

WHEN THE KING AWAKE.

By EDWIN L. SABIN.

(Copyright, 1909, by the Literary Magazine Co.)

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

The story has to do with the King of Stecia, a romantic little principality in Europe. He has a beautiful wife, but he is foolishly in love with the Duchess of Marto, who co-operates with her husband in his conspiracy to overthrow the king. The king is enticed by the Duke to yield to the king's pleadings to spend a day with him in his hunting lodge, where the conspirators plan to abduct him and make him prisoner. The queen knows of the king's infatuation; she knows, also, that he has to be with the Duchess in the morning, and she has a black domino with her robes embroidered on its cuffs for identification. So the queen contrives a way to see one of her domino cuts and on the very next the queen which the king requested. Approved that she should see against him for his abduction following the ball, the king's councilors seek to impress him of his danger, but in vain. Believing that the Duchess harbors the same attachment for him that he has for her, the king clandestinely visits the Duchess in her apartments and asks her consent to fly to his hunting lodge for her. That very night following the ball, at this hall the king holds further conversation with a beautiful woman in black domino, whom he erroneously believes to be the Duchess, and makes known his further plans for their flight together. As he leaves the ballroom, he is confronted by Lord Tonne, his chief councilor. The king is impatient with Lord Tonne's persistent warnings of an abduction, and leaves him only briefly. After saying good night to the queen, the king proceeds stealthily to the hunting place of the Duchess. There he meets with his mistress, and together they dress in their womanly array. They proceed without incident until they reach a dense forest, where their coach is ambushed and they are rudely dragged from the carriage. Then the king discovers that his companion is not the Duchess Myrtle, but the Queen, who lies the madhouse, unconscious, while over her lies the Duchess Myrtle. In the midst of the king's amazement, the Duchess Myrtle arises and they are all led to march up the mountain side to the hidden abode of the Duchess. The king is so overcome with joy that he has no recollection of the Duchess's words, but the king is presently brought to his senses by the Duchess, who explains a large reason without delay.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lady Louise Paints.

The queen was sitting up in the bunk. The black domino had slipped from about her, and all in the pink, shot with gold, her slim body, topped with the small, raised head, rose like the calyx of some black lily.

"Doris! Sweetheart!" cried the king, impetuously.

"Sh!" hissed the fool, shortly, in his ear, grasping his arm, with warning touch.

The king jerked away, and angrily turned upon him, but the steady front of the jester's earnest features cooled him, and held him in check.

"Be careful," murmured the fool, and the queen, her face slightly flushed from sleep, out of clear, wondering gray eyes, was gazing upon them—her glance wandering momentarily about their rude exterior, but coming back to her companion, pointing to their countenances.

"Doris!" barely breathed the king, indignantly, her delicacy, and the fragrance of her beauty—the subtle appeal of her, so girlish and dependent—stirring his self to his feet, and in a moment he stepped before him.

"You have had a sleep," said the fool.

"I must have, I seem so very confused," she faltered, against his arm, anxiously. "Where am I? I cannot remember."

A stifled groan came from the king. It seemed to him that this confession of weakness and helplessness, in a moment more than he could bear. But he overestimated the penalty, just as he has under-estimated the crime; for such is human judgment.

"When I explain you will remember," soothed the fool, with nervous haste.

"We left the palace, you know—"

"The palace?"

"Yes, the royal palace, after St. Thunberg's ball. And we had driven only a little way—yes, and Henry, too, when a party of revolutionists seized coach and us; and a few miles farther on they were attacked and routed by a band of robbers, who carried us up to this place, in the mountains."

"Who carried us up to this place in the mountains," repeated the queen, obediently. She hesitated, blushed and laughed. "And who are we?" she asked. "I am so confused. You both look familiar, too."

"Doris!" groaned the king.

"Yes, I don't wonder," soothed the fool, gently. "You have swooned twice, and have had a severe fright. Listen. You are Lady Louise, I am Hugo, your uncle, Lord of Banly and of Witte, and the man behind me is my servant and yours—Henry."

"I am Lady Louise, you are Hugo, my uncle, Lord."

"Lord of Banly and of Witte," prompted the jester, kindly.

"Lord of Banly and of Witte, and that man behind you is Henry, my servant and yours?" She laughed again with pretty helplessness. "I am glad," she said. "It is such a relief to know again who one is. It will all be clearer to me soon. I am sure."

"Without the slightest doubt, assured Sir Momus.

At the doorway sounded a single knock, and a slight clatter, as if of something deposited. King and fool turned quickly. Awaited upon the threshold an elaborate ladies' dressing service—silver ewer and basin appearing above, while beneath and within, probably, would be brushes and mirror, towels and face-cloth, perfume sack, rouge, aqueous, pencil and so. Whoever it was brought it was hastening away. Sir Momus bore the service and set it upon the table. The queen's eyes brightened.

"Oh!" she cried, gleefully. "How glad I am of that! Who sent it?"

