the words of their royal father who seemed buried in anxious thought.

Well might King Dodon be anxious ; for though in his youth and prime he had been famed as a redoubtable monarch who was always ready to repel his foes and did not even hesitate to affront his neighbours for the sake of a skirmish which should add to his glory, he had long since ceased to care for warlike pursuits and had no desire to engage in certain serious conflicts which now threatened the peace of his dominions.

During recent years the once active king had lost all interest in warfare or bold pursuits of any kind and had devoted himself to a life of indolence and luxurious ease ; and, following the example of their monarch, his people also had ceased to care for the profession of arms, and even the young men had given themselves up to pleasure, to which they devoted more time than they gave to manly exercises.

The rulers of neighbouring countries were not slow to take advantage of this state of affairs ; and now, in his advancing years, the splendid and once redoubtable King Dodon was threatened by invasion on every side and could not sleep at nights for fear of possible dangers for which he was not prepared. In great alarm his armies had been gathered together and dispatched to the borders, but still the King could not rest in peace, knowing not when the danger would draw nearer and his capital and even his own sacred person be threatened.

The Boyards, therefore, were called to meet their monarch in the Council, together with the two young

Princes, each of whom had a plan to suggest ; and when King Dodon, after a long and solemn hush, had at last broken silence and placed the serious position of affairs before the company, he called upon his elder son, Prince Guidon, for advice in this time of difficulty.

The young Prince, who, like his brother, had been brought up in soft ease and luxury, yet desired to be regarded as a dashing youth full of fiery ardour, wit, and brilliancy, sprang eagerly to his feet as though he had longed for the moment to come when his advice should be asked thus in the Council ; and he declared that he had lain awake all night seeking for some clever ruse to circumvent the coming danger.

“ My dear son, you will injure your precious health if you thus spend your nights in thought and lose your rest ! ” cried the King, anxiously. “ Do not add to my troubles in this way, I beg of you.”

Prince Guidon, with a proud and magnanimous gesture, waved aside any such fear on his account ; and then he added, in a self-complacent tone, as though well pleased with the cleverness of his own ideas : “ The chief of our troubles is that our enemy is so near to us that he is already about to fall upon our army and annihilate it ! Let us, then, bring back our warriors from the borders and place them around our beloved capital to protect it and ourselves from harm. Then we may all eat, drink, sleep, and make merry once more, as though we had no foes ! Even though

the enemy comes over the frontier and ravages the villages round about, yet may your Majesty and we who love and serve you rest in peace, knowing that we are well guarded from harm ! ”

All the company were delighted at this inglorious advice, which pleased such comfort-lovers mightily—with the exception of Prince Afron and the most venerable of all the Boyards, Polkan, the aged Voevoda or head of the army. The latter angrily opposed such a foolish plan, declaring in violent tones that it was much more dangerous to have a cruel foe at close quarters than at a safe distance.

The Boyards were furious at having their prospects of ease thus disturbed, and the King, after threatening Polkan with being put in chains for casting such a damper upon the Heir-Apparent's plan, turned to his younger son and entreated his advice on the weighty question.

Prince Afron also repudiated his brother's scheme with contempt and suggested instead that the army should be disbanded for a time and that the soldiers should be recalled to the colours just a month before the enemy attacked. “ And then,” he added grandiloquently, “ we will go forth and crush him ! ”

This short-sighted advice was extremely pleasing to the doddering old King and his Boyards, who acclaimed the young Prince's speech with loud applause; but the Voevoda Polkan opposed this plan too, pointing out sarcastically that their enemies were hardly likely to be so obliging as to give them timely

notice beforehand as to when it was their intention to make an attack.

The King passionately denounced his sage Counsellor for once again throwing cold water upon a plan which had appeared to promise at any rate temporary exemption from the warlike activity which would so sadly interfere with his own rest and comfort ; and a scene of wild uproar now ensued, the two young Princes and the Boyards all drawing their swords, ready to attack the old Voevoda who had dared to speak his mind so boldly and who valiantly prepared to defend himself.

The King, however, called the company to order, and once more asked for advice ; and then several of the Boyards began to regret that they had no fortune-teller to consult, who might have divined a way out of the difficulty and revealed the future to them by means of beans or by wine-dregs or by the stars. An altercation now arose as to which was the best way of securing such magical divination, whether by means of beans, dregs, or stars, and the noisy uproar was resumed.

In the midst of this confusion there appeared at the top of the stairway that led down into the street a very old and venerable-looking Astrologer, who wore flowing blue garments sprinkled with golden stars, and a tall white hat. He carried in one hand an astrolabe and in the other a bag ; and as the whole company relapsed instantly into respectful silence and gazed upon the new-comer with awe and veneration,

the dignified stranger slowly approached the throne and bowed low before the King, saying as he did so :

“ Hail, King Dodon ! Although thou knowest me not, yet art thou well-known to me. I have served thy sires in long ages gone by, when they were in difficulties which could only be overcome by means of magic. Such a trouble has now come into thy life, O King Dodon ; and as it seems a pity that so gorgeous a monarch should lose his sleep because of the cares of state that overwhelm him and the dangers that beset him, I have come to offer unto thee a magic remedy, so that thou mayest once more sleep in peace ! ”

So saying, the Astrologer took out from his bag a Golden Weathercock ; and whilst the whole company gazed admiringly upon this enchanted object, which flapped its wings and crowed, its owner continued : “ Accept my Golden Cockerel, O Sire, and place it upon the highest spire upon thy palace ; and it shall be a true watchman unto thee ! When all is peaceful and quiet, it will make no sound whatever, and thou mayest rest and take thy pleasure in safety and comfort ; but if enemies are about to assault thy gates or to draw nigh to thee from any quarter, or if thy peace is threatened in any way, then will my magic Golden Cockerel raise his comb, flap his wings, and, turning in the direction from whence the danger appears, will crow aloud ‘ Cock-a-doodle-do ! Beware ! ’ ”

All the people were full of admiration for the beautiful Golden Weather-vane ; and King Dodon, overjoyed at the thought of securing such a treasure which should warn him when danger was at hand, poured grateful thanks upon the Astrologer for bringing him so splendid a gift, asking what favour he could bestow upon him in return, promising to give him anything he might desire, even to the half of his kingdom. The Astrologer, however, declared that the ordinary gifts of riches and high rank were as nothing to him, since he regarded love only as precious ; and he added that he would call upon the King later on to redeem his promise by bestowing upon him a certain gift which he would then ask for.

King Dodon gladly reassured his venerable visitor that he would certainly be willing to redeem his promise when the right time came ; and then the Astrologer bowed low before the throne once more, and departed as quietly as he had come.

The enchanted Weather-vane was taken away at once and placed with great reverence and care upon the highest spire on the palace roof ; and as the King came down from his throne and walked about the hall, joyfully rubbing his hands together at the thought of the magical treasure he now possessed and receiving the congratulations of his courtiers, the voice of the Golden Cockerel was heard crowing from its lofty perch : “ Cock-a-doodle-do ! Eat, sleep, and take your ease.”

“ Ah, what happiness for me to know that my land

is free from enemies, and that I shall be warned the moment danger approaches !” cried the King, joyfully. “ I may sleep as long as I wish, without the thought of cares to awaken me ! The most daring of foes cannot reach me until I shall have had time to know of their base plans ! Once more my jesters may amuse me, and my dancers may delight me ; and I may well forget that there are such things in the world as troubles and dangers, since I shall not know of them, nor see them coming ! ”

Rejoicing in this ostrich-like comfort, King Dodon dismissed his Counsellors ; and, calling to his chief female attendant, old Amelfa, the Royal Housekeeper, he announced his desire to indulge in a long siesta in the warm sunshine now pouring in through the open balustrade.

At a sign from the Housekeeper, the palace servants carried out into the sunshine a luxurious couch of ivory, with fur coverings, upon which the King seated himself ; and then Amelfa herself brought a tray filled with dainty confections and other delicacies, upon which her royal master feasted for awhile. When he had finished this repast, he sent for his favourite parrot, which had been taught by Amelfa to make flattering remarks about His Majesty ; and after amusing himself with the bird for a short time, he waved it aside, and settled down in his couch to sleep, whilst Amelfa, whose chief duty it was to chase away the flies from her royal master’s nose, seated herself on the ground beside him, and

slowly fanned him with a long fan of peacock feathers.

It seemed that, for the moment, even the King's slumber should bring him the joys of peace, for in his dream he was visited by the vision of a most beautiful Queen, whose alluring charms thrilled him and caused his heart to beat as in the days of his youth.

Following the example of their royal master, as the sleepy guards repeated the words of the magic Weathercock, "Rest, and be at ease!" all the courtiers and palace attendants likewise retired to their resting-places and indulged in a long sweet sleep—with the exception of the faithful Amelfa, who never ceased in her occupation of fanning the King; and for some hours a peaceful quiet reigned, whilst the sun still shone brightly overhead.

Then, suddenly, the voice of the Golden Cockerel was heard loudly crowing his warning cry: "Cock-a-doodle-do! Arouse yourselves and beware! Beware!"

Instantly, all was hustle, bustle, and confusion in the palace. The guards sprang to their feet in alarm, the people in the streets crowded round the palace with their children, and the aged Voevoda, Polkan, rushed in to the presence of the King, crying loudly: "Awaken, O my King! Awaken! The Golden Cock is crowing, and terrible danger threatens!"

At first, King Dodon, rising sleepily and unwillingly from his comfortable couch, was most annoyed at

being thus rudely awakened and disturbed in the midst of the most seductive dream that had ever visited him ; but upon hearing from the impatient Polkan that the magic Cockerel was indeed giving lively warning of an approaching enemy, he became resigned. Addressing the frightened people, he bade them calm their fears and prepare their fighting men to set forth to the frontier at once ; also to make a generous offer of their riches and goods to provide against the many new expenses that would have to be met.

He then appointed his two sons as the leaders of the expedition against the coming foe, bidding them divide the army between them, and go forth to gain glory and renown ; but the young Princes were both in great ill-humour at having been roughly disturbed from their own enticing dreams, and, being cowards at heart, grumbled at the prospect of hardships in store and of the dullness of their lives if thus parted from their sweethearts.

King Dodon reproved his sons for their softness and poor spirit, and with a parting embrace and a blessing, bade them take command of his hosts forthwith ; and the young Princes, though much cast down, were fain to depart with the Boyards and chief warriors, leaving the aged Polkan and remaining soldiers in charge of the capital.

When the blare of trumpets and the noise of the departing army had died away in the far distance, peace and calm descended upon the city once more ;

and presently, the voice of the Golden Cockerel was heard crowing : " Cock-a-doodle-do ! Rest and take your ease ! "

When the people heard this reassuring announcement, they gladly returned to their homes again, to eat, drink, sleep, and be merry ; and King Dodon dismissed his Court and retired to his couch once more, calling upon his Housekeeper, Amelfa, to recall to his mind the already half-forgotten but seductive dream out of which he had been awakened by the recent hubbub and to reveal its meaning to him.

The old dame, wishful to please her royal lord and jealous of her reputation as a Wise Woman, though sorely puzzled by such a sudden request, made several wild guesses at the subject of the pleasant vision which had so delighted the King ; and when Dodon impatiently chided her for her lack of skill in such matters, she begged him to give her more time. Then, knowing that it flattered him to be regarded as still young enough to play the lover, she slyly shook her finger at him and declared that he had dreamed of a beautiful lady who had loved him and whose love he had returned.

King Dodon, thus reminded of the charmer of his ravishing dream, and already full of drowsiness, once more settled down in his luxurious couch and fell into a deep and peaceful slumber, again dreaming happily of the mysterious charmer who had before filled him with such joy.

The whole Court, including the guards and even

Amelfa this time, fell into the same heavy yet peaceful slumber, which appeared to be caused by some hypnotic means, since it lasted for an unusually long time and affected one and all.

Then, once more, there sounded the clear clarion cry of the Golden Cockerel, crowing insistently and calling out the warning : “ Cock-a-doodle-do ! Arouse yourselves, and beware ! Beware ! ”

Quickly awakened by the warning cry of the magic Weathercock, the people again arose from their couches and made their way to the royal palace, where the guards and courtiers were all hastening hither and thither, whilst the old Voevoda, Polkan, was endeavouring to arouse the drowsy King, declaring that the Golden Cockerel had again crowed forth a warning, which could only mean that disaster must have already befallen the brilliant army before it had even had time to reach the borders.

