

SATURDAY

MAY 2

TEN CENTS

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



A Gypsy
Fantasy

by
Paul
Regard

"The Haunted Legacy"

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Vol. XXXI

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. XXXI

MAY 2, 1914.

No. 1

The Haunted Legacy

By
Paul Regard



A NOVEL--COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF THE INVISIBLE.

ALMOST before the limousine came to a standstill young Turga had thrown open the door and was darting across the sidewalk. He had tea-ed and tangoed for half an hour longer than he should have done, and he was in danger of being late for a dinner engagement.

It was his twenty-first birthday. The day had been full of excitement and drinks of one kind or another, and his nerves were on the jump. Youth and nerves were both in his present haste, yet as the street door closed behind him he paused.

In his hand was a soiled, yellow envelope. How it had got there he wasn't quite sure. He had a vague recollection of having passed some one on the outer steps. He wasn't sure. Yet there was the envelope.

It was odd. Athwart his high-strung nerves there swept, very lightly, a minor chord of uneasiness—a ghostly hand on the strings of a harp. He turned and threw a glance back in the direction from which he had just come.

Waiting automobile—a few nondescript pedestrians—general impression of a misty, autumnal evening, with the lights on streets and passing vehicles showing dimly—and that was all.

No one in the lobby, no one lurking on the steps, and yet the impression was growing stronger, now that he took thought, that there had been somebody there — a man, gaunt, dark — dark because the only really noticeable thing about him was the whiteness of his eyes.

Turga looked down at the missive again with a shuddering little smile. For a second or two he was almost tempted to cast it from him as a thing unclean. He mentally decided to burn his gloves, at any rate.

Still holding the yellow envelope in his hand, he entered the elevator and was carried to his bachelor quarters on the top floor.

An aged man servant was there to receive him — a man with a swarthy complexion and glowing dark eyes, with the stamp of strength and passion about him still despite his snow-white hair.

His appearance, as well as his language when he spoke, showed unmistakably that he and his young master were sprung from the same race.

For Turga also was dark — dark, slim, elegant — and his eyes had all the sombrous luster of the East.

"What is this thing, Paulo?" asked Turga, with a little laugh, as he allowed the servant to take his hat and stick. "Begging letter, I suppose."

Paulo took the letter as well, just as he had taken hat and stick, with unsmiling humility; but as he looked at the yellow envelope a gradual change of expression came over his face.

"Open it," young Turga flung over his shoulder as he strode through the padded luxury of his drawing-room into the room beyond. He had already floundered through his bath and into fresh linen when Paulo appeared again.

In one of his hands the servant still held the yellow envelope, and in the other was a crumpled sheet of paper. He was trembling. His eyes glowed, and he smiled slightly.

"It is the call, sir," he said in the

same musical language which Turga had used a little while before in addressing him.

"What call?"

Turga was struggling to get his tie just right, and didn't even turn. But he let his eyes drift beyond the shoulder of his reflection to where the reflected Paulo stood. What Turga saw in the old man's face brought him round with a recurrence of that same feeling of uncanniness he had experienced a little while before in the lower hall.

"What call, Paulo?" he asked, with a touch of irascibility. "Nothing doing for to-night, at any rate; I'm late now."

"It is for to-night, sir."

With visible constraint of the excitement which illumined his face, Paulo stepped forward with the paper outheld. Turga took it with a little gesture of impatience. He read a single line:

Come with Paulo at nine o'clock.

The only signature was a symbol in the form of a cross, to the arms of which were added winglike projections.

"Why, this is absurd!" he exclaimed. "It is necessary for me to be at the Plaza in fifteen minutes. I'm late now."

But even as he spoke he had a creeping sensation that the thing was not absurd. Paulo had never looked nor acted like this. Moreover, he felt that at last he was on the verge of enlightenment as to the mystery which had enshrouded his life.

It made him gasp. He knew so little about himself! All that he did know had been told him by Paulo. That he was rich, that he was noble — these things he had accepted as naturally as he accepted the color of his hair. So had it been even with his name.

He was Count Carlos Turga. No one had ever questioned it, he himself least of all. And Paulo was his servant.

"Look here, Paulo," he said after a frowning pause. "I ask you what's the meaning of this confounded tomfoolery—anonymous letter, go with you whether I want to or not? I call it cheeky. They can go to the devil!"

The boy was speaking to convince himself, not Paulo. The old servant listened without change of expression.

"You'll have to go, sir."

"Why?"

"It is important, sir."

"And if I refuse?"

The servant slowly shook his head.

"You can't refuse, sir," he said with meek obstinacy.

"I say why not?" cried Turga. He was working himself into a passion. "Do you think I'm going to disappoint my hostess at this hour?"

"You have time now, sir, to make your excuses."

Turga had finished dressing. For a moment or two he stood and looked at Paulo, with his slim, young form drawn up very straight and his splendid eyes blazing. Into the dusk of his cheeks there had crept an underglow of pink, such as might have come into the face of a dark-complexioned girl.

"To flazes with excuses!" he said. "I'm twenty-one. I'm master of my own movements, I imagine."

"The paper had the mark on it," Paulo sighed, with more than paternal patience.

"That swastika thing?"

"The winged cross."

"Winged fiddlesticks—"

"Shall I call up the Plaza, sir?"

Young Turga threw his clenched fists into the air above his head and grated a half-articulate curse.

"You'll drive me crazy, Paulo! What is this thing—or have you gone mad?"

Paulo smiled slightly.

"It is the call, sir," he said again as their dark eyes took contact without flinching. "The days of your preparation are over. Here is the winged cross to prove it. At nine o'clock you'll come with Paulo and

learn many things that he can't answer."

"And if I make them wait?"

"You won't make them wait."

Turga started to speak again, then dropped into a chair.

"Call the Plaza," he said in desperation.

CHAPTER II.

INTO THE UNKNOWN.

It was one of those misty nights in October when all material things are dissolved into a sort of vague unreality. There had been a little fog toward sundown, but this had increased with the advancing night. It grew heavier still as the automobile made its way down-town.

Turga was alone, for Paulo had taken his seat outside where he could direct the chauffeur on this strange excursion.

The young man had plenty of time to meditate. The night outside was symbolical in its mystery and gloom of the scarcely less impenetrable night in his own mind and heart.

Not for the first time—but more profoundly perhaps—he considered the facts and the circumstances of his career. As far back as his memory could go he had been a creature apart. He had never known family ties or affections, except as these came to him through the presence of the old servant. There had always been wealth, but the source of this wealth was as unknown to him as the source of his very existence.

Yet he was conscious that he had always been the object of unremitting care. No youth—and he knew many sons of families eminent socially and financially—had ever been more carefully clad, educated, and looked after generally.

Now he was twenty-one. He told himself that he was a man. With what he considered a man's courage and *sang-froid*, he attempted to con-

front not only the past riddles, but the present one.

The automobile had entered a region of deserted streets—streets that in the daytime teem with their striving millions, inhabited at night by mere memories. It was as a city of the dead; a city itself dead, now still and silent where a little before it was so instinct with life.

Through street after street they passed, each more deserted than the last; dark and silent houses peering down upon them; each succeeding lamp-post surmounted by a waning, sickly glow—as though these last sentinels of human activity were themselves discouraged, about to yield up their spirits to the triumphant gloom.

It was at the end of one of these streets, which had seemed interminable to the young man in the comfortable luxury of the limousine, that the automobile halted.

A moment later Turga confronted his servant on the sidewalk. Turga was still in evening dress. His silk hat was pushed back at a boyish angle of challenge. He stood with his feet apart and his chin down.

For a moment Paulo regarded him with that same cryptic smile that had been on his lips back in the apartment.

"I'm glad to see, sir, that you are not alarmed."

"Not alarmed, certainly not," said Turga. "But, by the Lord Harry, Paulo, if you've begun to joke with me at your age—"

The smile disappeared from the face of the old servant. Instead there appeared an expression of almost religious exaltation.

"It is no joke, sir," he whispered.

He turned and spoke a few words softly to the chauffeur, who thereupon touched his cap, resumed his seat, and prepared to drive away. He had not even paused to give Turga a glance—a most extraordinary thing for a well-trained chauffeur, as Turga knew him to be.

Ordinarily, a young man of distin-

guished appearance and arrayed in evening clothes would have attracted attention in that part of town. Yet, the occasional pedestrians whom they encountered passed them by without apparent notice. It was almost as though they were invisible.

The automobile had carried them through the down-town business section to the fringe of one of those lost residential districts—once aristocratic, now thick-coated with grimy squalor. It was a lugubrious place, where every house might have been the birthplace and home of tragedy; where dim alleyways led to dim, suggestive courts; where doors were open on black interiors.

The only signs of life were occasional frightened cats, starved and unclean—these and a few furtive men and limping women, the occasional squall of suffering children.

Turga was beyond the point of asking questions. He had never been in a place like this—not that he remembered. With a little internal clutching at his heart, he asked himself if it were possible that he had sprung from such surroundings—that this was the hideous geography of his origin.

Paulo did not enlighten him. Paulo had nothing to say. Once Turga had glanced at the old servant—had seen that rapt expression that had come there a while before when they were still standing at the side of the automobile.

It was evident that the old man knew where he was going. He walked with the air of one who treads a familiar path. He looked neither to right nor to left. He seemed to be absorbed in his own thought.

That they were near the river Turga knew. In the air was the damp reek of sea-fog and ships, of tar and bilge and ooze, and occasionally the smell of queerly aromatic cargoes from the far places of the world.

They came at last to the door of what appeared to be a deserted ware-

house. It was a large, low building of brick.

Over the door, almost illegible in the dim light, a yard-high expanse of scaling paint still proclaimed the name of "W. G. Frail." Turga started. He knew the Frails very well—from a distance—a rich and famous family.

Without pause, still intent on his secret broodings, Paulo brought out a key and unlocked the door. A moment later they had stepped inside and the door was closed behind them.

Turga felt a hand on his arm, whether Paulo's or not he could not say. At any rate, there was something unfamiliar about it.

Paulo had taken his arm, it is true, once or twice before in his life, when Turga had been having too much of a celebration; but the action then had always been timid and friendly.

There was nothing timid in the hand on his arm at the present time. It had the undefinable feel of authority about it—an authority which Turga, for some reason or other, neither questioned nor resisted. He told himself that he was in for an adventure, and that he would see it through.

There followed an interminable promenade across a rough plank floor. Not a word was spoken. No gleam of light came from any direction.

They passed through another door. There was a change of atmosphere; the air had become closer, damper, subterranean.

Upon Turga's straining senses there came two things—a recurrence of aromatic odors, very faint, and, fainter still, the sound of weird music and many voices.

CHAPTER III.

WITCHES' SABBATH.

At some time in the remote past the place had probably been used as a storage-cellar for alcoholic liquors—possibly Jamaica rum. The sweetish smell of spirits was still there.

There was a dim forest of brick pillars supporting the low, brick arches of the roof. What light there was came from what seemed to Turga as the remote distance—a suggestion of red and yellow, such as might be thrown out by either a camp-fire or by Venetian lanterns unsteadily suspended from moving hands.

They had come through the last door. He turned to look at his erstwhile invisible guard. It was Paulo.

From the farther end of the grotto-like place in which they found themselves there still came that confused babble of speech and intermittent gusts of music which had reached them before the last door had opened.

Without preliminary Paulo whistled—a high, shrill blast, with a little quaver on the end of it.

After that silence fell. Silent were their footsteps on the damp, earthen floor as they walked rapidly forward. The only sound that broke the stillness was the occasional dripping of water, the faint crackle of fire, and the bubbling murmur of a boiling pot.

Turga saw, fitfully outlined in the uncertain glow, the segment of a living circle—the faces of men and women, each impressed somehow with the seal of savagery, of cunning and cruelty and excitement.

Then the music broke out again, a wild, minor chant beginning with the quavering falsetto of some old man or woman, he knew not which, and gradually accumulating the hushed, strange cadence of other voices. And in these voices was the suggestion of the same things that he had seen in those oddly limned faces—savagery, cruelty, excitement.

As they passed the last row of pillars that barred his view, his first impressions were verified—both verified and magnified.

The circle was complete—men and women, perhaps two hundred of them, most of them old, some of them young, all seated on the floor, except for one old hag.

She it was, evidently, who was acting as mistress of the Satanic choir. She stood in the center of the circle, a grotesque figure—a grotesque silhouette against the red and yellow glow of an open fire over which an iron pot was simmering.

She appeared now large, now small, as the flames rose and fell; and again, almost invisible, by some trick of the uncertain light, as though she were not a creature of flesh and blood at all, but merely the fantom of a disordered brain.

It was some time before Turga's intellect resumed its proper functions. He was like a swimmer who had been cast into the middle of a whirlpool—the rushing of sensations had been too complex, too confusing, too overwhelming.

Then he began to recognize some of the words of the chant. He heard "Fate," "Doom," "Destruction." These words might have applied to his own impending destiny; but, before he could formulate the thought, he heard a name other than his own—"Frail."

He found himself at the center of the circle. He was standing just back of the Satanic choir-mistress. Paulo had brought him there, but Paulo had disappeared into the circle of dimly seen faces and figures.

"Fate," "Doom," "Destruction," "Frail"—the words were assuming their proper sequence in his brain. It was the language that he and Paulo had always used when speaking to each other—a dialect of the Bohemian mountains.

They were chanting the doom of the Frails—all that was left of the race of the great Count von Frelinghuysen, who had fled to America from Bohemia and changed his name half a century ago.

Turga had bent every faculty now to understand. He and Hugh Frail had been classmates in the same university, belonged to the same clubs—in a manner belonged to the same clique,

though they had never been in any sense intimate.

It was not so much a song—song would have been too pretty a term for that devilish chant—as it was a *recitative*, in which the old woman standing in front of him shrilled her uncannily falsetto—the crazy winging of a wounded bat—trailing along with it the sibilant weight of the chorus.

Aie, the lord-count was a mighty man,
And he builded his castles of blood
and gold,
Blood of our youth, the gold of our
clan,
But this is the end of the fated span;
Behold, behold!
We take again what was never sold.

If there is such a thing as fate in the lives of men, this appeared to be the temple of it, the woman in the center of the circle its high priestess. Her incantation was not devoid of logic, despite the apparent frenzy she threw into it. There was no denying that great families grew up, then decayed and disappeared like the trees of a forest.

That this hour was impending for the Frail family was conceivable. It was even conceivable that Turga himself was the chosen instrument to this end.

The longer he stood there the more completely he surrendered both will and personality. Upon him was the omnipotent grip of destiny. Destiny had provided him with all things. Destiny was his creator. He had never felt it before, but he felt it now—that forever afterward, in all things, by day and by night, he could not otherwise move or think or feel.

Suddenly silence fell on the assemblage, and he was looking into the beady, inscrutable eyes of the old woman. She was very wrinkled, very yellow and terrible; yet her ugliness had about it something of the majesty of age and infinite intelligence.

"Who are you?" she asked.

In the tremendous silence Turga heard his own voice recite his name,

age, address. Each syllable he pronounced was echoed in a whisper from the circle.

CHAPTER IV.

BAR SINISTER.

THERE followed another period of silence. Turga stood very straight. He made a proud young figure standing there—proud and incongruous in his evening clothes there in the dank crypt with no other light than that of the open fire, confronted by the ancient witch, circled by her fantasmic band of followers. Her eyes held his, beady and inscrutable.

"Yes, that name will do," she said in soothing tones widely different from those she had used in her incantation. "But the time has come for you to know the truth. You, also, are a Frelinghuysen, my chick. Yes, you're of the noble blood—the noble black blood. Left-handed—left-handed."

"I'm right-handed," said Turga, with that slight blush of his.

"Left-handed, my chick," said the old woman—"left-handed, like all of us here; and yours the legacy."

"What legacy?" he asked.

With a quick movement the old woman turned and threw out her hand over the bubbling kettle. Instantly there rose from it a cloud of aromatic, intoxicating steam.

Into this the old woman peered for a moment or two with an expression of eager expectancy. Suddenly again she reached out, and this time it seemed that from the wraith of steam she plucked a coin.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler*," she murmured. "Have you ever heard of it?"

"No."

"This is it"

She kissed it and passed it over to him. He saw that it was a dollar—an ordinary American dollar of early date, worn and shiny. It seemed to possess some other warmth than that

of its recent bath of steam. It made his fingers tingle. It sent throughout his entire being a feeling of *malaise*, almost of nausea.

He would have given it back. He could not. It clung to him, gripped him—that bit of minted silver—as though it were a frightful thing, the metallic heart of some invisible octopus, the signet of an invisible hand.

As he stared at it he saw that it also bore the emblem of the winged cross rudely graven on its surface. Signet indeed of an invisible hand—a hand that was gripping him.

"What is it?" he managed to articulate in strained tones.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler*," the old woman repeated, speaking softly with a thrill of excitement. "That is your heritage, my chick—oh, a rare and wonderful heritage!"

She cackled with delight.

"What centuries are locked up in it," she went on. "He fled from Holland to Bohemia, did the first Frelinghuysen, before America was. He built his castle. The king was his friend. That was nothing."

She emphasized her statement by slowly wagging a crooked finger. Her small eyes were fixed, yet glowing still with excitement.

"That was nothing. The curse of his devil's pact was upon him. Since then it has pursued his line. The last count fled to America, even as the first count fled to Bohemia; but no man can flee his own shadow, my chick. Thou art the shadow. The dollar is thy legacy. Thine the power to carry on the curse—the curse of the Frelinghuysens—curse of the Frails."

"And if I refuse?"

"You can't refuse."

"I'm a man—I'm twenty-one."

The old woman laughed again—a derisive, fateful laugh.

"The world is full of men like you. And which will be the gallows-bird and which the bishop? The world is full of sapling-trees. And which will be the crosier and which the gibbet?"

"Ah, not for nothing have we reared you in idleness and luxury. But now the time has come. A young tree grew to become a gibbet. This is you, my chick."

Turga stood there palpitant, somewhat frightened, yet his fear dominated, overwhelmed, by a sense of fatality, of exalted helplessness. Upon him he felt the grip of the invisible. He knew that the old woman was speaking the truth.

The Turga of the past—the reckless, care-free youth—was a fading ghost. This present Turga was the reality, would remain so forever more. He swallowed, sought to get a grip on himself, tried to take a man's part in the situation. He tore his eyes away from those of the old woman, glanced at the shadowy faces of the circle.

"Who are these people?" he asked.

"They are the last of the Cave-Dwellers," the old woman answered. "Our work is done in the old country. Schloss Frelinghuysen will never see another Frelinghuysen or a Frail. Strangers are buying it. Soon it will burn. Peasants will sow and reap where the cruel counts held sway. We have followed where the last count led."

She laughed softly. The laugh was echoed with a ghostly sibilance by the people in the circle.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler* has become the dollar of the Frails. The curse is in it. You'll see. You'll see."

Before Turga could draw back or even suspect her purpose, she had seized his shoulders in her skinny hands, had brought her dreadful face to his, and kissed him.

Turga felt his senses reel. He was conscious that the entire assemblage had risen to its feet, that men and women were alike engaged in a mad saraband. There were shrieks of wild laughter and quick anger, of half articulate speech and song. But through it all there reached the center of his brain, steadily, insistently, the voice of the old woman.

She was calling him the chosen one, telling him that he was the ax in the hand of the woodchopper, that the creator of the Frelinghuysen name and fortune had borrowed from the world and had never paid back, that the world would reclaim its own, even as the earth had already reclaimed, long ago, its original toll of titled dust.

The noise, the confusion, the intoxicating fumes from the seething pot mounted to Turga's head.

How he left the place he hardly knew. He had a vague recollection afterward of going out the way he had come in, without Paulo there to help him, back through the mean streets until he happened upon his automobile.

At sight of him the chauffeur jumped down from his seat and opened the door of the limousine.

Turga sank back into the familiar seat and the motor throbbed into life. Was he also, he wondered, a mere machine, to be stilled or sped into action at the will of some higher power?

He strove to find himself, to recover something of the confidence and equipoise that had been so strong within him only a few hours before.

His hand touched the coin in his pocket, lingered there. Up from it—swift, subtle, omnipotent—sprang something that gripped him, held him fast, gave him that same feeling of exalted helplessness.

There reeled through his brain a vision of sinister power.

CHAPTER V.

SET TO MUSIC.

THEY rolled out of the section of deserted streets into the sudden light and activity of Fourteenth Street, then on up through the reassuring brilliance and movement of upper Broadway. Yet Turga felt strangely apart, almost as though he were alone in silence and darkness, and all these people and things he saw and heard were but the phantasmagoria of a disordered brain.

He thought wildly of making this solitude real, of going home, of locking himself into his bedroom—anywhere, anything to shut out this compelling, invisible specter.

With a hand that trembled slightly he seized the speaking-tube to give the order to the chauffeur.

Then he had one of the strangest experiences of his life.

It was his voice that spoke. But it was as though the will that formed the words were other than his own.

Home! Home! That was where he wanted to go; yet, very complacent, cool, with no trace of excitement, his voice was instructing the chauffeur to drive to the opera.

The man didn't understand immediately. Turga's heart was thumping. This time—this time—

While he was still resolving to resist, still striving to master the sort of terror which engulfed him, his voice, still dispassionate, repeated the order: "To the opera!"

Even there in the promenade of the crowded auditorium he felt strangely alone. All about him were the smooth backs and the sleek, well-nourished heads of men dressed as he was, yet they might have been so many spirits. Some one spoke to him, clapped him familiarly on the shoulder.

He murmured a reply, but he had not even noticed who it was. He heard the stormy clamor of the "Walküre," yet he seemed to be in the silence.

He had tried to go home. A superior power had forbade—that was the thing that kept beating through his brain. That was the thing which became the theme of the music—throbbing, thunderous, triumphant—and the wild messengers of *Wotan* were attendant upon him—him, Count Carlos Turga.

While he listened and mused—waited as a man waits for a pain or a delusion to wear itself away—he suddenly became conscious that his eyes, for the past several minutes, had been

directed and held to something outside his purpose, just as his voice had been when speaking to his chauffeur.

With a fresh quiver of an almost tragic interest, he recognized the object—or, rather, the objects—of his interest.

He was looking at a party in the box almost directly opposite—a fascinating woman of about forty or so, gorgeously appareled and begemmed; a girl of nineteen, slender and beautiful, and then a youth of his own age.

As he looked he saw the elder woman lift her *lorgnon* and scrutinize him with the lazy insolence of her kind, and through his heart there crept a feeling of dumb hatred. Into his face there crept a sullen flush, then faded again.

He looked at the girl—dark hair, gray eyes, exotic—and his hatred was modified by the world-old sense of masculine greed. She was very young, very beautiful, very desirable in every way.

Again his eyes shifted and rested on the youth. Surely the old dame of the warehouse had given him an easy task. The work of fate—the work to which that invisible hand and the cursed dollar in his pocket had doomed him—might not be so disagreeable and difficult, after all. For the first time that evening he felt a wave of almost good humor, almost of exultation.

Then, once again, he felt that inexplicable wave of dumb hatred, of a desire to work ill, to profit by the misfortune of these people at whom he was looking and who had been looking at him.

For they were Mrs. Frail—the former Princess Viatka—and her two children, Hugh and Agatha, all that was left of the fated line, and these were the ones that he was destined to destroy.

He must not let them suspect, he told himself. He tried to look away. He could not. A black cloud had closed in upon his field of vision.

The wild music of the "Walküre" still throbbed in his brain; but of all the

vast assemblage there he could see only those three—the fascinating Mrs. Frail, the girl at her side, the weak and self-indulgent face of the heir of all the Frail millions.

Once more Turga's hand came in contact with the coin of ill-omen the old woman had given him.

As he recognized the feel of it he saw Hugh Frail bow in his direction, then rise and leave his place.

CHAPTER VI.

A GHOSTLY SOUVENIR.

THERE was something about young Count Carlos Turga that had always made a certain appeal to the somewhat jaded interest of the widow of the late Horace Frail. She had often seen the youth hovering about on various occasions—dances, garden-parties, horse-shows.

She had admired him. Every woman did that. No handsomer, better-mannered young man was imaginable, though the former Princess Viatka came from a part of the world where men are notoriously good-looking.

She was a Slav in the flower of her age—gray eyes and abundant dark hair sagaciously coifed, subtle, ardent, possessing a tremendous amount of what people call temperament, thirsty always for new sensations, yet never losing that almost Oriental fatalism which translated itself in terms of the most exquisite poise.

There was a delightful little flutter in her bosom now as she lifted her *lorgnon*. Perhaps it was that stormy "Walküre" music quite as much as it was the appearance of young Turga himself.

He appeared to be very tragic, very distraught. Perhaps he was in trouble. Into the somewhat tropical field of her imagination there sprang up some idea of consoling him.

He was certainly looking in their direction. It couldn't be Agatha who wholly absorbed his attention. She

knew all about the psychology of young men, and Agatha was very immature, not to say acidulous, and green.

Mrs. Frail reclined languidly back in her chair and touched her son on the arm with her fan. Hugh generally required some physical jolt to awaken him.

"Isn't that young Count Turga over there, dear?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "Just been looking at him. A bit thick, you know—his staring at Agatha like that."

"Let him stare," said Agatha by way of disguising any emotion she might have felt.

She was a slim, young thing, was Agatha, but there was that about her—just as there was about her mother—of the beautiful, dreamy, aristocratic Siberian tigress.

Still young, slightly acidulous and green perhaps, but quite self-sufficient, quite self-possessed and capable of managing her own affairs, was Agatha.

She also had dark hair and gray eyes, like her mother's; but her eyes were more responsive, more capable of fleeting changefulness.

"By the way," Mrs. Frail resumed, blissfully ignoring the animadversion of her son, "he could just complete a little party at supper."

Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

"I was just going to beg off, mater."

"Indeed!"

"A couple of fellows at the club—really couldn't get out of it, you know."

Mrs. Frail stifled a yawn. She didn't care very much what Hugh did; this was her way of showing it.

"Then I must have Count Turga to take your place," she sighed with fine resignation.

"I'll try to catch the animal for you now," Hugh answered with something bordering on animation. One cocktail now would do him a world of good.

Turga wasn't surprised, a little later, when young Frail delivered himself of the invitation. It was almost

as though he had been expecting it. For the fraction of a second his dark eyes swept the young man in front of him, and there flashed through his heart and brain, like the tepid fire of old wine, an almost dreamlike sense of power.

The feeling was still strong within him as he entered the Frail box, brought the pink, beautifully manicured tips of the former Princess Viatka's fingers to his lips, and he enveloped, fleetingly, with his dark eyes the exceedingly graceful figure of Agatha Frail.

He hadn't desired the thing. It was fate that had brought him here. Had he had his own way he would even now be mooning the hours away in morose loneliness in his own bedroom. But the invisible guardian had decreed otherwise, had brought him into the presence of all that remained of the great family whose arbiter he was—youth, wealth, beauty.

There was still that quality of tragic solemnity in his deportment which had just now so deeply impressed the former Princess Viatka's impressionable nature.

But Turga was smiling in his heart.

The chant still cadenced through his brain—

—Behold, behold!

We take again what was never sold.

Throughout the remainder of the opera, and afterward, in the soft refulgence of the supper-table, with the cloyingly sweet music of a Hungarian band charging the atmosphere, Mrs. Frail was conscious that Turga's eyes were upon her.

The fact gave her quite an unusual and decidedly pleasant little thrill. She had never felt like that before when young men had looked at her. She had a presentiment of danger, illusive, haunting, ghostly. The music surged in upon them, swooning, voluptuous.

"They lack the fire of our Bohemian players," said Mrs. Frail, with a smile that called for more intimate speech.

Turga's eyes flashed. Again that undertone of pink suffused his cheeks.

"How did you know that I was Bohemian?" he asked.

"I know Bohemia well," she answered. "It was there that I lived for years after my marriage; you know, Mr. Frail had a place there. We still have it—a gloomy and terrible place; Schloss Frelinghuysen, in the Piesen Hills."

"And you're going back some time?"

The former Princess Viatka shrugged her exquisite shoulders.

"It was there that Mr. Frail died."

She flashed a pink and white smile in Turga's direction sufficient to indicate that her mourning was a thing of the remote past. But his somber eyes came back from Agatha, met hers, and compelled her to go on in spite of herself.

"A duel—a countryman of yours. Schloss Frelinghuysen always was haunted—family curse—all that sort of thing. That was why Count von Frelinghuysen, Mr. Frail's grandfather, came to this country and clipped his name."

"And left the curse behind him?"

Turga was smiling, but an inner excitement had quickened his pulse. Everything—everything—was adding realization to this ghostly world which that night had been uncovered to him.

Mrs. Frail affected a slight shudder—a little shrinking of her delicately carved throat and shoulders.

"I believe not," she answered. Her vibrant voice dropped still lower, came to him accompanied by a minor rhapsody from the orchestra. "It all came back to me to-night when I saw you looking so dreadfully tragic at the opera. They say that ghosts can't cross the water, you know; but, somehow—"

Without premeditation, Turga had drawn the marked dollar from his pocket and was idly toying with it on the table in front of him. At the sudden break of what Mrs. Frail had to

say he again glanced up at her. She was looking at the coin with a sort of passionate eagerness.

"What have you there? Where did you get it?" she whispered.

He held out the coin for her examination, and let his eyes drift over to Agatha; only dimly visible in the light of the shaded candelabra, she was manifesting her disapproval of her mother's monopoly by affecting an exaggerated indifference.

Mrs. Frail had taken the coin, was staring at it, fascinated.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler*," she whispered. "The dollar of the Frails! The dollar Horace carried when he was killed in the duel. I knew it! I knew it!"

She lifted her eyes to Turga's. He was again looking at her. She passed the coin back to him. It was quite obvious that she was frightened—frightened but thoroughly happy, as is often the way with women like that.

"The ghost," she thrilled softly—"the ghost has crossed the water."

CHAPTER VII.

FOR HIGH STAKES.

It was late, but Turga had no desire for sleep. He had hurried back to his bachelor apartment, unhindered this time by the invisible hand which had rested upon him so heavily some time before.

Paulo was not there. For the first time within Turga's memory the aged servant was not where he should have been. It was but another incident in the chain of circumstances which Turga felt was binding him.

He telephoned to the lower hall. Paulo had not been seen since they had gone out together earlier in the evening. He called up the garage and interviewed the chauffeur. The man's memory of the night's events coincided wholly with his in every respect, so far as that was possible.

There was no trace of the cryptic

message which had served as a preliminary of the mystery. Paulo had evidently taken it with him.

He threw himself into an easy chair and tried to reflect. Had there been nothing else, it was remarkable enough the way he had been brought into contact with the Frails that night. Mrs. Frail had never been at such pains before to manifest any interest that she might have had in him.

He recalled again their moment of parting, when her fingers had lingered in his, when she had looked into his eyes with that strange expression of hers—a mingling of joy and fear and almost tragic anticipation—which he had first noticed when they were sitting together at the supper-table. It made him feel a little cruel, gave him once more that vision of sinister power.

Then the memory of the mother was blotted out by thought of that fairer, younger face and figure—Agatha, with Heaven knows what of volcanic fire smoldering under the gray ash of her inscrutable eyes.

And he, Count Carlos Turga, was the ax in the hand of the great wood-chopper, he the sapling-gibbet, he the ordained instrument of destruction!

Gradually, at thought of her, his excitement was tinged with something of remorse as well. It brought with it a resurgence of doubt and rebellion. After all, the thing was too absurd. He must have drunk too much. Mentally, he catalogued the events and libations of the afternoon.

But even as he reflected, some force outside of himself—that same strange extra-volition which he had already experienced—had started him again toward the elevator.

This time he did not resist. He knew that it would be futile to resist. He even argued with himself in a blind attempt to prove that he was doing what he wanted to do; that the cool air of the night would do him good; that contact with the material aspects of normal things would bring him back to normal comprehension.

But the night had gone foggier than ever—a night of infernal enchantment when nothing was natural. He walked on and on, moodily lighting cigarette after cigarette in an effort to regain some degree of calm.

Had he questioned himself, he would have admitted that there was only one place in town that he really cared to avoid—that was the Checker Club, the one club where he knew he would be pretty sure to encounter Hugh Frail. He had had quite enough excitement that night. He wished no more.

Yet, he was not altogether surprised when he lifted his eyes and found that he had come to the Checker Club's ample door.

For a moment he paused. He smiled a little, felt within himself an impulse to turn back. He translated this impulse into the form of a command which he sent along the telegraph system of his nerves. It was as though his will had not been—as though it had never been. He was like a swimmer powerless in the sweep of a great current.

His feet were carrying him through the club-house entrance.

It wasn't a very large club, but with a somewhat large reputation for the liberality of its house rules and the extent to which this liberality was utilized by its limited membership.

Even before Turga had crossed the entrance-hall he could hear the voice of young Hugh Frail lifted high in maudlin speech. The sound came to Turga as both promise and challenge. Was this, then, the appointed hour?

For a second or two he paused in the doorway. A smile was on his lips, a gleam of almost savage excitement, such as he himself had seen on other faces that night, came into his eyes. It had needed but a glance to see that the inmates of the billiard-room had been gambling—some primitive game of heads and tails.

Young Frail, his weak face flushed, was crowing some recent victory like a tipsy cock.

"I've got you all bluffed," he said. "You're pikers—all of you. I challenge the world."

"There's Turga," somebody said. "Try him."

Frail turned and looked at Turga unsteadily. For the second time that night their eyes met—the one sober, fateful, something about him of the watchful snake; the other muddled, arrogant, foolish.

"Heads or tails?" Frail cried. And he added the information: "I'm the champion of the world, Turga, old chap. Fair warning. Hate to take money from a child."

As he spoke he tossed a gold coin into the air as a demonstration of his claim and called heads. Heads it was.

He had advanced to that uncanny state of inebriety where some people are possessed of a sort of second sight. He again tossed the coin; again called the turn.

"For twenty dollars, what will it be?"

The coin shot, revolving, into the air—a slender thread of light.