"Capt. Del Oro, whose men captured us, I suppose," answered Sir Momus. "We are to dine with him. Do you want to get ready? Come," he spoke to the king, in a stern, dumb mimicry, was surveying her, we will outside, and let the Lady Louise (the emphasis was apparent) make her toilet."

The king started, and hesitated, with one last beseeching look; but the queen, with tripartite, little exclamations of delight, was examining the articles of the toilet set.

The cover of an unguent box dropped, and Sir Momus stepped in.

"A phloxin' affront," he muttered, showing the embossed silver to the king. "another memento." He laughed grimly and passed the cover back. "Come," he suggested again.

Sighing heavily, the king obediently preceded him through the door.

Beneath a pine, a few paces from the cabin, the king abruptly halted and turned.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, tensely. "What has happened to the queen? She does not seem herself."

"She is not herself," replied the fool, in hurried, low tones. "I feared it after the first unconsciousness, there below. She may have been struck a blow on the head, or fright and exposure may have caused it—a loss of personality."

"My God!" muttered the king.

"But now she is what the best that should appear to be—the Lady Louise. That is safer, and I beg you—your majesty—sank to a cautious whisper—'his majesty—not to strive to bring her back. Let well enough alone."

"She does not know me," said the king, with a catch in his voice. He writhed with the thought. "Will she ever know me again? How is that? It is not for-

ever? It is not incurable?" he questioned, rapidly.

"Not necessarily. Time will tell. But let us hope that the cure will not come until after we are safely away again. Let her be the Lady Louise. That is best."

"My God! The punishment is more than I can bear!" moaned the king.

"No," responded the jester, calmly, eyeing him. "God sends no punishment too great for man to bear."

"Why did you let her come? You are to blame for this!" accused the king, wildly.

"Listen," bade the fool, sternly. "Then appeal, not to St. Jude, but to your own conscience. Yes, I let her come; I, the court fool, permitted a queen and a wife to essay the saving of a king and a husband. And I believe I lived within my rights. Why did I let her come? Why did you make her come? You now know what a clumsy conspirator you were, and that what you whispered to the queen, who whispered also to the coronet. The queen was assured of what she had feared, and she feared the more. It was to save you, if possible, from yourself and your lesser enemies that she was sent to you. If you will, then to share your deserts—and this was her privilege by law. So we deceived you, she and I; she, so long deceived, took her turn at deceiving you. I care not a sou. I do not know what occurred between you in the coach; I prayed—the fool prayed—but I received no signal to turn back. The worst that I had feared came to pass. The scoundrel of Prince George, your brother, seized the coach, but they never looked within to see whom they had! Why? Because they knew. How? Because the Duke of Marto was their leader. Can you guess how they knew? Ask the court, if ever you see the court again. Worst followed upon worst, and here we are—and which of us, yes, which of us is to blame? And why this lamenting, crying, and weeping? You do not want your wife. For all purposes she may still be at the palace. You have the Lady Louise—far more beautiful, of course; although, I admit, not the type of the Duchess of Marto."

"Enough—Sir Hugo, Lord of Banly and of Witte," said the king, quickly, with rueful smile.

He was silent for a minute, as if pondering.

"Now, let me see," he resumed, quietly. "I want to play the part of a true man and help us extricate ourselves. This name of yours—is it not hazardous, thus to raise the dead? The last lord of the house of Marto, you have attacked dead when I was a boy."

"When leavened by truth, falsehood is doubly hard to detect," quoth the fool.

"And the truth of it is, I am Hugo, Lord of Banly and of Witte."

"What!" exclaimed the king, and he viewed the speaker with genuine concern. The jester smiled whimsically.

"No, not crazy," he said, "beyond my court license. I know my history better than you. The line of Banly ends with me; I am the comma (and something of the old court manner, mocking, biting, showed itself in him, as by the metaphor he indicated his oddly top-heavy stature).

"And unless I can prove false, I shall soon be the full stop."

"You are the Lord of Banly?" queried the king, still incredulous, yet impressed by the other's bearing.

"I am the Lord of Banly," answered the fool, but, despite his calm disclaimer, in his mien, clothing so unpretentious a figure, was a dignity that was pathetic. "It matters not, save as it came to hand for the purpose of my hat, and other rambling, unimportant things, have played it and paid highly for the privilege. Eh?"

"By St. Jude, you shall never be jester again!" vowed the king, impetuously.

"No," responded Sir Hugo, gazing soberly past the king with strange introspective widening of the pupils, bespeaking some inward vision; verily, I shall ever be jester again."

"You shall have all that your rank entitles you to, I promise it," persisted the king.

"Which will be a monument," answered Sir Hugo, comically.

"His vision was still holding him fast. By an effort he broke the spell ensnaring and hypnotizing his brain, far from normal.

"But no matter," he spoke, recovering. "One may as well die as to die. We did not let me dispatch you to the city. That done, you could find means of dispatching him."

