



## CHAPTER XV.—(Continued.)

TO Phoebe Perowne, sensitive and unlearned in the ways of vice, the only aspect of the place was the aspect of reckless joie de vivre. There was magic in the sheer heathenism of the scene, the wild music, now slow, seductive, wailing, pathetic almost, now fierce, unbridled, turbulently sensuous; there was magic in the garnish lights, the many moving figures, the utter abandonment of pleasure of all who filled the strange picture unfolded to her gaze. She thanked the Providence that had decreed her visit to Grimland. What greater tonic could there be to devitalised youth than to behold a community stripped naked of the mantle of civilisation, real men and real women, frankly intense in their emotions, living terrifically and fiercely in the joys of the dance and the goading strains of barbarous melody? Suddenly she saw something which caused a strange tightening of the breath, and started her heart galloping like a runaway horse in her bosom. Herr Lugner was there! One of the well-dressed, clean-cheeked men from the other side of the social world was no other than the individual who had excited her contempt and pity in the Strafeburg that afternoon. There was nothing strange in such a man, idler and hedonist, seeking his diversions in such a quarter. What was strange was that the vision of him filled her with an emotion that was dominant and intensely pleasureable. She felt that she had been waiting for this, that without it the evening would have been incomplete, that, as in the glorious ice-waltz on the frozen Rundsee, the presence of that effeminately graceful youth was an essential factor to the nameless fascination of the scene. There was no trace or suspicion of intoxication about him now. He danced firmly, lightly, vitally, like the best. She noted his partner, a bold-looking girl with handsome features, scarlet lips, and jewelled ears—and envied her. If she had longed for a partner in the ice-waltz on the Rundsee, she longed for one a thousand times more desirously in the dance of the "Persian Vaults."

For a moment she said nothing, not trusting her voice. Then she said fairly calmly to Saunders, "Cannot we dance too? I am sure I could do those steps."

Saunders smiled. "I can do the 'wolf-dance' pretty well," he said, "and I'm sure I could pilot you through without mishap. But—"

The objection came from Mrs. Perowne. "I absolutely forbid it, Phoebe," she said decisively. "It is a most unladylike measure."

Mrs. Saunders laughed outright. "It is certainly most unladylike," she agreed.

"But we are not gentlemen and ladies to-night," protested Phoebe excitedly, "we are 'night-wolves' of the Morast. If I don't dance I shall go mad."

"You are mad already to think of such a thing," said Mrs. Perowne severely. "It is absolutely imperative that you should not over-fatigue yourself, and you have had too long a day already. I was thinking of asking Mr. Saunders to take us home."

"One moment," said Saunders absentmindedly. His eyes were on "Herr Lugner," who was working his way down the room towards them. When he was quite close Fritz disengaged himself from his partner, leaving her standing against a pillar, and approached Saunders. He made the slightest possible bow to the ladies,

and then whispered in Saunders' ear.

"Stiff soil here to-night."  
"Things not going well?"  
"They are not going at all. Cross-currents at work. I meet them at every turn."

"Why is that, do you suppose?" asked Saunders.

"Someone has been here before me."  
"Major Lacherberg?" asked Saunders.

Fritz nodded. "How do you know?" he asked.

"I saw him at the 'Three Cats.' He is out for mischief."

"He was here when I came," said Fritz. "He saw me and went out, but the result of his visit was most apparent. I tried the most promising men, and as you know, I have the knack generally of getting the right side of these fellows. But I have had failure after failure. They say they come here to dance, not to turn rioters. One man was quite rude, and hinted that I was an agent provocateur. Then that fellow Langli, who is always turning up in unexpected places, came slinking up to me and hinted broadly that I should be wise to clear out."

"And Kathie?" asked Saunders, jerking his head towards Fritz's late partner.

"Kathie tells me I've got to dance with her the whole evening, and let Neumann go to predication his own way. I am inclined to think she is right, and that we shan't do much good this evening."

"And I," said Saunders, "am inclined to think any further efforts on our part are unnecessary. By now, unless I am much mistaken, Herr Neumann's brewery is wiped off the map of Weidenbruck."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Simply that I have been combining business with pleasure. I do not waste my time, even when escorting ladies through the stews of the city."

Fritz's eyes expressed the profoundest admiration. "You're a marvel," he said.

