



"I hope, my dear young lady," said Count Quinnox, "that you will not regard me as a stupid old meddler."

THE PRINCE OF GRAUSTARK

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YOU alarm me. Are you to be sent to prison?"

"You wouldn't look upon it as a prison, but it seems like one to me. Do not laugh. I cannot explain to you now. Another day I shall tell you everything, so pray take me for what I am today, and ask no questions. I have asked none of you, so do be equally generous with me."

"True," she said, "you have asked no questions of me. You take me for what I am today, and yet you know nothing of my yesterdays or my tomorrows. It is only fair that I should be equally confiding. Let there be no more questions. Are we, however, to take each other seriously?"

"By all means," he cried. "There will come a day when you may appreciate the full extent of my seriousness."

"You speak in riddles."

"Is the time ripe for me to speak in sober earnest?" he questioned softly. She drew back again in swift alarm.

"No! No! Not now — not yet. Do not say anything now, Mr. Schmidt, that may put an end to our — to our adventure."

She was so serious, so plaintive, and yet so shyly prophetic of comfort yet to be attained, that his heart warmed with a mighty glow of exultation. A sweet feeling of tenderness swept over him.

"If God is good, there can be but one end to our adventure," he said, and then, for some mysterious reason, silence fell between them. Long afterward — it seemed hours to him! — she spoke, and her voice was low and troubled.

"Can you guess why I am being watched so carefully, why I am being followed so doggedly by men who serve not me but another?"

"Yes. It is because you are the greatest jewel in the possession of a great man, and he would preserve you against all varlets, — such as I."

She did not reveal surprise at his shrewd conjecture. She nodded her head and sighed.

"You are right. I am his greatest jewel, and yet he would give me into the keeping of an utter stranger. I am being protected against that conscienceless varlet — Love! If Love lays hands upon me — ah, my friend, you cannot possibly guess what a calamity that would be!"

"And Love *will* lay hands upon you, Bedelia, —"

"I am sure of that," she said, once more serene mistress of herself after a peculiarly dangerous lapse. "That is why I shudder. What could be more dreadful than to fall into the clutches of that merciless foe to peace? He rends one's heart into shreds; he stabs in the dark; he thrusts, cuts and slashes and the wounds never heal; he blinds without pity; he is overbearing, domineering, ruthless, and his victims are powerless to retaliate. Love is the greatest tyrant in all the world, Mr. Schmidt, and we poor wretches can never hope to conquer him. We are his prey, and he is rapacious. Do you not shudder also?"

"Bless you, no! I'd rather enjoy meeting him in mortal combat. My notion of bliss would be a fight to the death with Love, for then the conflict would not be one-sided. What could be more glorious than to stand face to face with Love, hand to hand, breast to breast, lip to lip until the end of time? Let him cut and slash and stab if you will, there would still be recompense for the vanquished. Even those who have suffered most in the conflict with Love must admit that they have had a share in the spoils. One can't ignore the sweet hours when counting up the bitter ones, after love has withdrawn from the tender encounter. The cuts and slashes are cherished and memory is a storehouse for the spoils

that must be shared with vanity."

She laughed joyously, naturally. "You really are quite wonderful, Mr. Schmidt. Still I must change the subject. I trust the change will not affect your glibness, for it is quite exhilarating. How long do you purpose remaining in Interlaken?"

"That isn't changing the subject," said he. "I shall be here for a week or ten days — or perhaps longer." He put it in the form of a question, after all.

"Indeed? How I envy you. I am sorry to say I shall have to leave in a day or two."

His face fell. "Why?" he demanded, almost indignantly.

"Because I am enjoying myself," she replied.

"I don't quite get your meaning."

"I am having such a good time disobeying my father, Mr. Schmidt, and eluding pursuers. It is only a matter of a day or two before I am discovered here, so I mean to keep on dodging. It is splendid fun."

"Do you think it is quite fair to me?"

"Did I induce you to come here, good sir?"

"You did," said he, with conviction. "Heaven is my witness. I would not have come but for you. I am due at home by this time."

"Are you under any obligations to remain in Interlaken for a week or ten days?"

"Not now," he replied. "Do you mind telling me where you are going to, Miss Guile?"

"First to Vienna, then — well, you cannot guess where. I have decided to go to Edelweiss."

"Edelweiss!" he exclaimed in astonishment. He could hardly believe his ears.

"It is the very last place in the world that my father would think of looking for me. Besides I am curious to see the place. I understand that the great Mr. Blithers is to be there soon, and the stupid Prince