BARLASCH OF THE GUARD

By Henry Seton Merriman

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued).

The Emperor of Russia had been taken prisoner. Napoleon had been checked at the passage of the Niemen. There had been a great battle at Gumbinnen, and the French were in full retreat. Vilna had capitulated to Murat, and the war was at an end. A hundred authentic dispatches of the morning were the subject of contemptuous laughter at the supper table.

Lisa heard these tales in the marketplace and told Desiree, who, as often as not, translated them to Barlasch. But he only held up his wrinkled forefinger and shook it slowly from side to side.

"Woman's chatter!" he said. "What is the German for 'magpie'?"

And on being told the word he repeated it gravely to Lisa. For he had not only fulfilled his promise of settling down in the house, but had assumed therein a distinct and clearly defined position. He was the counsellor, and from his chair, just within the kitchen, he gave forth judbment.

"And you," he said to Desiree, one morning, when household affairs had taken her to the kitchen, "you are troubled this morning. You have had a letter from your husband?"

"Yes—and he is in good health."

"Ah!"

Barlasch glanced at her beneath his brows, looking her up and down, noting her quick movements, which had the uncertainty of youth.

"And now that he is gone," he said, "and that there is war, you are going to employ yourself by falling in love with him, when you had all the time before and did not take advantage of it."

Desiree laughed at him, and made no other answer. While she spoke to Lisa he sat and watched them.

"It would be like a woman to do such a thing," he pursued. "They are so inconvenient—women. They get married for fun, and then, one fine Thursday, they find they have missed all the fun, like one who comes late to the theatre—when the music is over."

He went to the table and examined the morning marketing, which Lisa had laid out in preparation for dinner. Of some of her purchases he approved, but he laughed aloud at a lettuce which had no heart, and at such a buyer.

Then Desiree attracted his scrutiny again.

"Yes," he said, half to himself, "I see it. You are in love. Just Heaven, I know! I have them in love with me—Barlasch."

"That must have been a long time ago," answered Desiree, with her gay laugh, only giving him half her attention.

"Yes, it was a century ago. But they were the same then as they are now, as they will always be—inconvenient. They waited, however, till they were grown up!"

And with his ever-ready accusing finger he drew Desiree's attention to her own slimness. They were left alone for a minute while Lisa answered a knock at the door, during which time Barlasch sat in grim silence.

"It is a letter," said Lisa returning. "A sailor brought it."

"Another?" said Barlasch, with a gesture of despair.

"Can you give me news of Charles?" Desiree read, in a writing that was unknown to her. "I shall wait a reply until midnight on board the Esa, lying off the Krahn-Thor." The letter bore the signature "Louis d'Arragon." Desiree turned away slowly and went upstairs, carrying it folded small in her closed hand.

She was alone in the house, for Mathilde was out, and her father had not yet returned from his evening walk. She stood at the head of the stairs, where the last of the daylight filtered through the barred window, and read the letter again. Then she turned and gave a slight start to see Barlasch at the foot of the stairs beckoning to her. He made no attempt to come up, but stood on the mat, like a dog that has been forbidden the upper rooms.

"Is it about your father?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"No!"

He made a gesture commanding secrecy and silence. Then he went to close the kitchen-door and returned on tiptoe.

"It is," he explained, "that they are talking of him in the cafes. There are to be many arrests to-morrow. They say the patron is one of them, and employs himself in plotting. That his name is not Sebastian at all. That he is a French noble who escaped the guilotine. What do I know? It is the gossip of the cafes. But I tell you it because we are friends, you and I. And some day I may want you to do something for me. One thinks of oneself, eh? It is good to make friends. For some day one may want them. That is why I do it. I think of myself—an old soldier—of the Guard."

With many faces of tremendous import, and a face all wrinkled and twisted with mystery, he returned to the kitchen.

Mathilde was not to return until late. She had gone to the house of the old Grafin whose reminiscences had been a fruitful topic at Desiree's wedding. After dining there she and the Grafin were to go together to a farewell reception given by the governor. For Rapp was bound for the frontier with the rest, and was to go to the war as first aide-de-camp to the Emperor.