"Heads," said Turga softly. He had drawn within himself. He was letting that other will do as it would.

"Heads it is!" cried several of the crowd with delight.

Into Frail's face had come a look of drunken stupefaction. What had happened struck him as incredible, unjust.

"Make it a hundred," he urged, bent on revenge.

Turga did not speak. He poised the coin he had just recovered on thumb and finger and sent it whirling upward. There had recurred to him that words of the old woman that he had come into his legacy—that marked silver coin. If she had meant by that that funds were no more to be sent to him as heretofore, it was high time that he be accumulating some money of his own. Year after year these funds had come to him. He had never asked whence or why.

"Heads," Frail murmured with less confidence than he had shown before.

The coin clinked down, rolled the length of the table, and toppled over on its side. A chorus of exclamations went up from the crowd. It was tails. Turga had won again.

Frail was furious. But he sought to cover his discomfiture with rude sportsmanship.

"I'm tired of this kid-play," he averred. "Listen, Turga; are you a sport? One more shot for"—he paused to give emphasis to what he was going to say—"for ten thousand dollars."

"Ah, cut it out, Hugh!" some one objected.

Turga glanced in that direction, saw a stout young man with broad shoulders and yellow hair—Frederic Graw 3d. They had never liked each other to any marked extent.

"I'm on," Turga said softly, with his eyes again on Frail. "I'm on for any amount you wish."

Frederic Graw 3d had taken Frail by the arm, was expostulating with him; but Frail was obdurate, shook himself free.

"For ten thousand—more if you want," he insisted.

"For ten thousand," said Turga softly.

His hand had sought the marked dollar in his pocket. At contact with it there had again crept up his arm and throughout his entire being a sense of fatality. He had nothing whatever to do with what was to follow. He was but the instrument in the grip of a greater power.

He had brought out the coin and placed it on the table in front of him. As in a dream, he heard his voice ask the question as to whether or not he should make the toss.

Graw had whispered something to Frail—a warning perhaps, for Hugh had been borrowing heavily of late—but Frail continued to disregard him. Graw turned to Turga. Had he spoken to a deaf man it would have been the same.

"You toss," Frail commanded, "I'll call the turn."

"For ten thousand dollars," Turga said, his voice barely above a whisper.

For a moment or so he stood there, holding up the coin, waiting, half-fearful, expectant, yet certain of what was to follow. Suddenly the muscles of his arm and hand twitched convulsively and the coin was in the air.

It had almost touched the table again before Frail spoke. All confidence had gone out of his voice. In spite of his effort to appear indifferent, there was no mistaking that tremulous huskiness.

"Heads!"

Turga did not even look to see whether he had won or lost. He knew—knew he had won even before he heard those there proclaim the fact.

Frail had leaned over and seized the marked dollar.

"Don't mind, do you, Turga?" he asked with sudden sobriety.

"Don't mind what?"

"Don't mind if I keep this dollar as a souvenir?"

"Of course not." He paused. "Why?"

Young Frail appeared to have recovered his sobriety. He gazed down at the coin for a while musingly.

"Coins like this have had a place in my family history," he said. "Maybe this one's haunted. I want to try the thing out."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ZIGZAG ROAD.

A HIGH-POWERED roadster with a single occupant swerved into Broadway, just missing the curb.

Turga, standing alone on the corner, recognized Frail. His late adversary at the Checker Club was off for a spin. Those solitary "joy rides" of his were celebrated—his favorite wind-up for a night filled with other kinds of exhilaration.

Turga felt a little crisping of excitement. There went the "winged dollar."

There was something uncanny in that careening power, only half dominated by the tipsy youth—*Phaethon and the Chariot of the Sun*.

There was a parking-space for public automobiles but a few yards away. Before Frail's machine had traversed the distance of two city blocks—making an exaggerated curve round a vigilant policeman—Turga had stepped quickly forward, a nervous cranking-movement of one of his arms sufficient hint to the chauffeur of one of the largest machines. It happened to be an equal of Frail's machine in almost every respect—late the property of some private in New York's great army of ephemeral rich.

"Follow that machine," said Turga briefly.

The chauffeur wasted neither time nor words. He was a wise young man so familiar with the night-life of the city that he had ceased to wonder—or to ask explanations—when a fare was so obviously a commander of ready money.

Frail was already approaching Central Park. The chauffeur of Turga's machine slid discreetly past the policeman, then shot forward with a breath-taking burst of speed. Before two minutes had elapsed, the tail-light of the first machine had grown brighter.

Frail was evidently not out for speed—not yet. He was seeing how close he could come to various obstacles, moving and stationary, without touching them. It was a favorite sport of his.

Half through the park, he swung out into Central Park West and started south at a livelier clip. He was no longer toying with danger. He had apparently selected a destination and was making for it by the shortest route. They were just in time to meet a ferry for the Jersey shore.

Frail appeared to be perfectly happy. He was in evening dress, but he was bare-headed and sat hunched up in his driver's seat. He looked neither to right nor to left, nor behind him.

They climbed a long incline into the

smooth expanse of a deserted boulevard. There was a magnificent burst of speed for half a dozen miles or so, then Frail again began his fancy-work—swinging giddily from one side of the broad road to the other. Then he was off again like a shooting star.

Turga's chauffeur grinned, but spoke no word. Turga kept his eyes on the dim, red light.

Before him it wound in and out through the misty darkness, now faint, now clear, like the annunciator on some tally-board of fate.

Frail had left the boulevard, turned into a more dangerous road—narrower, darker, not so straight. Again he had stopped wavering, was again intent in getting from his machine its last shred of speed. There were risks enough.

They dropped dizzily down long descents, catapulted over hills, stormed like the night-wind through sleeping hamlets.

It had become a race. Turga's chauffeur had settled a little lower in his seat. This was something else than a noisy excursion round town. His mouth was finer drawn. The lines from nose to chin had deepened.

Five years had dropped from his life. He was back again in the heyday of road-racing—when he had the big chance, when he had come within just an ace of glory and fortune.

Turga long ago had cast hat and stick into the tonneau back of him. He was crouching in his seat at the chauffeur's side. The wind gripped his face like a cold, wet towel, blinding and stifling him.

Only occasionally now could he see the red spark that was luring them on—the fugitive curse of the winged dollar. And who could say where the curse would fall?

They unreeled swift, disordered miles of wood and open meadow. The Frail country-place lay far up on the Hudson. It was obvious that this was the destination. It couldn't be much farther now.

There was a shrill discordance in the

hurricane noise besetting them, a sudden slackening of speed. Turga lifted himself slightly. He was sore and cramped. He was suddenly conscious that for several minutes the fitful red spark that they had been chasing had disappeared.

They were in a heavily wooded country. As their speed slackened still more, a tremendous silence seemed to deluge in upon them from the frightened trees. For the first time the chauffeur spoke.

"Something's happened."

"An accident?"

"Nothing else."

Turga experienced a pang at his straining heart. It was the ultimate test. It was no nightmare.

He had heard a strange, old woman singing the doom of the Frails—in a warehouse with the Frail name on it, still redolent of the spirits that had contributed so much to the Frail fortune—and he had had his allotted share in the working out of fate.

In the great stillness that had fallen the machine crept forward then round a turn.

And by the light of their *phares* they saw the machine that they had been pursuing there, just ahead of them.

It was turned half round. It was crumpled down, broken, spent, like an exhausted runner.

CHAPTER IX.

BROWN COTTAGE, BLUE EYES.

THEY found him lying in a ditch at the side of the road a dozen yards farther on. There was a little blood on his face, but this might have come from a flying pebble during the run.

He was breathing. One of his arms was twisted beneath him. But so far as they could discover from their first, hasty, nervous examination, there was nothing to indicate that his injuries would be fatal. He was unconscious, but his pulse was strong. A tangle of

weeds and high grass had broken his fall.

"There's a house near here," said the chauffeur. "We'll get him to it."

"Where?"

"Get him into our machine. It can't be far."

They lifted him up as gently as possible. The twisted arm had been broken or dislocated; they didn't know which. Investigation just then would have done no good, anyway.

"I've got a little booze I keep for accidents," the chauffeur suggested hopefully.

"He's had enough as it is," Turga answered.

The chauffeur was right. Before they had traversed a quarter of a mile they came to a private driveway serpentine among the trees through an opening in a low stone wall. Back from the road they made out the dim silhouette of a cottage.

The chauffeur got down from the machine and went in to investigate.

Turga, still in the machine, supporting the unconscious Frail, saw a yellow gleam of light, heard the barking of a dog, then voices. Again he touched Frail's pulse. He felt almost as though he had a share in murder.

The chauffeur came running back and clambered into his seat.

"We're lucky," he said. "The man who lives here is a doctor."

He swung the machine round and brought it daintily up the private driveway. Turga could see that they were in the precincts of one of those country homes which are found in the neighborhood of every great city—modest, yet luxurious in its perfect comfort, beautiful, exquisitely kept.

It was a large brown cottage, and even in the gray darkness of the October night there was a hint of scarlet oak and maple, of massed chrysanthemums and other autumn flowers. The air had a special fragrance—healing, aromatic, as though the master of the house had summoned nature to assist him in the practise of his art.

The front door was open. Turga saw a stout, rubicund old gentleman, with a mass of disorderly white hair, standing there to receive them. He helped them carry Frail through the hall and into a leather-furnished and book-lined study. There they placed him on a broad divan.

"The end of a night's frolic," said the chauffeur, in quest of something to say.

"And the beginning of a career," said the doctor gently enough.

"It's Mr. Frail."

Both Turga and the chauffeur turned.

A girl had entered, unheard until she spoke. She couldn't have been more than nineteen, but she appeared even younger—her heavy, pale, yellow hair hanging down her back in a single braid, her sloping shoulders delicate and almost childlike in the thin, light-blue kimono; a delicately chiseled face with a fine cheek-bone and a fine chin, and the softest, bluest eyes—so Turga thought—that man ever looked upon or that ever looked on man.

There was something at once fairy-like and maternal in this soft entrance of hers. She was perfectly modest, but not the least nervous.

"Gentlemen," said the physician, without interrupting his intent ministrations to his patient, "this is my daughter, Miss Carstairs. She generally helps me in affairs like this."

Miss Carstairs acknowledged this somewhat summary presentation with a brief glance, a bare nod. Her alert sympathy was otherwise engaged. Already she was assisting her father.

Frail opened his eyes.

"I came a cropper," he murmured.

His eyes met those of the girl leaning over him, and tarried there.

"And I've died," he continued, "and gone to heaven."

The doctor snorted, then delivered himself of a cheery little laugh.

"Not so bad as that," he said. "A dislocated shoulder, a broken collar-bone."

The girl helped him with steady hand; the doctor had stripped the injured shoulder. Turga, seeing that he could be of no assistance, and with a guilty desire to keep his presence unknown to Frail, had passed out into the hall, followed by the chauffeur. They heard Frail groan and expostulate as the doctor performed his painful service; then there was silence again.

Presently Miss Carstairs came out to where they were waiting.

"Mr. Frail is a neighbor of ours. He is in good hands," she added with a swift smile. "If you don't mind, I think that we had better keep him here for the night. He is rather unstrung—needs rest, you know."

The look of her blue eyes came back to Turga as he and the chauffeur drove back their lonely way to the city.

CHAPTER X.

HIS GUARDIAN ANGEL.

His surroundings were so wholly at variance with the way he felt that Hugh Frail groaned inwardly. His physical discomfort was sufficient, but the groan was intended to express his bitterness of spirit. He felt abominably unworthy, unspeakably unclean. Everywhere he looked was the impeccable chastity of pale blue and white.

His headache was bad enough, and a stabbing pain came from the region of his right shoulder when he attempted to move. But his remorse was worse than either of these things.

He wasn't yet quite sure where he was. He had but the haziest recollection of what had happened after losing far more than he could afford at the Checker Club. Then, by slow degrees, his flight by motor returned to him—that he had started out for his family's country-place at Cherry Hills, that some place along the road there had been an accident.

Then he remembered dimly, as one recalls the phantasmagoria of a dream,

the ministration of the doctor, the vision of a soft-handed, blue-eyed girl.

It seemed to him that he had seen her before. He wondered where? Perhaps this was her room. It looked as though it might be. Again remorse and a sense of unworthiness submerged him.

There were blue-silk curtains at the French windows. The wall-paper was blue and white. So was the upholstery, as much as he could see of it. It all harmonized with the fragment of blue sky he could see through the white branches of a grove of beeches, thus accentuating the ethereal, unearthly quality of the place.

"If I ever," he reflected—"if I ever—"

He paused to meditate an oath sufficiently solemn to bind himself for the rest of his natural life, when there was a faint tapping at the door. Then the latch clicked. He watched in silence, half suspecting who the visitor would be, fearful lest she be frightened away before he could look at her.

He recognized her now—the daughter of Dr. Carstairs—though he had never spoken to her. From a distance he had even noticed that she was good-looking, but he had never suspected her of being so downright beautiful.

She noticed that his eyes were open, and her first expression of caution was dissolved in a smile of quick sympathy.

"How are you?" she asked.

"Wonderfully fine," he managed to say; but the look of undisguisable misery on his face gave him the lie.

Miss Carstairs had stepped forward with no more hesitancy than any trained nurse would have displayed and put a cool, smooth hand on his forehead. Young Frail closed his eyes and held his breath.

"A little fever," she said; "not much."

"Not when your hand's there," he told her.

"*Katzenjammer!*" she diagnosed.

"And repentance," he supplemented. "Will you ever forgive me?"

"It isn't I who have anything to forgive," she said.

"But it will help a lot—"

Her blue eyes were looking down upon him with fathomless serenity. Again there came in upon him painfully that feeling of wretched unworthiness that was so strong upon him when he first awoke. He had made a little effort at levity, but all levity went out of him. No sinner, dragging his soiled record to the footsteps of the throne, could have felt much more abased than he did.

Those blue eyes above him were like two transparent fragments of the blue sky.

"Gee," he broke out, with a self-surprising tremor in his voice, "but I do feel rotten!"

"Poor boy!"

Again that wonderfully cool, smooth hand resumed its place on his forehead. Again Frail closed his eyes, but this time with some vague idea of not embarrassing her when he said what he had to say.

"Not the way you mean," he explained. "You know, you look so altogether different from what I know I am."

He paused. There was no fluctuation of the hand on his forehead. He kept his eyes closed. He didn't have to look to know that Miss Carstairs understood.

"We've sent Uncle Jerry, our gardener, over to your place for some clothes," she said soberly. "As soon as he comes back he'll help you bathe and dress. Shall I bring you your breakfast now?"

"I could wash my own face," said Frail.

He demonstrated the possibility by moving his left hand over his face in an imaginary ablution. Without premeditation his hand came into contact with hers. It startled him so that for a moment he left it there—just barely touching it.

Had the contact been electrical, the thrill of it couldn't have been more

real. Miss Carstairs made no move to draw her hand away.

"I'm a trained nurse," she said with an excited little laugh like a child proposing a new game. "I can help you—I really can."

With spontaneous enthusiasm for her self-imposed task, she had given his hand a tiny squeeze and was out of the room before he could object. When she appeared again, she had donned a long, white apron, had surmounted her fluffy yellow hair with a linen nurse's cap.

She carried a bowl of water. There was a towel over her arm. She tried to look very serious and dignified, but her blue eyes were sparkling and there was a little flush of excitement in her cheeks that hadn't been there before.

"You're my first regular patient," she said, "though I have helped."

She took the business with the utmost seriousness, although she could not quite keep from smiling.

Frail surrendered himself utterly. He was willing now to imagine himself even sicker than he was. He groaned.

"I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to get away from here for a long time."

"Oh, wouldn't it be lovely!"

"I'd let you practise on me so much!"

This time it wasn't mere excitement that flushed Miss Carstairs's beautifully smooth cheek.

"You mustn't speak," she said, with the air of one who recalls a lesson from a text-book. "The patient should avoid excitement."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FRELINGHUYSEN "THALER."

MRS. FRAIL had a little thrill of satisfaction as she looked at herself in the long mirror. And well she might. The gorgeously embroidered mandarin-coat of Chinese-red made her positively superb.

Ordinarily, eleven o'clock in the morning was an hour of the day when she didn't care to be seen. But this time she regretted that her visitor was somewhat aged and, so far as she could remember, not at all the type to be influenced by feminine loveliness.

Her dark hair was coiled about her small head in a single opulent braid. The cloudy darkness of it made her face very striking, with its dark brows and dark-fringed gray eyes. By some legerdemain known only to her maid and herself she had brought her lips to match perfectly the color of her Oriental robe—an alluring red stain harmonizing face and costume in a way which would have delighted an artist.

She was a native of Southern Russia. She was still the Princess Viatka. Ah, *Dieu*, if she were only a girl again!

Gray, austere, spectacled and bearded, the typical European lawyer of the old school, Dr. Melnik couldn't suppress a little gasp of delighted astonishment at sight of her—thus rendering his welcome certain. It wasn't the first time that she had made men gasp like that, but coming from Dr. Melnik it was doubly welcome.

He had leaped to his feet with almost boyish impetuosity, had bent over her hand like a young courtier.

"This is indeed a most pleasant surprise," she said in her softest Russian. "How is everything in our beloved land?"

Dr. Melnik's Russian was not so soft. He spoke with a sort of guttural, forceful hesitancy. It was as though the Princess Viatka's gray eyes, mandarin-coat and lips to match had somewhat dazed him. Yet he was a man incapable of circumlocution.

"If you speak of Russia, I know not," he answered. "If you speak of Bohemia, more particularly of the Frelinghuysen estate, I must answer, not altogether good."

"And you've come all the way across the ocean to bring bad news?"

"Not precisely."

"Yet not for the mere pleasure of—"

She completed her sentence with a provoking smile and a toss of her beautifully coifed head.

Dr. Melnik delivered himself of a slight gesture of negation. "Alas, that would be strange enough; but my errand is stranger still."

"I am very interested."

"With your marriage into the Frelinghuysen line, *altesse*, you assumed something more than a share in the name and fortune."

"Even under the name of Frail?"

"When the last Count von Frelinghuysen thought that he could escape the historic curse of his line by changing his name to Frail, thought that he could leave the curse behind him by coming to America, he was desperate; he grasped at a straw."

"But he prospered."

Mrs. Frail shrugged her shoulders slightly, cast a glance at the damask-silk interior.

"Prosperity is not merely wine and silk. Surely, no man ever lived a life more a curse. I need not remind you of the story of his life—of their children and grandchildren—nor of the late Mr. Horace Frail, your honored husband."

"I know the story of the family curse. I know that most of the family have a penchant for tragedy, insanity, genius, suicide—oh, what you will—"

"And the Frelinghuysen *thaler*!"

There was no affectation, this time, in Mrs. Frail's start of surprise, her shudder of frightened recollection.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler*! I remember—Horace had a marked dollar in his possession when he fell in the duel. And now—tell me. What do you know about it?"

Melnik delivered himself of a gesture of self-absolution—the gesture of a serious man who permits himself to speak of a subject which he does not understand and which might be absurd.

"The family archives mention it as far back as the sixteenth century, when there were no other *thalers* in Europe—only those *Joachims-thalers* of our Bohemia, and the first count, a fugitive from Holland, was master of the mint. God knows what thing he did—something so horrible, in any case, that it was never set down in writing. But then it was that we find our first reference to the curse—stamped into one of the original *thalers*."

"And the coin?"

"Ah, naturally, the original coin has long since disappeared. Would that this were also true of the legendary curse. It appears again and again—not in a *Joachims-thaler* but always somehow in a similar coin. As you say, when your honored husband fell, he had in his possession—But, why do you tremble?"

"An American dollar, curiously marked!"

"Precisely."

"I have seen it—or one just like it."

"Where? Not in the possession of—"

"Of a young man—also a Bohemian, young and noble—Count Carlos Turga."

"Turga—Turga—" Dr. Melnik sought to place the name. "Whence comes he?"

"Oddly enough, from the same district as that of Schloss Frelinghuysen—the mountains just to the north. So he has been told. He knows practically nothing of his family. He was brought up and educated here in America."

Dr. Melnik let his bearded chin rest on the bosom of his shirt. He twirled his thumbs one around the other and reflected.

"A friend of the family?" he asked.

"Almost."

Mrs. Frail, even now, could not resist letting her thought dwell, butterfly-fashion, for just a moment on the

way that the young count had looked at her the night before.

"Beware of him," said Dr. Melnik, with unrelieved austerity. "These mountain-folk are a dangerous lot for the Frelinghuysen line. I do not mind telling you, princess, that your estates in Bohemia failed to realize all the money we had hoped for. All the bidders—and there were few enough of them, Heaven knows—acted as though they had been touched by the blight—cautious, penurious, mean—almost as though they had been warned that they were dealing with a dangerous property."

Dr. Melnik laughed a hoarse, unhumorous laugh. He was speaking of a painful subject.

"This it was, largely, that brought me to New York—that and something else. A certain famous—or infamous, I know not which—sorceress of the mountain-tribe recently left the district of Frelinghuysen and came to America. And now, you speak of the marked dollar.

"I know I'm a fool—an old fool. But, you know, I've lived so long in the archives of the Frelinghuysens—I've seen so much of the tragedy of the Frails—that you can hardly blame me. Let me suggest, at any rate, that we keep this Turga at arm's length. Keep the dollar out of the family."

They smiled at each other—she thinking of the handsome Turga, perhaps, and he of the tragic destiny of the line represented by the woman in Chinese red, when Mrs. Frail's maid, Gabrielle, came in, paused, fluttering, with her hand on her heart—everything about her heralding bad news of some sort.

"Speak! What is it?" Mrs. Frail exclaimed, leaning forward with sudden agitation.

Gabrielle essayed English, out of deference for the presence of the stranger.

"Ah, madame," she exclaimed, "there is a accident of automobile. M. Hugh, he is *écrasé*."

"Not dead!"

"*Non, non; mais—*"

Chivvers, the butler, appeared with a card on a silver tray. He also showed traces of excitement. It was evident that he had heard the news. But he was a bringer of information as well.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," he said, "but the young gentleman says that he has seen Mr. Hugh, and he says, ma'am, that Mr. Hugh was not so badly hurt; that it isn't much, ma'am, and that he would be happy to reassure you."

Melnik had been as spectator, solemn, open mouthed. Here was additional evidence, indeed, that one of the reasons that had inspired his trip across the Atlantic was not all tragic nonsense.

Mrs. Frail had taken the card and scanned it, then held it out to Melnik with a frightened smile.

"This is delicious," she said, with an affectation of gaiety, "delicious or terrible."

Melnik took the card and frowned down at it in silence.

It bore the name of Count Carlos Turga.

CHAPTER XII.

SPELLS AND CHARM.

THERE was a good deal of the castle about the town house of the Frails. The Frelinghuysen fugitive who had built it had brought with him from the old country a good deal of the old country's futile ideas of architecture.

There was a dry moat instead of an areaway. The entrance-hall was an imposing place of carved sandstone and marble, its baronial aspect augmented by its trophies of flags and arms and suits of armor. The only light that entered it came from a wide, low, Gothic window at the first landing of the grand staircase.

It was the first time that Turga had ever been there. He looked about him

with a curious mingling of unrest and elation.

He was familiar enough with the homes of the mighty. He had been in many a hall as handsome as this. But never before had he felt that such a place was in any way intimately associated with his own destiny.

He had hardly ever even thought of marriage; but he thought of it now—thought of it with a quickening of the pulse.

As if in answer to some unspoken petition in his heart, there appeared just then, against the opalescent glow of the Gothic window, the slight and graceful silhouette of Agatha Frail. She was dressed for the street in gray and black—the dove gray of her eyes, the blue black of her hair.

Turga started forward with a half-stifled exclamation of pleasure, then checked himself. But Miss Frail had noticed him and swung over in his direction with her hand out. She noticed the quick wave of color that came, girl-like, to his cheeks, and gave it a correct interpretation. He had been thinking about her.

It was very romantic. Several times on the preceding evening their eyes had met. Some sort of a mutual understanding had already sprung up between them.

A footman was already at the door ready to open it for her. But she turned back. She and Turga strolled side by side down the cloistral length and shadows of the hall.

"You've come to see mama?" said Agatha. "She'll keep you waiting. She always does—and I believe somebody else is here to see her, anyway." The butler returned.

"Mrs. Frail will be pleased to see you, sir," he said.

"Very well, Chivvers," Agatha answered on Turga's behalf. "As I was saying—oh, as I was saying—"

Her voice trailed off into nothing.

The dutiful Chivvers was again out of ear-shot.

"You are looking wonderful this

morning," said Turga, with a slight quickening of his pulse.

Miss Frail was very close to him.

"Do you tell every one that?"

"Not so truthfully," he answered with conviction.

"You weren't a bit nice last night," she accused him.

"I had stage-fright—your fault."

"Why did you look at me like that?"

Not only Turga's pulse but also his respiration had quickened.

"I couldn't help it," he said in a stifled whisper.

It must have been some feminine version of the old adage that every man is a king in his own house. Miss Frail was feeling very bold and reckless. They had come to the end of the hall—a grottolike recess under one of the flying archways of the stairs.

She instinctively knew that they were out of sight of Chivvers and his cohorts. There she paused and faced Turga, her inscrutable gray eyes looking up into his luminous dark ones.

"I couldn't help it," he breathed in an almost inaudible whisper.

There was something in the twilight that shut them in that recalled the chimera of the previous evening—an experience which even now, vivid as his memory of it was, he was half inclined to repudiate as a nightmare. But there was no doubt of that conviction in his heart that he was master here; that he was the arbiter of the destinies of this girl who stood before him, of her mother and her brother.

He also knew that they were out of sight of indiscreet eyes; that the girl herself had led him here.

With a quick gesture he had placed his hands on her shoulders.

He felt the tremor of her slight body, but she did not recoil. He kissed her on one of her closed eyes. A moment later they were strolling back into the hall as though nothing had happened, perfectly calm, perfectly circumspect—so far as all outward

appearances were concerned, at any rate.

The dutiful Chivvers was approaching. Said he:

"Mrs. Frail will be pleased to receive you now, sir."

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE FLIGHT UP.

FOR reasons best known to herself, Mrs. Frail had decided to dispense with the proffered presence and advice of the austere Dr. Melnik in the forthcoming interview. She had taken another look at herself in the mirror; had decided that she was quite capable of taking care of herself in any combat where her antagonist would be so susceptible a person as the young Count Carlos Turga.

Her Chinese red mandarin-coat, with lips to match, was, after all, mightier than much wisdom of a mere intellectual sort.

Half-way up the grand staircase Turga met the severe-looking gentleman of the beard and spectacles. They were just under the Gothic window. Some trick of the light coming through it, distorted by the leads and the colored glass, may have exaggerated the lawyer's expression. A purple stain lay across his frowning brow. A red stain covered the rest of his face. Then the apparition smiled—a diabolical sort of smile.

They had bowed to each other, after the manner of Europe when well-bred persons pass each other on the stairs.

There was occasion for Dr. Melnik's smile. He had had a glimpse of a handsome, dark-eyed youth in the full flush of health; had seen him pass a zone of light that had given his face the livid green of death, then almost instantly the scarlet of eternal fires.

He was of imaginative stock, sprung from a visionary race. The momentary symbolism of the changing light had pleased him immensely.

Mrs. Frail was still under the domi-

nation of emotion when Turga was ushered in. He embraced her in a sweeping glance full of sympathy; had brought her fingers to his lips—and held them there for the fraction of a second longer than the ordinary social protocol required.

"Dear boy—you bring me news?"

"Alas! of a kind. But it isn't serious."

"So they just told me; but I was so afraid that you were merely trying to allay my anxiety."

"He is in good hands. That he isn't badly hurt I know. I was taking a spin through the country last night—after leaving you"—Turga's eyes rested on hers for a moment in a way that said that she might have been the cause of his riding far out into the country like that in the middle of the night—"and I was lucky enough to be there just after the accident. A doctor was on the spot. Really, Hugh couldn't have chosen a better place, especially as the doctor had a good-looking daughter. Dislocated arm, a broken collar-bone; nothing worse than any one might get following hounds or on the polo-field.

"You're a dear," sighed Mrs. Frail. "I was so alarmed!"

Her red lips trembled. Her gray eyes were touched with self-pity and dawning relief. Turga reached forward and took her hands in his.

"I have my motor at the door. The morning is so fine! I'd love—"

Again he completed the half-spoken sentence with a look.

As Turga had said, the day was fine. The November sun had come up and driven away the mists and cloud of the night just passed. Only the blue haze of Indian summer hung over the far places. The air was fragrant, crisp, and exhilarating, the crimson and russet trees were atremble in the sunlight.

There was that about the day which meant not only the mystery of life, but the zest of it as well.

Any maternal anxiety which the

former Princess Viatka may have felt concerning the state of her offspring had long since disappeared.

The chauffeur, being a student of human nature as well as a respecter of speed-laws when he had a lady aboard, was bowling along at only comfortable speed. The two passengers on the rear seat had ample opportunity to compare notes.

It was Uncle Jerry, the Carstairs' gardener, who received them at the gate of the brown cottage. He imparted the cheerful information that nobody was home. The doctor was off for his regular walk through the woods. Miss Carstairs herself had driven the patient of the night before over to the adjoining Frail estate.

"If you drive right smart you might catch up with them," said Uncle Jerry.

"What consideration!" Mrs. Frail sighed.

"Just that," Turga replied, with a laugh. "Now, if we were only forced to follow them on to Poughkeepsie!"

Mrs. Frail looked her gratitude.

The precocious warmth of their friendship had steadily increased.

"We'll have our revenge," she said lightly. "Have you any other engagement? You could stay out here for luncheon. We could make a day of it," she said, with mounting enthusiasm.

"Watch me break all other engagements," Turga replied.

Quite unconsciously his hand was again resting on hers. Quite as unconsciously she was leaving it there.

Turga's thoughts again reverted for the hundredth time to the encounter with Agatha Frail in the hallway of the Frail town house that morning. Again Mrs. Frail's thought reverted to the morning call of Dr. Melnik.

It was very stupid of Dr. Melnik to think that a warning was even necessary. Turga was so manifestly ready to put himself entirely in her power.

In a very leisurely way the motor was treading through a more

than usually beautiful section of road, heavily wooded on both sides and fringed with rock and laurel. It was almost primitive, except that on one side—for mile after mile, it seemed—there appeared through occasional openings in the screening shrubbery the spear-headed pickets of a high iron fence.

"Cherry Hills," said Mrs. Frail, with her eyes on the fence. "Horace's grandfather would have his deer-park."

"Is the place open?"

"Unfortunately," Mrs. Frail replied.

She had thrown him an amused glance from the corner of her eyes. She saw the girl-like tinge of color that crept into Turga's smooth cheek, and she gave a slight pressure to the hand resting against hers before indulging in the fiction of arranging a lock of hair.

"I forget just how many people there are on the place all the year round," she continued. "Some frightful number—seven or eight hundred, not including the children and old people. It's the only form of charity the Frails have ever been noted for," she concluded, with a little laugh.

They came to a monumental gate of granite and wrought iron, with a porter's lodge of generous dimensions and sober architecture. A stout, rather flabby retainer appeared with the expression of a tired business man. He had already been forced to open the gate once that morning.

But at sight of the woman in the automobile his expression of bored weariness gave way at once to one of anxious zeal. The gate swung open.

They had entered a beautifully kept avenue that swept away ahead of them in graceful curves. The tall trees arched their multicolored branches overhead. The dark, shining green of cedar and rhododendron made each side of the road a frontier of alluring and unexplored mystery.

There is a sort of intoxication in the physical presence of great wealth combined with great beauty, especially when these things take the form of a noble park.

At Turga's side was the mistress of this place. She was sitting so close to him that he could feel the tepid vibrance of her body. She hadn't resisted when he held her hand.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said.

Turga flashed upon her a dazzling smile. He leaned very close to her.

"I take you," he said softly; "but I'll have to whisper them."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GATE OPENS AGAIN.

FEELING just as though she had had an early morning cocktail, Agatha Frail turned into the avenue with a light step and a sparkling eye. Generally she looked on this affair of the morning constitutional as more or less of a bore.

But it was at least useful in killing a part of the day, and it always held out a certain promise of adventure.

She had received an abundant heritage of romanticism from both father and mother. She had often thought of running away. She wasn't sure in her mind that she wouldn't do it yet.

Her habitual mood was that of a young eaglet just fledged, with all the instincts of soaring flight, yet hemmed in by gilded bars.

She had just reached the age when she could give a certain weight to her declarations of independence so far as tutors and dressmakers were concerned, but was still far from the greater liberty of a last year's debutante.

The day had auspiciously begun. There was adventure in the air. She had some vague idea of perhaps encountering young Count Turga again, after his interview with her mother—whatever that might be for. She had

seen his motor at the door. She could imagine a glorious elopement, a thrilling dash into the unknown, with pieces in the paper, and everything like that.

She was brought back to earth again by a cheery hail. A rather stout young man with broad shoulders and yellow hair had overhauled her—Frederic Graw, 3rd.

"I say, Agatha," he said cheerily as he swung into step at her side, "how the deuce do you expect a fellow to get to work when you put obstacles like this into the road?"

Agatha's first impulse was one of impatience, but his good nature dominated her.

"Are you really trying to work, Freddy?" she asked.

"Got in three whole days last week," he asserted with righteous dignity. "The governor's having a new sign painted—'Graw & Graw, Brokers.' Looks great."

"Won't he scold you if you're late?"

"Feeling a bit seedy—can't work if I'm sick," he smiled down at her. "By Jove, I'm a brute! Did you hear about Hugh?"

Agatha hadn't heard; and when she did hear, what interested her most was the fact that the original disseminator of the news was Count Carlos Turga.

It gave her a little thrill of pleasure that Turga could have seen her and talked to her—and made love to her—without having experienced the necessity of even mentioning the fact. She was a good deal of the Slav, was Agatha.

"And we could run out there in no time," said Graw, breaking in on her reverie.

"I hate sick-rooms," Agatha retorted—"dismal, smelly, subdued voices, and all that sort of thing."

