

because it slackened the nerves and softened the muscles. Pretty faces, because they distracted the mind, which must be concentrated on one object, the upholding of the dynasty and the confusion of traitors. Rather a physical than a spiritual regeneration this, but a very real one nevertheless, for the resolves were made by one who had fundamentally great qualities, and who was very much a man, despite his smooth cheek and pretty features.

As the Perownes left the foyer he looked round in search for Tortenform.

At the same time the hall door opened, and a big, strong-built man in civilian attire entered.

Fritz's white teeth flashed a smile of welcome and he advanced to greet the new-comer.

"My good friend Saunders," he said, taking the other's hand cordially, "how goes it?"

"Pretty well, Fritz," answered Saunders in a low voice. "I've got a letter."

"For me?"

"No, for her—from him."

Fritz whistled softly.

"I should like to see it," he said.

"You shall, but not here. There are too many of the other side here, and we are being closely watched. As I came in I passed that old mastiff Lacherberg, whose views of Grimland's welfare are not, to put it mildly, our views."

"Not exactly," laughed the young Baron. "A few minutes ago he put his dirty glove across my face."

"And when are you going to kill him?" asked Saunders.

"I am not going to kill him."

"What!"

"I am unwilling to take risks," said the young noble slowly.

Saunders gasped.

"Fritz of Friedrichsheim is unwilling to take risks!" he ejaculated.

"At present, yes. My life is more valuable than his. I am taking the situation seriously, and I realise the difference in tactical value between a Baron of Friedrichsheim and a swash-buckling dragoon."

Saunders nodded thoughtfully.

"The situation must indeed be serious if it makes you prudent," he said.

"It is. I loved poor old Karl, and I like his boy. There is devilment afoot, but I mean the lad to sit where his father sat, on the throne of Grimland."

"There speaks a loyal soul! But it was difficult, was it not, refusing the challenge?"

"Diabolically so," agreed Fritz. "Especially as it was given under the eyes of the loveliest maiden I have ever seen."

"Ah! Fritz," laughed Saunders, "woman's eyes will bring you to bad end."

"Some day, undoubtedly; but not till the son of Karl XXII. is firmly seated on the throne of Grimland."

Saunders nodded his approval in his own quiet way.

"It is a pleasure to find you in so determined a mood," he said warmly. "But this letter calls for immediate perusal. I have given my word to the person I took it from that it will be delivered by the four o'clock post. Let us adjourn to the house of General Meyer, who is expecting us."

"Most willingly," agreed Fritz, and the two men left the building together. Both donned heavy fur-lined coats, but the damp-cold air of the city closed round them like an icy sheet.

Very different was the atmosphere of Weidenbruck from the crisp air of the uplands which Saunders had traversed earlier in the day. Here, instead of the dry light of the mountains was a thin white mist, bred of the ill-drained plains and the River Niederkessel, and instead of a sapphire blue the heavens were of a lifeless grey.

Beneath their feet a thick carpet of snow hushed the city in a noticeable silence. A long line of sleighs was drawn up outside the Hotel Concordia—some elegant conveyances with richly furred drivers, splendid horses, and silver bells; others shabby, paintless vehicles with bony steeds and poorly clad coachmen. This diversity well reflected the varied character of the visitors within the foyer. Walking down the line of waiting equipages they came presently to one

conveyance which differed in various respects from the others, and more particularly in respect of having no horses. This was Saunders' motor-sleigh, the only vehicle of its kind in Weidenbruck. It had been built from his own specification, for Saunders possessed an inventive and practical mind, and had only recently come from the makers in Coventry into his possession. Its engines were motor-engines of high horse-power, and the thing moved on runners like an ordinary sleigh, save for a central cog-wheel which bit into the snow and formed the propelling agent.

On the front seat was a driver in a leather jacket and peaked cap.

"Get in behind," said Saunders to his companion, "and wrap the rug well round you, for motor-sleighting in Weidenbruck is the coldest game I know." So saying Saunders seated himself at the wheel, the chauffeur started the engines, the clutch was put in, and with a jerk and a rattle and the hoot of a horn, the remarkable vehicle began to rush at an alarming pace down the Bahnhofstrasse. In a few minutes they left the spacious modernity of the Bahnhofstrasse for the more picturesque confinement of the Schugasse. Here it would have been advisable to go slowly, but Saunders was in a hurry, and when Saunders was in a hurry police regulations were apt to be set at naught. An open space called the Karl-Platz was reached, and leading from this they took a respectable avenue named the Peter-strasse.

At a stone house, slightly recessed from the alignment of the street and bearing the number 18 on an especially handsome door, the sleigh was stopped. Fritz and Saunders alighted, and the latter told the chauffeur not to wait, but to return at once to his garage adjoining the Neptunburg Palace.

"Meyer's house is well known," he explained, pressing the bell, "and my motor-sleigh is well known, and it is not necessary to proclaim to all the world where I am spending the afternoon."

A man-servant appeared—an ivory-faced person with close-set eyes of a pinkish hue, and hair of snowiest white. A slight stoop taken in conjunction with his bleached locks gave a first impression of age, which, however, was belied by the smooth cheek and unfurrowed brow. As a matter of fact, Langli, General Meyer's butler, had been white-haired since he had any hair at all, a matter of some thirty odd years.

His quick, shifting eyes recognised the visitors in an instant. He asked no questions, but admitted them, and closed the door swiftly behind them.

"The General is in his study," he said in soft, lisping tones.

"By himself?" asked Fritz.

"His Excellency, General von Bilderbaum, is with him."

"So much the better," said Saunders. "Announce us, if you please."

The butler led the way through a large stone-flagged hall to the end of a long corridor.

"Their Excellencies, the high-born Baron of Friedrichsheim and Herr Saunders," he announced softly, and almost inaudibly.

In a room of moderate proportions, very comfortably furnished, and somewhat thick with tobacco smoke, two men were seated in large arm-chairs in close proximity to a green porcelain stove.

One was a big, stout old officer with white hair, a billowy-white moustache, and a brick-red face.

The other was an elderly man, clean-shaven, sallow, and of unmistakably Semitic origin. He was clad in a uniform of dark green with black facings. His pose was indolent and lethargic, he wore an eyeglass and an air of boredom, and conveyed the impression of being either very tired or very lazy. This was General Meyer, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Grimland.

Meyer surveyed the new-comers through his eye-glass without attempting to rise from his seat, or even mitigating the slovenliness of his posture.

"You will find cigars on the table," he drawled, "and brandy in the side-board. If there is anything else I want, touch the bell."

(To be continued.)



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