Mathilde could not be back until ten o'clock. She, who was so quick and quiet, had been much occupied in social observances lately, and had made fast friends with the Grafin during the last few days, constantly going to see her.

Desiree knew that what Barlasch had repeated as the gossip of the cafes was in part, if not wholly, true. She and Mathilde had long known that any mention of France had the instant effect of turning their father into a man of stone. It was the skeleton in this quiet house that sat at table with its inmates, a shadowy fourth, tying their tongues. The rattle of its bones seemed to paralyze Sebastian's mind, and at any moment he would fall into a dumb and stricken apathy which terrified those about him. At such times it seemed that one thought in his mind had swallowed all the rest, so that he heard without understanding, and saw without perceiving.

He was in such a humor when he came back to dinner. He passed Desiree on the stairs without speaking, and went to his room to change his clothes, for he never relaxed his normal habits. At the dinner-table he glanced at her as a dog, knowing that secret air at his master, wondering whether he is detected.

Desiree had always hoped that her father would speak to her when this humor was upon him, and tell her the meaning of it. Perhaps it would come to-night, when they were alone. There was an unspoken sympathy existing between them in which Mathilde took no share, which had even shut out Charles as out of a room where there was no light, into which Desiree and her father went at times and stood hand in hand without speaking.

They dined in silence, while Lisa hurried about her duties, oppressed by a sense of unknown fear. After dinner they went to the drawing-room as usual. It had been a dull day, with great clouds creeping up from the west. The evening fell early, and the lamps were already alight. Desiree looked to the wicks with the eye of experience when she entered the room. Then she went to the window. Lisa did not always draw the curtains effectually. She glanced down into the street, and turned suddenly on her heel, facing her father.

"They are there," she said. For she had seen shadowy forms lurking beneath the trees of the Frauengasse. The street was ill-lighted, but she knew the shadows of the trees.

"How many?" asked Sebastian, in a dull voice.

She glanced at him quickly—at his still, frozen face and quiescent hands. He was not going to rise to the occasion, as he sometimes did even from his deepest apathy. She must do alone anything that was to be accomplished to-night.

The house, like many in the Frauengasse, had been built by a careful Hanseatic merchant, whose warehouse was his own cellar half-sunk beneath the level of the street. The door of the warehouse was immediately under the front door, down a few steps below the street, while a few more steps, broad and footworn, led up to the stone veranda and the level of the lower dwelling-rooms. A guard placed in the street could thus watch both doors without moving.

There was a third door, giving exit from the little room where Barlasch slept to the small yard where he had placed those trunks which were made in France.

Desiree had no time to think. She came of a race of women of a quicker wit than any women in the world. She took her father by the arm and hastened down-stairs. Barlasch was at his post within the kitchen-door. His eyes shone suddenly as he saw her face. It was said of Papa Barlasch that he was a gay man in battle, laughing and making a hundred jests, but all other times lugubrious. Desiree saw him smile for the first time, in the dim light of the passage.

"They were there in the street," he said; "I have seen them. I thought you would come to Barlasch. They all do—the women. In here. Leave him to me. When they ring the bell, receive them yourself—with smiles. They are only men. Let them search the house if they want to. Tell them he has gone to the reception with mademoiselle.

"As he spoke the bell rang just above his head. He looked up at it and laughed.

"Ah, ah!" he said, "the fanfare begins."

He drew Sebastian within and closed the door of his little room. Lisa had already gone to answer the bell. When she opened the door three men stepped quickly over the threshold, and one of them, thrusting her aside, closed the door and turned the key. Desiree, in her white evening dress, on the bottom step, just beneath the lamp that hung from the ceiling, made them pause and look at each other. Then one of the three came toward her, hat in hand.

"Our duty, fraulein," he said, awkwardly. "We are but obeying orders. A mere formality. It will all be explained, no doubt, if the householder, Antoine Sebastian, will put on his hat and come with us."

"His hat is not there, as you see," answered Desiree. "You must seek him elsewhere."

