CÆSAR'S COLUMN.

A STORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

CHAPTER VI

THE INTERVIEW.

COUNTING from the electrical rail cords, we were soon at the house of the Prince. Passing around to the servants' entrance of the palace, Maximilian sent in his card to the Master of the Servants who soon appeared, bowing deferentially to my friend. We were ushered into his private room. Maximilian locked the door, he then examined the room carefully, to see if there was any one hidden behind the tapestry or furniture, for the room, like every part of the palace, was furnished in the most lavish and extravagant style. Satisfied with his search, he turned to Rudolph, as the Master of the Servants was called, and handed him the message he had received, which gave the history of Estella.

"Read it," he said.

Rudolph read it with a troubled countenance.

"Yes," he said, "I am familiar with most of the facts here stated, and believe them all to be true. What would you have me do?"

"First, said Maximilian, "we desire to know if Estella is still in ignorance of the purpose for which she was brought here."

"Yes," he replied, "Frederka is jealous of her, as I can see, and has contrived to keep her out of the Prince's sight. She has no desire to be supplanted by a younger and fairer woman."

"*God be praised for that jealousy,*" exclaimed Maximilian. "We must see Estella, can you manage it for us?"

"Yes, he said, "I will bring her here. I know she is in the palace. I saw her but a few moments since. Wait for me."

"Stop," said Maximilian, "have you *the receipt for the $5,000 signed by Mrs Plunkett?*"

"No, but I can get it."

"Do so, pray; and when you bring her here introduce me to her as Mr Martin, and my friend here as Mr Henry. She may refuse our assistance, and we must provide against the revenge of the Prince."

"I will do as you command," replied Rudolph, who acted throughout as if he felt himself in the presence of a superior officer.

As we sat waiting his return I was in a state of considerable excitement. Delight, to know that she was still the pure angel I had worshiped in my dreams, contended with trepidation as I felt I must soon stand in her presence.

The door opened and Rudolph entered, behind him came the tall form of the beautiful girl I had seen in the carriage, she seemed to me fairer than ever. Her eyes first fell upon me, she started and blushed. It was evident she recognized me and I fancied the recognition was not unpleasant to her. She then turned to Maximilian and then to Rudolph, who introduced us as we had requested. I offered her a chair. She sat down, evidently astonished at such an interview, and yet entirely mistress of herself. After a moment's pause, for Maximilian, as he told me afterwards, was too bewildered with her splendid beauty to speak, she said, in a sweet and gentle voice:

"Rudolph tells me that you desire *to speak to me on matters of importance.*"

At a sign from Maximilian Rudolph closed and locked the door. She started, and it seemed to me that her eyes turned to me with more confidence than to either of the others.

"Miss Washington" said Maximilian, "it is true we desire to speak with you on *matters of the greatest moment to yourself.* But we shall say things so surprising to you, so painful and cruel, so utterly in conflict with your present opinions, that I scarce know how to begin."

She had grown paler during this speech, and I then said

"Be assured that nothing but the profound respect we feel for you, and the *greatest desire to serve you,* and save you from ruin, could have induced us to intrude upon you."

Her face showed her increasing alarm, she placed her hand on her heart, as if to still its beatings, and then, with constrained dignity replied

"I do not understand you, gentlemen. I do not know what the dangers are to which you allude. Can you not speak plainly?"

"My friend here, Mr Henry," said Maximilian, looking at me, "you have, I perceive, already recognized."

"Yes," she said, with another blush.

"If I am not mistaken, he is the gentleman who saved the life of a poor beggar, some days since, and punished, as he deserved, our insolent driver. Miss Fredorika, the Princess niece, has at my request, refused since that time to permit him to drive us when we go out together, as we often do. I am glad to thank you again," she said, with a charmingly ingenuous air, "if your noble act in saving that poor man's life."

"It was nothing, I said, "but if the service was of any value it has been a thousand times repaid by your kind words."

"You can easily imagine, said Maximilian, "that my friend here, after that interview, was naturally curious to find out something about you."

She blushed and cast down her eyes, and thought the flushed across my mind that perhaps she had been likewise curious to find out something about me.

