

# A SON OF THE IMMORTALS

## CHAPTER XIV. (Continued)

### The Broken Treaty



THE departure of such a large party probably created some speculation among the palace servants; but Nesimir did not put in an appearance, and no one dared to question the King's movements. Alec had purposely allowed the barest time for the drive to the station. The midnight train, not being an important express, carried few passengers, mostly traders returning to neighboring towns in Austria after conducting the day's business in Delgratz. The King and his companions, of course, were recognized; but again it was not to be expected that any official would trouble them with inquiries.

Having secured compartments for his mother and Beaumanoir, Alec made for the station master's office, meaning to obtain a messenger who might be trusted to deliver Stampoff's letter, and he happened to notice a policeman standing near a carriage door. A white face peered out through the window. It was Sojieski. The King and the waiter were quitting Delgratz by the same train!

Alec laughed, and the policeman saluted. "When the train has gone," said Alec, "I want you to deliver this letter to General Stampoff."

"Yes, your Majesty," replied the man. "It is important, remember. Here are ten rubles, and ask General Stampoff, with my compliments, for the like amount. Take no denial from his servants. If he is in bed, he must be waked. Say that I sent you, and there should be no difficulty."

Precisely at midnight the train started. Quickly gathering speed, it ran through the tumbledown suburbs of the city and rumbled across the iron bridge that spans the Tave River. In twenty minutes it was at Semlin, and Austrian officials were examining passports. It was almost ludicrous to find that they gave Alec and his mother a perfunctory glance; but Lord Adalbert Beaumanoir excited their lively suspicion. One man, in particular, mounted guard outside the carriage and did not budge till the train moved on again.

"That chap remembers me," said Beaumanoir. "Did you notice how he glared? He was the Johnny I slung through the window."

AT an early hour in the morning Joan was peering disconsolately through the window of a railway carriage at the life and bustle of Budapest station. Felix had gone to purchase some newspapers and the girl was absorbed in gray thought, when an official thrust head and shoulders into the compartment and asked if the Fräulein Vernon, passenger from Delgratz to Paris, was within.

"Yes," gasped Joan, all the slightest color flying from her cheeks and leaving her wan indeed.

"Here is a telegram for you, fräulein," said the man politely, and his civil tone, at least, assured her that she was not to be dragged from the train and subjected to some mysterious inquisition by Austrian police. "Sent care of the station master," he explained, "and we were urgently requested to find you. Kindly sign this receipt."

She scribbled her name on a form, and the man carefully compared it with the superscription on the telegram.

"Yes, that is right," he said, and at last the agitated girl was free to open this message from the skies. It was written in German, probably to insure accurate transmission, and it read:

My mother and I, together with Beaumanoir, left Delgratz seven hours later than you. Pauline accompanies us. We are returning to Paris after having settled affairs satisfactorily in Kosnovia. Please await our arrival in Budapest, and accept the statement without any qualification that there is no reason whatever why you should not do this.

The amazing words were still dancing before her eyes when Felix came running along the platform. He too had been identified by an official, and in his hand was another telegraphic slip.

"We need have no secrets between us now, my belle," he cried excitedly. "You guess what has happened."

"Alec has left Delgratz—he and his mother—Oh, Felix! If he really sent this telegram, why did he not explain things?"

"The explanation would be rather ticklish, when you come to think of it," said Felix dryly. "The Austrian Government might take too keen an interest in it. Don't you understand, girl? He wrung the truth from some one. He is no longer a King, but a very devoted lover. Come, we can pass the day pleasantly in Budapest. There is nothing else to be done. No sense in running away merely for the fun of the thing. If Alec is not a King, there is no immediate probability of your becoming a Queen. You will be plain Mrs. Somebody or Other. Now I wonder what in the world his new name is? The son of an American father would hardly be called Alexis. Horrible thought! You may have to learn to love him all over again as Chauncey, or Hiram, or Phineas. Tell me, *mignonne*, could you take him back to your heart as Phineas?"