The man shook his head with a knowing smile. "We must seek him in this house," he said. "We will make it as easy for you as we can, fraulein—if you make it easy for us."

As he spoke he produced a candle from his pocket, and encouraged the broken wick with his finger-nail.

"It will make it pleasanter for all," said Desiree, cheerfully, "if you will accept a candlestick."

The man glanced at her. He was a heavy man, with little, suspicious eyes, set close together. He seemed to be concluding that she had outwitted him—that Sebastian was not in the house.

"Where are the cellar stairs?" he asked. I warn you, fraulein, it is useless to conceal your father. We shall, of course, find him."

Desiree pointed to the door next to that giving entry to the kitchen. It was bolted and locked. Desiree found the key for them. She not only gave them every facility, but was anxious that they should be as quick as possible. They did not linger in the cellar, which, though vast, was empty; and when they returned, Desiree, who was waiting for them, led the way upstairs.

They were rather abashed by her silence. They would have preferred protestations and argument. Discussion always belittles. The smile recommended by Papa Barlasch, lurking at the corner of her lips, made them feel foolish. She was so slight and young and helpless that a sort of shame rendered them clumsy.

They felt more at home in the kitchen, when they got back there, and the sight of Lisa, sturdy and defiant, reminded them of the authority upon which Desiree had somehow cast a mystic contempt.

"There is a door there," said the heavy official, with a brusque return of his early manner. "Come, what is that door?"

"That is a little room."

"Then open it."

"I cannot," returned Lisa. "It is locked."

"Aha!" said the man, with a laugh of much meaning. "On the inside, eh?"

He went to it and banged on it with his fist.

"Come," he shouted, "open it and be done."

There was a short silence, during which those in the kitchen listened breathlessly. A shuffling sound inside the door made the officer of the law turn and beckon to his two men to come closer.

Then, after some fumbling, as of one in the dark, the door was unlocked and slowly opened.

Papa Barlasch stood in a very primitive night-apparel within the door. He had not done things by halves, for he was an old campaigner, and knew that a thing half done is better left undone in times of war. He noted the presence of Desiree and Lisa, but was not ashamed. The reason of it was soon apparent. For Papa Barlasch was drunk, and the smell of drink came out of his apartment in a warm wave.

"It is the soldier billeted in the house," explained Lisa, with a half-hysterical laugh.

Then Barlasch harangued them in the language of intoxication. If he had not spared Desiree's feelings, he spared her ears less now; for he was an ignorant man, who had lived through a brutal period in the world's history the roughest life a man can lead. Two of the men held him with difficulty against the wall, while the third hastily searched the room—where, indeed, no one could well be concealed.

Then they quited the house, followed by the polyglot curses of Barlasch, who was now endeavoring to find his bayonet amidst his chaotic possessions.

CHAPTER IX.

The Golden Guess.

"The golden guess
Is morning star to the full round of truth."

Barlasch was never more sober in his life than when he emerged a minute later from his room, while Lisa was still feverishly bolting the door. He had not wasted much time at his toilet. In his flannel shirt, his arms bare to the elbow, knotted and muscular, he looked like some rude son of toil.

"One thinks of oneself," he hastened to explain to Desiree, fearing that she might ascribe some other motive to his action. "Some day the patron may be in power again, and then he will remember a poor soldier. It is good to think of the future."

He shook his head pessimistically at Lisa as belonging to a sex liable to error—instanced in this case by bolting the door too eagerly.

"Now," he said, turning to Desiree again, "have you any in Dantzig to help you?"

"Yes," she answered, rather slowly.

"Then send for him."

"I cannot do that."

"Then go for him yourself," snapped Barlasch, impatiently.

He looked at her fiercely beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

"It is no use to be afraid," he said, "you are afraid—I see it in your face. And it is never any use. Before they hammered on that door there my legs shook. For I am easily afraid.—I. But it is never any use. And when one opens the door, it goes."

