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The Garden of Lies

By Justus Miles Forman

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CHAPTER XIX.
We dined, all together, at a little res-
taurant near by, and then came back to
the studio and spent the long evening in
making our plans for what was to be done
in the small hours of the night. We at-
tended the slightest details of the attack,
allowed for every possible contingency,
and held a most spirited dress rehearsal
in which Prince Karl enacted the part of
the Princess Eleanor and I that of von
Steinbrück—somehow to the detriment
of my breath and personal appearance,
for Denis made an uncomfortably pressing
leader of the charge.

Then when we had done laughing over
this, Denis and von Altdorf gave us an ex-
hibitory with the foils, just to get their
hands in, as Denis put it. Ill von Altdorf,
hopelessly outclassed, threw down his
sword, declaring that Denis was the devil
in no man at all, which was more or less
true when Denis had a yard of steel in his
hand.

And Denis, intent still upon "getting his
hand in," strung an apple on the overhead
lamp and cut thin slices from it with
German schlager sliced from its
decorative position on the wall,
shaved it with a blade as swift
as a scythe, and the slices fell
nothing but the core was left, and von
Altdorf who rather fancied himself at the
sabres, sighed and shook his head in de-
spair.

Thus we whiled away the dragging time
and strove to cover with laughter and
games the tense keenness of anxiety that
was in all our hearts, the grimness of resolu-
tion and the sense of deadly peril that
was mervig us to our task.

Old MacKenzie clicked his watch and
gave a smothered groan of impatience.
"A quarter of 12," said he, "God in
heaven, must we wait forever? Who's
for a hand at piquet? We've nearly two
hours yet."

The Prince, Denis and I sprang up readi-
ly enough, for idle waiting at such times
strains the nerves as nothing else, but von
Altdorf stood in the middle of the room
with his hands in his pockets and a some-
what guilty expression of countenance.
"Why, I was thinking," said he, in a
careless tone, "of—of just stepping over
to the house—to see that they're all
ready for our return. I shall be back
directly of course."

There was a subdued chuckle from Mac-
Kenzie which I take shame to remember.
ing I echoed. Colonel von Altdorf went
red as fire.

"Oh, they're quite ready, man," said
MacKenzie, brutally. "I've seen to all
that."

"Still, you know," insisted von Altdorf,
"they may have forgotten something. It's
best to be sure. I really think I'd better
go." And Denis backed at our shins under
the table, and said, "I wish you would go,
old chap. Our time is ought to. Go by
the garden. It's shorter."

Von Altdorf made for the little rear
window.
"I shan't be long," said he as he let
himself out.

He went up through the cool scented
gloom of the garden, up under the aca-
cias and through the old refectory porch
into the house.

There was a dim light in the music-
room and some one was playing very soft-
ly, with pauses of silence, upon the piano.
Then, presently, the music ceased, and
there came to his ears the sound of low
weeping.

"Mademoiselle," said Colonel von Alt-
dorf from the doorway. "But the girl sit-
ting before the piano did not raise her
head from her book. He went diffidently
into the room with his heart playing
strange tricks, thumping most curiously.
Women in smiles, ready with quick speech
and feminine wiles, were a sad puzzle to
von Altdorf. They lay beyond the world,
undiscovered lands. But a woman in
tears lay further still, beyond wider seas,
filled him with an odd inarticulate dis-
tress, a longing to help and comfort, to
caress and defend, a new longing, aye,
but filled him with a certain terror, too.

He stood over the bowed figure and
touched her shoulder awkwardly, timidly.
"Don't, Mademoiselle," said he, "Don't,
I—I beg, you unman me. Don't
weep, Mademoiselle. We'll bring
the princess back to you. You need have
no fear—we'll bring her back."

"I do not—weep for the princess," said
Miss Jessica Manning between her sobs.
"Why, then, mademoiselle?" asked Col-
onel von Altdorf very low.

"I weep," said she between her fingers,
for a—for brave gentlemen who—go,
into peril of their lives."
"Your tears," said he unsteadily, "your
tears should nerve their hearts and
strengthen their arms. I'll—I'll tell them,"
added von Altdorf, felicitously.

