

THE WAY OF THE GODS

A Musical Romance

Two souls seemed to have for a while but a single thought expressed in the great language of music. Then something happened. Not the ordinary cloud of sentiment; something more sinister—a way the world has now-a-days with individuals

By ETHEL KIRK GRAYSON

shivered, and could not bring herself to even think the word "spy."

"Will you have tea served here, Miss Armour?"
"Oh, no, Palmer. It is too terribly desolate. In the drawing-room, please."

Even tea and buttered muffins failed to dispel the thousand and one reminiscences that irritated her. Every word, every glance, would seem now to have had its double meaning. How many months, was it, she wondered sadly, since she had first gone up to London to become the pupil of the famous young Warsaw pianist, and had ended by becoming his betrothed.

Lady Grover entered volubly. "This organization business is going to take a whole lot out of me, Helen. I've fairly lived in a motor since the beginning of things, and knitting every minute of the time. Couldn't you contrive to help me a little more?"

Helen smiled wanly.
"I'll make an effort, Aunt Miriam, after I've settled up one or two other matters."

"I surely hope so. Max coming to-night?"
"Yes, to stay till to-morrow night."

"Well, I won't join you at dinner, then. It takes too much time to dress. Just have Palmer send a tray to my room, will you? You'll drive to the station for him, of course?"
"Oh, yes, I suppose so."

Lady Grover took her tea with despatch, and was up and away again.

A little while later Helen drove slowly through the September gloaming. A red-throated bird chirped plaintively from the hedge-rows, now a gorgeous tangle of briar and berry, and flaming leaves. The road wound white through the purple stillness; a faint apricot glow still lingered in the sky.

SHE felt constrained when she met him, but he had always talked more than she did, and so the drive home was not quite as difficult as she had anticipated. He was very foreign and distinguished in his flaring grey coat, and the soft grey hat pulled low over the heavy shock of hair, she thought, and he chatted tirelessly of opera and drama, the war, the army, the navy, the munition factories. Was it all a part of his training? She almost screamed.

The tete-a-tete dinner followed.
"May I smoke on the terrace?" he asked, when it was finished.

"Certainly. Would you like me to join you?"
For one fraction of an instant he seemed to hesitate.

"Why—yes, indeed. What could be more charming?"

"Then I'll come in a few minutes." She left the room, only to walk quietly into the garden by a side door. There was a feverish flush in her cheeks, now, and her eyes were dangerously bright.

She saw him come out on the terrace, look carefully around him, as if for her, and then go inside again. She waited tensely—she could scarcely have told why. The windows of his room faced the sea. She knew instinctively that he had gone there. She crouched behind a great lilac bush, and then she saw him clearly, standing by the broad window. He was holding a lighted candle in each hand—or were they torches?

Still looking far over the darkened sea he waved them in a series of signals. She did not think of the meaning that they might convey. She only realized the horrible truth of it all.

He disappeared, and Helen ran swiftly from her shelter, and up the steps of the terrace.

"I have decided not to stay with you, Maxim. I have a desperate headache, and I think I shall go to my room at once."

ALL day the woman had walked aimlessly in the garden. Between its grey cliff walls, the beds of late verbena were already turning to a dusty purple, and the geranium leaves becoming old and russet, she felt a curious sense of isolation. Here, at least, no prying eye might detect the strange restlessness that had come over her—that uncertainty of mind and spirit by which she was obsessed.

The long wash of the sea met her gaze, leaden and wavering as her own thoughts. Sometimes a gull dived and wheeled, or a dejected white sail came into view on the far horizon.

She was scarcely sensible of that harmony of nature with her own mentality. In mechanical precision, queer, black little notes danced before her like the music that the morning's mail had brought. It had not been addressed to her, but she had opened it, as she had done once before in one of her careless, light-hearted moments. To the unsuspecting mind the dots and dashes, breves and semi-breves, would have meant nothing unusual. But the woman in the garden knew that they formed a cipher.

Yet she had far greater cause of distrust. Her thoughts reverted to the patriotic matinee in London, a week before, which even Royalty had honoured with its presence. Helen Armour remembered how she had leaned eagerly forward in her chair, her eyes intent upon the young pianist. How gaily he had executed that quaint old Polish mazurka, as if he were living his boyhood over in each rollicking strain! A shock of fair hair fell over his brow, and well nigh obscured his vision. "The privilege of a genius to be untidy," she had been wont to tell him, laughingly.

She could not remember what he had played next, but it was something of Mozart's, with a melody that was more a sorrow than a joy, and sublime crashing chords that drowned the sense in an exaltation of the spirit.

She had looked around in dewy-eyed wonderment. Did these others appreciate his divine gift in the same measure as she herself? Yes, everyone was speaking excitedly of the artist from Warsaw. Then her gaze fell upon a woman in the box opposite her, and remained fixed.

She had seen her before, a willowy figure in scintillating black draperies. Her face was oval and expressionless, after the manner of the mediaeval paintings; her pale brown hair framed it closely, and in her light blue orbs there was only a languid indifference.