He looked at her with a puzzled frown, seeking in vain, it may have been, the ordinary symptoms of fear. She was hesitating, but not afraid. There ran blood in her veins which will for all time be associated by history with a gay and indomitable courage.

"Come," he said, sharply; "there is nothing else to do."

"I will go," said Desiree, at length, deciding suddenly to do the one thing that is left to a woman once or twice in her life—to go to the one man and trust him.

"By the way back," said Bartasch helping her with the cloak that Lisa had brought, and pulling the hood forward over her face with a jerk. "Ah, I know that way. The patron is hiding in the yard. An old soldier looks to the retreat—though the Emperor has saved us that so far. Come, I will help you over the wall, for the door is rusted."

The way, which Barlasch had perceived, led through the room at the back of the kitchen to a yard and thence through a door not opened by the present occupiers of the old house, into a very labyrinth of narrow alleys running downward to the river and round the tall houses that stand against the cathedral walls.

The wall was taller than Barlasch, but he ran at it like a cat, and Desiree standing below could see the black outline of his limbs crouching on the top. He stooped down, and, grasping her hands, lifted her by the sheer strength of one arm, balancing her for an instant on the wall, and then lowered her on the outer side.

"Run," he whispered.

She knew the way, and although the night was dark, and these narrow alleys between high walls had no lamps, Desiree lost no time. The Krahn-Thor is quite near to the Frauengasse. Indeed, the whole of Dantzig occupied but a small space between the rivers in those straightened days. The town was quieter than it had been for months, and Desiree passed unmolested through the narrow streets. She made her way to the quay, passing through the low gateway known as the door of the Holy Ghost, and here found people still astir. For the commerce that thrives on the northern river is paralyzed all the winter and feverishly active when the ice has gone.

"The Elsa," replied a woman, who had been selling bread all day on the quay and was now packing up her stall, "you ask for the Elsa. There is such a ship, I know. But how can I say which she is? See, there lie right across the river like a bridge. Besides, it is late, and sailors are rough men."

Desiree hurried on. Louis d'Arragon had said that the ship was lying near the Krahn-Thor, of which the great hooded roof loomed darkly against the stars above her. She was looking about her when a man came forward with the hesitating step of one who has been told to wait the arrival of someone unknown to him.

"The Elsa," she said to him; "which ship is it?"

"Come along with me, mademoiselle," the man replied, "though I was not told to look for a woman."

He spoke in English, which Desiree hardly understood; for she had never heard it from English lips, and looked for the first time on one of that race which all the world waited now for salvation. For the English, of all the nations, were the only men who from the first had consistently defied Napoleon.

The sailor led the way toward the river. As he passed the lamp burning dimly above some steps, Desiree saw that he was little more than a boy. He turned and offered her his hand, with a shy laugh, and together they stood at the bottom of the steps with the water lapping at their feet.

"Have you a letter?" he said, "or will you come on board?"

Then, perceiving that she did not understand, he repeated the question in German.

"I will come on board," she answered.

The Elsa was lying in the middle of the river, and the boat into which Desiree stepped shot across the water without sound of oars. The sailor was paddling it noiselessly at the stern. Desiree was not unused to boats, and when they came alongside the Elsa she climbed on board without help.

"This way," said the sailor, leading her foward the deck-house, where a light burned dimly behind red curtains. He knocked at the door, and opened it without awaiting a reply. In the little cabin two men sat at a table, and one of them was Louis d'Arragon, dressed in the rough clothes of a merchant seaman. He seemed to recognize Desiree at once, though she still stood without the door, in the darkness

"You?" he said in surprise. "I did not expect you, madame. You want me?"

"Yes," answered Desiree, stepping over the companion. Louis' companion, who was also a sailor, coarsely clad, rose and, awkwardly taking off his cap, hurried to the door, murmuring some vague apology. It is not always the roughest men who have the worst manners toward women.

He closed the door behind him, leaving Desiree and Louis looking at each other by the light of an oil lamp that flickered and gave forth a greasy smell. The little cabin was smoke-ridden, and smelt of ancient tar. It was no bigger than the table in the drawing-room in the Frauengasse, across which he had bowed to her in farewell a few days earlier, little knowing when and where they were to meet again. For fate can turn a surprise better than the human fancy.

