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# Under the Rose

By FREDERIC S. ISHAM.  
Author of the "Strollers."

### CHAPTER VIII.

"Turn out these torch-bearers, furnish candles and valets to chamber, and I'll get me to bed," commanded the duke, standing in the centre of the room, and a scowling valet with a mustache, wearied of a swarm of pages, cup-bearers and attendants from the door and closed it.

"How are the men quartered, John?"

"With all the creature comforts, my lord," answered the soldier, gazing downward.

"Hold them in check, John, as though we were in a campaign," said the noble.

"Yes, my lord," returned the man, starting imperceptibly before him.

Reluctantly, an expression of quick intelligence on his thin features, the trooper beckoned out of the room. When his hands behind him, his shoulders bent forward, the duke long pondered, his look keen and discerning, his propensity clear in the eyes of Francis' wine or the intoxication of the great bed. Instinctively he knew he was not alone and yet his gaze, rapidly sweeping the apartment, failed to perceive an intruder.

Again the thinking, a low laugh, and turning sharply toward an alcove from whence the sounds came, the duke, through the half-light and trailing, smoky shadows of the entrance, perceived a figure in a chair. From a scabbard set in a spiked scabbard stuck a yellow glimmering that came and went with the sparkling flame rested upon an ironical face, a graceful figure in nobly and a wand with the jester's head and the bell. Without rising the plaintiff quizzically regarded the surprised nobleman, who in spite of his self-control had stopped back involuntarily at the suddenness of the encounter.

"Good evening, my lord," said the fool. "I am like the giant of the tale. You think of me and I appear."

Regaining his composure at once, the king's guest bent his heavy brow over his deep set eyes and deliberately surveyed the fool.

"And now," went on the jester gayly, "it is in your mind I am like as suddenly to disappear! Am I at fault?"

"On the contrary, you are unusually clear witted," was the answer.

"Oh, my lord, you overestimate my poor capacity!" returned the noble's unsmiling calm, with a deprecatory gesture.

The hands of the other worked impatiently. His herculean figure blocked the doorway. "You are a merry fellow," he observed. "It is to be regretted, but unless you have brought it upon yourself."

"What? My fate? Oh, yes!" And he indifferently regarded the wand and the wooden figure upon it without moving from the chair.

"You have no fear?" questioned the duke quizzically.

"Fear? Why should I?"

Yawning, the fool stretched his arms, looking not at the nobleman, but beyond him, and instinctively the princess' betrothed peered over his shoulder in the darkness behind, while his hand quickly sought his sword.

"The most noble duke!" exclaimed the jester. "We have no extravagants or interlopers, believe me. We are entirely alone, you and I, master and fool. There, come no nearer, I beg," as the nobleman menacingly moved toward him.

"Have you any arguments to advance, Sir Fool, why I should not?" said the other grimly, a gleam of amusement depicted on his broad face as he pressed the wand.

"An argument sharp as a needle, somewhat longer," replied the jester, touching his fingers and drawing from between the folds of his doublet a shining blade.

"Hush and loud laughed the king's guest.

"You fool," he said, "you find your op-



"An argument sharp as a needle."   
tion of the princess' eyes. Although the noble's glance seemed bent on vacancy, it was himself as well as others he was studying, weighing the memorable events of the evening, recalling to mind every word with the princess, reviewing her features, the softening of her cold disdain, now mentally distressed because she was a woman, again confident he already dominated the attitude of her heart.

portunity below there in the hall and missed it. You hastened, with blindly another course, and now," with ominous meaning, "you are here!"

Upon the stick a candle dripped, splashed and went out. The jester bent forward and with the copper snuffer on the table near by deftly trimmed the remaining light.

"Only fools fight in darkness," he remarked quietly, "and here is but one of them."

"You pit yourself and that lightning-against me?" asked the lord's soldier decisively.