"I am a member, said Maximilian, "of a secret society. We have a Bureau of Inquiry, which announces to a Chief of Inquiry, for the use of the society, concerning every person. I am sorry. When my friend desired to know some thing of my name, here the Chief, (wonder into eyes were cast down again) I sent a message to our Bureau of Inquiry and received a reply which I have here. I fear to show it to you. The shock will be too great to learn in a moment the utter baseness of one in whom you have trusted. I fear you have not the courage to endure such a blow and at the same time I know of no better way to communicate to your purity and innocence the shocking facts which it is my duty to disclose."

Estella smiled, and reached forth her hand for the paper with the dignity of conscious courage and high blood.

"Let me read it, she said "I do not think it can tell me anything I cannot endure."

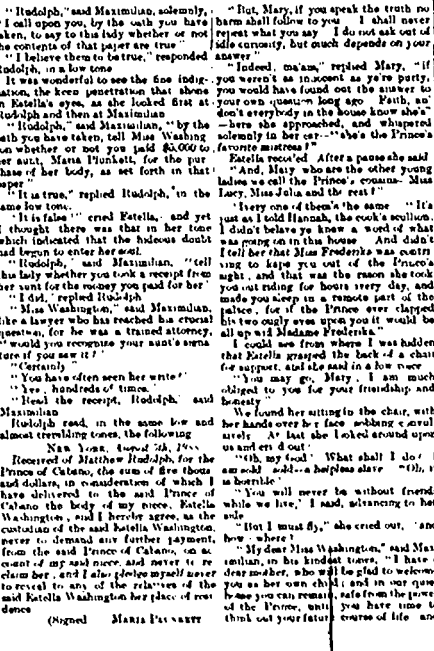
Maximilian delivered the paper into her hand. I watched her face as she read it. At first there was a look of wonder at the minuteness of the knowledge of her family which the paper revealed; then the interest became more intense; then the eyebrows began to rise and the blue eyes to dilate with horror, then an *expression of scorn* swept over her face, and as she read the last half she flung the paper from her as if it had been a serpent, and rising up, yes, towering, a splendid image of wrath, she turned upon us and cried out

"This is a base falsehood. A cowardly trick to wound me. A shameful attempt to injure my dear aunt."

And wheeling around on Rudolph, her eyes blazing, she said

"Unlock that door. I shall reveal at once to the Prince this attack on his good name and Miss Frederik. How dare you bring these men here with such false hoods?"

Rudolph, alarmed for himself, hung his head in silence. He was trembling violently.



"MAXIMILIAN DELIVERED THE PAPER INTO HER HAND."

"Rudolph," said Maximilian, solemnly, "I call upon you, *by the oath* you have taken, to say to this lady whether or not the contents of that paper are true."

"I believe them to be true," responded Rudolph, in a low tone.

It was wonderful to see the fine indignation, the keen penetration that shone in Estella's eyes, as she looked first at Rudolph and then at Maximilian.

"Rudolph," said Maximilian, "by the oath you have taken, tell Miss Washington whether or not you paid $5,000 to her aunt, Maria Plunkett, for the purchase of her body, as set forth in that paper."

"It is true," replied Rudolph, in the same low tone.

"It is false!" cried Estella, and yet I thought there was that in her tone which indicated that the hideous doubt had begun to enter her soul.

"Rudolph," said Maximilian, "tell this lady whether you took a receipt from her aunt for the money you paid for her."

"I did," replied Rudolph.

"Miss Washington," said Maximilian, like a lawyer who has reached his crucial question, or he was a trained attorney, "would you recognize your aunt's handwriting if you saw it?"

"Certainly."

"You have often seen her write?"

"Yes, hundreds of times."

"Read the receipt, Rudolph, said Maximilian.

Rudolph read, in the same low and almost trembling tones, the following

NEW YORK, *March 7th, 1899.*

Received of *Matthew Rudolph, for the* Prince of Calano, the sum of five thousand dollars, in consideration of which I have delivered to the said Prince of Calano the body of my niece, Estella Washington, and I hereby agree, as the guardian of the said Estella Washington, never to demand any further payment from the said Prince of Calano, on account of my said niece, and never to reclaim her, and I also pledge myself never to reveal to any of the relatives of the said Estella Washington her place of residence.