"As I would, by God!" muttered the king. "But at least, the ransom would have been forthcoming. And now?"

"We must work craftily, and see. He has refused, but perhaps he may be persuaded."

"Have you anybody in mind to whom you would send a message which would result in ransom?"

"Who at court would pay attention to an appeal from Lord Banly?" smiled Sir Hugo. "Lord Banly is dead—as you said, Sir Hugo. I never had my own snare. But I must try for the best."

"Then be Sir Momus again."

"With Del Oro reading the message, if written; or having it rehearsed, if told. Humph!—then the king would be in the predicament of a jester. Who? and again, 'Who?'—and like as not give us more questions than we could match with answers."

And Sir Hugo made a grimace.

"But is there no one who knows you as Sir Hugo?"

"Only one—and she is a woodchopper's wife. But I can try her, if she can find the sound '150,000 francs' will find her poor wits. I am afraid."

"Send word to the Duchess of Marto," suggested the king, flushing dully. "She will understand, if the message is rightly worded. That is, if, as you charge—"

"Here comes our host," said the jester of the beginning, she must now be aware of the ending."

"The Duchess of Marto has worked her woe; we will not give her other opportunity," responded Sir Hugo, gravely.

"The king would have covered his confusion."

"At any rate, I am glad to be beholden—since beholden it will be—to a noble in the stead of a jester," he quoth, with an attempt at lightness.

"But would have chosen a tresser to either," retorted Sir Hugo.

"Sir," said the king, coloring.

"Here comes our host," announced the other in reply.

"Del Oro! My father handed his, and I shall not forget the son," muttered the king, vaguely watching.

"The Duke of Marto!" By God, he should hang like as his foul soul might get! And the duchess—ah, no; there must be some mistake. She could not have betrayed him, knowingly. Not yet; he was willing to admit to her, he had not been tricked; no, he had not given more than he had received. 'Twas impossible that such as she could harbor treachery—she, so wondrous beautiful, so glorious in her dowry of eyes and hair and warm, soft skin. The king again shifted uneasily. His pride was stung.

But war! The clash of arms rang upon his hearing, and to his nostrils wafted the reek of ancestral battlefields. By St. Jude, brother or no brother, duchess or no duchess, even Doris or no Doris, he was the king, and king he would remain. His chest swelled, and the lust of conflict surged into his cheeks. Impatience thrilled him.

The queen laughed shrilly, and once more slightly leaned and flitted the captain's shoulders with her closed fan. The captain gathered his hat, and pressing his lips upon her hand suddenly arose. With eyes flaming, the king, too, arose. This Del Oro, this cur, this vulture, whose neck was shaping for the throat of his father's nose, daring so far! By—

The captain was sauntering toward the cabin, a self-satisfied smile upon his evil countenance. With anger ill-concealed the king met him, and stood not aside to give him passage, but with a haughty nod, now particular. Umbrage clouded not upon his brow. He was too content.

"Where is the little man, Sir Hugo?" he asked, abstractedly.

"Within," answered the king, scant of words, black of looks.

The captain stroked by and entered. The king's eyes, perforce, deprived of him, sought the queen. She was sitting there, as he had been, and with sudden resolve the king advanced.

"Twas his first opportunity since their arrival in this accursed place to speak with her by themselves. Del Oro had covered close, and had monopolized her; and she, who would have been Sir Momus, or Sir Hugo, whichever might be his name. One had compelled caution, the other had impeded candor; but now at last might he speak with her untrammelled. He had hoped that he could prevail; he would make her herself again. Yes, he would call her Doris—and Doris would she become; his Doris. And eager, ambitious, he strode forward, and halted, but ready to be ashamed in front of her.

She was dallying with her fan; beneath their penciled brows her eyes were strangely bright, and rouge lay high, but not unbecomingly, upon her cheeks. She smiled, and he, who would have been Sir Hugo, he said, "Oh, it is you, is it?" she said. "You have come to say good-by, I venture. You must not try to kiss me. Kisses are for love, I am tired of other kisses. Kiss me for love at a proper distance; so. You will not come nearer, will you?"

"Doris!" besought the king, aggrieved, but startled, for about her was something so strained, so feverish, so unaccountably vivacious.

"Not Doris. Why, Doris? I am the Lady Louise. Doris is dead. There is no Doris."

"Sweetheart! Don't talk so. Look at me—there. I am your husband, Henry, come to be forgiven."

"Tell me, Henry. Do you think me crazy? I am not crazy. I am quite sane. I was crazy once; down there in the palace. Oh, so many women are crazy—are they? You must not blame Henry. I simply wanted to be happy. But now I am well—all well. Are you not glad, Henry? It relieves you of so much bother. I shall steadily improve up here, Henry."

"Doris! I do not understand."

"Tell me, Doris, is dead—buried in the palace. It is the Lady Louise who wishes you Godspeed."