"Have you hunted the wild bear, my lord?" lightly answered the other. "How might it be? How savage? Was I not? You know the pasture? A quick step, a sure aim, an eye like lightning—prison!—your bear lies on his back, with his feet in the air! Yes, my lord, are the bear; big, clumsy, brutal! Shall we begin the sport? I promise to prick you with every nub."

The prospective bridegroom pressed thoughtfully.

"There is some justice in what you say," he returned, his manner that of a man who has carefully weighed and considered a matter. "I confess to the justice of the duke of the fray, the brand of the light, where men press all around you."

"Especially, my lord, for then the bear is in his element. No matter how he rushes, his tusks strike yielding flesh."

"Why should we fight at all—at present?" cautiously ventured the noble, with further hesitation. "Not that I doubt I could easily crush you—extending his muscular arm—but you might prick me, and just now discretion may be the better part of valor. I, a duke, engaged to wed a princess, have much to lose; you, nothing! A fool's strike might kill a king."

"Or a knave, my lord!" added the plaintiff.

"Or a knave, starting!" thundered the duke, the veins starting out on his forehead.

The jester half drew his dagger. His quiet confidence and glittering eye impressed even his antagonist, unused to some of violence and strife.

"Is it a truce, most noble lord?" said the fool significantly. "A truce wherein we may call black, black, and white, white! A truce which may be broken by either of us, with due warning to the other?"

Knitting his brow, the noble stood motionless, deeply pondering, his headlong passion evidently at combat with the judgment. Then his face cleared, a hard, brusque laugh burst from his lips, and he brought his fist violently down on the massive oak table near the door.

"So be it!" he assented, with a more open look.

"A truce—without any rushes from the bear!"

"Fool! Does not my word suffice?" contemptuously retorted the duke.

"Yes, for although you are—what you are—you have been a soldier and would not break a truce."

"Such commendation from my jester is indeed, flattering," seriously remarked the king's guest, seating himself in a great chair which brought him face to face with the fool and yet commanded the door, the intruder's only means of retreat.

"Pardon me, the duke's jester, you mean?"

"Yes; mine."

"A distinction with a difference," retorted the fool. "It is quite true—I am the duke's jester. It is equally true I am yours. Therefore, we reach the con-

clusion that you and the duke are two dukes, you are an impostor. Have you any fault to find with my reasoning?"

"On the contrary," answered the other, with no sign of anger or surprise. "Your reasoning is all that could be desired. Why should I deny what you already know? I was aware, of course, that you know when I first learned the jester was in the castle. Frankly, I am not the duke—to you."

"But with Francis and the count?" suggested the fool, splitting his brows.

"I am the duke and such remain. You understand?"

"Perfectly, my lord," replied the jester, shrugging his shoulders. "But since I am not the king nor one of the courtiers, whom for the time being have the honor of addressing? But perhaps I am over-ambitious."

"Not at all," said the other, with mocking ceremony. "You are a whimsical fellow. Besides, I am taken with a man who tells you the truth, and I have no objection to my liking. There are few men who would dare what you have tonight. And, although you are only a fool, will you drink with me from this bottle on the table there? I'm tired of ceremonious of rank, and would drink a glass in private with a military fellow. What say you?"

And, leaning over, he filled two large goblets with the rich beverage from a great flask placed on the stand for his convenience. His face bright with good-humor, but behind his jovial, free manner, that of a trooper in his cups, gleamed a furtive, guarded look, as though he were studying and testing his man.

"I'm for a free life, some fighting, but snug walls around for companionship," he continued. "Look at my soldier's nose; remember, I'm making Charles' France; Not one of the troop would leave me for emperor or king! Not one but would follow—where ambition leads!" Holding up the glass he looked into the depths of the flask burgundy. "Why, a likely fellow like you should carry a gleaming blade, not a wooden sword. I know your duke—a man of lineage, a string of titles long as my arm—an undying of the emperor, while I'm—closing his great jaw firmly—"own allegiance to no man or monarch, which is the same thing. Drink, lad; I'm pleased I did not kill you."