King Dodon hastened to the balustrade to observe for himself the antics of the magic Weathercock ; and seeing that it was still flapping its wings wildly and crowing continually, he agreed to Polkan’s suggestion of calling up the reserves of old men, declaring that he himself would lead this second army and go forth to the rescue of his children. He then called for his armour and weapons of war ; and though the former had become too tight for his rotund body, and his favourite sword was red with rust, he donned the complete equipment boldly, and was carried forth and mounted upon his white charger,

which had also grown dull and decrepit with age and had lost all the fire of its youth.

When the people beheld their King riding at the head of this stout army of greybeards, and followed by his old Voevoda, Polkan, they raised loud shouts of joyful pride, pouring blessings upon their beloved monarch for thus going forth himself in their defence, but entreating him to take care of his own sacred person and to keep out of all danger, that he might return safely to them once more. Thus, though well advanced in years, rode forth King Dodon, in great splendour and comic pride—though mightily afraid of his staggering old war-horse—to meet the foe, of which he had been so timely warned by the Golden Cockerel.

After marching many weary miles in the wake of the first splendid if reluctant army of young men that had set out before them, King Dodon and his greybeards were puzzled because they could find no trace of their children, nor of the foe of whom they had been warned ; and full of an ever-growing uneasiness, when darkness fell, they still continued to wander on, though weary and longing for rest.

By this time, they had reached a wild and desolate spot ; and as the moon came up, it cast pale gleams over a narrow gorge covered with stunted bushes and bare hillocks, and hemmed in by rugged, threatening cliffs.

Here, at last, they came upon traces of a great battle ; for as they penetrated into the gorge, the

moonlight shone down upon the ghastly upturned faces of countless dead bodies of warriors, strewn in every direction, lying stark upon the hillocks, or crowded in heaps among the bushes. All these dead bodies were those of the handsome youths of King Dodon's first splendid army ; and the mystery of the hidden foes deepened, as no corpse or even wounded warrior could be seen of the enemy battalions, which had vanished as completely as though they had never been in the gorge at all.

As the old warriors burst forth into a wail of sorrow and lamentation while seeking for their beloved ones amongst the slain, King Dodon and the old Voevoda dismounted and penetrated a little further into the gorge, full of amazement at the mysterious battle which had evidently been fought either with an invisible foe, or with no foe at all, each warrior evidently having turned upon his neighbour. This latter terrible suggestion was presently confirmed by King Dodon, who, stumbling against two bodies, discovered them to be the corpses of his own well-beloved sons, whose swords were each buried in the heart of the other.

As the grief-stricken King flung himself upon the bodies of his heirs and poured forth tears and lamentations for their untimely end, the aged Voevoda fetched up his followers and claimed their allegiance to the old monarch, calling upon them to join him now in search for this mysterious enemy, who had thus robbed them of their Princes and their own sons, and to destroy

him. All the warriors swore to avenge the deaths of their children ; and they searched the gorge throughout the night, but in vain, since no sign of any enemy warrior could they find.

Then, at last, as the night mists began to clear and the first rosy glow of early dawn slowly penetrated the entrance to the gorge, to the amazement of all, in one of the hollows, the outline of a large silken tent of brilliant colours became clearly discernible.

King Dodon would have made a sudden raid upon the strange tent ; but he was prevented from so doing by the more prudent Polkan, who declared that it would be better to fire upon the unseen—but evidently deadly—foe from a safe distance. He gave orders, therefore, for a culverin to be brought up and loaded ; and the charge was just about to be fired, when the flaps of the tent were silently moved aside, and a queenly woman of dazzling beauty came forth, attended by four female slaves, and, regardless of the presence of King Dodon and his army, raised her arms and addressed a song of welcome to the rising sun.

This dazzling vision of female loveliness was clad in filmy shimmering robes of rose-colour, adorned with chains of pearls and priceless jewels ; and as the soft tones of her seductive voice reached them, the anger in the hearts of the approaching warriors vanished utterly, and they drew back to a respectful distance, leaving King Dodon and his Voevoda alone to parley with the mysterious siren.

As the beautiful singer finished her hymn of praise, she turned and gazed long and intently upon King Dodon, who turned pale and whose heart began to beat wildly as he recognised in this wonderful stranger the lovely and seductive maiden of the joyful vision which had visited him since his possession of the Golden Cockerel ; and when the bewildered monarch at length asked in a trembling voice from whence she came and whither she was travelling, she replied boldly : “ I am the far-famed Virgin Queen of Shemakhan ; and I am journeying silently, like a thief in the night, to make conquest of thy city, and to take it for mine own ! ”

Then, as King Dodon and the amazed Polkan demanded roughly how she intended to accomplish her bold intention, seeing that she had no army and was merely attended by a retinue of slaves, she replied with an enchanting smile : “ Beauty needs no army ! Beauty provides me with all the weapons I need, and by means of my beauty I conquer one and all ! ”

She then clapped her hands, and called for goblets of wine to be brought, declaring that the King and Polkan were welcome guests to her tent ; and, at her command, a company of slaves brought forth a gorgeous carpet from the tent, spread it out, and threw upon it silken cushions, upon which the Queen sank in a graceful attitude, inviting her stranger guests with an imperious yet irresistible gesture to seat themselves beside her and to partake of the rich wine now

proffered to them by fair slave maidens on bended knees.

Both the warriors hesitated, uncertain, and fearful of enchantment, or, at least, of poison ; and then the King, already under the spell of the Queen's alluring beauty, took the goblet and drank deeply and with delight of its luscious ruby contents, and old Polkan, somewhat sulkily, followed his royal master's example.

The Queen of Shemakhan continued to talk to her guests, telling them of a delightful dream which had visited her that night, in which a strange and unknown lover, whose face she could not see, had whispered passionate words of love to her ; and upon the rough Polkan gruffly making light of this vision, declaring that it was caused by indigestion, the lovely Queen, in angry tones, commanded King Dodon to dismiss the tiresome old Voevoda, since his presence was distasteful to her.

Nothing loath, the already enamoured King curtly bade Polkan betake himself to the back of the tent ; and when the old warrior had grumblingly retired, Dodon gave himself up gladly to the joy of the moment, and eagerly submitted to the blandishments of the beautiful Queen, who now made flattering love to him and soon had him completely under the sway of her magical fascination. She sang love-songs to him in her most alluring tones ; and she compelled the King to sing to her in return—which he did in an old cracked voice, upon hearing which his fair listener burst into peals of silvery laughter.

Seeing, however, that King Dodon still held back from caressing her, the beautiful Queen sought to arouse his jealousy by telling him that, but a few hours since, both the young Princes, his sons, had vied with one another for her love and had fought each other to the death for possession of it. As she proceeded with her story, King Dodon realised that, though unaccompanied by an army, yet this siren Queen was the most irresistible of all foes, since her seductive beauty had caused his entire army of youthful warriors to turn on themselves and to slay one another for the favour of her smiles ; yet so completely had he, also, fallen beneath her fatal spell, that these terrible misfortunes were as nothing to him, and, in spite of his advanced years, all he foolishly desired was the love of the beautiful enchantress beside him, whose every word was already law to him.

When the lovely Queen, therefore, playfully insisted upon him joining her in a merry dance, he permitted her to relieve him of his cumbersome armour and to bind his silver locks with her own gaily-coloured silken kerchief, ready to join in the impromptu revels which now took place.

A company of pretty slave maidens went through many graceful evolutions ; and after joining in the dance herself for a short time, the Queen forced the unwilling Dodon—who had not danced for many years and was exceedingly stiff in his movements—into the whirl of the mad revel, to the accompaniment of wild music played by the slaves.



THE ENCHANTRESS CHARMS KING DODON.
(Mme Thamar Karsavina as *The Queen of Shemakhan.*)

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At last, the foolish King sank back amongst the cushions, exhausted, but still full of the strange joy which held him in thrall; and, seizing the Queen's hand, he acknowledged himself her slave, begging of her to become his Consort and to return with him to his capital, there to reign over all his people.

The Queen now coquetted with her elderly lover, declaring that she desired only to wed with one who would dare to resist her will and to thwart her plans; but King Dodon only the more eagerly agreed to please her in this respect also, if only she would consent to be his and to return with him.

The wily Queen of Shemakhan, who had foreseen this offer and played her hand for it, and had, in addition, other desperate plans for the future formulated in her scheming brain, now made pretence of agreement and gave orders for her slaves to strike the tent and to join in the procession of King Dodon's triumphant return to his capital.

Meanwhile, the people left behind in the capital were full of fears and presentiments of coming disaster, wondering what was to become of them should their King meet with defeat; and when, at length, after many anxious hours of waiting throughout the night, runners were seen next morning entering the city gates towards midday, vast crowds collected around the palace to learn what news the messengers had brought. When, a few hours later, the old House-keeper, Amelfa, was observed through the open balustrade bustling about the Council Chamber,

arranging the drapery about the King's throne, and giving orders to the slaves, some of the bolder spirits amongst the observers ventured to the entrance and began to importune the old dame with questions. Had victory attended the arms of King Dodon, or had a direct calamity befallen him? Was their royal father returning to them, or had he been killed or captured? Were they themselves to become the slaves of a foreign conqueror? What news had the runners brought, and what was about to happen?

To these questioners, at first, Amelfa, full of her own importance and proud of her secret knowledge, refused to divulge any information at all, delighting in her power to keep the eager inquirers on the tenter-hooks of suspense; but, at length, unable to keep such a weighty secret to herself any longer, she told them of the expected return of her royal master, enlarging considerably upon the story brought in by the runners, and leading her hearers to imagine that the King had made a great conquest, saying mendaciously: "Have you ever heard of the four great Kings of Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs and Spades? Well, our noble lord has conquered them all! Moreover, he has saved from the jaws of a terrible dragon the most beautiful royal damsel in the world; and he brings her back with him to be his bride! They will soon be here; so prepare a splendid and joyous welcome for them! Leap like goats, and turn somersaults, sing, clap your hands and dance for joy! If not, woe betide you, for our new

Queen is not likely to endure the sight of doleful faces ! ”

On hearing this astonishing news, the people were plunged into a great state of excitement ; and though grieved at learning also that their beloved Princes were slain, they did not hesitate to don their gala attire in joyful anticipation of a holiday, and congregated in great masses in the streets ready to welcome the returning “conqueror.” They even swarmed on to the roofs of the houses, sat on the window-ledges, and clung to the chimney-pots, in order to get the best possible view of the approaching procession.

Within the palace, the bustle increased tenfold, and old Amelfa was soon nearly raving with fussy preparations ; and in between the pillars of the open balustrade, the oldest of the Boyards—who had been left behind to guard the city— assembled with their wives and children, all garbed in the richest of raiment. The atmosphere soon became stifling ; and although the sun still shone brightly, it was observed that a dense black cloud was creeping up from the East, giving warning that a terrible thunderstorm was approaching. The joyful people, however, refused to have their spirits damped by the ominous appearance of the eastern sky ; and since the beautiful Golden Cockerel still remained silent and glistened in the bright sunshine, with its wings folded as the sign of peace, they had no qualms of fear, but awaited with eager anticipation the approach of the royal procession.

At last, just before the black thundercloud obscured the sun, the triumphal procession appeared in the distance ; and a mighty shout of welcome went up from the thousands of spectators.

First came the royal warriors, some mounted on dashing steeds and others marching on foot, all holding up their heads high with pride as though indeed returning from some mighty feat of arms ; and after these, there followed the splendid retinue of the Queen of Shemakhan. This gorgeous procession of eastern courtiers and slaves was an amazing sight to the humble people gathered in the streets of King Dodon's city ; for there were many strange and fantastic beings amongst them, the like of which had never before been seen in that country.

Amongst these strangers were giants of huge size, and dwarfs so tiny that they scarcely reached to the knees of the shortest man present. There were even stranger and more freakish creatures—people with horns on their heads, some with but one eye in the centre of their foreheads, and a few who had heads like those of a dog. Besides these, there were many gigantic negroes and tiny black boys, whose ebony skins shone like satin in the sunshine, and whose decorations were sashes and turbans of brilliant colours and barbaric ornaments of curious workmanship ; and these were followed by a bevy of lovely slave maidens, whose charms and delicate outlines were only half concealed by the long, diaphanous veils of shimmering gauze which enveloped them.

Many of these gorgeously-attired attendants carried caskets overflowing with strings of pearls and precious stones ; and the sight of these stupendous riches filled the observers with greater satisfaction still, since it was good to know that such treasures were to be added to the wealth of their city.