"But I am not going," protested the king, gently. "Why do you talk so, dearest? What is it—do you hate me?"

"Dearest! That is a sweet word—but so easily spoken. Yet a woman likes it. Oh, we women are so silly. When do you start, Henry? This morning? This afternoon?"

"Start where, sweetheart?"

"Back to get the ransom, if you can; to do as you like; to war, to love; to regain a kingdom, to say 'sweetheart' to other ears. You say it very nicely, Henry. I used to see it. I do not think Del Oro can say it so, but he says it in a new way. One tries of the old—doesn't one, Henry?"

The queen's voice was mechanical, hurried, and in the middle of each tinted check glowed a spot of red not from the rouge. Her fingers nervously plucked and turned the fan in her lap.

"Explain to me about my going, please," said the king, still gently.

"Oh, you are going. The matter was easily settled. You want to go, don't you, Henry? Capt. Del Oro has consented. He will give you a little time for collecting the ransom. Maybe it is a larger sum than you think best. You need not send it, Henry. I shall be quite happy here. The captain loves me—oh, he has said so many nice things, and I believe them. I am to be his queen, Henry. Yes, a queen; and queens must be very happy, with a king for a husband. No, I do not mean this—this thug—this robber—this murderer, making love to you? And you listened? Why—Doris!"

"But he is a man—and men make love where they please, don't they, Henry? You do not care. Why should you care? Do you not want me to be loved? A woman is made to be loved, Henry—and I am a woman. You are so selfish."

"But Del Oro! You, Doris? And you would have me go, and leave you? It is monstrous! You cannot mean it! You may not forgive me, but you shall not do this. You are my wife; why, dearest, you are my wife."

"Oh, yes, I shall. What is wife to you, Henry? When I am gone then maybe you will love me again. I do not hate you, Henry. Del Oro may tire. Men do tire. Then you may want me again, perhaps even as soon as the ransom is fetched. He will not hurry you with the ransom. Go back to your kingdom—what kingdom is it? Oh, yes; a kingdom of two arms, is it not? And—"

"But to take you back—from him, Doris?"

"But why not? You would have me take you back from her. But it will not be necessary. I shall try not to call upon her. He swears he loves me. Up here there are not other women to tempt him and steal him from me. Oh, women are so cruel, and men are so false, but it is the woman who suffers. I shall never suffer again. I am so happy now. It is much better to be the Lady Louise than Queen Doris. I am the Lady Louise; yes, I am. That funny man with the great head will love me, go false, but it is different. I want to believe it—but sometimes—and she lowered her voice, as if in confidence—"I am puzzled. You think me crazy?" she resumed. "My head does hurt—but that is better than the heart. I am not dark enough to be your love, Henry. Some time, maybe, I will be. The sun up here scorches so. Del Oro loves me; I shall stay. It is so nice to be loved. If only you might be my uncle. Oh, you must not go. Henry is waiting for you. It is my left hand, Del Oro kissed my right. Call me dearsweetly, Henry, like you used to. Hurry, Henry."

Sir Hugo and Del Oro had emerged from the cabin, and were standing, talking, before it. Sir Hugo's large head wagging earnestly. Now catching the king's gaze, he beckoned; and Del Oro supplemented with an imperious summoning nod.

"Hurry, Henry. You must go. Get the ransom—that will be best. You need not come back; I shall be very happy. But unless the ransom is sent, Del Oro will kill my uncle, and that would make me unhappy. You do not want poor, good Sir Hugo to be killed do you, Henry? And please take this black thing away. I do not want it up here. It is black, and it comes from below, and it makes me shudder. Take it far away."

Again Sir Hugo beckoned, and hawknose nodded impatiently.

"God, have mercy! I cannot go!" moaned the king, staggering to his feet.

At that moment, from the lower end of the meadow floated conversation, laughter, and a whinny; and trudged, approaching a group of men, bringing with them a horse, upon its back a woman.

Del Oro walked out to intercept them, and stood waiting. King and Sir Hugo stared, wondering.

CHAPTER IX.

The King Wakes.

The sun was two hours high, flooding alike the snow-capped above, where man and man's passions were things unknown, and the meadow and cabins below, where, in the midst of peace and purity, was bred rapine and cruelty and death.

In the full beams (for the air was yet still in the shade) beside the cabin was sitting the king, disconsolate, perturbed, and with his thoughts within the cabin Sir Hugo, one-time court jester, slept—slept in spite of himself, after a night of self-imposed vigilance.

A hundred yards away, just at the edge of the shade cast by a double chimney, whose two trunks were fixed to the base, loomed upon a little outcrop of gray granite, was ensconced the queen, and at her feet, half-reclined, like a courtly cavalier, Capt. Del Oro. His drooping, brimmed, and in its every curve the hat of a rogue—lay carelessly flung beside him. He wore the jacket of blue velvet and the tasselled white sash of yesterday; evidently his one gala attire. In his hand he held a book, and half at length he looked upward at her, was a dash of mocking deference, a tinge of audacious familiarity.