(Signed) MARIA PLUNKETT

As he finished reading Estella seized the receipt quickly from his hands, and fixed her eyes eagerly upon the signature. In a moment she became deadly pale, and would have fallen on the floor but that I caught her in my arms (oh, precious burden!) and had her in a soft Rudolph thought some wine and bathed her face. In a few minutes she so recovered consciousness. She looked at us curiously at first, and then as memory returned to her an agonized and distracted look passed over her features. I feared she would faint again. I held some water to her lips. She looked at me with an intense look as I knelt at her side. Then her eyes passed to Maximilian and Rudolph who stood respectfully a little distance from her. The pale lips moved *distinctly* but *faint*. Then a new thought seemed to strike her and she rose to a sitting position.

It cannot be true. My aunt would not do such a thing. You are strangers to me. It is a conspiracy. I will ask Frederika.

"No no," said Rudolph, "not Frederika. It would not be to her interest to tell you the truth. But is there any one of the servants to whom you have more confidence than all the others?"

"Yes," she said, "there is Mary Callahan, an honest girl, if there is one any where. I think she loves me, and I do not believe she would deceive me."

"Then," said Rudolph, "you shall send for her to come here."

This was done, and in a few moments Mary appeared—an honest, stout, rosy cheeked Irish girl, with the frank blue eyes and kindly smile of her people.

"Mary," said Estella, "you have always been kind to me. Do you love me sufficiently to tell me the truth if I ask you some questions?"

"Sure, and you may do so, my dear, said Mary.

Then, Mary, tell me, is Frederika the Prince of Calano's niece?"

Niver a drop's blood to him, replied Mary.

"What is she doing in his house, then?" asked Estella.

"Sure, it would be as much as my place is worth, mean to answer that question and hard enough it is for an honest girl to get a place now a-days.

"But, Mary, if you speak the truth no harm shall follow to you. I shall never repeat what you say. I do not ask out of idle curiosity, but much depends on your answer."

"Indeed, ma'am," replied Mary, "if you weren't as innocent as ye're purty, you would have found out the answer to your own question long ago. Faith, an' don't everybody in the house know she's—here she approached, and whispered solemnly in her ear—"she's the Prince's favorite mistress!"

Estella recoiled. After a pause she said

"And, Mary, who are the other young ladies we call the Prince's cousins—Miss Lucy, Miss Zula and the rest?"

"Every one of them's the same. "It's just as I told Hannah, the cook's scullion. I didn't belave ye knew a word of what was going on in this house. And didn't I tell her that Miss Frederika was coutin' ying to keep you out of the Prince's sight, and that was the reason she took you out riding for hours every day, and made you sleep in a remote part of the palace, for if the Prince ever clapped his two ough eyes upon you he would be all up with Madame Frederika."

I could see from where I was hidden that Estella grasped the back of a chair for support, and she said in a low voice

"You may go, Mary. I am much obliged to you for your friendship and honesty."

We found her sitting in the chair, with her hands over her face sobbing convulsively. At last she looked around upon us and cried out:

"Oh, my God! What shall I do? I am sold—sold—a helpless slave. Oh, it is horrible."

"You will never be without friends while we live," I said, advancing to her side.

"But I must fly," she cried out, "and how—where?"

"My dear Miss Washington," said Maximilian, in his kindest tones, "I have a dear mother, who will be glad to welcome you as her own child; and in our quiet home you can remain safe from the power of the Prince, until you have time to think out your future course of life and ancestral portraits, into a magnificent

if you conclude to remain with us for ever, you will be only the more welcome. Here is Rudolph, who will vouch for me that I am an honorable man and that you can trust yourself to me with safety."

"Yes, said Rudolph, Maximilian Peter is the soul of honor. His simple word is more than the oath of others."

"Then let it be so," said Estella.

"No," replied Rudolph, "that would not do. she is too confused and full of excitement. You would be followed at once to claim her."

"What then do you advise?" asked Maximilian.

