

## LORD KILGOBBIN.

By CHARLES LEVER.

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## CHAPTER II.

## THE PRINCE KOSTALERGI.

MAURICE KEARNEY had once a sister whom he dearly loved, and whose sad fate lay very heavily on his heart, for he was not without self-accusings on the score of it. Matilda Kearney had been a belle of the Irish court and a toast at the club when Maurice was a young fellow in town; and he had been very proud of her beauty, and tasted a full share of those attentions which often fall to the lot of brothers of handsome girls.

Then Matty was an heiress—that is, she had twelve thousand pounds in her own right; and Ireland was not such a California as to make a very pretty girl with twelve thousand pounds an everyday chance. She had numerous offers of marriage, and with the usual luck in such cases, there commonplace, unattractive men with good means, and there were clever and agreeable fellows without a sixpence, all alike intelligible. Matty had an infusion of romance in her nature that few, if any, Irish girls are free from, and which made her desire that the man of her choice should be something out of the common. She would have liked a soldier who had won distinction in the field. The idea of military fame was very dear to her Irish heart, and she fancied with what pride she would hang upon the arm of one whose gay trappings and gold embroidery emblemized the career he followed. If not a soldier, she would have liked a great orator, some leader in debate that men would rush down to hear, and whose glowing words would be gathered up and repeated as though inspirations: after that a poet, and perhaps—not a painter—a sculptor, she thought, might do.

With such aspirations as these, it is not surprising that she rejected the offers of those comfortable fellows in Meath, or Louth, whose military glories were militia drills, and whose eloquence were confined to the bench of magistrates.

At three-and-twenty she was in the full blaze of her beauty; at three-and-thirty she was still unmarried; her looks on the wane, but her romance stronger than ever, not untinged, perhaps, with a little bitterness toward that sex which had not afforded one man of merit enough to woo and win her. Partly out of pique with a land so barren of all that could minister to imagination, partly in anger with her brother who had been urging her to a match she disliked, she went abroad to travel, wandered about for a year or two, and at last found herself one winter at Naples.

There was at that time, as secretary to the Greek legation, a young fellow whom repute called the handsomest man in Europe. He was a certain Spiridion Kostalergi, whose title was Prince of Delos; though whether there was such a principality, or that he was its representative, society was not fully agreed upon. At all events, Miss Kearney met him at a court ball, when he wore his national costume, looking, it must be owned, so splendidly handsome that all thought of his princely rank was forgotten in presence of a face and figure that recalled the highest triumphs of ancient art. It was Antinous come to life in an embroidered cap and a gold-worked jacket, it was Antinous with a voice like Mario, and who waltzed to perfection. This splendid creature, a modern Alcibiades in gifts of mind and graces, soon heard, among his other triumphs, how a rich and handsome Irish girl had fallen in love with him at first sight. He had himself been struck by her good looks and her stylish air; and learning that there could be no doubt about her fortune, he lost no time in making his advances. Before the end of the first week of their acquaintance, he proposed. She referred him to her brother before she could consent; and though, when Kostalergi inquired among her English friends, none had ever heard of a Lord Kilgobbin, the fact of his being Irish explained their ignorance, not to say that Kearney's reply, being a positive refusal of consent, so fully satisfied the Greek that it was "a good thing," he pressed his suit with a most passionate ardor; threatened to kill himself if she persisted in rejecting him, and so worked upon her heart by

his devotion, or on her pride by the thought of his position, that she yielded, and within three weeks from the first day they met she became the Princess of Delos.

When a Greek, holding any public employment, marries money, his government is usually prudent enough to promote him. It is a recognition of the merit that others have discovered, and a wise administration marches with the inventions of the age it lives in. Kostalergi's chief was consequently recalled, suffered to fall back upon his previous obscurity—he had been a commission agent for a house in the Greek trade—and the Prince of Delos gazetted as Minister Plenipotentiary of Greece, with the first class of St. Salvador, in recognition of his services to the state; no one being indiscreet enough to add that the aforesaid services were comprised in marrying an Irishwoman with a dowry of—to quote the *Athenian Mercury*—"three hundred and fifty thousand drachmas."

For awhile—it was a very brief while—the romantic mind of the Irish girl was raised to a sort of transport of enjoyment. Here was everything—more than everything—her most glowing imagination had ever conceived. Love, ambition, station, all gratified, though, to be sure, she had quarreled with her brother, who had returned her last letter unopened. Maurice, she thought, was too good-hearted to bear a long grudge; he would see her happiness, he would hear what a devoted and good husband her dear Spiridion had proved himself, and he would forgive her at last.