Cast aside, his early morning usefulness having passed, Del Oro, in a sudden member blotch against the gray of the granite, in her pink and gold ball gown, leaned and flitted him across the shoulders with a fan which (akin, probably to the toilet set) he had bestowed upon her.

Out of the corners of his eye, the king moodily watched the by-play, while, wandering from it, but returning ever and anon, he gazed toward the queen, amid the tumultuous events of the last twenty-four hours.

Yesterday lay upon him like a nightmare—and yet, forsooth, had he slept so soundly that he ought to have slept it away. The queen's titillating, empty laugh sounded upon his ears, and he frowned, with a frown born half of perplexity and half of annoyance.

Doris! Heaven's name what has happened here! This change—how was it possible to grasp it. This painted woman Doris! This person who seemed bent upon proving only her shallow frivolity, swayed by even the clumsy flatteries of a common handmaid.

Was she insane? If so, 'twas a scurvy master-stroke by which ruthless heaven had countered upon him, taking what it had no right to take, and giving what it had no right to give. He had not intended to deserve so much, and he had not burned in his heart, as he pictured to himself that days of grace had not been allowed him, and that he had been given no opportunity to repent and save himself. Had he not suspected, of course he would not have gone on as he did. No, he would not have sown, had he but foreseen what he would reap. There was injustice in it—aye, there was, somewhere. He regretted his role at the same time he resented it. And thus he turned stroke against reality; and sought here palliation, here leniency, as man will when within himself he is at once the judge and the prisoner in the dock. While he protested, he would also have cried for mercy.

Again he heard the queen's laugh, painted like herself. She evidently was in great feather. He shifted uneasily. His mind flew to the fact that where a kingdom—his kingdom, dear to him no matter what might obtrude to sway him—was at stake. Revolution; that had been the word brought by the men who had arrived before the cabins, and had reported, after a long and weary dinner of yesterday, whereat the queen ogled and coquetted. Del Oro pined his gallantries, Sir Hugo sat so suave and yet watchful, and he himself flushed and hot and ate and drank and ate all day.

Revolution; the forces of Prince George uprising and rallying, filling the countryside. Rumors, rumors—but nothing definite save the one fact, had a battle occurred? What was the result? Would he be known when the remainder of the bandits came. Lord Tonne, the sturdy old warrior—ah, George would find him a hard nut to crack. With Lord Tonne alive, the kingdom could not be lost. But the king? Where was the king? What would Lord Tonne think? He had given Lord Tonne a promise, and had deceived him. King and queen—both gone. Poor Stecia. But the Duke of Marto! By God, he should hang like as his foul soul might get! And the duchess—ah, no; there must be some mistake. She could not have betrayed him, knowingly. Not yet; he was willing to admit to her, he had not been tricked; no, he had not given more than he had received. 'Twas impossible that such as she could harbor treachery—she, so wondrous beautiful, so glorious in her dowry of eyes and hair and warm, soft skin. The king again shifted uneasily. His pride was stung.

But war! The clash of arms rang upon his hearing, and to his nostrils wafted the reek of ancestral battlefields. By St. Jude, brother or no brother, duchess or no duchess, even Doris or no Doris, he was the king, and king he would remain. His chest swelled, and the lust of conflict surged into his cheeks. Impatience thrilled him.

The queen laughed shrilly, and once more slightly leaned and flitted the captain's shoulders with her closed fan. The captain gathered his hat, and pressing his lips upon her hand suddenly arose. With eyes flaming, the king, too, arose. This Del Oro, this cur, this vulture, whose neck was shaping for the throat of his father's nose, daring so far! By—

lips upon her hand suddenly arose. With eyes flaming, the king, too, arose. This Del Oro, this cur, this vulture, whose neck was shaping for the throat of his father's nose, daring so far! By—

The captain was sauntering toward the cabin, a self-satisfied smile upon his evil countenance. With anger ill-concealed the king met him, and stood not aside to give him passage, but with a haughty nod, now particular. Umbrage clouded not upon his brow. He was too content.

"Where is the little man, Sir Hugo?" he asked, abstractedly.

"Within," answered the king, scant of words, black of looks.

The captain stroked by and entered. The king's eyes, perforce, deprived of him, sought the queen. She was sitting there, as he had been, and with sudden resolve the king advanced.

"Twas his first opportunity since their arrival in this accursed place to speak with her by themselves. Del Oro had covered close, and had monopolized her; and she, who would have been Sir Momus, or Sir Hugo, whichever might be his name. One had compelled caution, the other had impeded candor; but now at last might he speak with her untrammelled. He had hoped that he could prevail; he would make her herself again. Yes, he would call her Doris—and Doris would she become; his Doris. And eager, ambitious, he strode forward, and halted, but ready to be ashamed in front of her.