"Let me see," replied the old man thinking. "this is Thursday, on the day after to-morrow, there will be a number of visitors present and more or less confusion, more guards will be necessary also, and I can contrive to have one of the Brotherhood act as sentinel at the door which opens into a hall which connects with that room. Very few see here in a special entrance which leads to a stairway and to the door I speak of. I will procure a gentleman's dress for Miss Estella, she is tall and will readily pass in it. I will secure for you a permit for a carriage to enter the grounds. You will bring a close carriage and wait with the rest of the equipages near at hand. But I must have some one who will accompany Miss Estella from this room to the carriage for I must not show myself."

I stepped forward and said, "I will be here."

"But there is some danger in the task, said Rudolph, looking at me critically. "If detected, your life would pay the forfeit."

"I would the danger were ten times as great, I replied. Estella blushed and gave me a glance of gratitude.

"There is one difficulty I perceive," said Maximilian.

"What is that?" asked Rudolph.

"I hesitate about leaving Miss Washington exposed to the danger of remaining four days longer in this horrible house."

"I will look after that, replied Rudolph. She had better pretend ill health, and keep her room during that time. It is on an upper hall and if she remains there the danger will be very slight that the Prince will see her."

"Miss Washington," I said, handing her the dagger which Max had given me, "take this weapon. It is poisoned with the most deadly virus known to the art of man. A scratch from it is certain death. Use it to defend yourself if assailed."

"I know how I shall use it in the last extremity," she said, meaningly.

"Better," I replied, "purity in death than degradation in life."

She thanked me with her eyes, and took the dagger and hid it in her bosom.

"There is one other matter," said Rudolph to Max, "the meeting next Monday night is to be a very important one, I think, from certain indications. It is absolutely necessary for an important coup d'etat, as hereafter, who can report to you all that occurs. If you can send me a discreet man I can hide him where I have before hidden our brethren."

"Why could I not serve the purpose?" I said. "I will be here anyhow, and as I would have to remain until the gathering broke up, I might just as well witness the proceedings."

"He is not one of us," said Rudolph, doubtfully.

"No," replied Max, "but I will vouch for his fidelity with my life."

"Then be it so," said Rudolph. "Let Miss Washington withdraw by the farther door, and after a reasonable delay we will pass through into a communicating series of rooms, and I will then show your friend where he is to be concealed.

CHAPTER VII

THE HIDING PLACE.

I HAD seen something of the magnificence of this age, and of the splendor of its lordly habitations, but I was not prepared for the grandeur of the rooms through which Rudolph led me. It would be impossible to adequately describe them. We moved noiselessly over carpets soft and deep as the moss of Spain, tinted with colors and designs, from the great looms of the world, beside which the comparison of nature's carpets seemed insignificant. We passed up great winding stairs, over which, secured to the, three carriages might have been driven abreast, we were surrounded at every step by exquisite statuary and royal paintings our course led through great libraries where the softened light fell on the endless arrays of richly bound books. Men and women passed and repassed us for the house was so full of servants that it seemed like a town in itself. Here and there were quiet looking watchmen, who the nature of a spy, yet unlike the rest, and whose duty it was to keep watch and ward over the innumerable articles which everywhere met the eye, costly *books, works of art, bronzes, jewelled boxes,* musical instruments, small groups of exquisite statuary, paintings, curios, etc., from all quarters of the earth. Each room seemed to contain a king's ransom. I could not help but contrast this useless and extravagant luxury, which served no purpose out display and vanity, with the dreadful homes and working places of the poor I had visited the day before. And it seemed to me as if a voice pierced my heart, crying out through all its recesses, in strident tones, "How long, O Lord, how long. And then I thought how thin a crust of earth separated all this splendor from that burning hell of misery beneath it. And if the molten mass of horror should break its limitations and overflow the earth? I stood still, lost in these engrossing reflections, when Rudolph touched me on the arm, and led the way through a great hall, covered with

chamber. In the centre stood a long table, and around it, about two hundred chairs all made of dark tropical wood. It was like the council chamber of a great government with the throne at one end.

