

"I will double it for you!" replied Saxon, passionately.

"For me, Mr. Trefalden?"

Saxon was dumb. He feared he had offended her. He trembled at his temerity, and did not dare to lift his eyes to her face.

Finding he made no answer, she spoke again, in a soft, tremulous tone, that would have turned the head of St. Kevan himself.

"Why for me? What am I, that you should do more for me than you would do for my country?"

"I—I would do anything for you," faltered Saxon.

"Are you sure of that?"

"As sure as that I—"

The young man checked himself. He would have said, "as that I love you," but he lacked courage to pronounce the words. Miss Colonna knew it, however, as well as if he had said it.

"Would you jump into the sea for me, like Schiller's diver?" she asked, with a sudden change of mood, and a laugh like a peal of silver bells.

"That I would!"

"Or in among the fighting lions, like the Count de Lorge?"

"I know nothing about the Count de Lorge; but I would do for you all that a brave man dare do for a lady," replied Saxon, boldly.

"Thanks," she said, and her smile became graver as she spoke. "I think you mean what you say."

"I do. Indeed I do!"

"I believe it. Some day, perhaps, I shall put you to the proof."

With this, she gave him her hand, and he—scarcely knowing what he did, but feeling that he would cheerfully march up to a battery, or jump out of a balloon, or lie down in the path of an express train for her sake—kissed it.

And then he was so overwhelmed by the knowledge of what he had done, that he scarcely noticed how gently Miss Colonna withdrew her hand from his, and turned away.

He watched her across the terrace. She did not look back. She went thoughtfully forward, thoughtfully and slowly, with her hands clasped loosely together, and her head a little bent; but her bearing was not that of a person in anger. When she had passed into the house, Saxon drew a deep breath, and stood for a moment irresolute. Presently he swung himself lightly over the parapet, and plunged into the park.

His head was in a whirl; and he wandered about for the first half-hour or so, in a tumult of rapturous wonder and exultation—and then he suddenly remembered that he had broken his promise to William Trefalden.

In the meanwhile, Olympia went up to her father's study in the turret, and stood before him, pale and stern, like a marble statue of herself.

Colonna looked up, and pushed his papers aside.

"Well," he said eagerly, "what speed?"

"This."

"Saying which, she took a pen, deliberately filled in double the sum pencilled on the margin, and laid Saxon's cheque before him on the table.

CHAPTER XL. THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY

Had Saxon been suddenly plunged into a cold bath, it could scarcely have brought him to his senses more rapidly than did the remembrance of his broken pledge, and the thought of what his lawyer cousin would say to him.

"It isn't as if he hadn't cautioned me, either," said he, half aloud, as he sat himself down, "quite chopfallen," at the foot of a great oak, in an unfrequented hollow of the park. And then one unpleasant recollection evoked another, and he remembered how William Trefalden had joked with him about fetters of flowers, and made him almost angry by so doing; and how he had boasted of himself as more invulnerable than Achilles. He also remembered that his cousin had especially inquired whether he had not yet been called upon to subscribe to the Italian fund, and had given him much good advice as to what his conduct should be when

that emergency might arise. To put his name down for a moderate sum, and commit himself to nothing further—those were William Trefalden's instructions to him; but how had he observed them? How had he observed that other promise of signing no more large cheques without consulting his cousin; and what reliance would his cousin place upon his promises in the future?

Saxon groaned in spirit as he thought of these things; and the more he thought of them, the more uncomfortable he became.

He did not care in the least about the money, although he had, in truth, been mulcted of an enormous sum; but he cared a great deal about breaking his word, and he saw that it must be broken on the one hand or the other. He also saw on which hand it was to be.

He had given the cheque to Miss Colonna, and Miss Colonna must have the money, there was clearly no help for that. But then he entertained misgivings as to the cheque itself, and began to doubt whether he had anything like balance enough at his banker's to meet it. In this case, what was to be done? The money, of course, must be got; but who was to get it, and how was the getting of it to be achieved? Would that mysterious process called "selling out" have to be gone through?

Saxon puzzled his brains over those abstruse financial questions till his head ached; but could make nothing of them. At last he came to the very disagreeable conclusion that William Trefalden was alone capable of solving the difficulty, and must be consulted without delay; but, at the same time, he did not feel at all sure that his cousin might not flatly refuse to help him in the matter. This was a fearful supposition, and almost drove the young fellow to despair. For Saxon loved the lawyer in his simple honest way—not so much, perhaps, for any lovable qualities that he might imagine him to possess, as for the mere fact that his cousin was his cousin, and he trusted him. He had also a vague idea that William Trefalden had done a great deal to serve him, and that he owed him a profound debt of gratitude. Anyhow, he would not offend him for the universe—and yet he was quite resolved that Miss Colonna should have the full benefit of her cheque.