She was dallying with her fan; beneath their penciled brows her eyes were strangely bright, and rouge lay high, but not unbecomingly, upon her cheeks. She smiled, and he, who would have been Sir Hugo, he said, "Oh, it is you, is it?" she said. "You have come to say good-by, I venture. You must not try to kiss me. Kisses are for love, I am tired of other kisses. Kiss me for love at a proper distance; so. You will not come nearer, will you?"

"Doris!" besought the king, aggrieved, but startled, for about her was something so strained, so feverish, so unaccountably vivacious.

"Not Doris. Why, Doris? I am the Lady Louise. Doris is dead. There is no Doris."

"Sweetheart! Don't talk so. Look at me—there. I am your husband, Henry, come to be forgiven."

"Tell me, Henry. Do you think me crazy? I am not crazy. I am quite sane. I was crazy once; down there in the palace. Oh, so many women are crazy—are they? You must not blame Henry. I simply wanted to be happy. But now I am well—all well. Are you not glad, Henry? It relieves you of so much bother. I shall steadily improve up here, Henry."

"Doris! I do not understand."

"Tell me, Doris, is dead—buried in the palace. It is the Lady Louise who wishes you Godspeed."

"But I am not going," protested the king, gently. "Why do you talk so, dearest? What is it—do you hate me?"

"Dearest! That is a sweet word—but so easily spoken. Yet a woman likes it. Oh, we women are so silly. When do you start, Henry? This morning? This afternoon?"

"Start where, sweetheart?"

"Back to get the ransom, if you can; to do as you like; to war, to love; to regain a kingdom, to say 'sweetheart' to other ears. You say it very nicely, Henry. I used to see it. I do not think Del Oro can say it so, but he says it in a new way. One tries of the old—doesn't one, Henry?"

The queen's voice was mechanical, hurried, and in the middle of each tinted check glowed a spot of red not from the rouge. Her fingers nervously plucked and turned the fan in her lap.

"Explain to me about my going, please," said the king, still gently.

"Oh, you are going. The matter was easily settled. You want to go, don't you, Henry? Capt. Del Oro has consented. He will give you a little time for collecting the ransom. Maybe it is a larger sum than you think best. You need not send it, Henry. I shall be quite happy here. The captain loves me—oh, he has said so many nice things, and I believe them. I am to be his queen, Henry. Yes, a queen; and queens must be very happy, with a king for a husband. No, I do not mean this—this thug—this robber—this murderer, making love to you? And you listened? Why—Doris!"

"But he is a man—and men make love where they please, don't they, Henry? You do not care. Why should you care? Do you not want me to be loved? A woman is made to be loved, Henry—and I am a woman. You are so selfish."

"But Del Oro! You, Doris? And you would have me go, and leave you? It is monstrous! You cannot mean it! You may not forgive me, but you shall not do this. You are my wife; why, dearest, you are my wife."

"Oh, yes, I shall. What is wife to you, Henry? When I am gone then maybe you will love me again. I do not hate you, Henry. Del Oro may tire. Men do tire. Then you may want me again, perhaps even as soon as the ransom is fetched. He will not hurry you with the ransom. Go back to your kingdom—what kingdom is it? Oh, yes; a kingdom of two arms, is it not? And—"

"But to take you back—from him, Doris?"

"But why not? You would have me take you back from her. But it will not be necessary. I shall try not to call upon her. He swears he loves me. Up here there are not other women to tempt him and steal him from me. Oh, women are so cruel, and men are so false, but it is the woman who suffers. I shall never suffer again. I am so happy now. It is much better to be the Lady Louise than Queen Doris. I am the Lady Louise; yes, I am. That funny man with the great head will love me, go false, but it is different. I want to believe it—but sometimes—and she lowered her voice, as if in confidence—"I am puzzled. You think me crazy?" she resumed. "My head does hurt—but that is better than the heart. I am not dark enough to be your love, Henry. Some time, maybe, I will be. The sun up here scorches so. Del Oro loves me; I shall stay. It is so nice to be loved. If only you might be my uncle. Oh, you must not go. Henry is waiting for you. It is my left hand, Del Oro kissed my right. Call me dearsweetly, Henry, like you used to. Hurry, Henry."

Sir Hugo and Del Oro had emerged from the cabin, and were standing, talking, before it. Sir Hugo's large head wagging earnestly. Now catching the king's gaze, he beckoned; and Del Oro supplemented with an imperious summoning nod.

"Hurry, Henry. You must go. Get the ransom—that will be best. You need not come back; I shall be very happy. But unless the ransom is sent, Del Oro will kill my uncle, and that would make me unhappy. You do not want poor, good Sir Hugo to be killed do you, Henry? And please take this black thing away. I do not want it up here. It is black, and it comes from below, and it makes me shudder. Take it far away."

Again Sir Hugo beckoned, and hawknose nodded impatiently.

"God, have mercy! I cannot go!" moaned the king, staggering to his feet.