"Still alive!" exclaimed the king's guest, momentarily, although a dark shadow crossed his glance. "I'm scoured from head to foot, and my life is as tough as—"

"A bear's!" tapping his chin with the fool's head on his hand.

"Ah, you have your jest," retorted the noble of the occasion good naturedly. "It's bred in the bone. A quality for a soldier. Next to courage is that fine sense of humor which makes a man a bon comrade. Put down your gaudy image, lad; you were made to carry arms, not bubbles. Put it down, I say, and touch glasses with Louis of Plas-Urfield!"

"Lord Hochfeld!" exclaimed the jester, fixedly regarding the man whose name was known throughout Europe for his reckless bravery, his personal resources and his indomitable pride or love of freedom and independence, which held him aloof from emperor or monarch and made him peer and leader among the many untractable spirits of the abstemious country who had not yet bowed their necks to conquest; a soldier of many battles, whose thick wall of fortification, ported picturesquely in mind on a steep mountain top, established his security on all sides.

"The same, my friend of the motto,"

continued the other, not without complacency, observing the effect of his announcement on the jester.

"He who calls himself the free baron of Hochfeld," observed the fool, setting down the glass from which he had moderately partaken.

"Ay," a man of royal and peasant blood," harshly answered the free-booter. "Ambition and arrogance are the kindly inheritance, strength, a constitution of iron, the lowborn legacy. What think you of such an endowment?"

"You are far from your castle, my lord of Hochfeld," commented the jester, absently, unmindful of a question he felt not called upon to answer.

"And yet, as safe as in my own mountain nest," retorted the free baron of freebooter indifferently. "Who would betray me? There is not a trooper of mine but would die for his master. You would not denounce me, because—but why underestimate the reasons? I hold you in the palm of my hand, and when I close my fingers there's the end of you."

"But where—allow me, the wine has a rare flavor," and he reached for the flask.

"Drink freely," returned the pretender.

"In the king's own, and you are my guest. You were about to ask—"

"Whence came the idea for this mad adventure?" said the jester, his eyes seemingly bent in admiration on the golden held—a half globe of crystal sustained by a golden perch.

"Ideal," repeated the self-called baron, with a gesture of satisfaction. "It was more than an idea. It was an inspiration, born of that chance which points the way to greatness. The feat accomplished, all Europe will wonder at the wit of an exploit. At first Francis will rage. Then, seeing me impenetrably entrenched, he will seek the best of the marriage, especially as the room is of royal blood. Next an alliance with the French king against the emperor. Why not? Was not Francis once ready to treat even with Soliman to defeat Charles, an overture which shocked Christendom? And while Charles' energies are bent to the task of protecting his country from the Turk—a new leader appears, a devil's egg—dark fellow—and then—and then—"

He broke off abruptly, stared before him as though the fumes of wine were at last beginning to rise to his head, toyed with his glass and drank it quickly as a draft. "What an amusing world this is—tomorrow!" he mused.