The girl sprang suddenly to her feet
and blazed at him. Her aspect was really
quite intimidating, despite an occasional
sniff and a furtive dab with a very moist
handkerchief. Colonel von Altdorf shrank
back a step.

"You tell them if you—if you dare!"
she cried. "I'll never speak to you again!
Never!"

Colonel von Altdorf sighed and shook his
head.
"Alas, mademoiselle," said he, "I fear I
know little of women. They do such sur-
prising things," by complaining. "They're
so unexpected! I—I thought you would
not mind my telling the others that you
weep for them. Your tears, mademoiselle,
are pearls that each of us would wear
into danger for to tell us—of happiness
and—such, while the Princess Eleanor
is in the hands of villains. That were to
be selfish and more than heartless. You
must rescue her first, and then—She
caught her breath with a little sob.

"Oh!" cried Miss Manning. "It fills
me with trembling, colonel, my colonel,
to let you risk your life as—a you must
do."

She came to him and put her hands upon
his arm looking up into his face.
"You'll be careful!" He begged. "You'll
be no more rash than you need? You'll
come back to me unhurt, safe? Ah, but I
mustn't speak to you so! I wouldn't
make your eye falter or your arm weaken.
I mustn't speak to you so, my dear girl.
She would have moved away from him,
but Colonel von Altdorf took the small
hands that had been upon his arm—mak-
ing it tremble foolishly—and raised them
to his lips.

"Your soldier, mademoiselle!" said he
in a strange voice, "your soldier? Oh,
yes, yes I'll come back to you!
Do you think anything can
harm me now? Your soldier, Mademoi-
selle? Ah, your soldier?"

She turned away from him at last and
sat down before the piano. She was
weeping again softly, but not tears of
grief.
"I must go, Mademoiselle," said Colonel
von Altdorf, "the time is near for
starting. Will you, before I go, sing to
me again? Will you sing your old song,
"Love in my bosom like a bee—? One
like to go into action with music."
She touched the keys, faltering a little,
and presently sang her voice very low
and none too steady. And Colonel von
Altdorf had been upon his knees with
head bowed.
Then when she had finished he took a

long, deep breath and pulled himself to-
gether with a jerk. He was the soldier
again.

"And so, good night, Mademoiselle,"
said he, smiling. "The princess shall be
with you in an hour, or at the most two,
and—I shall see you again, to-morrow.
Good night!" And he turned quickly and
left her as he dared stay no longer.
Whereupon Miss Manning, being one of
those strange creatures, women, of whom
von Altdorf confessed to knowing little,
fell to weeping and then to sniffling,
and held her two hands to her cheeks as
if they were suddenly grown dear to her,
and again wept.

But Colonel von Altdorf went down
through the garden and climbing in by the
little window presented himself once more
in the studio, with a carriage so jaunty
and a face so illumined that old MacKen-
zie chuckled again. But Denis caught his
breath sharply and went over to the op-
posite side of the room where he stood
some time with his back to us, making a
choice of the swords that hung there.
I think it was not till this moment, not
till he saw von Altdorf's transformed
face, that he realized what the night's
work meant to him, and rescuing the
princess, that she was lost to him utterly and
forever, that once she was safe again, he
might not have the satisfaction of work-
ing and fighting for her. I think
that the past week of desperate planning
and working had quite driven his own
pilot from his mind, had directed his
whole energy to the one fierce struggle to
rescue the woman he loved, and that it
was not till now the thought came to him,
"What of to-morrow?"

Still the thought came to him in that
moment with crushing force, he threw it
from him with a force as great. The
work was yet to be done. He turned
about once more, and directed his
"Make ready, gentlemen! 3/4 3/4
have your pistols, but remember, they're
for look only, no firing. It's steel
to-night. We must have no more noise
than is necessary. Take a sword, each
of you, a light one. Here's my toy!"