"We wouldn't have to stay long," Frederic argued. "It isn't any of this sad business, you know. Great day for a run—bracing air, woods, good roads. And I have the greatest little old machine—new one, just got it. Only

thing it lacks, you know, is that you haven't ridden in it—hasn't been christened, or haloed, or whatever they call it."

"I—won't—go," said Agatha decisively.

Freddy's exuberance was beginning to get on her nerves. He was by way of spoiling everything that the morning had promised by way of romance and adventure.

She and Graw had grown up together. For her he held out nothing of these things. She knew him too well. He was too healthy.

"By Jove, Agatha," he said, undismayed, "you look positively stunning when you snap your snow-white teeth like that. I feel like the fellow in a cage with a panther or a tigress, or something like that."

"A cat!"

At that he had paid her the only kind of a compliment that she cared for.

"A bit cattish," he cajoled. Then, with a change of intonation: "Come on; it'll do you good."

They strolled along together a considerable distance, stopping now and then to look into shop-windows like a couple of children. Graw was hanging on with good-natured persistence. He had even confronted the terror of a milliner's shop, while Agatha gaggled abominably over some trifle or other.

She had quite despaired of getting rid of him by fair means, and was trying foul.

Again they were out on the avenue. If Graw would only go!

If Turga would only come along!

The traffic-policeman at Thirty-Fourth Street lifted his hand as a signal for the cross-town cars to pass. In the quick congestion of motor-cars and other vehicles in the avenue on the upper side of the street Agatha caught a glimpse of some one—of two people—whom she recognized.

They were sitting together in an automobile; were so absorbed in their

conversation that they did not appear to care about anything else at all, least of all who might be looking at them from the sidewalk.

It was Count Turga and her mother.

After that first glance of hers Agatha looked straight ahead and quickened her pace.

Graw had noticed nothing in particular. There was only one person on the crowded avenue whom he could see anyway.

"I say, Agatha," he was saying, "we'll lunch together, then do a matinee."

Her answer was a deluge of delight.

"I've changed my mind," she said without so much as looking at him. "Get your car. We'll go out to Cherry Hills."

CHAPTER XV.

A FACE IN THE CROWD.

YOUNG Frail had negotiated a change of raiment. They found him reclining in a long chair of woven grass on the Cherry Hills terrace. He had succeeded in keeping Miss Carstairs in attendance, and his greeting of Turga and his mother was not particularly exuberant.

Miss Carstairs was plainly embarrassed, though Mrs. Frail hailed her as the preserver of her son's life. Mrs. Frail belonged to that category of women who encouraged romance. By some devious psychology she took the presence of a pretty girl at her son's side as a compliment to herself.

She even glanced discreetly in another direction as Miss Carstairs bade Hugh good-by and assured him that her father would drive over in the afternoon to see that he was getting along all right.

To Turga fell the acceptable task of accompanying the visitor to her waiting phaeton. Miss Carstairs's hand had felt so slim and cool, so smooth

and pleasant, in his a little while before, when he greeted her, that the memory of it lingered.

It had been like the touch of a soothing lotion to a fever patient. And as he walked at her side now along the balustraded terrace which was one of the features of Cherry Hills, he knew that her hand symbolized her whole nature—in a way not generally taken into consideration by professional palmists.

Miss Carstairs was just a bit disconcerted. For years she and her father had lived under the shadow of the great Frail estate; but by no possible stretch of imagination had the Frails and Carstairs been neighbors. But, like most young girls, her fancy had been captured by the Frail tradition—there was so much of splendor and mystery in it, of magnificence and tragedy.

The builder of the French château, which was the center of the Cherry Hills estate—the terrace of which she had just left—had left behind him a legend resembling that of *Blue Beard*.

He was a very terrible man, this fugitive Count von Frelinghuysen, and terrible he had remained even as the plain Mr. Frail; terrible even when for year after year he no longer appeared driving his fiery black team and it became known that he was glooming his life away in a corner of his palace, the victim of some nameless malady. There had been several ladies in the household, according to all accounts, but they had disappeared even more completely.

Then there was the tragedy of the Frail children. There had been an eldest son, heir not only to the name and fortunes of the Frails in America, but to a share of the historic Frelinghuysen lands in Bohemia. They had found him smothered in the family safety-deposit vault—so tradition had it—with a single coin clasped in his dead hand—a silver dollar peculiarly marked.

There had also been a daughter, but

she had disappeared—no one knew where.

The only remaining child was Horace, a profligate—according to all reports—whose folly had exiled him early from America. He it was who had married the Princess Viatka, had reached the climax of his career with a dueling-sword through his heart.

And now, for the first time in her life, Miss Carstairs had spoken to a Frail; had stood on the legendary terrace; had been kissed by the more or less fabulous Mrs. Frail, the former Princess Viatka. She had found them human. They had treated her as an equal—had insisted that she come to see them often, and her father was to continue his ministrations to the Frail heir.

A groom, with immobile patience, was holding the Carstairs pony.

"Let's walk a little way," Turga suggested. "Don't leave me all alone. We must give mother and son a chance to talk it over in private. I can't go back right away."

Miss Carstairs was tempted. Before them lay a sunken garden still tremulous with perfumed color, despite the lateness of the season. Both she and Turga knew that the entrance-road skirted the farther end of it. She looked at the garden, then back at Turga and smiled. He needed no other authority, but instructed the groom to drive ahead and wait for them.

"I should really be hurrying home," she said.

"'While the rose blows along the river brink,'" Turga quoted.

Again she flashed on him her blue-eyed smile. "'With old Khayyam the ruby vintage drink,'" she supplemented. "A bad preceptor."

"An excellent one—with 'thou' and a day like this."

She tossed her head slightly; but Turga, watching her from the corner of his eyes, could see that she was not displeased. She seemed to be marvelously in her element—here in the cool sweetness of the garden—and he told

her so, then watched the heightened color, the flash of her eye, with a sense of perfect luxury.

It seemed to him an abominable thing that she should already have passed so much time in the company of Hugh Frail. He wondered what had passed between them. But when he questioned her in a half-jocular, half-suggestive way, which most girls would have accepted as a mere challenge to repartee, Miss Carstairs answered him with such frank innocence that he was disarmed.

As Agatha Frail, with Frederic Graw, 3d, at her side proudly demonstrating the suppleness of his new car, spun past the sunken garden, she caught a glimpse of Turga bending over a chrysanthemum with his head very close to that of a woman. At first she thought the woman was her mother. Then she noticed that this particular person had yellow hair. She bit her lip. Then the car was out of sight.

Turga received such an impression of having been looked at that he had turned almost instantly. But he was just too late.

He heard the receding, whispering rush of the motor that had just passed. He wondered who could have been in it. He was very susceptible to impressions. He was still looking, still absorbed in his new train of thought, although Miss Carstairs's soft voice continued to caress his ears, when a group of laborers—a full score of them—passed along the road in the wake of the automobile. Turga started slightly.

There was a face in the crowd that recalled his fantastic adventure in the old warehouse—the face of one who had surely been there.

The man threw a single glance in his direction—cruel, alert, savagely content—then trudged on his way with the stolid company.

"You look," said Miss Carstairs, "as though you had seen a ghost."

Said Turga: "I have."

"This place is full of them," she added softly, then bit her lip. She held out her hand. "There's the pony. I mustn't keep you any longer."

"Do you know how to lay ghosts?" he asked, clinging to her cool fingers.

She started to speak, then checked herself. Hugh Frail had asked her that same question but half an hour before.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL IN THE FAMILY.

THEY were all on the terrace when Turga returned from his pleasant errand to the sunken garden—not only Hugh and Mrs. Frail, but Graw and Agatha. Graw saluted him coldly enough, so Turga thought, but the momentary twinge of unpleasantness was instantly obliterated by the smile that the former Princess Viatka gave him, by the thinly disguised pleasure that Agatha evidently experienced at seeing him again.

It really mattered very little what Graw might think of him—or Hugh Frail either, for that matter—as long as he was *persona grata* to the châteline and her alluring daughter. Turga was perfectly at ease.

Agatha had come forward to meet him, had held out her hand—a sort of delicate white lie meaning to indicate that they had not previously met that morning.

"Now that you have lost one guide," she said, "I volunteer to take her place." She turned to her mother. "Luncheon won't be ready for half an hour yet, will it, mother dear? I'm going to show Count Turga about the place—some of grandfather's Bohemian things."

Agatha was not lacking in audacity. Almost before any one had had time to object, Agatha was bearing him off, a perfectly willing captive. Graw had taken a step in their direction, as if to follow; had recognized the hopelessness of it; had subsided as grace-

fully as possible into the company of Hugh and his mother.

"Something of a bounder, all the same," Graw murmured, with his eyes on the Princess Viatka.

"Why, Freddy dear!"

The former Princess Viatka had shrugged her shoulder in negation. If she felt any resentment at Agatha's venture in piracy she did not show it. After all, she found the situation just a bit amusing, especially in view of Graw's ill-nature.

"And you'll have to admit," she went on, "that he's awfully handsome."

"Oh, he's pretty enough!" Graw conceded; "but that doesn't mean that he's not a bounder. After what he did last night—"

"What did he do last night?" Mrs. Frail wanted to know. The conversation had lagged until then.

Graw looked at Frail.

"Go on and tell her," counseled the invalid. "Better now while she is sorry for me. She'll have to dig up, anyway."

He looked up at his mother with a rueful smile.

"More gambling debts?" queried Mrs. Frail with the ready intuition of long experience.

"It was Turga's fault," Graw explained. "Hugh was ahead and everything was lovely, when this Turga person came along and egged him on."

"How much was it this time?" asked the princess softly.

"A trifle of ten thousand."

Mrs. Frail caught her breath. It wasn't altogether the money loss that made her do it—she was thinking of what Melnik had told her that morning, of all the sinister memories which Turga himself had stirred in the back of her brain the evening before.

"And Turga won it?"

"By gad, *mater!*" Graw exclaimed. "I'm glad you take it like that. I really am. But, really, one would think you were glad that Turga won."

"Hush, Hugh; don't make yourself

out to be a worse fool than you are." She turned to Graw. "Tell me about it. Give me the details."

"Oh, come now, *mater,*" young Frail protested. "Don't make poor Freddy be the goat. I'll admit that I was a bit tipsy—not in the least soused, or anything like that. No, really you couldn't blame Turga for that, Freddy, old man. But he did put the jinx on me, mother dear—oh, a regular jinx, you know."

He began to fumble awkwardly in his pocket with his one free hand. The former Princess Viatka did not speak. She was watching him with tense expectancy. She had moments of really remarkable prescience.

"You see," young Frail was rambling on, "everything was going so lovely until Turga pulled this bally dollar on me. I swiped it from him. Did you ever see the like?"

He held it up—that worn and shiny coin with the winged cross graved roughly on its face.

"Haunted!" young Frail exclaimed, with some primitive instinct for humor. "Jinx! Ah, you know; blessed if it doesn't feel a bit queer to the touch even now. I noticed the same thing last night."

"For the Lord's sake, Hugh, talk sense!" Graw mumbled.

As a matter of fact, there was something so uncanny about this youth sitting there after his recent misfortunes, here on the ancestral terrace which had been the scene of far greater misfortunes in the past—something so uncanny in his reference to the haunted coin—that Graw had felt a qualm of uneasiness.

"I am talking sense," Hugh retorted with lazy insistence. "I'm a Frail. Didn't you ever hear of the dollar—the dollar?"

The former Princess Viatka had stood somewhat tense, yet somewhat withdrawn, her eyes on the coin, yet hardly listening to what was being said. She was listening instead to the hundred whispers of the past, remote

and recent, which had to do with a coin like this—with this selfsame coin she had no doubt. Very calmly she reached over and took it.

"I'll keep this," she said softly. "I'll pay your debt this time, but I can't risk your getting in so deep another time."

"A fair exchange," laughed Graw.

"You're a brick, *mater*," said Hugh. "If I weren't wounded I'd slip you a little hug."

There was no great enthusiasm in the latter declaration. Nor did the former Princess Viatka display any enthusiasm so far as accepting the suggestion was concerned.

"You two boys stay here," she said as she moved off. "I'm going to call Agatha."

Turga had followed his volunteer guide into a lofty and somewhat barren hallway—as gloomy and spectral as a cave. It would have seemed natural had bats swarmed down from the remote corners, if a ghost or two had stalked forth from the dark oak paneling.

"I just love this place," Agatha confessed tremulously.

"So do I," Turga asserted.

He had slipped his arm through hers without creating any visible impression on the graven mask of a footman standing near.

"Let's explore."

"Let's." Turga accented somewhat the pressure of his arm.

They passed from the hallway into a great library, only a little less gloomy. It thrilled Turga with pleasant anticipation as he sensed Agatha's obvious purpose to lead him somewhere, anywhere, away from prying eyes.

She twisted open the *espagnolette* of a French window, and they found themselves on a little stone porch, commanding an exquisite view of park and garden.

"What did you think of me this morning?" quavered Agatha, with

her back turned, as she busied herself with the window.

Turga's hand trembled slightly as it touched her waist. The soft hair curling on the back of her neck was wonderfully attractive, he thought.

The former Princess Viatka, once alone, with that dollar of ill-omen in her possession, was tremulous, excited. She had no definite purpose—only a vague idea of confronting Turga, of questioning him concerning it and his possession of it.

She came at last to the French window through which Turga and her daughter had passed but a little while before. She stopped short, with her hand pressed to her heart—the hand that held the dollar.

She had seen Agatha throw back her head with swooning abandonment, had seen Turga press his lips to hers.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FACE IN THE GLASS.

ALONE that night in his apartments, Turga again took thought of Paulo. It was as though there had been a death in the family—as though death had removed the only other member of the only family he had ever known. There was no word. The old servant had disappeared as completely as though he had never existed, although on every hand there was still abundant evidence of his long devotion. Yet how changed was the place!

For the first time in years Turga dressed himself for the evening without assistance. Now that he had passed for a time at least from under the influence of the interests that had enthralled him during the day his conscience smote him. After all, he couldn't desert poor old Paulo like that.

Still wondering, still distraught, he strolled into the Checker Club. There was a letter there for him. It was a brief note from Hugh Frail and en-

closed was his check for ten thousand dollars.

With the slip of paper in his hand Turga fell into a reverie. After a minute or two he went into a private room and got his banker on the telephone. The man had gone home for the night, but he could give Turga the information he desired. The usual date for his monthly remittance from Bohemia had passed almost a week ago, but the remittance this time had failed to materialize.

He loitered through a portion of the evening at a theater, then went again to his apartments. Still no Paulo. Still no word.

He summoned his chauffeur and asked him if he could recall the place where he had been guided by Paulo the night before.

"Sure thing," said the man.

"Take me there."

They ran south once into the zone of loneliness beyond.

Once more they made their way through those spirit-haunted streets. Then clamor broke out in the form of a fire-engine, hurtling through a street a couple of blocks ahead. It recalled the "Walküre" of the night before.

Turga could still see the sparks in the street, a few moments later, when the chauffeur brought the automobile to a stand at the corner where he had waited the night before.

There was a glow of red to the east. That was the direction that Paulo had taken.

With a slight quickening of his pulse, with snatches of the "Walküre" music alternately droning and throbbing through his head, Turga started off in that direction.

He suspected the truth even before he had traversed half of the distance. Black hallways and dismal courts were vomiting their black froth of human misery. Fire was a spectacle, with always the possibility of loot.

As Turga rounded the corner he was suddenly confronted with a near

prospect of whirling flame, a pillar of dancing fire surmounted by a wallowing cloud of spark-shot smoke.

In the fitful, sinister illumination thrown out by this tremendous torch, he could read the name on the burning building. It was W. G. Frail.

In spite of his premonition, he experienced a tightening of his throat, a catching of his breath. He seemed to hear again in the roar of the flames—

We take again what was never sold.

"Any lives lost?" he asked a policeman who was shooing back the crowd.

"Not yet," the policeman answered.

"Was no one in the building?" he persisted.

The policeman glanced at him impatiently, then glanced again with increased interest.

"Naw; that place hasn't been in use for the past thirty years. Why?"

"Oh, nothing; except that I know the owners."

He felt very small in the presence of that dancing giant of smoke and flame—as Aladdin might have felt in the presence of the Jinnee of the Lamp. Only he knew, did Turga, that he was not master but slave.

As he turned to go he discovered that he had been standing in front of a cheap restaurant, long since closed for the night. There was a section of unclean mirror in the window, designed no doubt to conceal things still more unclean beyond.

He caught a reflection of his face—weirdly lighted, each feature distorted and accentuated by the light of the fire.

He shuddered, then laughed. He hadn't recognized himself. He looked older. He looked like *Mephistopheles*.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OPEN WINDOW.

TURGA wasn't the only one who was reviewing just then the events of the

past twenty-four hours. Twice Mrs. Frail had snapped on the light at the side of her canopied bed, had coaxed calm and forgetfulness and possibly sleep with the suavest of Bosnian cigarettes. It was of no use.

She swore softly under her breath in Russian, but she confessed to herself that she wasn't precisely unhappy. *Ennui* was the only thing she feared, and there was no immediate prospect of that, not with this renaissance of old fears and superstitions, not with the young Count Turga as her latest plaything.

Not since her husband, Horace Frail, had been brought back to Schloss Frelinghuysen from the woody dueling-ground had she been so tremulous.

For a long time she lay there looking at her dressing-table, as though half expecting some demonstration of the supernatural. It was so odd that the *thaler* should thus have come back into the family—doubly odd that this should have occurred on the very day that the dismal Melnik had called to croak his warning.

At last she could stand the sensation of unsatisfied expectancy no longer. She slid her pink feet out of bed and into a pair of wadded Turkish slippers.

She scurried over to the table and, opening a drawer, took out the shining silver disk—the dollar which she had discovered that afternoon in her son's possession, the same dollar, she made no doubt, that she had seen the night before in possession of the strange and disconcerting young Turga; the same, she was equally sure, that she had seen among her husband's possessions that last day that they had carried him home.

"The Frelinghuysen *thaler!*"

She believed in curses. Her mind ran back over the old wives' tales she had heard in the long winter evenings in southern Russia, stories of the frightful crimes and superstitions and witchcrafts which prevailed in that part

of Europe during the close of the dark ages, during the religious wars, during the time that the ogres of the past were at death-grip with the young giants of the new era.

That there still lived lost tribes of the old régime in various parts of central Europe she was convinced. Even after her marriage, and she and her handsome husband had gone to live in the historic Frelinghuysen Castle, she had heard stories about the "cave-dwellers" of the wild mountain neighborhood that made her shudder.

Descendants and followers still were they of the great and terrible Munzner; all that was left of his earthly dream of becoming a second Mohammed; sharers still of some of the dark secrets and rituals that had at last brought him to the stake.

Instead of distressing her, these souvenirs brought to Mrs. Frail an exquisite thrill of fear and excitement. She had nurtured such sentiments ever since she was a very little girl. After a manner they had become necessary to her happiness.

She caressed the sinister coin. Placed it against her cheek. Tried to imagine that she felt the pricking tingle of esoteric emanations.

There are two explanations of what followed—there are for almost every event in life, whether the event be spiritual or physical.

One explanation is that Mrs. Frail still carried her lighted cigarette in her fingers; that it was the coal of fire at the end of it that touched the delicate texture of her throat.

The other explanation—and the one which she accepted—was that it was the coin that burned her; that she had felt the thrust of Belial's red-hot claw. Her old nurse had told her about such things back in Russia.

But this is certain. As she brought the coin down the side of her face it seemed to her lively imagination that it actually did carry with it a little trail of heat. She had brought it to that extra-delicate corner of the human

mask just under the jawbone, midway betwixt ear and chin, when she let out a half-stifled cry which was both shriek and curse.

There had been a stab of hot pain— instant, terrible.

For a moment she was wholly dominated by frenzied panic. It was for this thing that her imagination had been cunningly preparing her. She reeled, saw her open window, and hurled the coin into the darkness.

As though her experience was not already bad enough, there was to be one additional feature of it which she was never to forget.

The coin disappeared. She waited with straining senses to hear it fall on the cement driveway outside. There came no sound. It was this final, uncanny exit that affected her more than anything else. It was as though the thing had melted into thin air.

She tiptoed over to her window and looked out. The cement driveway below, the unbroken stone wall of the neighboring house just opposite. There was not a rug nor a square of sod— nothing—that could have deadened the sound like that.

She went back to her mirror and examined her wound. It was a burn; there was no questioning that—a red mark and a blister, to say nothing of the pain.

She dressed her wound with cream. She shuddered and smoked. It was rarely that she had been so happy—not since coming to America.

She crawled back into her bed and slept like a baby.

CHAPTER XIX.

FALSE DAWN.

MUCH to the surprise of his family and friends, Hugh Frail lingered on at Cherry Hills long after his shoulder and collar-bone were well again. A new interest had come into his hitherto aimless life. It was as though he had been very short-sighted and had

been supplied by the Master Oculist with a perfect lens. The lens was the crystal-clear character of Elin Carstairs.

Their acquaintance had ripened. She was something different from any girl he had ever known before. She was a drink of spring-water to a man tired of champagne.

Young Frail, by the same token, was getting acquainted with Cherry Hills. Its thousand acres of hills and valleys, of woods and meadows, was becoming something else than a mere place to dawdle away empty hours, where he could shoot and ride and flirt without constraint. Deep in his nature was the atavistic love of nature common to all men. Miss Carstairs had developed and strengthened this.

She was the priestess of the great god Pan. She had been reared in the open. She knew the flowers and birds and trees. Dogwood, tulip, the different oaks and maples—even such foreign trees as the Japanese kiri and the Chinese ginkgo—were old friends.

"You make me feel like a nit," said Hugh one day as they strolled through one of the remoter corners of the Cherry Hills estate.

"What's a nit?" she asked blithely.

"Everything you're not—nothing that you are," he answered feelingly. "You know, something like what a night in town is compared to a day like this out here in the country."

It was a gorgeous day in the late Indian summer—blue and old gold, the smell of dead leaves and an occasional faint whiff of burning brush.

Miss Carstairs's only answer was her sympathetic, blue-eyed smile.

"I know nothing; you know everything," Frail went on, his pretense of humor touched with wistfulness. "I'm a poor actor; you're a queen. When I think of what I am, have been, and always will be, and what you are, have been, and always will be—gee, I feel like—"

He doubled up his fist and thumped himself on the side of the head.

Miss Carstairs's eyes were very alert and she was still smiling.

"I don't deserve all that; neither do you," she said half seriously. "You have this wonderful present—a still more wonderful future."

"Do you believe it?" he asked appealingly. "Jove, Elin, you don't know what an awful lot of good it does me to hear you say a thing like that!"

"Of course I mean it—it's perfectly true."

"You're the only person who does believe it—the only person who ever said so, at any rate. You know, Elin, I'm a rather bad lot. Everybody says so, and Lord knows I've given them cause. But, honestly, I'm not altogether rotten."

He laughed at his own seriousness.

"Just see how I rise when—when you make a cast like that. Really, you know, you're the first girl who ever talked sense to me; who could tell the names of trees and everything like that. And yet sometimes I like to think that I'm not a mere blithering idiot."

Again he laughed, but there was no disguising the *cri de coeur*, the profound sincerity of what he was saying.

A shade of wistfulness swept lightly across Elin Carstairs's face also—a passing cloud, a moistening of her eyes, suggesting the lightest, briefest of showers.

"Look at that beautiful young larch over there," she said, turning to him with sudden inspiration. "It's beautiful because it's growing up under good conditions—good ground, plenty of liberty, yet protected. What chance would it have in the city streets? They couldn't make it grow. Perhaps you're a larch."

"I see the point," he answered, reaching over and giving her nearer hand a grateful little squeeze. "But, you know, the larches were never—"

"Never?"

Frail didn't answer. He appeared to be struggling for a moment or two

to find adequate expression for some thought that was forming in his mind, then decided not to express it, after all.

They had come out of the woods onto a knoll overlooking a valley back of the house. At the bottom of the valley a small army of men were excavating an enormous basin. There was a steam-shovel at work. Steam-drills were tapping away at granite rocks. Steam-winchies were helping team-drawn wagons from the excavation to the road.

"See how rapidly they're getting along with the lake," said Frail, grateful for a change of interest. "Later on we're going to have a moat—a moat with running water in it right round the house."

"And why a moat?" asked Miss Carstairs. "I should think that it would cost an awful lot of money—an awful lot of money to spend when it won't do any good."

"There's a reason."

"Vanity."

"Not altogether. I wasn't going to say what I had in my mind a little while ago," said Frail seriously, "but I'll say it, anyway. I was going to say that the larch family wasn't under a curse. You wouldn't have to surround the home of the larches, for example, with running water to keep away the family ghost."

He broke off with a laugh in which there was no humor and glanced at Miss Carstairs, curious as to just how she would take the declaration. She took it seriously enough. She was thinking of the family history—of all the tragedies that had become legendary about the names of both Frelinghuysen and Frail.

"There are no ghosts," said Elin Carstairs—"that is, none that can't cross running water."

"By Jove," agreed Frail, "I believe you're right at that, you know! It was an idea of my mother's. She's dreadfully superstitious—along with other things."

He paused. He was looking curi-

ously at a dark-eyed workman who happened to pass that way. The man turned. Their eyes met.

Frail turned to Miss Carstairs.

"It's curious," he said. "When that fellow looked at me just now I felt as though the ghost were actually there."

CHAPTER XX.

"A DARK YOUNG MAN."

MISS CARSTAIRS had often seen the old woman before, but had always avoided her. Even the healthiest of young persons bred in the open air have just a thread of superstition. And there was something about this old woman that made her nervous. She might have been a gipsy, only there was more intellect in the swarthy face and beady eyes than usual—something even of majesty in her decrepit form.

In spite of her desire to pass the old woman by this time with nothing more than a mere salutation, Miss Carstairs paused. The old woman had looked at her in a way that was both appeal and command.

"You wish to ask me something?" Elin said.

"Not to ask, but to tell," the old woman answered with a strong foreign accent.

"What can you tell?" Miss Carstairs asked with the fearlessness of innocence.

"Your future, beautiful princess," the old woman responded with unflinching eyes.

Miss Carstairs colored slightly, then smiled.

"I don't believe in such things."

"I am very old. I already see with the eyes of my spirit, even as those who are already dead."

As though to give physical proof of this odd declaration, the old woman continued to stare at the younger one as though already she were delving into that perfumed temple of dreams.

The unintentional poetry of what she had just said appealed to Miss Carstairs's imagination.

"It is true that you are very old," she said. "Wisdom does come with age."

"And with youth, as well, daughter mine."

"I am not wise."

"Yea, you're wise—wise enough to listen to the voice of age, even as you have already listened to the voice of God's out of doors."

"I have no money."

"No more than I, no more than the moon, my beautiful wood-pigeon. I ask no money. I need none. There'll always be a coin to put between my teeth for the Ferryman. And him we cannot cheat."

The old woman had continued to look into Miss Carstairs's face with unflinching interest.

"But lately," she went on, "there have come into your life two young men, both of them dark, both of them of foreign strain. Tell me, is this not true?"

"It is true—a great many people have seen them about here."

"But have not seen the inside of your head, little baroness."

"Have you?"

"I see it now—how these two young men have absorbed your thought. No, do not blush—there is nothing there to be ashamed of, nothing that your mother in heaven could not see and smile about. But your blue eyes will shed many tears because of them."

"I don't want to hear evil predictions," said Miss Carstairs.

"You listen to the voice of Fate," said the old woman steadily. "It will not be because of yourself that you weep, but because of these two young men. Can't you already see that one must die before the other two can laugh?"

Miss Carstairs pressed her hand to her heart.

"What you say is terrible."

"Terrible and grand."

"Which—which—" the girl had intended to ask the question lightly, but she couldn't quite get it out.

"Which—which? It is always so. Which will die and which will laugh—the eternal question of the universe. But I will answer it for you, my cygnet. He will first die who first kisses you."

"Then I'll—I'll kiss neither."

"Are young men in the habit of asking permission to kiss a rose-petal cheek like yours? Listen, there's yet something else. It will be he to whom you first give your love."

"I'll give my love to neither," said Miss Carstairs, with a species of horror despite the manifest absurdity of what was being said.

But the old woman continued to look at her unflinchingly, with no smile to relieve her compelling seriousness.

"Has the fear of death ever stopped a girl from giving her love?" the old woman asked.

"I'll warn them," said Elin with a trembling lip.

"Yea, warn away the night."

For the first time the old woman smiled, but it was a sort of uncanny, supernatural smile.

"It is easy, indeed," she added, as though to explain that smile of hers, "to see that you are innocent."

Again a quick wave of color overspread Miss Carstairs's face.

"I must be going," she said.

"To forget what I've told you?"

"Yes."

"Nay, you'll not forget," the old woman replied steadily. "Both young and old forget the past. Neither of them ever forget the future."

These words still lingered in Miss Carstairs's brain as she drew near her home. Reason as she could, she was unable to overcome a queer feeling of apprehension, a sense of having caught a glimpse through the impenetrable veil.

Once she paused and looked back,

half tempted to search out the old woman again and question her further. But what she deemed to be her better sense—perhaps, after all, it was the hand of Fate—got the better of her momentary debate, and she kept on down the woodland road toward her home.

The melancholy trees were so silent, steeped in mystery as never before.

She turned the last bend and saw a motor-car standing in front of her father's gate.

In it was the young Count Carlos Turga.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FALLEN ANGEL.

As he saw her, he sent the car forward in her direction. While he was still at a distance she could see a light in his eyes that she had glimpsed there on the occasion of their conversation in the sunken garden, that she had seen afterward once or twice since then when they had met.

"What luck!" Turga was saying. "I drove out all the way from New York to see you, if only for a minute. I was so afraid that I was going to have to go back unrewarded."

He had brought the car to a halt, had leaped to the road, had taken one of her hands in his. She drew back slightly, a wee bit frightened, the words of the old woman still uppermost in her mind.

But her reticence merely increased his fervor.

"Tell me that you're not sorry," he pleaded, half seriously, half teasingly.

"I'm not sorry, but—"

"Not but; just not sorry," he interrupted her. "You don't know how much good you can do a fellow by simply existing—something like the ozone, something like all this."

He waved his hand at the surrounding woods and smiled.

Elin had never seen him look so handsome. The impression made upon

her by the old woman was fading fast. Her optimism was all but unshakable. She reflected that there would be a full hour before supper-time.

"You've been feeling blue," she deduced.

"As a whetstone. Do you know, it's becoming quite a habit of mine—when I'm away from you."

"Sh!" she chided.

"It's the truth. You know, you told me yourself to be absolutely truthful."

She colored prettily, glanced at him from the corner of her eyes. She had never seen his face so serious, so illumined. Even his voice had in it a thrill which had never been there before.

"What have you been doing?" she asked.

"The greatest of occupations—thinking of you."

"I thought you promised me to look for work—to catch a job," as you expressed it."

"Preparation. I've been preparing myself—getting a better outlook. If I'd gone out looking for a job without first saturating myself in your heavenly influence I suppose I'd been just a bartender, or a *croupier*, or something like that. Now—now I wouldn't be satisfied with anything lower than a—than a soda-fountain clerk, or something like that."

"Will you always joke about it?"

"I'm not joking." He laughed shortly. "I know it sounds like a joke," he went on seriously; "but I am sort of making myself over with your help."

"I only wish I could help you!"

"Help me! Great Lord! you are helping me; neither you nor any one will ever know how much."

By common consent they both entered the machine, and Turga was driving slowly along.

As she looked at him with an appreciative, modest smile, he reached over and again nestled one of her hands in his.

"You can't imagine what a distaste I've taken for tango teas and all that sort of thing. I think, think, think, like a good fellow. Listen; do you know what I've decided to do?"

His voice had become more serious than ever. She slowly shook her head, absorbed already in what he was going to say.

"I've decided to shake my fist under the nose of Fate, and if he gets gay—"

Miss Carstairs caught her breath slightly.

"What do you know about Fate?" she asked, trying to make the question sound light and indifferent.

"What do I know about Fate?"

A sudden silence fell, broken only by the pebbly tread of the rubber tires on the road, by the thousand fine, small voices of the woods. The silence had brought a resurgence of undefinable alarm in Miss Carstairs's heart. There was something of this in her face as she turned and asked again very softly:

"What do you know about Fate?"

"What do I know about Fate?"

For an interval he did not answer, then the hand that held hers tightened its hold. He was driving very slowly, just creeping along.

"I've been thinking a whole lot about Fate," he said. "I've become quite an expert on the subject. And I've come to the conclusion that there is something in the world still stronger."

"Faith?"

"Stronger than faith," he answered.

"What, then?" she whispered, then bit her lip.

She knew that there was only one answer in the world that he could give—had known it even before the question sprang to her lips; yet she knew that in her heart she had made no effort to keep it back.

"Love, Elin."

"Don't say that," she murmured with a tremulous lip.

"Why not?" he demanded fiercely.

"Oh, but perhaps it isn't stronger."

"But it is."

"Not always. Think of all the mothers who have loved their children and yet were unable to fight off Fate—oh, terrible Fate, just like a mad tiger with green eyes, mouth open, claws outspread!"

"Just watch me poke him in the slats," laughed Turga, trying to get her into a more cheerful mood.

Then he noticed that there were tears in her eyes. With a sudden exclamation of pity, he lifted his hand to her cheek. The touch of that warm, infinitely soft skin sent an electric thrill up his arm and through his entire body.

"Elin," he said in a faltering whisper, "it is you whom I love. It's my love for you that'll be too strong for Fate. I love you—love you!"

The machine had purred to a standstill and stood tremulous—like a thing alive and expectant.

Turga leaned over and, before she could suspect his intention, had kissed her lightly on the cheek.

CHAPTER XXII.

ELIN SEES A GHOST.

FOR a moment or two the whole universe stood still. It wouldn't have been very much different had some catalytic force reduced the world to primeval chaos. During that moment Elin Carstairs was dumb, stricken. She was guilty. She was a murderess.