Joan rose and stepped out on the platform. Polus-

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Drawing by Howard Chandler Christy



ki's chaffing outburst failed in its intent, though, to his great relief, she did not break down, as he feared. "Perhaps he will not want me now, Felix," she said, and her eyes were shining.

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" cried the hunchback. "Why did he telegraph from the first wayside station after leaving Semlin? Alec not want you! At this moment he is more proud that he is a free born American than if a miracle almost beyond the powers of Heaven had made him a Delgrado."

Felix, cynic that he was, was secretly delighted when Joan discovered after breakfast that a blouse which caught her eye in one of the Budapest shops was much more suitable for traveling than that which she happened to be wearing. It was also significant that the dust which had gathered in her hair during the long journey from Delgratz required a visit to a coiffure. These straws showed how the wind blew, he fancied.

AND it was good to see the way Joan's face kindled when Alec clasped her in his arms. They said little then. The why and the wherefore of events they left to another hour; but when Joan extricated herself from her lover's embrace she turned to Princess Delgrado. The two women exchanged an affectionate kiss; each looked at the other through a mist of tears. Words were not needed. They understood, and that sufficed.

In a calmer moment Alec told Joan what had happened. He laid special stress on the fact that his mother was quite determined to renounce her title and revert to the name she bore during her first marriage.

"I never realized the tenth part of her suffering in Paris," he said, "though I knew far more about Prince Michael's conduct than he guessed. We must make it our business, Joan, to bring some brightness into her declining years. I have been planning our future all day in the train. Shall I become the fortune teller this time?"

"Yes," she murmured, "and perhaps I may forget that I have cost you a Kingdom."

He laughed gaily, just as he used to laugh on those bright May mornings when he waited on the Pont Neuf in the hope that he might be permitted to escort her to the Louvre.

"Never dream that I shall bring that up against you, dear heart," he said. "Delgratz ought to advertise itself as a sure cure for ambition. I liked the people; but I hated the job, and Kosnovia is already becoming a myth in my mind. I am rejoicing in my new name, Alexander Talbot. I hope you like it. My mother tells me that my father was one of the strong men of the West. I am called after him, it seems, and although my own name sounds strange to me I like the purposeful ring in it."

Joan laughed merrily. "Felix was teasing me this morning by suggesting that you might have been christened Phineas," she said.

"The wretch! And what if I was?"

She looked at him with a delightful shyness. "No matter what name you bore, you would always be my Alec," she whispered.

They were leaning over the balcony of an open air restaurant at the moment; so Alec perforce contented himself with clasping her hand.

"And now for my scheme, little girl," he said. "We will get married at once, of course."

She made no reply; but he felt the thrill that ran through her veins.

"Then," he went on, so gravely that she raised her eyes to his, seeking to catch his slightest shade of meaning; for her heart was still troubled by the fear that she had wrought him evil, "I will take you to America, my home. There is surely a nest for us out there. I have never understood it before; but often, as a boy, I felt the call of the West. It was natural, I suppose. We had many American friends in Paris, and my blood tingled when they spoke of the great rivers, the prairies, the ocean lakes, the giant mountain ranges, and the far flung plains of that wondrous continent which they describe with a reverent humor as God's own country. I feel that I shall win a place for myself in the land of my birth, and my poor mother is aching to go back there again."

He paused, and perhaps he hardly realized why Joan signed with happiness; for she could believe, at last, that he had never a pang for his lost kingship.

"It is my home too, Alec," she said. "I was born in Vermont. We are going home together."

"Yes, dear, no more partings. We shall not be wealthy, Joan. It seems that the miserable little humbug whom I have regarded as my father has wasted the whole of my mother's fortune by his extravagance. The only scrap left is a small farm near Denver, and even that would have been sold had not the crisis in Delgratz offered a wider scope for Michael's plundering instincts. It is a strange thing, sweetheart, but on the day we parted in Paris—the day the news came of the murder of Theodore and his wife—Prince Michael quarreled

with my mother because she refused to sanction the sale of that last shred of her inheritance. In order to vent his spite, he had actually deeded to tell me the secret of my birth in the very hour that Julius Marulitch announced the disappearance of the Obrenovitz dynasty.