Behind the curtain, the window stood open, and the high, clear song of the wind through the rigging filled the little cabin with a continuous minor note of warning which must have been part of his life; for he must have heard it, as all sailors do, sleeping or waking, night and day.

He was probably so accustomed to it that he never heeded it. But it filled Desiree's ears, and wherever she heard it in after life, in memory this moment came again to her, and she looked back to it, as a traveller may look back to a milestone at a cross-road, and wonder where his journey might have ended had he taken another turning.

"My father," she said quickly, "is in danger. There is no one else in Dantzig to whom we can turn, and——"

She paused. What was she going to add? She hesitated, and then was silent. There was no reason why she should have elected to come to him. At all events, she gave none.

"I am glad I was in Dantzig when it happened," he said, turning to take up his cap, which was of rough, dark fur, such as seamen wear even in summer at night in the northern seas.

"Come," he added, "you can tell me as we go ashore."

"Come," he added, you can tell me as we go ashore."

But they did not speak while the sailor sculled the boat to the steps. On the quay they would probably pass unnoticed, for there were many strange sailors at this time in Dantzig, and Louis d'Arragon might easily pass for one of the French seamen who had brought stores by sea from Bourdeaux and Brest and Cherbourg.

"Now tell me," he said, as they walked side by side; and in voluble French, Desiree launched into her story. It was rather incoherent by reason, perhaps, of its frankness.

"Stop—stop," he interrupted, gravely, "who is Barlasch?"

Louis walked rather slowly in his stiff sea-boots, at her side, and she instinctively spoke less rapidly as she explained the part that Barlasch had played.

"And you trust him?"

"Of course," she answered.

"But why?"

"Oh, you are so matter-of-fact," she exclaimed; "I do not know. Because he is trustworthy, I suppose."

She continued the story, but suddenly stopped and looked up at him under the shadow of her hood.

"You are silent," she said. "Do you know something about my father of which I am ignorant? Is that it?"

"No," he answered, "I am trying to follow—that is all. You leave so much to my imagination."

"But I have no time to explain things," she protested. "Every moment is of value. I will explain all these things some other time. At this moment all I can think of is my father and the danger he is in. If it had not been for Barlasch he would have been in prison by now. And as it is, the danger is only half-averted. For he, himself, is so little help. All must be done for him. He will do nothing for himself while this humor is upon him; you understand?"

"Partly," he answreed slowly.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, half-impatiently, "one sees that you are an Englishman."

And she found time, even in her hurry, to laugh. For she was young enough to float buoyant upon that sea of hope which ebbs in the course of years and leaves men stranded on the hard facts of life.

"You forget," he said, in self-defence.

"I forget what?"

"That a week ago I had never seen Dantzig, or your father, or your sister, or the Frauengasse. A week ago I did not know that there was anybody called Sebastian in the world—and did not care."

"Yes," she admitted thoughtfully, "I had forgotten that."

And they walked on in silence, a long way, till they came to the Gate of the Holy Ghost.

"But you can help me to escape?" she said, at length, as if following the course of her own thoughts.

"Yes," he answered, and that was all. He was, it seemed, a person of few words. Or he had, perhaps, acquired the habit of taciturnity while living among men whose daily speech is "yea, yea," or "nay, nay."

They passed through the smaller streets in silence, and Desiree led the way into a narrow alley running between the street of the Holy Ghost and the Frauengasse.

"There is the wall to be climbed," she said, but as she spoke the door giving exit to the alley was cautiously opened by Barlasch.

"A little oil," he whispered, "and it was soon done."

The yard was dark within, for there might be watchers at any of the windows above them in the pointed gables that made patterns against the star-lit sky.

"All is well," said Barlasch; "those sons of dogs have not returned, and the patron is waiting in the kitchen, cloaked and ready for a journey. He has collected himself—the patron."

He led the way through his own room, which was dark, save for a shaft of lamp-light coming from the kitchen. He looked back keenly at Louis d'Arragon.