Saunders smiled complacently. "That is the second compliment I have had to-day," he said. "The hall-porter of the Concordia called me 'redoubtable.' Fritz of Friedrichsheim has called me a 'marvel.' Assuredly my obituary notices will be long and beautiful."

"Anyway," said Fritz, "as the good work has been put in hand without my assistance, I propose to rejoin Kathie and take up the broken thread of the 'wolf-dance.'"

"Hum!" said Saunders, "I thought Fritz of Friedrichsheim had sworn off—Kathies."

"To-night I am not Fritz, but Lugner the degenerate. I am going to dance with a highly coloured young woman before the eyes of a young woman whose colouring is purer than the most delicate rose that ever blushed in the gardens of Friedrichsheim. That will be torment for me. I have an idea it will be torment for her. That is at once an additional agony for me and a compensation. Behold the logic of a madman. Auf Wiedersehn! Kathie is waiting for me."

## CHAPTER XVI.

## A New Thing.

THE woman called Kathie was as well known in the "Persian Vault" as the Red Virgin was in the "Three Cats." She was a kind of queen of the "night-wolves," and hand in glove with the big men of the nether world. Handsome, reckless, wanton, she had decoyed many a rich quarry into the hands of her ruffianly confederates. Rumor said she could handle a knife herself, and in this case rumour did not lie. Saunders

and Fritz, who always recognised an "influence," even when it was a lawless one, had made a point of getting to know her. To-night Kathie had invited Fritz to dance with her, bashfulness not being one of her failings, and Fritz had accepted the honour—for so it was deemed in that locality—from motives of policy. He had so far failed to advance his propaganda, but he conceived that he might influence the men through the woman. He opened the game by stimulating a profound admiration for Kathie's undoubted charms. His gallantry met with a quick encouragement. Kathie, who was a terror to those who failed to attract her, was responsive enough to those who tickled her caprice. Apparently she was desirous of dancing with Fritz, and with no one else. He paid her frank compliments, and she repaid him with franker ones. Had he been his old self, the piquancy of the situation would have carried him away. But his oath held him, and the spirit of the oath remained inviolate.

COMPLIMENTS flowed from his lips, but not from his heart. His eyes spoke burning admiration, but his lips lied. For the moment Kathie was a sexless pawn in the game, nothing more and nothing less. Had she been hideous as a Harpy and old as Methuselah, his lips and eyes would have told the same flattering tale with the same glib mendacity.

For besides his oath and the exigencies of politics, there was another force that made mightily for discretion. And that force was a pair of solemn eyes, the eyes of Phoebe Perowne, that followed him wherever the mazes of the dance led him, that burned him with invisible but penetrating rays in every corner of the hall. The pure oval face, with its ridiculously perfect mouth, was either seen or mentally pictured at every step he took in the whirling "wolf-dance." Kathie's features he never saw, even while he praised them. The room was heavy with the reek of garlic and patchouli, but in Fritz's nostrils was the incredibly delicate aroma that had emanated from a glorious head of hair when waltzing that morning on the Rundsee. At the present moment his arm was round a strong and supple waist, the waist of a young woman, coarsely vitalised, barbarously exuberant. In the ice-waltz he had held a goddess—that was the difference. When one being so outshone her sex, what was Kathie, what was any woman? When daintiness and seraphic demureness were throned incarnate in the flawless Phoebe, what were compliments to a bold-featured, savage-souled daughter of the Morast?

Sometimes, when his imagination triumphed over actuality, and he almost believed himself repeating the pulsing ecstasy of the ice-waltz, his head reeled among the stars, and the blood rushed through his frame in a riot of sheer bliss. Then at the pitch of his exaltation the cold truth would stab at his heart like a weapon of frozen steel. It was before Phoebe Perowne that he had appeared everything that was despicable, cowardly, intemperate, debauched. And now, perhaps in his role of fashionable roue seeking pleasure in a tawdry dancing-saloon of slum-land, he appeared worst of all.

It was dull, cruel torment to appear thus, but he bore the pain voluntarily, voluntarily increased it. The matchless English girl had come into his life just when he wished it empty of woman. As his resolution was strong, the cry of the flesh was strong also. Love was a thing he did not understand, because he had not yet learned to reverence woman. His soul was



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