Though, as was well known, the Greek envoy received but a very moderate salary from his government, and even that not paid with a strict punctuality, the legation was maintained with a splendor that rivaled, if not surpassed those of France, England or Russia. The Prince of Delos led the fashion in equipage, as did the Princess in toilet; their dinners, their balls, their fetes attracted the curiosity of even the highest to witness them; and to such a degree of notoriety had the Greek hospitality attained, that Naples at last admitted that without the Palazzo Kostalergi there would be nothing to attract strangers to the capital.

Play, so invariably excluded from the habits of an embassy, was carried on at this legation to such an excess that the clubs were completely deserted, and all the young men of gambling tastes flocked here each night, sure to find lansquenet or faro, and for stakes which no public table could possibly supply. It was not alone that this life of a gambler estranged Kostalergi from his wife, but that the scandal of his infidelities had reached her also, just at the time when some vague, glimmering suspicions of his utter worthlessness were breaking on her mind. The birth of a little girl did not seem in the slightest degree to renew the ties between them; on the contrary, the embarrassment of a baby and the cost it must entail were the only considerations he would entertain, and it was a constant question of his—uttered, too, with a tone of sarcasm that cut her to the heart: "Would not her brother—the Lord Irelandais—like to have that baby? Would she not write and ask him?" Unpleasant stories had long been rife about the play at the Greek legation, when a young Russian secretary, of high family and influence, lost an immense sum under circumstances which determined him to refuse payment. Kostalergi, who had been the chief winner, refused everything like inquiry or examination—in fact, he made investigation impossible; for the cards, which the Russian had declared to be marked, the Greek gathered up slowly from the table and threw them into the fire, pressing his foot upon them in the flames, and then calmly returning to where the other stood, he struck him across the face with his open hand, saying, as he did it: "Here is another debt to repudiate, and before the same witness, also!"

The outrage did not admit of delay, the arrangements were made in an instant, and within half an hour—merely time enough to send for a surgeon, they met at the end of the garden of the legation. The Russian fired first, and, though a consummate pistol-shot, agitation at the insult so unnerved him that he missed; his ball cut the knot of Kostalergi's cravat. The Greek took a calm and deliberate aim, and sent his bullet through the other's forehead. He fell without a word, stone dead.

Though the duel had been a fair one, and the *procès verbal* drawn up and agreed

on both sides showed that all had been loyally, the friends of the young Russian had influence to make the Greek government not only recall the envoy, but actually the mission itself.

For some years the Kostalergis lived in retirement at Palermo, not knowing, nor known to, any one. Their means were now so reduced that they barely sufficient for daily life, and though the Greek prince—as he was called—constantly appeared on the public promenade well dressed, and in all the pride of his handsome figure, it was currently said that his wife was dying of want.

It was only after long and agonizing suffering that she ventured to write to her brother, and appeal to him for advice and assistance. But at last she did so, and a correspondence grew up which, in a measure, restored the affection between them. When Kostalergi discovered the source from which his wretched wife now drew her consolation and her courage, he forbade her to write more, and himself addressed a letter to Kearney so insulting and offensive—charging him even with causing the discord of his home, and showing the letter to his wife before sending it—that the poor woman, long failing in health and broken down, sank soon after, and died so destitute that the very funeral was paid for by a subscription among her countrymen. Kostalergi had left her some days before her death, carrying the girl along with him, nor was his whereabouts learned for a considerable time.

When next he emerged into the world it was at Rome, where he gave lessons in music and modern languages, in many of which he was a proficient. His splendid appearance, his captivating address, his thorough familiarity with the modes of society, gave him the *entrée* to many houses, where his talents amply requited the hospitality he received. He possessed, among his other gifts, an immense amount of plausibility, and people found it, besides, very difficult to believe ill of what well-bred, somewhat retiring man, who, in circumstances of the very narrowest fortune, not only looked and dressed like a gentleman, but actually brought up a daughter with a degree of care and an amount of regard to her education that made him appear a model parent.

Nina Kostalergi was then about seventeen, though she looked at least three years older. She was a tall, slight, pale girl, with perfectly regular features—so classic in the mold, and so devoid of any expression, that she recalled the face one sees on a cameo. Her hair was of wondrous beauty—that rich gold-color which has "r-flets" through it, as the light falls full or faint, and of an abundance that taxed her ingenuity to dress it. They gave her the sobriquet of the Titian Girl at Rome whenever she appeared abroad.

In the only letter Kearney had received from his brother-in-law after his sister's death was an insolent demand for a sum of money, which he alleged that Kearney was unjustly withholding, and which he now threatened to enforce by law. "I am well aware," wrote he, "what measure of honor or honesty I am to expect from a man whose very name and designation are a deceit. But probably prudence will suggest how much better it would be on this occasion to stimulate rectitude than risk the shame of an open exposure."