The enthusiasm of the people, therefore, knew no bounds when, presently, the magnificent golden chariot containing King Dodon and his royal bride came slowly by ; and for a few moments they were dazed and struck almost dumb by the dazzling beauty of the siren Queen, which held them spell-bound as they gazed upon it. Then, seeing that the lovely Queen, so far from being gracious and kindly in her demeanour, threw only haughty, scornful glances on all around, they sought to please her and to win her smiles by renewed cheers and joyful songs, turning somersaults and leaping high into the air, to prove to her the joy of their welcome.

King Dodon, on his part, looked older and more worn than when he had set forth upon this strange enterprise, and he appeared also to be nervous and restless ; but he gazed continually and with doting sentimentality into the wonderful eyes of the haughty Queen of Shemakhan, who returned his glances of love with cold indifference and disdain, as though he were but a pawn in some mysterious game she was playing—as, indeed, he was. What was more, the end of this curious game was at hand ; for, as the people's glad song of welcome came to an end, and

the golden chariot drew up at the entrance to the palace, a stranger suddenly emerged from a neighbouring portico, in whom all recognised at once the mysterious old Astrologer who had presented the Golden Cockerel to King Dodon.

Clad in the same star-spangled blue garment and tall hat, the Astrologer stood, motionless and silent, gazing earnestly into the eyes of the Queen of Shemakhan, who returned his gaze long and steadfastly ; but King Dodon, delighted at the sight of one who had bestowed upon him so precious a gift, hailed him genially as his respected benefactor and asked him to claim now his reward for bringing the Golden Cockerel, promising again to give him anything he might desire.

The Astrologer, with slow, measured tread, made his way to the side of the chariot, and said : " Give me, then, O King, this beautiful maiden, the Queen of Shemakhan ! I demand nothing more, nothing less ! "

King Dodon sprang to his feet in anger on hearing this amazing demand from his benefactor ; and, thinking the Astrologer must have taken leave of his senses, he declared that such a request was ridiculous and impossible, since one so hoary-headed and aged could not hope to feel the thrills of passion, as in the days of youth.

The Astrologer replied with dignity that, nevertheless, it was his desire to try the joys of marriage, even in his old age ; but King Dodon, beside himself with indignation, commanded him to name some

other price, promising him the highest noble rank, or even the half of his kingdom.

To this, the Astrologer still firmly declared that he desired only to have possession of the beautiful Queen of Shemakhan, that nothing else would satisfy him, and since the King had made a solemn promise to grant him whatever he might desire, he must certainly redeem that promise now that the time of reckoning had come.

King Dodon, no longer able to restrain his rage, burst forth into a torrent of abuse ; and to such a great height of excitement did his uncontrollable passion lead him that, raising his royal sceptre, he aimed a violent blow at the Astrologer, and stretched him dead at his feet. At the same time, the sun went behind the cloud, and a loud clap of thunder was heard, whilst a strange darkness began to creep over the land.

As the people all drew back, awed and horrified at this deed of violence, King Dodon was relieved when the Queen of Shemakhan declared coldly that the foolish old man had only got his deserts for his presumption ; but when the King endeavoured to continue his love-making and would have embraced her, she repulsed him with unutterable scorn and pushed him away from her side, saying contemptuously: "Prepare to die, thou hoary-headed old imbecile! This sorry jest has gone far enough. Thy death is at hand!"

As the crestfallen King now turned to mount the steps of the palace, the voice of the Golden Cockerel

was heard crowing loudly : “ Cock-a-doodle-do ! I will avenge my mysterious master ! I will peck this foolish old dotard and kill him ! ”

With these words, the Golden Cockerel flew down from its perch on the spire above, circled over the heads of the people a few times, and then aimed a heavy blow with its powerful beak at the head of King Dodon, who fell instantly to the ground, dead. At the same moment, there was a violent peal of thunder, which struck the terrified people almost dumb ; and for a few minutes a veil of black darkness hung over all, through which could be heard the scornful laugh of the stranger Queen.

When at length the storm had ended and the cloud of darkness began to pass away, it was seen that the mysterious Queen of Shemakhan and the Golden Cockerel had both vanished, as though they had never been present. Knowing now that some enchantment was at work, the trembling people slowly approached the still form of their fallen King, hoping that the preceding events had been but a terrible dream, and that he was asleep or in a trance. But their hopes were in vain, for King Dodon was indeed dead ; and the people raised their voices in loud lamentations for the loss of their beloved monarch.

Thus did a mighty magician vainly endeavour to bring within his own power a beautiful enchantress, through the means of a doting old King, and, though failing in his enterprise, repaid the latter for base ingratitude in his own coin.

THE DEMON

AMIDST the wild, lonely heights of the Caucasus Mountains, a terrific storm was raging. The four winds of Heaven seemed to have been let loose and to have joined their forces into one stupendous hurricane; and while the fierce tempest roared and raged, the ground was rent by a fearful earthquake, and out of the wide chasms that yawned in every direction evil spirits escaped for a brief spell from their abode of darkness, laughing in derision as they passed now and again groups of good spirits appearing through the lightning-rent skies.

Into the midst of this awe-inspiring scene, their master, half-mortal and half-demon, presently appeared upon the highest mountain peak of Kazbec, in answer to the call of the truant evil spirits over whom he ruled, cursing the world and its Creator and railing at the Spirit of Light Who so often prevented his wicked plans from coming to pass. His curses, however, were futile and seemed to give him but little satisfaction; and presently, wearying of everything, even of his own terrible power, he dropped his head for a moment and appeared to be upon the verge of despair.

Just then, however, in a flash of dazzling radiance,

the Spirit of Good appeared, crowned with Light ; and instantly, the Demon burst forth once again into a passion of vindictive rage, railing at the Light that would destroy his darkness, defying all the hosts of Heaven, and uttering violent curses against the dwellers upon earth.

In spite of the stern rebukes of the Angel of Light, Who warned him again that his evil hatred would never conquer the Goodness of Divine Love, the Demon continued to hurl defiance at the Creator, his sole satisfaction since he had succumbed to the evil within him being to offer opposition to everything good and pure and to engage in endless strife with the heavenly hosts. Even when the fury of the present storm abated somewhat and his attendant evil spirits had returned to their own abode, he lingered upon the mountain-tops, still cursing and planning further wickedness into which to plunge weak mortals.

As the hours rolled on, however, and the storm passed, a sudden change came over him, and his fury vanished as the sun rose in the clearing sky ; and he who had railed at the hosts of Heaven and cursed the dwellers upon earth throughout the tempestuous night became strangely silent, his rage vanishing with the dawn of a glorious summer day as a new passion took possession of him.

The reason for this sudden change was a remarkable and almost unbelievable one. Down in the valley below, which lay in the district of Grusia, he

beheld a mortal maiden of such exquisite beauty that he immediately conceived a wild and violent passion for her, remaining silent, heedless of all nature, as he gazed, fascinated, upon her.

This lovely maiden, who had come forth thus early to gather flowers and to wander upon the banks of a sparkling streamlet that flowed below, was Tamara, the daughter of Prince Gudal, the Ruler of Grusia. As she filled her arms with sweet-scented blossoms and rejoiced in the beauty of the peaceful morning that had succeeded the storm-racked night, her reflections were no less sweet and beautiful—for her thoughts were all of her betrothed lover, the Prince of Sinodal, who was even now travelling with all speed from his distant land to be united to her, and who was expected to arrive for the marriage ceremony within the next few days.

So pleasantly were her thoughts engaged in anticipation of her gallant lover's arrival that Tamara wandered somewhat further afield than was her usual custom, soon leaving her attendant maidens far behind; and presently, to her intense alarm, as she turned to retrace her steps, she was accosted by a stranger, whose unearthly fascination held her in instant thrall. For the Demon, having conceived an overwhelming passion for the beautiful maiden on beholding her for the first time in the valley below, had ceased his railings against the Spirit of Good, and, determining to lose no time in securing this new prize, he now appeared before her in the guise of the hand-

somest young man she had ever seen, and clad in the rich garments of a great Prince. He addressed her eagerly, and plunged at once into a passionate declaration of his love.

Amazed and terrified at the hot flow of words uttered by the stranger, Tamara's first thought was to fly from his presence; but so fascinated was she by his sinister beauty and by his earnest pleading for her love, that she felt, for the moment, almost powerless to move. As she listened to this wild love-making, all remembrance of her betrothed faded from her mind and an answering passion began to kindle in her own heart for this brilliant new lover who had so suddenly appeared from she knew not where, and whose wooing, though she felt it to be unearthly and unholy, yet filled her with a strange joy.

When, however, the Demon would have folded her in a passionate embrace as he uttered these extravagant words: "Thou art the Queen of my Love, and I will make thee Queen of all the world!" she was terrified, as she thus realised that the stranger was certainly no ordinary mortal but a being possessed of supernatural powers. She made the sign of the cross, and, with a mighty effort, tore herself away from his inviting arms and fled from his presence, not slackening her steps until she had rejoined her companions and had returned with them to her father's castle.

The Demon, however, was full of triumph, and,

satisfied that he had already ensnared the heart of Tamara, he felt that she could not now escape his toils ; and in order that he might satisfy his sudden desire, he determined that her betrothed lover, the Prince of Sinodal, should never arrive in Grusia but should meet with an untimely end upon his present journey. By means of his supernatural powers, therefore, he caused terrible disaster to fall upon his rival.

Little dreaming that he had innocently earned the fatal hatred of a supernatural rival, the young Prince of Sinodal proceeded eagerly and patiently upon the long and weary journey which he hoped and believed was to bring him to the crowning happiness of his life—his marriage with the beautiful Tamara, whose love he prized more than all the world. The journey had been a troubled one from the first, for the distance was great and the way had been exceedingly rough ; and during the night that followed the meeting of his beloved one with her new sinister wooer, final disaster overtook him.

That night the young Prince and his suite encamped near a wayside chapel which, as it happened, had been built many years ago as a memorial to one of his own ancestors, who had been treacherously murdered upon that spot by an enemy ; and the old body-servant of the Prince, full of superstition and trembling lest the place should be haunted, entreated his royal master to pray for the soul of his murdered ancestor ere he lay down to rest. The young Prince, however, was too

footsore and weary to attempt special devotions at so late an hour ; and, despite the admonitions and warnings of his old servant, whose fears of approaching danger he endeavoured to allay by promising to pray for the soul of his murdered ancestor when daylight came, he fell asleep within his tent and was soon dreaming of Tamara, his beautiful bride-elect.

But the premonitions of the old servant were well-founded and what he had feared came to pass. A few hours later, when the whole caravan was wrapped in unsuspecting slumber, a party of savage Tartars—ancient enemies of this particular royal family—brought up swiftly and silently by the mysterious powers of the Demon, made a sudden raid upon the sleeping camp ; and the unfortunate young Prince, with his suite and followers, was taken unawares, and all were massacred save a few swift runners who managed to escape and to bring the terrible news to Grusia. Thus did the Demon dispose of the rival in his path ; and he now hoped that his pursuit of the fair Tamara would end in conquest and joy for himself—for, strange to say, the passionate love he had conceived for this beautiful maiden was a real and sincere one, and he even ventured to hope that if he could win her love in return, he might redeem himself from his fallen estate and thus escape from the evil influences with which he had encompassed himself.

Meanwhile, the Court of Prince Gudal made all the necessary preparations for the approaching nuptials of the royal maiden ; and on the day of the marriage,



THE PREOCCUPIED BRIDE-ELECT.

(Mlle Drusikina as *Tamara*.)

Tamara stood in the reception-hall of her father's palace, clothed in her bridal robes, awaiting the arrival of her bridegroom, of whose approach news had been received the day before.

While her attendants were full of animation and gaiety, Tamara herself was strangely preoccupied. Though she anticipated with pleasure the meeting with her bridegroom, for whom she had a sincere love, ever since her meeting in the valley with the mysterious stranger who had laid such sudden and overwhelming siege to her heart, she had been unable to keep her mind free from thoughts of him. The beauty of his person, the softly tender tones of his musical voice, his deep admiration and passionate wooing haunted her constantly, so that his magnetic personality seemed ever present with her though she saw him not, and she could not forget his tempting pleading words. Consequently, the present sounds of revelry seemed to her far away and to be unconnected with herself. When the lively guests from the banqueting-tables beyond drained goblets of wine in her honour, it was with a great effort that she roused herself sufficiently to acknowledge their greetings and good wishes with a smile. Even when a number of her own girl friends took part in a wild fantastic dance specially arranged and devised for the bridal festivities, she scarcely noticed the mazy rhythm of it ; and leaving the applauding guests to enjoy the spectacle, she moved aside to a quieter part of the chamber, allowing her disturbing thoughts free play once more.