"And the goddess sent you east instead of west," she said softly.

"Yes, my trial has been short and sharp; but she must have found me worthy, since she has given me—you."

THEY reached Paris next evening; but by that time the newspapers were hot on the scent of the missing King. So far as could be judged from the reports telegraphed by French correspondents in Delgratz, Stampoff had remained true to his dream of a monarchy. For lack of a better, Michael was King. Some one, Beliani probably, had issued a statement that the infatuation of Alexis III. for a pretty Parisian artist had led him to abdicate, and as soon as it was discovered that the Delgrado flat in the Rue Boissière was again occupied by Alec and his mother, they were besieged by reporters anxious to glean details of a royal romance.

They decided, therefore, to leave Paris for London, where, under the name of Talbot, they might hope to escape such unwelcome attentions. It was no easy matter to shake off the horde of eager newspapermen, but they succeeded at last, and when Alec and Joan were quietly married in a West End church, no one except the officiating minister had the least knowledge of their identity.

After a brief honeymoon in Devon they rejoined the Princess, and the three sailed from Southampton, whither came Felix and Beaumanoir to bid them farewell. Bosko and Pauline were on the same ship. The tactful Serb had positively refused to leave his master, though Alec pointed out that his fallen fortunes hardly warranted him in retaining a valet, while Pauline, whom recent circumstances had thrown a good deal into Bosko's company, declared that Paris no longer had any attraction for her. Without consulting anyone the two got married, and astounded Alec's mother one fine morning by announcing the fact.

At the last moment Joan almost persuaded Felix to go with her and her husband; but he tore himself away.

"I peeped into the Grande Galerie the other morning," he said, with a real sob in his voice, "and my poor Madonna looked so lonely! There was no one with her; just a few painted angels and a couple of gaping tourists. I must go back. Some day you will come to the Louvre, and you will find me there, the poor Bourdon, still singing and painting."

He began to hum furiously. When the gangway was lowered and the great ship sidled slowly but relentlessly away from the quay, he struck the tremendous opening note of "Ernani."

Beaumanoir grabbed him by the collar. "Stop up, you idiot!" he said, not smiling at all, for he loved Alec. "This is England. If you sing here a bobby will run you in. An', anyhow, blank it! why do you want to sing? This isn't a smoking concert. It's more like a bally funeral!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### The Envoy

IN the autumn of the following year, Joan was seated one day in the garden of her pretty suburban house at Denver. Not far away glittered a silvery lake; beyond a densely wooded plain rose the blue amphitheater of the Rocky Mountains; the distant clang of a gong told of street cars and the busy life of one of America's most thriving and picturesque cities.

She was somewhat more fragile than when she crossed the Pont Neuf that fine morning in May eighteen months ago; but she looked and felt supremely happy, for Alec would soon be home from his office, where he was already proving that the qualities which made him a good King were now in a fair way toward establishing his position as a leading citizen of his native State. By her side in a dainty cot reposed another Alec, whose age might not yet be measured by many weeks, but whose size and lustiness proclaimed him—in his own special circle, at any rate—the most remarkable baby that ever "occurred" in Colorado.

The Princess, tired of reading, was now dozing peacefully in an easy chair on the other side of the cot. The day had been warm; but the evening air brought with it the crisp touch of autumn, and Joan was about to summon Pauline, who—with honorable mention of the unchanging Bosko—had solved for the young couple the most perplexing problem of American life,—when the click of the garden gate caught her ear and she heard her husband's firm step. He stooped and kissed her.

"I hope you have passed the whole day in the garden, sweetheart," he said.

"Yes," she replied, "I was just going to send baby indoors. Will you tell Pauline it is time he was