To this gross insult Kearney never deigned any reply; and now more than two years passed without any tidings of his disreputable relation, when there came one morning a letter with the Roman post-mark, and addressed, "A Monsieur le Vicomte de Kilgobbin, a son Chateau de Kilgobbin, en Irlande." To the honor of the officials in the Irish post-office, it was forwarded to Kilgobbin with the words, "Try Maurice Kearney, Esq.," in the corner.

A glance at the writing showed it was not in Kostalergi's hand, and after a moment or two of hesitation, Kearney opened it. He returned at once for the writer's name, and read the words, "Nina Kostalergi"—his sister's child! "Poor Matty," was all he could say for some minutes. He remembered the letter in which she told him of her little girl's birth, and implored his forgiveness for herself and his love for her baby. "I want both, my dear brother," wrote she: "for though the bonds we make for ourselves by our passions—" And the rest of the sentence was erased—she evidently thinking she had delineated all that could give a clew to a despondent reflection.

The present letter was written in English, but in that quaint particular hand Italians often write in. It began by asking forgiveness for daring to write to him, and recalling the details of the relationship between them, as though he could not have remembered it. "I am, then, in my right," wrote she, "when I address you as my dear, dear uncle, of whom I have heard so much, and whose name was in my prayers ere I knew why I knelt to pray."

Then followed a pious appeal—it was actually a cry for protection. Her father, she said, had determined to devote her to the stage, and already had taken steps to sell her—she said she used the word advisedly—for so many years to the impresario of the Fenice at Venice, her voice and musical skill being such as to give hope of her becoming a prima donna. She had, she said, frequently sung at private parties at Rome, but only knew within the last few days that she had been, not a guest, but a paid performer. Overwhelmed with the shame and indignity of this false position, she implored her mother's brother to compassionate her. "If I could not become a governess, I could be your servant, dearest uncle," she wrote. "I only ask a roof to shelter me and a refuge. May I go to you? I would beg my way on foot, if I only knew that at the last your heart and your door would be open to me, as I fell at your feet, knew that I was saved."

Until a few days ago, she said, she had by her some little trinkets her mother had left her, and on which she counted as a means of escape; but her father had discovered them, and taken them from her.

"If you answer this—and oh, let me not doubt you will—write to me to the care of the Signori Ceyani & Battistella, bankers, Rome. Do not delay, but remember that I am friendless, and, but for this chance, hopeless. Your niece, "NINA KOSTALERGI."

While Kearney gave this letter to his daughter to read, he walked up and down the room with his head bent and his hands deep in his pockets.

"I think I know the answer you'll send to this, papa," said the girl, looking up at him with a glow of pride and affection in her face. "I do not need that you should say it."

"It will take fifty—no, not fifty, but five-and-thirty pounds to bring her over here, and how is she to come all alone?"

Kate made no reply; she knew the danger sometimes of interrupting his own solution of a difficulty.

"She's a big girl, I suppose, by this—fourteen or fifteen?"

"Over nineteen, papa."

"So she is—I was forgetting. That scoundrel, her father, might come after her here he'd have the right, if he wished to enforce it, and what a scandal he'd bring upon us all."

"But would he care to do it? Is he not more likely to be glad to be disembarrassed of her charge?"

"Not if he was going to sell her—not if he could convert her into money."

"He has never been in England; he may not know how far the law would give him any power over her."

"Don't trust that Kate; a blackguard always can find out how much is in his favor everywhere. If he doesn't know it now, he'd know it the day after he landed." He paused an instant, and then said: "There will be the devil to pay with old Peter Gill, for he'll want all the cash I can scrape together for Loughrea fair. He counts on having eighty sheep down there at the long crofts, and a cow or two besides. That's money's worth, girl."

Another silence followed, after which he said: "And I think worse of the Greek scoundrel than all the cost."

"Somehow, I have no fear that he'll come here."

"You'll have to talk over Peter, Kitty"—he always said Kitty when he meant to coax her. "He will mind you, and at all events you don't care about his grumbling. Tell him it's a sudden call on me for railroad share, or—" and here he winked knowingly—"say, it's going to Rome the money is, and for the Pope!"

"That's an excellent thought, papa," said she, laughing: "I'll certainly tell the money is going to Rome, and you'll write soon—you see with what anxiety she expects your answer."

"I'll write to-night when the house is quiet, and there's no racket nor disturbance about me." No, though Kearney said this with a perfect conviction of its truth and reasonableness, it would have