

out thought," interrupted Saunders, "and I admit that your objections are reasonable, just, and inevitable. Nevertheless, I believe that the whole success of our schemes hangs on this issue. As long as Cyril of Wolfsnaden holds the King and Fritz as hostages our hands are tied. If we could recover the prisoners we win game, set, and match. The big prize calls for a big risk. Every hour the Arch-duke holds Karl our chances are worsened. But Cyril has one sort point in his armour—a fatal weakness for a pretty face. There," said Saunders, pointing rudely to Phoebe, "—there is the prettiest face in Grimland."

"You would use her as a lure!" ejaculated Mrs. Perowne in horror.

"As a lure, a bait, an enticement," affirmed Saunders, "and I would use this"—he produced his Westley-Richards—"as the hook concealed by the bait."

"I came here for protection," protested Mrs. Perowne indignantly, "for myself and daughter. You offer us danger and shame."

"Say rather 'glory,'" retorted Saunders. "But I only offer it, I do not thrust it on you. Miss Perowne can stay here in absolute safety if she wills."

"But I do not will," cried Phoebe. "I would go with Mr. Saunders anywhere. He saved our life in the 'Persian Vaults'; he will protect me to-night."

"I am flattered," said Saunders. "Nevertheless I do not counsel disobedience to your mother's commands. I am a man with one idea, a monomaniac. I love this fierce old country, and I love its ruling dynasty. The memory of the late King is sacred to me, for we were friends as few men can conceive friendship. No power on earth would make me leave his boy in the lurch, or abandon the fortunes of this country to the caprices of the blackguard who aspires to rule it. Therefore I say I am going, and I admit I desire that you should go with me. But your mother and my wife are against that, and they are right. You must stay behind and do the woman's part—which before Heaven I do not despise—the part of 'watch and pray.'"

"But I do despise it," said Phoebe, "at any rate when one can give active aid. Mrs. Saunders, I thank you for your sense of responsibility for my welfare. Mother, I thank you for your loving fears for my safety and honour. I am going to repay you by disobeying you both. To-night there is rebellion in the air, and I am the greatest rebel of them all. I am going to accompany Mr. Saunders whether he permits it or not."

Saunders shrugged his shoulders; then he turned to kiss his wife. She made as though to turn her head away.

"You do wrong, you do wrong," she murmured.

"Then pray for me more earnestly than usual," he retorted quietly.

PHOEBE approached her mother, who buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Phoebe, Phoebe," she sobbed, "why are you such a wicked, wilful girl?"

"I don't know, Mother. I simply know that I can't help myself. Something is impelling me out into the streets by Mr. Saunders' side, something stronger than myself, something stronger than any strength that I could have conceived of as existing in the world."

For a time Phoebe and her companion strode over the snowy streets in silence. Saunders was obviously preoccupied, and his long swinging gait was hardly adapted for a female companion. But Phoebe, whose physical powers responded to her spiritual ardour, kept game to the brave pace. Nor did the bitter night wind chill her, nor the empty streets, which spoke eloquently of danger to wayfarers. It was not till they entered the Morast that the first qualms of nervousness assailed her. There was something enveloping about the close-pent maze of lanes, something horribly suggestive of a trap. One breathes less easily when one can

touch the houses on one side of the street with the right hand and the houses on the other with the left. One is farther from nature, farther perhaps from God, when the sky above is a narrow strip of violet running jaggedly between lurching gables and tottering chimney-stacks. Man, and man at his worst, is very near. The ice-cold air came to their nostrils tainted with heavy, sickly odours, and objects peered at them through the broken slats of worm-eaten shutters. The rare street lamps lit up cavernous alleys and threw sinister shadows on the trampled snow. Silent, purposeful, preoccupied, Saunders led her relentlessly through by-ways of ill-repute and shameful passages trodden only by the baser sort. On they plunged into the very heart of the nefarious quarter; courtyard succeeded to courtyard, and one reeking kennel followed another.

WHAT was at first a vague uneasiness to Phoebe became the settled horror of a nightmare dread. She had started full of hope and enthusiasm. Fate, pregnant with glories if ill-defined possibilities, had beckoned her, and she had followed eagerly, trusting supremely with the inspired confidence of her kindled youth. The hope and enthusiasm were cold now, chilled almost to death by the vile atmosphere of the abominable quarter. No enchanted wood ever held such suggestions of evil as this crowded congeries of stone and mortar. And yet if her spirit sank her purpose held. She was no bread-and-butter miss, for all her angel face and cupid mouth. The depths of her had been stirred, and her resolution was as strong as that of a brave man. There was strength to be drawn from her companion, too, had she needed it. Nothing daunted him, or altered the set contour of his iron chin. The monomaniac—as he called himself—was out for duty, and his one idea possessed him to the exclusion of fear or even prudence. His life, her life, were nothing compared to his resolve. She read that in his cold grey eye and settled scowl. She was merely a pawn in his game, a thing not to be thrown away wantonly, but to be ruthlessly sacrificed, if needs must, against the more precious life he hoped to win. He was either the most selfish of men, or the most utterly unselfish. She was uncertain which, but of her admiration for his purposeful manhood she was supremely certain.

"This is the Krippel-Thor," Saunders at length broke his long silence. They walked along the ill-omened thoroughfare, past the old Gothic gateway that had given the street its name, and was now incorporated into the premises of an "antiquitäten" shop. At Number 17 they halted. The house was no better than its neighbour's; it could scarcely be worse.

"What do we do now?" said Phoebe.

"Go in," said Saunders. "Ask for Cyril of Wolfsnaden. Say Lieutenant Hugo of the Artillery sent you. Smile all the time you are talking, and say that supper is laid in the Juden-gasse."

"What then?" asked Phoebe.

"He will come out with you."

Phoebe's heart fluttered in her bosom, and faintly she asked again. "What then?"

"Then," said Saunders curtly, "the fish feels the hook."

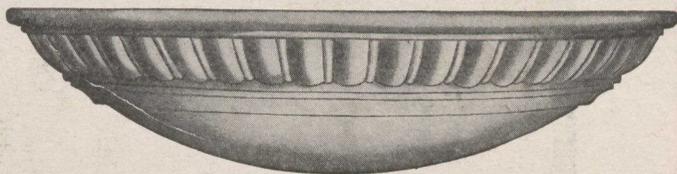
The fluttering gave place to a settled drumming beat. Murder and treachery were words that writ themselves large on her shaken brain. And yet she had known the purpose for which she had come out. She knew that she was fighting on the right side, and that now, if ever, the end justified the means. Even so she might have faltered had she not looked for strength to her companion's face. Never had she beheld anything so calm or so inexorable. The man was made of steel, but the metal was good and clean, free from flaw, and she knew in a revealing moment that virtue without strength in a man was as contemptible as beauty without chastity in a woman.

(To be continued.)

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