It was at this moment that there came a sudden and tragic interruption to the revels. Just as the merry dance came to an end and the guests were about to drain their goblets once more in honour of the nuptials of their host's fair daughter, the news was brought that the gallant young Prince of Sinodal had been surprised and slain by marauding Tartars the night before, and that his corpse was even now being brought to the castle.

Immediately the gay music ceased, giving place to wailings and cries of woe ; and presently, the chanting of a funeral dirge was heard as the body of the dead bridegroom was brought into the chamber.

With despairing cries, the grief-stricken Tamara flung herself upon the body of her beloved one and burst into passionate weeping ; and despite the pitying commiserations of her royal father and of her many girl friends, she refused to be comforted, begging only to be left alone with her dead lover.

When the guests had all retired, however, Tamara was instantly confronted with a fresh trial. No sooner had she been left alone than she heard tender words of comfort whispered in her ear by the same soft, seductive voice that had haunted her continually since her meeting with the stranger in the valley, and, looking up in alarm, she once more beheld that mysterious being standing beside her with outstretched arms.

Enthralled against her will, Tamara listened with a beating heart as the Demon sought to console her

for the loss of her betrothed ; but when, emboldened by her downcast eyes and seeing that she was not indifferent to the lure of his irresistible fascination, the stranger once more hotly pressed his own suit and endeavoured to fold her in a passionate embrace, she was again terrified and fled wildly from his presence.

But, wherever she went, whether alone or in company, the words of the Demon still rang in her ears and his sinister yet alluring presence seemed ever with her, pervading her every thought. At length, feeling that her power of resistance was weakening and that she would not have strength to refuse his evil desires should she meet him in person again, realising that he possessed supernatural powers, Tamara sought her father and tearfully entreated him to allow her to enter a convent, declaring that now her betrothed had been taken from her she only sought oblivion, the world and its pleasures no longer having any attraction for her.

At first, Prince Gudal endeavoured to dissuade his daughter from taking the veil, offering first one objection and then another, as he desired to seek for her another bridegroom ; but seeing that she was almost distracted with grief and that the seclusion of a nunnery alone could bring her peace of mind, he finally gave his consent, and the unhappy Tamara was received into the nearest convent.

Even here, however, she had to face another and final terrible conflict ere peace was vouchsafed to

her ; for the Demon, whose passion for this beautiful maiden was intense and overwhelming, sought her yet once again even in the sanctuary in which she had sought refuge. At the entrance to the nunnery, he found his way barred ; but, by means of his supernatural powers, he quickly forced an entrance and made his way to the apartment of the victim he sought.

Once more he made violent protestations of love to Tamara, and, now revealing to her his true identity as a demoniacally possessed mortal, he begged her to have compassion upon him, declaring that if she would return his love he would forsake the ways of evil and would, for her sake, even humble himself and bow once more to the Will of the God Whom, in his pride and disobedience, he had offended. The unhappy girl was now torn by conflicting feelings, believing that this strange being's seeming penitence could not be sincere, yet feeling the warmth of an answering passion, which she seemed powerless to resist, enveloping her on every side.

She was about to succumb to the intoxicating joy of the stranger's unholy love, when, as the Demon folded her in a close embrace, she saw the evil light of triumph in his burning eyes and made a last frantic effort to resist his influence and to escape from his toils. At this terrible moment, the Angel of Light appeared at the entrance to the cell ; and Tamara, with a cry of relief and joy, was about to fly to Him for protection, when, overcome by the fearful ordeal

through which she had just passed, her overwrought strength gave way and she fell lifeless to the ground.

The Demon, seeing that his hope of an earthly joy had been thus snatched from his evil grasp, and that, in addition, he had lost the redemption he had sought, was filled with rage and despair ; and renewing his curses against mankind and all the heavenly hosts, he vanished from the spot amidst the lightnings and tumults of a terrible storm. At the same moment the Angel of Light appeared, bearing aloft with him the purified spirit of the love-rent Tamara to rest in peace at last.

THE NIGHTINGALE

MANY thousands of years ago, there lived a certain mighty Emperor of China, who was the most magnificent sovereign on earth. He lived in a wonderful palace made of precious porcelain ; and the throne he sat upon was all of solid gold, studded with sparkling gems. His robes were so richly jewelled and so stiff with gold and silver threads that they would stand alone.

So luxurious were all the appurtenances of this Emperor's Court that no one had ever seen their like before ; and the lords-in-waiting were very nearly as dazzling in appearance as the Emperor himself. This was especially the case with the Lord Chamberlain, who was extremely haughty and pompous and held his aristocratic head so high up in the air that he had never seen the ground he walked upon since he was a child ; and when any one of a lesser rank than his own spoke to him, he only condescended to answer " Pooh ! "

The most exquisite flowers grew in the palace gardens, and they all had silver bells attached to them, which tinkled in the soft breezes ; and the garden was so large that even the head gardener did not know where it ended. The furthest point

most people had reached in this enormously large garden had brought them to a beautiful forest, beyond which it was believed that the blue ocean rolled ; and here, amongst the tall trees on the borders of this forest, dwelt a Nightingale, who had the loveliest voice in the world and whose magical song could charm away evil and bring joy to the saddest hearts.

There was a poor Fisherman who came all the way from the seashore every evening for the sole pleasure of listening to the sweet singing of the Nightingale ; and the humble folk who dwelt round about loved to listen to her joyous song, which made them forget their troubles for the time being.

And many travellers who came past that way were so entranced when they heard the thrilling notes of the Nightingale that when they returned to their own lands, they wrote entire books about it, declaring it to be the most wonderful thing they had come across on their travels.

Yet, strange to say, neither the Emperor of China himself, nor any of his courtiers, had ever heard of the little bird whose fame had travelled so far and wide ; and it was not until he had read a description of the songstress's powers in a book of travels sent him as a present by the Emperor of Japan, that the mighty Ruler of China learned that such a wonderful creature existed in his dominions.

He was then extremely annoyed that he had never been told of it before ; and he commanded the Lord

Chamberlain to have the celebrated songstress brought to Court that he might judge of her voice for himself.

At first, the pompous Lord Chamberlain declared that, not knowing the abode of the lady in question, he was afraid he could not gratify this sudden wish of his lord and master; but when the Emperor announced angrily that unless he produced the bird that evening, he and all his fellow-courtiers should be trampled upon, he bestirred himself at once, as he did not relish the idea of being trodden under foot by the royal elephants, even though the latter had their tusks gilded and wore golden bells around their big ugly feet.

After inquiring in vain from hundreds of people as to the whereabouts of the Nightingale's abode, the Lord Chamberlain was informed by a little kitchen-maid that she knew the bird well, and that, as she went to listen to its song every evening, she would gladly lead him to the haunt of the songstress.

So the Lord Chamberlain and a few other courtiers followed the little kitchen-maid, who led them through the palace garden to the borders of the forest beyond; and after mistaking first the lowing of a heifer and then the croaking of the frogs in the marshes for the famous singer, they at last heard the wonderful voice of the Nightingale, as it trilled through the woodland depths.

The Lord Chamberlain was so amazed and overjoyed as he listened to the magic song, that he lost

his breath for quite a minute ; but as soon as he had recovered himself, he made a pompous speech and invited the Nightingale to come to Court that same evening, to sing before the Emperor.

“ Thank you, I will come with pleasure ! ” replied the Nightingale. “ But my voice really sounds very much better in the green woods, and I hope His Majesty will not be disappointed ! ”

The coming of the Nightingale to Court was the greatest event of the Emperor’s reign ; and the excitement in the palace was intense.

When the Nightingale arrived, she took up her stand upon the golden perch which had been provided for her and began to sing at once. Everybody was enchanted with the wonderful charm of her sweet voice, which had the magic power of making people feel intense joy or sorrow as she willed.

There were tears in the eyes of the Emperor when the song came to an end ; and the Nightingale had to sing again to chase the tears away and to make him smile.

The plain little brown and grey bird now became the rage, and was established as Chief Musician at Court, with many lords and ladies to wait upon her ; and she was only allowed to go out into the garden once at night and twice in the daytime. So much admiration did she attract that all the Court ladies became quite jealous, and vainly attempted to sing in shakes and trills that they also might be regarded as Nightingales ; and there was nothing else talked

of but the new songstress. Even the common people were allowed to hear her occasionally ; and the little kitchen-maid often stood at the scullery door to listen while the performance was taking place.

Then, just when the new singer's popularity was at its height, a second gift arrived from the Emperor of Japan, which turned out to be a clockwork Nightingale made of precious gems which sparkled at every turn, and which, when wound up, could sing pretty tunes. True, these tunes were only waltzes and were quite mechanical ; but the jewelled bird's outward appearance was so gorgeous and dazzling, and the clockwork apparatus inside its body which produced the tunes appeared so marvellous to the Emperor and his courtiers, that it was at once appointed Imperial Court Singer, being voted much more wonderful than the real Nightingale, whose sombre garb had never been wholly approved of, though her voice had enchanted all.

So the plain little bird, surprised and hurt by the ingratitude of man, flew away to her beloved woodlands once more, where she again sang sweetly every night to the humble Fisherman and to the kindly country folk ; and the gaudy artificial Nightingale became the craze of the Emperor and his Court.

The popularity of the new toy lasted quite a long time ; and then, one day, its mainspring broke, and it was found to be nearly worn-out. The royal clockmaker mended and patched it up as best he could ; but it was never the same again, and its wheels

were worn so thin that it was only allowed to be wound up to sing occasionally on the most important festivals.

The Emperor was so upset at this catastrophe that he lost not only his good spirits but his appetite as well ; and, at last, he became so extremely ill that he was expected to die any minute. The order was given out for his coming funeral, and a new Emperor even was chosen to be in readiness to succeed him.

While these dismal preparations were taking place, the sick Emperor lay upon his bed, pale and wan, with the spectral form of Death sitting at his bedside ; and the shades of his Good and Evil Deeds hovered around and peeped at him from behind the bed-hangings. The royal invalid was just on the point of expiring, when, suddenly, he heard the sound of the most beautiful music floating in through the open window, and, to his joy, recognised the sweet song of the little bird whom he had treated with such ingratitude.

It was indeed the humble little Nightingale, who, having heard of her Imperial admirer's illness, had come, out of the kindness of her heart—and not because he deserved it—to sing to him, and to heal him with her magical voice ; and as the Emperor lay back in bed and listened to the wonderful sounds, his pains left him, his vitality returned, and he began to feel better.

Even the gaunt visage of Death showed delight as he listened to the song of the Nightingale ; and the

sinister visitor begged her to continue her song, promising to depart at daybreak, if she would consent to do so. The Nightingale gladly agreed to this bargain, singing joyfully all the night through ; and at daybreak, Death and his shadowy spirits departed and the Emperor arose from his couch, cured of his sickness and in the best of health.

As soon as he had arrayed himself in his royal robes, and had put the crown upon his head once more, he thanked the Nightingale for having saved his life by her soothing song, and entreated her to take up her abode at Court once more ; but the humble little songstress replied : “ Nay, my lord, I am not a courtier, but a creature of the wilds, loving the beauties of Nature. My home must be in the forest ; but I will come and sing to you every night, and I will tell you wonderful secrets, too, if you will promise never to let any one know that it is a little bird who tells you everything ! ”

The Emperor gladly gave the promise asked by the Nightingale, and retired to his bed once more ; and then, as the funeral procession approached, and his courtiers, robed in mourning garments, entered the chamber in order to bear him away to his burial, believing that he must surely have died during the night, as he had been on the point of expiring when last they saw him, he thrust aside the curtains and greeted the astonished beholders with a hearty “ Good-morning ! ”

EUGÈNE ONIEGIN

It was a warm evening in the late autumn, and Madame Larina, a wealthy landowner in Russia, was sitting in the garden of her beautiful country house, busily engaged upon the homely task of peeling and picking fruit, in which occupation she was assisted by an old nurse named Philipjevna. Through the open windows of the mansion close by came the sound of the happy singing of her two fair young daughters, Olga and Tatiana; and as she listened to their song, the mother's heart was filled with sympathy and tender recollection, for the song was one she had herself sung in the days of her youth.

Twilight was fast closing around, and presently a band of merry peasants came trooping into the grounds, carrying sheaves of corn, which they presented to Madame Larina, for to-day was the last of the harvest and they had come to lay their customary tribute at the feet of their benefactress.