Then her woman's nature asserted itself. Tears sprang to her eyes. The hot blood rushed to her cheek. She turned to the man at her side with tragic pity in her face and voice.

"Oh, Carlos! Oh, Carlos!"

She could say no more.

He also for a moment had remained thunderstruck. He had had a fleeting impression that he had mortally offended her. He had had much experience with girls of one kind and an-

other, but never, he reflected with all the speed of thought—never, with one like this. But, as she turned her face to his, as he saw the expression there, he felt a mighty surge of chivalry, of adoration even. He had really felt that he loved her before, but it hadn't been like this.

"Elin!" he whispered. "My Elin!"

For another eternal moment they looked into each other's eyes—hers blue, seraphic; his earthborn, glowing.

"Oh, Carlos," she repeated as she sought to explain. "I am so frightened!"

Her words, so simple, so girlish, broke the spell. He laughed, leaned forward slightly as though he would have cured her fear by repeating the cause of it. She drew back.

"Don't!" she warned, in a whisper.

"Why not?"

"It frightens me."

"Nothing can happen to you—not," he added, "except over my dead body."

"Don't say that," she panted.

She smote her breast with a white fist, controlled herself with an effort.

"What's the matter, Elin?"

Elin smiled through her tears.

"I know that I'm foolish," she said, "but I wouldn't have had you do that for the world."

"Do what?"

She looked at him and shook her head.

"Say it."

"Kiss me," she faltered.

Turga laughed.

"Why, Elin, wouldn't you want to see me made a knight, a superman, a greater than king or President or Czar? That is what I have become. That is what you have done for me."

Again she murmured: "Oh, Carlos!"

"Listen, Elin," he went on; "some foolish people thought that they could do with me as they would, thought that they could get me mixed up in

some old curse of theirs, thought they could put over on me some jinx about Fate—”

His voice had become softer than ever, soothing, pleading. Elin had begun to cry gently, like a sorrowing child, hiding her eyes with a tiny handkerchief.

“—and I thought it was so until you came into my life. Then I knew that there was something else.

“It always has been that way,” he went on, as though arguing as much to convince himself as he was to convince her. “There always have been two forces in the world—good and evil. Every religion, every philosophy, concedes that this is so. And they all concede that the good is stronger than the bad.

“Oh, Elin honey, can’t you see what you mean to me—what you always will mean to me? You are the good, the good! I’ve had so little of it in my life. I’ve been hoodooed. I’ve never had any love. They tried to damn me—money and nothing to do, nothing to love but myself. I’m sick of it! You’ve shown me a new world. You’ve created me a new Eden. You’ve give me religion. You’ve given me deity!”

He paused, overcome with emotion. His face was very pale. Into his eyes had come all the fervor of an adept at prayer.

Miss Carstairs had taken her handkerchief from her eyes, a wet, little ball of linen, no larger than her dimpled thumb. At first she had listened to Turga with the ineffable sweetness of a girl who listens with a responsive heart to the voice of her first lover. Again her fears faded, her native qualities of hope and courage and cheerfulness rising triumphant, when she caught sight of a face beyond the hedge.

It was as though she had seen a ghost.

She was still peering in the direction of that haunting vision as Turga finished speaking. Only gradually he

took note of her changed expression. He had been talking to her spiritual presence, not to the physical Elin Carstairs, in that period of transport.

What he saw baffled him at first; gradually brought him back to earth with a growing sense of wonder and pain.

Was it possible that she hadn’t even been listening to him? It was incredible. For several seconds he remained silent, staring at her.

“Elin”—his voice was changed, hoarse, curiously dead—“what is it—what has come over you—what did you see?”

“Take me home,” she said with a pitiful little smile.

“What did you see?” he repeated.

As is the case with most sensitive natures, his pain was easily translatable into anger.

“Oh, is it possible,” cried Miss Carstairs, “that I should bring pain to those I have just learned to love?”

“To those?”

The question had about it the essence of accusation.

“Oh, Carlos, can’t you understand?”

“Great God, Elin, what am I to understand? I throw my bleeding heart at your feet, and you stare off into the bushes at some bird or other!”

“Don’t—don’t speak like that,” Miss Carstairs pleaded softly. There was no anger in her face, only pain and fear.

“I ask you what’s the matter?” Turga said. “Are you promised to another? Is it back to—back to the inferno for me?”

“Not promised!” cried Miss Carstairs in a small, strained voice. “Not promised to any one, dear Carlos. But just now I saw—oh, I’m so frightened! Oh, everything is going wrong; I didn’t want to say.”

“Saw what?”

“Saw Hugh Frail—and his face looked—”

Something mightier than any will of his sent the blood pounding into

Turga's head. He affected a laugh as he set the machine in motion and began to negotiate a turn. But the laugh sounded, somehow, terrible and sickening even to himself.

Miss Carstairs completed her sentence in a frightened whisper, "—like a ghost."

Turga was like a dead man, an automaton, a thing without sensation. His visions had faded. He felt that his hands were cold. The light had gone out of the landscape.

It was as though he saw through a black veil. And he was only dimly conscious of the ride back to the Carstairs gate, of his perfunctory leave-taking, of the long, cheerless, spectral drive to town.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONE WAY TO KILL TIME.

LIKE a good many other persons with plenty of money and nothing to do, Agatha Frail was keen for any sort of a suggestion that promised to kill a few bothersome hours in a pleasant fashion. Society, as she understood it, was organized to this end.

For what other purpose were books written, music composed, theaters built, and games invented? To what other end, indeed, were charities, guilds, settlements, and other things like that organized? Plainly not for the sake of the uninteresting creatures they were supposed to help.

It was this view of things, rather than any innate love of her fellow men, that had moved her to accept membership in a certain society for the protection of Bohemian immigrants.

But she had passed a good deal of her young life in Bohemia. On the whole, she preferred Czechs to other nationalities, and her purse was no more limited than her time.

She confessed to herself that a combination of these motives had inspired her sudden and unrestrained interest

in the young Count Turga. He had promised well, both as a time-killer and a Czech.

But Turga had dropped out of sight—a fortnight or so, a terribly long time according to her system of reckoning. She wondered if it were possible that he had become interested in Elin Carstairs. Agatha was not of the kind that mourn. She shrugged her young shoulders and piously decided on charity again.

The particular group of young women with whom she was associated had arranged an excursion to Ellis Island. It was an annual affair, destined, no doubt, to accomplish a world of good. The excursion happened to fall on a day when there was an unusually large influx of Bohemians through New York's water-gate. The young women were delighted.

They saw many interesting things. Two or three hours were slain, not without profit to numerous immigrant children. And for most of the members of the party it was thus that the day became a memory.

But for Agatha Frail the day was not to end there. Her sympathy had been elicited from the first by a certain immigrant girl with yellow hair, a Turkey-red shirt-waist, and a face of such broad candor as to make her look like nothing so much as a six-foot child.

She spoke the Bohemian dialect of the peasants in the neighborhood of Schloss Frelinghuysen. When Agatha addressed her in this dialect the innocent giantess was instantly for falling on her knees.

"What is your name?" asked Agatha.

"Maria Duba, excellency."

"And how long have you been here?"

"Three days already, excellency."

"Where are your friends?"

"I have none, highness."

"And relatives?"

"I have only a father, well born."

"And where is he?"

Maria, from a pocket in her capacious plaited skirt, drew out a piece of paper with a name and address printed on it. It seemed that the officials had already sent several inquiries to the place mentioned, but had been unable up to the present to get a satisfactory answer.

The first thing that attracted Agatha's attention was the number and avenue—an address she recognized. It was the home of Count Turga. Then she read the name. That, also, she recognized.

It was that of Paulo Duba, Turga's former servant.

Maria, regarding any one who could speak her native dialect as a bright messenger sent from heaven, especially when this person was a beautiful young woman, had opened the vials of her pent-up emotion, was reciting the litany of her past.

Her father had been so many years in America. Recently her mother had died. Almost every one else whom she knew was coming to America. She was young, strong as an ox, ambitious as an archduchess, and so she had followed suit.

"I'll help you," said Agatha.

A young inspector, whose duties elsewhere had been unable to get him beyond ear-shot, was at her side in an instant.

"Isn't there some way," she asked, "in which I can stand sponsor for this girl, take her under my protection—oh, anything to give her a good start?"

The inspector was sure of it. They were still discussing what was best under the circumstances when another inspector called the girl's name in a raucous voice from the other side of an iron grille—the Ellis Island equivalent for being paged.

"Some one calling for her now," said the inspector. "Her father, perhaps."

It was very exciting. Agatha Frail felt almost as though it was she who was held prisoner on the island, that

her name had been called by a voice from the vast, mysterious continent beyond the grille.

They all went forward together—she and the inspector and Maria Duba. And it was Maria who looked through the grille at the waiting visitor with placid indifference. It was the other girl who uttered a little cry of pleased recognition.

Count Turga, still hopeful of discovering the whereabouts of Paulo, had heard with the utmost interest about the inquiry which had come up from Ellis Island. From his abundant leisure he had taken sufficient time to look into the matter himself.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE AMATEUR DETECTIVE.

AH! that golden age when two young people look at each other, and not only demand the impossible, but promise it with equal facility! The excitement of it, the inspiration! Both of them felt it—both Agatha Frail and Carlos Turga, as they stood there on the lower sea-wall of New York with Maria Duba standing complacently at their side.

Their conversation had quickened, had taken on the additional thrill of speed. For already a group of loiterers were standing near, the nucleus of a crowd.

Not even in the neighborhood of the barge office do they see every day two distinguished young people with a blond giantess in tow.

"It's the first time that I've ever asked you anything," said Agatha, with sparkling eyes.

They had patched up a truce coming across on the Ellis Island ferry. At first Agatha was not going to forgive him—no, never—for keeping out of sight so long after he had—he had—well, it wasn't necessary to say what. They both remembered well enough.

"But I tell you I've been looking for Paulo myself for the past month,"

said Turga. "There isn't anybody in New York that I've wanted so much to see. That is, except—"

He flashed a dark-eyed smile upon Agatha.

She also smiled, but was insistent.

"I tell you," she declared firmly, "that I've told this girl that we'd find her father for her. I don't care how you do it, but you must do it. Now!"

"But, Agatha—"

"Don't make excuses."

Her eyes were sparkling—just a suggestion of the volcanic fire which always glowed very near the surface, anyway, beneath that gray ash. A heightened color had crept up above her cheeks and just below the temples, making her very picturesque, very adorable, a trifle dangerous.

"By gad, Agatha!" cried Turga softly, "when you look like that I'd promise you the moon—promise it to you and get it."

"You'll do it—"

"And you'll meet me—"

"Anywhere you say."

"Stay home and wait for a telephone call. It may be late."

"I don't give a—d-a-rn!" said Agatha, the volcanic fire glowing in earnest.

"And the girl?"

"I'll have her with me. I love her—'has the strength of Gibraltar!'"

"Me too?"

"Yes, if—"

Even while he was talking Turga had already begun to formulate a plan. It was something that he would never have thought of without the knout of Agatha Frail's inspiration. Before the taxi conveying the rich girl and the immigrant was out of sight, Turga entered the subway. Before an hour had passed he was driving his own car at reckless speed over the familiar road to Cherry Hills.

He feared as much. It was past one o'clock before he reached his destination. Through the still air he could hear the busy tapping of the steam-drills, the cough and strain of

the steam-shovel again at work, after the noon recess.

He had left his machine in a little grove off to one side of an unfrequented road running back of the Cherry Hills estate. He had carefully avoided any chance of meeting either Hugh Frail or Elin Carstairs. A sediment of bitterness still clogged his heart with regard to them, but his present quest absorbed him pretty much to the exclusion of everything else.

It was already yielding excitement. It promised more. Nor was he disappointed.

He had taken up his position where he could watch the men who were at work on the new lake. Heavily loaded wagons came and went with no great supervision. One stranger more or less about the place attracted no particular attention.

At last he made out the man he was looking for—the dark-eyed workman who had looked at him so strangely that day he stood in the sunken garden with Elin Carstairs. He watched this man with the passionate scrutiny of an Apache stalking a ranchman.

His opportunity came when the man started over a knoll to the temporary shelter where the contractor had stored his dynamite. Turga lost no time. He hailed him in the language of the Cechs.

"I have a question to ask," said Turga.

The man had recognized him, had smiled slightly, had started on as though he intended to pay no attention.

"I have a question to ask," Turga repeated, placing himself in front of his quarry.

There was that about both his voice and his manner that brought the other up short. He glanced about him. They were quite alone.

"I can answer no questions," said the man.

"You'll answer this one," Turga answered. "You'll tell me, my friend, what has become of Paulo Duba."

The man uttered a half-hearted denial, but his whole demeanor showed that he was lying.

Turga's long wait had not improved his disposition. He felt within himself a resurgence of fighting independence. In a way, the man in front of him personified the crushing weight of the destiny that had been oppressing him ever since that memorable night when Paulo had disappeared.

"Listen," he said softly. "We're brothers, aren't we—grandsons of the same grandmother?"

"Yes, brothers," said the man, recoiling slightly.

"Cain and Abel," laughed Turga.

The man had started to run, but before he had taken half a dozen steps Turga had seized him by the throat and twisted him round.

There was a guttural curse, a sound of heavy breathing, of straining muscles.

There fell a momentary silence through which there rushed a sparkling shower of lesser sounds—the twitter of birds, the distant tapping of the steam-drills, the far voices of men at work.

Turga released his hold somewhat. He hadn't escaped altogether unscathed. He had an unmistakable premonition that one of his eyes was going shut.

There was a hot streak down the side of his face. He was perspiring. But his heart was exultant with a sense of triumph.

The man sucked in the air with the strident gasp of a vacuum-pump.

"Mercy, my prince," he gurgled, "and I'll tell you!"

CHAPTER XXV.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

If Turga had been as good as his word, so also had been Agatha Frail. She had worn herself to a frazzle answering telephone-calls all day, had thrice repulsed the assiduous Frederic

Graw, 3rd, had broken, at least, two previous engagements, and declined other suggestions and invitations as quickly as they arrived. She hadn't passed such a delightful day for a long time—an intermittent flutter of excitement with periods of stimulating intercourse with Maria Duba between.

Not since she had become the proprietor of a St. Bernard dog, years ago, in her childhood, had she had such a diverting plaything. Maria displayed about the same degree of prompt and fathomless devotion.

Again Maria saw the wonderful young lady consult the still more wonderful instrument in the alcove at the head of the stairs; this time saw her give unquestionable symptoms of renewed excitement and delight. Miss Frail had hugged the instrument to her heart, had twisted her silken ankles together in a sort of ecstasy, then, to Maria's delight, had dropped into the language which she could understand.

"You're a dear," "You're a wonder," "You won't do any such thing," "Well, perhaps; just once"—these were the English equivalents of some of the things that Maria heard.

Mrs. Frail took only an indifferent interest in Agatha's activities. She belonged to the race of women in whom the maternal instinct is not particularly strong, however many children might come their way. Agatha pleaded further activity on behalf of the immigrant society, and was free.

Maria, in raiment more subdued—and with the first hat that she ever owned enhancing her bucolic beauty—but with spirits even gayer than her discarded Turkey-red shirt-waist, was already waiting in the limousine as Agatha came out.

The chauffeur had a grin on his face. He knew a few words of Bohemian—the first words which young unmarried people generally acquire first of all when acquiring a new language.

America was surely a mighty fine

place, thought Maria, where even the gentlemen drivers were so pleasant.

They picked up Turga at a point on the East Drive of Central Park. He had done his best to improve his appearance, but he still bore about him unquestionable signs of battle.

"For you," he whispered in explanation as he entered the limousine, then checked himself and looked at Maria. He had spoken in Bohemian.

"Don't mind her," said Agatha without premeditation.

Turga didn't.

The automobile passed over to the east side of the city. It was the hour when the ten thousand shops and factories in the neighborhood of Fourteenth Street were emptying themselves of the industrial army which every morning marches up the hill and every evening marches down again.

"Let's walk—let's join the parade," said Agatha.

"I'm on," said Turga. "The place is not very far anyway."

A minute later they had left the car and joined the moving throng on the sidewalk. To any one habituated to the quieter, emptier streets up-town, it seemed incredible that so many people should be out on no other mission than that of their daily bread. No spectacle had brought them there. These were not the melting audience of a crowded *matinée*.

Nine, ten hours of grinding toil, and yet how lightly they swung along!

Turga, Agatha, even the untemperamental Maria, felt the thrill of it. They were carried along by a human cable as wide as the wide sidewalk and charged with Heaven knows how many volts of human electricity.

Agatha was storing up a new impression which she was to draw upon in later years. She thought, with something akin to shame, of her dreary days of *ennui*—of nothing to do.

The majority of the moving swarm in which she found herself were girls—girls of her own age and even younger. For another day they had

fought the old dragon of want, had won, were going back to their many-storied brick and plaster camps with the victory apparent in eye and lip and bearing.

It was almost as though pennants were flying and bands playing—invisible pennants, inaudible music, but there all the same.

"And what do they care about curses," Turga asked himself, "so long as they've got work? Work—a job! Just plain, ordinary, every-day labor! That's the thing which is stronger than fate, stronger than all the powers of hell. Not faith, not love—*balderdash*—but work!"

They passed down Second Avenue, then over through Ninth Street, still carried along in that eternal stream of girls and young men, principally girls. The stream branched at the corner of Tompkins Square—half of it running diagonally off through the square, like a real stream through a bit of woodland. It was this division that Turga followed with Agatha and the patient Maria—the latter perfectly at ease, patient, unquestioning.

After all, the experience which she was undergoing had nothing very surprising about it. One could expect anything in America. As for the palace in which she had spent the major portion of the afternoon, it was quite conceivable that before very many years she would have a place like that of her own. In America, as she knew full well, such things were always happening.

Beyond the square they came to another avenue, quaint, foreign, old-fashioned. There was that about it which suggested the streets of Prague itself.

They had entered another cross street a little farther on, and Turga was looking for a certain number, when behind him he heard a cry of affectionate delight—so full of heart it was almost a sob.

He and Agatha had left Maria a few steps behind them. They both

turned. They saw the blond giantess stooping slightly, peering through a sidewalk hedge of privet-bushes into a basement restaurant.

"Father! My father!"

Up from the depths from behind the screening hedge there rushed an old man.

It was Paulo.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OLD WINES, NEW JOYS.

ORDINARILY, it would have been a dismal enough place—low ceiling, sanded floor, bare tables, a few time-stained chromos on the walls, an all-pervading redolence of exotic cookery and liquors. But it had been touched by the magician's wand. Had it been an alabaster hall hung with masterpieces and perfumed with frankincense and myrrh, it would have been the same.

For an elated moment or two father and daughter were so absorbed in each other that they had no attention for any one else.

Then Paulo saw Turga. He tore himself loose from the powerful embrace of the blond giantess. Dazed wonder, almost fear, mingled with the joy that was shining in his face.

"You, sir!" he gasped. "Why—"

Turga had stepped forward, was wringing the old man's hand.

"Where have you been keeping yourself?" he asked.

"Here, sir; ever since—"

"But why didn't you tell me where you were? I've been looking everywhere for you. I've been worried about you."

"That was so good of you, sir!"

"But why didn't you tell me?"

"I dared not." The answer was given in a frightened whisper.

"Do you mean to say—"

"She ordered, sir."

"That old woman?"

Paulo nodded his head.

Miss Frail had stepped forward.

"Let Paulo and Maria enjoy each other for a moment, at least. What are you two talking about?"

Paulo smiled at the young woman and saluted respectfully.

"Paulo," said Turga, "do as she says. Miss Frail and I have enough to keep us busy for a while."

"Miss Frail, sir?"

This time the old man couldn't conceal the consternation in his face.

"Cheer up," Turga whispered. "We'll break all this curse business, old man."

Paulo was wearing the black jacket and white apron of a waiter. Sure enough, he had been employed—was still employed—in the little restaurant where they found themselves.

"We'll stay here for dinner," Miss Frail cried delightedly.

"What-ho," Turga agreed. "Agatha, you're a brick."

They took advantage of the fact that Paulo and his offspring were again immersed in family endearments and news from home, and that the restaurant was otherwise deserted, to execute a certain threat and promise delivered not so very long before over the phone.

"And I'll do it again," said Turga.

"So will I," laughed Agatha, enjoying the excitement.

A comely matron, with sparkling eyes and an ample bosom, appeared in the shadowy door at the back of the restaurant.

"Mme. Zidek!"

Paulo introduced them, spoke a few words rapidly. When Mme. Zidek again appeared she bore a very dusty bottle on a tray with a number of glasses.

"The wine of my country," she smiled, embracing the company in the breadth and warmth of it.

Skilfully she pulled the cork from the bottle's dusty nozzle, and there floated throughout the room an autumnal perfume of ripe grapes, of warm fields, of balsamic mountainsides. The wine ran thick and golden

into the sparkling glasses—a topaz necklace worthy of an empress.

Mme. Zidek passed the gems around, and, standing, they drank Maria's safe arrival.

The bouquet had presaged the quality of the wine. By its subtle alchemy it had suffused and transformed the social atmosphere of the place a good deal, as it had already beatified the physical atmosphere when the cork was pulled. There were no rich and no poor, no mere proprietress and waiter—bothers and sisters all.

Somehow or other, the evening deepened into night. There were not many customers and, so far as Turga was concerned—and so far as the others were concerned, perhaps—they came and went like shadows, mere fantoms of dark-eyed men, who came and ate and drank and smoked, then went away again.

Other bottles of captured sunshine from the Erz and Piesen foot-hills came and went, each leaving behind it something more of wealth and warmth—like fairy porters.

At last, of all the strangers who had been there, only one remained—a very old, somewhat distorted musician with a cunning and jovial face. He carried a hurdy-gurdy—one of those strange, old instruments in which a revolving wheel takes the place of the fiddler's bow.

The magic which he sent up from this was similar to the magic distilled from Mme. Zidek's wine—it was so filled with the same haunting suggestiveness of far, beautiful places; of charms and gaieties ripened through the ages; the very essence of these things.

The musician had also drunk of the wine. He had lingered there at their invitation. Then gradually there had come over his cunning and jovial face a veil of dreaminess.

The wheel of the hurdy-gurdy turned. The musician's fingers danced deftly on the keys. There whirled lightly up a wreath of elfin music.

"Bravo!" they cried.

Before the entire company—if the company cared to see—Turga leaned forward. So did Agatha. Their lips met.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PAULO BECOMES A REBEL.

By imperceptible degrees the noises from the street outside had ceased. So far as the little party in the restaurant was concerned, the city of New York had ceased to be.

With all its millions of men and women—each one of whom was the center of an individual universe, with its individual set of hopes and fears, of loves and hatreds—it had disappeared into the gauzy nothingness of a little wine, of a little music.

"Perhaps the curse isn't so, sir."

Paulo had brought his chair closer to Turga's. They were no longer master and servant. Surface convention had disappeared, laying bare the granite of their long companionship and mutual trust.

"But you deserted me, Paulo."

"I had to. I would have stuck, sir, even had it meant the death of me. But I couldn't—I couldn't. No man, not even a father, can make things go the way he wants them to."

"What is it," asked Miss Frail, with her face close to theirs—"what it is you two are always talking about?"

"Does she know?" asked Paulo.

Turga shook his head, with his eyes on Agatha's.

"What is it?—I want to know."

On Agatha's face was the spell of curiosity—such an expression as might have been on the face of *Bluebeard's* last wife as she peered through the door of the forbidden chamber.

"Have you ever heard of the Frelinghuysen curse?" asked Turga.

"Yes."

"Do you believe in it?"

"Yes."

Agatha's face was glowing. She

was quivering with excitement. All the Slav in her nature was on top.

There fell a little lull. There came the soft voices of Maria and Mme. Zidek chatting happily together of far Bohemia. The elfin music of the old musician breezed in upon them—unreal, exotic. Now and then he quavered into a fragment of song, a mere shred of melody—a tattered rag of a voice, but still colorful.

"Well, don't," Turga answered with a fitful smile. "We'll break it. We'll show that there is no such thing."

"Oh, can you, sir?" sighed Paulo. "I have been wishing so that such a thing might be. But I was all alone. I was afraid. I even tried, sir, to go to see you, to get word to you. I could not. It was as though something gripped me, fastened me tight to the road I have followed since."

He paused, struck the table with his open palm. Into his face there came an expression of recollection, of new hope.

"It will be different, now that Maria has come. What better sign could we have that she is here to break the curse than that you, miss, and she should have thus met; that through you she should have found her father? My old mother, back in the Piesen *Gebirge*, used to tell me that there is only one way to fight the devil, and that is with kind acts. This you have done."

Again there fell a little lull. Once more the soft voices of Maria and Mme. Zidek came murmuring into audible prominence. Then once more the incessant, cadenced music of the old hurdy-gurdy player rippled in—a rising tide on a pebbly beach.

They heard his quavering voice—a mere echo of a voice—lilt brokenly the phrase of a song. To Turga there was something familiar about it. Perhaps this was true also in the case of Paulo. Both of them turned and looked in the musician's direction.

Oblivious, apparently, of everything except the fancies which he was spinning out of himself into his spider-

web music, the old man sat with his chin down, his eyes half closed, his left hand busy with the small curved crank of his instrument, his right deftly manipulating the keys.

"And what also gives me hope," Paulo resumed, "is that my life otherwise has not been disagreeable. Ah, she's a rare, fine woman, is Mme. Zidek."

Two tears—they seemed to be more shrunken and withered than the tears of a younger person might have been—glistened onto the rim of Paulo's eyes.

"Do you love her?" asked Agatha Frail, with spontaneous sympathy.

"I might very well do so," Paulo confessed.

"She'd make a wonderful mother for that girl of yours," said Turga. "Look at them now."

"Ah, no," said Paulo, disconsolately shaking his head. "What you say is true. But she is the proprietor of all this."

He waved his hand at the restaurant.

"And she has a wonderful cellar—a wonderful cellar. I am poor."

Agatha Frail was a gambler at heart. All this was a new game—one of the most interesting she had ever played. She reached out her pretty, delicate jeweled hand and let it rest on Paulo's.

"You're not poor," she whispered.

He caught her meaning. A tinge of color crept into his pallid face.

"You are generous," he said. His voice showed that he was touched. "As generous as you are beautiful," he went on, "but such a thing is impossible."

"It is not impossible," Agatha cried—vehement enough, though she kept her voice low. "You said, just now, that there was only one way to fight the devil. Give me the chance. I know all about the Frelinghuysen curse. I'm saturated with it."

"All my life I have heard but little else. I believe in it. I feel it. I know that it involves not only us, but others,

From what you have just said, you are one of these. And you, Carlos. Listen, we'll band together. We'll cast off this thing."

Her eyes had gone preternaturally bright.

There came another one of those lulls. The elfin, echolike music of the hurdy-gurdy zimmered and cadenced up and filled the room, and floating on the surface of it—like a chip on a moonlit river—was the voice of the player himself.

Once more Turga had that recurrent, insistent impression of having heard both words and music before. It was that way with Paulo.

They both turned slightly, listening, intent, their eyes meeting, shifting to the glorified face of Agatha Frail, then back again.

Then they recognized it—words and music:

—"And he builded his castles of blood
and gold,
Blood of our youth, the gold of our
clan,
But this is the end of the fated span—"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ELIN WRITES A NOTE.

FOR the first time in her young life Elin Carstairs had some slight doubt as to the positive goodness of the world and everything in it. She had never found very much difficulty in maintaining this cheerful view-point before.

But ever since that day that the old woman had told her fortune—followed so uncannily by her memorable and never to be forgotten interview with Count Carlos Turga—she had found it exceedingly difficult to harmonize things as they were with things as they ought to be.

Most of all she clung to the impression that Count Turga loved her. It gave her a maternal interest in him, made her sympathize with his unhappiness.

Ah, Elin—and to think that only a month or so before you were strong in the faith that all unhappiness was fiction, was wrong, was immoral even!

Day after day she calmed her unusual anxiety with the promise that he would come. He came not.

Half guiltily she sought to renew her pleasant friendship with Hugh Frail—walked over to the Frail estate, as she had done on other days, trying to convince herself that she wasn't bold in doing so, that it was the natural thing for her to do, that in no wise could it be construed as a lack of faithfulness on her part so far as Carlos Turga was concerned.

One day she saw Frail. Not only saw him, but she was almost certain that he had seen her as well.

It was near the new lake. He had been standing there watching the workmen. With a little resurgence of friendliness and happiness she had started in his direction.

Something in his attitude had smitten her innocent heart like an accusation. It was almost as though she had divined his thoughts—that he felt she had deserted him. And there he was—standing there so lonely and disconsolate, in spite of his wealth and this abundant activity around him which his wealth could command. He was looking at this lake, monument that it was to the family superstition, to the family tragedies—past, present, and to come.

She started toward him, she had seen him turn and glance in her direction, then he had sauntered away. She changed her direction, walked on and on, outwardly smiling, with a stricken heart within.

Something had happened to her universe, she could not tell herself just what.

Dr. Carstairs noticed the change that had come over his daughter. Throughout the years of his widowerhood he had been preparing himself for some such situation as this. He had been telling himself all along that the time

would come when his daughter would be lost to him to some extent—when she would respond to the stronger claim of another, younger man. But it found him all unprepared.

They had always been the best of comrades. He did not hesitate to question her—only it was in a shy and delicate way.

“A hard life,” he murmured with a sympathetic smile one evening when Elin was pouring his tea with more than ordinarily grave face.

She looked up quickly, guiltily, a bit frightened at the discovery that her preoccupation had been found out.

“Do fortune-tellers ever stumble onto the truth?” she asked irrelevantly.

“Very likely,” he answered indulgently. His rather broad and florid face was almost indulgent when he talked to Elin. “They often stumble on the truth, no doubt; but they can never change it.”

“What—the future?”

“The future—the truth. I mean that it doesn’t make any difference whether your fortune-teller is a good guesser or a bad; there is never anything to worry about.”

“But this is different.”

“In that it concerns you and—”

“Yes, tell me.”

“You and a young man.”

“I’m *Dr. Watson*,” she commented, with a flash of her old sprightliness.

“It doesn’t take a *Sherlock Holmes* for this. One young man and one young woman—fortune-tellers have dwelt upon that since the world began.”

“There were two young men,” Elin amended, then bit her lip.

Dr. Carstairs laughed gently.

“One or two—or three. But two in the present case. Do you want me to tell you their names?”

“You know them.”

“And the fortune-teller, too. I’ve often met her on my walks. She seems to be particularly thick with some of those foreign workmen young Frail has working on that lake of his.”

“Does she look evil to you?”

“Not evil—just sort of wondrous wise. She looks as though she might have almost completed the circle—got back to the perfect omniscience of, let us say, the new-born infant—along with the other things that she has picked up on the way.”

“Then she might be a fortune-teller?”

“She might be a corking good guesser, if that’s what you mean.”

“She predicted a terrible thing.”

With fragments pieced together—as our grandmothers, then young, used to make their “crazy-quilts”—she managed to get out a pretty fair account of what the old woman had told her, of what had happened since then. To all of which Dr. Carstairs listened with affectionate interest.

“Lots of things in the world that we can’t understand, honey,” he said later on, as he kissed her good night.

“Lots of things. But you know our old rule—the best rule that was ever framed—just not to worry, just to meet every situation with old-fashioned good sense and honesty, to take everything that comes as all in a day’s work.”

It were sacrilege to penetrate the chaste, immaculate fragrance of Elin Carstairs’s bedroom. But there she had her writing-desk. As she looked at it when she was alone her father’s words came back to her about meeting each situation that came up with old-fashioned honesty.

Impulsively, she sat down and began to write a note to Turga.

She wrote and wrote, with heaven in her face, a mingling of love, both human and divine, in her blue eyes, and with a tenderness ineffable on her pink lips.

She signed it with a rushing pen, then sat immersed in sudden reverie.

Across her thought had swept a vision of Hugh Frail as she had seen him standing beside the unfinished lake—that monument to family superstition, grief, and tragedy.

The night had gone very still. It must have been almost midnight. Then the silence was broken by the distant, mournful howling of a dejected dog.

Miss Carstairs tiptoed to the window and looked out. A gibbous moon was coasting down thin clouds behind the bare branches of the trees. The moon, the year, the Frails were waning.

Elin Carstairs picked up the letter she had just written—thought of Turga, thought of Frail.

She murmured a little prayer.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE INVISIBLE HAND.

TURGA opened his eyes from a deep sleep, noted gratefully that the sun was shining and that he was feeling fit. Then, rapidly enough but by degrees, the events of the night before recurred to him.

He had found Paulo again, had drunk some wonderful wine, had heard an old musician play a hurdy-gurdy. Succeeding recollections were on him with a rush—the barriers of forgetfulness all down, the legions of memory storming in triumph.

There had been a repetition of the old nightmare, the old haunt.

The words of the song he had heard came back to him now. But they were mingled with other words—words that he had spoken to Agatha Frail when they were riding home, other words that Agatha had spoken when they were still in the restaurant.

The ghost had shown its head again. They had banded together to drive it forever out of their lives—he and Agatha, Paulo and his blond giantess of a daughter, and the ample-bosomed, bright-eyed Mme. Zidek.

It was all arranged. Paulo and Mme. Zidek were to be married. It had almost been arranged—almost—that he and Agatha were to go and do likewise.

He was to see her that afternoon. He thought of her now with tenderness. She was certainly a very wonderful girl—complex, beautiful, just a bit dangerous—one of those feminine mixed drinks which nature prepares every now and then for a weary palate out of her billion years of experience.

A Swiss valet—polite and presentable enough, but too pale for comfort—came in with some letters on a silver tray and the verbal information that Turga's bath was waiting—"fotre panne, m'soor."

"For the love of Mike, speak English," Turga ordered, reaching for his mail.

"Your pat is retty, sair," the valet repeated obediently, with the decorum of a judge passing sentence. He had a lively sense of humor—like the majority of his kind.

"For the love of Isaac, make it German," said Turga as he tore open an envelope.