"Salut!" he growled, scowling at his boots. "A sailor," he muttered, after a pause. "Good. She has her wits at the top of the basket—that child."

Desiree was throwing back her hood, and looking at her father with a reassuring smile.

"I have brought Monsieur d'Arragon," she said, "to help us."

For Sebastian had not recognized the new-comer. He now bowed in his stiff way and began a formal apology, which d'Arragon cut short with a short gesture.

"It is the least I can do," he said. "In the absence of Charles. Have you money?"

"Yes—a little."

"You will require money and a few clothes. I can get you a passage to Riga or to Helsinborg to-night. From there you can communicate with your daughter. Events will follow each other rapidly. One never knows what a week may bring forth in time of war. It may be safe for you to return soon. Come, Monsieur, we must go."

Sebastian made a gesture with his outspread arms, half of protestation, half of acquiescence. It was plain that he had no sympathy with these modern hurried methods of meeting the emergencies of daily life. A valise, packed and strapped, lay on the table. D'Arragon weighed it in his hand, and then lifted it to his shoulder.

"Come, monsieur," he repeated, leading the way through Barlasch's room to the yard. "And you," he added, addressing himself to that soldier, "shut the door behind us."

With another gesture of protest, Sebastian gathered his cloak round him and followed. D'Arragon had taken Desiree so literally at her word that he allowed her father no time for hesitation, nor a moment to say farewell.

She was alone in the kitchen before she had realized that they were going. In a minute Barlasch returned. She could hear him setting in order the room, which had been hurriedly disorganized in order to open the door leading to the yard, where her father had concealed himself. He was muttering to himself, as he lifted the furniture.

Coming back into the kitchen, he found Desiree standing where he had left her. Glancing at her, he scratched his grey head in a plebeian way, and gave a little laugh.

"Yes," he said, pointing to the spot where d'Arragon had stood. "That was a man that you fetched to help us—a man. It makes a difference when such as that goes out of the room—eh?"

He busied himself in the kitchen, setting in order that which remained of the mise en scene of his violent reception of the secret police. Suddenly he turned in his emphatic manner and threw out his rugged forefinger, to hold her attention.

"If there had been some like that in Paris, there would have been no revolution. Za-za, za-za!" he concluded, imitating effectively the buzz of many voices in an assembly. "Words and not deeds," Barlasch protested. Whereas to-night, he clearly showed by two gestures, they had met a man of deeds.

CHAPTER X.

In Deep Water.

Le coeur humain est un abime qui trompe tous les calculs.

It is to be presumed that Colonel de Casimir met friends at the reception given by Governor Rapp in the great rooms of the Rathhaus. For there were many Poles present, and not a few officers of other nationalities.

The army, indeed, that set forth to conquer Russia was not a French-speaking army. Less than half of the regiments were of that nationality, while Italians, Bavarians, Saxons, Wurtemburgers, Westphalians, Prussians, Swiss, and Portuguese went gaily forward on the great venture. There were soldiers from the numerous petty states of the German Confederation which acknowledged Napoleon as their protector, for the good reason that they could not protect themselves against him. Finally, there were those Poles who had fought in Spain for Napoleon, hoping that in return he would some day set the ancient kingdom upon its feet among the nations. Already the whisperers pointed to Davoust as the future king of the new Poland.

Many present at the farewell reception of the Governor carried a sword, though they were the merest civilians, plotting, counterplotting, and whispering a hundred rumors. Perhaps Rapp himself, speaking bluff French with a German accent, was as honest as any man in the room, though he lacked the polish of the Parisians, and had not the subtlety of the Pole. Rapp was not a shining light in these brilliant circles. He was a governor not for peace, but for war. His day was yet to come.

Such men as de Casimir shrugged their supple shoulders at his simple talk. They spoke of him half-contemptuously as of one who had had a thousand chances and had never taken them. He was not even rich, and he had handled great sums of money. He was only a general, and he had slept in the Emperor's tent—had had access to him in every humor. He might do the same again in the coming campaign. He was worth cultivating. De Casimir and his like were full of smiles which in no wise deceived the shrewd Alsatian.