Madame Larina received the peasants with great kindness, inviting them to sing and dance before her and to partake of the refreshment she had ordered to be prepared for them. So the lively youths and maidens, notwithstanding their weariness after a long day's toil, began to go through the mazy figures

of a country dance upon the lawn, singing a merry harvest song as an accompaniment.

On hearing the song of the peasants, Olga and Tatiana came out into the garden and stood beside their mother, listening to the singing and watching the dance with interest.

The two sisters, though both fair to look upon, presented a great contrast to each other ; for whereas the elder, Olga, was light-hearted, matter-of-fact, and frivolous, loving gaiety and amusement, Tatiana, on the other hand, was dreamy, romantic, and retiring, caring little for the usual excitements of youth, but preferring to wander off alone to read in solitude or to indulge in day-dreams.

This difference in disposition was shown now, as they emerged from the house ; for Olga, exhilarated by the lively music, was ready enough to join the peasants in their merry revels, but Tatiana, in whom the music had awakened more romantic thoughts, retired to a quiet corner of the terrace to read a favourite book and to enjoy the beauty of the twilight.

Seeing that her young daughter was more than usually quiet and dreamy this evening, Madame Larina, with motherly solicitude, approached to enquire if anything troubled her ; but Tatiana declared that nothing ailed her, and that she was but deeply interested in her book and in her own musings.

When the peasants had finished their dance, they trooped away again to partake of their patroness's

hospitality ; and immediately afterwards, a carriage arrived, from which alighted two gentlemen who lived in the neighbourhood. These were Vladimir Lenski, a young nobleman who was betrothed to Olga, and his friend, Eugène Oniegin, who, although he owned land in the district, yet was unknown to Madame Larina and her daughters.

At sight of the stranger, the shy and timid Tatiana would have retired to the house, but was detained by her mother ; and a few moments later, Lenski came forward to greet the ladies, at the same time introducing his friend.

Oniegin was a handsome man, who had seen much of the world and possessed an interesting, fascinating and even mysterious personality ; and as the impressionable Tatiana lifted her timid eyes and gazed shyly upon him, she was strangely attracted by him, feeling that he was the very impersonation of the romantic hero of her girlish dreams. Oniegin, too, was interested in the pensive girl, who attracted him more than did the laughing Olga ; and entering into conversation with her, they presently strolled into the garden together.

Lenski was overjoyed at finding himself alone with his beloved Olga, and poured forth passionate protestations of devotion into her ear, which, although she received them with merry bantering, were nevertheless pleasing to his fiancée ; and the time passed all too quickly for the happy lovers.

Presently, however, Madame Larina reappeared,

calling them to the evening meal which was now ready; and as the lovers retired to the house, Tatiana and Oniegin emerged from the garden, deep in conversation, and passed in after them.

Tatiana, in spite of her shyness, had found intense enjoyment in the society of Oniegin; and although his conversation revealed him to be a world-weary cynic, with little belief in human goodness, yet his curious melancholy and his fascinating personality thrilled her intensely, so that her heart beat with a strange delirious joy that would not be suppressed. As the night advanced, this sudden passion grew more and more intensified; and when at last she retired to her chamber, her agitation was so great that she could restrain her feelings no longer.

The old nurse, who had accompanied her to attend to her wants, endeavoured to soothe the young girl, seeing that she was overwrought; but she found her task a hard one, for Tatiana insisted on hearing the story of Philipjevna's own love and betrothal and was not to be diverted from this all-enthralling subject. The old dame, therefore, described the events connected with her marriage, which were prosaic and unromantic enough; for, according to the usual custom of the Russian peasantry, a husband had been chosen for her, and she had been bidden to wed him, the short courtship being a mere matter of form and the question of love having had nothing whatever to do with the transaction.

Tatiana, however, paid little heed to the story she

had asked for, being too much engrossed with her own conflicting emotions ; and as the recital came to an end, she desired the old nurse to bring writing materials into the room and then retire.

Philipjevna, thinking it best to humour the young girl, obeyed her behest at once ; and having placed writing materials on the table, she kissed her nursling tenderly and left the room, hoping that sleep and pleasant dreams would restore her to calmness by the morning.

But sleep was very far from the thoughts of the agitated Tatiana ; for, unable to restrain her feelings any longer, she had determined to write a letter to Eugène Oniegin, confessing the passionate love she had conceived for him and asking him to grant her a meeting in the grounds next day. For a long time conflicting thoughts assailed her, maidenly modesty and natural reticence struggling with her newly-born love and the desire to have it returned ; but at length the intensity of her passion overcame all other feelings, and, seizing a pen, she began to write. But even now, when her decision was made, she found it a difficult task to put her overwhelming thoughts upon the paper ; and many were the sheets she destroyed and the new attempts she made.

The night crept on, but Tatiana was heedless of the passing hours ; and at length, as the first signs of dawn appeared, she finished the letter, and, with trembling hands and much misgiving, placed it in an envelope ready to be delivered.

The letter was characteristic of the girl's disposition, and every line breathed the sweet trustfulness that had prompted its writing. It was the simple outpouring of a generous romantic nature, and the depth and intensity of passion it revealed but proved the value of the gift offered—the gift of a pure young girl's love.

Having sealed the letter, Tatiana went up to the window, and, drawing aside the curtains, pensively watched the rosy dawn of another beautiful autumn morning; and a short time afterwards, Philipjevna came in to awaken her, according to her usual custom. Amazed to find her young mistress already dressed, the old nurse hurried forward to greet her, noticing with alarm that the bed had not been slept in; but Tatiana, scarcely waiting for her greeting, hastily placed in her hand the letter she had written, and nervously entreated her to have it conveyed to Eugène Oniegin without delay.

At first the nurse hesitated, knowing that this was an extraordinary request; but seeing that the girl was still in a state of nervous excitement, she again thought it best to humour her, so took the note and promised to have it delivered at once.

As soon as Philipjevna had left the room, Tatiana buried her face in her hands, half-regretting that she had sent the letter and wondering if Oniegin would grant her the appointment she had asked for, first hoping that he would come to the trysting-place and the next moment praying that he would not.

However, later in the day, as the time appointed for the meeting drew near, she gathered her courage together and went out into the garden, with doubt and longing in her heart, trembling at the thought of what the result of her interview would be, fearing lest her love should be scorned yet equally full of shy fears should it be returned.

As she appeared in the garden, she found that a group of village maidens were continuing their harvest festivities by indulging in further merry songs and dances on the lawn ; but presently they departed to another part of the grounds, leaving Tatiana alone, and a few moments later Eugène Oniegin appeared and came towards her.

In the presence of the man she now loved so passionately, Tatiana's little stock of courage entirely forsook her, leaving her trembling ; and she would certainly have run away again had not Oniegin peremptorily bidden her to remain. Then, drawing nearer to the agitated girl, he told her gently that he had received and read her letter ; and he added that because she had been so frank with him, he would, in return, be equally frank with her.

He then went on to declare in passionless tones, yet half-regretfully, that he was too world-weary to accept the fresh young love she had to offer and that he was neither worthy to receive so generous a gift nor had he a like passion to give in return.

As the trembling Tatiana listened to these cold, unresponsive words, each one of which wounded her

deeply, she felt crushed to the earth ; and, overcome with grief and shame, she buried her face in her hands. Oniegin, sorry for the pain he was thus inflicting upon the heart of this romantic girl, now bade her, in a more tender tone than he had yet used, to restrain her feelings, since another, less conscientious than himself, might take advantage of such impulsiveness for his own selfish ends ; and then, taking her by the hand, he led her into the house as though she had been a little child.

A short time after these events, Madame Larina gave a splendid ball in honour of Tatiana's eighteenth birthday, and all the young people of the neighbourhood were invited to join in the festivities, prominent amongst the guests being Lenski and his friend Eugène Oniegin.

The entertainment was an elegant one, and the assemblage brilliant ; but Oniegin found it dull and was frankly bored. He passed most of his time with Tatiana, for the impressionable girl still interested him ; but Tatiana was restless and silent, and at last he left her to her own reflections, seeing that she seemed ill at ease with him.

Being now more bored than ever, he felt annoyed with Lenski for having persuaded him to come ; and presently he sought and found a means for paying off this small grudge against his friend. Seeing the pretty, smiling Olga approaching at the moment, he invited her to dance with him several times, including the cotillion she had promised to her fiancé ; and

Olga, being by nature a daring coquette, gaily accepted his attentions with such evident pleasure that Lenski's brow grew black with disappointment and jealousy, for he loved her passionately and could brook no rival in his affections. Full of gloom, he watched the pair as they danced through the intricate figures of the cotillion, noting with increasing anger the many roguish glances bestowed by the coquettish Olga upon her partner ; and when the cotillion came to an end, unable to restrain his jealous feelings any longer, he openly accused Oniegin of endeavouring to steal away the affection of his fiancée, and, before all the guests, furiously challenged him to give him satisfaction and to fight with him on the morrow.

At first, Oniegin tried to laugh the matter off, declaring that he had had no thought of doing his friend a wrong ; and Olga, now frightened and full of remorse that her giddy conduct should have thus been the means of causing strife, also implored her fiancé to calm himself and to think no more of the matter.

But Lenski's jealous passion could not be restrained, and he continued to pour such angry reproaches and stinging taunts upon Oniegin, that the latter at length lost control of himself also, and, goaded beyond bearing, angrily accepted the challenge. The guests, alarmed and dismayed, at once took a hurried departure, and the ball, which had commenced so brightly, ended in confusion and gloom.

Early next morning, Lenski and Oniegin, with their

seconds, met in a retired part of the grounds ; and there, with all the usual ceremonious etiquette, the duel was fought. Both felt sad at the thought that their long and happy friendship should end in this terrible way, and longed to utter the one word that would have reconciled them ; but pride kept their lips sealed, and, when the signal was given, they raised their pistols and fired instantaneously.

Lenski fell to the ground at once ; and when Oniegin, who was untouched, ran forward with the seconds and clasped him in his arms, he found, to his horror, that he was dead.

Full of grief and remorse that he had thus for the sake of a foolish code of honour slain the dearest friend of his youth, Oniegin, dazed and miserable, left the neighbourhood at once ; and for several years afterwards he wandered restlessly from country to country, in the vain endeavour to drown the tormenting regrets and harrowing recollections that haunted his brain.

But neither change of scene nor wildest adventure could succeed in bringing any comfort or peace to his wounded and remorseful heart ; and at last, overruled by an irresistible longing to return to the scene of his trouble, he travelled to Russia once more, and upon arriving in the capital, was sought out by his old friends and induced to remain there for a while. On receiving an invitation to a magnificent ball from one of his near relations, Prince Gremin, a nobleman of high position and honour, he was persuaded to accept



UNHAPPY MEMORIES.

(D. A. Smirnoff as *Eugène Onegin*.)

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this ; and when the evening arrived, he proceeded to attend the function, though somewhat against his will.

But even such a brilliant scene as this could not bring distraction to the torn and weary heart of Eugène Oniegin ; and as he wandered restlessly from room to room, his self-accusing thoughts still haunted him and the memory of the fatal duel was again pictured in his mind as vividly as ever. Presently, however, he noticed a stir among the guests and a subdued murmur of admiration ; and following their gaze, he saw that the centre of their attraction was a beautiful young woman, richly clad and sparkling with jewels, who was passing from one group to another with easy dignity, bestowing smiles and gracious words on all. A second glance revealed to Oniegin that this brilliant figure was Tatiana, the young daughter of Madame Larina, the romantic maiden who had so impulsively offered him her fresh girlish love a few years ago—Tatiana, no longer a dreamy child, but grown into a lovely, soulful woman, gracious and self-controlled, moving with queenly dignity amidst this dazzling array of fair women.

Quite recently Tatiana had been taken from her quiet country home to become the admired wife of Prince Gremin, who, though many years her senior, yet loved her tenderly and did all in his power to make her happy ; and the fair young girl, though she could not give him love, yet made him a dutiful and devoted wife and had soon learned to bear her exalted position with becoming dignity.

As Oniegin gazed once again upon Tatiana, always interesting to him, but doubly so now in her matured beauty with all her natural charms of mind, body and disposition intensified a hundredfold, his heart suddenly throbbed with a new and strange feeling of exaltation ; and he who had thought himself dead to all passion, suddenly felt his pulses quicken and a thrill of keenest joy pass through his whole being.