"*Ihre Bad ist fertig*—" he began.

"Oh, very well," said Turga.

With a sure hand he had first of all pulled out the one letter addressed to him in a woman's hand. It was a letter from Elin Carstairs, as he saw by a hasty reference to the signature.

Then he began again at the beginning. He couldn't quite see what she was driving at—he began to skip—he had so many other things to think about. She wasn't the girl that Agatha Frail was—not by any means.

Turga dropped the letter back into the tray for future reference, then shuffled over to the waiting bath.

The pale Swiss, left alone, began to set the room to rights. Once or twice he glanced at the open letter on the tray, caught a word or two of interest, then began to read it greedily. He was one of those who take their romance vicariously.

Turga splurged and scrubbed. Something of the courage he had felt the night before was coming back to him. After all, he was young and

healthy, this was America and the twentieth century, Agatha Frail was young and rich and beautiful. And he was to see her that afternoon.

He was to make it early—not later than two o'clock. They had agreed upon that between them. They had agreed upon so many things. They had so much in common!

He could feel again the thrilling contact of her lips, could feel the equal thrill of her eyes on his, especially in the twilight mystery of the cab when they were riding home together.

Their minds were open. Perhaps this afternoon would settle it. He was quite willing to have it settled—one way or the other, for that matter. After all, getting married didn't necessarily mean tying oneself up for life. He knew no ends of people—many of them friends of his—who had made the trip to Nevada or Dakota, and had rather enjoyed it withal.

Faultlessly dressed—the Swiss was a pearl of a valet, if he was a fool—Turga strolled out into the frosty sunshine.

He had forgotten all about the letter he had started to read. He had other things to think about—just time for a pleasant stroll up the avenue, a look into a shop or two where one was always apt to encounter a provoking smile, an exciting pair of eyes; then lunch, then his rendezvous—with all its latent possibilities. Few days had ever promised so much.

As a matter of fact, few days were ever to be so fruitful.

He had quite decided on the restaurant that was to have the honor of his patronage—an expensive, well-known restaurant where he often went, both alone and with friends of his. And he had a particular reason for going there. Several times, when he had lunched there recently, he had remarked a certain fair and alluring stranger who had also showed a partiality for the place.

These things being true, it is very odd that Turga did not even go near

the place. It was almost as though he were being led by an invisible hand—as though he were a mere infant conducted by an invisible nurse.

He loitered up the avenue, it is true, then strolled off aimlessly into one of the cross streets toward Broadway. He did not do this unconsciously. Several times he mentally warned himself to get back to the avenue, to his restaurant, to his selected program of action.

It was almost as though he were bereft of will. He walked on and on. And somehow a subtle change had come over his mood. He was no longer as gay as he had been. Several very comely young women passed him in the course of this promenade—fashionably gowned and hatted, any one of whom would have made an excellent advertisement for a beauty-parlor, and who, under ordinary circumstances, would have delighted his eye.

Turga did not see them. A sort of gray cloud had piled up athwart the sky of his spirit—a presage of possible storm, though the real day was as frostily fair as ever.

He had come to Broadway, was pausing before the entrance of a brilliant hostelry for which he had never greatly cared, was meditating the advisability of eating luncheon there instead of at that other place he had in mind.

Suddenly he stood still, the cold fingers of fear caressing his heart. He smiled, but he was weak, stricken.

Inclination and reason had told him to go back the way he had come. Instead, he went on in—forced there by inevitable fate.

Almost before he knew it, he was surrendering hat, stick, and overcoat to a uniformed flunky, and a suave head waiter was bowing him into a salmon-pink dining-room.

As if in greeting, there broke softly about him the mellifluous of a hidden orchestra—swooning, sensuous.

Through the soft glamour of sha-

ded lights he caught sight of a familiar face and figure—still very fascinating, still very beautiful, still what the French call *troublante*. She was smiling at him.

It was the former Princess Viatka—Mrs. Frail.

CHAPTER XXX.

CHAMPAGNE AND CAVIAR.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Frail was looking so altogether attractive that, after the first well-concealed twinge of impatience, Turga discovered that he wasn't so unhappy, after all. There was something about that salmon-pink interior, the shaded lights, the voluptuous music, that suited the former Princess Viatka marvelously well.

She was by far too expert a ring-general, however, to show an overabundance of pleasure at the outset. Apart from that initial smile, her invitation to share her table with her, Turga found her inclined to be more reserved than usual.

He decided to use the brief time at his disposal in breaking down this reserve as far as possible. He wasn't particularly interested in the result, but it was a rather better way of killing time than anything else he could think of.

"*Kismet*," he said with a dry smile as the waiter withdrew. "I was just asking myself what in the world had brought me here. Now I know."

"The same question has been answered for me," Mrs. Frail volunteered.

"You'll forgive me if I don't sympathize with you."

"I ask no sympathy. And you?"

"I'm the luckiest man in New York," said Turga feelingly, as he quaffed a preliminary beverage known as a "Clover Club"—whatever that might be.

Over the door of the restaurant to which Turga had entered there was a large gilt dial. During a lull in the

music there floated down from this direction the silver fragment of a chime. Looking up, he saw that it was half past twelve—still an hour and a half of liberty before he would have to keep his engagement with Agatha Frail. The fact gave him an added feeling of exhilaration. Plenty of time—plenty of leeway.

Mrs. Frail had gracefully permitted him to order for her. He outdid himself, ordering with all the *savoir vivre* of a man three times his age. Only, the luncheon ordered had no very strict relationship with the physical demands of health. A taste of this and a taste of that—caviar, truffled grouse, heart of the palmetto, an ancient Burgundy, glowing black and red.

It was amazing—amazing and pleasant, too, for that matter—how quickly the time fled.

Turga glanced up at the gilt dial. One-fifteen, and only down to the salad. After all, it shouldn't prove disastrous if he were five or ten minutes late.

The leader of the orchestra was outdoing himself. He was an Ole Bull and something more. He was leading a company of Sarasates and Paderewskis, no less. The music that they were playing was the most wonderful music in the world. It seemed to be affecting everybody. They were all smiling; they were all in good humor. And, if the truth be known, they also were breaking engagements.

Not that he was going to break an engagement. Ah, no! Agatha Frail was one of the sweetest little girls in the United States. And it was easy enough to see that she had come by her charms by direct descent. Mrs. Frail was fascinating, all right.

His eyes drifted past the gilt dial as he lifted his glass. One-fifty-five. Quarter of an hour, more or less, would make no difference. He was in excellent company. Nevertheless it was perfectly true that the *fête* would have to end some time. There was

only one way to bring this about, and that was by drinking their happy rencontre in a glass—just one glass—of champagne.

The former Princess Viatka was perfectly willing. She had nothing more important on than an engagement with the dry-as-dust Melnik and the American lawyers of the Frail family at two-fifteen. In a lofty mirror on the wall opposite her she also could see the gilt dial.

She wasn't quite sure just what time the hands did indicate, and she wasn't going to give herself a headache trying to figure it out. The lawyers always settled things among themselves, anyway. They could do the same thing this time and send her the papers to sign—if there were any.

The champagne sparkled—cool, refreshing. Two-ten by the gilt dial. A final determination on the part of Turga that the best of friends must part.

As if by magic, a clear space had been discovered in the center of the restaurant. A slim youth and a slimmer girl appeared from nowhere—something like the magician's rabbits on the brim of a silk hat. The orchestra—composed entirely of famous musicians—had throbbed into something delightfully African.

The magician's white rabbits intertwined and began to convolve—quite as though they had both been swallowed at the same time by an invisible snake.

"I wonder if I could telephone?" Turga murmured half apologetically.

He couldn't leave just now. After all, he might have been in a taxi accident, or something like that. Agatha would be grateful—or she ought to be if she wasn't—that nothing dreadful had happened to him.

Two - twenty - five. There hadn't been anything positively fixed about the rendezvous. Besides, he had studied the psychology of women, both in books and by observation. Every one was agreed that the way to

clinch a girl's affection was by making her suffer—you know, "the more you beat her the better she be."

The Princess Viatka was holding a match for his cigarette. He steadied her hand with his, held it a moment, then pressed it to his lips. It was a public place, but a gentle spirit of good-fellowship was abroad. Instead of rebuking him, the princess had rather done otherwise, had rather pressed her dimpled knuckles forward instead of drawing them back.

With a mental "*Ouf!*" of relief, Turga looked at the gilt dial with a sort of brazen impudence. Going on three—too late to keep the engagement—too late to telephone—too late for any ordinary excuse. The only way to save the situation now was to turn it into downright tragedy, let resentment be dissolved into anxious tears.

Besides, he was delighted to discover that, apart from a sense of perfect well-being, the champagne wasn't having the slightest effect upon him. It wasn't having the slightest effect on the Princess Viatka either, except to make her younger, more scintillant, and beautiful.

After all, for a full-grown man of twenty-one there was nothing like the society of a mature woman. Kids were all right from time to time, but—

He leaned forward and locked little fingers with the princess.

"I've got an idea," he said.

The Princess Viatka invited him to proceed, with her most dazzling smile.

"We'll go some place where we can dance ourselves," said Turga.

"You're a darling!" she answered with enthusiasm. "I feel so—so darling."

CHAPTER XXXI.

SUBURBAN, SUB ROSA.

THE day was already drawing to a close—so far as the workers were con-

cerned—but still early morning for Turga and his companion. It was very obliging of the sun to thus beat his record to the horizon.

Out of the salmon-pink interior of the restaurant into the sparkling twilight of upper Broadway, a million colored lamps continuing the festal atmosphere; even the white globes of the ordinary arc-lamps looking like mistletoe-berries in their milky whiteness.

The taxi swayed, crawled, and dashed ahead again, to the perfect indifference of those inside. After all, New York was a capital place to live in. There was always something doing, always something to see, always something new.

"I'm so delightfully frightened," said the former Princess Viatka, settling herself a little closer.

"Nothing to be afraid of," Turga consoled her.

"Oh, but I love it."

"Love what?"

"To be frightened."

He felt her arm quiver slightly under his. He could understand a temperament like that.

"Fear," he whispered, unintentionally dramatic. "I understand the thrill of it. I've had it in my life also, here lately. But different from the kind you mean."

"What kind do I mean?"

"Fear that you will be seen and criticised—fear of what people will say."

"And this fear of yours?"

"Are you afraid," he asked, with sudden intensity, "that this chauffeur of ours will smash into something, have an upset, kill us?"

"How delightful!" cried the former Princess Viatka with a shiver, but happy none the less. "Do you think he will?"

"I don't know," Turga replied steadily. "And, what's more, I don't give a—darn. And that's the attitude I've taken toward life in general."

He was speaking very softly, very

intensely, with his face close to Mrs. Frail.

"Go on," she urged softly. "Tell me what you mean."

"I mean," said Turga, "that we two—we two, particularly—are passengers in another sort of taxi-cab. Life!—somewhat dark, somewhat giddy, a sway, a crawl, a dash, a strange chauffeur, and Heaven knows what ahead."

He relieved the seriousness of what he was saying with a sardonic laugh and kissed her lightly before she could suspect his purpose. But she was atremble with interest in what he was saying. She suspected that he was holding back something.

"And you're expecting an accident?"

"And you?"

She shivered again—again nestled a little closer.

"Have you ever heard of the curse—of the curse on the family of the Frelinghuysens?" she asked softly. "Oh, somehow I never think of it except when I am with you, when I see you!"

"And an unknown chauffeur at the wheel," he repeated.

They didn't refer to the subject again. But the mutual understanding that to some extent had existed from the very first time that they had seen each other had deepened, become more intimate. There was a new element of daring, of recklessness in this outing of theirs.

The road-house stood on the edge of a wooded cliff, reached by a winding road. In the distance was the shimmer and glare and clustered constellations of the great city. Round them, as they paused on the porch, was the illimitable solemnity of night. For an abiding moment or two it was as though they two had already died, that they could look back on the world that they had just left, were about to go through the door of a new world—Valhalla. Sheol, Hades or Paradise, they knew not, nor greatly cared.

A band of negroes—drum, violin, cornet and piano, these supplemented with barbaric howls and chants—were doing their best to smother metaphysical problems in a riot of cubist chords and *tempi*.

"At any rate," the former Princess Viatka whispered to herself, "I have got rid of that cursed Frelinghuysen dollar."

She had passed alone into a room set apart for the women patrons of the place—a cigarette, a touch of powder, a dash of rouge. The brilliant yellow air was heavy with mingled perfume, rather too penetrating for the most part, but subtly intoxicating none the less. There was a general spirit of bravado among the others there, a sort of feminine dash and recklessness that quickened the former Princess Viatka's own pulse delightfully.

She smiled at herself in a long mirror. After all, she was beautiful, she told herself. She allowed one of the attendants to pencil her eyes—oh, ever so little, just the barest suspicion of a delicate green, the garish light requiring it.

As she inhaled her cigarette, she noticed a discarded newspaper lying there—the red and black page of an afternoon journal with screaming head-lines.

She glanced at it casually with idle interest, saw that a murder was proclaimed, then looked again with a slow filtration of wonder and horror.

MELNIK!

Stabbed in the Back! No Clue!

She clutched at the arms of her chair. She felt giddy—ill. Melnik murdered! The woman attendant approached, eyebrows lifted, sympathetic.

"I think," said the former Princess Viatka, "I'll take that cocktail you suggested."

So this was the end of the Bohemian lawyer who had tampered with the affairs of the Cave-Dwellers. On him, also, had fallen the shadow of the

curse. It must be so. It couldn't be otherwise.

The attendant came back still fluttering with sympathy, but carrying the cocktail steadily enough on a tarnished tray.

"*Madame n'est pas bien?*"

Mrs. Fraïl took a pungent swallow. She felt better instantly. Her eyes brightened. She smiled.

"Oh, I'm all right," she answered lightly.

She finished her cocktail, looked down at the offending paper for a moment with growing disdain, then reached it with one of her small and beautifully shod feet. An exquisite spasm of pleasure thrilled through her as she felt the paper tear. She drew it closer with the sharp edge of her French heel, then trampled and tore, trampled and tore, in an ecstasy of delight.

For a moment or two she contemplated the advisability of one more cocktail. A number of the other women there were also drinking. But she saw that in their faces that caused her to desist.

Over and above the babble of conversation throbbed and boomed the distant frenzy of the negro musicians. That was quite exciting enough.

Her feet still on the torn and crumpled fragments of the newspaper, she stood up, looked at herself once more in the mirror, smiled and started for the door.

Turga was waiting for her there. He smiled at her darkly.

"*Ciel*, woman," he laughed, "how beautiful you are!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

CHORDS AND DISCORDS.

WITHOUT permission, or the need of it, Turga had slipped his arm about her waist. The music was compelling. They glided into the strengthening current of dancers. It was very exciting—quite intoxicating. Even that

memory of the torn journal recording the tragic end of Dr. Melnik contributed somehow to the former Princess Viatka's elation.

She had never danced before to music like that, not precisely. But she had danced to the wild music of the *Tziganer* throughout central Europe. And there was something about the tempestuous and freakish harmony of these present musicians which reminded her of them—which reminded her of another ball, something like this one, years ago, in Tarnopol.

The years slipped away. Emotions that had slumbered for years were awakened again. Through the atmosphere, heavy though it was with the mingled smells of perfumes, liquors, and the disquieting effluvia of the well-dressed human herd, there came the aromatic aroma of a Russian cigarette—a haunting memory.

Her eyes were brilliant, her red lips were open, she swooned lightly through the dance. Who could be smoking a cigarette like that, she wondered? But she didn't care.

Turga also was a superb dancer—on an occasion like this, with a partner like Mrs. Frail. But twice, now, he had noticed a black-bearded stranger in the fringe of onlookers at the tables.

There was something about the man that recalled the shadowy faces he had seen that night in the warehouse. In an ineffectual sort of way, he searched his memory. But he brought back nothing definite, only that uncanny, indefinable sense of impending Fate.

His arm tightened about Mrs. Frail's waist. He looked down into her face seeking some counter-charm which could dispel the obsession, increase his recklessness and courage.

She had abandoned herself to him utterly. She was as responsive to the wild music as were the primitive musicians themselves. She smiled up at him languorously. Turga's face was very close to hers. He was almost on the point of dropping his own face

yet a little closer. There were so many people on the floor that there was a certain element of seclusion.

Then some sense of being looked at caused him to glance again in the direction of the onlookers. Again his eyes rested upon the man with the black beard. But it was not he, Turga, who was being looked at—not just then, at any rate—the stranger had half-started from his chair, was gazing with passionate surprise at Mrs. Frail.

Turga felt an inrush of fresh uneasiness. So this was the thing that he had been suspecting! He had been dancing—dancing in the dark, in his sleep, had felt the imminence of the precipice, and it was this.

Only a glance was necessary. That the man knew Mrs. Frail there was no doubt. Striking in appearance though she was, no mere stranger would have started like that at sight of her.

Turga had brought her to the other side of the room. There he paused, his arm still about her.

"Have we had enough?" he whispered.

"No, no!" she murmured. "It's superb—wonderful! Let us go on. I love it."

"There is some one here. I feel—I'm uneasy."

"Some one here?"

Mrs. Frail cast a quick glance about.

"Some one we know—some one of our sort?"

"A man with a black beard—he looked at you so strangely."

Mrs. Frail hesitated. Her imagination brought again that faint whiff of the Russian cigarette. But she was undismayed—quite the contrary. Could it be possible that some old admirer of hers was here in this outlandish place? Her intuition at times amounted to almost a sixth sense.

Without speaking, her hand again sought Turga's arm and she swayed him impellingly once more into the rhythm of the black musicians. It

was the very quintessence of enjoyment to dance with this handsome youth before the eyes of a possible rival. To inspire jealousy again—what could equal that?

Again they circled the floor. But Mrs. Frail made no effort to see who it was that Turga referred to. Her eyes were all for Turga himself. She was more languorous and lissom than ever. One more element had been added to her delight.

And this time even Turga failed to notice the stranger. His attention had been suddenly absorbed by a youth who, for some reason or other, was exceedingly awkward in steering his companion across the crowded floor. Turga did his best to avoid a collision. Too late!

As Mrs. Frail recovered herself from the shock she found herself looking into the amazed, incredulous face of her son.

Hugh Frail stared and stared. His face had been flushed from much exercise and numerous libations. But his color gradually faded.

He turned to Turga. For a moment they stood there facing each other with the other dancers on the floor elbowing and zigzagging around them.

"What—what are you doing here?" Frail asked thickly.

Before Turga could answer, a frightful discord brought a sudden period to the clamor from the orchestra. There was a moment of terrifying silence, then a fresh clamor broke out, during which the lights went out.

There followed a greater cacophony than ever—a medley of shrieks and yells, of laughter and curses, in all of which there was but one articulate word.

The word was "police!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FREDERIC GETS A JOLT.

As brilliantly as this momentous day had dawned for Count Carlos

Turga, it had dawned more brilliantly still for the junior member of the firm of Graw & Graw. For Frederic awoke with a sense of work well done and a day of rest ahead. It was almost as though he were a little kid again, he told himself, that this was Saturday with a day's sport ahead on his grandfather's farm.

Quite to his surprise work had proved to be a tonic, not the slightest bother in the world. But none the less he had decided to follow his father's suggestion and knock off this day at any rate.

As was usually the case when he was feeling more than ordinarily fit, Graw's thought turned to Agatha Frail. He had been thinking a good deal about Agatha here of late, nor had these thoughts been entirely complacent.

But as he swung down the Avenue, he reflected that any fears he might have had with regard to Agatha were rather absurd. Surely, Agatha could never marry any one else.

His own grandfather had been one of the few friends of the original Frail—the fugitive Count von Frelinghuysen. His father had been one of the companions who shared the stormy youth of Agatha's father.

And almost as far back as he could remember, until very recently, both families seemed to have taken it as a matter of common accord that some day he and Agatha would be happily married—to the satisfaction of all.

But young Graw knew well enough that a change had taken place. It was with a certain amount of wonder that his brain had recorded the events of that day when he had driven Agatha out to Cherry Hills in his motor-car—when he had noticed for the first time her partiality for Turga.

He was just a trifle stupefied at the possibility of Agatha being seriously interested in any one else. At first he had put it down to a passing whim. Agatha was famous for her whims.

But that she should have elected

Turga was the most whimsical thing of all. Turga was all right, but he wasn't quite normal—normal as to family, and all that sort of thing. He was too much of a mystery, too much of a foreigner—a foreigner still, despite his long residence in the United States.

"Hello, Chivvers," he greeted the Frail butler with the familiarity of an old acquaintance. "Miss Agatha in?"

"A fine day, sir," Chivvers volunteered. "I really don't know. I'll see, sir."

"Quit your kidding," said Freddy lightly. "Tell her she's got to be in."

Chivvers permitted a smile to flicker dutifully on his shaven mask.

"I'll see, sir."

Frederic lit a cigarette and strolled over to look at the tapestry. He had looked at the tapestry perhaps a thousand times before, but it always interested him. He had never been able to puzzle out how people could attach such inordinate value to pictures so hideous. They would have been bad enough in oil, let alone picked out in woolen threads.

There was a soft step behind him. He whirled delighted. He had recognized it.

"Agatha, by all the gods!" he exclaimed. "You're looking positively stunning."

Chivvers cast upon the young pair a single glance of paternal commendation. Graw noticed the glance.

"You're a brick, Chivvers," he said.

"Going to remember you in my will, be deuced if I don't." He let his adoring eyes rest again on Agatha. "What's on?" he wanted to know. But he answered his own question. "Nothing. Come along with me. I'll run you out into the country. We'll make a day of it—all by ourselves—have a bully time."

Agatha smiled upon him tenderly. She was so happy that she wouldn't willingly have hurt a fly—least of all, this big, good-natured, and fairly good-looking boy who stood in front of

her. Turga was coming—coming at two o'clock.

"You're a perfect dear," she conceded; "but it can't be done."

"I'll take you, anyway," said Graw, making a playful little move as though he intended to grab her.

"I'll tell you what we will do," said Agatha. "If you're not going any place in particular—as I know you're not; you never are—I'll let you stay here for luncheon. I'm all alone. My beloved mother is off shopping or something. But you'll have to go at one-thirty sharp."

"Ah, gee, that's only two hours at the outside. Make it two-thirty."

"At two," said Agatha, with perfect solemnity, "my dressmaker is coming—a dreadful person."

Graw drew a rueful face.

"A him or a her?" he wanted to know.

"Insolent!"

Agatha had caught his hand in hers—as she was wont to do years ago, when he had come over for a day's frolic. Perhaps it was a memory of those other days that recurred to her now.

"And I'll have them serve our luncheon up in the nursery," she added playfully.

They had come to the upper landing of the grand staircase—a most shadowy and churchlike place. Courage was now running stronger through Graw's veins than ever before. Agatha, still leading him by the hand, was a little in front of him—graceful, slight, infinitely inviting.

Obedient to a sudden and uncontrollable impulse, he caught her in his arms, swayed her lightly backward, and kissed her fervently on chin and temple.

Agatha was so startled that for a moment or two she couldn't speak. She had torn herself free, not so much from any distaste she had for such conduct as from some native instinct of self-protection.

She stood quivering with excite-

ment, her face illumined, her lips smiling and tremulous, an extraordinary light in her eyes.

"Why, Fred Graw!"

Graw stood in front of her, trembling, confused. All of his splendid courage had been expended in that one magnificent attack. He had never felt so wholly abashed and frightened in his life.

He tried to speak—tried to laugh—succeeded in nothing but chattering his teeth. For him the hour was a solemn one.

Suddenly Agatha's expression changed, relaxed, as did her tense, young figure. She was shaking with laughter. Gale after gale of laughter, rollicking, surcharged with merriment, swept over her, brought the tears to her eyes, made her squirm.

There was only one thing in the world that could have increased Graw's fear—it was not her anger, which he believed he had already felt—and that was her ridicule.

"Stop your laughing," he managed to say.

Agatha caught the meaning of the intonation. She continued to laugh, and there was an element of cruelty in it. She had suddenly discovered that she could make some one suffer. The discovery pleased her, gave her a hitherto untasted thrill of excitement.

"Stop it, I say!" Graw reiterated, his dismay turning into anger.

Agatha's laugh turned into something perilously like a sneer.

"And since when did you get the right to give me orders?" she wanted to know.

He recovered himself somewhat, smiled awkwardly, took a step in her direction.

She drew back slightly, still looking at him with sparkling eyes. It was too good an opportunity to lose. She had another barbed shaft already on the cord.

"Go on," she said. "While you're about it, order me to break that engagement as well."

Graw looked at her in silence while the watch in his pocket ticked off thirty seconds.

"With Turga?" he asked softly.

"Yes, Mr. Graw. Won't you stay?"

"I'm sorry I can't stay," he said.

As he passed Chivvers in the lower hall he was ostensibly humming a tune.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"NEVER SAY DIE."

FREDERIC GRAW, 3RD, still humming—ostensibly—turned into Central Park. It was an ideal day for the equestrians, and there were many of them out. For a moment or two he half determined to go and get his own mount. He must be nervous and out of sorts, he told himself, or he never would thus have flown off the handle.

But even this indirect way of reverting to the incident from which he had just emerged brought him a little pang of self-pity. By the same token the mere thought of being jogged up and down into anything resembling physical activity became abhorrent. A little while before the very atmosphere was tingling with the zest of life. Now he kept quoting:

"The melancholy days have come—"

He could get no further, nor cared to. Those few words expressed sufficiently his whole outlook on life.

But before he had been there very long, only half noticing the stream of cavaliers and amazons, his attention was awakened by a horseman mounted on a skittish, young thoroughbred filly—such a queen of an animal that, perforce, Graw thought again of Agatha.

She quivered at every dead leaf that fluttered down—the filly did—showed an incessant readiness to bolt. There was slumbering fire in her beautiful eyes, revolt in her quivering flanks and every toss of her finely chiseled head.

The man on her back gave no heed. He was a picture of masterful dignity—calm, self-possessed, thoroughly sure of himself. But to Graw's trained and admiring eyes it was obvious that the filly recognized the master. She had learned the strength of his hand, had yielded the higher will. He could see what might easily have happened had a feebler spirit tried to dominate her.

Again he thought of Agatha—skittish, young, a thoroughbred. He flushed a little, but it was for himself, not her. He straightened up, looked again at the rider who had just passed, and at sight of that strong back, commanding shoulders, the proud carriage of the head, felt his own muscles become taut, a fierce uprising of his own latent courage.

For a moment he stood there, breathing deep the cool, invigorating air. He turned and retraced his steps.

"Back again, sir?" asked Chivvers dutifully, although the question was manifestly absurd.

"Back again," he answered. "Has Miss Frail gone out?"

"I'll see, sir."

"Tell her I must see her—must. Got that?"

A mellow chime from somewhere in the interior of the house was announcing three o'clock. Graw had lunched in solitary melancholy. There was a little twinge of melancholy now as he thought how he and Agatha might have had their luncheon together, as she had suggested, up in the nursery, as in the days of old.

Then he remembered what she had said about her two o'clock engagement, and again the militant spirit rose strong within him.

It might not have been with Turga.

He knew Agatha well enough for that. But if it was Turga—

"Miss Frail isn't feeling very well, sir," Chivvers reported, "and would like to know, sir, if there is any word."

"Only one word, Chivvers," said Graw, "and that is that I want to see

her, must see her—if only for a moment," he added, as a slight concession to diplomacy.

When Chivvers came back the next time he brought with him a slight smile. Graw was practically a member of the family, anyway.

"And she's in an awful humor," he whispered.

Graw returned the smile, but kept his own counsel.

He found Agatha standing in the center of her own little drawing-room. She was standing very straight. Her fists were clenched. She was scowling, but there was abundant evidence that she had recently been crying.

"What do you want?" she asked with brutal directness.

Graw had paused, was sizing up the situation. Neither did he waste any breath on circumlocution.

"You!"

The answer came like a shot. Like a shot Agatha Frail received it. For a moment or two she was too surprised to speak.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"I mean what I said—I want you."

Graw had started forward. Agatha drew back in a way which had never theretofore failed to command respect, not to say fear. Her eyes glowed. Her nostrils were dilated.

"Don't—don't you try that again!" she panted. "Don't you dare touch me!"

She was reminding Graw more than ever of that skittish, thoroughbred filly—aquiver, ready to kick, insurgent. He himself was not without experience so far as the breed was concerned. He had passed most of his youth hanging about the stables of his father's country-place—had absorbed a good deal of the strategy that an occasion like this demanded.

Almost cautiously, yet kindly, steadily, without the slightest outward sign of trepidation, he went forward, his hand on her shoulder. Before she could again draw back he had clasped her in his arms.

The victory wasn't an altogether simple thing. Nor had he expected it to be. He knew that Chivvers hadn't lied about her humor, and with her humors, of one sort and another, he had had a long experience.

She freed one hand and struck him across the side of his face. He hardly winced; reached up and pinioned this hand again with unshaken complacency.

"Let me go!" Agatha gritted between clenched teeth. "Let me go, I tell you, or I'll shriek!"

Graw didn't answer—merely tightened his hold, merely swayed her back a little so that her eyes met his. She was throwing every iota of her strength into her struggles, but she could scarcely move.

"I hate you!" she hissed.

"Oh, no, you don't," he replied softly.

His hold had not relaxed. Agatha had left off struggling, but he could tell from the feel of her lithe body that she would seize the first opportunity to escape. She wasn't mastered yet.

"Oh, no, you don't," he repeated just as softly.

"Coward!"

In a way the epithet was an acknowledgment of weakness on her part.

He smiled down at her indulgently.

"Why don't you laugh at me?" he asked.

She didn't answer. In the depth of her eyes he could see some slight indication of change.

"And where is that Mr. Turga you were talking about?" he wanted to know.

There was a final flare of volcanic light in the depth of Agatha's eyes; then quite unexpectedly the fire was quenched with a sudden mist. He felt her body relax.

"Poor little kid!" Graw murmured almost paternally. "Poor little kid!"

The mist, repeating a phenomenon common in nature, became rain.

The mellow chime was again ringing. As Graw listened it seemed incredible that an hour had passed so swiftly—equally incredible that such a stupendous change had taken place in such a short time.

"I'll do anything in the wide, wide world that you ask me to," he murmured softly. "Only I'm boss."

"You're boss," whispered Agatha, with her hand on his cheek, "and these are your orders—orders that you give, you know."

"Sure—anything you say." Graw laughed.

"Since that beloved mother of mine has seen fit to remain away," said Agatha, "you don't want me to stay in this big, old house all alone. It's to be dinner in a bright, big restaurant; then afterward—"

"Then afterward?"

"Then afterward, oh, something desperate—something wild—a dance in a country road-house."

"Sure; I know just the place."

"Where we'll get excitement," insisted Agatha.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SCENE OF EXCITEMENT.

THEY were headed for excitement enough, were Graw and Agatha—had they only known it—a little later, as, like the pair of young sweethearts that they were, they held hands in the cushioned obscurity of an automobile headed north.

The long truce, which had permitted the proprietor of the road-house in question to do pretty much as he wished, and to let his guests do pretty much as they wished, was broken.

The police had descended like a twofold curse of locusts and darkness. And Egypt was smitten hard.

As darkness fell on Turga, on Mrs. Frail and her son, there was at first a surge as if everybody there were trying to move in one direction—a herd of panicky sheep.

There was a crash of glass—another and still wilder stampede in that direction, dominated this time by the stentorian voice of authority. At one end of the hall a single gas-jet quivered into light, and again the crowd fell silent.

It was spectral, uncanny—a vision of pale faces petrified with fear in the midst of merriment. A hysterical woman let out a falsetto laugh; and again the noise broke out, only this time more subdued, more easily dominated by the voice of some officer or other giving orders.

"All you gents and ladies stand still just where you are, and nothing will happen to you."

In a general way the order was being obeyed. Other gas-jets were flaring up one at a time, then with a sort of noiseless rush the electric lights were on again and once more the place was brilliantly illuminated.

Already the process of evacuation was under way. At one end of the hall there was a little knot of policemen maintaining order and taking names, while the recent revelers filed out singly and in groups, giving names and addresses—real or fictitious, it mattered not.

It was the only way out. At the other end of the hall and at each window, wherever one cared to look, there were glimpses of other uniforms.

Young Frail had turned on Turga with fierce desperation.

"Where is my mother?" he demanded.

Turga looked from left to right in amazement. Apart from the strangers round them they were alone.

"Your mother—where is she?" he gasped in turn.

"Where is she?" Frail repeated.

There was something of panic in his voice. He was looking at Turga out of round eyes. His mouth was open and his lower lip was aquiver.

Mrs. Frail was nowhere to be seen. They looked all round them. The

young lady with whom Frail had been dancing but a minute before, feeling keenly their present lack of attention to her presence, murmured something uncomplimentary and started in the direction of the exit.

"Perhaps Mrs. Frail has gone out," Turga suggested.

"Of course she's gone out!" Frail blurted with growing hysteria. "What did you mean by bringing her here?"

"Calm yourself," Turga replied, though he himself was far from being calm. "Everything will be all right. She's here. We'll find her."

"But where?"

Frail was again staring at Turga, maudlin, fish-eyed. For a moment or two he struggled to get out the words that were trembling on his quivering lower lip.

"By the Lord, Turga," he ejaculated, "you got her into this, and you got to get her out!"

Frail's nerves were steadily becoming worse. Turga ignored the charge, looked about him with an assumption of coolness.

"And you got me into it, too," Frail continued with almost a sob. "You dirty pup, if you hadn't butted in with Elin Carstairs I shouldn't have been here."

He paused, aghast at his own audacity. Plainly, he had said something that he hadn't intended to say—one of those things that a man keeps in his heart until it springs forth in defiance of his will.

But Turga received his declaration with cool disdain.

"Shut up!" he said. "We've got other troubles—here, now."

The hall was becoming rapidly emptied.

There was no longer any doubt about it. Mrs. Frail was not there. About the only hope which remained was that, in some manner, she had been among the first to get out; that they would find her perhaps in the motor-park or on the porch.