Mathilde Sebastian was among the ladies to whom these brilliant warriors paid their uncouth compliments. Perhaps de Casimir was aware that her measuring eyes followed him wherever he went. He knew, at all events, that he could hold his own amid these adventurers, many of whom had risen from the ranks; while others, from remote northern states, had birth, but no manners at all. He was easy and gay, carrying lightly that subtle air of distinction which is vouchsafed to many Poles.

"Here to-day, mademoiselle, and gone to-morrow," he said. "All these eager soldiers. And who can tell which of us may return-"

If he expected Mathilde to flinch at this reminder of his calling, he was disappointed. Her eyes were hard and bright. She had had so few chances of moving amidst this splendor, of seeing close at hand the greatness which Napoleon shed around him as the sun its rays. She was carried away by the spirit of the age. Anything was better she felt, than obscurity.

"And who can tell," whispered de Casimir, with a careless and confident laugh, "which of us shall come back rich and great?"

This brought the glance from her dark eyes for which his own lay waiting. She was certainly beautiful, and wore the difficult dress of that day with assurance and grace. She possessed something which the German ladies about her lacked; something which many suddenly lack when a Frenchwoman is near.

His manner, half-respectful, half-triumphant, betrayed an understanding to which he did not refer in words. She had bestowed some favor upon him—had acceded to some request. He hoped for more. He had overstepped some barrier. She, who should have measured the distance, had allowed him to come too close. The barriers of love are one-sided; there is no climbing back.

"A hundred envious eyes are watching me," he said, in an undertone, as he passed on; "I dare not stay longer. I am on duty to-night."

She bowed, and watched him go. She was, it would seem, aware of that fallen barrier. She had done nothing, had permitted nothing from weakness. There was no weakness at all, perhaps, in Mathilde Sebastian. She had the quiet manner of a skilled card-player with folded cards laid face down upon the table, who knows what is in her hand and is waiting for the foe to lead.

De Casimir did not see her again. In such a throng it would have been difficult to find her had he so desired. But, as he had told her, he was on duty to-night. There were to be a hundred arrests before dawn. Many who were laughing and talking with the French officers to-night were already in the grasp of Napoleon's secret police, and would drive straight from the door of the Rathhaus to the town prison or to the old Watch-house in the Portchaisengasse. Others, moving through the great rooms with a high head, were already condemned out of their own bureaux and escritoires now being rifled by the Emperor's spies.

The Emperor himself had given the order, before quitting Dantzig, to take command of the maddest and greatest enterprise conceived by the mind of man. There was nothing above the reach of his mind, it seemed, and nothing too low for him to bend down and touch. Every detail had been considered by himself. He was like a man who, having an open wound on his back, attends to it hurriedly before showing an undaunted face to the enemy.

His inexorable finger had come down on the name of Antoine Sebastian, figuring on all the secret reports — first in many.

"Who is this man?" he asked, and none could answer.

He had gone to the frontier without awaiting the solution to the question. Such was his method now. He had so much to do that he could but skim the surface of his task. For the human mind, though it be colossal, can only work within certain limits. The greatest orator in the world can only move his immediate hearers. Those beyond the inner circle catch a word here and there, and imagination supplies the rest or improves upon it. But those in the farthest gallery hear nothing and see a little man gestulating.

De Casimir was not intrusted with the execution of the Emperor's orders. He had nothing to do with the secret police. As a member of General Rapp's staff, resident in Dantzig since the city's occupation by the French, he had been called upon to make exhaustive reports upon the feeling of the burghers. There were many doubtful cases. De Casimir did not pretend to be better than his fellows. To some he had sold the benefit of the doubt. Some had paid willingly enough for their warning. Others had put off the payment; for there were many Jews then, as now, in Dantzig; slow payers requiring something stronger than a threat to make them disburse.