He held up a thin, glittering blade,
a wonderful masterpiece from his
workshop, and with a quick touch, light,
slender as a foil and no heavier, weighted
indeed like a foil at the hilt, properly to
balance its length.

"We can carry the things under our
coats," said he. "Thank heaven it's a
rainy night! If I were you I should take
sharpened foils, rather than anything
heavier. They'll mean us with sabres. I
think for they'd a lot of sabres about the
room to-day. They won't dare shoot. You
see the beauty of the foils is that a man
with a foil has a tremendous advantage
over a sabre. He can strike quicker.
Yes, take foils by all means. Have you
the dark lantern, von Altdorf? Ready,
Ted? Into your rain coats and come along
then!"

But three of us were to go, von Alt-
dorf, Denis and I. The Prince, though
he at first insisted and afterward begged
piteously, we would not take, for his life
must not be risked. Sir Gavin was no
swordman and was moreover beyond the
age for fighting.

In any event we considered that we
three should be a match, in a surprise,
for the four we were to attack. And the
quarters, it must be remembered, were
cramped.

We wrung the Prince's and old Mac-
Kenzie's hands gravely, and then
upon us all at the last, for we know that
we might not meet again. Then the three
of us went quickly out into the wet night.
We turned, presently, from the Boul-
vard Raspail into the Boulevard Edgar
Quinet, and walked down its length under
the dripping trees, down past the high
wall of the cemetery and so under the
railway bridge to the avenue du Maine,
and halted before the mouth of the im-
passe. It lay black and wet and wholly
deserted. Indeed there was no living
thing in sight, not a dog, not a cat, not
the street and down a little way at the
foot of the avenue stood a cab rank. The
lamps threw a row of dispiriting yellow
gleams across the shining pavement.

"I suppose," said Denis, "we'd best
bring a carriage to the head of the im-
passe here, and have it wait. It wouldn't
do to take it clear in."

"I say take it right away to the door,"
said I. "It will sound as if we were
ordinary lodgers coming home for the night.
Have the thing turn about ready to make
a dash the moment we're out with the
Princess. If we're pursued we stand a
better chance of getting well away."

"Right, O!" cried Denis. "Ted, you've
at times a surprising head! Come along
then, we'll all get into the carriage and
ride up to the door."

So we went down the street to the mis-
erable looking line of vehicles and roused
a coachman who was sleeping peacefully
inside his garage.

"A l'impassé du Maine!" we cried, "out
au fond, and wait there till we come
out!"

I don't mind confessing now, when it is
all over and long past, that my heart
jumped a bit and my breathing quickened
as we went rattling noisily into that long
narrow echoing row of pistols in our
pockets, swords hidden under our long
rain coats, and a dark lantern bulging
from the vicinity of Colonel von Altdorf's
manly bosom. It seemed, there in the
chill dripping rain, such an absurd thing
to be doing in peaceful Paris at this end
of the nineteenth century! I could not rid
myself of the notion that it was all a
huge joke, a masquerade, over which we
would have a great laugh presently. The
planning of a desperate coup, seated at
ease amongst lights and warmth and
comfort, with friends about one, keen
minds to offer suggestions, cool heads to
weigh risks, is such a different thing
from carrying out that coup, silently, grimly,
in the dead of a cheerless night, with
death grinning at one's face through the
rain.

To be continued to-morrow.

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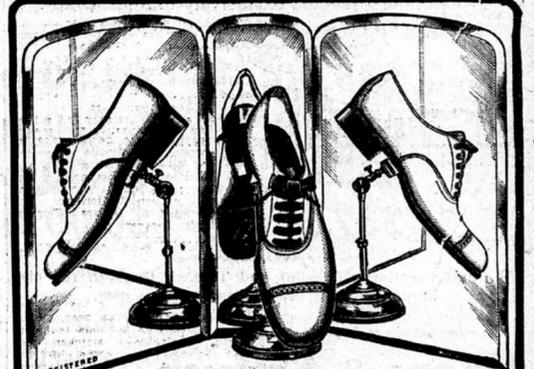
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