

"Previously, she had no desire to get loose. She has been living quite comfortably, and that marks the limit of her wishes in this regard. But things have changed suddenly of late. Her daughter has just come of age. Soon she will marry someone, and the old woman will supply the data that will put everything I can produce out of keeping with the truth. Now here is the precise point at which I am going to call upon you for assistance."

Paul looked coldly at him without speaking.

"You have spoken quite frequently with the daughter, the young lady who holds so much that is promising for the fortunate devil who marries her."

"I do not know her," returned Paul.

"With whom were you walking yesterday when I met you near the new cathedral?"

"Whom, Veda?"

"The same. *She* is the hag's daughter. Now here's the plan. I have approached them with a view to making Veda my wife. But you know the difficulties are many. In the first place it is not so very long,—not long enough since I rid myself of the wife I did have. Besides I am a little over age to fulfil the dreams of one so handsome as our fair one of the dark eyes. Looking it over from all sides I can hardly hope to find favor in their sight, and although the old lady has promised to consider it carefully, I am not expecting much from them. So you see, it seems that I am out of the question as far as making her my wife is concerned. But I have another card yet to play. That little girl is half in love with you. You have a strong influence there. While I cannot win her affection, you can—you've won it already."

"She speaks to me kindly," said Paul, evasively.

"I'll wager her thoughts don't stop where her words make an end," said Nickolai, jokingly. "If you let me tell you how, we'll launch ourselves safely into a mighty nice thing. To begin with, I want you to marry Veda."

"Marry Veda! That would not be possible."

"Possible! Pooh! Oh, I know, I

know; Paul. I've been a soldier for over fifteen years, and I know the trade. Of course, you're a soldier yourself, and take nothing like that seriously. We're ail alike in that regard. But let that be, I want you to *make* it possible. Be serious for a while. If it doesn't suit you, why, do as I've done,—get out of it when you're satisfied with what you've got."

Paul rose from his seat and faced Nickolai.

"I say it is impossible," he said coolly. "You need not ask me to explain why."

"Impossible!" reiterated Nickolai. "Do you forget I have brought you from poverty to what you are? I have helped you, now it's for you to return the favor. Remember who you are, Paul. It might pay you better if you do not let others know it. You were an outcast, a pick-up, a———"

"Stop!" demanded Paul. "It makes no difference what I was when you found me. Now I am a man and I take no part in your dirty schemes. I do not need your name in order to live, and from this time forward I am still an outcast, a pick-up, and without a name until I find one that is more honorable than Nataroff."

"Then you refuse to help me!"

"You insult me to ask."

"Be careful," replied Nickolai, threateningly. "You might be sorry for it, you know."

"I shall never be sorry for having done what is honorable," said Paul, with an air of dignity.

Further conversation was prevented by the door being suddenly opened. The hag appeared, and led the way before the tall, beautiful woman with flashing eyes. Paul turned pale and Nickolai started perceptibly as they beheld Veda standing before them.

Nickolai turned to Paul with a malicious smile.

"You can go to the devil, now," he said. "Your assistance will not be required."

IV.

It was an hour later that Paul paced restlessly up and down in his room. His