His emotion increased presently when Prince Gremin brought his beautiful young wife forward and introduced her to him with pride and affection ; for although Tatiana greeted him with easy calm and even coldness, making no attempt to hide their former acquaintance, the intense look of repressed passion in her deep, tender eyes told him plainly that her feeling for him had not altered, but, indeed, had deepened with her growth. As she moved away again on the arm of her husband, Oniegin felt the sharp pangs of jealousy for the first time in his life, and knew that he now loved this woman with his whole heart ; and he was seized with a passionate desire to possess the love he had once refused.

Unable to restrain his overwhelming feelings, he determined to declare himself at all costs ; and, making his way to a retired spot, he waited until Tatiana came past that way alone. Then, hastening towards her, trembling with emotion, he told her of his love and implored her to grant him hers in return ; but Tatiana reminded him bitterly that he had slighted her proffered affection years ago, treating it as the

mere fancy of a sentimental girl and had even blamed her for her boldness. Cut to the quick by this just retort, Oniegin sank to his knees and begged her with increasing emotion to have pity and to grant him the love he now longed for above all things ; and his pleading was so powerful that Tatiana, unable to keep up her pretence of coldness any longer, admitted that her passion for him was still the same, and for a few moments a feeling of delirious joy surged through her heart at the thought that her love was at last returned. But when Oniegin next entreated her to depart with him at once, that they might yet be happy together, theirs being a love that could not be denied, then the young wife declared in broken accents that she would remain faithful to her husband, no matter how hard it might be to refuse the pleading of the man she loved.

Again and again Oniegin besought her to obey the dictates of her heart ; but Tatiana, though tempted almost beyond endurance, still brokenly, yet firmly, refused, and then, fearing to remain longer lest her resolution should break down, fled away from his presence with a last distracted look.

Immediately afterwards, the guests were startled by the sound of a pistol shot ; and, upon hastening to the alcove, they were horrified to discover Oniegin lying dead upon the floor, his despair on realising that the happiness he desired could never now be his having proved more than he could endure.

IOLANTA

ABOUT the middle of the fifteenth century, in a secluded valley amidst the hills of Provence, there was to be seen an exquisite garden, so full of beauty that to gaze upon it seemed almost like taking a peep into the wonderful fairyland of childhood's days. Masses of roses and other lovely flowers blossomed in profusion on every side ; fruit-trees grew luxuriantly among the flowers ; and splendid vines twined about the trellises placed in the sunniest part of the grounds.

In the midst of this wonderful garden, there arose a small one-storied dwelling, handsomely appointed within and without. In front of the house there stretched a flower-gemmed terrace, beneath which was to be seen a wall overgrown with ivy and other climbing plants, concealing a door which led to a summer bower within.

The approach to this little earthly paradise was hidden by the heavy undergrowth and was not readily to be discovered ; for all around, even to the distant mountains, the country was wild and rugged, and no one would have dreamed of finding so refreshing an oasis in such an unlikely wilderness.

But, though an air of mystery overhung the spot, as though it were the abode of some enchanted Princess in a fairy-tale, joyful life and beauty dwelt therein ; and one glorious summer afternoon, the fair maiden whose home it was might have been seen wandering as usual in her blossoming garden with her nurse and girl companions. Lovely though her surroundings were, the maiden herself was the fairest blossom of all. The fresh pink roses were not more delicately tinted than were her softly-rounded cheeks ; the tall white lilies were not more graceful than her slender form, and could scarcely vie with the purity of her smooth brow ; and her soft dewy eyes and shining tresses seemed but reflections of the sky and dazzling sunshine.

The divinity to be worshipped at this secret shrine was certainly more than worthy of her surroundings ; yet as she moved among her companions and joined in their games and amusements, the tragedy of her existence became apparent. The girls had all brought baskets with them into the garden, and every now and again would stop to place in them various flowers and fruits from the choicest plots ; but when their lovely mistress wished to do likewise, they guided her hands in the right direction and gently pulled down the branches and briars until her slender fingers felt and closed over the luscious fruit. The Princess of this fairy-like abode was not enchanted, as one might have readily imagined ; but she was blind ! For that reason she had been kept hidden away from the world

and brought up in this lonely but lovely spot, the beauties of which, however, were only known to her by her marvellously acute senses of touch and hearing ; and with only a few faithful servants around her, she had never learned the truth of her infirmity, and did not know the meaning of sight.

Such was Iolanta, the blind daughter of René, King of Naples and Count of Provence ; and as she occupied herself with her companions on the afternoon on which this story commences, she little dreamed that the uneventfulness of her life was at last to be broken and that within the next few hours her destiny would be changed.

Iolanta had not been born blind ; and while she was still an infant, King René had been engaged in an ancient feud that had existed for many years between his family and the Dukes of Burgundy. Both sides having grown heartily weary of the struggle, the reigning Duke proposed at this time to his hereditary enemy that they should agree to bury the hatchet and to seal the compact of their renewed friendship by the betrothal of his only son to the newly-born Princess Iolanta, whose budding infantile charms already gave promise of wonderful beauty later on.

The compact was readily entered into by King René, and the betrothal contract of the children was duly drawn up and signed. Then, shortly afterwards, a terrible misfortune befell the King of Naples, which threatened to destroy all his plans and hopes of a peaceful future and to plunge him once more into

a renewed feud with his haughty and powerful neighbour. One night, a fire broke out in his palace, and the flames gained so rapidly in the apartments of the baby Princess that at first it was feared she could not be saved from death. It was impossible to get her out of the blazing apartment; and in the last extremity, as a final attempt at rescue, the terrified babe was dropped out of the window from a great height and caught into willing arms below. Her life was thus saved; but, to the grief of her royal father, it was afterwards found that—whether from fright and shock or from the dazzling glare of the flames could not be determined—though her lovely eyes still retained their brilliancy and beauty, the sight had gone from them and she was blind.

Full of woe for the terrible affliction of his beloved and motherless child, whose bright hopes of a joyous life thus seemed darkened for ever, King René was further plunged in despair as he also realised that his ancient feud was now likely to be renewed, for the proud Duke of Burgundy would scarcely desire to wed his only son to a blind girl, and would almost certainly refuse to believe that she had ever been otherwise than blind, being more likely to imagine that he had been purposely deceived at the time when the betrothal contract was signed.

In order to preserve peace in his long harassed land, therefore, the troubled King resolved to keep the knowledge of his child's blindness a secret from all save a few faithful servants whom he could trust.

With this object in view, he had caused a retreat to be prepared for her in an almost unknown valley of the Provence hills, where she could be brought up away from the sight of the world and in complete ignorance even of the awful fact that she was blind.

To the Duke of Burgundy and to all other inquirers, it was given out that the child was delicate and had been sent to be brought up in a convent in Spain, there to remain until her sixteenth year, when her marriage was to be celebrated ; and the secret of her true hiding-place and the real reason for her isolation had been safely preserved up to the present time.

To Bertran, a faithful retainer, the guardianship of the royal child had been entrusted ; and a careful, loving nurse was found for her in Martha, the wife of Bertran. This loyal couple also were the custodians of the tiny chateau that had been erected in the midst of the beautiful retreat ; and, with the addition of a few serving-maids and archer guards, these were the only persons who ever saw the little blind Princess, save her father, who was only able to visit her at long intervals. The latter's true estate was not revealed to her, and she learned to know and to love him as her father under the title of Raymbaut, a troubadour or wandering minstrel.

At first, the ministrations and companionship of her nurse, Martha, were sufficient for the blind child ; but as she grew to maidenhood, it was deemed advisable to provide for her companions of her own age. Therefore, a few maidens of high degree were sent as

attendants upon her, all of whom were bound to secrecy and instructed to keep from her the knowledge of her blindness and of her true rank.

Thus Iolanta, sightless herself and accustomed to living and moving in a world of darkness, never having heard of the joys of light and colour, knowing beauty only by her delicate sense of touch and intuition, believed all others to be even as she herself; and therefore, she was happy, in spite of her dire affliction, and grew up light-hearted as a bird and beautiful as the dawn.

All through the early childhood of Iolanta, King René had been resigned to her affliction, though he lived in dread of the time, then long-distant, when he would have to reveal the fact of her blindness to her betrothed and thus bring almost certain warfare once more upon his now smiling land; but as the young Princess approached to maidenhood, hope revived within him, and he began to think it possible that some wonderful miracle might happen to restore her sight before the time for her marriage should arrive. Not contented merely to hope, he sought eagerly for means of help; and hearing of a certain Moorish physician, famed for his marvellous powers of healing, he sent for him and offered him great rewards if, out of his wonderful store of Eastern learning and even of his knowledge of the Dark Science, he could bring back the sight to his daughter's beautiful eyes.

The physician, Abn Hakia, was willing to devote his great talents to this congenial task; and after visiting

the blind child, he gave hope that, though it would be necessary to wait until she attained the age of sixteen years, it was possible that, by that time, he might effect a cure, and announced that if, in the meantime, his directions were faithfully followed out, "by the grace of Allah—Who is great as He is merciful—the sight may even return to the beauteous eyes of the royal maiden !"

Such tidings of hope revived the drooping spirits of King René ; and giving instructions that the directions of the Moorish physician should be strictly carried out, he looked forward with anxious eagerness to the time when his daughter should attain her sixteenth year, when the final treatments and tests were to be made.

That time had now arrived ; and, full of loving anticipation, almost agonising in its intensity, the King of Naples dispatched one of his Knights to the retreat of Iolanta, to announce to her custodians that he would shortly arrive there with Abn Hakia, the Moorish physician.

Strangely enough, Iolanta, unconscious that her fate and future welfare thus hung in the balance, throughout that day had experienced an unusual feeling of depression which she found it difficult to shake off ; and as she joined her companions in their fruit and flower gathering, her step seemed less elastic than usual. A strange, undefinable feeling that she lacked something—she knew not what, but something that she could not name—took possession of her, and

caused her usually happy spirits to droop almost to the point of sadness.

This slight depression of Iolanta's communicated itself also, in a less degree, to her companions, who seemed not so lively as was their wont ; and even the musicians who had been bidden to make sweet music for her amusement played only plaintive airs, as though they, too, were in sympathy with the royal maiden's faint intuition of something lacking.

Presently, Iolanta's steps grew slow and heavy, and, as though weary, she sank weeping upon a mossy bank.

Her friends gathered quickly around her in concern, asking what ailed her ; but she replied that she felt she lacked something, though she knew not what, and bade them go on gathering blossoms for her, as the touch and scent of such fair flowers might comfort her. When the girls had retired to do her bidding, she called her nurse, Martha, to her side, and, saying that she had wept instead of sleeping during the night before, asked suddenly if eyes were meant only for weeping, adding that formerly the sweet songs of the birds and the other happy sounds of Nature had brought her joy enough but that now a change had come and that even in the song of the nightingale she heard only sobs.

Martha, full of alarm at this strange alteration in her nursling, uttered words of comfort and good cheer ; and when the merry girls had returned once more, laden with blossoms, the royal maiden's spirits

revived somewhat, and, after thanking them for their gifts, she begged Martha to sing to her as in the days of her early childhood. The fond nurse gladly did so ; and when, at the end of her crooning lullaby, it was found that Iolanta had fallen asleep, the attendants lifted her gently and carried her away to rest upon a couch in the bowery apartment beneath the terrace, the entrance to which was almost hidden by the overhanging roses.

Soon after the sleeping Iolanta had been carried away by her maidens, the sound of a hunter's horn was heard in the near vicinity of the retreat ; and almost immediately following this, there came a knock at the great door of the entrance to the grounds.

The custodian, Bertran, immediately answered the summons, and, opening the door, peremptorily asked the business of the visitor, adding sternly that he had orders to slay any unwarranted intruder.

The new-comer, however, announced that he was the Knight, Almeric, and that he brought a message from King René. Boldly entering, he handed a sealed letter to Bertran, at the same time showing him the King's ring as the symbol of his ambassadorship, but stating that he knew not the reason why his royal master should visit this strange retreat nor who lived within it.

On reading the royal missive, which announced the early arrival of King René with the Moorish doctor, Bertran, now realising that the stranger might be

trusted, received him with cordiality and revealed to him the true identity of his beautiful charge. Sir Almeric was filled with astonishment and pity on learning for the first time that the King's fair daughter was blind and that she had been thus hidden away in order to preserve the secret of her affliction from her fiancé, who had never yet beheld her, but who was now expected at any time to come forward to claim her as his betrothed. Realising and sympathising with the dilemma of King René, he expressed the earnest hope that the treatment and tests about to be applied by the learned physician—whose early arrival he had come to announce—would prove successful and that the Princess would at last recover her long-lost sight.