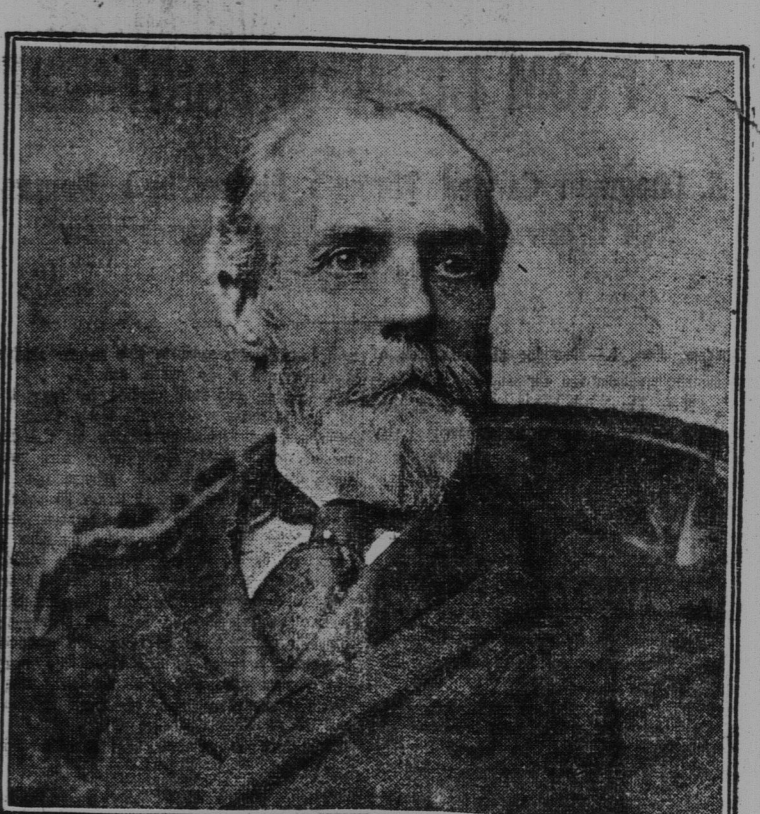
"An illusive hope that reconciles us with today," answered the plaintiff.

"Illusive!" cried the other. "Only for poets, dreamers, fools!"

"And you, Sir Baron, are neither one nor the other," remarked the jester. "No philosopher, but a plain soldier, who chaps hands, not logic. But the inspiration that caused you to embark upon this not trained, pretty enterprise?"

"Upon a spur of rock that overlooks the road through the mountains is set the Vallure's Nest, Sir Fool," began the adventurer in a voice as cool confident and arrogant. "At least so the time honored fortress of Hochfeld is disparagingly designated by the people, as the road is the only pass through the mountains, naturally we come more or less in contact with the people who go by our doors. Being thus forced through the situation of our fortress into the proximity of the travelling public, we have from time to time made such sorties as are practiced by a beleaguered garrison and have in consequence taken prisoners many traffickers and traders whose goods and chatties

## THE NEW AMBASSADOR TO GREAT BRITAIN



Joseph Choate, ambassador extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of the United States at the Court of St. James, has decided to retire from the American diplomatic service, and in forwarding his resignation from the post at London to the president, according to the custom in vogue immediately preceding a new administrative term, he requested that it be accepted that he might be enabled to return to New York and resume his extensive law practice.

Following the announcement of Mr. Choate's retirement from the highest dip-

lomatic representation of this nation abroad comes the announcement of the appointment of Whitelaw Reid to succeed the retiring ambassador. The fact of Mr. Reid's selection by the president for the coveted post followed an extended conference held between Secretary of State Hay, Assistant Secretary Loomis and President Roosevelt, which was devoted to discussion of the appointments and transfers that are to follow the inauguration on March 4. The diplomats to the American embassies abroad was treated by the administration in this conference.

were worthy of our attention as spoils of war. Generally we have confined our operations to migratory merchants, who carry more of value and cause less trouble than the emperor's soldiers or the king's troopers, but occasionally we brush against one of the latter hands so that we may keep in practice in laying our blades to the grindstone and also to show we are soldiers, not robbers.

"Which remains to be proved," murmured the attentive jester. "Your pardon, noble lord," as the other half started from his chair; "let me fill your glass. 'Tis a pity to neglect such royal wine. Proceed with your story. Come we presently to the inspiration!"

(To be continued.)

**Bangor Man Killed.**  
Bangor, Me., Jan. 1.—Melvin Freese, 53, a railroad steward, fell from the roof of his house here today, striking on the concrete sidewalk, fracturing his skull and killing him instantly.

**Sussex Town Council.**  
Sussex, N. B., Dec. 31.—The civic elections here have resulted in the re-election of the present council by acclamation. They are: W. H. Mackay, mayor; Alderman—Walter Mills and Dr. Langstroff; ward 2, Dr. McMillan and Andrew Miller; ward 3, J. A. McArthur and Abner Cripps.

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