De Casimir therefore quitted the Rathhaus among the first to go, and walked through the busy streets to his rooms in the Langemarkt, where he not only lived, but had a small office, to which orderlies and aide-de-camp came by day or night. Two sentries kept guard on the pavement. Since the spring, this office had been one of the busiest military posts in Dantzig. Its doors were open at all hours, and in truth many of de Casimir's assistants preferred to transact their business in the dark.

There might be some recalcitrant debtor driven by stress of circumstance to clear his conscience to-night. It would be as well, de Casimir thought, to be at one's post. Nor was he mistaken. Though it was only ten o'clock two men were awaiting his return, and, their business dispatched, de Casimir deemed it wise to send away his assistants. Immediately after they had gone a woman came. She was half-distracted with fear, and the tears ran down her pallid cheeks. But she dried them at the mention of de Casimir's price, and fell to abusing him.

"If your husband is innocent there is all the more reason why he should be grateful to me for warning him," he said, with a smile. And at last the lady paid and went away.

The town-clocks had struck eleven before another footstep on the pavement made de Casimir raise his head. He did not actually expect anyone, but a certain surreptitiousness in the approach of this visitor, and the low knock on the door, made him suspect that this was grist for his mill.

He opened the door and, seeing that it was a woman, stepped back. When she entered, he closed the door, while she stood watching him in the dark passage, beneath the shadow of her hood. Knowing the value of such small details, he locked the door rather ostentatiously and dropped the key into his pocket.

"And now, madame," he said, reassuringly, as he followed his visitor into the room, where a shaded lamp lighted his writing-table. She threw back her hood, and it was Mathilde! The surprise on de Casimir's face was genuine enough. Romance could not have brought about this visit, nor love be its motive.

"Something has happened," he said, looking at her doubtfully.

"Where is my father?" was the reply.

"Unless there has been some mistake," he answered, glibly, "he is at home in bed."

She smiled contemptuously into his innocent face.

"There has been a mistake," she said; "they came to arrest him to-night."

De Casimir made a gesture of anger, and seemed to be mentally assigning a punishment to some blunderer.

"And?" he asked, without looking at her.

"And he escaped."

"For the moment?"

"No; he has left Dantzig."

Something in her voice—the cold note of warning—made him glance uneasily at her. This was not a woman to be deceived, and yet she was womanly enough to fear deception and to resent her own fears, visiting her anger on any who aroused them. In the flash of an eye he understood her, and forestalled the words that were upon her lips.

"And I promised that he should come to no harm—I know that," he said quickly. "At first I thought that it must have been a blunder, but on reflection I am sure that it is not. It is the Emperor. He must have given the order for the arrest himself, behind my back. That is his way. He trusts no one. He deceives those nearest to him. I made out the list of those to be arrested to-night, and you father's name was not in it. Do you believe me? Mademoiselle, do you believe me?"

It was only natural in such a man to look for disbelief. The air he breathed was infected by suspicion. No deception was too small for the great man whom he served. Mathilde made no answer.

"You came here to accuse me of having deceived you," he said, rather anxiously. "Is that it?"

She nodded, without meeting his eyes. It was not the truth. She had come to hear his defence, hoping against hope that she might be able to believe him.

"Mahtilde," he asked, slowly, "do you believe me?"

He came a step nearer, looking down at her averted face, which was oddly white. Then suddenly she turned, without lifting her eyes—and was in his arms. It seemed that she had done it against her will, and it took him by surprise. He had thought that she was trying to attract his love because she believed in his capability to make his fortune like so many soldiers of France, that she was only playing a woman's subtle game. And after all, she was like the rest — a little cleverer, a little colder—but like the rest.

While his arms were still round her, his quick mind leapt forward to the future; wondering already to what end this would lead them. For a moment he was taken aback. He was over the last of those barriers which are so easy from the outside and unclimable from within. She had thrust into his hands a power greater than, for the moment, he knew how to wield. It was characteristic of him to think first whither it would lead him, and next how he could turn it to good account.

Some instinct told him that this was a different love to any that he had met before. The same instinct made him understand that it was crying aloud to be convinced; and, oddly enough, he told her the truth.

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