Even while Sir Almeric spoke with Bertran and Martha—who had also now joined her husband—the sound of a further hunting horn heralded the approach of the royal party; and, next moment, King René entered the garden, accompanied by the Moorish physician, Abn Hakia. In a voice trembling with emotion, the King bade Martha lead the doctor into the presence of the sleeping maiden, as he desired to examine her eyes whilst she slept; and when the learned leech returned, he eagerly begged for his report, saying passionately that he would give everything he possessed if his daughter could regain her sight.

In the calm eyes of the physician, dark, unfathomable, and inscrutable, he could read nothing; but

his heart leapt with joy when Abn Hakia said : " Have hope, O King, for Allah is great, and all things are in His hands ! There is a chance that the royal maid may be cured under the special treatment I shall now give her ; but it is essential that she be told that she is blind, of which fact she is now ignorant, for, unless she has the desire to see, nothing can be done for her ! "

On hearing this condition, the King became angry and impatient, declaring that he would not permit Iolanta to be told of her affliction, for fear the cure should not be successful, when the knowledge—so carefully and lovingly kept from her all these years—might make her unhappy ; and he even announced his resolve to punish with death any person who should dare to reveal to his daughter that she was blind.

While the King and physician thus argued upon this vital point, a stranger in another part of the garden was unconsciously playing into the hands of Abn Hakia. Two handsome young men of high degree, having wandered from the beaten tracks and lost their way in this wild district, had, accidentally, stumbled upon the hidden retreat ; and being amazed at the beautiful surroundings in which they so unexpectedly found themselves, they hastened through the luxurious garden until they reached the rose-hung terrace.

These wanderers were none other than the young Duke of Burgundy and his friend, Count Vaudemont,

who were even now journeying to the Court of King René that the former might claim his affianced bride ; and as they stopped to rest a few moments by the terrace, the bridegroom-elect spoke of his errand and future bride in tones of the greatest discontent. He railed at his late father for having made such a tiresome contract for him, declaring that he had no desire at all to meet his betrothed, having already given his heart to another maiden, Matilda, the fair Countess of Loteringia, whose beauty and wit were beyond compare.

Count Vaudemont bade him take cheer, since King René's daughter might prove to be even more beautiful still ; and then, noticing a tiny footprint in the soft ground leading to the terrace, he cried gaily : " Surely, a fairy must dwell in this wonderful paradise ! Let us seek her out ! "

Soon noticing the half-hidden door amongst the roses, he pushed it open ; and the two young men fell back in amazement, lost in admiration as their gaze fell upon the beautiful form of the Princess Iolanta, who slept upon a couch within.

The young Duke hastened back into the open, full of alarm, calling to his friend to withdraw also and declaring that the place was surely enchanted and that the ethereal being within must almost certainly be some dangerous siren who would enchant them also with her evil spells should she awaken and find them there ; but Vaudemont remained fascinated, his senses enthralled, and, scorning the fears of the Duke,

said softly : “ Nay, say rather that she is an Angel from Heaven ! ”

He also stepped back, however ; for, at the sound of strange voices, Iolanta awakened, and, rising from her couch, came slowly forth upon the terrace and asked in her sweet voice : “ Who is here ? ”

The Count, in spite of the Duke’s attempt to restrain him, announced their names and titles, explaining that they were weary travellers who had lost their way ; and Iolanta, ever mindful of the wants of others, said : “ I will fetch wine and fruit, then, for your refreshment ! ”

As she moved back into her apartment to fetch the wine and fruit, placed there by her own thoughtful attendants, the Duke, still fearful of being thrown under a spell of enchantment, hastened away from the spot to seek for help ; but Vaudemont, already strangely attracted by the lovely maiden, waited, full of eagerness for her anticipated return.

When Iolanta appeared, therefore, with fruit and wine, and invited him to refresh himself, he did not hesitate to do so, for fear of offending her ; and then, feeling more and more the rapture of her charming presence and realising that he already loved her, he spoke to her tenderly, yet reverently, admiring her beauty and wooing her very gently. But Iolanta appeared confused, and said she did not understand such words, though they sounded very sweetly in her ears, for no one had ever spoken thus to her before ; and afraid lest he might alarm her, Vaudemont

realised that he must have patience, though he ventured to ask her to pluck for him a red rose to keep in remembrance of her flushed cheeks, and that he might know she was not merely a dream maiden. "Gladly will I do so!" replied Iolanta; but not knowing one from the other, she plucked for him a white rose.

"Thanks, sweet maiden! I will keep this white rose as the emblem of your purity!" said Vaudemont, adding: "but will you not give me also a red rose?"

"But what is red, and what is white?" asked the puzzled Iolanta. "I know not what you mean by such words!"

Not willing at first to believe that the beautiful girl could be afflicted with blindness, as her words now led him to suppose, Vaudemont hastily plucked a number of roses, and asked her to say how many blossoms he held in his hand; and when she could only tell him this by coming near to him and passing her delicate fingers over the flowers he held, he realised, to his sorrow, that she was, indeed, blind, and his deep pity for her reduced him to sudden silence.

Fearing by his silence that she had unwittingly offended him, Iolanta's tears began to flow; and Vaudemont, with great gentleness, endeavoured to comfort and cheer her by telling her about the great world in which he lived and of the wonderful things to be seen and done therein, amazed that she should be so ignorant of these matters and even of her own infirmity.

Iolanta thus learned from her new friend the fact that she was blind, and realised that the feeling of something lacking which had possessed her all day was a true feeling. Full of interest in Vaudemont's revelations of wonders and beauties unknown to her, she begged him eagerly to tell her more about these marvels of sunshine, colour, and form, all of which special beauties of Nature he said helped mankind to understand and to realise God, the Creator of all.

"You say beautiful things!" she said. "I, too, understand God by something within myself, by the scent of the flowers and the songs of the birds; but how much greater must be your understanding of Him, by the wonders of which you speak!"

So engrossed were the two young people in their happy talk, every word strengthening the wonderful bond of sympathy between them, that they heeded not the sound of approaching footsteps; and interruption came all too soon.

King René with the Moorish physician and his daughter's companions had come to seek Iolanta in her rose bower, where they imagined her to be still sleeping; and they were astounded and bewildered at finding her not resting as they had supposed, but awake and talking with a stranger.

Angrily, the King came forward and demanded of the intruder how he came thither and how he dared to speak to his daughter. Iolanta replied for the Count, begging her father not to be angry with the stranger, declaring that his company had given her great delight,

as he had told her of the beauties of the great world and of the mighty wonders of Nature which she had never seen, and had expressed pity for her in her blindness.

All exclaimed in alarm on thus hearing that their beloved Princess had been made acquainted with her affliction ; and the King cried aloud in fury : “ What have you done, rash youth ? My child’s happiness is destroyed for ever ; and you shall surely die for the evil thing you have done ! ”

The doctor, however, was glad to learn that Iolanta thus knew of her blindness, which was in accordance with his desires ; and he told the King that the maiden now might certainly be cured, if only she would desire to see. He, therefore, asked his patient if she now wished to see ; but Iolanta shook her head and said she could not desire for that which she did not know, but that she was willing to do as her father wished in the matter.

The doctor, nonplussed, declared sadly that he could not cure her unless she, herself, had the desire to see ; and then, realising at last the trend of the physician’s plan, a sudden idea occurred to King René for securing the consummation of Abn Hakia’s wish, and he said sternly : “ Commence your cure, physician, for it is almost twilight, which is the time you have chosen for performing this mighty work ; and if by the time your treatment is completed my daughter has not regained her sight, this young stranger shall certainly be slain. If, on the other hand,

by your mighty healing art and by her own strong desire to see, she is cured, then shall the young man live and receive my favour ! ”

Iolanta, who had conceived a deep affection for the young stranger whose sympathetic presence and tender words had already taught her the meaning of love, was full of alarm lest he might lose his life for his rashness. She now longed passionately to see, for his sake, that his precious life might be spared, and she cried eagerly : “ Oh, hasten, wise physician, and apply your cure ; for I wish above all things in the world that my eyes may be opened and that I may see and thus look upon the countenance of my new friend ! ”

Well pleased on hearing these words, the physician now led Iolanta within the palace, in order to apply his final tests for her cure ; and Count Vaudemont and the King were left alone.

King René immediately apologised to the stranger for the harsh attitude he had been obliged to take, explaining to him his real reason for doing so ; and the Count assured him that he fully understood the plan in his mind. He then declared his love for the fair Iolanta and begged that her hand might be bestowed upon him, whether she regained her sight or not, revealing his name and high rank ; but King René replied sadly that his daughter had been betrothed to another since infancy.

Just then, Almeric appeared and announced to the King that the young Duke of Burgundy had arrived

and craved an immediate audience ; and King René turned to Vaudemont and said : “ Behold your rival, for he even now approaches ! ”

The Duke now appeared on the scene, and explanations quickly followed, for the young men were astounded at thus learning that the beautiful blind maiden whom they had discovered so romantically was King René’s daughter and the Duke’s betrothed, whom they had come to claim in fulfilment of the contract made so many years ago.

The Count now begged the Duke to confess to King René that his affections were already bestowed upon the Countess Matilda of Loteringia, and that he desired to be released from the contract made by his late father ; and seeing that his friend had conceived a deep love for the afflicted royal maiden, the young noble gladly did so.

King René willingly agreed that the contract with the Duke of Burgundy should be annulled ; and he now consented to the marriage of his daughter with Count Vaudemont.

By this time twilight was far advanced, and the doctor’s tests were completed ; and, to the overwhelming joy of all, when the bandages were removed from Iolanta’s eyes, it was found that the cure had been successful and that the royal maiden could now see.

Although bewildered at first on beholding the wonders around her, Iolanta quickly accustomed herself to her new powers ; and when King René placed

her hands in those of Count Vaudemont, she smiled upon him with great joy, and uttered praises to Heaven for the mighty miracle that had been wrought on her behalf and for the wonderful happiness that now filled her heart.

THE QUEEN OF SPADES

ONE bright springtime day, merry throngs of people might have been seen enjoying themselves in the beautiful Summer Garden at St Petersburg. Now that the ice and snows of the severe Russian winter had at last melted away and the warm sunshine shone forth once more, everyone was eager to be out in the open air and to inhale the gentle breezes, to admire the beauty of the freshly-opened flowers, and to rejoice with the happy singing birds carolling among the branches of the trees.

The Summer Garden presented a specially gay and animated scene, providing as it did a happy recreation ground for many groups of children, who played their merry games while their nurses and governesses strolled about and chatted together.

This pleasant spot being also a favourite meeting-place for the wealthy and aristocratic, a number of ladies and gentlemen in fashionable garb contributed a buzz of conversation; and a good sprinkling of military men in brilliant uniforms added further to the brightness of the scene.

Among these latter were two young officers, named Tchekalinsky and Sourin, who, however, were not quite in the best of spirits, having met with bad luck

in their card play the night before ; and they were just consoling themselves with the reflection that their own misfortunes had been capped by the extra bad luck of their friend Herman, a fellow-officer, when they observed the latter approaching, and moved aside on noting his gloomy looks.

Young Herman was indeed in a melancholy frame of mind ; and presently, on being rallied for his silence and gloom by his companion, Count Tomsy, he confessed to the latter that his bad spirits were caused by the fact that he had fallen in love, and that he was at the same time filled with despair since he did not even know the name of his beloved one, who was certainly of a noble family not likely to consider the advances of so humble a suitor as himself.

Tomsy, deeply interested, asked for further particulars ; and Herman, being a young man of ardent and romantic temperament, burst forth into an enthusiastic description of the object of his affections, saying that her beauty and sweetness had never been excelled ; and then, to Tomsy's surprise, he declared that he had never yet spoken to her, and that he had only met her a few times walking in the Gardens and accompanied by her constant guardian, a sinister-looking old woman, whose rich clothing, priceless jewels, and haughty bearing, however, proclaimed her to be of high degree.

“ Nevertheless,” he added, “ I know that my ardent glances have made an impression upon this beautiful maiden, and that she cannot be insensible

to the deep passion she has aroused in me ; and her terrible old guardian also has noted me, and while casting looks of indignation and disdain upon me for presuming to gaze upon her ward with eyes of love, I have remarked a strange look, almost of fear, in her baleful glances ! ”

As Tomsy, greatly interested in his young friend’s mysterious love affair, was about to question him further on the matter, Tchekalinsky and Sourin approached them in company with their friend, Prince Yeletsky, a wealthy nobleman of great dignity and brilliant attainments, to whom they were at the moment offering their congratulations, his engagement to a certain beautiful young lady having just been announced.

