

THE KING OF NO-LAND.

BY B. L. FARROW.

(Continued.)

Lord Crabtree clasped his hands, with a cry of dismay which he could not check, and the King, whose last words had been addressed to his own son, as it were, said sternly:

"Mark me, my lord. This part of my life shall not be measured for me. When I marry, I choose for myself."

"It is against all precedent, your Majesty," whimpered Lord Crabtree, in anguish. "Behold, I implore you, Majesty to reflect."

"No reflection is necessary. Why should I be deprived of my dearest privilege? My lord, I will dispense with your further attendance to-day."

"I cannot your most gracious Majesty to allow me one more word."

"Quickly, then."

"If any lady has been happy enough to attract your Majesty's notice," said Lord Crabtree, his head wagging from side to side in deep distress, "if your Majesty's eye has been captivated by beauty—we old men know from experience how hard it is to resist a young bloomer"—(the King stamped his foot impatiently)—"if your Majesty has any private attachment—"

"What, my lord?"

"Lord Crabtree seemed to admit of the necessity of a private attachment. The old lord had a thought to express, but he did not know how to shape his words."

"Your Majesty," said Lord Crabtree, with tears in his eyes, "would not surely think—"

"If what, my lord? Speak out, like a man."

"Of marrying, your Majesty? Your Majesty would not surely think of that?"

The King's eyes glinted. "What else should I think of with reference to a woman whom I love?"

"Anything, your Majesty," cried Lord Crabtree, wringing his hands. "Anything—anything!—I would not be satisfied. What would a woman not give for a king's smile, for a king's embrace? Your Majesty does not know—the house of the royal notice—even, if the worst came to the worst, a marriage might easily manage your Majesty, easily—"

"But Lord Crabtree was obliged to pause in his florid speech. The King's strong hand had grasped his shoulders so firmly that he wiggled with pain."

"Enough, my lord," said Sassafraz, in clear, scornful tones. "I forbid you to speak another word. Leave the palace with you in this assurance. No example of mine shall ever weaken or degrade in my people's eyes the sanctity of the marriage bond. I am but a man, and I have no better than the meanest of my subjects. What would be the crime if I had a wife as free as I am? No convenient winking of the eyes on the part of my men can make it otherwise. The shame of a lord-handled man shall not rest upon my name. When I marry, I marry with my right hand. And my heir shall be it."

From the date of this conversation Sassafraz spent more time than ever in his private lodge, and it was quite a common thing for the lousiest-waiting to be informed three and four times a week that his Majesty had gone to his lodges, and had given orders that he was not to be disturbed. The lodge began to be talked about, and queer things were said concerning it. With reference to the King's conduct and the marriage, the lords-in-waiting, with Lord Crabtree at their head, decided in consultation that although they were not to say anything, their wisest course at present were to humor his eccentric Majesty. When the Court was asked Lord Crabtree what he should say in his daily report concerning the movements of the King, he was told to write: "His Majesty walked in the royal grounds."

But his Majesty was not seen in the royal grounds, that it set tongues wagging even among the attendants, and it began to be a saying, when any one was on a visit, that he was walking in the royal grounds. A bit of gossip, with the flavor of scandal in it, is as delightful to a duchess as to a woman. Some of them even went so far as to wink at each other, and to touch their noses with their forefingers.

But these palace tongues wagged discreetly, and a sort of freemasonry was established in the winking of eyes and the touching of noses, to which only the select were admitted. Outside the palace tongues wagged more not so discreet. Numbers of people were busy putting two and two together, as the saying is. The saying was not sufficiently explicit in this instance, for instead of putting two and two, the gossips and the little-tattlers were busy putting one and one together. And one was Sassafraz and one was a lady. The presence of Sassafraz was always necessary for the correct doing of the sum; the lady was sometimes changed. The misfortune was that all sorts of things got mixed up together in consequence. One thing led to another, it is a truth, but there is often not the slightest relationship between one and another.

It had been decided that the proposed matrimonial alliance between King Sassafraz and the Princess Calla should be kept a profound secret; but somehow or other the news leaked out, and it was spread abroad that his Majesty declined to entertain the proposal. The numbers of good reports said as little about it as the others.

There resided in No-land a very pretty little tribe, whose family name was Quanoel. Great numbers of the members of this family were to be found in every town, city and hamlet of the kingdom. The smallest villages were not free from them. Their prying eyes were on every street, and so powerful were those eyes that they could pierce stone walls, and see what was going on inside; their tongues wagged at every corner; they stopped at every convenient post, and touched noses with a knowing air. These Quanoels made great use of their noses, for they poked them every where, especially in those places where they were least wanted. They scented the news of the King's refusal to contract an alliance with the Princess Calla as bees scent honey, and the owners of these clever features went round and about whispering to each other, and making friends of each other's noses, when they contemplated with positive affection any thing that was said. So the King would not marry? They said to one another, "Strange! was it not? (Here they winked.) There must be a reason for it. Do you know? Him? Do you? (Here they touched their noses.) Indeed! But it must not be repeated—no, not for the world. It is so strange, and the more one thought of it the stranger it was. His Majesty was often absent from the palace now! (Here they

looked mysteriously at one another.) Indeed? Oh, yes; for hours together. Perhaps he was in the palace all the while. Perhaps, if it is not the King Crabtree's nose in the King Crabtree's nose, it is the King Crabtree's nose in the King Crabtree's nose. Very mysterious very. A lady in the case (Here they winked and touched their noses, and looked knowingly at one another, all at one time.) Hush-hush! How can you? Well, we do hear yesterday that him! him! You won't tell anybody, will you? I had it from—him! In strict confidence, you know. To be continued.

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