Helen Armour caught her breath quickly. This was the woman she had seen at Bonne, only the summer before. They had been walking under a shady green avenue when she encountered them, with a little foreign exclamation of surprise, and a hand laid imperiously on Maxim's arm. He had not come to see her that evening—pleading preparation for the morrow's exertions as an excuse, when he was to play before a Grand Duchess, and her interminable retinue.

There was little space for jealousy in Helen Armour's nature, but something about the whole affair had struck her unpleasantly. A sinister conviction came to her, and when the matinee was at length over she slipped out hastily, and waited for the appearance of Maxim and the woman, within the shelter of her taxi.

THEY came together, as intuition had warned her. They drove away in a close carriage and she ordered her driver to follow slowly. When they turned down an unpretentious street she dismissed the taxi at the corner, and quietly followed on foot. From a deftly chosen point of observation she watched the woman go into a house, and presently come out again with a bundle of papers.

"They are all here, Elsa?" she heard him say.

"There is not one lacking. Ach, but I am glad to see the last of them. That drawing of the coast took me an eternity."

"Till to-morrow, then. Go and get some sleep, child."

As they conversed for a few moments in a lower tone a friendly gust of wind blew two of the loosely folded papers toward her. She picked them up, and tucked them feverishly away in her blouse. The others had not noticed the incident. When she was able to look them over privately she saw that they were sketches. Symbols meant little to her, but she realized that they were beautifully executed, and—strangely enough—there was a tiny Austrian crest in one corner. Yet to-day the woman in the garden

He murmured a few graceful words of sympathy.

In solitude again, walking restlessly in the old-fashioned chintz bed-room, the woman fought out the great struggle of her life. "It's ridiculous," she said over and over, "Maxim isn't a spy. He's a great musician, and a conventional being who goes out to dinner and rides in the park and belongs to the best clubs—and signals with lighted candles from lonely seaside houses," she found herself invariably concluding.

"I love him," she exclaimed once, fiercely. Then came an awful revulsion. "My country is in the throes of her greatest agony, and he hates her, and is plotting against her. A spy! How could anyone possibly love a spy? Hateful word! And to have won you under false pretences, under an assumed name, no doubt!"

But the heart of woman is a complex, wonderful thing, and with every remembered warmth of look or tone her soul went surging out to him. "If you betrayed him he would suffer the fate of a spy." A spy! Her own betrothed! Could anything be more terrible?

Then the stern voice of conscience—"would you betray the land of your birth? And your brother in the trenches at this very moment?"

It was midnight, and she still battled with her problem. It would be a simple matter to walk to the telegraph office now, and send a message to London. The military authorities would be down in a few hours and then—ah, no! Not when a woman loved as she had loved. A thousand times, no!

There came a low, quick knocking at her door.

"Miss Helen, dear, are you awake? Why—you're still dressed. This telegram has just come. Shall I call her Ladyship?"

"Oh, no, I'll read it first. I couldn't sleep to-night."

It was an official message. Harold—seriously wounded. She repeated the words dazedly.

"Oh, Miss Helen, dear, poor Master Harold! Let me call—"

"No, no, Cummings, my aunt must not be disturbed. I shall go to the station myself. I want to send a wire."

"Miss Helen! Not at this hour of the night! I'll have my things on right away."

"No, you must not do any such thing. You don't understand, Cummings. It isn't just this news. There's another reason—I can't stay to explain. Wait here for me if you will, but do not rouse anybody else."

AS she sped silently, inexorably, down the staircase, through the oak-panelled hall, she caught a rift of light from behind the velvet curtains. She stole towards it—ah! Maxim was sitting by the piano. His hands strayed over it, though he allowed it to emit no sound. His face was rapt, almost seraphic.

"The musician now," she whispered, "he has forgotten that he is also a spy."

She could not trust herself to watch that look he wore. She glided away like a phantom. Out into the garden, past the sun-dial, crushing the geraniums under her feet, along the box hedges and the old stone wall—then came an awful glare of light.

The woman screamed. Away in the sky it was silhouetted against the deeper blackness, a monstrous, awful thing, like a bird of evil omen. There came a heavy deadening roar, as if some Titan had been hurled into being. Helen was thrown to the ground and for a long time she lay there stunned.

When she dragged herself up again and met the frightened village people, and the Zeppelin raid was only a hideous nightmare, she saw unfamiliar things around her. Old trees had disappeared, and ancient fences, and there were battered houses, and people moaning over their dead.

The house overlooking the sea stood miraculously untouched. But just outside the garden there had been a great upheaval of the earth. "Poor Max must have run outside for safety," her aunt explained with choking sobs, "but when they found him—it was so unlike—"

Helen listened to her, strangely quiet. Perhaps the signals were wrong then, or surely the raid would not have taken place that night. She had resolved to give her lover to the Justice of her land, and then Fate had intervened and spared her the ignominy. The secret of his life might die with her. She looked away to the sea, ghostly, and azure in the dawning, and in her heart, almost oblivious to the tragedy around her, there was only a great calm.