It would do no good to ask the

blue-coated registrars at the door. Both of them knew that a woman of Mrs. Frail's position and experience would give any name but her own.

Out in the open air they stumbled round in the ever present confusion, hating each other yet sticking together—leashed up by a common anxiety.

There was light enough outside, but they knew their quest was hopeless. Even had Mrs. Frail succeeded in getting out by herself in that first descent of darkness and panic, she would have had to be an extraordinary woman indeed to find the taxicab or the chauffeur that had brought her.

Frail discontinued to whine like a discontented, ill-bred child.

Turga was becoming instantly more somber.

They had made their way to the parking - space. Automobiles were honking and coughing all around them. Their overworked nerves were kept perpetually on the jump. They were in imminent danger of being run down.

"I tell you to shut up!" Turga grated as he suddenly turned and confronted Frail.

They had come into a place full of confusing lights and shadows—a lugubrious place, in some way as chaotic and disordered as their own thought.

"I won't shut up!" Frail cried. "It's your fault. Everything is your fault—you dirty—"

Before he could finish the sentence Turga had swung a smashing blow to his face.

Frail reeled back, as much dazed by the suddenness of the assault as he was by the force of it. He was completely sobered now. As far back as he could remember no one had ever struck him before. The horror of it was not sudden; it was gradual. His brain required time—only a few moments, but it seemed longer—to fully note the fact and all the attendant circumstances.

There in the darkness, with the discordant thunder of motor-horns, of barking engines and excited voices around him—a darkness shot to pieces by the blinding flare of headlights—it wasn't so much a man that he saw before him as it was a personification of all that was evil and brutal and dangerous in his own life.

It was not Turga—it was the thing that had robbed him of the only girl he had ever loved; that had dragged his mother into this inferno, and had now awakened him to a full realization of the wretched pass into which his life was drifting by a blow on the face.

Turga was still standing there in an attitude of watchfulness as Frail recovered himself and stepped forward.

It was Turga who spoke.

"Keep away from me," he commanded. "Keep away from me and keep silent. If you insult me again—"

Frail hadn't spoken. He was swifter and steadier than Turga could have suspected him of being, and as Frail struck out Turga was taken almost unawares.

He sought to sidestep, to parry.

Then, just as Frail landed, an automobile rushed by.

Turga had felt a hideous impact—a deluge of pain.

The mud-guard had caught him in the back, had hurled him into the dust.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN ECHO FROM MUSCOVY.

NEVER in her life had the former Princess Viatka enjoyed such a thrill of fear and excitement as when the lights went out. A strange place, a strange crowd, strange perils! To her jaded nerves the situation was perfect.

An instant later, while the excitement was still on its upward rush, an arm had slipped under her own, a voice had whispered in her ear the one word "Come!"

Mrs. Frail, as she looked back on the incident later, remembered that the voice was strange, that the word was spoken in her native Russian. At the time she noticed neither of these things, merely obeyed automatically.

There wasn't time to think during that swift, brutal rush through the darkness, through the surging, invisible crowd. Followed a crash of glass as a window went out. They were in the open air.

Two policemen rounded a corner of the building, but before they could get their bearings Mrs. Frail, still obedient to the urging arm locked in hers, was across a narrow footpath and behind a mass of ornamental shrubbery. She and her escort stood there crouching, like hunted animals, until the sportsmen of the law had passed.

Not until then did she take note of the fact that the man who had steered her to the open air was neither Turga nor her son. He was a stranger. But even here in the darkness she sensed his lithe strength and somehow his station in life. He hadn't released his hold on her arm, and as she attempted to draw back he held her more tightly than ever.

"Who are you?" she demanded softly in Russian.

The stranger laughed.

"The Princess Viatka has a short memory," he said. "I recognized her the moment that she came into the room."

Mrs. Frail again felt the eery delight of fear—the unnameable thrill of the child who asks with chattering teeth for one more ghost-story. There was a familiar echo in the voice—an echo of her own far Muscovy.

"Who are you?" she repeated.

"What do names matter?"

A note of impatience had crept into the stranger's voice—just a hint of latent cruelty.

For a fraction of a second the former Princess Viatka flashed a look into her jungly past. She had broken many hearts in the old days—she

could not recall the fact even now without a secret sense of triumph; many men had crossed her path. This was one of them. Beyond that, she was still in doubt.

Before she could formulate further question or protest, her self-elected escort attempted to force her again to follow as he led the way. She drew back with a movement of revolt.

"Come," he flamed fiercely. "I've got you this far. You needn't think that you're going to get away from me now. Come! I've my motor over there. You're coming with me.

"I'm not coming with you!"

Mrs. Frail had snatched her arm away, but before she could take a step her captor again had her by the wrist, had jerked her toward him roughly that for a moment she was deprived of the power of speech.

"I'll scream!"

But the words lacked something of sincerity. They contained more of pleading than of threat. And even so that note of delicious dread could not altogether be concealed.

Again the stranger had laughed. He had thrown a strong arm about her waist, was almost carrying her as he hurried forward, by a circuitous route to where he had left his automobile.

They passed through a rift of brilliant light cast by an arc-lamp between the shadows of the trees. There the stranger paused, looked down at his captive. His eyes glowed. His white teeth gleamed through his black beard as he smiled.

"Sergius!" she gasped.

"Yea, my little Olga, it is Sergius," he replied. "I'm glad that your memory is not so short as I feared it was. I have never ceased to love you. Thought of you has been my consolation in the cold, white hell of Siberia—in Saghalien. If it hadn't been for you—and yet, it was because of you."

A spasm of pain swept across his face. He lifted a clenched hand above

her face, poised it there tensely as if he could have slain her with a blow, as though he had determined to do so. He kissed her instead.

The former Princess Viatka shuddered, half swooned.

"I'm glad, at least," said Sergius exultantly, "that your husband is dead."

"Michel killed him."

"Good business. If it hadn't been for that, I might not have come to America. I only got here a week or so ago—thought I would give you up, perhaps, after all. The fates decreed otherwise—sent me up this afternoon to this jamboree—I saw you—all the old fires flamed up again. I was just back of you when the lights went out."

"You said—the death of my husband—what did that have to do with your coming here?"

Sergius whispered:

"Have you forgot the Frelinghuysen curse—the Cave-Dwellers?"

The former Princess Viatka trembled slightly.

"And now?"

"And now!"

There was another gleam of white teeth through the black beard, but it could hardly have been called a smile. His arm tightened about her. He again started forward.

"Stop struggling," he commanded. "Don't be a fool. You could be sent to the police court—or an asylum."

As one who is borne along in a nightmare the former Princess Viatka traversed another brief interval of glimmer and gloom, found herself at the polished door of a limousine. Dismayed, incapable of coherent thought, bereft almost of reason and of will, she yielded herself to an innate fatalism.

There was a purring throb of machinery, a lurch, the car padded forward.

They had entered a smooth but illy lighted road. The car gained speed.

From time to time Sergius laughed again. He still held her tightly—and

in the clasp of his strong arms, as well as that laugh of his, the former Princess Viatka knew that there was as much cruelty as passion.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked.

"Let the future take care of itself," he purred. "This is enough."

He pressed her face to his and held it there. She had ceased to struggle, ceased to resist. She felt like a little child in the presence of this strong man. She was completely under his domination.

"And you love me still?" she breathed.

"Love you and hate you," he answered, holding her away from him, but still gripping her hard. "I have not decided yet whether or not to make you my queen or to kill you."

She had uttered a little cry of pain. He was hurting her. Then his cruel grip relaxed and he was all tenderness again.

"To cherish or to slay," he echoed.

"Either—from you," she sighed.

It was as though she were young again—young and back in southern Russia. *Dieu!* How she suffered! How happy she was!

Whither?

They were rushing through the night. It was as though the chauffeur had absorbed something of the dare-devil spirit of his master—reckless, careless of the future, dashing lawless through the night.

The car swayed.

There was a tremendous, cataclysmic inrush of noise.

Mrs. Frail was hurled through space—oh, an illimitable distance!

It was horrible, wonderful—death perhaps!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ON THE DARK ROAD.

GRAW'S own chauffeur had done his best to avoid a collision, but the other automobile was on the wrong side of

the road and going fast, had swerved at the last moment. They were on the last lap of their journey to the roadhouse when the accident occurred. After the first crashing tumult they discovered that neither of them had been hurt—not even cut by the shattered glass.

Graw forced open a door of the limousine and he and Agatha were out on the road. There was another automobile there. It was easy to see that it was upon this machine had fallen the brunt of the accident.

There was a simultaneous cry. There was a woman in the road, unconscious, her face revealed in the cold glare of an unbroken headlight.

"My mother!" gasped Agatha.

"Great Lord!" Graw moaned.

Even then it was not so much the fact that Mrs. Frail was there before them injured—mortally, perhaps—that filled him with dismay, as it was the fact that the accident should have occurred here, at such a time and such a place. He felt the added horror of imminent publicity and scandal.

Agatha had stooped down, was tearing off her gloves with some idea of rendering effective aid.

Graw had thrown a quick glance about him in a first desperate hope of salvation from some one, somewhere.

Out of the chaos appeared a dark-bearded stranger, hatless, both blood and dust on his handsome face. With a muttered exclamation which might have been either prayer or curse, the stranger had likewise discovered the form of Mrs. Frail, had knelt down beside her. Agatha had been brushed aside.

For a moment both she and Graw were so surprised, so completely had all their ordinary judgments been upset by what had just happened, that they sought neither to protest nor explain, nor even demand an explanation.

The stranger had moved his hand lightly over Mrs. Frail's forehead, had felt her wrist.

"Is she badly hurt?" asked Graw, breathless.

It was as though the stranger had not heard him.

For a moment longer Graw and Agatha continued to look at the group in the road. Then Graw touched the man on the shoulder.

"Tell me," he commanded. "Are you a doctor?"

With a decided foreign accent the stranger replied that he was not. A moment later he had leaped to his feet. Another automobile was coming along. It happened to be a taxicab with no one in it. There was a brief parley.

Graw and Agatha were still hovering over Mrs. Frail when the stranger returned. They themselves had scarcely recovered from the shock of the accident, were still incapable of efficient action.

It was otherwise with the stranger. Without a word to them he lifted Mrs. Frail in his arms.

"What are you going to do?" "Where are you going?" Their questions were simultaneous.

The stranger threw them a quick scowl. At first he seemed to be on the point of refusing to answer, then to have thought better of it.

"She's hurt," he answered brusksly. "I take her to a hospital."

His audacity so amazed them that he had taken several steps toward the waiting taxi before either of them thought to interfere.

Agatha's small hand gripped Graw's arm. He sprang forward.

"We'll go with you," he said at the stranger's shoulder.

The man with the black beard neither turned nor hesitated nor spoke a word.

Graw felt an instant rush of panicky anger. He had caught one of the victim's limp hands in his.

The stranger had turned with a muttered curse of impatience.

"Let go," he commanded.

"Who are you?" Graw asked.

"None of your business."

The stranger had again turned. They were almost at the side of the waiting taxi. He was walking faster.

Behind him Graw heard the small voice of Agatha bidding him not to let the stranger take her mother away. He leaped forward as a horse leaps at the jab of a rowel. A strong and very eager hand had grabbed the stranger's collar at the instant peril of further catastrophe.

The stranger had already made a move to put down his burden, to fight off the intruder. There was murderous rage in his face as he turned.

Just then Graw received a welcome reinforcement.

"Take care of *madame*—I take care of heem!"

It was August, Graw's chauffeur—a most disordered and villainous-looking August, with a cut over one eye, capless, coat torn. But he carried a wrench in his hand. There was no question about his continued efficiency so far as a fight was concerned.

With a quick movement Graw had passed his own arms about Mrs. Frail's body, just as that lady opened her eyes.

She, as well as Graw, perhaps, had a confused glimpse of a grimy paw seizing the black beard, of a whirling wrench as the fight began.

Then Graw had thrust Mrs. Frail into the taxicab, had helped Agatha in.

He turned to give August a hand. At first it was impossible; after that it wasn't necessary.

The combatants were down. There was a tremendous writhing of interlocked bodies, then August appeared on top.

He had dropped his wrench, but both of his hands were engaged under the black beard.

Graw bent over them. Close to his August lifted an exultant face.

"*Moi*, I triumph. You go—take *madame et mademoiselle*. Other automobiles come—scandal! Go quick!"

It was sound advice. August was right. There was no doubt about that.

Graw threw a quick look round him. He saw the chauffeur of the stranger's car still sitting in the middle of the road, where he had been thrown, wholly absorbed in studying the state of his own injuries. He could hear other cars coming from the direction of town. There would soon be help for all concerned.

A moment later he was in the taxi, had slammed the door shut.

Stimulant—a good, stiff drink!

The driver of the taxi was no doctor, but he knew something about first aid in matters of this kind. He had swung his car round, had made a quick dash toward the road-house. He was just on the edge of the parking-space, and had taken note of the extraordinary confusion there, when a disfigured young man tottered out of the disordered gloom directly in his path.

By the quickest sort of action he was just able to avoid running over him. Even as it was, he had to swing his car round at the imminent risk of an upset.

The maneuver had brought the youth to the taxicab door.

Dazed, a good deal like one in a delirium, he gazed in. It was Hugh Frail.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MASTER-MIND.

THERE was a family reunion, not only there and then in the taxicab, but later on, in the damask seclusion of Mrs. Frail's boudoir. That lady had refused to permit them to call a physician. She had even refused to risk herself again within the portals of the road-house. A little nervous, a little headachy—and that was all.

She had given a not altogether convincing version of her having been kidnaped by the dark-bearded stranger.

She wasn't sufficiently recovered yet to master all the details of it—hand on her heart, repeated use of her smelling-salts, *cau-de-cologne* on her temples.

"And Turga took you up there?" Graw asked, with his eyes on Mrs. Frail.

He himself had brusquely announced the fact of his engagement to Agatha, had assumed a seat in the family council on the strength of it. The seat happened to be a Louis XVI chair, which appeared much too slender for his robust weight.

His blond hair made his face glow with a bloom of health that was almost arrogant. He dominated the situation.

There had sprung into his heart and mind something of that spirit which had helped him to dominate Agatha earlier in the day. The situation, as he saw it, was analogous—a skittish and factious family, if ever there was one, in need of a strong and gentle hand.

"My poor child," sighed Mrs. Frail, "what a tone you take!"

"I'm sure I don't want to take a tone," he said, refusing to be put off. "But you'll admit that it's a bit thick of him. Personally, I think that we have seen quite enough of this Turga person—we, all of us."

"You mean?" Mrs. Frail asked.

"I mean," Graw answered stoutly, "that we've got to cut him out—you, Agatha, Hugh, all of us."

He sat very straight. His neck swelled out a little. His lower jaw came out. His eyes met Mrs. Frail's unflinchingly.

"Count me in," cried Agatha eagerly.

She had listened with passionate interest to her brother's own version of how he himself had chastised Turga. It had brought out all that she possessed of sisterly tenderness, had sent her over to the arm of his chair. Hugh found it all highly flattering.

There was a glitter in Agatha's eyes.

The way that Turga had failed to keep his appointment with her that afternoon still rankled.

"I never liked him," she lied vindictively. "I never want to see him again."

Unhesitatingly, Graw stalked over, turned back her face and kissed her on the lips.

Mrs. Frail started up, unconcealed admiration in her eyes and voice.

"Oh, what a czar!" she cried. "Oh, what a master-mind!"

Graw kissed her also.

A little later Agatha met her brother in the hall, whither she had gone to bid her new hero a more intimate farewell. For the second time that night she put her arms round Hugh's neck, kissed him with unaccustomed affection.

"Oh, I'm so glad—so glad!"

Hugh was touched.

There was really a whole untapped lake of affection in the bottom of his heart.

"I'm glad you're glad, sissy," he said. "Freddy will make a good husband for you."

"Oh, I didn't mean about that," said Agatha. "I mean I'm so glad that you struck Turga."

"Struck him?" said Hugh. He let his voice fall. "Why, Agatha, I'm afraid the son-of-a-gun got it even worse than I intended. He got not only what I handed him, but he was also side-swiped by the mud-guard of a passing auto."

Again Agatha kissed him in a transport of grateful affection.

Oh, dreadful night—dreadful and yet delicious!

Mrs. Frail, alone in her bedroom, looked at herself in the mirror. She was still beautiful—there was no doubt about that—even now, with her hair down and brushed back ready for the night.

She wondered that Sergius had not also found her so. He must have—to have acted like that. How handsome he was—handsome and brutal!

She bared one of her ivory arms and contemplated a greenish bruise, again smiled at her reflection, then shuddered.

All sorts of complications might result. What if the thing should get into the papers—a vulgar riot in such a place!

She thought of Turga. She was perfectly willing to uphold Graw's ban—she had seen Turga smile at that outrageous painted person on the dancing-floor. And thought of Turga, even more than her adventure with Sergius, recalled the family curse, the hideous nightmare of the Frelinghuysen *thaler*.

She shuddered slightly as she recalled how the marked dollar had burned her neck just there—she touched the place—while she was standing here in front of the mirror as she was now; how she had hurled it through the window, listened, but could not hear it fall.

It was an uncanny thing—that winged dollar. She thanked some pagan spirit of her superstitious youth that she had got rid of it.

Idly she drew open a drawer of the dressing-table.

She started back as though a viper had been hidden there.

Horror crept into her eyes. She was rigid.

She felt an impulse to flee, but couldn't.

Lying there in the drawer—sinister, unmistakable, every mark and scratch of it already engraved in her brain—lay the coin itself.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CHIVERS MAKES A SLIP.

MRS. FRAIL had recovered herself sufficiently to light one of her favorite Bosnian cigarettes. Now that the first shock of the thing was past, she was rather enjoying it. She still looked at the dollar.

Once or twice she had even put out her tapering fingers to touch it, then

drawn back again. It wasn't exactly fear. Like a good many people who believe in magic of one sort or another, she was constantly on the outlook for proof in support of that belief. Here was such proof as even she had never hoped to have.

Finally she did touch the coin. It was there. It didn't disappear at her touch like a ghost.

Finally she picked it up, but she kept it in front of her. She didn't want to give it another chance to burn her. She studied it for a long time, recalling again all that she knew of its history and of the history of other *thalers*.

The thing did carry bad luck with it—did carry a curse. Ready made, she had an explanation now for everything which that day had befallen her and hers. Then her eyes narrowed slightly, her nostrils distended. It was the Marquise de Brinvilliers which was uppermost in her nature.

Under stress of her new inspiration she pawed about in one drawer after another until she discovered a small box just large enough to contain the dollar. Going over to her writing-desk, she made a package of it, sealed it carefully, and addressed it to Count Carlos Turga.

She jumped as her finger touched the hot wax and her heart pounded with a quicker pulsation.

The maid, Gabrielle, had not yet undressed, though her mistress had dismissed her for the night some time previously. Her eyebrows arched when the bell summoned her; she murmured a Gallic *sacré* something or other; but she was all smiles when she appeared in the doorway.

"Sorry, Gabrielle," said the former Princess Viatka, "but here is something which must be mailed to-night."

"*Oui, madame!*"

"Without fail."

"*Oui, madame!*"

"And I'll give you—give you—this."

Mrs. Frail had found a ring orna-

mented with a single pearl, which she knew her maid had long admired.

"Ah, *que madame est gentille, qu'elle est généreuse!*"

With the odd little package in her hand, but with all the fervor of her coquettish heart centered on her new ring, Gabrielle a minute later in the servants' hall collided with the dignified, not to say portly, frame of Mr. William Chivvers. That gentleman, being off duty and at peace with the world, playfully caught her by the arms. "Oh, oh, oh!" he chuckled. "You almost run me down."

The soft resilience of Gabrielle's round arms was grateful to his touch. Still holding her, he beamed down at her benignantly.

"And where might you be going, my pretty maid?" he wanted to know.

"Ah, M. Sheevair," cried Gabrielle, "sink — a *pacquet* to put in the post *encore* to-night!"

Mr. Chivvers disengaged one of his pleasantly occupied hands, gravely took the package, and slipping it into his coat-tail pocket, again resumed his hold and his benignant smile.

"Give me," Gabrielle pleaded. "I muss."

Chivvers slowly shook his head.

"No, little girl," he said, with perfect gentleness, "you must not. I'll mail the package. You have something else to do."

"Oh, M. Sheevair, you make me fear!"

"Not 'arf," said Chivvers, appreciating the joke. "Yes, little girl, there is something else which you 'ave got to do."

"Somesing terreible?"

"No doubt, no doubt; and that's to come along with me and drink a glass of wine."

Chivvers glanced quickly over his shoulder. The coast was clear. Gabrielle was willing. And why not, pray?

He gallantly sealed the invitation with a chaste kiss on Gabrielle's beautifully arched right eyebrow.

With Gabrielle on his arm and his coat-tails swinging with a certain majesty — there was no hint that a dollar with a curse on it might have found there its temporary resting-place — he passed on down the hallway.

CHAPTER XL.

A BREAK FOR LIBERTY.

HUGH FRAIL hadn't exaggerated the extent of the misfortune that had befallen Turga in that encounter of theirs. It is true that things otherwise were not precisely as reported. In response to Turga's blow Frail had struck back — blindly, wildly. And then, as Turga side-stepped, he had been bowled over by a passing automobile.

Bruised, dusty, and with that sickness at heart which many persons feel when they have been subjected to physical violence of any kind, not knowing what had become of the other actors in the nocturnal drama — and, moreover, not caring — he made his way painfully along a certain foot-path he remembered down the wooded cliff to the road below.

Not far away he could see the lighted façade of a saloon. It wasn't drink that he wanted — he had had quite enough of that — but there he knew that he could receive other attentions — a brush-up and a wash most likely.

A street-car without many passengers in it carried him back to town. He completed the journey in a taxicab.

He was in a frightful humor. Before he had so much as undressed himself he had discharged the insupportable Swiss. The man left grumblingly. Turga had the final satisfaction of narrowly missing the valet's head with a shoe.

Left alone, he gingerly crawled into his bath. There was one especially ugly bruise on his side that caused him exquisite torture. In some unaccountable way, moreover, the skin had

been scratched from one side of his face. He felt very old, very decrepit, disgusted with the world—all of these things and something more. He felt frightened.

He had been mauled by a heavy hand. As he looked back on the care-free insolence of the morning it all seemed incredible. So blithely had he started out to see Agatha! The day had ended so differently from what he had foreseen!

It struck him with a chill to think of the way that he had gone, in spite of himself, to the hotel where he had met Mrs. Frail, instead of to the restaurant whither he had intended to go.

Why had he done it? He didn't know. It was that which frightened him.

With a gleam of satisfaction he thought of the unread letter he had received from Elin Carstairs. Vaguely he remembered that the tone of it was comforting, endearing. He needed something like that, Heaven knew!

He looked for it everywhere—in drawer after drawer, under the bed, under the pillow—adding the exasperation of a fruitless search to the already heavy burden of his overwrought nerves.

He wished now that he hadn't discharged the valet. That he had simply murdered him instead. He thought with passionate regret what joy would have been his in feeling the fellow's ignoble throat in the grip of his fingers.

No use, the letter was not to be found. It gave him an added pang. Even this consolation was denied him. He felt isolated, alone—alone save for this invisible presence, this hand he could not see which was crushing him into ways that he would not go; that was leading him on to destruction.

An ivory-handled razor came under his touch as he opened the bath-room cabinet. He picked it up with a feeling of fearful joy. There was always a way out.

He held the thing in his hand—let

his eyes turn from the polished blade to the blue veins in his wrist, then back again. It would be painless—swift—lethal—a cut just there.

He could even keep his arm in warm water while it lasted. He could almost forget what he had done—forget everything except that the wide doors were swinging open for him to go through.

But even as he desired the thing, felt the first glow of anticipation, the hand that held the razor lifted it back to its place in the cabinet. He resisted. It was as though his will were not. A force greater than any will of his commanded every muscle.

Still disobedient to that will of his, the hand reached out and closed the cabinet door.

Turga passed a sleepless night. In the early dawn he went out into the streets again. There was one other hope of salvation which he had not forgotten.

He mingled with the serried crowds coming up from the East Side for their day's work. But it seemed to him that their faces and bearing were not what they were that other time when he had moved along with them. He felt that he was being stared at curiously; that he was an interloper.

They had rested through the night from a day's work; had accumulated strength for other labor. He had neither labored nor rested nor had work to do. On his face and in his walk was the ignominy of a common brawl. No wonder they looked at him!

He paused at last before a flaming placard advertising a certain steamship-line to Europe. He stared at it a long time, not even daring to formulate his thought—fearful lest the invisible presence crush out this new hope. But this was the thing that he would do.

Keeping his thoughts away from the project as much as possible, he dawdled long over a breakfast in a quiet

restaurant, went to his banker's as soon as the place was open, arranged to have his funds sent to him in Paris.

There was a steamer sailing that same day—with a short passenger-list at this time of the year. Turga engaged a stateroom.

He felt as a fugitive from justice must feel when doing that—with the strong, invisible hand outstretched, ready to drag him back. Was it all a delusion? He dared not answer.

A full two hours ahead of sailing-time Turga was on the steamer. He was in a state of dreadful expectancy—of mingled hope and fear. At first he walked the deck. But as the crowds increased he locked himself in his stateroom.

It was as though each moment were his last. He tried to read, tried not to look at his watch. He threw himself on his berth with a sob.

Through the great fabric of the ship had run a tremor—there had come the mighty wail of the siren.

The ship was leaving its dock.

CHAPTER XLI.

IN THE SADDLE.

THE two members of the firm of Graw & Graw smiled with perfect comprehension at each other across the mahogany desk of the senior partner. Graw, senior, resembled his son—large, fair, with only a few silver strands in his exceedingly well-trained mustache.

"Well, well, Freddy, so you've done gone and done it?"

"Sure have, dad," said Frederic, trying to appear nonchalant.

"Satisfied that you're right?"

"Absolutely satisfied—if you are."

The elder Graw smiled slightly, but his face was grave.

"You and I have known the Frails for a long time, son," he said. "I don't imagine that there is anything I can tell you which you don't already know."

He paused, shot a brief look of inquiry at Frederic before ostensibly fixing his attention on the end of a cigar.

"You mean about that curse business?"

"That, and—"

"I know that the Frail finances are not all that they might be, if that's what you mean," Freddy averred. "But of course that doesn't make any difference."

"I'm glad to hear you say it, Fred. As for the curse, it may be tommyrot; and again it may not be—Agatha's father and I were pretty good friends, you know, and I think you'll agree with me that the family has had rather more than its share of regrettable incidents. But that is neither here nor there. There is hardly a great or near-great family in the United States, in the world, except ours"—he punctuated the claim with another smile—"that hasn't got not only one skeleton in the closet, but several.

"We can't dodge such things. No one but a fool or a cad would try to. Don't run away from a curse—grab ahold of it. That's what I say, and that's what you're doing. God bless you!

"Now as to the Frail finances—they're all that you suggest, and possibly a trifle more so. Schloss Frelinghuysen has gone by the board. The family lawyer over there—that Dr. Melnik who came here recently, poor devil, and was killed—Heaven knows by whom—seems to have got things in a very bad mess.

"Not only that, but the American holdings are not in the best of shape—too much Latin-America; too much shaky finance in this country, receivers, and all that sort of thing. They've squandered a lot of capital otherwise—particularly Hugh. Notes, notes, notes—gambling debts, I take it; a pot of money sunk in their Cherry Hills place.

"There is something else. We'll just mention it now, Fred, then pass it

up. But, you see, I won't be here forever, and I feel as though I ought to get it off my chest."

Mr. Graw and his son looked into each other's eyes for a moment.

"Agatha is an admirable girl; I have no doubt of it. But her mother—if Mrs. Frail continues to run round with this young Turga—you know."

Over the younger man's face there had crept an extra shade of pink, but he smiled manfully.

"I got you dad," he said softly.

For an interval he struggled for speech, hesitated, smiled again like an awkward boy.

"Go on," said the father kindly.

"I've fought it all out, dad," said Frederic—"fought it all out; and I admit that it sort of had me guessing for a while. But I will grab ahold of this darned old curse of the Frails; I will earn enough money for Agatha and her folks—even if she hasn't got a cent of her own; and I will take them all in hand. Why, darn it, I've begun already. I'm in the saddle now, and if the darned filly tries to bolt—"

"Are you referring to your bride-elect?"

"Er—no. I was referring to—"

He was interrupted by the ringing of his father's private telephone. The elder Graw reached for the instrument, listened a moment, then handed it over to his son.

"They've evidently begun to depend on you already," he said. "I'll be back in a minute."

With exquisite diplomacy he left the junior partner of the firm alone.

Graw knew instinctively from the moment that he had taken the instrument in his hand that some sort of serious news awaited him. It was Agatha's voice that thrilled out the news.

"Chivvers is in the hospital. He wants to see you."

"How'd he get there—sick?"

"An accident in the street—we've just learned where he was. We don't know the details."

"Was he drunk?"

"It couldn't have been that. We're in such a state—mother and I. We know that it is something terrible and mysterious. And he wants to see you."

Young Graw was hanging up the receiver as his father strolled in.

"Chivvers in the hospital," Frederic explained. "The family ghost again. I'm going to get busy."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE HORNS OF THE BULL.

HE found the dutiful Chivvers installed in a private room of the big hospital to which he had been sent when picked up the night before, after the street-car had struck him. The butler had a broken leg and a few bruises, but he was doing very nicely, sir, and sorry to inconvenience you.

"Why, you old sport," said young Mr. Graw heartily, "the only thing that surprises me was that you didn't get it long ago—running round the way you do."

Chivvers smiled dutifully, but it was quite apparent that he had not asked his young mistress to get Graw to come to see him for just mere idle chat.

"There is something back of all this, sir," said Chivvers, after giving a preliminary sketch of his accident. "There is something back of it all. As you are to become a member of the family—and a mighty great joy it is to me to know it, sir—thank you kindly"—Graw had shaken hands with Chivvers on the strength of the declaration—"I thought it was only proper for me to speak to you about it, you being rather more serious like than Mr. Hugh."

Chivvers composed himself to the labors of composition. It was quite evident that he had a story to tell.

"I'll begin at the beginning," he said.

"And when was that?"

"The beginning of what brought

me here was, you might say, the first time that I ever looked at Gabrielle."

"I got you there, all right, Chivvers—a darned fine girl; Mrs. Frail thinks the world of her."

"And perfectly respectable," said Chivvers profoundly, "even if she is French."

"A fine, honest woman," said Graw.

"Her honesty was the beginning of it," Chivvers replied.

"Hold on, Chivvers; now you've got two beginnings."

"Simultaneous, although at different times," Chivvers explained. "But Gabrielle was doing Mrs. Frail's bedroom the other day—you know, Mrs. Frail would never let any one else muss round with her private affairs—and Gabrielle was arranging the curtains like, when she finds a piece of money lying on the floor. She notices at once that it isn't an ordinary piece of change—rather a keepsake like."

"This being so, Gabrielle doesn't hand the coin back as she might ordinarily have done; nor yet does she put it back into Mrs. Frail's purse—Mrs. Frail never carrying a piece of change that big. She says it's too heavy and makes her feel uncomfortable—says that it spoils the fit of her gown or her bag and makes blue spots where it bangs against it; you know, sir, Mrs. Frail was born a princess—a princess of the blood."

"And then, what? Don't mind if I smoke, do you?"

"Why, bless me, sir."

Chivvers made a move as though he would have gladly got the matches off the mantelpiece for his guest, then relinquished the idea with a sigh.

"And then," he resumed his story, "Gabrielle—a fine girl she is, sir—puts the coin into a drawer where Mrs. Frail keeps a lot of trinkets like. And Gabrielle hears nothing more, about it until last night. Nor do I, until—"

"Until—"

"Well, you see, I was closing up the house for the night when Gabrielle she comes to me and asks me if I

knew where she could buy a postage stamp, saying as how Mrs. Frail had just given her a package for to mail. Not liking to see her go out into the streets at that late hour, and none of the other servants being on duty, I offered to do the errand. And here I am."

"It's darned interesting," said Graw, "but I don't quite get you."

Chivvers had merely taken time to catch his breath. His face had suddenly taken on something of dramatic seriousness. When he spoke again his voice was intense. He was less of the servant, more of the man.

"Did you ever hear tell of the *Frelinghuysen thaler*—the winged dollar of the Frails?"

"Yes,"

"Open the drawer of the little table at your side."

Graw did so. What he saw was a broken pasteboard box—the wrapping had disappeared in the course of the accident.

"Do you see it?"

The young man pushed back the crushed and broken cover. He picked up the thing—a worn dollar with a peculiar emblem scratched on it—a rough cross with winglike projections on the extremities of the arms.

He examined it in silence. He wasn't quite sure, but it seemed to him that there was something familiar about it. Then he remembered—it was a coin like this which had passed from Count Carlos Turga to Hugh Frail weeks ago at the checkers. It was the night that Hugh had almost killed himself on his wild ride to Cherry Hills.

"So this is it!" he murmured half aloud.

"Yes, sir—that is it—the *thaler* of the *Frelinghuysens*—the dollar of the *Frails*—the family curse—the curse of all who possess it."

With his eyes on the old servant's face, a slight smile on his lips, Graw calmly thrust the coin into his pocket.

"Oh, don't do that, sir."

"Why not?"

"Look at me—here in the hospital. Look at the family! I have been with them so many years—have seen so many things—death and destruction—tears. Oh, oh, oh, what tears have been shed in the family, sir!"

Graw laughed—a trifle forced—but he laughed.

"I'm strong," he said. "I won't run away from the bull, Chivvers. I'll grab it by the horns."

"Ah, but the horns of the bull are long and sharp," said Chivvers. "Not the horns of the bull, sir, but the devil's own."

Nobody denies that there is such a thing as coincidence in the affairs of men—whether they carry about with them charms unlucky or otherwise. Graw still had the coin in his pocket an hour or so later as he returned to his office.

