

genuous companion is no less a person than the King of Montenegro.

"He is in the city," one of the men murmured.

"My dear boy, he is here. Gaze upon those classic features. Look into that regal and commanding eye. But sit down and make yourself at home. Even a king might do worse than drink a cup of Bertha Venis' tea."

A fine confusion stained Nita's cheeks. She was trembling with apprehension now, for it was more than humanly possible that some member of the crowd would recognise the features of Montenegro's ruler. But the whole thing passed for a joke. The gay company fell in with Clarette's humour, and something like a throne was hastily improvised for the king. As to himself, he was delighted with the warmth and freedom of his reception. Nobody seemed to care who he was, nobody asked any questions. It was all the same to them so long as he wore the attributes of good fellowship, and was properly introduced as a member of the clan. He had forgotten his regal position now. He threw himself heart and soul into the pleasures of his companions. He would have been better pleased, perhaps, if Clarette's little joke had been allowed to die a natural death. But the whisper went round the gay chattering circle, and to his great amusement the king found himself treated with a mock deference which he heartily reciprocated. Clarette had snatched up a handful of flowers, and deftly wove them into a green and yellow circlet. She came demurely over to the king where Nita was sitting, and cast them lightly on her yellow hair.

"I crown thee queen," she cried. "Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce you to the Queen of Montenegro. You did not know when you came out to-day how great an honour would be conferred upon us all. May I be allowed to have the felicity of giving his Majesty a cup of tea? I assure you it is not poisoned."

The king held out his hand smilingly.

"We are infinitely obliged to you," he said gravely. "Permit me to drink to the health of this excellent company. I assure you that I am charmed and delighted to make your acquaintance. Is not that so, my queen? Tell them you agree with all I say."

The colour came into Nita's cheeks, red and white chased one another like dappled shadows on a windy summer morning. The spirit of comedy was upon her. It was her mood to respond to the king's gaiety. Yet in a measure she was afraid. For this was getting a serious matter now. And the King of Montenegro was carrying the joke too far. Yet his voice was so clear and buoyant, and his face so boyish that she had not the heart to repel him.

"Of course," she said demurely. "I will never forgive Clarette for betraying my secret. When I am the Queen of Montenegro, she shall never be a guest at my court."

The others laughed merrily enough. They were in a mood when little seemed to please them. And from his throne amidst the spring flowers King Fritz surveyed the whole scene with unalloyed amusement. This, he told himself, was life, this was enjoyment. How different from the stern, hard creeds and shibboleths with which he had been fenced in up to now! What a contrast to the grim old castle at Rusta where he had passed the best part of his existence guarded by sentinels, and with no choice of company other than old Rutzstin and his ministers for companionship. What mattered affairs of State now? Why should

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G. C. ANDERSON,
Superintendent.