At that moment, from the lower end of the meadow floated conversation, laughter, and a whinny; and trudged, approaching a group of men, bringing with them a horse, upon its back a woman.

Del Oro walked out to intercept them, and stood waiting. King and Sir Hugo stared, wondering.

CHAPTER X.

The King Wakes.

The sun was two hours high, flooding alike the snow-capped above, where man and man's passions were things unknown, and the meadow and cabins below, where, in the midst of peace and purity, was bred rapine and cruelty and death.

In the full beams (for the air was yet still in the shade) beside the cabin was sitting the king, disconsolate, perturbed, and with his thoughts within the cabin Sir Hugo, one-time court jester, slept—slept in spite of himself, after a night of self-imposed vigilance.

A hundred yards away, just at the edge of the shade cast by a double chimney, whose two trunks were fixed to the base, loomed upon a little outcrop of gray granite, was ensconced the queen, and at her feet, half-reclined, like a courtly cavalier, Capt. Del Oro. His drooping, brimmed, and in its every curve the hat of a rogue—lay carelessly flung beside him. He wore the jacket of blue velvet and the tasselled white sash of yesterday; evidently his one gala attire. In his hand he held a book, and half at length he looked upward at her, was a dash of mocking deference, a tinge of audacious familiarity.

Cast aside, his early morning usefulness having passed, Del Oro, in a sudden member blotch against the gray of the granite, in her pink and gold ball gown, leaned and flitted him across the shoulders with a fan which (akin, probably to the toilet set) he had bestowed upon her.

Out of the corners of his eye, the king moodily watched the by-play, while, wandering from it, but returning ever and anon, he gazed toward the queen, amid the tumultuous events of the last twenty-four hours.

Yesterday lay upon him like a nightmare—and yet, forsooth, had he slept so soundly that he ought to have slept it away. The queen's titillating, empty laugh sounded upon his ears, and he frowned, with a frown born half of perplexity and half of annoyance.

Doris! Heaven's name what has happened here! This change—how was it possible to grasp it. This painted woman Doris! This person who seemed bent upon proving only her shallow frivolity, swayed by even the clumsy flatteries of a common handmaid.

Was she insane? If so, 'twas a scurvy master-stroke by which ruthless heaven had countered upon him, taking what it had no right to take, and giving what it had no right to give. He had not intended to deserve so much, and he had not burned in his heart, as he pictured to himself that days of grace had not been allowed him, and that he had been given no opportunity to repent and save himself. Had he not suspected, of course he would not have gone on as he did. No, he would not have sown, had he but foreseen what he would reap. There was injustice in it—aye, there was, somewhere. He regretted his role at the same time he resented it. And thus he turned stroke against reality; and sought here palliation, here leniency, as man will when within himself he is at once the judge and the prisoner in the dock. While he protested, he would also have cried for mercy.

Again he heard the queen's laugh, painted like herself. She evidently was in great feather. He shifted uneasily. His mind flew to the fact that where a kingdom—his kingdom, dear to him no matter what might obtrude to sway him—was at stake. Revolution; that had been the word brought by the men who had arrived before the cabins, and had reported, after a long and weary dinner of yesterday, whereat the queen ogled and coquetted. Del Oro pined his gallantries, Sir Hugo sat so suave and yet watchful, and he himself flushed and hot and ate and drank and ate all day.

Revolution; the forces of Prince George uprising and rallying, filling the countryside. Rumors, rumors—but nothing definite save the one fact, had a battle occurred? What was the result? Would he be known when the remainder of the bandits came. Lord Tonne, the sturdy old warrior—ah, George would find him a hard nut to crack. With Lord Tonne alive, the kingdom could not be lost. But the king? Where was the king? What would Lord Tonne think? He had given Lord Tonne a promise, and had deceived him. King and queen—both gone. Poor Stecia. But the Duke of Marto! By God, he should hang like as his foul soul might get! And the duchess—ah, no; there must be some mistake. She could not have betrayed him, knowingly. Not yet; he was willing to admit to her, he had not been tricked; no, he had not given more than he had received. 'Twas impossible that such as she could harbor treachery—she, so wondrous beautiful, so glorious in her dowry of eyes and hair and warm, soft skin. The king again shifted uneasily. His pride was stung.

But war! The clash of arms rang upon his hearing, and to his nostrils wafted the reek of ancestral battlefields. By St. Jude, brother or no brother, duchess or no duchess, even Doris or no Doris, he was the king, and king he would remain. His chest swelled, and the lust of conflict surged into his cheeks. Impatience thrilled him.

The queen laughed shrilly, and once more slightly leaned and flitted the captain's shoulders with her closed fan. The captain gathered his hat, and pressing his lips upon her hand suddenly arose. With eyes flaming, the king, too, arose. This Del Oro, this cur, this vulture, whose neck was shaping for the throat of his father's nose, daring so far! By—

lips upon her hand suddenly arose. With eyes flaming, the king, too, arose. This Del Oro, this cur, this vulture, whose neck was shaping for the throat of his father's nose, daring so far! By—

The captain was sauntering toward the cabin, a self-satisfied smile upon his evil countenance. With anger ill-concealed the king met him, and stood not aside to give him passage, but with a haughty nod, now particular. Umbrage clouded not upon his brow. He was too content.