He was going to show it to his father, ask his advice, find out all about the thing. Vanity, vanity—the vanity of human intentions!

As he entered the outer office, Mr. Purcell, the head clerk, hurried forward with a face stamped deep with anguish.

"I've been trying to get you," he faltered.

"What's the matter?"

Purcell gently pushed Graw back into the outer hall, following after.

"Oh, Fred," he blurted, "hurry home. Your father has had an attack."

CHAPTER XLIII.

"FOR BETTER OR FOR—"

GRAW kept the dollar.

It was even in his pocket that sleety, gray and boisterous day of his father's funeral. All the time that the choir was singing and the preacher was delivering his feeling little discourse, he sat there in the front pew with the fingers of his right hand toying with that smooth, silver disk.

He had grown immeasurably older and stronger—so he felt. Certain nebulous principles of his youth had all of a sudden solidified into a life philosophy, as real, almost as tangible—it seemed—as this emblem of something else that he would not relinquish.

There was no such thing as a curse nor a ghost—no such thing, even, as bad luck.

He was sure of it. He would stick it out. He would fight for his belief no less grimly than a certain ancestor of his had fought for some earlier tenet; even if, like his ancestor, he had to go to the stake.

That last conversation that he had had with his father he regarded as a sort of moral testament. He had passed his word in a way and had received the paternal O. K.

Before the winter had softened into spring he was carrying his unwritten plan of campaign into execution. He had entered more and more deeply into the counsels of the Frails. In a way they had shared his mourning.

Chivvers, walking with a limp, but otherwise fully recovered, still urged him whenever opportunity offered to get rid of the coin, still adhered to the belief that nothing but evil could come of it. In a way the old servant's fears seemed to be on the verge of realization.

It is true that the family had acquired a new sense of calm and strength that it had never before experienced. There were fewer nerves, fewer escapades, fewer breaches of the domestic peace.

But the financial situation was going from bad to worse, in spite of Graw's utmost efforts. He was taking advantage of the comparative firmness of the market to save what remained by judicious reinvestment. But he was appalled at times by the quantity and quality of the securities that had found lodgment in the Frail deposit-vault.

On the other hand, his own affairs were moving along in a way that could not have been better. It was as though

all the thought and devotion which he was bringing to the interests of others reacted on his own.

He sat alone in his office one night after almost every one else had gone. He sat in his father's chair at his father's desk, that shiny coin of ill-omen before him on the blotting-pad.

The place had fallen very silent. Hardly any sound reached him even from the street.

It was almost as though his father were there, keeping him company, telling him that he was fighting a good fight, to keep on the way he was going, never to weaken.

Purcell opened the door and whispered:

"A young lady to see you, sir."

Graw started up.

Before he could speak Agatha had come into the room. She came forward, smiling, yet slightly pale. The discreet Purcell had already closed the door. Graw caught Agatha in his arms, pressed her lithe and supple form close to his. It was the first time that she had ever come to see him at the office like that. He was profoundly touched.

"Agatha, my little sweetheart!"

"Hello, Fred! Are you mad at me?"

"Mad?"

He kissed her—that appealing to him, no doubt, as the most forceful form of negation.

"But I couldn't help it," said Agatha. "I've been so blue! I've felt all day—o-oh! What a terrible day it has been!—as though that old Frelinghuysen ghost was poking me with his icy fingers."

Graw laughed, drew her down beside him onto the arm of his father's chair. She looked at the coin, that he had left lying on the writing-pad, shivered, drew back. He reached over and covered it with his hand.

"I wish you'd get rid of it," she whispered.

"Nonsense!" he replied.

"Oh, but it isn't nonsense. You

ought to know that it isn't." Her lips quivered. "I've been thinking about all the horrible things in the family history all afternoon."

Graw strengthened just a little his hold about her waist.

"I'll fight your old ghost," he said.

"But you can't—no man, however brave, can fight a ghost. And I'm afraid—afraid—"

She quavered into silence.

Graw waited for her to continue, but she didn't complete whatever it was she had started to say. Again that silence which he had remarked a little while before settled down over the place. Again it was as though his father were there.

"And what if there is a Frelinghuysen ghost—a ghost of the Frails?" he said. "There are other ghosts, Agatha. Grant that the world is full of ghosts. It is true, perhaps. I'll grant it, even—this old ghost of yours and others like it. But all ghosts are not bad, Agatha. There are good ghosts, just as there are good people in the world. Listen!"

They sat there again in silence. It was getting late. The working-day, for the lower part of town at least, was over. No sound reached them even from the street.

"Listen to what?" she whispered.

"Can't you hear it?"

He also was whispering. They were like two little children sitting there, palpitant, expectant—waiting for they knew not what.

Purcell, in the outer office, walked slowly forward and back, not liking to interfere and yet not liking to go away for the night without some word. He was tremendously fond of his old employer's son—his employer now, though young Graw, unbeknown to the head clerk, had already given orders that the firm sign be changed to that of "Graw & Purcell."

His measured footsteps sent through the office a faint, recurrent echo.

"You frighten me. Hear what?" Agatha whispered again.

"When I'm here alone—as now, alone with you, Agatha, which is the same thing, for we are the same person, aren't we?—it is as though my father's spirit had returned to keep me company, to give me counsel, to make me wise and good. I can even feel the touch of his hand, almost; hear him as he goes about the old, familiar tasks."

He had been speaking very softly, and as his voice cadenced into silence Agatha put her cool hand on his farther temple, pressed his head against her face.

"I know—I hear it, too," she breathed.

There crept again into the silence of the place that ghostly, recurrent echo of a footfall.

"Good ghosts and bad," Graw repeated. "It is true, what you said just now about no man being able to fight a ghost, Agatha dear. But the good ghosts are on the side of the right. They'll fight for us. Just see if they don't. That is, if you'll stop putting it off, will marry me right away."

"I want to," said Agatha, with her face still pressed against his head. "I want to, but I love you too much. I'm afraid—afraid that the ghost will prove too strong."

"But I know a stronger ghost—a good one, Agatha dear," he replied. "You'll marry me to-night—to-night, over in Jersey?"

"Yes," she breathed.

Graw raised his voice. It was almost ringing.

"And this being so," he exclaimed, with his eyes on vacancy, "you'll help us, won't you, O my father?"

The room was dusky, for only the table-lamp—and that heavily shaded—had been lit.

And as Graw's odd question reverberated through the room they heard a voice, friendly, masculine, and with a quality of affection in it, speak the single word:

"Yes!"

Purcell had heard what he took to be a summons, had come up to the front office to say good night.

CHAPTER XLIV.

SPRING SONG.

EVEN after the drifting snow had made the roads in and about Cherry Hills all but impassable Hugh Frail had clung to the place. All that he possessed of a moral nature had been plowed and harrowed by the influences set to work that night he had his fight with Turga.

He was no fool—at least, not permanently—and he was fully aware how close an escape not only he, but the other members of his family, had had from public scandal and disgrace. Cherry Hills was a grateful retreat—so tonic not only in its thousand acres of woods and meadows, of half-wild trails and splendid avenues, but also in its thousand memories of health and happiness, most of which were associated now with Elin Carstairs.

Turga had disappeared. He knew that. It was a matter of general comment. But whither and why no one knew.

For a while young Frail had been haunted by the real fear that Turga had been dangerously hurt. For a while, as he mooned and brooded about the broad expanses of Cherry Hills, he half expected arrest.

But as the days passed—uneventful, unchanging, save in their constantly increasing freight of health and contentment—he recovered his nerve, began to take a saner look at things.

One day he encountered Dr. Carstairs, and the old gentleman greeted him with such simple cordiality that Frail was charmed.

"Why, Frail," said the doctor, "you're looking great—brown as a nut, eyes clear."

"It wouldn't mean anything if I were to tell you that, doctor; that's the way you always look."

"I understood that you were again a neighbor of ours," the doctor went on. "I was half tempted to come over and see you—professionally, at any rate."

Frail mumbled something that might have been an invitation. The doctor had said "*ours*." The pronoun had filled him with trepidation, almost unexpected, certainly disquieting.

The doctor threw him a sidelong glance.

"It isn't good for a fellow to stick round too much by himself, you know," he said, "even in a place like Cherry Hills."

The advice encouraged Frail to ask a question which had been trembling on his lips.

"And Miss Carstairs—how is she?"

"Oh, Elin's just the same—a regular Indian."

"To tell the truth," laughed Frail, "I've been wanting her advice more than I did yours. We've let Mr. Hardy go—one forester and landscape gardener was all that the place required."

"And the other was—"

"Myself."

"Come along and have a cup of tea," said the doctor. "Elin's always ready with advice of that kind."

But Frail found an entirely different Elin from the one that he had hoped for and imagined. Perfectly gracious, hospitable, but, oh, so distant, so distraught! And before he himself had risen to go she had excused herself, to appear no more.

Another month went by—for Frail a month of loneliness and brooding, despite the health and appetite that this new life of his compelled. Then, one day the sun shone with almost forgotten warmth. The air was filled with the music of a hundred rills and freshets. Up from the steaming earth came all the perfumes of all the flowers that were to bloom a little later on.

Into the heart of Hugh Frail came

such a mighty unrest as he had never known before.

He had risen early, eaten a simple breakfast—but such a breakfast as he had never eaten in the old days—then started out for a walk through the woods.

There was still plenty of snow about in the sunless places. But almost everywhere he looked was some hint of impatient life—tender, green, swelling buds, shoals of minnows in unsuspected runlets. And there, where some small wild thing had but recently scraped the leaves away from the black earth, was a spray of arbutus.

He picked a single blossom. Some unsuspected strain of poetry deep in his nature caused him to press it to his lips—dainty, fragrant, sweet—there was something almost feminine about it.

He heard a light, firm, deerlike step and looked up guiltily. Before him, not a dozen yards away, stood Elin Carstairs.

She tried to maintain something of that same attitude which had been hers the last time they had seen each other. At first he did not smile any more than did she. They were ever so polite—polite and dull. The two things often go together.

"I just found some arbutus," he said at last, having exhausted such themes as the weather, the state of the trees, the possibilities of an early spring.

He held out his single blossom. As she took it her fingers touched his palm. Could it be possible that they had lingered there for just a fraction of a second longer than was necessary?

Frail glanced up guiltily—as though fearful that she had surprised some secret thought of his. Their eyes met. There was no possible reason—but she colored slightly, a look almost of distress flashed into her blue eyes, a feminine reflection of the look that had come into his gray ones.

It was incomprehensible; but as

Frail smiled his smile brought two full-sized tears into Elin's eyes—just as though that early spring that they had been talking about had given birth to one more freshet.

"Elin!"

Elin was also smiling, but two other tears followed the first one.

"Elin!" Frail thrilled.

There had surged up within him all the mighty unrest that he had felt a little while before. But now it was otherwise. He was savage. In his heart was tumult, the lust of battle strangely mingled with the infinite tenderness of perfect joy.

"What are you crying about?" he demanded.

"I'm not crying." Elin tossed her head.

"What do you mean by treating me like a dog?"

His brutality was half playful—the strong in the presence of the weak.

"You—you—"

Elin Carstairs was one of those innocent and fearless natures who always tried to speak the truth, even at the cost of self-inflicted pain.

"You ran away—walked away—one day when I was coming in your direction."

Frail might have denied a greater charge or a lesser one, but this thrust was too direct to be parried except by a similar blow. He wanted to say something about Turga—sought for the words, hesitated, could not find them.

"I know I did. I know I did—" he began; "because you deceived—because you led me on—made me feel—"

He was thinking so intensely about his own past sufferings that a momentary rage drove out all other sentiments.

He was still groping for words as Elin Carstairs turned, started to walk away.

"Elin!" he cried. "Stop!"

She paid no heed, took two more steps.

"Stop, I tell you!"

He had leaped to her side, obedient to a single blind impulse to keep her near him, not to let her escape again. He had seized her arm.

There were both fear and amazement, as well as flaming anger, in her face as she turned. He had released his hold almost instantly.

For a moment they had looked at each other, tense, silent.

"Don't you leave me like that," Hugh said in a voice that was little more than a whisper. "I won't let you. I need you. I love you. I won't live without you. I'll die. I'll commit suicide. I'll commit murder. There's nothing hideous in the world that I won't do. You know my family. I'll show you."

He would have said more, but in the face of the girl in front of him he saw all anger fade, all fear and amazement, until there was nothing left but a sort of childlike, almost pathetic, distress.

It smote him with pity. His own fury went out of him utterly, left nothing there but a welling desire to cherish and protect.

"Ah, no I won't," he said softly. "I'll never do anything that'll cause you pain."

Her head drooped until it rested on his shoulder, for he had moved very close to her and she hadn't drawn back.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE LONG ARM.

SPRING in Paris, also. A wonderful season with every chestnut-tree in bloom, the parks gay and fragrant with their million flower-beds, the Bois de Boulogne a dream of beauty—sweet with the smell of blossoming locust and its acres of clipped lawn. An atmosphere of tender blue that dissolved the palaces and temples along the Seine into a dream of paradise. Sprightly girls, beautiful women, good-natured *flâneurs*, rich and poor; ten thousand

cafés, each more attractive than the last.

All this, and yet Count Carlos Turga was not happy.

Into his young veins also had crept the inexplicable unrest of the season, the desire, the call to romantic adventure.

He had sought amusement, forgetfulness, a new interest in life, and had not found them. When he had first set foot on shore at Havre he had sworn never to return to America again. Now every fiber of his being was commanding him with growing insistence to turn back once more to New York, to seek out those whom he had left behind him.

He argued with himself, at first, that here alone was peace and safety. But how long did the arguments of peace and safety ever curb the spirit of youth?

He had no eyes for the other women whom he met. Every dreamy or sparkling eye that met his own—gray, blue or brown—he compared with the eyes of those who absorbed his thought, Elin Carstairs and Agatha Frail. No lips smiled at him but that he wished that it was the lip of either of these. He saw no silken, curling tresses on the back of a graceful neck without thinking how infinitely more attractive was that same aspect of Agatha, of Elin.

For, like many young men of his age, Turga was not altogether single in his devotion. Not yet was his mute worship of these two fair memories altogether equal. At times it was Agatha. At times it was Elin. At times the spirit of his loneliness sent up a swooning incense which was a sort of composite of all that both of them might have meant to him.

He was sitting, one afternoon, on the terrace of the Restaurant de la Cascade, chewing the cud of his bitterness in solitary state. Behind him, a gipsy orchestra zinged and droned through the wild harmonies of an unwritten score, when out of the swift moving harmonies there came a hint of

that weird chant which he had first heard on the night of his twenty-first birthday, which he had heard again on that other night when he and Agatha Frail had gone forth to find Paulo; and which, ever since then, had somehow become a part of the web and the woof of his complex nature.

He didn't turn. He didn't move, except for the long inhalation of the cigarette he was smoking, a slight trembling of his thin fingers.

But that slight suggestion of the invisible world in which he moved and had his being meant as much to him as a new blur of light in the focus of an astronomer's telescope—the confirmation of a belief, the realization of a long-standing condition. There was no escape.

It was no mere heart-appeal that was dragging him westward again. It was something greater than that. Heart-appeals he had experienced before, to greater or lesser extent, and had never had the least difficulty in resisting them. But here was that greater, more terrible force of the invisible hand which had gripped him about and held him.

It was the invisible hand and the long arm. What was the Atlantic, what was the length and breadth of the whole earth, of the universe even, compared to the reach of Fate?

Carriages and motors glittered past on the neighboring driveway. The waters of the cascade glistened and leaped and roared. Leaves nodded and whispered in the soft breeze. The gipsy orchestra soared and swooped and soared again.

But Turga heard none of these things, saw none of these things. He was all alone in the silence—a gray silence shot now and then with the crimson phantasmagoria of memory.

With a sudden impulse, he leaped to his feet, paid his reckoning, caused his carriage to be called.

Still in that nightmare of aloofness, of isolation he drove back to his hotel.

He saw the people and things that

he passed, but they were not real; they did not belong to the same world. In that world of his there was a solitary inhabitant and this was he. There was a solitary power—a solitary primal cause—and this was the invisible hand, the invisible hand of the long arm.

“I am going back to America.”

It was his own voice speaking to the clerk of the hotel, but even as he listened to this voice delivering the message he was struck by the silliness of it, the silly futility.

Of course he was going back to America. He could not do otherwise. He might as well have proclaimed the rising and the setting of the sun, the swing of the stars through the heavens at night, the eternal march of the material universe. He also was in his orbit. What will of his could change his direction, could change the ultimate period of dissolution?

Now that he no longer resisted, he found that he was strangely happy. He was serene. He looked back on his recent rebellion against compelling Fate as a petty thing—irritant, painful, and unnecessary withal.

Those who saw him on the steamer marveled. Few handsomer young men had any one ever seen—so dark, so dreamy, so tragic; long-fringed eyes, a cheek that was apt to pale and glow like that of a girl, and yet, for all that, a sort of leonine strength and virility dominating overwhelmingly and excluding any suggestion of feminine weakness.

He made no acquaintances, acknowledged no friends. He kept himself apart. He might have been the young Napoleon on the sands of Egypt confronting the millennial sphinx.

The ship came up with the eastern shore in the late night with the serried constellation of Coney Island sparkling low on the horizon.

Alone, as usual, leaning on the rail of the deserted deck, Turga looked and looked. There were lights, gay and scintillant, to be sure, but, great God!

how small and dim they were compared to the vast darkness and mystery of the night.

And there, somewhere beyond the purple-black curtain which shut him in, lay the thing from which he had fled, the thing to which he returned.

CHAPTER XLVI.

NIGHTINGALE AND VAMPIRE.

THE first disappointment that awaited him was when he sought out the new home of his old servant Paulo. He had looked forward with such pleasure to meeting him! Here, at least, was some one of whose affection he was sure. He felt that he needed affection. He had thought it all out. He would adopt Paulo and his bride, the former Mme. Zidek—that blond giantess, Maria, as well—if only they would in turn adopt him.

Now that he was again back in the only country in the world that he felt he could call his own, he had recovered, to a certain extent, his courage and his faith.

This was no extraordinary phenomenon, he told himself. Each year Mother Columbia received into her broad bosom so many lonely children—men like himself who had no other mother, who were children in the night, frightened and forlorn. How many myths of terror had disappeared in the welcome of her strong arms; how much of terror and of loneliness had been banished in the safe asylum of her protection!

But, when he came to the little basement-restaurant where he had last seen his old friend and servant, the place was deserted. The privet-bushes were withered and dead, the windows were dusty, a padlock was on the door.

Without hope, he made a few inquiries among the neighbors. He learned that the late tenants of the restaurant had long since moved away, had left no address—had gone back to the old country, so they thought.

As Turga paused for a last look through the grimy windows he seemed to hear again the old musician—

“But this is the end of the fatal span—”

He whiled away the morning hours as best he could, sought gaiety and found it not. He drove through the park, went wherever there was some promise of crowds, of diversion. No use. Oh, to get away from himself.

After that first check to his hopes in the morning when he had failed to find Paulo, he determined to put off until the afternoon any further effort to realize his more intimate ambitions—that is to say, to find something of the old solace and excitement and, who knows, perhaps something more, in the society of Agatha Frail.

He was obsessed with a growing fear that she also would be absent from town, that something would have happened to her. Yet, when he drove past the Frail mansion, it was evident that the family was in residence. The windows were open, the shades were up, he even had a glance of some fresh flowers in one of the upper chambers.

He managed, somehow, to get through luncheon. He ate, though he knew not what he ate, nor had he any appetite. He had even sought the old fictitious courage of a once-loved cocktail. It might as well have been a glass of insipid water.

It was about three o'clock when he finally summoned a taxi and gave the address which had so long been throbbing in his mind. Had he been going to keep an appointment for his own execution he could not have been more abnormally expectant.

He knew that something was wrong, and yet he refused to permit himself to think about it. He essayed to hold himself with the thought that, after all, he was but a molecule on the Wheel of Chance, that nothing could happen to him; but the thought, wherein he

had found a sort of static contentment before, gave him no contentment now.

Aye! Aye! The invisible hand was upon him. The long arm had reached out across the ocean and had brought him back. There was only one thing in the world that he wanted, after all, and that was some one to break this cursed loneliness, some one to share, if needs be, his besetting fate.

He was immaculately attired, as was his custom. Many of the people whom he passed turned to look. But, even as he felt their eyes upon him, he was still the thing apart. It was not he that they saw—merely the outward semblance. He himself was as invisible as a ghost in the sunshine, as the mythical vampire in the flush of dawn.

The machine had stopped. Across the sidewalk lay the steps his feet had so often pressed before. Up there, deep in the shadowy arch, was the door through which he had so often passed.

His hand had pressed the ivory button. The door swung open and he saw the face of the Frail butler—familiar, yet unfamiliar.

“There is no one at home, sir.”

“No one home—they are out of town?”

“There is no one at home, sir.”

The door closed. The expected had fallen. For a moment Turga stood there bereft of the power of thought or movement. He still held his card in his gloved fingers.

“Get ye gone! This no place for you. To you—there is no one at home.”

He was back in the motor. Something in that handsome, dark, young face had caused the chauffeur to drive slowly on without so much as asking where next.

Where next, indeed?

Finally the chauffeur glanced back with something of sympathy in his deep-graven mask.

Turga gave the address of his apartment. There, at least, he would be safe from the scrutiny of his fellow

men. Even the loneliness of physical isolation would be better than the loneliness of strange, peering eyes. There also—he whispered it even to his own heart for fear that that other presence would hear and understand—there also was a certain cabinet, and in the cabinet an ivory-handled razor. Perhaps, this time—this time—

The thought gave him consolation.

But there was another sort of consolation awaiting him there. It was a consolation that filled him at once with grief and joy. Some accident of his restlessness had caused him to move an ormolu clock on the mantel-piece of his room.

He saw a piece of white paper under it. Ordinarily, he would have passed it by with a mental resolve to criticise the housekeeper, or some thing like that; but his restlessness caused him to pull it forth. There was not only one sheet, but several.

For a while he glanced at it vaguely, wonderingly, then gave a little gasp which was almost a sob.

It was the long-forgotten letter from Elin Carstairs.

He saw an endearing word, caught a phrase of sympathy. Tears came to his eyes. He could read no more just then.

And he had forgotten it—had thrown it aside!

The nightingale has sung to the vampire! An angel of high Heaven had wept for Satan!

CHAPTER XLVII.

A SONG AND A CURSE.

Now, who is there in the world who can tell the way of a maid with a man? Who is there who can measure the dynamics of a love-letter?

A marvelous thing, that letter of Elin Carstairs; so marvelous and so sacred that none should harbor the impious wish to share with that fool valet his sacrilege. The veil of mystery shall conceal it forever more.

Besides, there are other love-letters in the world—oh, many of them—written without the aid of logicians, unsullied by the withering breath of caution—yet, masterpieces all.

Turga gloated over it all afternoon—a starving man who had found, not a crust but a banquet table, a parched mariner cast up on the golden Hesperides.

He lay about his apartment all the remainder of the afternoon in a state bordering on prayer. Not once did he let the letter leave his hand. He read it time and again.

Here was assurance such as he had never dreamed of, or hoped for, that he was not alone. He had sent up his petition for some one—for *some one!* And the petition had been granted.

There was no lessening of his melancholy. If anything, that was even more profound than ever. But it had become in some way sacred—a sacred element had come into it. Even to his sinister blazon there was another side. It didn't seem to him to be possible that any girl in the world could express such tenderness, such consecration, such fine hope, and ever again be anything different from what she here portrayed herself.

The sun was sinking in a splendid riot of gold and crimson beyond the Pallisades when he again fared forth. The very wealth of color in the sky had its effect on his own colorful and exotic temperament.

Hitherto the day, though fair, had been somewhat too ethereal. After all, he was of the earth. He was the young animal in quest of the good things that the earth, and the earth alone, had to yield.

Before those gorgeous colors, like triumphant banners, had faded from the west he had crossed the Hudson and started for the home of the girl who had written to him. He would have departed long ere that—for his heart was leaping with eagerness—only he had dared not arrive too early.

It would be better to arrive a little

late, well after dinner, when the peace of night had fallen and when, most likely, he would find Elin alone.

He had told the chauffeur to take his time. Quietly they rolled through scented woodlands, and again out into open spaces where on the heavy breeze there came hints of the tide rushing up from the sea to greet Father Hudson.

While they were still a full hundred yards from the Carstairs home he bade the chauffeur to stop; got down, went ahead on foot. There was something deliciously romantic and mysterious about it.

Out here in the country it seemed already so late. He found himself in the feel of the night, and it gave him the old atavistic thrill that almost all men experience at such a time, in such a place, on such an occasion.

His heart was beating fast. His breath was short. He paused and listened. Through the damp and fragrant silence he had caught the notes of a piano—a minor chord, complex, sweet, soft, with something about it of the eternal lure and magic of a young girl's heart.

Before he had time to measure the full beauty of it he had heard something else even more transcendent—so it seemed to him, standing there so high-strung, so melancholy, and yet so glad. It was the voice of Elin Carstairs singing—the one voice in the world his heart most hungered for—a love-song, some old serenade.

He crept forward as stealthily as an Indian, fearful lest he break the charm.

There was no danger of it. The song soared on—always with the haunting accompaniment of minor chords. In a way it expressed, as nothing else could have expressed, the full significance of the present hour—so full of sadness, yearning, and promise.

He opened the gate and quietly made his way up the path. He was possessed with a tremendous desire to gloat a little, to enjoy her physical

presence in secret, even as he had already enjoyed her heavenly voice.

No one was on the porch. The windows were open, the soft curtains slowly billowing in and out as though translating the music of the song into the terms of some mystic dance. Every now and then he could catch a fleeting glimpse of the interior—each time it gave him an expectant thrill.

But he was just outside of one of the windows before he could see the singer—a bit of white dress, the infinitely softer whiteness of a slender forearm, a graceful neck surmounted by a mass of spun-gold, and then a lifted chin, a swelling throat. Oh, great god Pan! He had forgotten how beautiful she was!

He leaned a little farther forward. He saw that somebody was standing at her side.

It was Hugh Frail.

The song ended. But the chin went higher. Through a blur—for there had fallen upon him a sort of suffocating fog—he saw their two faces meet, merge into one.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

TURGA MEETS A FRIEND.

HE stumbled back along the path to the gate, careless of noise, his feet as unsteady as those of a drunken man. At the gate he paused—a hand on either post, reeling mentally, clinging there as though he were afraid that he would fall.

Until this last blow had fallen upon him he had nourished in the back of his head some vague idea that he was the avenger, the instrument of retribution by which others would be made to feel the working out of ultimate justice. Now the truth could no longer be evaded or denied. Instrument he remained, perhaps; but he was likewise the victim. He it was who would be gibbeted—hanged in infamy on this thing of his own making.

Along the fence there came a shad-

owy figure. At first Turga thought vaguely that it was his chauffeur. But even his confused senses soon told him that he was wrong.

In the dim light he could see that the approaching stranger had on the garb of a laborer. The man came closer. They were face to face, very close to one another.

Then Turga recognized him. It was that dark-eyed man with whom he had had the fight, the man from whom he had wrung the secret of Paulo's address.

If the man still bore him malice he showed it in no other way than by a sardonic smile.

"Hello, my brother," he said, speaking the dialect they had used on that other occasion. "You have come back to us."

Turga's reply was expressed almost inaudibly.

"Yes."

For a time they stood there looking at each other—the laborer with something of a sinister grin on his face, yet touched with sympathy; Turga, still gazing dull-eyed, struggling for comprehension.

"Come with me," the stranger said.

"My chauffeur," Turga whispered drunkenly.

Said the man: "You won't need him any more."

There was something symbolic in the statement—it was both threat and promise. Turga didn't care. Nothing mattered any more. He closed the gate.

"We'll go and tell him."

They went back along the road to where the automobile was waiting. The chauffeur was hunched down in his seat, dozing. There are always those who doze through comedy and tragedy alike.

"I shall not need you any more," said Turga.

The man started up with a look of surprise. Turga handed over a thin pad of bills he had drawn from his pocket. The chauffeur was still exam-

ining these—joy gradually dawning through his stupefaction—as they turned and left him.

Back along the road they went, past the Carstairs home. Silence had fallen upon it, but the house still peered at them through the black trees from its lighted windows, as though it, too, were stupefied at what was taking place. They turned into a narrow lane which separated the property from the Cherry Hills estate. They had proceeded along this for some hundred yards when Turga paused.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

It was the question of one who stirs in his sleep—the unresisting curiosity of a man who finds himself an actor in some fateful dream.

"To our camp—the camp of the brotherhood—back where the other Cave-Dwellers are awaiting us."

"The old woman—is she there?"

"Grandmother is dead," said the man. "She told us to be expecting you. She said that Fate would bring you to us without our looking for you. Those were her last words. And here you are."

"And here I am," Turga answered.

"And now what is to be done?"

"We have been working on that cursed lake. That is what has to do with the plan of things. Now, I suppose, that you are here, we'll understand why."

Silence again descended upon them. Nor yet for a while did they move.

Turga was making no effort to resist, to turn back, to assert any volition of his own. Destiny, the invisible hand, gripped him about as close, as soft, as unescapable, as the atmosphere. It was merely a moment of reflection, of contemplation.

Out from the soft, black ocean of the night there came a fresh ripple of music—Elin Carstairs's cool, slim hand on the piano—the hand he would never touch again. The music tinkled on—like the sad gaiety of fluttering handkerchiefs for the outward-bound.

"Let us go where it has been set

for us to go," said Turga, with a new note of solemnity in his voice.

Together they passed on into the night.

CHAPTER XLIX.

DREAM-STUFF AND SHADOWS.

THOUGH Chivvers had thrown an added meaning into that statement of his to Turga, that nobody was at home, he had spoken the simple truth. They were all out at Cherry Hills. There was to be a wedding out there. The new lake was nearing completion. There was to be a family festival. No greater gaiety prevailed at Versailles on the eve of the French Revolution.

Frederic Graw and Agatha were happily married. Their happiness was just about perfect. The rebellious spirit of the bride chafed not under the strong hand of the new lord and master, for the hand, with all its strength, was very gentle. Into her life had come the first hint of law and order. She found it surprisingly grateful.

As for Graw, he had that other joy of a strong man who bends his strength to a congenial labor.

His own affairs were moving along with perfect success. The new firm of Graw & Purcell was by way of becoming a power in the Street.

Even the former Princess Viatka, widow of the late Horace Frail, had come into a new bequest of happiness—of happiness very different from that of the others, but happiness still. For Mrs. Frail delighted in change, and change there most certainly was—not only change, but a sort of fearful expectancy.

She contemplated the things that were going on about her with an interest which was almost impersonal. Like many complex natures of her kind, she was gifted with an intuition which at times bordered on divination. And she knew that in some way these changes concerned her least of all.

She had given herself over to dream-

ing more than usual. It was about the only activity that remained to her with which her new son-in-law could not find fault. She felt his domination and recognized the nature of it without being told.

She no longer even smoked in public. Gone forever were her more or less innocent flirtations with callow youth—callow, that is, and otherwise.

But her dreams—ah, that was different!

Again she flirted and danced through Europe. A hundred old intrigues, forgotten until now, came again to enliven her somnolence.

She recalled again the fiery courtship of Horace Frail. *Dieu!* How handsome he was—how handsome and wild! When he had caught her in his arms that night on the terrace of Monte Carlo! When he had half killed the Austrian *attaché!* What a wonderful and fitting climax it was when they had brought him home to Schloss Frelinghuysen at last with a rapier wound through his unruly heart!

But, most of all, she thought of Sergius. That was more recent, more real, and, best of all, so filled with promise! More and more she confessed that here was her expectancy.

Sergius also was handsome, also was wild, also was—the thrill of it returned to her—also brutal.

She knew, moreover, that Sergius was in some way connected with those legendary Cave-Dwellers who had always haunted the mountains adjacent to the Frelinghuysen estate in Bohemia; that down from the Middle Ages these nameless folk had carried on their feud with the nobler line. It gave to Sergius just that needed element of mystery to make him wholly fascinating.

And even so, there was a sound material basis for these wild vagaries. There would soon be little left in America to keep her there. Graw was rapidly shearing the family of the romantic peril that had made it so much worth while.

Negotiations were practically complete now for the sale of the great town house and all that it contained. Before very long on the place where it stood there would rise another sort of palace—one of those new department-stores so luxurious in everything except shadowy tradition.

As for Hugh Frail, he had apparently once more answered the old question as to whether a youth who was wholly bad can suddenly become wholly good.

From that night when he had so nearly been the cause of Turga's death he had been transformed—a gradual process, of course, but rapid enough and dating from that time.

What the love he bore for out-of-doors had begun his love for Elin Carstairs had completed. Besides, he had absorbed something of that new, sane, practical philosophy that Frederic Graw had drawn from his father—the strong man who doesn't run away from a ghost, but grabs hold of it, the old philosophy of the horns of the bull or the horns of the devil.

The date of the wedding was drawing near. In a way it was to be a date doubly notable—made so not only by the nuptials, but by the inauguration of the new lake. Everything was preparing to this end. There were to be illuminations, a choral festival, a ball. After a manner, the whole world was to be advised that the house of Frail, once the house of Frelinghuysen, was to enter upon a new era.

They were working day and night to get the new lake completed. There was no water in it yet. That was to be a part of the celebration—when a final blast was to be shot that would throw up the last mass of granite and let the waters rush in from the little river that wound its way through the estate.

More than a hundred workmen—dark, red-flanneled—were laboring there at high speed.

Often in the pleasant, tepid afternoons Agatha or her mother, or some

guest of theirs—there were many guests—would stroll out onto the balustraded terrace of the great house and look out across the new moat at the toilers there.

A good many of these pick-and-shovel men were Bohemians. Sometimes there came to the watchers fragments of coarse jests and songs in the language of the Czechs; they would feel the flash of burning dark eyes upon them.

It never failed to give both Agatha and her mother some slight thrill as of other times—almost as though still hovering near was that historic curse which otherwise they had almost come to forget.