Thinking thus, he remembered that he had authorised her to double the amount. What if she should take him at his word?

"By Jove, then," said he, addressing a plump rabbit that had been gravely watching him from a convenient distance for some minutes past, "I can't help it if she does. The money's my own, after all, and I have the right to give it away, if I choose. Besides, I've given it in the cause of liberty!"

But his heart told him that liberty had played a very unimportant part in the transaction.

CHAPTER XLI. A COUNCIL OF WAR

In the meanwhile, a general council was being held in the octagon turret. The councillors were Signor Colonna, Lord Castletowers, and Major Vaughan, and the subjects under discussion were Baldiscrotti's despatch and Saxon Trefalden's cheque.

The despatch was undoubtedly an important one, and contained more stirring news than any which had transpired from Italy since the Napoleonic campaign; but that other document, with its startling array of numerals, was certainly not less momentous. In Major Vaughan's opinion it was the more momentous of the two; and yet his brow darkened over it, and it seemed to the two others that he was not altogether so well pleased as he might have been.

Castletowers was genuinely delighted, and as much surprised as delighted.

"It is a noble gift," said he. "I had not dreamed that Trefalden was so staunch a friend to the cause."

"I was not aware that Mr. Trefalden had hitherto interested himself about Italy in any way," observed Major Vaughan, coldly.

"Well, he has interested himself now to some purpose. Besides, he has but just come into his fortune."

Signor Colonna smoothed the cheque as it lay

before him on the desk, filled in the date, crossed it, and inserted his own name as that of the person to whom it was payable.

"I wonder what I had better do with it," said he, thoughtfully.

"With what?" asked the Earl.

Colonna pointed to the cheque with the feather end of his pen.

"Why, cash it, of course, and send the money off without delay."

The Italian smiled and shook his head. He was a better man of business than his host, and he foresaw some of those very difficulties which were the cause of so much perplexity to Saxon himself.

"It is not always easy to cash large sums," said he. "I must speak to Mr. Trefalden before I do any anything with his cheque. Is he in the house?"

To which the Earl replied that he would see; and left the room.

After he was gone, Vaughan and Colonna went back to the despatch, and discussed the position of affairs in Sicily. Thence they passed on to the question of supplies, and consulted about the best means of bestowing Saxon's donation. At last they agreed that the larger share should be sent out in money, and the rest expended on munitions of war.

"It's a heavy sum," said the dragoon. "If you want a messenger to take it over, I am at your service."

"Thanks. Can you go the day after to-morrow?"

"To-night, if you like. My time is all my own just now. By the way, who is Mr. Trefalden's banker?"

He put out his hand for the cheque as he said this, and Colonna could not do otherwise than pass it to him. After examining it for some moments in silence, he gave it back, and said:

"Are those his figures, Signor Colonna? I see they are not yours."

To which the Italian replied very composedly, "No, they are Olympia's."

Major Vaughan rose, and walked over to the window.

"I shall ask Bertaldi to give me something to do, when I am out there," he said, after a brief pause. "I have had no fighting since I came back from India, and I'm tired to death of this do-nothing life."

"Bertaldi will be only too glad," replied Colonna. "One experienced officer is worth more to us now than a squadron of recruits."

The dragoon sighed impatiently, and pulled at the ends of his moustache. It was a habit he had when he was ill at ease.

"I'm sorry for Castletowers," he said, presently. "He'd give his right hand to go over with me, and have a shot at the Neapolitans."

"I know he would; but it cannot be—it must not be. I would not countenance his going for the world," replied the Italian, quickly. "It would break his mother's heart."

"It never entered into the sphere of my calculations that Lady Castletowers had a heart," said Major Vaughan. "But you have enjoyed the advantage of her acquaintance longer than I have, so I defer to your better judgment."

At this moment the door opened, and the Earl came in alone.

"I can't find Trefalden anywhere," said he. "I've looked for him all over the house, in the stables, and all through the gardens. He was last seen on the terrace, talking to Miss Colonna, and nobody knows what has become of him since."

"He's somewhere in the park, of course," said Colonna.

"I don't think so. I met my mother as I came in. She has been wandering about the park all the morning, and has not seen him."

"If I were you, Castletowers, I'd have the Saxon dragged," said Major Vaughan, with a short, hard laugh. "He has repented of that cheque, and drowned himself in a paroxysm of despair."

"What nonsense!" said Colonna, almost angrily; but he thought it odd, for all that, and so did the Earl.

(To be continued.)