"Where is the little man, Sir Hugo?" he asked, abstractedly.

"Within," answered the king, scant of words, black of looks.

The captain stroked by and entered. The king's eyes, perforce, deprived of him, sought the queen. She was sitting there, as he had been, and with sudden resolve the king advanced.

"Twas his first opportunity since their arrival in this accursed place to speak with her by themselves. Del Oro had covered close, and had monopolized her; and she, who would have been Sir Momus, or Sir Hugo, whichever might be his name. One had compelled caution, the other had impeded candor; but now at last might he speak with her untrammelled. He had hoped that he could prevail; he would make her herself again. Yes, he would call her Doris—and Doris would she become; his Doris. And eager, ambitious, he strode forward, and halted, but ready to be ashamed in front of her.

She was dallying with her fan; beneath their penciled brows her eyes were strangely bright, and rouge lay high, but not unbecomingly, upon her cheeks. She smiled, and he, who would have been Sir Hugo, he said, "Oh, it is you, is it?" she said. "You have come to say good-by, I venture. You must not try to kiss me. Kisses are for love, I am tired of other kisses. Kiss me for love at a proper distance; so. You will not come nearer, will you?"

"Doris!" besought the king, aggrieved, but startled, for about her was something so strained, so feverish, so unaccountably vivacious.

"Not Doris. Why, Doris? I am the Lady Louise. Doris is dead. There is no Doris."

"Sweetheart! Don't talk so. Look at me—there. I am your husband, Henry, come to be forgiven."

"Tell me, Henry. Do you think me crazy? I am not crazy. I am quite sane. I was crazy once; down there in the palace. Oh, so many women are crazy—are they? You must not blame Henry. I simply wanted to be happy. But now I am well—all well. Are you not glad, Henry? It relieves you of so much bother. I shall steadily improve up here, Henry."

"Doris! I do not understand."

"Tell me, Doris, is dead—buried in the palace. It is the Lady Louise who wishes you Godspeed."

"But I am not going," protested the king, gently. "Why do you talk so, dearest? What is it—do you hate me?"

"Dearest! That is a sweet word—but so easily spoken. Yet a woman likes it. Oh, we women are so silly. When do you start, Henry? This morning? This afternoon?"

"Start where, sweetheart?"

"Back to get the ransom, if you can; to do as you like; to war, to love; to regain a kingdom, to say 'sweetheart' to other ears. You say it very nicely, Henry. I used to see it. I do not think Del Oro can say it so, but he says it in a new way. One tries of the old—doesn't one, Henry?"

The queen's voice was mechanical, hurried, and in the middle of each tinted check glowed a spot of red not from the rouge. Her fingers nervously plucked and turned the fan in her lap.

"Explain to me about my going, please," said the king, still gently.

"Oh, you are going. The matter was easily settled. You want to go, don't you, Henry? Capt. Del Oro has consented. He will give you a little time for collecting the ransom. Maybe it is a larger sum than you think best. You need not send it, Henry. I shall be quite happy here. The captain loves me—oh, he has said so many nice things, and I believe them. I am to be his queen, Henry. Yes, a queen; and queens must be very happy, with a king for a husband. No, I do not mean this—this thug—this robber—this murderer, making love to you? And you listened? Why—Doris!"

"But he is a man—and men make love where they please, don't they, Henry? You do not care. Why should you care? Do you not want me to be loved? A woman is made to be loved, Henry—and I am a woman. You are so selfish."

"But Del Oro! You, Doris? And you would have me go, and leave you? It is monstrous! You cannot mean it! You may not forgive me, but you shall not do this. You are my wife; why, dearest, you are my wife."

"Oh, yes, I shall. What is wife to you, Henry? When I am gone then maybe you will love me again. I do not hate you, Henry. Del Oro may tire. Men do tire. Then you may want me again, perhaps even as soon as the ransom is fetched. He will not hurry you with the ransom. Go back to your kingdom—what kingdom is it? Oh, yes; a kingdom of two arms, is it not? And—"

"But to take you back—from him, Doris?"

"But why not? You would have me take you back from her. But it will not be necessary. I shall try not to call upon her. He swears he loves me. Up here there are not other women to tempt him and steal him from me. Oh, women are so cruel, and men are so false, but it is the woman who suffers. I shall never suffer again. I am so happy now. It is much better to be the Lady Louise than Queen Doris. I am the Lady Louise; yes, I am. That funny man with the great head will love me, go false, but it is different. I want to believe it—but sometimes—and she lowered her voice, as if in confidence—"I am puzzled. You think me crazy?" she