Whilst Herman, still further plunged into gloom at the sight of another man’s happiness, drew back a few paces, Tomsy hastened forward to join in the congratulations to Prince Yeletsky ; and upon asking the latter to say which of the charming maidens of high degree adorning St Petersburg society he had chosen for his future bride, the Prince, indicating the approach of two ladies, said with joyful eagerness : “ Behold ! Here she comes ! It is the beautiful Lisa ! ”

As Prince Yeletsky hastened forward to greet his fiancée, the young officer, Herman, fell back with a gasp of despair ; for the lovely maiden who now approached to place her hand in that of her nobly-born suitor was none other than his own beloved one, whom he had so passionately adored from a

distance and whose name he now heard for the first time.

The fair young girl was accompanied by her guardian, a weird-looking old dame, whose piercing black eyes set deeply in her parchment-like painted face, cast forth almost malignant glances on all around, until they rested upon the stricken Herman, when a strange look of fear instantly appeared in them ; and, with a shudder, she drew Tomsky aside to ask the name of the gloomy young officer, declaring that she had a mysterious fear of him.

Lisa, on her part, was also greatly disturbed at thus coming face to face with her unknown admirer, whose attractive personality already had an extraordinary fascination for her ; and the two ladies, unwilling to prolong their strange uneasiness, quickly passed on with Prince Yeletsky.

When they had gone, Tomsky, having guessed at the cause of Herman's agitation and full of pity for the unhappy young man, endeavoured to divert him from his unlucky attachment by telling him of the evil reputation of his beloved one's guardian—who was also her grandmother—stating that she was a Countess, who, owing to her weird looks, dangerous dabbling in occult matters, and celebrated exploits as a cunning gambler, was usually spoken of as "The Queen of Spades."

He stated further that, in the early days of her youth, the Countess had been a famous beauty, toasted in all the capitals of Europe as "The Venus of

Moscow"; but, strange to say, though lovers innumerable fluttered constantly around her, eager for her smiles, love made no appeal to her, as she lived only for gambling, for which she had an overwhelming passion. It was further reported by the gossips of the town that her continuous and marvellous good luck at the gaming-table was due to her secret knowledge of a certain combination of three cards which never failed to bring her success—a secret which the tattlers further affirmed had become hers at the price of yielding to the importunities of one of her many adorers. She had been forbidden to reveal the secret to anyone else; but having twice disobeyed this command of her now dead lover, the latter had since visited her in ghostly guise to proclaim that she would surely die when a third man, forced by despair, should try to wrest from her this secret of the three cards.

Tchekalinsky and Sourin laughed at the gossips' tale told by Tomsy, and soon strolled away with the latter, as the rumblings of an approaching thunder-storm came nearer; and Herman, left alone and heedless of the storm which quickly broke with sudden fury, pondered over the strange story he had just heard. His own convictions forced him to believe in its truth, as he now realised that here was the key to the curious fear in the eyes of the old Countess whenever she gazed upon him—proof that she had a presentiment that he was to be the third man who would force her to reveal the fatal secret and thus bring about her death.

The more Herman pondered upon this matter, the more obsessed he became with a strange mad desire to work out what he now regarded as his destiny and to learn the magic secret of the three cards from the ill-reputed old Countess, and thus, by gaining a fortune at the gaming-tables, to win as his bride the lovely Lisa, who he felt had only been plighted to Prince Yeletsky because of the latter's wealth.

So great a hold did this idea take upon the imagination of the romantic Herman that he determined to put aside his former humility and to pursue an ardent wooing of his beloved one by means of clandestine meetings, and to induce her to help him in his efforts to persuade the celebrated "Queen of Spades" to yield up her secret to him.

With this object in view, the young officer secreted himself one evening on the balcony outside the window of Lisa's room, to await an opportunity of seeing her and declaring his love.

The fair Lisa, being still but a youthful maiden, had been entertaining some girl friends that evening; and when her guests rallied her upon her somewhat downcast looks, declaring that being but newly betrothed she should be all smiles and liveliness, she had made a special effort to rouse herself and to join in their games and dances.

When the girls had departed, however, a strange feeling of depression and of coming calamity crept over her; and, instead of retiring to rest at once, she dismissed her maid and gave herself up to sad reflec-

tions. Ever since her last meeting with Herman in the Summer Garden, she had realised that her love was wholly given to this mysterious young officer whose ardent glances had won her heart against her will ; and, in spite of her respect for the courtly Yeletsky—whose love for her she knew to be sincere—she felt that despite the honours and dignities she would enjoy as his wife, the sunshine of happiness would nevertheless have vanished from her life now that her love was given to another.

As she wept at this sad thought, a sound caused her to look up ; and she beheld the romantic subject of her affections, Herman, stepping into her room from the balcony.

With a stifled cry, Lisa drew back, overcome by mingled feelings of surprise, fear, and a strange joy ; but Herman hastened forward with eager steps and outstretched arms, pouring forth an ardent declaration of his passion and entreating her to accept his love and so obey the true dictates of her heart.

At first, Lisa made a movement as of anger, declaring that she would rouse the household unless her intruding lover departed ; but upon Herman, half mad with love and doubt, drawing a pistol and announcing that he had but come for one kind word from her ere putting an end to his now useless life, she endeavoured to calm him. Being unable, however, to disguise her own agitation, and betraying her love thereby, Herman was emboldened to continue his declaration, being overcome with joy on realising that

his passion was thus returned ; but at this moment there came an interruption in the form of a sharp knock at the door, and the young officer had only just time to conceal himself behind a curtain when the old Countess entered the room, scolding her granddaughter for not having retired to rest.

The old dame seemed to be haunted by a supernatural warning of her own approaching death, appearing to feel instinctively the unseen presence of one who was to have a fatal influence over her and to bring calamity ; but Lisa succeeded in reassuring her and promised to seek her couch at once, whereupon the Countess departed.

Herman then came forth once more ; and his wooing now became so intensely ardent that Lisa could no longer resist his pleadings, and with great joy the lovers sealed their compact of love with many tender embraces.

After this mutual understanding, Herman and Lisa had few opportunities of seeing one another, for the latter was kept strictly guarded by the old Countess, who now lived in constant fear of meeting with the mysterious young officer in whose presence she always felt such a strange foreboding of coming evil. Herman, thus realising that without at least unbounded wealth he could not possibly present himself as a rival suitor to the rich and aristocratic Prince Yeletsky, became more than ever obsessed by the idea of wresting from the notorious " Queen of Spades " the magic secret of the three cards, the combination

of which brought such good luck at the gaming-tables.

This idea of his was fostered, unconsciously, by his friends, Tchekalinsky and Sourin, who, knowing of his poverty, continually exhorted him in joking fashion to make friends with the uncanny old Countess and to learn her secret ; and, finally, the idea took such a strong hold upon his imagination that he was haunted continually by it and could think of nothing else.

At last, he determined to induce Lisa to help him to gain an interview with her grandmother ; and with this idea, he attended a masked ball given one evening by a rich dignitary of the city, knowing that Lisa would certainly be attending this ball in company with her fiancé, Prince Yeletsky.

Among the brilliant throng attending this function the unhappy Herman wandered in disguise, feverishly awaiting the chance of an interview with his beloved one, from whom he had that morning received a note stating that she desired urgently to speak with him.

Soon, to his relief, he saw Lisa enter on the arm of Prince Yeletsky ; and, later on in the evening, after the close of a musical interlude performed by some of the guests, the lovers managed to snatch a few stolen moments together.

After the first joy of meeting was over, Lisa gave to Herman a key of her garden gate, telling him that by means of a ladder she had left there he would be able to gain access to the room of her grandmother, with whom he would thus secure the coveted interview.

Having thus arranged their plan, the lovers mingled once more with the other guests ; and that night, just before the ball came to a close, Herman made his way to the home of " The Queen of Spades " and gained entrance by means of a secret passage to the Countess's sleeping apartment, where he concealed himself until the old dame returned from the ball, which she also had attended, dressed in gorgeous attire and blazing with jewels.

He had not long to wait ere he heard the arrival of the ladies in the boudoir beyond ; and after the aged Countess had been prepared for bed, she was brought into her sleeping chamber by a bevy of flattering maids and attendants, who praised her brilliant appearance at the ball and wished her a good night's rest.

The weird old dame looked even more uncanny than usual, a strange light shining in her dark, yet piercing eyes ; and, refusing to go to bed just then, she insisted on being propped up on a couch, where, after dismissing her maids, she indulged in chattering reminiscences of the triumphs and conquests of her youth.

Whilst she thus crooned to herself, Herman suddenly presented himself before her and implored her to make him happy by telling him her famous secret—the names of the three cards that brought good luck to the gambler.

The old Countess, at first full of amazement and anger at the intrusion of a stranger into her room,

gazed at him with menacing glances ; then, as Herman, growing reckless and despairing in his frantic eagerness to learn the secret, drew forth a pistol, declaring that he would force her to speak, a sudden change came over her. Overwhelmed with a nameless terror as she now recognised the strange young man whose presence always caused her to shudder with unaccountable fear, the shock was more than she could bear ; and, flinging up her shaking arms, she fell back upon the couch, dead.

For several moments, Herman remained transfixed with horror and overcome by an eerie feeling that supernatural agencies were at work ; then, realising that the old dame's secret had perished with her, he was filled with despair, which increased when Lisa, entering the room a few moments later and seeing the pistol in his hand, accused him of having murdered her grandmother and drove him from her presence.

The wretched Herman now passed some terrible days, almost mad with grief and remorse and haunted constantly by visions of the dead Countess ; and, shutting himself up in his room at the barracks, he refused to see anyone or to go out, feeling that nothing mattered if Lisa refused to smile upon him.

Lisa, however, could not long bear to live without seeing her beloved one ; and soon believing that she had wronged him by her hasty suspicions, she sent him a note asking for his forgiveness and entreating him to meet her that evening at midnight on the

Quay, where they would be unseen, or, at least, unknown.

Herman received the note on the day of the Countess's funeral ; and though it brought him some comfort, he could not overcome a strange uncanny feeling which he had experienced all that day. As evening drew on apace, a sudden storm arose and the wind howled around the house ; and as he sat in his lonely apartment, shivering with a nameless fear, the apparition of the dead Countess appeared before him, telling him in ghostly accents the names of the three cards he had desired to know—three, seven, ace.

As soon as the spectre had vanished and he had recovered somewhat from his fright, Herman once more became obsessed with a mad desire to try his luck at the gaming-table immediately ; but refraining, for a short time longer, from giving vent to his freshly stimulated passion he set forth at midnight to the Quay, to keep his appointment with Lisa, who was already waiting for him by the bridge.

There was a passionate meeting between the lovers ; but Lisa was soon plunged into grief and alarm once more on hearing from Herman that he now knew the secret of the three cards, so that she was again forced to believe that he had indeed murdered the Countess with his own hands ; and she imagined him to be raving when presently he told her excitedly that he was about to make a wonderful fortune at the gaming-tables.

With tearful entreaties, Lisa implored him to go

away with her and to forget the evil knowledge he had gained by supernatural means ; but Herman, now indeed raving and quite beside himself with the gambler's passion, tore himself from her side in a frenzy and rushed off to the gambling-house.

Now realising that her beloved one was indeed mad and lost to her for ever, the unhappy Lisa gave way to a paroxysm of despair ; and feeling that life had no joy left for her, she flung herself from the bridge into the river below, there to seek oblivion from the woes she could not bear.

Meanwhile, Herman fled with mad haste to the gambling-house, where he found his rival, Prince Yeletsky, whom he at once challenged to play him three times for terrific stakes.

His friends, Tchekalinsky, Sourin and Tomsy, who were also present, endeavoured to prevent him from engaging in such a reckless game, reminding him of the bad luck he always experienced at cards ; but their efforts were unavailing, and the play began at once.

To the astonishment of all, the first game fell to Herman, who won with his three ; and, encouraged by this, he doubled the stakes and won a second time with the seven. Already a large fortune was his ; but, not satisfied with this, the rash young officer, elated with his success, insisted upon a third game, staking all upon a single card—and lost !

Instead of turning up the ace, as foretold by the apparition of the Countess, he saw, to his horror, that

he held in his hand the Queen of Spades ! At the same moment, he once more beheld the spectre of the sinister old Countess, who had been his evil genius and had thus brought him to utter ruin, appearing to smile in triumph at his downfall ; and, filled with the madness of despair, the unhappy Herman plunged a dagger into his heart as his ghostly deceiver vanished from sight.

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