It was that way one afternoon, with the wedding only a few days off.

A dark-eyed workman was chanting to the slow cadence of his rising and falling mattock. Now and then his fellows joined him in a humming monotone.

The music was very strange. There was something uncanny about it. Agatha strove to remember. It seemed to her that she had heard it before.

Momentarily the green trees, the teeming activity, disappeared. She had a vision of the old man playing the hurdy-gurdy, the basement restaurant where they had found Paulo—they, she and Turga.

CHAPTER L.

SILK AND RED FLANNEL.

EVEN a mind less subtle than that of Agatha's might have sensed the elements of tragedy about the place. All the flowers from the Cherry Hills gardens and hothouses could not have made the old house otherwise than grim.

The laughter of the guests echoed still in corners haunted by dark memories. The music of the orchestra brought up from New York could not quite submerge that half-heard refrain

from the pick-and-shovel men in the unfinished lake.

Everywhere, all the time, hovered some vague hint of impending conflict—the hosts of light and the hosts of darkness arrayed for the Armageddon of the Frails.

On one side were the Frails and their guests. The younger element predominated. Chaperonage existed in name rather than fact. There were too many opportunities for flirtation to render any system of close guardianship possible—mile upon mile of shaded avenues, of footpaths and bridle-paths, acres of secluded woods, of meadows and gardens.

The broad terrace had become a summer camp of red-and-white striped umbrellas and tea-tables—tea-tables by courtesy, for anything that anybody could possibly desire in the way of refreshment could be served there—and here, every afternoon and evening, the orchestra went into alternate swoons and frenzies—the music of Vienna and Buenos Aires.

The Gorot twins, famous for their beauty, were up from New Orleans—blue-eyed, dark-haired, languid, and graceful, marvelous dancers, consummately versed in every art that ever rendered a woman dangerous.

Tante Thérèse—also dangerous in her day, but now given to the milder dissipations of tobacco, absinth, and bridge—kept her conscience clear by forbidding them to do everything that they wanted to do, well knowing that they would do it anyway.

Colonel von Steinmetz, of the Austrian cavalry, was there—head like an Easter egg, bandy legs, yet one of the most fascinating men, if not the wick- edest, who ever came out of Europe; a galaxy of the younger set from New York, married and unmarried, who had found it worth while to cut other arrangements for this royal good time—the Goodwoods, still undivorced, though notoriously free; the Van Trines, the Kents, the Willoughbys, an *attaché* or two from Washington.

Other guests were dropping in and out again by motor and coach.

The tired business man of the Cherry Hills lodge had wept and pleaded until Downs, the overseer, had given him one of the undergardeners as an assistant.

The great iron gates rolled open and shut by day and by night.

The standing army of maids and valets, of grooms and butlers, gained in gold what they lost in *avoirdupois*.

Chivvers, still walking with a limp—a general wounded in service—was in supreme command. Yet he, like Agatha, like Mrs. Frail—like others there, perhaps—could hear at times, through the whirling cadences of the imported orchestra, the perpetual murmur of laughter and light speech, that deeper note of the workmen engaged on the new lake, the droning chant which rose like an audible memory of the past, a constant reminder of impending danger, subtle, haunting, ghostlike.

It was strange that most of the toiling laborers in the new lake were Bohemians—a single clan, according to all appearances—swarthy, dark-eyed, sinister.

Among themselves they spoke the dialect of the Piesen Hills—a dialect spoken in the region of Schloss Frelinghuysen.

They were being driven hard, for their work would have to be finished on the wedding-day. Yet, labor as they would, their dark eyes would still roll up to the undulent grace of the Gorot twins, of Agatha or Elin, or the other young maids and matrons there, and linger hungrily.

While they sweated and talked softly and brokenly among themselves, as is the way with those who work in the earth, they could hear the music, the chat, and laughter from the great house; could see the graceful, whirling forms of the dancers.

And late at night, when silence had submerged their own camp and the surrounding country, they could hear the

fine wail of violin and cello, the rhythmic throb of the piano; the darkness, off there across the park, would be softened by the glow of many lights.

Silk and red flannel—the contrast was too sharp, too unrelieved, too constant.

Both Mr. Downs, the overseer, and the contractor in charge of the work were secretly worried. There had been signs of rebellion. It was too late now to change.

But these clansmen were strong, avid, half-wild. They were toiling hard for a pittance. Golden fruit—everything their savage hearts could desire—was dangling there overhead, in reach—for those who were daring.

CHAPTER LI.

THE ULTIMATE BLAST.

ONLY that one ridge of granite remained—a natural dam between the river and the new lake. That blown away, and the water would rush into the new bed that had been prepared for it, not only in the lake itself, but into the moat as well.

It was almost a monolith, that remaining isthmus, and the miners had already honeycombed it and filled it with giant powder for the ultimate blast. The wires had been laid, the battery was in place. One touch of the lever and the rock would be shattered into a million pieces.

As a matter of precaution, the battery had been installed in one of the drawing-rooms, for the shot was to be fired by the bride-elect, and those rebellious workmen were capable of setting off the explosion at the wrong time.

"It would be no joke," said Steinmetz, with a ferocious grin, "if that mine goes off while a few of our friends are walking over it."

"It is dangerous," said Graw bravely.

"So why not shoot it now?" the Austrian cavalrman wanted to know.

"Sentiment," Graw answered. "This is to be the last shot in a long war, colonel."

"I do not understand."

"It's intended to lay forever the family ghost—you know, the ghost of the Frelinghuysens and the Frails. There always has been one, but we've got it on the jump. The marriage of Hugh with Miss Carstairs will chase the ghost out of the house, if anything will. We shoot up this rock, the waters rush into the lake and the moat—we've kept the ghost out forever afterward. You know the old tradition about ghosts and running waters."

"Might it be so," the colonel rejoined. "But I'd keep watch—be careful."

"We're doing that," said Graw. "And there is only one more day, colonel—the wedding, then the blast."

"You believe in ghosts?"

Graw drew the winged dollar from his pocket, looked down at it for a moment meditatively.

"Believe in them, my dear colonel, and defy them. Still, I shall be glad when all of these infernal wild men are off the place, when this infernal blast is shot, when the water's in the infernal moat."

They looked out of the open window in the direction of the granite ridge—that small, slumbering volcano which was destined to have such a momentous place in the history of the Frails.

From the front of the house there came the swooning rhythm of the orchestra. From an adjacent corner of the new lake a group of dark-eyed workmen sent up a counter melody, weird and suggestive of things otherwise inexpressible.

One of the Gorot girls, swinging along as light as a zephyr and as graceful as a flower, passed along the path that bordered the moat, at the side of young Bob Willoughby.

Graw and Steinmetz saw the workmen pause, look up, follow the girl with their eyes.

Steinmetz snorted, let his eyes drift again to the almost military mine that had been laid in the granite monolith.

"There are ghosts and ghosts," he said.

"Meaning—"

"Meaning," the army officer replied, "that our mine out there might be useful to blow up two-legged ghosts as well as the kind which don't use legs any more."

Graw was thoughtful. He hesitated to convey to a guest any private fears he himself may have entertained. Yet with Steinmetz it was different.

"I don't mind telling you," he said at last, "that there might be occasion for something of the kind. Both Downs, the overseer, and Ferguson, the contractor, have told me that these men have been getting ugly—that they'll bear watching."

The colonel emitted a fierce chuckle.

"I'd hate to spoil the wedding," he said; "but I love a fight. We occupy the strategic position. An attack, we set off the mine, we shoot a few, we drown a few—"

Both men turned sharply. The former Prince Viatka had drawn near unperceived.

"Oh, you dear, dear man," she sighed. "Drown, shoot, everything delightful!"

They laughed and strolled back toward the front of the house.

Just under the window where they been talking a laborer straightened up from some task or other. He glanced up at the window with eyes scintillant, a flash of white teeth.

"O-ho," he breathed softly.

He glanced round him. He was unobserved. Just overhead, suspended from the casement on one side and on the other by a pole beyond the moat, was the insulated wire leading from the battery to the granite ridge. He looked at this wire fondly, meditatively. Again he cast his eyes about him, made sure that he was unobserved.

By a roundabout course he made his way to a grassy knoll, close to the rock,

where the wire took contact with the earth.

He drew out a heavy clasp-knife.

Furtive, watchful, he cut the wire in two.

CHAPTER LII.

LOWERING SKIES.

THE night had fallen velvet dark. Some presage of storm—perhaps it was a subtler intuition still—had caused Chivvers to order the gay paraphernalia of the terrace to be carried indoors while the guests were still at dinner. Some other sort of storm than the one promised by the oppressive atmosphere and the lowering sky seemed imminent.

Every one felt it. Neither the best of wine nor the best of music could quite drive the impression away.

As Agatha came out on the terrace after dinner, she noticed a sort of expectant hush—such as one notices in the lapse of a familiar sound. At first she didn't know why it was. She peered out into the opaque obscurity with a little shiver. There was nothing there—only darkness and the faint, dim, tremulous souvenir of that song she had heard.

Frederic came out and slipped his arm about her. Then she remembered.

"Why aren't they working tonight?" she asked. "Are they all through?"

"All through," Graw answered. "All except blowing up the rock."

"I'm glad—those workmen scared me. Have they gone away?"

He paused before answering, pondering on things that he was loath to tell her.

"Why do you pause? Oh, I feel as though something terrible were going to happen. Tell me—what is it?"

"There has been trouble," he said unwillingly. "A fight—a strike—"

He paused. He had almost said too much. But he was not to escape like that.

"And a murder?" Agatha whispered.

"I declare, Agatha," said Graw, "you're positively uncanny at times."

"I felt it," Agatha replied. "I felt it in the night—and from the way you spoke."

"It's nothing to worry your head about," he assured her, as he bent and kissed her temple.

As though to give him the lie a dark form clambered out of the night. It was Downs, the overseer of the estate. He started to speak, looked awkwardly from Graw to Agatha, then back again. It was evident that he had been running.

Agatha was the first to speak.

"What is it?"

"Nothing, ma'am," Downs answered. He was losing no time on civility. He turned to Graw. "I'd like to see you, sir."

Mrs. Frail and Elin Carstairs had also come out on the terrace, Hugh Frail following close afterward.

The former Princess Viatka made her bare shoulders tremble with a little "Bur-r-r!" For a moment she stood very straight with her head up as though sensing all that lay beyond her range of vision. Then again that "Bur-r-r!"

"Oh, how I love a night like this," she whispered, more to herself than to any one else. "What dreadful things might happen!" She turned to Elin Carstairs. "And you never, never feel frightened here in the country at night?"

"Never," Elin replied, with a caress of both voice and hand. "The day and night are not so different, except that possibly the day is the more beautiful."

The former Princess Viatka again sent her interest out into the sable darkness. It was quite apparent that she never, never would understand this future daughter-in-law of hers.

Out there in the night there lay such magnificent possibilities. She thought of Sergius, of Turga—of Turga, odd-

ly, most of all; of him and the family curse.

It was very strange—undoubtedly strange; and it proved so wonderfully those secret beliefs of hers. Had she not sent Turga that winged dollar, and had he not thereupon completely disappeared? She marveled over it, now for the hundredth time.

For, quite unbeknown to any one else, she had been at some pains to locate Turga. He had interested her. He would have gone far to mitigate this new loneliness of hers. But he had disappeared. She had mailed him the dollar that night, and lo! the very next day he was gone.

She had made secret inquiry at his apartment, had asked indirectly at the clubs as he was wont to frequent. All in vain. This was magic.

Oh, if something dreadful should happen—now, to-night, something to break this submerging monotony!

She started. Faintly, far away, she had heard a whistle. It came to her like the signal of a ghost—of a ghost of her youth. Some one had whistled like that years ago—she could not remember who, nor just when.

Silence had fallen upon the little group. Behind them reared the solemn grandeur of the old house—itsself merging into night, save for those few lighted windows. After all, there had been something in that ancient curse. If it could only have given tongue to the stories of what had happened there! Tragedy and tears—as Chivers had said.

Even the buoyant nature of Elin Carstairs had fallen under the momentary spell. She also knew many things not altogether engulfed in the past—a whole series of events which stood out pale and ghostly, like the stone pilasters of the balustrade.

"Where is Fred?" asked Frail.

Agatha didn't answer. She was still under the influence of what she had felt, of what he had told her, of the sudden advent of Mr. Downs with his message of mystery.

Her mother turned to her and spoke softly.

"Does he still insist that all superstitions are foolish?" she asked, curiously.

Agatha laughed uneasily. They had kept their secret—she and her husband—but some impulse moved her to tell it now.

"To such an extent," she answered, "that he even insists on carrying with him—"

"What?"

There was no mistaking the delicious thrill of anticipation in Mrs. Frail's question. Her native quality of intuition was somehow never so keen.

"Where is Fred?" Frail repeated.

Mother and sister still ignored him. They had very much in common, different though they were in many respects.

"What—not the —"

"Yes, he has it—the *thaler*—Chivers gave it to him. It was the day his father died."

Agatha whispered her answer in a tremulous voice.

Other members of the party sauntered out of the house into the grateful darkness—the beautiful Gorot twins, herded close by Steinmetz and an *attaché* mixing French and German, the Goodwood's undivorced but severely apart, Bob Willoughby and Aubrey van Trine—but the darkness swallowed them, the silence absorbed their voices.

Even the music of the orchestra sounded faint and far away—a minor wail with something about it suggestive, at least to one member of the family group, of the fantastic witchery of a hurdy-gurdy.

"Where is Fred?" Frail asked once more in exasperation.

Both Agatha and her mother turned with sudden realization of what the question might mean. They stood there looking at each other palpitant, not knowing what to say.

Suddenly, the great silence which enveloped the park was broken by a medley of voices—the voices of men in

hot altercation. They strained their ears to hear.

There came a shot, a howl of rage and pain.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE CAMP OF THE BRETHREN.

THE band of Bohemians who had been employed in pushing the new lake along toward completion had pitched their camp in a rocky grove just beyond the iron fence that encircled the estate. They preferred to live that way.

It was but a continuation of the half-wild life they had left behind them in their native hills. They were more at home like that, for rocks are rocks, the trees are trees the world over. The same sky was their canopy. The same breezes whispered the same secrets of the pagan gods whom their ancestors had worshipped.

It was the old witch who had selected the camp-site. It was she who, in some inscrutable way, had secured them their present employment.

They asked no question. They were as much the children of destiny as were the grasses and the flowers. It was almost as though they had no individual souls—that one soul was enough for all of them as one soul might be enough for a pack of wolves.

But for some time now even the dullest of them had felt the imminence of some change. There had come among them, greeted them as brothers and sisters, a black-bearded stranger by the name of Sergius. His coming had been foretold. They made him welcome in their barbaric camp.

It was to this camp that Turga came in the night. Him also they greeted not only as brother, but as something more. The grandmother had babbled much about him before she died. They did not understand it all, but they knew that he was of the hierarchy—in some way in league with their pagan deities. And he was their brother.

They had made him welcome with a sort of fearful joviality. There were men and women—a tribe—the same people whom he had seen that night of the Witches' Sabbath in the old Frail warehouse—the one that had been burned.

They asked him no questions, nor did he ask any. As it had been at the Carstairs gate, so it was now. There was no occasion for questions. They were all as those who understood.

Upon them all was the invisible hand; but he, Turga, was the elect—the bridegroom of impending fate.

They treated him kindly. They talked about their affairs in his presence as though he had always been one of them. He was filled with a sort of solemn gratitude. He was no longer alone. These were his people.

There was much talk of a strike, still more talk of violence—a sort of greedy eagerness for all the benefits which might accrue in case there was violence. There was vast wealth in the *Schloss*—they called it "*Schloss Frelinghuysen*," as though they were still back in the country of their origin.

And as Turga listened he began to get his first definite perception of what was possibly in store. He found himself listening with increasing eagerness. His recent dejection gradually dissolved.

In its place there came something of savage optimism. Life was not so altogether dark after all. Two women there were in the world whom he had desired with all his heart. He had cursed fate, yet here was fate throwing the cards at last that he might win.

An isolated country mansion, no one to defend it except a company of servants—poltroons to a man, as servants always were—and then, he himself master of this band of brothers, themselves as savage and eager for rapine as a band of famished wolves.

The answer was obvious. He had but to take what was thrown his way.

There was a fire burning there in the open, for the night was cool; and be-

fore this he sat on a box that some one had supplied for his comfort. Now and then, he heard himself add some word to the discussion, knew that he was playing his part in the drama which was now drawing rapidly near its final scene.

It must have been almost dawn when a dark-eyed sister of the tribe brought him a bowl filled with some fragrant beverage of which he drank.

A little later he had crept into a small cabin—a place which would have made him shudder only a day or so previously, but which he now accepted as unquestioningly as he had accepted this new-found fellowship, with the same sense of solemn gratitude.

When he again awoke, the sun was already in the west. He turned his face to it, muttered some odd, half-articulate prayer that fluttered into his consciousness from the back of his brain.

This was to be the night. What it held for him, he neither knew nor cared. He was but the mote in the sunbeam, that or the blind bat zigzagging in the moonlit night.

Unshaven, unkempt, careless as to his appearance in a way that he had never been before there was that about him that would have made almost any woman look twice. It wasn't surprising that the dark-eyed sister of the tribe looked at him so long.

But why she should have struck her forehead and her breast like that, in the age-old gesture of silent grief?

CHAPTER LIV.

THE COILED SNAKE.

It was all arranged.

There was to be an attack on the mansion that night. They would take the place by surprise, could do as they wished. There would be rich loot—enough for every one. And to him, to Turga, the lord-prince, the only power on earth they recognized since grandmother's death, and him because

he was the bridegroom of Fate—he should have his heart's desire.

Agatha—Elin!

He was still in doubt. Both of them he hated with a savage hate. Both of them he loved with more than a savage love. With either of them in his power, he told himself, he could be happy.

He was not bothering about the future. He had learned the futility of that. But he had some indefinite dream of a wild flight to the Piesen Hills—the rocky, wooded country of his origin; of life there, lawless and unrestrained.

A man with a black beard, whom he had noticed with the band on the preceding evening, appeared before him out of the gloaming.

For a moment they looked at each other in silence. Then the stranger spoke:

"Great times ahead, brother."

"Yes," Turga answered. A quaver of illumination appeared on the rim of his consciousness. "Yes, great times; even death, perhaps!"

The black-bearded stranger contemplated him soberly.

"I go to keep a tryst with the Princess Viatka," he went on. "I have come far to find her. She does not suspect that I am here, yet nevertheless she is ready."

"You are neither lucky nor unlucky," Turga answered. "For myself, I see not one but three."

"They are?"

"One is the daughter of the Princess Viatka—her name is Agatha. The other is a girl with blue eyes and yellow hair—angel or devil I can't decide. No one can, the difference is so slight. Her name is Elin. The third is better than either of them, more beautiful—a witch, a kind-hearted siren, a *Kishev-Macher* who deals in none but white magic."

Turga paused.

"And what's her name?" the stranger asked.

"Death!"

"You're a worthy head of the

brotherhood," the man with the black beard answered seriously. "I don't want you to kiss this white bride of yours yet for a while.

"Listen! I love you. It is as though you were my son. I might have had a son like you, had destiny so willed it; for there was once a daughter of the last Count Frelinghuysen whom I might have married."

A slight spasm of pain twitched his face. He seemed to be on the point of saying something more, but other members of the clan had drawn forward—a score of them, a rough-looking crew still in their earth-stained clothes—and he desisted. By common accord they all started in the direction of the park.

A hollow had been burrowed under the iron fence and through this they passed. Inside, they paused. The dark-bearded stranger had spoken to other members of the band. Again he approached Turga, put a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"What now?" asked Turga.

"We'll attack the house—loot it, each take what he most desires," said the man. "But as we can't spare you—we don't want you to get killed. What you said a little while ago has frightened us. Promise me that you will do as we ask or we won't go forward."

"Whether I promise or not," Turga responded, "everything will be as it will be."

"But you promise?"

"I promise."

"There is a certain place where you will remain and wait for me. I know what you want. You'll get it. I'll see to that."

It had fallen very dark. Clouds banked the sky. The air was oppressive with a promise of storm.

They moved softly over the turf. Through the great silence filtered the distant strains of the orchestra—a wildly cadenced air with something about it that brought back to Turga's mind the music of the old hurdy-gurdy

player in Mme. Zidek's restaurant. Where was Paulo now? he wondered. He had a premonition that he would see him again before very long.

They came to the border of the new lake, followed this in the direction of the river, then crossed over the granite ridge—all that remained to keep the waters from rushing into the new bed that had been prepared for them.

Here the man with the black beard and another member of the band drew Turga somewhat apart.

"This would be the safest place, you say?" the man with the black beard queried.

"Yes."

"But the place is filled with dynamite," he protested with a soft laugh.

"That's all right," the other answered. "The wire is disconnected. I cut it myself this afternoon."

"You wait here," said the man with the black beard, turning to Turga. "I can find you here. Otherwise, I might miss you in the park. Wait here and have no fear. You'll get what you want."

Turga didn't protest. He felt that never again, as long as he lived, would he protest. It was very foolish to protest.

What was a protest of one human atom against the cosmic march of things? As well might he protest against the revolution of the earth on its axis, against the infinite swing of the moon and the stars.

Without a word, passively, he sat down on the granite with his feet in the crowding turf. They went away and left him there. He was as much alone, he felt, as though he were the last man, on the last inhabited sphere, on the last frontier of time.

His foot touched something hard but resilient in the grass. He leaned forward and peered down through the darkness. It was a piece of insulated wire—freshly cut.

He dropped it back again.

After all, what bride could ever be the paragon of that kind-hearted siren

to whom all men turned at last, the witch who deals in none but white magic?

CHAPTER LV.

THE HOUR OF DREAD.

THOSE on the terrace of the great house were still waiting for something to follow the shot and the cry. Out from the house came the incongruous music of the orchestra.

The guests were not alarmed. They were merely interested. But it was otherwise with Frail, with Elin Carstairs, with Agatha and her mother.

They were still standing there with that sinister question ringing in their ears—"Where is Fred?"—when the answer came.

It was Graw himself. He ran toward him out of the darkness strangely disfigured. They saw the reason for it. There was a gash across his forehead, from which the blood streamed in spite of his efforts to keep it back.

There was a chorus of exclamations.

"Get into the house—all of you," he panted.

Other members of the party were hurrying forward—with all the speed that perfect breeding would permit—but it was neither the time nor the place for explanations.

"Inside—all of you," Graw repeated.

He huddled them in. Already Chivvers had sensed the danger. He had been so long in the family that nothing was capable of taking him altogether by surprise.

Before the iron shutters were closed on the last window a rock hurtled out of the darkness, crashed through the glass, and struck a chandelier.

"Shall I arm the servants, sir?" asked Chivvers.

"With anything you want to except firearms," Graw replied. "Hugh and I will do any shooting that's necessary. Scatter them at the windows, Chiv-

vers. Let them report to us in case anything breaks."

He faced the others.

"Now, don't get excited," he commanded, with a smile. "This will be a godsend for all of you—give you something to talk about for the rest of your lives. Nothing but a strike or something like that.

"Adolph"—turning to a servant—"tell that orchestra to go on. And now you girls go and play bridge, dance—do anything you want to except look out of the windows. There's a strike, some drunken workmen. Some one kindly tapped me on the head in the dark with a club.

"Downs fired a shot. He is off to the stables. Everything will be lovely again within half an hour. Steinmetz—you're a soldier—you come with Hugh and me. You other men stay here with the ladies and help them have a good time."

"*Hoch, der general!*" cried Steinmetz.

"Telephone for the police—for the sheriff," said Hugh when they were alone.

"We'll try," Graw answered; "but I'm afraid it is too late. They were cutting the wires when Downs and I surprised them. You go to the armory—get us each a shotgun."

"What, ho," Frail answered cheerfully.

He was a very different Frail from the youth who had borne that name a few months ago.

Steinmetz wasn't aware yet what it was all about; but he was ready to fight—whatever it was, whatever the odds. In a few words Graw explained the situation.

"The mine—now is the time to shoot your mine," Steinmetz suggested. "It would scare them off. It would send the water into the lake, into the moat—even if it blew up a few, should drown a few, as I suggested this afternoon."

He had moved over to the battery, looked down at it fondly.

Graw was beside him with his hand on his arm.

"Later, colonel, if we must."

"Is the coast all clear—none of your own people about?"

"None at this time."

"I have a peculiar feeling," Colonel Steinmetz remarked. "A peculiar feeling. You say they cut the telephone-wires—and this—"

Slowly he put out his hand and touched the rheostat. It hovered there for a moment. He pushed the lever slowly down.

Graw had ceased to breathe. But no explosion followed.

"As I suspected," said Steinmetz, with perfect calm.

Back in the drawing-room, where the rest of the party hovered, both fear and suspense were in the air. Obedient to orders, the leader of the orchestra still conducted his men, but perspiring distraction had fallen upon them all. There were unnoticed discords. An E-string snapped on the first violin. They jumped, to a man, as though it had been another shot.

The former Princess Viatka was in a quiver which had in it the elements of both distress and exquisite delight. Not since she had come to the country with the family had she taken a keener interest in life. Life! This was life as she understood it, loved it, and not otherwise.

She had moved somewhat apart, praying inwardly for the final crash that she was expecting. She was listening with all her ears.

There—she thought she had heard it again, that peculiar whistle she had heard but a little while before. While she cast a quick glance round her—caught an impression of frightened faces, of agitated shoulders, of imminent hysteria in a dozen forms. No one would see her—that much was certain.

She slipped out into the hall. No one was there. She put her hand on her bare breast.

Sergius—it was Sergius calling to

her, as he had called to her years ago when Horace was still alive, when she was still the chatelaine of Schloss Frelinghuysen in dear Bohemia.

"Ah, *Dieu!*—and why not?"

She slipped over to the front door, opened it, peered out into the night. There was darkness there—a whispering suggestion of things unseen, of unseen perils, of lurking joys.

Some one whispered her name.

She had stepped outside.

The door swung softly shut behind her with the tiny, fateful click of a spring-lock.

CHAPTER LVI.

"THE WINGED DOLLAR."

THE rioters had set fire to the stables. As Graw crept out of a window of an upper story a few minutes later onto the top of a small stone porch he saw a quavering plume of flame shoot up, multiply, sink, then leap higher than ever.

He groaned within himself. He would have to trust Downs and the other employees to protect themselves and the live-stock. He couldn't leave the house.

He had brought a shotgun with him. Hugh he had sent, also armed, to a vantage-point at the front of the house. Steinmetz was in complete command of the lower floor.

He thought of his father. He thought of the historic curse of this family which he had made his own. His jaw came out. He couldn't stand this inactivity much longer.

But as he wavered—as he watched the growing conflagration, thought of all those in the house for whose safety he was responsible—Agatha crept out beside him.

"Fire!" she sobbed.

"You're safe," he whispered.

He cautiously shifted the shotgun to his other hand, patted her gently on the shoulder, and ordered her to go back.

"I can't find mama," she whispered, "and I'm so frightened. What do you see?"

"Nothing but a few men prowling about," he whispered in reply. "But I won't shoot them for that."

"Have you still the dollar?"

"Yes."

"Throw it away."

"That hasn't anything to do with it."

"I know, only—I wish you would."

"Superstition," he whispered.

"I can't help it," Agatha answered. "It's all as you say, I know. But it has got the curse on it. Oh, this is the curse—I know! I know!"

In the darkness Graw could feel her tremble. With his eyes still on the fire, he encircled her with his arm, brushed her face with a hasty caress.

"As you will!" he exclaimed softly.

He had disengaged his hand, felt the coin in his pocket, drew it forth. In the dancing, fitful light he could see the white shimmer of it. So could Agatha.

It was as though all the terror she had thus far experienced that night was concentrated in that small disk—an evil eye of fearful potency.

"Throw it away!" she begged again.

Graw hesitated, still looking down at the coin. It was an evil-looking thing. Something of Agatha's terror crept into his own heart. Wasn't his continued defiance of the old superstition but another form of superstition on his own part? Besides, Agatha had given him the best of reasons—it was something that added to her distress.

"Throw it away!" she begged. "You'll see. Perhaps it's already spinning some evil influence upon you—something that will disappear when it disappears."

Agatha, like many a woman when she speaks like that, was hovering very close to a truth she wouldn't have spoken for worlds. The coin had made her think of Turga—the

handsome, fascinating, ill-omened Turga. It was because of him that the coin filled her now with an added fear.

Did Graw sense the truth?

Careless of exposure, he had suddenly got upon his feet, stood there with the gun in one hand, the coin in the other, gazing out ahead of him.

Then he unlimbered his strength, poised himself for a throw—Ajax defying the lightning.

Agatha trembled, held her breath. Some mighty thing was about to take place.

Graw threw the coin out into the night with all his strength.

Turga had been sitting where the brethren had left him. Upon him had fallen a pall as sable as the night—black, impenetrable, immensely solemn.

He heard the shot, the cry.

It was evident that the marauders had not been able to carry out their first purpose of a surprise. It brought to him but an added weight of confirmation that Fate was against him; that he and all those who were connected with him were to be the victims of Fate and not its allies.

Lo, was it not ever thus?

He had never thought much about moral questions. But suddenly there came to him, like the voices of an invisible choir, a chant the words of which he could not understand, but which he knew were the expression of old, immutable truths—truths that had inspired every religion, every aspiration, since the world began.

He stood up. He lifted his face to the sky. It was not that old pagan prayer to the setting sun that came to his lips now. It was something else—something he tried so hard to express.

"Oh, God—God—"

He paused. He sought for utterance.

He saw the red flames of the burning stable suddenly reach up, whirling in a diabolical dance—a final memento

of the saraband he had witnessed that night—so long ago, it seemed—when Paulo had led him to hear the story of his haunted legacy.

A slight tremor ran through his slender frame. Once more he lifted his face to the black heavens. It was a final appeal. He strove to express what was in his heart. After all, it wasn't fear. After all, it was resignation.

"Behold, I am ready!"

He stood there very straight, his feet planted on the granite ridge, his face still lifted, the infinite in his mind and heart.

It was there that he kept his tryst with the white bride—the kind-hearted siren to whom all men—and all women, and even the little children—turn at last.

There at his feet lay the severed wire.

The winged dollar soared upward through the night, then began its swift descent.

Who shall say that it was Graw's hand, and not the invisible hand which Turga in his young life had come to know so well, that gave it guidance?

Just there, where the two ends of the severed wire almost touched each other, it fell and completed the deadly contact.

"Behold, I am ready!"

The words were still on Turga's lips when he heard the padded thud of the coin.

Followed instantly annihilation, the crash of doom!

Graw and Agatha stood there motionless, breathless, expectant. Then, scarcely had the dollar disappeared, it had seemed, when there had come that mighty explosion.

Agatha had uttered a little shriek.

Graw had caught her to him, for even his robust nerves had been shaken by the uncanniness of the thing.

There came a sound of cheering from the stable, the hiss of steam.

Down there they had begun to fight the fire.

Two or three men came into view, running along the path. Graw recognized Downs and called out to him.

"They've gone," the overseer answered. "It was the explosion, I guess, that frightened them away."

Suddenly they were all listening. Even above the noise that came from the stables the lesser sounds that came from below stairs, where there was still some semblance of music and conversation, there was audible a new element of sound—a soft roar, the whispering rush of water.

The little river that ran through the Frail estate was pouring into the new lake.

CHAPTER LVII.

CONCLUSION.

THERE have been a number of changes on the face of things since the events herewith recorded took place. The face of things, like the faces of persons, will take on repose and tranquillity with the passage of time.

It may have been coincidence, of course; but it is true that all trace of the legendary Frelinghuysen curse disappeared utterly on that eventful night when Frederic Graw hurled the last materialization of the Frelinghuysen *thaler* into space.

It was never heard of nor seen again—no more than was Turga. The granite barrier between river and lake had been shattered. The living waters before dawn had encircled the old house to keep all bad ghosts away from it forevermore.

Poor Turga!

They often talked about him. They often wondered what had become of him. None of them knew anything about that supreme adventure of his when he stood on the mined rock in the park that night and sent up his last message—"I am ready!"

He disappeared utterly—as all men will some day—became a memory, not all good, not all bad—as is the case with other men as well.

There might have been those among the odd brotherhood who had participated in that fruitless foray who could have cast light on Turga's tragic end, but they never did so. For no less did the explosion shatter the granite rock than it shattered the bond that had held these strange men one to another.

The members of the brotherhood had simply disappeared—scattered as the rock had been in all directions. Perhaps, like the fragments of the rock itself, they also came to serve a useful purpose at last, each in his own way. Not always in union is there strength.

The former Princess Viatka had likewise disappeared that night.

At first this was the cause of untold anxiety, naturally. But, little by little, they all came to believe the story originally told by one of the under-servants—that he had seen his mistress greet a black-bearded stranger in front of the house, had seen her in his arms, had seen her follow him, a willing prisoner.

For every now and then some renaissant spirit of maternity inspires her to write to them—now from Vienna, now from Florence, now from Paris. She says always that she is very happy; that her husband's name is Sergius, and that some day—meaning never—he and she will come to visit them.

For there would be little enough in the lives of her children now to attract the exotic temperament of that lady—even if she is a grandmother.

Notwithstanding that single night of terror, Hugh and Elin were happily married. Their lives, like those of Agatha and Frederic Graw, have attained the ideal. Let each in his own way imagine of what that ideal consists.

The town-house of the Frails was

torn down long ago to give place to one of those new department-stores—so rich in everything except shadowy tradition.

Even the country-place has been greatly changed—a convalescent home for crippled children, still presided over by the saintly Dr. Carstairs, richly endowed by the—not the last—descendant of the wicked old fugitive who built it; also by his brother-in-

law. They can well afford it. They have prospered exceedingly in many ways.

And then, as the mother of Paulo once said, you can always counteract a curse—or, for that matter, any other of the devil's works—with some good deed.

And with all that is left of the ancient line of the Frelinghuysens, this has become a chief article of faith.

(The End.)