"This, said Rudolph, in a low whisper, "this is where the council is, the real centre of government. All matters of importance, all the laws, and form, the to whom it may concern, to be the subject of the Prince's consideration, shall be the subject of the council of Calano. It is composed partly of courts, princes, governors, legislators, presidents, judges and attorneys, and from this they are selected and constituted a chamber of that multiform function. He decrees formulated here are sent by a hundred thousand newspapers, many thousands of orators and then enforced by an uncountable army of officers, with clubs, spies and assassins. He who stands in the way the men who assemble here perishes. He who would oppose them takes his life in his hands.

I followed Rudolph on tiptoe as he advanced *to the end of the room.*

"Here," he said, entering through a wide arch, "is a conservatory which is constantly kept supplied and renewed from the hot houses of the palace, with the most magnificent flowers. The only humanizing trait the Prince seems to possess is an affection for flowers. And in especially loves those strange Mexican and *South American plants, the cactus,* which unite the most exquisite flowers, the most grotesque and repulsive forms, covered with great spear like spines, and which thrive only in barren lands, and in the poorest soil. I have taken advantage of the presence of these plants to construct the hiding place about which I spoke to you. Here are some which are *fifteen feet high.* They touch the ceiling of the room. Around them I have arranged a perfect hedge or breast work of smaller plants of the same family, growing in large boxes. Nothing could penetrate through this prickly wall and I have united the boxes by hinks and staples on the inside. There is, however one which a strong man can move aside and though the opening thus formed he can crawl to the centre of the barricade, and, having replaced the hooks, it would be almost impossible to reach him while he could not be seen unless one were intentionally over him and kicked down upon him. Then between him and the council room I have arranged a screen of flowers, which will hide you when you stand up, while between the blossoms you can see everything with little risk of being seen. But in case you should be detected you will observe behind you a window, which, as the weather is warm, I shall leave open. On the outside is a great ivy vine that will bear your weight. You will have to dare the spines of the cacti behind you, make a great leap to the window and take your chances of escaping the fusillade of pistol shots, by flying in the darkness, into the garden. If caught, you will have to pretend to be a burglar who entered at the window for purposes of plunder. A supposed burglar would be simply turned over to the law and punished by a term of imprisonment. I give you these instructions although I hope there will be no necessity for them. *This hiding place has been several times* used, and the deepest secrets of the ancient ivy revealed to our Brotherhood, without detection, and if you are prudent and careful there will be little to fear. The council will meet at eight o'clock, at half past seven it will be my duty to see that the rooms are in order, and to make sure that there are no spies *or intruders on the premises, and to report* in person to the Prince, and deliver the key of the outer door. I shall cover your dress with the garments of one of the household servants, and take you with me to help make that last examination, and, seizing an opportunity, you will slip into the hiding place, taking first taken off the disguise I have lent you, which we will hide among the plants. You must be armed and prepared for every emergency. I will meet you in the garden at half past six, before we part I will furnish you with a key to an outer gate, by which you can enter. As soon as the council has broken up, I will return to the room and again disguise you in the servant's dress. The Prince always enters his guests with his hat off, and champagne before they separate.

(To be continued.)

HAVE YOU MET THIS MAN?

THERE are traitors and traitors, but of all traitors the industrial traitor is the meanest. We don't refer to the out and out "scab" as to the pretended unionman. The former is, if anything the more honorable and less to be feared, since he declares himself and you know just where to find him, while the latter partakes of the nature of a spy, yet wears the wolf in sheep's clothing. He manages to keep himself in good standing in his union by many and loud protestations of sincerity, *respect any and all benefits that may* accrue to him as a member thereof, but have his interest in union matters ceases. He has no use for any other organization, does not recognize the tie which binds all laboring men in a common cause. He is wrapped up in the attainment of his own selfish interests. You've seen him haven't you? He stands on the corner and *exhibits himself as the 'square man,'* and then on the quiet, he sneaks into a non union barber shop to get shaved, or into a cheap clothing shop for a suit of clothes, turning over to the enemies of organized labor the money such organizations have made it possible for him to procure. Yes, you see him every day. But we would think him more manly to *hear him talk.* Let the solid fact is, he is not, and the only thing to do is to give him a taste of discipline. Such persons don't deserve any consideration, they are not unmanly men. *Montreal Echo.*